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**Improving Written Language and Exploring Attitudes  
towards Learning English in Primary Age ESL Learners in  
Brunei Darussalam.**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

**A thesis**  
**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree**  
**of**  
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**Heather Dallas**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research was conducted in the small sultanate of Brunei Darussalam on the island of Borneo where the researcher was working as an English language teacher at a government primary school. Although the majority of students' first language is Bruneian Malay, English is also an important component of the Bruneian curriculum, and is taught from new entrant level. From Year 1, Mathematics and Science are also taught in English and students sit Cambridge University examinations in these three subjects at secondary school. As these are examinations for native speakers, a high standard of English is necessary for academic success.

The main goals in this research were to investigate whether a journal writing programme would improve the English writing of primary students and to suggest to what extent their differing attitudes towards learning English affect success in writing tasks.

The research used the context of a case study of ten students in Years 4, 5 and 6 participating in a weekly journal writing programme to focus on four aims:

- to document any changes or improvements in students' written English over the course of ten months through a comparison of writing samples at the beginning and end of the programme;
- to observe any changes in student attitudes towards the writing programme and their relationship with the teacher;
- to ascertain basic attitudes or challenges towards learning and using English at school and at home;
- to suggest any connection between the findings for the above aims and actual academic achievement in end of year English examinations.

A mixed-methods approach was used for this research which collected five different types of data and was conducted in two parts. A background context for the study was first established by surveying peers from the same school about their attitudes towards English and any challenges they face. School examination results were also studied. A range of data was then collected from the case study students which included their own

survey responses, examination results, written journal entries and classroom observations by the teacher.

A major finding of this research study was the significantly improved deeper writing features exhibited in the journal writing entries. Students' sense of audience, personal voice, and quality of vocabulary improved far more than would be expected from normal writing maturation in this timeframe. There is evidence of a high degree of student engagement during journal writing, often due to personally motivating topics. The opportunity to share ideas through written dialogue with their teacher resulted in the development of strong teacher student relationships. Findings surrounding the issues of modeling correct language in context, code switching to enhance understanding of new language and the explicit teaching of vocabulary are also examined.

This research provides several other significant findings. There is strong evidence primary age students at all ability levels value English and would like to improve their academic results. Differences in gender were discovered with more boys than girls finding writing the most difficult English skill. Boys were also more likely to fail examinations. Interesting data is provided about the feedback teachers provide writers, and a major finding was that classroom English tasks were not able to be completed successfully by approximately half of all students. There are interesting findings about the strong beliefs students hold on being taught the other core subjects of Mathematics and Science using the English language.

Finally, this research makes an important contribution to understanding how young learners' attitudes towards a second or subsequent language affect their ability to do the task and to eventual task success or failure. A major implication for educators from this research is that many students are likely to highly benefit from a differentiated English programme in primary school which supports the varied learning needs of all students.

Although this research was conducted in Brunei, many of the findings may also be applicable to ESL teaching programmes in other parts of Asia and around the world at a time of strong international interest and growth in English second language teaching.

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*I attempt an arduous task; but there is no worth in that which is not a difficult achievement.*

*(Ovid)*

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## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

*To foster sustained learning, it may not be sufficient to convince students that language learning is interesting and enjoyable; they may need to be persuaded that it is also personally important for them.* (Noels et al., 2000, p. 75).

As a New Zealand trained primary teacher, packing my suitcase and travelling overseas to teach English as a second language in Brunei Darussalam on the tropical island of Borneo, has proven a rich and rewarding experience. But this drastic change of both culture and curriculum has brought its own series of challenges as I've sought to adapt my teaching beliefs and methodologies to a completely new country and context. It was an easy decision to make therefore, when the time arrived to conduct research for this thesis, to choose a research topic which would help me to understand my new Bruneian students better in order to adapt and improve my teaching practice.

My early teaching background gave me an early awareness that classes contain students with a wide range of abilities and that from even a young age some students find the English language very difficult to master, even when it is their mother tongue. Could the differences simply be related to intelligence and aptitude? Surely there were other factors involved? As my teacher training continued I began to understand many of the factors that affect learning but somehow there always seemed to be a missing link to explain why some students just did better than others...

As time went on I started to develop a strong belief – if a student does not have a desire to learn what is being taught, for whatever reason that may be, they don't. Many researchers agree that attitudes to learning appear to be a major influence (Chastain, 1992; Clement, Dornyei & Noels, 1994; Yang, 1999; Kennedy, Nelson, Odell & Austin, 2000; Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001). So when planning my lessons, I began to consider how could I ensure my students **wanted** to learn?

Again through my own experience, I also discovered how important it was for students to believe themselves capable of completing a task. This power of self-efficacy is in fact described by several researchers as the

most important learner belief (Bandura, 1986; Cotterall, 1999; Pajares, 2000). In my classroom I found, like Nunan (1989) and Vygotsky (1962,1978), that activities need to fit into that fine gap where they present enough of a challenge to be interesting but are also based around skills and knowledge that are known to students. Activities which students enjoy, improve learning and successfully allow for differentiated outcomes, yet are simple to administer with large classes, therefore become valuable teaching commodities.

I had found in my classes in New Zealand that writing is an important benchmark to measure a child's overall language ability and perhaps more importantly writing is a key component of most school-wide and national ability testing. Writing is regarded as the most difficult and complex of the four communicative macro-skills (the other three being reading, speaking and listening) as it requires an understanding of how a language works (Bozorgian, 2012), and improving student writing has become an area of special interest to me. Although the inter-dependence of all four language skills is vital and complex, encouraging understanding and enjoyment of language through writing has become an integral part of my teaching philosophy.

In ESL (English as a second language) classrooms, the need for students to understand how language works becomes even more important. It is also important for the teacher to understand the distinct nature of ESL speaking and writing (Silva, 1993). In Brunei Darussalam, as English is at least a second or third language for students (and for most of their teachers at primary school level), they lack the instinctive recognition that comes to mother tongue learners, as to when English language looks or sounds 'wrong'. Many students have very limited exposure to English outside of school time and need authentic opportunities to practise new language (Piaget, as cited in Wood, 1998).

With these thoughts in mind, when asked to take a weekly English club of Year 4-6 students at my primary school, I recalled a journal writing programme being run by a teacher at a Bruneian secondary school which appeared to be successfully motivating participants in writing (Galbraith,

2010). In addition a significant finding was that skills learnt were also being translated into other classroom writing tasks – a result of successful learning as described by Feurstein (1997). An examination of literature provided further evidence that this type of writing programme might provide a great opportunity for my primary school's students to enjoy a less structured form of writing than is normally set in class whilst still learning useful English skills (Clement, 1994; Eastman, 1997; Alexander, 2001; Berryman, 2001; Anderson, Mallo, Nee & Wear, 2003; Vanstael, 2008; Valigunova, 2010; Liao & Wang, 2010). It also seemed to offer a context for me to conduct research into students' learning beliefs and attitudes so that I could perhaps begin to understand my students and their culture better in order to develop activities that would be personally meaningful and motivating in a Bruneian classroom.

I decided that the first part of this research would be devoted to establishing a wider understanding of my primary school's students' beliefs about learning English in order to provide a background for the case study. The second part of my research would be a focus on the journal writing programme as a means to improve English writing skills – in this instance a case study of the ten students who participated in my journal writing club.

My research questions directed the course of this study. They are:

1. What are the learning attitudes of Bruneian primary age students towards the English language?
2. What do they perceive as the challenges involved in become effective English writers?
3. How do these attitudes and challenges influence the learning of students participating in a weekly dialogue journal writing programme with a western English teacher?
4. Could a weekly dialogue journal writing programme improve Bruneian primary ESL students' written English abilities?

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces myself as a researcher, and describes how my background and change to an unfamiliar context influenced my research topic and questions. Chapter 2

summarises important ideas from relevant literature under four sections – learning methodologies, journal writing, English as a second language, and variables affecting learning. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology behind the research, describes how the research was implemented and explains the reasons for the different types of data collected. The results and findings from the analysis of the data for the larger cohort group are presented in Chapter 4 and for the case study in the Chapter 5. Finally in Chapter 6, these findings are discussed, limitations of the research are listed and questions posed for suggested further research.

This concludes the introduction to my thesis. Chapter 2 now reviews the ideas from literature that shaped the research.

## CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Two discusses four areas of research that are relevant when using journal writing with primary age second language learners in Brunei Darussalam. Firstly, some of the major approaches relating to how students learn language are outlined, along with ideas on how this pedagogical knowledge can help educators teach written language more effectively. This includes a consideration of the importance of teachers ensuring classroom tasks meet the specific needs of their learners. The second topic explores the use of dialogue journals as a means to improve students' written English. There is a focus on the context of teaching students for whom English is a second language and the type of feedback that may be helpful for writers. Third, some of the specific difficulties and problems in learning English by local students in Brunei Darussalam are identified and examined. That leads into the final topic which discusses affective variables in the acquisition of a second language and how they may influence student success. These variables range from a student's personality to socio-cultural factors. The importance of self-efficacy is given particular consideration.

### **2.1 Major theories about learning language and their relevance in assisting classroom teachers to improve student writing**

#### **2.1.1 Introduction**

*Experience with different approaches and methods can provide teachers with an initial practical knowledge base in teaching and can also be used to explore and develop teachers' own beliefs, principles and practices. (Richards & Rogers, 2007: p. 252)*

The field of language learning has had its share of fashionable theories and trends over the years. However this thesis refers to four major approaches to learning language - behaviourism, cognitive psychology, humanism and social interactionism - in an effort to understand how they influence modern classroom methodologies and relate to the teaching of writing through a journal writing programme.

### 2.1.2 Behaviourism

Behaviourism has its beginnings in the positivist school of study in the late nineteenth century which based its methods of enquiry on measurable scientific methodology and data. As thoughts and feelings were considered unable to be measured accurately they were not acknowledged or investigated. Blakemore and Frith (2005) discuss how early learning theorists used behaviourism to attempt to explain that all learning was the result of connections between a Stimulus (S) and a Response (R) called *conditioned responses*.

The audio lingual approach and similar language teaching programmes were born from these principles (Richards and Rodgers, 2007). They involve students learning a language by acquiring a set of desired habits through drills, memorisation and choral repetition of patterns – there is no explicit teaching of grammar and students are expected to repeat specified sentence structures provided by the teacher until they become spontaneous.

There were however found to be a number of limitations when using these methods. First, the role of the learner was a fairly passive one as their role was to respond correctly to stimuli, so there was little analysis of the language or support in developing learning strategies. Second, there was little concern with the cognitive processes learners were using in their brains. Third, many activities could be done with very little understanding of the meaning of the language being taught. Fourth, there was no allowance in the programmes for interaction so that meaning could be negotiated through communication. Fifth, although making errors is an important part of learning, an emphasis on correct responses did not allow for learning through mistakes or experimentation.

The behaviourist view does have positive points that still require consideration by modern educators. Behaviourism stresses that parents and teachers play an important role in providing appropriate settings for learning and consequences for particular behaviours. It also emphasises

that reinforcement is a powerful influence on human behaviour, with the whole issue of rewards and feedback being extremely complicated.

However behaviourism does not explain many aspects of learning. Last century, a growing interest in understanding the processes that the human mind uses rather than observable behaviour led to more research being undertaken from a cognitive perspective.

### **2.1.3 Cognitive psychology**

Cognitive researchers began to consider the learner as an active participant who uses a wide range of mental processes to make sense of language systems. Cognitive research ranges from ideas on information processing (which uses the analogy of the brain as a highly complex computer with rules and models) to a constructivist view (which deals with how people make sense of their world) based mainly on the work of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (refer to p.16) and also George Kelly's (1955) personal construct psychology.

Memory is one aspect of cognitive research which is relevant to language learners. Ausubel (1968) discusses the use of advance organisers whereby a lesson is introduced by discussing how the forthcoming material relates to known subject matter, so learners can orientate themselves by making connections and bridges even before the new information is covered. In the journal writing classes in this study, many writing topics were introduced by referring to and discussing known vocabulary or concepts first and linking these to the new topic as particularly for ESL learners, it is important that they are not only understand the topic but can access vocabulary to describe their ideas.

Intelligence and its measurement has also been an area that has always raised considerable discussion. Traditionally it has been considered that intelligence is genetic and if children are born more intelligent than others, they would be more likely to succeed at school or in any other learning tasks. More recent research has offered other perspectives on intelligence (Gardiner, 1983; Sternberg, 1985; Paulesu, Demonet, and Frith cited in Blakemore and Frith, 2005 p.74-79) but Williams and Burden (1997) provide a helpful viewpoint. They suggest that whilst intelligence is

traditionally seen as a common noun which represents an entity which people have more or less of, teachers should consider it as an adjective or adverb so we can refer to people who act intelligently or demonstrate intelligent behaviour. This frees us from the constraint of seeing intelligence as being fixed. There is also the implication that people can improve their intelligence, so as teachers we can help all learners to become better at language by helping them to develop the strategies they need to learn more effectively. It follows on from this idea that being taught how to think intelligently should be an important part of language education and needs to be explicitly taught.

The major drawback with information processing theories is that they still do not take into consideration how individuals strive to bring personal meaning to make sense of their worlds. The constructivist movement, led by Jean Piaget (as cited in Wood, 1998), emphasises the *process* of learning rather than what is actually learned. Piaget's theory is based on people going through learning stages in their lives and making sense of personal experiences in different ways at each stage. Following this theory for example, it is important for language teachers of young learners to realise that they do not have abstract reasoning skills (which tend to start developing at an adolescent age) and therefore cannot be expected to apply them to language rules. It is more effective for pre-adolescent students to relate the new language to concrete objects and their known world. Journal writing can be seen as a means for children to write about things they know and have personal experience of, so it appears well suited for the primary age group and ESL learners. However, students who are beginning to develop abstract thinking skills can also be extended in their thinking thus providing an opportunity for differentiated learning.

Bruner (1966), also advocates Piaget's cognitive theories. His *social constructivist* research has mainly been concerned with the discovery approach to learning in which the development of conceptual understanding and cognitive skills are considered more important than the acquisition of facts and skills, as what is learnt in one situation can then be transferred to learning in another context.

Many of Bruner's ideas are still used in modern educational practices today and he can be seen as a key figure in bridging cognitive psychology and pedagogy. However a third approach to learning offers an extra dimension for researchers to consider – Humanism.

#### **2.1.4 Humanism**

This approach looks at the importance of people's thoughts, feelings and emotions in human development and so has an important link to this study as the questions chosen for this research deal with student attitudes and perceptions towards learning English.

Although Sigmund Freud is probably the most well-known proponent of this approach, Erikson's text *Childhood and Society* (1963) draws on Freud's views to create his own theory of developmental stages in a human's life. His epigenetic principle theory states that as individuals pass through predetermined maturational stages, their development is dependent upon the societal challenges they face. One of these key stages is in the early school years. Erikson describes this stage as one in which a child either develops a sense of *industry* through basic educational and learning skills or alternatively a sense of *inferiority* when they meet with failure. He believes that when teachers emphasize individualized or co-operative learning in classrooms, students are less likely to feel inferior than when they are constantly placed in more competitive situations where they are compared to each other, so this is highly relevant to language teachers of primary school learners. In adolescence, Erikson sees *identity* as the most important challenge. Students need to establish a strong sense of personal identity through making decisions for themselves and expressing their individuality constructively. Journal writing is seen as one way students can develop a sense of both identity and industry in a non-competitive, supportive environment.

Carl Rogers (1969) is a further humanist whose work has influenced ideas about education. He suggests that significant learning only takes place when the subject matter is seen as being personally relevant and involves active participation. Rogers along with Hamachek (1977) feel that it is imperative for a teacher to develop warm and empathetic relationships of

trust with students through differentiated learning, allowing personal learning choices and encouraging the development of personal opinion. Journal writing meets these criteria and has a further benefit in that student responses are not compared to each other or graded – all responses are considered important and of equal value.

Although each of the theories discussed so far – Behaviourism, Cognitivism, and Humanism – have added to our knowledge of how we learn, they all have the disadvantage of considering learning as something that occurs within an individual (Gibbons, 2002). This ‘empty vessel’ approach is illustrated by the traditional teaching methods and prescriptive programmes which have been commonly used in Brunei. Students are often passive learners who regularly individually perform tasks that involve out of context exercises of limited personal interest. They are told how language works and tend to learn through memorization of rules rather than having opportunities to experiment and discover meaning themselves.

The next section discusses the main theory underpinning the modern day collaborative approach to language teaching. This approach contends that the most effective language learning occurs through meaningful interactions with others and is called Social Interactionism.

#### **2.1.5 Social Interactionism**

Two influential Social Interactionist researchers are Lev Vygotsky (1962,1978) and Reuven Feurstein (as cited in Williams & Burden, 1997 p39-185). They both believe that children learn most successfully by making sense of the world through interaction with others.

Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, emphasizes the importance of language in transmitting culture, developing thinking and learning. He has a holistic view of learning in which he argues that meaning should be the basis of any study and should be taught in all its complexity rather than breaking units down into isolated chunks of skills and knowledge. His widely known *zone of proximal development* concept describes the zone of learning which is just beyond that at which the learner is currently capable. By working with another person, either an adult or a competent

peer (known as the *mediator*), a learner can move into that next zone supported or scaffolded through social interaction.

Around the same time as Vygotsky's works were being published, Feurstein, an Israeli psychologist and educator was involved with his own research on social interaction involving the education of immigrant children traumatized from World War II. He introduced the concept of *dynamic assessment* in which, rather than viewing assessment as a process carried out by one person on another, assessment becomes a dialogue between both parties in which they share ways to improve performance on a subsequent occasion. Assessment and learning are seen as linked processes rather than separate processes. The teacher's role is seen as a mediator, selecting and shaping learning experiences to enhance learning, but their ultimate goal is to create independent and co-operative learners.

Feurstein believes there are three essential features that should be present in all learning tasks. Learners first need to see that a task is of value to them personally and culturally, so has *significance*. They also need to understand that the immediate task will have wider relevance in the future – a *purpose beyond the here and now*. Thirdly, learners must have a *shared intention* by clearly understanding and reciprocating the intentions of the teacher. He also emphasized the importance of considering all the different cognitive factors involved when learners perform tasks (as cited in Williams & Burden, 1997 p39-185).

All of the aspects mentioned and perceived as necessary for effective learning by both Vygotsky and Feurstein are present within a journal writing programme, but the following section discusses some of the other factors that may be important when deciding whether a journal writing programme is likely to be successful when used with second language learners.

#### **2.1.6 Further theories that support task success for second language learners**

Bruner (1966) believes that tasks in the language classroom have to strike a balance between the teaching of target language vocabulary or skills

and the teaching of language analysis, risk taking in trying language, and learning from errors. He feels that teachers should plan tasks which introduce ideas then develop them in sequence. In the journal writing programme in this study, a sequential lesson plan first introduced students to a topic orally and by using visual images. Then written vocabulary and sentence structures were modeled through exemplars. After that students shared personal experiences with peers, discussing the language provided within the exemplar if necessary and outlining what they intended to write about. Finally students wrote individual entries aiming to accurately convey their message to the teacher. This learning outcome corresponds to Bruner's goal for learners to use new words and language accurately and appropriately in meaningful contexts.

One of the problems in creating tasks can be accurately determining the task difficulty because of the many factors involved even in what might be considered a relatively simple activity. Every task for a second or foreign language learner can be considered to be made up of three components – the *input* of the language to be learned, the *activities* which the learner is required to do, and the *cognitive processes* required to complete the task. Nunan (1989) discusses how input can vary in difficulty considerably due to, for example, the complexity of the grammar, text length, amount of and explicitness of information, genre, vocabulary, discourse structure and support through pictures. He states that other *learner factors* such as confidence or prior knowledge can influence the difficulty of a task. This is discussed further in section 2.4.

Brindley (1987) also agrees that there are a number of variables which influence task difficulty and suggests viewing a task from the perspective of the types of interaction generated. For example, doing the same writing task with different topics can produce variations in interaction. Altering the amount or type of collaboration, the size of groups, or allowing for the exchange of required or optional information can also affect the difficulty for certain students. Gender, familiarity with each other or the task, and individual learning preferences can also impact on the success of an interactive activity.

When the specific focus of a task for second language learners is writing English there are several further considerations. Firstly, English teachers need to be more than competent adult writers themselves. According to Parr and Timperley (2010), they need to not only have detailed subject knowledge but it is vital that they can articulate implicit ideas in a way that is accessible to developing writers. Teachers then need to study student writing so they can diagnose the gap between the work the student produced and an ideal piece of writing. Once this has been determined, the teacher has to consider how best to respond to students in a way that addresses their individual needs and supports their next learning steps to progressively close that gap.

Journal writing provides a convenient way for teachers to regularly read students' writing and note reoccurring writing errors that can be addressed explicitly in other tasks or modeled correctly in responses. Teacher feedback may encompass questions seeking clarity of the message being conveyed, request extra information from students, model correct language or may simply be a personal response to the message depending on the learner's needs. As time goes on, students begin to develop skills in providing the necessary information to convey a message clearly and correctly to a reader without this prompting.

Research regarding feedback unfortunately has found that teachers often concentrate on surface features (Stern & Solomon, 2006) instead of making comments directed at deeper learning features which are more likely to trigger cognitive processing (Balzer, Doherty & O'Connor, 1989). Comments should also actively engage students and invite their response (Huot, 2002). Parr and Timperley (2010) concur stating: "*Feedback that is corrective rather than designed to foster development is unlikely to engage students*" (p.70). Beach and Friedrich (2006) also agree. After reviewing different strategies for feedback, they summarise their findings:

*Without effective feedback, students will not engage in the substantive self-assessment and revision that is essential to learning to improve their writing. Effective teacher feedback is specific, descriptive, nonjudgmental, and varied according to*

*students' phases of development, developmental level, ZPD, language skills, perceived persona, and self-assessment ability. (p. 231)*

All these comments are applicable to the type of feedback provided in a dialogue journal writing programme which focuses on responding to the deeper meaning of the message being communicated rather than marking errors. Language is modeled at an appropriate level through written responses rather than being explicitly corrected.

Wait time is another factor that is pertinent to journal writing. Research by Stahl (1994) describes how many teachers provide insufficient time for students to process information and come up with responses. This seems to be particularly problematic for boys, students from lower socio economic backgrounds, second language learners and those with learning disabilities. Interestingly, this short wait time also causes problems for highly able students who have dense neural networks and require more time to process complex thoughts. Journal writing is one activity that gives all these groups of students opportunities to work at their own pace and consider their responses without time pressure.

An Iranian study (Bozorgian, 2012) investigated the links between the four communicative macroskills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. Bozorgian argues that listening is the basic bricks and mortar of language acquisition and that writing is the hardest skill as it is the last skill learnt by second language learners. His research supports the notion that developing speaking and writing ability (the productive skills) greatly assists improvement in reading and listening (the receptive skills). Within his study, Bozorgian cites Shanahan (2006) who argues that efficient writers use the structures and linguistic perspectives used in oral language and Yalcinkaya, Muluk and Sahin (2009) who state that writing ability cannot fully develop without an understanding of the sounds within the language – the language's infrastructure. It is important therefore for second language learners to gain knowledge and confidence in speaking a language before they attempt to write in it. When related to journal writing with ESL learners, the preceding oral discussion should be

considered an integral part of the pre-writing process so students have an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the vocabulary and grammar needed to communicate their message clearly.

For many years it was not realised that there are important differences in the writing of first and second language students but research from Raimes (1983), Zamel (1982) and perhaps most importantly Silva (1993) amongst others has contributed to the view that teachers need to be aware that second language writing has a distinct nature. Some of Silva's conclusions were that written texts by second language students were shorter and less fluent, had more grammar errors, were stylistically and structurally simpler, had less lexical control and overall were less effective and sophisticated. Students did less planning, the writing was not as well organised, they spent more time referring back to an outline, had frequent pauses from writing, wrote at a lower rate, and reviewed their work less. These all seem to be common characteristics observed in Bruneian students' work and are necessary to consider when seeking to improve writing.

One of the ways that teachers have tried to address some of these problems has been through the use of dialogue journal writing, which is now explained more fully in the second section of this chapter.

## **2.2 Improving the written English of ESL students through dialogue journals**

### **2.2.1 Introduction**

*At first my journal was so boring ... now if I could write a million pages, I would. (A Year 11 student quoted by Galbraith (2010) p.9)*

Journals are not a new teaching tool, having been used in classrooms for many years in a variety of forms. The dialogue journal is one style of journal used to foster communication between two people – sometimes student to student, but usually student and teacher. Although it is a tool that lends itself easily to use within an English programme, teachers can also use dialogue journals to communicate individually with students over a range of subjects including mathematics and the sciences. The focus of the entry, the quantity of writing, the number of responses, and perhaps

most importantly, the type of teacher feedback, may all be varied too, so teachers need to have a clear idea exactly what they wish their use of dialogue journals to achieve.

### **2.2.2 Using dialogue journals in an English as a second language programme**

One of the first documented research studies into their use in an ESL context was in 1979 when a class of Californian sixth grade native and non-native English speakers were introduced to dialogue journals by their teacher in an effort to motivate and personalise student writing (Peyton & Staton, 1993).

Peyton found that the students responded very favourably to the journals and provided the following benefits:

- Provides one-to-one communication between teacher and student.
- Enables the teacher to adjust feedback to meet individual language and learning needs.
- All students can participate to the level of their individual ability.
- Is a non-threatening context for literacy and language development.
- Makes writing purposeful.
- Acts as a natural bridge to other forms of writing.
- The role of the teacher is as a participant rather than as an evaluator and students are focussed more on communicating rather than worrying about being graded on work.
- Students can write about topics that are important to them in the appropriate genre instead of being constrained by curriculum based topics.
- Students can write freely and are not focussed on form.
- The teacher can model correct English usage.
- Extends contact time between the teacher and students so it enables the teacher to build better relationships and discuss problems.
- Real topics and issues of interest to students can be written about.

- Teacher's entries provide reading which may be challenging but which is usually comprehensible as it relates to what a student has previously written.
- Teacher's entries provide a continual exposure to the thought, style and manner of expression used by a proficient English writer.
- As student confidence improves, so does their ability to express their own ideas clearly and they become more fluent and interesting writers.
- The journal writing can serve as the basis for other class work.

A major drawback with the use of dialogue journals is often considered to be the large amount of teacher time required. However Peyton considers that this is offset by the amount of knowledge a teacher gains about individual student needs and emphasises how feedback from the journals can be used as a basis for future lesson planning or targeting individual learning needs. Also it should be noted that as entries are not 'corrected' or 'marked', they can often be read and evaluated quickly. Time spent responding to entries will probably therefore only take slightly longer than traditionally 'corrected' writing and this is balanced by the benefits provided. During this research study, I found that reading and responding to journal writing entries was not only more enjoyable than responding to other types of written work but took a similar amount of time.

Recently, research was conducted by Liao and Wong (2010) in which Year 10 Taiwanese students wrote two journal entries per week for twelve weeks. Liao and Wong describe many Taiwanese students as lacking in motivation with regard to English writing. They attribute this to an instructor-centred curriculum, similar to Brunei, which places undue importance on correcting grammatical and mechanical errors and few opportunities to generate ideas and verbalize them in English. Students often score low grades on tasks in which they are asked to use self-expression and communicate thoughts and feelings. At the end of their study they concluded that :

*..DJW (dialogue journal writing) improved the students' writing fluency; writing performance on content, organization, and*

*vocabulary; reflective awareness of writing and self-growth as learners; and intrinsic writing motivation. It also reduced their writing anxiety. The students held positive attitudes toward the project and confirmed that DJW was an important tool for self-understanding and self-growth. They indicated that DJW allowed them to consider something new; enhanced their self-confidence so that they could get along better with others; matured them through sharing their ideas, feelings, and self-perceptions; consolidated their thinking when re-reading their journals; strengthened their confidence in English writing; and gave them the chance to reflect on their daily lives (p 1).*

Liao and Wong's findings regarding writing anxiety concur with Betancourt & Phinney (1988) who state that ESL writers often have more negative and anxious attitudes toward writing than native writers. Like other researchers (Holmes & Moulton, 1997; Lucas 1990; Jones, 1991) Liao and Wong felt that journal writing appreciably lessened writing apprehension. Another Taiwanese study had similar findings (Hsu, 2006).

Alexander (2001) explains that writing anxiety through journal writing appears to reduce as the relationship with the teacher improves and the student feels safer to experiment with language without being penalised. As the student-teacher relationship deepens, students also usually try harder to make meaning clearer so that the reader understands them and they become more comfortable portraying emotions within their writing.

Two interesting New Zealand studies (Vanstone, 2008; Glynn, Berryman & Weiss, 2005) have also been conducted on responsive journal writing with primary age students. Both found a particularly positive impact for students learning English who had a strong Maori (native people of New Zealand) or Pacific Island cultural identity or who were actually learning English as a second language as students in a Maori language immersion school.

Burniske (1994) discusses how dialogue journals provide a situation where students automatically become an 'apprentice' to a mature writer. He found that they observe the teacher's response to the same topic and

compare the language used by the teacher with their own writing. The teacher leads by example, modelling grammatical and mechanical correctness, and often students begin to imitate the teacher's writing. More recently, Harmer (2004), compared dialogue journals to the scaffolding that parents provide for young children in early oral communication. Just as parents reply to and elaborate on what is said by a child who is learning to talk, the teacher's purpose within a dialogue journal is to develop fluency and authenticity in writing. Harmer goes on to state that "It is only polite to respond to what people say and not correct how they say it (p.250)."

This thinking concurs with Eastman (1997) who also believes that journal writing is one means of providing a bridge from spoken language to written language as it is easier for children to explore meaning in their own level of language rather than trying to interpret the language of textbooks and teachers. Expressive writing such as found in journals, can be thought of as an internal dialogue and a means to organise thoughts. She also states that dialogue journal writing between a student and teacher relates to Vygotsky's (1978) 'zone of proximal development' theory in which the teacher supports the student to cross the gap between what students are capable of independently and what they are capable of with assistance (Referred to earlier in section 1.1.1). After successful collaborations, the student can internalize and apply learning without assistance, thus moving into a new 'zone'.

Where students lack maturity in their writing, this is usually demonstrated by a lack of awareness of their audience. Again Eastman cites Vygotsky's view that lack of maturity indicates that the writer has not developed their own thoughts fully. Therefore to improve writing maturity and audience awareness, students need time to practise reflective discourse and explore their own thoughts on a variety of issues. Journal writing is seen as an ideal strategy to use to assist in this process. Certainly in Brunei there have been few opportunities for many students to write about their own thoughts and reflections so journal writing can be considered a medium in which to practice the critical thinking skills now being encouraged by the Ministry of Education.

Both Zacharias (1990) and Fulwiler (1987) agree with the importance of developing critical thinking ability, suggesting in their research findings that journal writing incorporates many thinking processes that modern educators seek to instill in students. Although not all processes are used for each entry, they found that journal writing can involve processes such as comparison, contrast, summarising, observing, classifying, interpreting, criticising, imaging, collecting, organising, hypothesising, applying, decision making, digressing, revising and editing.

It is important that students feel that the journal represents their ideas and thoughts. Fulwiler (1987) is adamant that ...*"For better or worse, the journal is the student's own voice; the student must know this and the teacher respect it (p.4)."* Arthur, a student in Eastman's (1997) class wrote *"My journal is my own little world where anything can be said or happen (p. 79)."* Other students in her class enjoyed being able to write extra entries whenever they liked. Elise stated, *"I thought I would not like writing in a journal at first but I guess I was wrong. It's fun!" (p. 79).* At the stage of the year that she wrote this entry, she had written 38 entries of which only five had been assigned by the teacher. In fact, most of Eastman's students who had started the year as reluctant writers, became very enthusiastic about their journal writing. Although Eastman points out that not all writing on the full page entries was of good quality, the sense of accomplishment in writing a whole page gave some low ability students the confidence to complete other writing assignments. For many students not only did the teacher feel writing improved due to the skills learnt in journal writing but, perhaps more importantly, students felt their writing had improved. Amy reflected at the end of the year that *"I think having this journal helped me to express my feelings better and to like writing more. I used to hate writing but now it's not so bad (p.93)."* A few students still felt that journal writing was *'boring'* or *'a waste of time'* but even those students were able to tell about goals they had accomplished and how they had improved their writing.

Eastman noted that skills were being transferred to other writing as students were writing longer, better quality papers for other English assignments. This concurs with the research of Anderson, Mallo, Nee &

Wear (2003) and Duppenhaler (2004) on the positive transference of skills from journal writing to other types of writing. A further example is that of Valigurova (2010) whose Czech study of eighth grade students (thirteen or fourteen years of age) who had been studying English as a second language for five years showed that the average length of the journal entries increased by nearly 30% after three months during a fifteen minute writing time. When compared to a control group, the journal writers were able to write 24% more during fifteen minutes on the same given topic demonstrating that this increased writing volume was translatable to other writing tasks.

A number of English teachers within Bruneian schools have used variations of journal writing within their teaching programmes. Two documented instances have been by Clement (1994) and Galbraith (2010) in lower secondary and upper secondary respectively. Clement originally starting using journals as a medium to engage his students to produce writing which was authentic, purposeful and communicative. He achieved mixed results from students over a two year period. Although most students benefitted greatly from free writing, there were a few who participated very little or not at all. He found a major problem was the large number of students who had a boring reliance on a particular topic or used a repetitive style of entry. He devoted some time during class lessons modeling ways students could break out of this formulaic style and be more creative in their writing. Clement also found that by using a completely different coloured pen than normal (bright purple) it assisted him in remembering to focus on giving personal, distinctive and meaningful comments as all other class work was corrected and responded to using red ink. At the end of the two years, Clement concluded that the benefits of using dialogue journals with his classes easily outweighed any downsides stating “*The chance to interact with students and read writing that they voluntarily produce is too good to miss (p.123)*”.

Galbraith (2010) was just as enthusiastic about the advantages of using dialogue journals with her upper secondary students and it was her article about her students’ success with journal writing that prompted this choice

of thesis topic. After deciding to trial their use for two or three terms, after only a month most students were eagerly writing in their journals and enjoyed reading Galbraith's comments. The feelings of many of her class members seemed to be represented by one student who wrote:

*Every week, the amount I write increases even if it is only bit by bit. It seems that I can talk more as I do my journal. I kind of like the teacher's comment on each of my journal entries which encouraged me about it. (p. 6)*

Students in Galbraith's class wrote in the journals for thirty minutes once a week during class time. Students appeared to enjoy most of the topics that were set. Many indicated that journal writing was their favourite activity in English and that they considered that it had improved their ability to express themselves in other forms of writing.

When students were given a composition task to test whether their journal writing skills were able to be transferred to an examination format, many students chose to write about one of the five topics by using personal experiences as they had been doing in their journals. These pieces of writing were more successful than those students who chose to try and explain the topic without using personal thoughts and stories. Galbraith suggests:

*It seems to me that removing the pressure of producing a perfect piece of writing has given students the freedom to use the target language in a way that was previously not available (p.6) ... the journal provides a format, a forum and a freedom of expression that may not have been accessed by our students. The internet with all its various sites is opening up communication but the text of messages is usually brief and abbreviated. The journal is a consolidation of thoughts and experiences in structured sentences and paragraphs (p.9).*

### **2.2.3 Types of feedback that can be provided to students in journals**

The importance of the teacher responses in dialogue journal writing should not be under-estimated as these provide valuable formative feedback for students. Black and Williams (1998) state that formative assessment is the most important type of assessment and its use supports effective student learning. Their research provides evidence to show how powerful high quality formative feedback is to students but that unfortunately most teachers are not skilled at providing this type of response. In actuality Black and Williams consider many common assessment practices are probably harmful, overemphasizing marks and grades and neglecting to provide useful advice that will assist students to improve. Although their study was conducted in England, much of their writing applies to Brunei schools as the strong emphasis on external standardised exams and the importance attached to them, has contributed to summative tests domination over curriculum and instruction.

Black and Williams argue too that feedback should be about the particular qualities within an individual student's work and should contain advice on how to improve it. It also seems that supportive comments from the teacher promote longer responses from students compared to occasions when teachers asked questions (Peyton & Staton, 1993). Providing written feedback on student writing is arguably one of the teacher's most crucial tasks as it allows individualised attention and the opportunity for one to one communication that is often impossible during class time. Research by Ferris, Pezone, Tade and Tinti (1997), suggests that ESL students particularly need written teacher comments to be clear.

To close this section of the review, Canale's (1983) view of second language learning could be considered as further supporting the case for dialogue journals. He argues the necessity of balance between knowledge orientated and skill orientated activities in the classroom. He states that for communicative competence in students, both types of activities are required. Students first need knowledge of a language gained through drills, rules, and explanations but this does not prepare learners for using a second language in authentic situations. Journal writing appears to meet the criteria of being an authentic communicative

activity which does allow students to practice and gain confidence in using writing skills.

### **2.3 Teaching English as a second language in a Malaysian/Bruneian context.**

#### **2.3.1 Introduction**

It is useful when teaching a second language, particularly English with its many variations, to be able to have a model and the model chosen by the Ministry of Education to be taught in Brunei is Standard English. Many students in local government schools are prepared for British based 'A' and 'O' level examinations aimed at native English speakers and therefore need a high standard of English to achieve good results. Success in these examinations is seen as a mark of prestige and is a requirement for entry to employment in well paid or important positions. Scholarships for further education are also keenly sought, and these are also often awarded based on academic results.

At school children are taught Standard Malay which is considered their first language but even this language can cause confusion for many students as they use the local Brunei Malay dialects for their day to day life. As the Muslim religion is an integral part of Brunei life and culture, students also learn Arabic at school for their religious studies. This means therefore that it is quite normal for a five year old Bruneian primary student to speak at least one local dialect at home and with friends, and be using three other languages to communicate in during their school lessons – Standard Malay, English and Arabic. There are also a substantial number of students whose first language is Chinese, or another Asian language.

#### **2.3.2 Difficulties for native Malay speakers in learning English**

Even without taking into consideration the confusion of learning to read, write and speak in several different languages from the time they enter school, learning a complex language such as English is difficult for many Bruneian students as outlined by Yong (2007). The differences between the Malay and English phonological systems cause many problems as English contains more sounds than Malay. Although 18 consonant sounds are shared and pronounced the same in both Standard Malay and English, problems arise with articulation of vowels and consonant clusters

(which are rare in Malay). Many of the errors that occur in oral speech naturally therefore carry over into written work. For example as Malay words do not end in consonant clusters, speakers often drop final sounds when saying English words. Once again, the Bruneian dialect emphasises the problem, as many local words are commonly shortened and end sounds are omitted. This often leads to confusion for students in perceiving the plural form of English words through the addition of the suffix 's' or correctly recognising words that differ from others only by their final sounds.

The complexity of the English grammar system is found to be extremely difficult to understand by the majority of students. Particular areas of confusion are often the use of singular/plural, pronouns, articles/determiners, negatives, prepositions and word order. However, probably the area that causes the most difficulty is that of verb usage. Malay verbs do not differ for subject or tense, although these may be indicated by auxiliary words or phrases in a sentence. Using the correct tense and ensuring subject/verb agreement in a sentence is therefore often an area of frustration and confusion for Bruneian students.

In written work there are several issues regarding vocabulary and style. Learners tend to use short sentences. When longer, more complex sentences are used, punctuation is often erratic or even non-existent. Even capable learners usually avoid idiomatic or less common expressions in favour of more basic or well-known structures. Sometimes this can contribute to writing becoming long-winded or repetitive. Confusions often arise when learners have to choose from pairs of English words that have a single Malay language equivalent. Malay words are usually spelt as they are pronounced but the English language contains many difficulties as spelling often does not correspond to pronunciation. Also, as a number of words, particularly technical terms, are lexically transferred from English, students are often misled into using the Malay spelling variation with words such as *ekonomi* (economy) and *telepon* (telephone).

### 2.3.3 Typical Bruneian learning styles

Classroom teaching in Asia is traditionally dominated by whole class, teacher-centred lessons with an emphasis on rote memory and book work (Liu & Littlewood, 1997). Many limitations of the Cognitive and Behaviourist theories discussed earlier in this chapter are still present in current classroom pedagogy and Brunei is no different. The result of this style of teaching is that learners can be introverted and often see learning as something which is transmitted to them by the teacher rather than being discovered by themselves. Students can be quiet, shy and reticent in the classroom, with many disliking open displays of emotion and opinions. Compared to Western students, Asian students usually take significantly fewer opportunities to speak in a classroom context as confirmed by the studies of Sato (as cited in Zhenhui, 2001).

Zhenhui suggests that typically Asian students like to be 'correct' and feel uncomfortable making a guess, preferring to be given all the necessary information and time to think about the right answer. They are used to following set rules for completing work and are often supplied with templates to ensure they keep to a rigid structure for their writing. The teacher is seen as an authority figure whose opinions are to be respected and some students can feel uneasy when the teacher requests students to take the lead in an activity or to offer personal opinions that they feel may differ to what the teacher thinks. Zhenhui believes that students should be gradually 'weaned' by teachers to become more independent learners, and guided into communicating in authentic language situations which are designed to improve students' ability in thinking as individuals. Journal writing could be seen as one way of meeting these requirements.

Research on code switching is also relevant to Bruneian teaching contexts. In any bilingual or multilingual culture, it's desirable to be able to switch easily from one language to another (Auer, 2002). This may range from using either occasional words in a monolingual dialogue to a regular interchanging of phrases from both or even several languages. Rather than code switching users being considered deficient in their language learning, Li (2000) and Nilep (2006) conclude that this systematic alternating use of two languages is simply a characteristic of a bilingual's

speech used to personalize and contextualize communication and actually signifies high order thinking ability in both languages.

Liebscher and Dailey-O’Cain’s (2005) findings encourage the use of the mother tongue in the classroom to discuss the second language with either the teacher or peers. Their research suggests that by code switching between the two languages when necessary to increase understanding of vocabulary or grammar, students are able to more easily learn the new language and develop higher proficiency. It was found that students used their first language not only when they were deficient in the second language, but also when they knew it to provide each other with shared understandings of the language purpose. In Brunei, it has been observed that many students tend to seek clarification in English lessons from their friends if they are uncertain of a task. Both queries and responses tend to be in the local Malay dialect. Once students know what they need to do, they are often able to then construct the correct language in English.

It appears then that Bruneian second language learners face many challenges in learning English. The last topic in this literature review relates to how affective variables may explain why some students are more successful in their learning than others.

## **2.4 The importance of affective variables, especially self-efficacy, in second language learning**

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

*Understanding how human beings feel and respond and believe and value is an exceedingly important aspect of a theory of second language acquisition. (Douglas-Brown, 1987. p.101)*

Crystal (1992) defines language attitudes as the feelings people have about their own language or the languages of others. This study seeks to explore differing Bruneian students’ attitudes towards learning English. As it seems that variations in success of foreign or second language learners can only be explained by aptitude or intelligence to a certain extent, the final topic in this chapter therefore discusses theories on how affective

variables may also influence attitudes towards second language acquisition.

#### **2.4.2 The affective domain**

Earlier in this literature review the reasons why student intelligence should not be considered a sound indicator of academic ability were discussed (Refer to 2.1.1). Chastain (1988) suggests that there must be another equally important variable which determines how well students learn a language. In fact he states that “*The affective domain plays a larger role in developing second language skills than does the cognitive because the emotions control the will to activate or shut down the cognitive function*” (p.122).

The affective domain has been a subject of research for many years. As far back as the 1960's, Hilgard (1963) and Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia (1964) agreed that any theories of learning which were based purely on cognitive considerations and did not take affectivity into account, should be rejected.

The next section of this chapter considers some specific affective variables and how they may affect second language learning.

#### **2.4.3 Specific affective variables which affect learning**

Affective variables are difficult to define precisely but include attitudes, motivation, interest, learners' beliefs, needs, expectations and prior experiences (McKenna et al., 1995, cited in Gee, 1999, p. 3). A number of researchers (Clement, Dornyei & Noels, 1994; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Kennedy, Nelson, Odell & Austin, 2000; Yang, 1999) believe that these affective variables are the determining factors in second language learning success.

Douglas-Brown (1987) supports the theory of affective variables playing a major role in second language learning and he divides learning into the cognitive domain and the affective domain. He stresses the importance of the relationship between language and thought and poses the question that if language helps us to shape thinking and thinking helps us to shape language, what happens when a second language is acquired? Do we have one storage system for language (compound bilingualism) or two

separate systems (coordinate bilingualism) in our memory? He stresses that second language learners face a huge task in not only sorting out the meanings of new words, but distinguishing between varying shades of meaning of the thoughts and concepts of a different culture. He believes that existing cultural thought patterns may often interfere with the learning of new linguistic patterns.

#### **2.4.4 Self-efficacy as a variable in second language learning**

Self-efficacy is an affective variable that has been described in several ways by researchers. These include being a learner's beliefs about their abilities to accomplish a task (Bernhardt, 1997); the degree to which a student thinks he or she has the capacity of cope with a learning challenge (Ehrman, 1996, cited in Arnold & Brown, 1999, p.16); and a student's judgment of their academic competence (Pajares, 2000).

Bandura (1986) argues that self-efficacy is the most influential learner belief and plays a powerful role in deciding what choices people make, the effort they make when faced with a challenge, and the degree of anxiety or confidence they bring to a task. He believes that how people behave can be better predicted by the beliefs they hold about their capabilities rather than by what they are actually capable of accomplishing. This view is supported by Graham and Weiner (1995, as cited by Pajares, 2000) and Cotterall (1999). These researchers believe that self-efficacy is a more consistent predictor of behaviour than any other variable and can help explain why people's behaviour and performance may differ widely even when they have similar knowledge and skills.

Bandura and Pajares both refer to different ways that self-efficacy is developed in learners and seem to support the ideas of Erikson (1963) who uses three categories to describe self-efficacy development. Firstly, the most influential method appears to be by *mastery* experience where a student attempts tasks and succeeds. Alternately, a student who often experiences failure will develop low self-efficacy. This has important implications for the self-enhancement model of academic achievement which contends that for students to improve academically, they must first improve their sense of self-worth. Traditionally, schools have attempted to

raise self-confidence through specially run programmes but the shift towards the social cognitive theory means that now it is realised that genuine successes in school tasks (mastery experiences) are a much more effective way of doing this.

A second way of developing self-efficacy is through *vicarious* experiences. Here a student observes the effects of other people's actions. This may occur through a well-regarded teacher modelling excellence in an activity and a student begins to think 'I can do this'. Or they may see other students, who they perceive as comparable in ability, achieving success and perhaps honour or recognition from peers and begin to develop a motivation and belief that they too can be successful.

A third way is through *social persuasion*. When something is said to a person that has a meaningful impact, it may change their self-belief and confidence. If a student's belief in their capabilities is strengthened through encouragement, it may empower them to envision and attain success. However Erikson cautions that even children can differentiate between empty praise and genuine, meaningful encouragement, going on to stress that it is much easier to weaken self-efficacy than it is to strengthen it.

Academic self-efficacy should not be confused with self-esteem (Bong and Clark, 1999; Pajares and Schunk, 2002). Self-esteem, or self-concept, differs in that it evaluates competence and perceived self-worth. It has to do with how we perceive our culture judges us and how we measure up against our own personal standards of worthiness. Because the people we consider significant in our lives change as we grow - often from parents, to teachers, to peers - so our self-esteem can also change. Self-efficacy, however, is about our judgment of our capabilities. It is a confirmation that we have the skills and knowledge to manage a particular situation. So we may have poor self-efficacy in singing, but if we do not think that is an important ability to have in our culture and it is not something that causes personal anxiety because we can't do it well, then our self-esteem will not be affected.

#### **2.4.5 The role of self-efficacy as a relevant research topic**

Graham and Weiner (1996) observed that a shift was occurring in educational views about student motivation. In the last two or three decades there has been a growing trend and interest in studying aspects of self – self-monitoring, self-concept, self-focus, self-worth as examples – and this has become the new direction for research. Since Bandura published his social cognitive theory (1986) he has become one of the most prominent authorities calling for a new perspective in self-beliefs. Many students, he says, have difficulty in school, not because they are incapable of performing successfully, but because they are incapable of *believing* they can perform successfully. Most academic crises, he says, are actually crises of confidence. Bandura goes on to say that reflection is the most uniquely human characteristic and that it enables us to make links between knowledge and action. We need to believe that we can organise and execute courses of actions so as to manage situations – self-efficacy.

A number of researchers have studied self-efficacy. Pajares (2000) cites several studies ((Pintrich and De Groot (1990); Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Pons (1992); Multon (1991); Stajkovic and Luthans (1998)) as well as his own. All these studies came to a similar conclusion – that self-efficacy is one of the most important components in motivation, self-regulation and academic achievement – and continued findings from research on self-efficacy are contributing to current improvements in educational practice, policy and theory.

#### **2.4.6 Research conducted on self-efficacy within an Asian ESL context**

Recently, Shah, Mahmud, Din, Yusof & Pardi's (2011) research has explored the level of self-efficacy in Malaysian secondary school students towards writing in English. Their study was based on Tuckman and Sexton's (1990) findings that students with high self-efficacy are more likely to put more effort into their work, seek out new solutions and persevere when they face difficulties, as opposed to students with low self-efficacy who tend to put in little effort or avoid tasks, have low educational aspirations and have a weak commitment to goals. Shah et al's study showed that there was '*...a large, significant positive correlation between*

*self-efficacy and writing performance in English*" (p.10). They observed that students with high self-efficacy were indeed good writers and were able to creatively approach tasks even when they were difficult, applying the rules and mechanics of English whilst maintaining accuracy. Students who believed they were poor writers, performed accordingly. They suggested that second language learners particularly need to be explicitly taught the writing process and a range of effective writing strategies.

Su and Duo (2012) provide additional evidence from their Taiwanese research as to the importance of self-efficacy in ESL and they also cite research by Ho (2005), Chou (2007) and Lin (2002). Su and Duo's study also highlighted an interesting and significant gender difference, with female students much more likely to have a wide range of learning strategies for tasks and a high self-efficacy level when compared to males.

The many and varied viewpoints in this literature review still only scratch the surface of the complex issues involved in teaching Bruneian students to write English more effectively. However they have enabled the scene to be set for this case study into the use of dialogue journals. Chapter Three now focuses on the methodology involved in the research.

## CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

*It may well be that the main utility of research is ... to make otherwise familiar situations more interesting, curious and indeed less familiar. Research can put new perspectives on to old situations, which is exactly why it can contribute powerfully to innovation and the maintenance of innovation in context.*  
(McDonough & McDonough, 1997, p. 67)

The previous chapter has reviewed many of the issues facing ESL writers and their teachers but there appears to be little research directly pertaining to Bruneian primary school learners of English. Consequently, the first part of this primarily inductive study was designed to explore, from a general perspective, the complex range of factors which appear to influence attitudes towards learning English by primary students in Years 4-6 at a Bruneian primary school. The second stage of the research is focused on a case study which examines the impact of an intervention programme. It investigates a group of ten students' attitudes towards learning writing in English and how a journal writing programme might improve the students' written language and influence their attitudes.

This chapter explains the research methodologies utilised for these two different groups of participants – referred to as the Cohort and the Case Study group respectively. However the chapter begins with a brief outline of the theoretical perspective underpinning the research, the four questions directing the research, and provides further details of the research site and context.

### 3.2 Theoretical perspective

This thesis involves two main research methodologies - a case study approach and a quantitative 'mixed methods' approach. The theories behind both these methodologies are now explained and the reasons why they were chosen for this research project are outlined.

#### 3.2.1 The Mixed Methods Approach

This research employs the mixed-method approach where a combination of qualitative and quantitative styles are used as both views have

strengths and weaknesses and a methodological pluralism is seen as a superior research approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) . This approach involves an iterative process or 'spiralling technique' in which the researcher goes back and forth between qualitative and quantitative types of data and uses a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning (Mendlinger and Twikel as cited in Pluye, Grad, Levine & Nicolau, 2009). However, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) warn that although this hybrid approach attempts to complement both styles of study, novice researchers often find it difficult to meld them successfully whilst maintaining integrity in both.

An inductive approach is one characterisation of qualitative research (Trochim, 2006). The researcher begins by making a number of specific observations about the study, and then by constantly comparing and analysing information, they try to detect any patterns and regularities. As this study's purpose was to reveal and attempt to interpret possible relationships between attitudes and learning and the impact of an intervention programme rather than to prove an hypothesis, a primarily inductive approach was chosen.

Qualitative researchers' questions tend to be flexible and evolve with the study. In this case, a range of literature was explored before and during the study to provide this researcher with further knowledge and direction. Obtaining knowledge of the field of research was an integral part of preparation for this study, as it signified respect for the participants and allowed the researcher to "... *enter the field with an open mind, not an empty head ...*"(Fetterman as cited by Krathwohl, 1998, p.239).

Much of the data collected in this study is qualitative, for example writing samples and reflections, however many results and responses were entered onto a numerically based database. This conversion to quantitative data made analysis easier for this researcher.

### **3.2.2 A descriptive case study**

A case study involves an intensive, longitudinal analysis of a unit. A descriptive case study researcher systematically looks at events that occur, collects reliable data, and then tries to make sense of it through

methodological paradigms, in the hope of gaining a sharpened understanding of why certain things happened and what may require further research.

The second part of this particular research is focused on a small group of primary students participating in an English journal writing programme over a period of ten months. A case study approach was used to gather a range of data to establish individual students' attitudes towards the journal writing programme including an analysis of the writing that students' produced during the research period to identify any improvement. Any changes that occurred in either attitude or writing were documented during the study.

As the class teacher for the journal writing programme, this researcher played an active role in the study. The sample unit was comprised of ten Year 4, 5 and 6 Bruneian students from the same school with varying abilities and attitudes towards writing English. The students were timetabled to meet on a weekly basis each Saturday from the end of January 2011 until early November 2011. Saturday is a normal school day in Brunei due to a split weekend of Friday and Sunday. Due to holidays, school functions and to extended assemblies (which were held prior to the class), only 20 sessions were held.

### **3.3 Research questions**

Over the course of the study, the original research questions were reshaped and defined. This is in line with most qualitative research as outlined by Grady (1998) who says that initial questions are usually modified during the course of the project because *...as information is gathered, the research question can be narrowed further or focused to serve as an even finer sieve with which to discover an answer or set of answers ( p. 14).*

Four questions were chosen to investigate in this study. The first two pertain to the initial, larger Cohort Group of students and the second two questions relate specifically to the smaller group involved in the Case Study:

1. What are the learning attitudes of Bruneian primary age students towards the English language?
2. What do they perceive as the challenges involved in becoming effective English writers?
3. How do these attitudes and challenges influence the learning of students participating in a weekly dialogue journal writing programme with a western English teacher?
4. Could a weekly dialogue journal writing programme improve Bruneian primary ESL students' written English abilities?

The next section provides information regarding the research site and context involved in answering these questions.

### **3.4 Research site and context**

The research site and cultural background of participants played an important role when collecting and analysing data for this thesis, as it was considered that culture and nationality were likely to be influential factors in attitudes students had developed towards English. This section therefore gives details about both Brunei Darussalam and the primary school that was involved in the study. The journal writing programme itself is also explained in detail as this context was integral to the case study.

#### **3.4.1 Brunei Darussalam**

Brunei Darussalam is a small sultanate (5,765 square kilometres and a population in 2011 of 401,890) dating back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century which for many years has had strong ties to Britain. English has long been considered an important language for its citizens to learn as a language of business to communicate with other countries and as a common language between its own citizens who speak a range of languages and dialects. The relatively small but influential ex-patriate community has also contributed to a high level of ability in English being seen as a valued and highly desirable skill by families, employers and the monarchy. Brunei is located on the northern coast of Borneo in South East Asia and has been an Islamic country since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Malaysia surrounds it on three sides with the South China Sea as its fourth border. Although originally a much vaster empire, Brunei's fortunes and land size declined over the last few centuries and it eventually became a British protectorate in 1888. Oil

was discovered in 1929 and production increased considerably over the next 20 years. After extensive damage to the country by the Japanese during World War II, a new government (BMA – British Military Administration), which actually mainly consisted of Australian military servicemen, was tasked with helping to revitalise the economy. In 1959 Brunei became a self-governing state with Britain responsible only for foreign and defence affairs. Britain did however step in to help to suppress a small rebellion against the monarchy in 1962. Brunei Darussalam regained its independence on 1 January 1984 and due to a 56% economic growth rate during the 1970's until the 1990's, it has now become a newly industrialised country with the second highest Human Development Index in South East Asia after Singapore. Crude oil and natural gas account for about 90% of its GDP. Although Brunei's leaders are planning to widen the country's economic base through tourism and increase its self-sufficiency, many of them feel concern that further integration with the world will undermine internal social cohesion.

The country is ruled by His Majesty Paduka Seri Baginda Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah who has full constitutional authority over the country and parliament. He governs under the ideology of Malay Muslim Monarchy which has three components – Malay culture, Islamic religion and the political framework of the monarchy. The royal family is venerated by its citizens.

About 77% of the people live in the eastern part of Brunei which includes the capital of Bandar Seri Begawan. Approximately 66% of the population is Malay, 11.2% is Chinese, and 3.4% Indigenous groups with the balance being comprised of other nationalities. The official language is Melayu Brunei which is quite divergent from standard Malay. Chinese and English are widely spoken with a variety of indigenous languages also spoken. Two thirds of the population follow the Islamic religion. Although the culture is predominately based on the Malay culture, the strong Islamic influence means that most Bruneians tend to be much more conservative than Malaysians. Media is very much pro-government and although alternative viewpoints are sometimes published, negative opinions or criticisms against the government or the monarchy are rare.

### **3.4.2 The School**

The research was carried out at a government primary school in Bandar Seri Begawan. This school was chosen as this researcher was employed as an English teacher there through CfBT Education Services (who provide English teachers to schools under contract to the Ministry of Education in Brunei), so there was easy access to the participants. The school principal and staff were also supportive of my proposed study.

The school is fairly typical of other urban primary schools in the country although it is one of the larger sized primary schools with more than 600 pupils. Students mainly come from nearby Malay Islamic households but there is a wide socio-economic range within the area. The school is run under Malay Muslim Monarchy principles. There are approximately 40 teachers on the staff and they are predominantly local Malays. At the time of the study there were also two Chinese staff members. For a number of years, there has been one CfBT English teacher on the staff at a time teaching at junior levels. Although a variety of people have filled this role, they have always been the only teacher at the school from a western English first language background. Often they have been the first westerner that local children have formed a relationship with. At the time the research began, this researcher had been teaching there for one year.

### **3.4.3 The journal writing programme**

At the beginning of the school year the researcher was the teacher assigned to plan and run a writing class as part of a range of cross curricula clubs and activities for school pupils in Years 4, 5, and 6. As the main goal was to increase students' motivation and enjoyment in writing in English as well as improve the writing, the researcher decided to adapt a successful local secondary school journal writing programme (Galbraith, 2010) to meet the needs of primary students.

The first lesson was an introduction to the journal writing programme and provided an outline of what the class would be about. Students were told that their writing would not be marked for errors and graded as normal. Instead the teacher would reply to the content or message they wrote - an approach which allows students of varying levels to all experience success and gain confidence in writing (Peyton & Staton, 1993; Duppenhaler,

2004; Harmer, 2004). A local teacher translated these expectations into Malay to ensure students' understanding. Each student was given a journal writing book which they were asked to personalise and decorate in any way they wished. This was intended to emphasise to students firstly, that this class would be different to their regular lessons, and secondly, that they had ownership of the journal and its contents (Fulwiler, 1987).

Each subsequent one-hour class followed a similar plan (apart from the lesson in which the survey was given). Students started the lesson by sitting in a group near the whiteboard. The topic of the day was introduced by writing the title on the board and any prior knowledge was elicited from students and shown as a brainstorm on the board so as to relate the topic to known experiences (Piaget, as cited by Wood, 1998). Other vocabulary pertaining to the topic was also written on the board and discussed as explicit teaching of target language is particularly important for ESL learners (Bruner, 1966). Sometimes Malay translations were given for unusual words or concepts. Students were then handed out an example of a student response to that topic and glued it into their journals. This step enabled students to understand the task and reciprocate the teacher's learning intentions (Feurstein, as cited in Williams & Burden, 1997). The class read the text out loud together and vocabulary, meaning, and language features were discussed as necessary. If necessary students were allowed to code switch and use Malay in the discussion to clarify meaning as advised by Li (2000) and Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain (2005). Students were given the opportunity to share with a partner what they were intending to write about. This pre-writing stage was very important as it allowed students to practice listening, speaking and reading the target language before they attempted the most difficult skill of writing (Bozorgian, 2012) and access to the target vocabulary decreased the task difficulty level for students (Nunan, 1989).

The topics covered during the programme were:

1. Introduction, outline of programme and distribution of journals.
2. Letter of introduction to the teacher
3. Bio-poem

4. Colour poem
5. Senses poem
6. If I had a Super Power, it would be ...
7. Someone who is special to me
8. My favourite activities
9. Music that I like
10. Fears!
11. A 20 question written survey on attitudes towards English and challenges in learning English at school
12. My favourite place
13. A memorable celebration
14. Using the Internet
15. Reflection on journal writing
16. Dreams
17. What sorts of programmes do I watch on television?
18. Review a favourite movie or book
19. Foods I like to eat or cook
20. The best present I ever got was .....

Before the next lesson, each student's entry was read. A reply of several sentences was written, using an attractive layout and brightly coloured ink (not red, as this is used by regular subject teachers for corrections), which modeled use of personal voice, correct vocabulary and language as advised by Burniske (1994) and Harmer (2004). As mentioned previously, the reply commented on the message communicated by the student and its clarity, not errors in language use. Any questions from students were answered and questions were also posed to them. Students were given their journals as they entered the classroom and given time to read the teacher's entry before the lesson started.

A description of how participants in this research were selected and the size of each sample is now provided.

### **3.5 Selection of participants and sample size**

There were two distinct groups studied in this research – the Cohort Group in the first phase of the study and a smaller Case Study group in the second phase.

#### **3.5.1 Cohort**

As the case study only had ten participants and this research was searching for relationships between attitudes to learning English and challenges faced which might impact on academic achievement, it seemed important to ascertain whether the case study participants were representative of other primary students. Due to the research site being a large primary school, it provided an easily accessible additional group of peers. Upper primary students (Years 4, 5 and 6) only were asked to participate in the first phase of this study for three reasons. Firstly, these were the same level as students from the case study. Secondly, by this level many students would be able to understand and fill in the survey with minimal assistance. Thirdly, at the end of Years 4 and 6, students sit nationwide examinations which provided reliable statistics for determining academic achievement of students. Of the 277 Upper Primary students attending the school, 219 agreed to participate. These comprised 72 students out of 97 from Year 4, 79 out of 81 from Year 5 and 68 out of 99 from Year 6.

#### **3.5.2 Case study**

The students for the case study comprised all ten students from my journal writing class after the withdrawal of two students. The original twelve students from the class agreed to participate and all returned consent forms, however two boys with very low level English skills only attended class for the first few lessons and dropped out of the study. Students varied in age, gender and ability. Six students were girls from Year 6, a boy from Year 5, and one boy and two girls from Year 4. This was a sample size which appeared to work well for a case study approach, as it provided a varied range of students but was small enough for the teacher to develop individualised relationships and get to know students.

### **3.6 Data type, purpose and collection**

Researchers using qualitative methods use one, or a combination, of three data collection methods – interviews, observations and document analysis (Grady, 1998). In this case study, the latter two methods provided the following range of data:

- written surveys about students' attitudes, challenges and practices associated with English at home and at school;
- end of year examination results;
- samples of students' journal writing during the year;
- student self-reflections about journal writing;
- observations and notes made by the researcher during the programme.

These data sources were chosen as they were all easily obtainable and supplied differing perspectives. The variety of information provided was also considered necessary to answer all of the four research questions.

This section of the chapter explains the purpose behind the types of data collected for each group.

#### **3.6.1 Cohort**

There were two types of data collected from participants in the Cohort group. These were student surveys and end of year examination results.

The selection of the Cohort Group students at the school is considered an example of convenience sampling (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

The greatly increased sample size (from only 10 students to a total of 219) does increase the reliability of findings based on survey responses and examination results. Validity is also increased due to the larger sample size being representative of the school cohort population.

##### **3.6.1.1 Student surveys**

*Questionnaires that ask specific questions about aspects of the classroom, curriculum or teaching method are a quick and simple way of obtaining broad and rich information from pupils.*

(Hopkins, 2008 p 118)

As one of the aims of this research was to establish the attitudes of Bruneian primary school students' towards learning English and the challenges that they encounter in learning English, it was decided to ask a series of questions to a sample group large enough to be considered a valid representation of a primary school Year 4-6 age group. Written surveys were seen as the most practical method to obtain a large amount of data from students quickly, easily and inexpensively.

The Cohort Group completed a written survey of 20 questions about learning and using the English language (Appendix 1). Half of the questions were used to determine student attitudes and the other half were used to gauge some possible challenges. Only six surveys were unusable due to their non-completion, illegibility or obvious non-understanding of the requirements of the questions.

All of the school's 277 Upper Primary students were given a bilingual information sheet about this research project which was taken home for parents to read (Appendix 4). Consent forms were included requesting student participation through the completion of an anonymous survey. Students were asked to return these to the school (Appendix 5). 219 students in Years 4 - 6 consented to participate.

The school's English teachers attended a meeting in which the nature of the research was discussed and the questions on the survey were clearly explained. Over a timeframe of several days, the teachers then administered the survey to their classes in normal lesson time by reading questions first in English and then translating into Malay as necessary. Extra explanations were given to improve student understanding, particularly in the lower ability classes. Nearly all surveys seem to have been understood and filled out by students clearly so it appears that either the majority of students were able to read the English themselves or their teachers were able to clearly translate and explain the questions. To check reliability, a selection of papers from each class were randomly checked and compared. As each class's questionnaires provided a range of answers, it would appear that students were answering the questions as

individuals and were not using peer pressure to provide similar answers to other classmates or as directed by a teacher.

The Cohort students answered a slightly different version of the survey than that given to the Case Study group. The survey was given to the Case Study students first and it was found that some students had difficulty answering questions which required written responses and needed assistance from a Malay speaking teacher. Although the same questions were retained when surveying the Cohort Group, the language used in the survey was simplified and the method of response was adapted to a multi-choice format. These changes were necessary so as to make understanding of the survey and its administration easier for a larger sample size and were not considered to significantly affect the reliability or validity of the study.

#### **3.6.1.2 Examination results**

Standardised examinations are a method of obtaining base line data on achievement levels for all students in a particular year group. In this study, the end of year examination results for 2011 were obtained for all Year 4, 5 and 6 students at the school. In February 2012, the examination results for the 277 Upper Primary students from the school were obtained from school records. These were photocopied in the form of nine A3 class sheets (three classes for each of the three year levels) which listed the names and examination results for each student. These sheets identified which class a student was in, their English examination mark and grade, their achievement ranking within their class and their year level, and their examination results for the other core subjects including Mathematics and Science (both taught in English).

#### **3.6.2 Case study**

Student surveys and examination results were also collected from the students in the case study. Additionally, three other types of data were collected – student writing samples gathered during the journal writing programme, students' written reflections about the programme and a teacher's journal containing observations and notes. These five types of data were chosen as providing a range of information about students' attitudes and academic performance.

### **3.6.2.1 Case study student surveys**

These were used to provide information about each Case Study student's specific attitudes towards English including ideas about its use, value, and importance. The surveys answered by the Case Study students (Appendix 2) differed to the Cohort Group (Appendix 1), in that students were asked to write responses to several of the questions as opposed to a multi-choice format. After completing their surveys, case study students met with the teacher and a translator individually and more details were requested or clarified as necessary. When all surveys had been reviewed, feedback from the Case Study students was used to adapt and simplify the survey used for the Cohort Group.

### **3.6.2.2 Examination results**

As examination results are the most common and influential measurement of student success in English, the case study students' individual examination results were collected to ascertain possible links between performance in examinations and the other data collected. Each student was able to be ranked in comparison with their peers. Grades for other subjects were also obtained in order to ascertain whether a student had differing levels of competence for English medium subjects as compared to subjects taught in Malay. The level of consistency between grades in all subjects was also investigated as it might suggest a student's general level of academic competence might be influenced by factors such as attitudes within particular subjects.

### **3.6.2.3 Writing samples**

Writing samples were collected to provide information on any changes or improvement in student writing and also to obtain evidence of students' attitudes towards participating in the journal writing programme. Students' work from their journals was photocopied regularly (about once a month) during the course of the programme so that a record of student work was available in case a journal was lost. Annotations were made on the photocopies commenting on features of the writing.

Samples from the start and end of year were graded against a writing skills matrix (Appendix 5) to determine whether there were any changes in students' writing other than what would be expected from normal writing

maturation. Further details on this procedure are provided in the Data Analysis chapter.

#### **3.6.2.4 *Written reflections***

As this study focused on the attitudes of students towards learning English and in particular journal writing, case study participants were given the opportunity to specifically reflect upon their experiences of being members of the journal writing class and their feelings towards tasks. As students were chosen for the class at random and may have wished to be part of other popular classes (such as sports, dance, drama) there was the potential for negativity towards their placement in a more academic based programme. This may have detrimentally influenced their attitude towards the class and the tasks involved. Alternatively, a student may also have become more motivated in the programme in comparison to normal English writing tasks. In either scenario, it was important for the research collection to include data which illustrated students' attitudes towards English, feelings towards the journal writing tasks and their participation in the class.

By mid-year, students had built a relationship of trust with the researcher and understood that they could be honest about their feelings without fear of reprisal. The week's journal topic was to write about whether students thought the class was proving helpful in improving their English writing skills, the topics they liked or disliked, and to compare their feelings towards journal writing class with their regular English classes. These reflections were responded to as normal by the teacher. Photocopies of the entries were made and any passages on these copies were highlighted which seemed to provide further evidence or examples of student thinking about journal writing and attitudes towards learning English.

#### **3.6.2.5 *Teacher's journal***

Informal anecdotal observation is one important method of gathering information on students' attitudes towards learning which may not be evident from document analysis only and so was an important data collection method pertinent to all of the research questions. One strength of observation is that the researcher is not relying on self-reporting which

may be inaccurate, but instead can observe and record what is actually occurring in a situation. Also, observation is often complimentary to other research methods and when used as one source of triangulation can often enhance the quality of evidence available to a researcher (Punch, 2009). In this study, by observing and noting such aspects as body language, behaviour, engagement, participation, oral discussion, task independence, noise level and interaction, a richer picture of student learning was created than would have occurred with a reliance on writing samples only.

At the end of each journal writing class, notes were made about the students based on informal observations during the lesson. During the writing of responses to students, brief quotes from each individual's journal writing for the day were also noted in the teacher's journal. These quotes included examples of language features used, and possible relevance to affective variables such as motivation, interest, prior experiences, and beliefs as discussed in section 2.4 (Clement, Dornyei & Noels, 1994; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Kennedy, Nelson & Odell & Austin, 2000).

This concludes the explanation of the purpose for the different types of data gathered in this study and how they were collected. Section 3.8 now discusses how these different types of data were then analysed.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

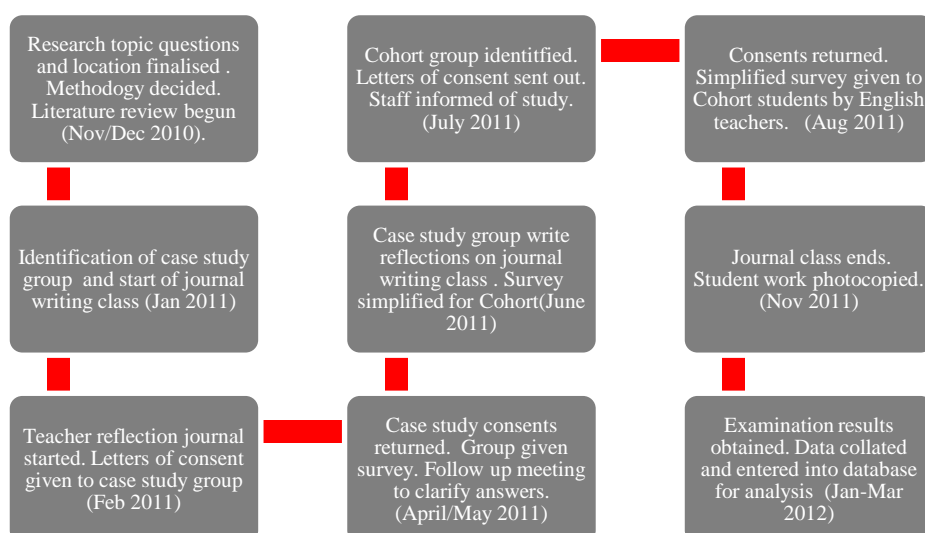
*One of the most powerful aspects of teacher research is that it brings those hunches, the teaching lore we carry quietly with us, to the surface of our thinking...The biggest part of data analysis is learning to see 'what likes what'. These are the patterns in your work, the pieces of data that fit unexpectedly next to each other, leading to a flash of insight... If the analysis seems very easy, you've probably only found out what you already knew before the project began... (Hubbard & Power, 1999. p 117-120)*

The data analysis was divided into two parts – the Cohort Group and the Case Study. The larger Cohort Group was seen as a control group to compare the case study students to, when deciding if their attitudes and challenges were indicative of the majority of their peers.

The major part of the research analysis involved the smaller group of the ten Case Study students. Data for each student was gathered together to form personal profiles comprising their survey answers, journal writing entries, written reflections, classroom observations noted in the teacher's reflection journal, and end of year examination results. Once all the data was collected, it was examined for evidence to determine how each of these ten students felt about English in order to establish their attitudes towards learning and using the language as well as the challenges involved. In particular, their attitude towards the journal writing programme was examined and any marked improvements in their writing.

Figure 1 shows a timeline of the study outlining when the different types of data were collected.

**Figure 1 Research Timeline**



The following sections describe in more detail the processes involved in analysing the data for each group.

### **3.7.1 Cohort**

#### **3.7.1.1 Student surveys**

After the surveys were completed, answers were recorded in a computer spreadsheet so that differing responses for each question could not only be totaled easily but also data could be filtered to provide information for year level and gender. A research methodology weakness was discovered in that the differing multi-choice range of answers that had been given to students for each question made data entry a more difficult

task than had been anticipated. The survey would have been much easier to record results for if the Likert Scale or a similar system had been used.

All questions were entered using numerical spreadsheet values. Each of the 219 students who participated in the survey was allocated a unique ID number on the database and every question listed the student ID, student year level and gender.

Although there was some overlap in data (ie some questions about challenges did include information about student attitudes and vice versa), it was decided that ten questions would be used to determine student attitudes (Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 20) and ten questions would be used to gauge some possible challenges for students (Questions 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19) as shown in Table 1 on the following page. This table also outlines what this researcher chose to focus on within each question and the spreadsheet fields used.

**Table 1 Survey Questions**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Spreadsheet Fields</b>
1	Importance of English as a school subject compared to five other subjects.	Field 1 - English Field 2 - Arabic Field 3 - Bahasa Melayu Field 4 - Science Field 5 - ICT Field 6 - Maths. <i>(Rank 1-6)</i>
2	Enjoyment of English as a school subject compared to five other subjects.	Field 1 - English Field 2 - Arabic Field 3 - Bahasa Melayu Field 4 - Science Field 5 - ICT Field 6 - Maths. <i>(Rank 1-6)</i>
3	The amount of time spent using English outside of school.	Field 1 – Often used Field 2 – Sometimes Field 3 – Seldom/Never <i>(Tick one response)</i>

4	The main contexts English is used outside of school.	Field 1 – With family Field 2 – With friends Field 3 - Shopping Field 4 - Movie/tv/internet Field 5 – Reading books Field 6 – Listen to music Field 7 – Travelling Field 8 – Other  <i>(Tick all those that apply)</i>
5	Self-assessment of English ability.	Field 1 - Speaking Field 2 - Listening Field 3 - Reading Field 4 – Writing  <i>(Each marked as Excellent, Good, Poor)</i>
6	Perception of parents' English ability	Field 1 - Father's English <i>(Excellent, Good, Poor)</i> Field 2 - Father's use  <i>(A lot, Sometimes, Very little/Never, Don't know)</i> Field 3 - Mother's English <i>(as for Father)</i> Field 4 - Mother's use <i>(as for Father)</i> .
7	Range of English language resources at home	Field 1 - Reading books Field 2 - CDs/Music Field 3 – DVDs/Movies Field 4 - Newspapers Field 5 - Magazines  <i>(Tick all those that apply)</i>
8	Perception of the importance of English.	Field 1 – Importance  <i>(Very, Quite, Not very)</i>
9	Prediction of personal future needs in English.	Field 1 - University Field 2 - Employment Field 3 - Travel Field 4 - Internet Field 5 - Meeting people Field 6 – Other  <i>(Tick all those that apply)</i>
10	Anxiety due to English examinations.	Field 1 – Pass class tests/exams  <i>(Always/Usually, Sometimes, Never)</i>  Field 2 – Worry about exams/tests

		<p><i>(Often, Sometimes, Never)</i></p> <p>Field 3 – Feel well prepared for exams</p> <p><i>(Tick if agree)</i></p>
11	Perceived difficulty in learning English	<p>Field 1 – Hard language to learn</p> <p><i>(Yes, Sometimes, No)</i></p> <p>Field 2 – Teacher explains tasks well</p> <p><i>(Tick if agree)</i></p> <p>Field 3 – Able to do task</p> <p><i>(Always, Usually, Sometimes, Never)</i></p>
12	Difficulty of different aspects of written English.	<p>Field 1 - Grammar</p> <p>Field 2 - Spelling</p> <p>Field 3 - Punctuation</p> <p>Field 4 - Vocabulary</p> <p>Field 5 – Topic content</p> <p><i>(Tick all those which are difficult)</i></p>
13	Difficulty in writing in English as compared to speaking, listening and reading.	<p>Field 1 - Writing</p> <p>Field 2 - Speaking</p> <p>Field 3 - Listening</p> <p>Field 4 – Reading</p> <p><i>(Rank 1-4 from easiest to hardest)</i></p>
14	Attitudes towards the teaching of Maths and Science in English and challenges faced.	<p>Field 1 – Maths should be taught in English</p> <p>Field 2 – Maths is hard to understand in English</p> <p>Field 3 – My results in Maths would be better if taught in Malay</p> <p>Field 4 – Science should be taught in English</p> <p>Field 5 – Science is hard to understand in English</p> <p>Field 6 – My results in Science would be better if taught in Malay</p> <p><i>(Tick all those that apply)</i></p>
15	Perceived helpfulness of different types of classroom activities in preparing for examinations.	<p>Field 1 – Writing compositions</p> <p>Field 2 – Translation to/from Malay</p> <p>Field 3 – Reading</p> <p>Field 4 – Questions on text comprehension</p> <p>Field 5 – Discussion in groups</p> <p>Field 6 – Exemplars of good work</p> <p>Field 7 – Worksheets</p> <p>Field 8 - Other</p> <p><i>(Tick all those which are helpful)</i></p>

16	Types of written feedback received from teachers when written English tasks are marked.	Field 1 – Underlined errors Field 2 – Corrected errors Field 3 – Written comments Field 4 – Oral discussion <i>(Tick types of feedback used by teacher)</i>
17	Perceived helpfulness of the written feedback received from teachers.	Field 1 – Feedback from teacher is helpful <i>(Tick if agree)</i>
18	Use of self or peer assessment practices in English lessons.	Field 1 – Self assessment Field 2 – Peer assessment <i>(Tick if used in lessons)</i>
19	Favourite classroom English activities	Field 1 - Reading Field 2 - Spelling Field 3 - Plays Field 4 – Story writing Field 5 - Other <i>(Tick favourite activities)</i>
20	Preference in having a mother-tongue English teacher to teach English compared to a local Malay teacher.	Field 1 – Year level 1 <sup>st</sup> taught by foreign English language teacher <i>(Indicate Year level)</i> Field 2 – Foreign or CfBT teacher Field 3 - Local Malay teacher <i>(Tick preferred teacher for English)</i>

Questions used to establish attitudes

Questions used to establish challenges

Results from the database were tabled for easy reference. During analysis of the tables for information about students' attitudes and challenges in learning English, any interesting outcomes or trends for each question were noted. These included very high or low percentages for particular responses or examples of significant variation between gender or year level.

### **3.8.1.2 Examination results**

It was important for students' perceptions of ability and attitudes towards learning English to be related to the evidence of actual academic results. Once the different pass rates and grades in English for all students at the school in Years 4, 5 and 6 (differentiated by gender and year level) were calculated, these figures were compared to the findings for the survey of the Cohort Group in an attempt to reveal any possible relationships between attitudes or challenges and examination achievement. This was

helpful background knowledge when examining student survey responses as several questions pertained to self efficacy and student perception of ability and these were able to be judged against actual academic results within the school.

### **3.7.2 Case study**

Each type of data was first examined separately as described in the following section. An inductive approach was then used to compare and analyse these findings seeking any interesting relationships.

#### **3.7.2.1 Student surveys**

A paragraph was written about each student commenting on how their response to each survey question related to the responses of the Cohort Group. Unexpected variances were examined closely to identify any reasons why this difference might have occurred. These comparisons assisted the researcher's understanding of whether the attitudes and challenges of case study students were representative of their peers or not. The findings stated within the paragraph were also related to the student's performance during the journal writing programme.

#### **3.7.2.2 Examination results**

Individual examination results were tabled and students ranked in comparison with peers. Results were also compared to answers in surveys and to their engagement and achievement in journal writing so as to ascertain any links between attitudes, task achievement, class progress and eventual examination success.

#### **3.7.2.3 Writing samples**

To determine improvement in writing, the student writing samples collected at the start and end of the year, were marked and analysed using the matrices of progress indicators for writing as contained within the New Zealand Education Curriculum. This is a system the researcher is familiar with and which clearly shows any improvements in writing ability at different ability levels (Appendix 5). One matrix describes characteristics of deeper features of writing (Audience/Purpose, Content/Ideas, Structure and Language). These were the focus of the writing programme. The other matrix describes characteristics of surface features (Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar). Students were assessed as a 'best fit' within each area of

writing and were further described within each level as Beginner, Competent or Advanced. Comparisons were made between the pre and post course writing results with allowance made for normal maturation of students.

#### **3.7.2.4 *Written reflections***

The photocopies of the written reflections were examined and any passages were highlighted which seemed to provide evidence or examples of student thinking about journal writing and learning English. Notes were first made regarding the findings of the group as a whole, for example regarding the tasks which were enjoyed or disliked by the most students, comparisons to regular English classes and whether students had overall positive reactions to the programme. Individual observations were then analysed and annotated to highlight positive or negative reactions in the reflections. Additional comments were added to the photocopies if the reflections related to other data or research.

#### **3.7.2.5 *Teacher's journal***

Anecdotal observations and reflections from the teacher's journal were used to support findings from other data. During the analysis of the other types of data, the teacher's journal was referred to constantly and relevant parts highlighted and referenced when they provided supportive evidence, additional information or related to reviewed literature. The journal contributed valuable evidence in the discussion of all four research questions.

The following sections of this chapter discuss other aspects of the methodology behind this research.

### **3.8 Validity and reliability**

Any research is worthless in scientific eyes if assessment techniques are not reliable and valid (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Due to its nature, qualitative research can be at risk of being seen as lacking validity, particularly if findings are based on limited data and the observations of one person. The extent to which the findings and insights contained within a study can be generalised and applied to other situations may improve its external validity. Burns espouses the use of triangulation as one way to improve reliability. If conclusions from three different perspectives show an

agreement in results, their validity and reliability increases. Erickson (as cited in McDonough & McDonough, 1997) agrees, and states that to ensure plausibility there must be rules of evidence. One of these is that evidence must come from a variety of data types and that reliance on one type can miss important features and leave conclusions unvalidated.

Lincoln and Guba (also cited in McDonough et al.) offer a helpful way to understand the difference between validity and reliability. They describe validity as the credibility research findings have, both to the consumers and to the participants. Reliability is defined as the dependability of the results.

Triangulation was used in this study by comparing information provided by three quite different primary sources of data - the students' journal books, student answers to the survey, and the teacher's reflective journal. Examination results also provided a fourth source of data.

Another method that improved reliability and validity was sought, was through the use of both qualitative and quantitative data (the mixed-methods approach referred to earlier in this chapter) and the inclusion of data from a larger number of peers through an additional survey and overall school examination results. This researcher feels that findings from this study are relevant to many educational practitioners and translatable to other situations so there is external validity.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

#### **3.9.1 Access to participants**

I had access to the case study participants for one hour a week for the purpose of teaching a class entitled Creative English Writing. I did not teach any of these students for their normal English classes. I had the support of my school principal in involving students or staff to participate in my study. The principal was provided with a copy of the thesis proposal before it was submitted to the university so that he could not only be fully informed about the proposed research but also so that he could review it and make suggestions for any changes if he felt that the school, students

or staff were being disadvantaged in any way through this research. After reading the proposal, there were no changes he wished to make.

### **3.9.2 Potential harm to participants**

This research did not expose participants to any significant risk. To allow for the possibility that students may make negative comments during the course of the research about people, the school or the education system, participants were reassured that any comments made would be treated confidentially. Students were asked before completing the survey to not refer to any people by name but rather to use terms such as Teacher A etc if necessary.

The translator used to clarify written comments on the student survey, was asked to sign a form in which he acknowledged that he may hear or read comments that may be negative, but that he would respect the confidentiality of all students and not pass on any comments of any nature or information to anyone but myself. This was also agreed to by the teacher who was the contact person for parents and who translated the informed consent letters into Malay.

### **3.9.3 Participants' right to decline to participate and right to withdraw**

There were no repercussions for any students or teachers not participating in the study. Information sheets about the research contained information regarding participants' right not to participate in the research and also their right to withdraw from the study before the end of the data collection period. Consent forms clearly outlined what activities participants were involved in and how much of their time was required.

### **3.9.4 Surveys**

The case study group had a local young person, unattached to the school, individually going over completed surveys with students. This possibly gave students more freedom to respond frankly than having a teacher assisting them. The translator used a mixture of English and Malay for asking questions and responding to answers as suited the needs of each student, which enabled clear information to be gained from each question in the survey even when a student had poor English skills. They were

given time to discuss any changes they wished to make to any of their answers or to provide more details if necessary.

### **3.9.5 Use of information**

This research has been used to write a thesis for completion of a Master of Education degree. As a employee of CfBT, the thesis and its findings has also been made available to CfBt in Brunei as part of their ongoing collaboration with the Ministry of Education to improve English education in this country. It may be presented at appropriate academic conferences or published in academic journals.

### **3.9.6 Conflict of interest**

Although I was the teacher of the case study students for the journal writing programme, I found that no conflicts of interest arose during this research. Collection of data did take up some time that was scheduled as student lesson time but this was minimal and was approved by the school principal. Most research activities were conducted in my own time and did not conflict with my duties as a teacher. Normal classroom accountability ensured that all students in my journal writing programme, although participants in research, were fully supported in their learning.

### **3.9.7 Informed consent**

Students from the Cohort Group and the Case Study received letters to take home to parents/caregivers outlining the research and clearly stating that their children were under no obligation to participate in the study. This letter was written in Malay and provided contact details for the researcher and a Malaysian teaching colleague so that any questions or concerns could be addressed. Parents had several days to return the consent form so they had adequate opportunity to read it, make contact if necessary and make their decision freely.

All teachers were informed of the research at a staff meeting with the opportunity to ask questions and an information sheet about the research was handed out to staff. It was ensured that English teachers asked to administer the survey did not feel obligated to take part due to friendship or collegial ties.

### **3.9.8 Confidentiality**

Participants were assured that they would all remain anonymous as they are not named in the thesis and no information is included that may identify them. Particular care was taken with members of the case study group to ensure their information remained confidential and that they cannot be identified through any comments made by them or about them that are contained within the thesis. All paperwork related to the research, apart from the students' dialogue journals, was kept securely in a locked container so that there was no access to student assessments, questionnaires or interviews by anyone except the researcher.

### **3.9.9 Social and cultural sensitivity**

As a New Zealander conducting research in another country with a very different cultural, religious and social background, care was taken so as to not cause offense or misunderstanding particularly due to language difficulties and to not jeopardise professional relationships with staff or students. Information sheets, surveys and forms were written in both Malay and English or fully translated orally so that all participants had full understanding of the research being conducted at all times. A local staff colleague provided written translations and advice on any cultural and social considerations that arose during the course of the research.

Chapter 3 has outlined the methodology behind this study. The division of the analysis into two phases enabled a primary school ESL context to be first established through the investigation of the Cohort Group. This background enabled the subsequent Case Study to be examined from a more knowledgeable perspective, with the larger sample size also increasing the validity and reliability of findings. The mixed methods iterative approach involved the investigation of many possible relationships between a range of data, and provided several findings which appear pertinent to literature and research discussed within this thesis.

Now Chapter 4 explains the results obtained from the analysis of data.

## CHAPTER 4 - COHORT GROUP FINDINGS

*Analysis means taking things apart... it means looking for the holes, the patterns, the secrets, the mysteries, for what is in between the stones, the hidden assumptions, the disguises that we find when we follow the path that wanders off almost silently into the forest where the Yellow Brick Road disappears.*

Arhar, Holly & Kasten, 2001, p. 191

This chapter describes the findings pertaining to the cohort group after analysing survey responses and school examination results for students in Years 4, 5 and 6. Findings have been related to the first two research questions being studied, and so are focused on determining primary school students' attitudes towards learning English and any challenges involved.

### **4.1 Cohort survey on attitudes toward English and challenges faced in learning the language**

To answer the first two research questions, it was necessary to explore general attitudes towards English and the challenges faced by the school cohort to which the case study students belonged. In Bruneian primary schools, English is usually taught for about one hour each day and as English is also the medium used to study two other core subjects, Mathematics and Science, it is important to identify learning challenges faced by primary school students. For students entering secondary school at Year 7, English ability is a key factor in streaming classes. Commonly Year 6 examination results for these three subjects and Bahasa Melayu (Malay language) are used to stream students into ability based secondary classes. Even from Year 7, class placement can affect subject and learning choices, teacher allocation and the learning environment itself. Although intervention classes are usually provided, it becomes a very difficult task for low achievers in English at Year 7 level to improve their English ability enough to achieve passes in secondary examinations. This significantly affects choices of employment and consequently, community status. It is therefore of great benefit to identify why some students struggle with the learning of English throughout primary school and others

do not. As this research focuses on just ten students, the opportunity to relate to and compare information gathered from a larger pool of peers, seemed an important step in the research process.

The following section outlines the survey findings to the twenty questions (See Appendix 1) asked to the 219 students who made up the Cohort Group. Appendix 6 displays additional tables pertaining to the survey questions which are not displayed in this chapter.

Any significant anomalies in results for gender and year level are also presented. Gender differences are noted as this was considered to be a relevant factor in this study as suggested in the research on journal writing of Su and Duo (2012). Differentiation by year level is also shown as primary school students' thought processes change as they grow (Piaget, as cited by Wood, 1998) and therefore it was important to establish whether students' thoughts showed any differences over the three years from Years 4, 5 and 6. The ability for personalised abstract thought has usually not been developed at primary age and student ideas and attitudes are strongly influenced by other people – often parents, family, teachers and peers.

The results from the ten survey questions about attitudes are now outlined.

The first question sought to establish the value placed on academic achievement in English, so students were asked to rank six school subjects.

**Question 1: Ranking of English in academic importance when compared to Arabic, Bahasa Melayu (Standard Malay), Science, ICT and Mathematics.**

Most students considered English important academically with 66% of students ranking it first (22%), second (21%) or third (23%) out of the six subject choices given. Females tended to consider it significantly more important than males - 76% ranked it first, second or third compared to 55% of males. In Year 4, 69% of students ranked it in the first three

subjects, and although this fell in Year 5 (53%), the figure increased to 79% of Year 6 students.

One possible explanation for the higher percentages in Year 4 and Year 6 could be the emphasis on and importance of the external examinations for both these year groups in which English plays a key role.

The following table shows the rankings students allocated each of the six subjects.

**Table 2 Student Ranking of Academic Importance of Six Subjects**

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6 <sup>th</sup>
English	45 22%	44 22%	49 24%	39 19%	20 9%	8 4%
Arabic	19 9%	21 10%	13 6%	18 9%	48 24%	85 42%
Bahasa Melayu	48 24%	32 16%	35 17%	61 30%	20 9%	9 4%
Science	26 13%	33 16%	48 24%	47 24%	29 14%	21 10%
ICT	10 5%	29 14%	21 10%	24 12%	65 32%	55 27%
Maths	58 29%	45 22%	37 18%	15 7%	23 11%	26 13%

Maths was the most popular choice as the most important subject (29%), followed by Bahasa Melayu (24%) and English (22%). If however the first three columns are added together, it is noted that although Maths was chosen by 69% of students as being one of the three most important subjects, English achieved a similar result (68%), with Bahasa Melayu chosen by only 57%. Science was chosen by 53% of students as being one of the three most important subjects so also rates as significantly important. English was only chosen by 8% of students to be the least important subject (a similar figure to Bahasa Melayu at 9%).

This finding is of interest to this research, as of the four subjects considered most important by primary students to achieve academic success in, three are taught in the medium of English. It also provides evidence that achieving academic success in English is considered by many primary students to be as important, or more important than achieving success in Malay. This emphasises the integral role that English plays in the culture of Brunei.

**Question 2: Ranking of enjoyment level of learning English as a school subject compared to Arabic, Bahasa Melayu (Standard Malay), Science, ICT and Mathematics.**

Subject enjoyment and emotions are likely to impact on learning (Yang, 1999). Emotional engagement and interest in a subject plays a major role in learning and whilst negative emotions can minimise cognitive functioning, active engagement often increases the desire to learn. English is one of the top three most enjoyed subjects for 70% of students (24% rated it first, 24% second and 22% third), so they may be likely to be more motivated to achieve good results than the 30% who do not enjoy it as much. Females and males showed similar levels of enjoyment.

One interesting point is that even with the stress of important Year 6 examinations, as enjoyment levels increased with year level, this year group overall had the highest enjoyment levels in English. 29% of Year 6 students enjoyed English more than their other subjects, compared with 25% in Year 5 and 18% in Year 4, and no Year 6 student listed it as least enjoyable. As the students who rated English highly at Year 6 were ranged fairly evenly over all three classes involved (each with a different teacher) the cause of this difference is undetermined.

**Question 3: The amount of time spent using English outside of school**

As may be expected in a country in which English is widely spoken, 70% of students said they spoke English sometimes out of school hours and 8% said they often spoke it. However 22% of students seldom or never speak English when not at school which does raise some concern. If

students do not perceive that learning a language is of use to them personally and culturally, not just academically, this could have a strong impact on their incentive to learn (Feurstein, as cited in Williams & Burden, 1997 p39-185). There was little difference with regard to gender or year level.

At primary age, many lifestyle choices including the use of English, are likely to still be heavily influenced by and controlled by parents so Question 4 of the survey was aimed at finding out in what contexts primary students in Brunei do use English outside of the classroom.

#### **Question 4: The main contexts in which English is used outside of school**

Social Interactionism (as outlined in Chapter 2.1.5) is underpinned by the belief that language is taught most effectively by encouraging meaningful interactions with others (Vygotsky, 1978). When students are motivated to voluntarily interact using the target language outside of school, this language practice could be regarded as being even more valuable.

Survey responses show that recreational use appears to be the major reason for primary students using English. Listening to music is the most popular context (60%) for both males (53%) and females (65%), but many students, also use it for the internet and for watching movies or television (40%). Almost half of the students read English books out of school (48%). Many students said they used English when talking with family (53%) and friends (35%) or going shopping (30%). Some students had also used English when travelling (17%) The majority of these activities are likely to involve personally meaningful interactions with other people and make English highly relevant to these students' daily lives thus increasing its perception as being valuable to them.

Year 6 students showed a substantially higher level of English usage compared to younger students when talking to family and friends, reading books and listening to music, possibly reflecting their higher skill level in the language.

To judge their level of self-efficacy, students were then asked to self-assess their ability level and skill in using English.

### Question 5: Self-efficacy in English

Students were asked to rate their English speaking, listening, reading and writing skills as excellent (E), good (G) or poor (P) as shown in Table 5.

**Table 3 Students Self Perception of Skill in English**

	Speaking (174)			Listening (164)			Reading (174)			Writing (161)		
	E	G	P	E	G	P	E	G	P	E	G	P
All students	32 18%	108 62%	34 20%	47 29%	95 58%	22 13%	66 38%	102 59%	6 3%	36 22%	98 61%	27 17%
Females	19 19%	60 61%	20 20%	35 39%	46 51%	9 10%	37 38%	58 60%	2 2%	24 26%	55 60%	12 14%
Males	13 17%	48 64%	14 19%	12 16%	49 66%	13 18%	29 38%	44 57%	4 5%	12 18%	41 60%	15 22%
CfBT	23 17%	86 65%	24 18%	34 27%	72 58%	19 15%	47 35%	83 61%	5 4%	33 27%	71 59%	17 14%
Local	10 23%	24 54%	10 23%	13 29%	28 64%	3 7%	19 45%	22 52%	1 3%	3 8%	27 67%	10 25%
Year 4	17 34%	26 52%	7 14%	12 25%	27 56%	9 19%	20 38%	32 60%	1 2%	9 22%	25 61%	7 17%
Year 5	8 13%	42 67%	13 20%	20 32%	37 59%	6 9%	29 44%	35 53%	2 3%	18 28%	37 58%	9 14%
Year 6	8 13%	42 65%	14 22%	15 26%	36 62%	7 12%	17 29%	38 66%	3 5%	9 16%	36 64%	11 20%

Reading had an extremely high self-efficacy rating with 97% of students considering themselves excellent or good. In addition, 87% thought they were excellent or good at listening, 83% excellent or good at writing and 80% excellent or good at speaking. Overall results clearly show that the

majority of primary students have a very high self-efficacy with regard to English. This could be seen as a very positive aspect of English teaching in Brunei as high self-efficacy is an extremely influential learner belief and has very strong links to the acquisition of new skills (Bandura, 1986; Graham and Weiner as cited in Pajares, 2000; Cotterall, 1999).

There are three further points of note. Firstly, although boys showed similar rates for speaking and reading to the girls, they had significantly lower self-efficacy than girls for listening and writing. Secondly, self-efficacy lessened with year level so that Year 6 students tended to have lower self-efficacy than Year 4s. The reason for these differences between gender and year level are unclear. It is possible that Year 6 students are more concerned about forthcoming examinations and therefore their perception about their ability to do well is lessened. However there appears no obvious explanation for the differences between gender for listening and writing self-efficacy.

The last point of interest was the higher self-efficacy in writing for students who had been taught by a CfBT teacher. Over a quarter of students (27%) thought themselves excellent and only 14% rated themselves as poor compared to 8% and 25% respectively for locally taught students. Although this may indicate that western teachers have increased students self efficacy in writing more than local teachers the reliability of this finding would need to be further investigated due to the relatively small sample size of students classed as non-CfBT taught.

New entrant (PRA) students enter the schooling system in Brunei with a wide difference in English ability and their parents also have a range of ability in using English. To establish if there may be a relationship between a student's ability in English and the perception of their parents' ability, students were asked Question 6.

### **Question 6: Student perception of parent's English ability and use of English for employment.**

The majority of students felt that their parents have either an excellent or good ability in English. More mothers (94%) were perceived as being excellent or good when compared to fathers (88%). Just 12% of fathers and 6% of mothers were considered by their children to have poor English.

There seems little relationship between perception of ability and perceived use of English at work. Although many students were uncertain how frequently their mothers (35%) and fathers (39%) used English for their jobs (this included stay at home mothers), it seems that English is often or sometimes used by many parents. Just 14% of fathers and 5% of mothers were thought to use English rarely. Even the 67% of parents who were thought to rarely used English for employment were still rated by their children as having excellent (23%) or good (44%) English skills. The 30% of parents who were seen as having excellent English were employed in positions where they used it a lot with only 7% using English rarely. Many mothers (60%) and fathers (47%) were seen as often or sometimes using English for work.

Overall a generalisation could be made that many students consider that English is an important skill that their parents regularly use in and out of the workplace. This may affect attitudes to learning English, as if students perceive the language is valued by their family and culture then they are probably more likely to value it as well. However it must be noted that primary school age children are likely to admire their parents and may perceive them as 'good' at something even when there is no valid criteria.

Students were then questioned about the types of English materials they have access to at home.

### **Question 7: English materials in the home**

Books, music and movies are in the homes of most students with newspapers and magazines to a lesser extent. Only two students (1%) did not have any access to English materials but a significant 33% only

had one type of medium. Of the students with only one type of medium, the majority had DVDs or movies (47%), with books and music the next most popular choices (both with 18%). Some students (10%) had only magazines or only newspapers (7%). Over half of all students had between two and four different types of English materials (51%) with 15% having all of the media listed available in their homes.

These results indicate that many primary age children have access to some English materials at home and are beginning to use the English language for recreational purposes outside of the classroom. Even when they don't fully understand the language used, it appears that students are enjoying watching and listening to English based movies, music and books.

The next question relates to the importance of English in their lives once students leave school.

#### **Question 8: The importance of English skills for school leavers.**

By this point in the survey, findings were already strongly indicating that even at primary age, most Bruneian students have a strong belief that learning English is important. This question showed that in fact 79% of students believed that it will be very important to have good English skills by the time they leave school, with a further 16% thinking it will be quite important. Only 5% of students felt it was not very important. There was little variation in these results for gender. Once again these findings indicate very positive attitudes by most students towards learning English due to its possible future personal value.

Students were then asked to indicate for what reasons they thought they would need good English skills once they leave school.

#### **Question 9: Reasons school leavers are likely to need good English**

Further education (68%) was the most popular reason given for needing good English skills with the other choices (Employment 52%, Travel 55%, Internet 49% and Meeting people 44%) also popular with many students. Just over 10% more females listed university and employment as being

more important than males, but the other choices had little gender variation. The only context that more boys (50%) chose compared to girls (44%) was in English medium internet usage. This researcher considers that one possibility for this could be due to the popularity of internet gaming in which many boys in Brunei seem to participate but there was no evidence given to support this idea in the scope of this research.

As it appears clear that Bruneian primary students therefore do consider English important, how well do they do in class tests and how worried are they about passing their examinations? Do they feel their teachers are able to prepare them well for examinations and assessments?

**Question 10: Frequency of passing English assessments and class tests. Anxiety over English examinations. Perception of how well English teachers are trained and their ability to prepare students for examinations.**

Whilst there was little difference between gender, the examination years of Year 4 and Year 6 cause anxiety for many students with 55% of Year 6 students often worrying about examinations and a further 41% sometimes worrying about them. This reflects the pressure that primary school students are under to achieve good results in English and enhance their future education prospects. Only 21 students (10%) said they never worry about examinations.

Of note is that although 83% of Year 6 students considered they were well prepared by their teachers to sit the end of year examinations, only 32% state that they often pass class tests or previous examinations.

Unfortunately, information was not collected to provide further clarification as to whether the students who believe they were well prepared also believe they will pass the examination - evidence of self efficacy. However the discovery that 68% of Year 6 students were preparing to sit their examinations with little prior examination success in that subject may help explain why 96% of them suffered from some or frequent examination anxiety.

When considering students who did not feel that they were well prepared for examinations, 7% stated that they also never worried. These students may be considered to have higher self-esteem than self-efficacy – although they feel they may not pass the examination (low self-efficacy), this has not caused them personal anxiety. They may not value English and so failure in English does not affect their self-esteem (Bong & Clark, 1999). As a contrast 4% of students did not feel well prepared and also often worried. These students would therefore rate as being low in both self-efficacy and self-esteem.

**Question 11: Perception of difficulty in learning the English language. Clarity of teacher explanations of class work. Ability to complete class activities.**

Overall most students (85%) responded with high self-efficacy, stating that English is either not difficult to learn (25%) or only sometimes difficult (60%). This appears to correspond with 82% of students also feeling that teachers explain tasks clearly. Task clarity was similar for all levels and there was little variation in gender, but there were some differences in year level responses to this question regarding perception of difficulty and task success.

A major finding was that only 50% of students (52% females and 48% males) say they always or usually can complete class tasks. This means that nearly half of all students surveyed often do not complete tasks including 4% of students who say they are never able to complete tasks. Task success decreased as year level increased with 69% of students of Year 4 regularly completing tasks but only 40% doing so in Year 6. This is a very important finding implying that many teachers may be setting tasks at a difficulty level beyond the capabilities of most of their students or that other factors are preventing students from completing them.

This survey did not provide specific information as to all the challenges for students in completing English classroom tasks, but the next question focused on some possible difficulties faced when writing in English.

### **Question 12: Difficulties faced in writing English**

For the 214 students who responded to this question, Spelling (69%) was seen as the most difficult area of language followed closely by Grammar (64%), then Vocabulary (53%) and Topic content (52%). Punctuation was considered the easiest but was still rated as difficult by 45% of students. There appears little difference in results for gender.

It is possible that punctuation may be seen as having lower difficulty due to punctuation skills also being used when writing in Bahasa Melayu so it is practiced in both languages. Spelling and grammar are both skills that teachers tend to focus on when correcting books, so if students are regularly receiving corrective feedback regarding them, it may influence their perception of their skill level and may have contributed to the high difficulty awarded to them.

All five aspects of written language were found difficult by 10% of students. In comparison, just 1% of students stated that all aspects were easy.

Of interest was the differences in year levels. Year 6 students overall found four (grammar, punctuation, vocabulary and topic) out of the five areas more difficult than in Year 4, particularly grammar. This could be due to the strong focus on written accuracy and examination preparation in Year 6. However spelling difficulty was considered less at this level which could mean that students have developed a better knowledge of English spelling rules and can therefore apply them to unknown words with more confidence. There was one major anomaly in Year 5 responses for which no explanation is readily available – 86% of them found spelling difficult as compared to 68% for Year 4 and 50% for Year 6.

As writing is a primary focus of this study, students were then asked to consider how Writing ranked in difficulty when compared to Speaking, Listening and Reading.

**Question 13: Ranking of the four English skills from easiest to hardest.**

This question provided interesting results with the main finding being that Reading is considered by most students (36%) to be the easiest activity overall, particularly by girls (38%). Only 10% responded that it was the most difficult activity. Most students in Year 6 (41%) and Year 5 (38%) agree, although in Year 4 Speaking is thought to be easiest.

Overall students varied greatly in their perception of difficulty of Speaking, Listening and Writing. Whereas 29% of students ranked Speaking the easiest, another 40% ranked it the hardest. Listening was considered easiest by 20% of students, but 17% found it the most difficult. Likewise although 15% of students stated that Writing was the easiest activity, it was seen as the hardest by 33%. However the finding that 73% of students found either Speaking or Writing the most difficult activity provides some evidence that many students find the passive skills of reading and listening easier than the productive skills of speaking and writing as suggested by Bozorgian (2012).

There was some variation within gender. Speaking was rated by 35% of girls as easiest or second easiest as opposed to 47% of the boys who thought this, Listening 40% of girls compared to 55% of boys, Writing 54% of girls compared to just 35% of boys, and Reading 71% of girls compared to 62% of boys. This indicates that in this survey the majority of girls tended to find Writing and Reading easier than boys, whereas many boys found Speaking and Listening easier than girls.

Many Year 6 students from the survey felt Listening and Reading activities are easier than in Year 4. Listening was easiest for only 11% of students in Year 4 but this rose to 29% in Year 6 (15% of students still found it the most difficult). Reading was the easiest activity for 28% of students in Year 4 but 41% of Year 6 students thought this with just 3% of students finding it the most difficult.

In contrast, Speaking and Writing results indicate that these activities appear to increase in difficulty between Year 4 and Year 6 for a significant

number of students. Although 40% of Year 4 students found Speaking easiest, in Year 6 this had decreased to just 18% with 35% of Year 6 students finding Speaking the hardest activity. Similarly there were 21% of Year 4 students who found Writing easiest but just 12% in Year 6 found it easiest with 47% stating that this was the hardest activity.

The discovery that writing increases in difficulty for many primary age students is highly pertinent as improving writing ability is a key area of study in this research and Chapter 5 examines how journal writing was able to improve the writing skills of participants.

The next question addressed the problems of students being asked to also learn Maths and Science using the English language.

**Question 14: Agreement on whether Maths and Science should be taught in English. Difficulty in understanding questions and using English within these subjects. Perception of possible academic improvement if these subjects were taught in Malay.**

The results for this question provided an interesting example of the almost contradictory, love-hate relationship many Bruneians seem to have with English. Although clearly most students agree that Maths (81%) and Science (77%) should be taught in English, most also agree that they would get better marks if Maths (61%) and Science (63%) were taught in Malay. To back this claim up, more than half of the students find understanding and answering questions for Maths (51%) and Science (52%) in English difficult. One point of interest is that more boys (85%) than girls (78%) believe Maths should be taught in English but more girls (85%) than boys (67%) feel that English should be used to teach Science.

It is noted that the results show that by Year 6 views are at their strongest for each of the questions asked. In Science although 83% of Year 6 students think this subject should continue to be taught in English, the same percentage also believe they would achieve higher marks if it was taught in Malay with 67% of students finding the subject hard to understand in English. In Maths, 85% of students agree that it should be

taught in English although 62% find it hard to understand questions and 72% believe they would achieve higher marks if it was taught in Malay.

Already at primary age, Bruneian students seem to have acquired an understanding that English is a necessary and important part of their life and culture. However a significant number have already discovered, that as ESL learners, the acquisition of good English skills, even in their English-biased school curriculum, is not a straight forward matter.

Students were therefore asked to comment on what sorts of classroom activities they find helpful when learning English.

**Question 15: The most helpful activities for preparing for examinations and tests.**

Students were given a choice of seven activities, which had been suggested by students from the case study group, and were asked to indicate which ones they also found helpful. The activities were writing compositions, translating to and from Malay, silent reading, answering questions about texts, solving language problems in groups or with peers, looking at examples of good work and worksheets. There was also space for students to indicate any other activities they found helpful.

No one activity from those options given to students emerged as being a clear favourite in being helpful in preparing for examinations. The writing of compositions was ranked highest at 55% but there was only a 17% spread over the seven options given. Generally girls seemed to find the activities more helpful than boys, with the largest gender difference showing up with regard to writing compositions as 63% of girls found these helpful compared to only 44% of boys. This could relate to Survey Question 13 findings in which writing was considered the most difficult activity overall and more boys than girls tended to find reading and writing harder than listening and speaking. It does appear that all these common types of classroom activities are considered useful by many students as examination preparation.

Students were also asked to answer questions about the type of feedback their class teacher usually gave about their writing.

### **Question 16: Feedback given by the class teacher about written work**

The importance of quality feedback from teachers was discussed in Chapter 2 at some length. As teacher feedback was an important component of the journal writing programme in this study, it was thought relevant to ascertain the types of feedback primary students usually receive from their teachers.

All students surveyed (100%) said that they regularly received at least one type of feedback about their writing errors from their teachers. There were 29% of students who noted that they normally only receive one of the types of feedback mentioned in the survey – oral discussion (2%), written comments (2%) errors underlined for students to self correct (12%) and teacher corrected errors (13%). All four types of feedback were regularly received by 19% of students, although the majority (52%) normally received two or three different types.

The underlining of errors or teacher corrected errors were the most common types of feedback (both received by 63% of students). Teachers also gave feedback orally to many students (52%) but the survey did not clarify to what extent this included whole class feedback as opposed to one-to-one conferencing.

The writing of comments was the least common method of feedback (41%). It is noted here that when students in the case study answered this question, they were instructed to consider that the response choice 'Writes comments at the end of the activity' could include short generic comments such as 'Well done' or 'Unfinished' as well as lengthier comments providing information on improving learning or success in meeting lesson objectives. It is suspected by this researcher that many of the students who responded in the affirmative to this question were referring to short generic comments rather than comments that provide focused information to improve learning. Unfortunately the response choices did not allow for this differentiation, so this theory is unsupported.

It is suggested that a Bruneian study into feedback given to primary students would be useful as findings from this survey indicate that this is an area that may benefit from local research. The following question asked students how effective they found the feedback they were given in improving their English.

**Question 17: Effectiveness of teacher feedback in improving English.**

It appears that the type of traditional feedback given as detailed in the previous question is often based on surface features such as grammar and spelling and is of a corrective nature. This traditional style feedback tends to result in students being passive recipients of feedback rather than active learners engaged in complex cognitive processing (Huot, 2002; Beach and Fredreich, 2006; Parr and Timperley, 2010). However, the students surveyed in this research project overwhelmingly stated (87%) that they find their teachers' feedback helpful in improving their English and particularly when preparing for examinations. 91% of Year 5 and 6 students agreed with this statement. Slightly more females (91%) agreed than males (82%).

One explanation for this could be that at the time of this research most primary age students in Brunei have only experienced traditional types of feedback from their teachers so have no comparison with other types of feedback. Also as the national primary examinations tend to follow similar formats each year, many senior teachers have become very adept at 'teaching to the test' and are certainly able to provide a range of useful activities which are specifically aimed at providing practice for examination style questions. Students therefore are likely to consider that activities and feedback provided by their teachers are very helpful in their examination preparation.

The Ministry of Education is currently involved in implementing an Assessment for Learning national training programme for primary teachers. At the time of this research this had not begun, so an interesting question to ask students was whether they used techniques such as self or peer assessment/feedback in order to establish whether a move to more student centred activities was already occurring in primary schools.

### Question 18: Use of self or peer assessment in English

The use of self and peer assessment techniques can assist students to take self-responsibility for their own learning and become aware of personal strengths and weaknesses rather than being passive learners who rely on their teacher to tell them what to do. The Ministry of Education in Brunei states that the use of Assessment for Learning practices “...represents a major paradigm shift in Brunei education calling for significant changes in attitude and mindset...” (2011, p.vii).

It was found that at the time of this research, many students were already regularly using self assessment (69%) and peer assessment (59%) with 37% of students using both regularly in the classroom. The students who used these assessment methods came from varied levels and classes. There were some students (9%) who said they did not use either form of assessment but it is possible that these students did not fully understand the meaning of the terms or did not realise that certain activities were considered to be forms of self or peer assessment as they came from classes in which the majority of their classmates stated that they were used. This seems a more likely scenario than these students being excluded or absent.

There was little difference to responses by gender or class level. Two exceptions to this were a higher number of girls (77%) who stated that they self assess their work as compared to boys (60%) and generally more Year 6 students were involved in these assessment techniques than in Years 4 or 5.

Overall it would seem encouraging that some local primary teachers have been beginning to introduce these techniques into their classrooms even before official MoE training and directives.

As enjoyment of a task is linked to greater motivation and improved learning, students were asked to name their favourite English activity. The choices listed were those commonly chosen as favourite activities by the case study students.

**Question 19: Popular English classroom activities**

Students were provided with four choices of popular activities (spelling, performing plays/reading aloud, personal choice reading, and story writing) with space provided to write down any other favourite activities that were not listed. Reading aloud or performing plays was the highest ranked activity (42%) from the four listed. Spelling tests and games were ranked second highest being enjoyed by 36% of students. Reading and story writing (fictional writing) were also favoured by a significant number of students (both 29%). Other activities were mentioned by 9% of students.

There were some differing responses for different year levels which again appear hard to explain from the information provided. It is noted however that with regard to gender, figures for males were substantially lower for each of the four activities listed when compared to females. More males also suggested other activities they enjoyed more than these activities, which indicates that different genders may prefer and may be more motivated by different types of classroom activities. It is noted that the activities listed for this question were those most commonly mentioned as favourites by the case study students who consisted primarily of females.

Of further interest is that 8% of students, which included both genders, said that all of the four activities suggested were favourite activities in contrast with twenty nine students who responded that none of the activities mentioned were favourites. Whereas fifteen of these latter students named other English activities that they enjoyed on their survey papers, fourteen students, seven male and seven female, were unable to name any favourite English activity at all. An assumption that these students did not enjoy English as a subject was however proved incorrect after further analysis as eight of these students rated English as one of their favourite subjects in Survey Question 2. Of the other six students, one did not answer Question 2 and the other three did rate English as one of their least enjoyable subjects. It seems unusual that eight students who stated that they did enjoy English, found it difficult to provide any examples

of enjoyable activities, but the information available was insufficient to provide any further insight.

The final question about attitudes that students were asked was about being taught by western English teachers.

Question 20: Number of students previously taught by a foreign/CfBT English language teacher. Preference of students to be taught English by either a foreign/CfBT or local Malay teacher.

The majority of students in this research project had been previously taught by western English teachers, mainly through a long running CfBT contract with the MoE in Brunei which provides mother tongue primary teachers at lower primary level. Many English teachers at secondary level are also provided by CfBT. As this study involved attitudes towards learning English it seemed of interest to ascertain whether being previously taught English by a western teacher would influence students attitudes to having a western teacher in the future.

Even though it is suggested that CfBT teachers would probably describe their relationships with their lower primary students as good or very good, it appears that most students still prefer a local Malay speaking English teacher (55%). Only 21% indicated a preference for a foreign teacher with another 24% undecided or having no preference. As discussed in section 2.3.3 on code switching (Liebsher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2005), this preference for a local teacher seems to be strongly linked to students wishing to use the Malay language with both their peers and their teacher to enhance understanding of the second language and ask questions about their learning rather than a dislike or fear of Westerners.

### **Summary of findings**

The responses of the Cohort Group to the survey questions provided a number of interesting findings. To summarise this section, it is clear that in general students' attitudes towards English are extremely positive. They value English as an academic subject but more importantly acknowledge its pivotal role as a major language for communication, connecting

Bruneians to other people and cultures. However, students do find English a challenging language to learn. Many do not have the skills, knowledge or time to successfully complete classroom tasks on a regular basis and most suffer from examination anxiety. Often feedback does not provide the specific information and support students need to understand their errors and correct them in future tasks. These attitudes and learning challenges are discussed in more depth in Chapter 6.

The school examination results for the Cohort group are now examined.

## **4.2 Cohort school examination results**

Examination results are a means to measure academic success. The importance of Bruneian students achieving high English results has been emphasised already in this study so it was important to explore any relationships between examination results and students' attitudes towards English or the challenges they face in learning the language.

For this study, results for all students at the school in Years 4, 5 and 6 were obtained. Although, Year 6 examination results were provided as grades only, the results for Year 4 and Year 5 were provided in tables which showed student order of ranking for each subject as well as their overall year level position when results for all subjects were collated.

School results for each year level are now examined.

To achieve an overall pass at the end of the year, Year 6 students must gain passes in at least three of the five core subjects which include English, Science and Maths. Students can achieve four levels of pass (A-D) or a failed grade (U). There were 96 students from the school who took part in the national end of year examinations in 2011. These comprised 46 males and 50 females. Final English grades for students were: A – 9, B – 26, C – 35, D – 18, U – 8. Despite examination anxiety, most students passed their English examination (73%). Females generally scored higher than males with 46% achieving an A or B pass compared to only 26% of males. More males also failed to complete the paper.

In Year 5, there were 41 boys and 40 girls - a total of 81 students. An important finding was that 49% of boys and 20% of girls failed the examination and received a U grade. Of the 51% of students who did complete the examination, results were much lower than for Year 6. This may be explained by the Year 5 examination being an internal assessment only with a corresponding reduction of pressure on both students and teachers, but the large gender imbalance does appear unusual and not easily explained.

During this study, 97 (40 boys and 57 girls) Year 4 students sat examinations. Similarly to Year 5, there were a substantial number of students (39%) who failed the examination. This figure was comprised of 58% of the boys in Year 5 and 26% of the girls – a large gender imbalance once again.

The first major finding regarding the analysis of the Cohort group examination results was that a large number of students are failing English examinations at Year 4 and 5, although this reduces substantially in Year 6 for the final primary school examination (PSR). Males are also much more likely to fail English examinations than females. A failure rate of 58% in Year 4 and 49% in Year 5 for males is an issue of major concern.

It was also found that the English ranking for Year 4 and Year 5 students had a strong correlation to overall achievement in examinations.

Consistently for all six classes, 80 - 90% of students ranked in the top ten students in their respective English classes also appeared in the top ten students overall when all core subjects were combined. A similar trend applied to the lowest ten students in each English class. 70 – 100% of these students were also ranked in the bottom ten overall. Although the data obtained did not allow for Year 6 students, it appears that English ability and achievement is a strong indicator of overall academic success in a Bruneian primary school context.

Once the data for the Cohort Group had been analysed, the data from the Case Study participants was examined and these findings are outlined in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5 - CASE STUDY FINDINGS

*Data is a burden in that you've got so much of it. It's very much like taking twenty pounds of mashed potato and shoving it through a straw.* Cox, as cited in Hubbard & Power, 1999, p. 117

This chapter outlines the findings from the five different types of data collected about students participating in the case study. These consist of the profile paragraphs summarising each student's survey responses, examination results, writing samples, written reflections and the teacher's journal. This information was used to determine how students' specific attitudes and challenges influenced their participation in the journal writing programme and whether the programme improved their written English.

The first section relates to students' responses to the survey about attitudes and challenges in learning English.

### 5.1 Case Study Survey Responses (Profile Paragraphs)

A profile paragraph was written about each of the ten case study students based on their answers to their surveys in comparison to the answers by their peers. Writing paragraphs about each student enabled this researcher to more clearly identify and understand the range of different factors influencing them as compared to showing results in table form. The profile paragraph for Student 2 is provided as an example:

**Student 2 – Year 6 female:** This student considers English to be the second most important academic subject behind Mathematics. It is her third most enjoyable subject after Mathematics and Bahasa Melayu. She considers that she uses English a lot outside of school hours using it at home with her family and talking to other relatives or friends. She rates her own English as good and her parents' English ability as excellent. Her father does not work but her mother works in an office where she uses both English and Malay. She considers that she has a lot of English language resources at home particularly English movies which she enjoys and can usually understand. She likes to read her older brothers' comics, but most of the English books in her home are for adults. As she plans to

travel when she is older, S2 believes having good English skills will be very important for her in the future. She also feels that English is becoming more important for Bruneians “because you don’t know when you will need it”. She often worries about examinations because she will have no help answering questions and will have to try and do everything by herself. She finds punctuation the easiest part of learning English however grammar and spelling are the hardest aspects. Reading is the easiest activity for her, followed by speaking, listening and writing. She would much prefer the other core subjects to be taught in Malay rather than English - she doesn’t know many of the words in Science and Maths although the teachers are helpful. She finds the majority of classroom tasks assist her learning, but the most useful activities for her are those that provide time to ask questions and have a discussion. Her teacher gives her feedback on her writing by crossing out errors and telling her what is wrong, but she often still doesn’t understand how to do her work better. Sometimes her teacher comments that her work is “Very Good” which makes her happy. She likes oral feedback the best because it is easier to understand. S2 rates the teaching in her English classes as very good although she would like more time to study the questions and work out the answers as sometimes she feels rushed. She enjoys the journal writing class because it is very easy to write about the topics but she likes to have a Malay teacher because they can explain about a topic better.

As is indicated from this profile paragraph there are many factors influencing students attitudes towards learning and it was of interest to note how each student varied markedly from other participants in the journal writing programme. The profile paragraphs for the other nine students are attached as appendices (Appendices 6 to16). It was also found of interest to compare these students’ survey responses with the two Year 4 boys who withdrew from the case study and therefore paragraphs were also written about them (Appendices 17 and 18).

After the analysis of all the profile paragraphs, a number of important reoccurring themes became evident and are supported by findings from the survey responses of the larger Cohort group.

The following paragraph summarises the main ideas indicated by responses to the ten survey questions used to suggest attitudes to learning and support the findings of the cohort group.

The first major theme reoccurring in the profile paragraphs is that all ten case study students consider English very important academically. Nine students ranked it in the top three subjects with four placing it first. Many also consider it one of the more enjoyable subjects at school. Seven students ranked it in the top three for enjoyment. Most students consider they use English rarely or only sometimes outside of school hours. Only one case study student described her usage level of English as 'a lot'. When English is used, it's often to access English language media such as movies, music and books. To a lesser extent, English may be used when talking to friends and family or shopping. Students tend to have a high self efficacy towards learning English – all students in the case study described themselves as good or excellent at English in general. (The two boys who dropped out both described themselves as having poor English skills.) Similarly, all parents of case study participants are regarded as having good or excellent skills in English. All students strongly feel that it is becoming increasingly important for citizens of Brunei Darussalam to develop good English skills, their main reasons being that it is the language used for international communication and interaction with foreigners is important and likely to increase. All students predict they will have a high level of future need for English especially for employment, travel, internet use, and access to other Western media such as movies, television, books and music. Examination anxiety is commonplace. Half of the case study participants worry often about examinations and the other half worry sometimes.

Themes also emerged about the challenges faced by the case study students which again backed up findings from the cohort group. Most students (nine) have access to a good variety of English materials in their homes but it appears much of it is not appropriate for their age or ability level. Books are often for adults or young children so most students lack access to texts which are personally interesting and motivating. Movies are popular with subtitles assisting many students to understand and enjoy

them. Western music is also enjoyed. On the whole, students felt that teachers tried to explain work clearly but that often there was insufficient time to practise and ask questions before a task began. Homework was seen as being particularly difficult as it tended to be set with little explanation. Spelling was easy for most students (eight) with the main difficulty knowing the correct vocabulary to use. Half of the case study students stated that they know what they wish to say in Malay but have great difficulty in finding the right words to convey meaning. All students would prefer more time spent on building knowledge and understanding of vocabulary before they were asked to complete a writing task independently. Many aspects of grammar are also considered difficult. The lack of understanding of correct sentence structure may contribute to the problems some students have with punctuation. Reading is the easiest of the four language skills for many students. Five students rated it easiest and the other half rated it second easiest. Responses varied widely as to the perceived difficulty level of writing, speaking and listening – each of these skills had at least one student who ranked it the easiest and one who ranked it the most difficult. Students are split evenly as to whether Mathematics and Science should be taught in Malay or English, but all agree that the main challenge is learning the subject vocabulary. All students felt that, particularly in Science, more time should be spent on learning vocabulary. In English, most classroom activities are seen as being helpful. Four students believe that more oral activities should be incorporated into lessons to help them improve their listening and speaking skills, as lessons usually focus on reading and writing. Several noted that much homework was not helpful and unrelated to class work. They would prefer homework to give them further practice of that day's learning points. However, this study found that every student agreed that one of the most helpful activities for learning is task discussion and question time and that often this is not provided. This relates to responses regarding the preferred type of feedback. Seven students chose oral feedback giving the reason that this gives them the opportunity to ask their teacher questions to improve their understanding. Written feedback was seen as being the most important for three students as it modelled correct language visually and was able to be referred to at a later stage. Another

point raised by five students was the wish to be provided with more opportunities to redo a task or correct their own mistakes after errors had been explained so they could 'get it right'. The ability of the teacher to explain language clearly to students and answer their questions was very important. Eight students would choose a Malay speaking teacher for this reason even though they acknowledge that a Western teacher is likely to have a better knowledge of the language.

An examination was then made of the profile paragraphs written about the two boys who withdrew from the journal writing programme and this indicated some possible reasons for their withdrawal. As S12 feared, his results in the end of year examinations for Year 4 were very poor. He was unable to complete any of the core subjects and received a combined mark of 41% over all his subjects. He achieved just 18% for the year for English. This may be related to the responses to his survey in which he indicated that English does not play an important role in his life. He seldom uses it outside of the classroom, has low self-efficacy and does not particularly enjoy lessons stating that although he tries to do the work, tasks are often too difficult. Unfortunately this situation is compounded by his teachers reacting angrily to errors, perhaps blaming him for not listening or focusing in class, when in actuality he does not have the skills or knowledge level to complete many tasks that are set. There seem few opportunities in which the teacher provides scaffolding, constructive feedback and activities at his level of understanding to promote learning so the gap between his ability and the ability required to complete classroom tasks is slowly widening. If this scenario continues in the following years, it is likely that S12 will increase his negativity towards the learning of English. There appears little motivation for S12 to improve his English skills in the current situation, but it is important to note that he still feels that English is important both to himself and to other Bruneians, tries hard to learn, and would like to work with his teacher to improve his skill level

S11 did well in English achieving 80% (B pass) in his examinations although in his other English medium subjects of Maths and Science his marks were a lot lower at 52% and 53% respectively (D passes). He

passed all his core subjects. Academically it appears that S11 has reasonably good English skills so unlike S12 he probably did not avoid journal writing because he could not do it. His reason for failing to attend can possibly be explained quite simply – S11 loves sport and several of his friends were in sports clubs during the period allocated for journal writing. He responded in his survey that English is his least enjoyable subject and he has low self-confidence in it. So although he did state that he quite liked journal writing and the topics it involved, this would not provide sufficient motivation to attend class if he saw an opportunity to be involved with his friends socially playing football or badminton instead. Possibly if the journal writing had been part of the regular English class programme, this student would have been more committed and motivated.

In summary, an analysis of the profile paragraphs highlighted a considerable range of attitudes, challenges and personal experiences influencing each student's learning during the journal writing programme.

The next section of this chapter compares the examination results of the case study participants to the cohort group.

## **5.2 Case Study participants' examination results**

All of the six Year 6 case study students passed their English examination and also passed all their other core subjects (although these did include three D passes). S1, S5 and S6 were in the top 10% of students in English with an A grade pass, S2 and S3 were in the 27% of students with a B grade, and S4 was one of 19% of students who received a D pass.

S7 was the only case study student at Year 5 level. His English mark of D put him with 33% of other Year 5 students and 24% of the boys. He failed two other core subjects including Maths and passed two others including Science.

Out of the three Year 4 students, S8 received an A pass which places him in the top 9% for English, and S9 and S10 both got B passes (20% of students). These students also passed all their other core subjects.

This data supports the findings of the cohort study in which good results in English are strong indicators of good overall examination results. In contrast poor results in English usually suggest poor results in other subjects as evidenced by S11 who withdrew from the case study. He was the only student studied who failed English and he also failed all other core subjects.

The data also supports this study's other findings that boys are more at risk of failing in English than girls and that most Year 6 students pass English examinations.

The preceding analysis of the surveys and school examination results enabled this researcher to 'set the scene' and provided a basis from which to study participants' attitudes towards learning English in the context of a journal writing programme. It is highly pertinent to this study that findings from the survey indicated that primary students face many challenges in writing including poor vocabulary or topic knowledge, lack of pre-task discussion or practice, insufficient time or skills to complete activities, and not enough individualised feedback. Journal writing is an intervention tool that addresses these issues as well as enhancing task engagement through the use of personally motivating topics.

This chapter first discusses the assessment of the writing samples collected for each student during the journal writing programme.

### **5.3 Student writing samples**

The object of this analysis was to determine whether students' written English had improved during the year and, if there was improvement, whether this may have any links to the journal writing programme.

Each of the ten students were allocated curriculum achievement levels for seven writing criteria (see Appendix 5) as used by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. The first writing sample of the year was compared to a writing sample provided at the end of the programme. For both the beginning and end of year samples, students had approximately half an hour of writing time. As each curriculum achievement level is intended to take a student approximately two years to achieve, each level is broken up

into three sub-levels which are a more efficient gauge of progression. These sub-levels are described as Beginner (B) in which the student is beginning to demonstrate some of the writing practices which characterise this level, Proficient (P) in which they are regularly demonstrating many writing practices from this level, and Advanced (A) in which they consistently display most or all of the characteristics from this level in their writing. The following tables show the levels allocated to each student. Students are shown as S1-S10.

The first table shows a comparison of the writing sample level at the start of the year (S) with a sample from the end of year (E).

**Table 4 Writing Levels of Case Study Participants – Comparison Between Start and End of Journal Writing Programme**

	S1		S2		S3		S4		S5		S6		S7		S8		S9		S10	
	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E
Spelling	3 P	4 P	2 P	3 B	2 P	2 A	3 B	3 B	3 P	3 A	3 A	3 A	1 iii	2 B	2 P	3 B	2 P	3 B	3 B	3 P
Punctuation	3 P	3 P	1 iii	1 iii	2 B	2 B	3 B	3 B	2 P	3 P	3 P	3 P	1 i	1 iii	2 P	2 P	2 P	2 P	3 B	3 A
Grammar	1 ii	1 ii	1 ii	1 ii	1 ii	1 ii	1 ii	1 ii	2 B	2 B	1 ii	1 ii	1 i	1 ii	1 ii	1 ii	1 ii	1 ii	2 B	2 B
Audience	2 B	3 P	1 ii	3 B	1 iii	3 B	2 B	3 P	2 P	3 P	2 P	3 P	1 ii	3 B	1 iii	3 B	2 B	3 P	2 B	3 P
Content	2 B	3 P	2 B	3 B	2 B	3 B	2 P	3 P	2 A	3 P	2 B	3 P	1 iii	2 P	1 iii	3 B	2 B	3 P	2 P	3 P
Structure	3 B	3 P	2 P	3 B	2 P	3 B	3 B	3 B	3 B	3 B	3 B	3 B	1 P	2 P	1 iii	2 B	2 P	3 P	2 P	3 P
Language	1 iii	2 B	1 iii	2 B	1 iii	2 B	2 B	2 P	2 B	2 P	2 B	2 P	1 ii	2 B	1 ii	2 B	1 iii	2 B	2 B	2 P

As an approximate guide to comparing these results to first language learners, in New Zealand average students in Years 1-2 might be expected to be a 'best fit' overall at Level 1, Years 3-4 at Level 2, Years 5-6 at Level 3 and Years 7-8 at Level 4 but students would be expected to have differing strengths and weaknesses over the range of criteria. It is noted that one limitation of this assessment matrix is that there is no achievement level or criteria for early writers who are not yet able to meet the standards for Level 1. Therefore, students at a pre-writing stage are classified as Level 0.

The table below more clearly shows the number of sub-levels each student increased by over the year for each of the seven aspects of writing on the matrix.

**Table 5 Increase of Writing Sub-Levels for Case Study Students During the Journal Writing Programme**

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10
	Year 6 Girl	Year 6 Girl	Year 6 Girl	Year 6 Girl	Year 6 Girl	Year 6 Girl	Year 5 Boy	Year 4 Boy	Year 4 Girl	Year 4 Girl
Spelling	+3	+2	+1	0	+1	0	+1	+2	+2	+1
Punctuation	0	0	0	0	+3	0	+2	0	0	+2
Grammar	0	0	0	0	0	0	+1	0	0	0
Audience	+4	+3	+4	+4	+3	+3	+5	+4	+4	+4
Content	+4	+3	+3	+3	+2	+4	+2	+4	+4	+3
Structure	+1	+2	+2	0	0	+1	+2	+3	+3	+2
Language	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+2	+1	+1	+2

In analysing these results from individual student's perspectives, the six Year 6 girls improved their combined grades for all the criteria by between eight to thirteen sub-levels. It could be expected that, with normal writing maturation, a student might improve over a year by an average of a sub-level for all criteria, so an increase of more than seven levels overall could be interpreted as good progress in a subject.

S7 was the only boy from Year 5 in the study. He achieved the highest increase overall with a very significant improvement of fifteen sub-levels. He improved by at least one sub-level for all the criteria, and was the only student in the study to improve in grammar. His greatest improvement was in audience awareness – a very significant five levels. From a beginning grade of only 1ii for a very basic self-description, his final entry showed excellent audience awareness and numerous efforts to make his work entertaining and personally directed at the reader. This writing sample was graded at level 3B. This student also improved by two sub-levels for each of the areas of punctuation, content, structure and language.

The three Year 4 students comprised two girls and one boy. All three students improved by fourteen sub-levels overall. They each improved by one or two sub-levels in spelling with S10 also improving by two sub-levels in punctuation. However their best gains were in the deeper features of writing. All three students improved by three sub-levels for audience, three or four sub-levels for content, two or three sub-levels for structure and one or two sub-levels for language.

These results provide evidence of considerably greater improvement than would usually be expected for normal writing maturation over the timeframe of the research project and strongly indicates that this improvement was due to students' participation in the journal writing programme.

To try and identify how and why these improvements occurred, each of the seven writing criteria from the curriculum achievement matrix are now analysed separately. As the journal writing programme focused on the deeper features of writing, these are discussed first.

### **Deeper Features – Audience, Content, Structure, Language**

Due to class writing tasks in Bruneian classrooms often being highly directed by the teacher with a strong focus on accuracy, a main aim of the journal writing programme was to encourage students' to express their own opinions and viewpoints about personally meaningful topics. It was hoped that by emphasising the deeper features of language and its

purpose as a means of communication, students would improve the depth and clarity of their writing, without worrying unduly about the correctness of spelling or grammar. Four deeper language features were examined in the students' journal writing – awareness of audience, richness of content, structure of the work, and their language choices. These were all areas that students were supported in during the year and encouraged to experiment with in their writing so that they could improve their skills. The success of the journal writing programme in improving each of these aspects of writing is now described.

### **Audience**

Before each writing task, students were given a short exemplar of a journal entry for that topic supposedly written by a fictitious student named 'Ali'. As the original programme was designed for secondary students, most of these entries were simplified and adapted so as to be more appropriate for primary school students. Attention was directed to the vocabulary used, the details provided and the ways that 'Ali' made his writing interesting for the reader. Students used the exemplar as a basis to plan their own journal entry and to discuss what they planned to write about with a partner before they began. They were asked to think about what information the reader needed to know for clear understanding and what types of details would be helpful. Students were asked to begin their entry in a way that would encourage the reader to want to know more.

Developing an awareness of audience is an important part of a successful writer's growth. Young writers need to learn how to "... *speak first from their own experience and knowledge, in their own voice, maintaining their integrity. However, writers need readers, so they must consider their audience unless they are to end up writing only for themselves.* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2012). Students' introductory journal entries were predominantly quite formal factual self-descriptions using basic sentence structures, although the exemplar had contained a number of examples of personal thoughts and feelings and incorporated humour. These findings also concur with Yong (2007) who describes how many Malaysian students tend to use well known structures and avoid less

common words or phrases. Some students did mention favourite school subjects and several talked about their best friends. Students received curriculum achievement levels from the deeper features section of the writing matrix ranging from 1ii to 2P reflecting their basic awareness that they were writing to communicate information to somebody else but had not sought to make their work engaging and interesting for the reader.

Several examples of the use of factual, basic sentences structures are:

*Bandar Seri Begawan is city in Brunei Darussalam. Bandar Seri Begawan is in the Brunei Muara district.*

*I have a pets. My pets are rabbits.*

*I am nine years old. I am in class 4C. I have two brother.*

S6 showed the most skill in writing to engage an audience. This is an excerpt from her letter of introduction:

*I have lots of hobbies I like to do in my free time. I love to read about friendship and happy ending story are my favourites! Other than reading books, I also love to play bicycle in the afternoon. Sometimes, I also love to act in front of the mirror.*

During the course of the year, audience engagement was an area that showed considerable improvement by most students. They began to start their entries in various ways that sought to attract the reader's attention by using greetings, exclamations, questions, or interesting statements. Some examples of these are:

*"Hello! \_\_\_\_ here once again for my English journal."*

*"Good morning, today I'm going to write about music."*

*"Do you know what my favourite activity is? I love to play badminton!"*

*"Fear!!! I aren't afraid of snakes. Snakes are me afraid of!"*

Humour and personal voice were evident in many entries. Students frequently related personally important stories and ideas, often 'talking' directly to the reader and asking for responses.

*"I'm sorry I don't like snake and I sorry if it your favourite animal."*

*"When I went to open the door all my family, grandmother, grandfather, my cousins and any more talk to me happy birthday and my sister give me the cake. I eat the cake and I talk mmm ... delicious cake. That is special for me. I am very happy."*

*"Me and my family goes out of brunei last December. I can't wait to go out of brunei. I so proud to go out of brunei. When goes in the aeroplane I have one little food at the aeroplane. I feel so hungry at the night in the aeroplane."*

*"When I was sleeping my brother and sister they said "This is morning." I said to them "This is Sunday but I want to sleep please let me sleeping please."*

*"I am afraid of scary stories in a legend book. Yes, when I go to library on Tuesday at morning school I get a scary stories or ghost book. Then I start read and changed scary stories with a not scary stories book."*

*"I want to talk about a fear. Everyone have own fear. Definitely I have my own fear. I am very fear to snakes. I'm sure I'm so afraid but I can't help myself."*

*"My special person is father because he always help me when my homework was hard or easy. He is my special father ever. He always make me smile and if I sad he will brought me to went shopping. I love my father very-very-very much."*

Some students began to write comments directed at the reader regarding their thoughts on the day's topic, asking a question or just hoping that the reader enjoyed their journal entry:

*"That is my story about fear. What are you afraid of Mrs Heather?"*

*“It is on water but it is very high on a waterfall. Wasn’t that very scary, wasn’t it, wasn’t it huh!!!”*

*“Do you have a nightmare when you sleep? I hope you will answer it next week.”*

Curriculum achievement levels for the final journal entry of the year for all ten students were either 3B or 3P – an increase of between three to five levels. This increase was much greater than normal maturation would suggest. Eastman (1997) offers a possible explanation describing journal writing as a type of internal dialogue and a means to organise thoughts. She states that by practising reflective discourse and exploring their thoughts on a wide variety of topics, students will improve their audience awareness and writing maturity.

### **Content**

Content was also an area in which all students showed improvement when writing samples were compared. Start of the year levels ranged from two students at 1iii to one student at 2A so there was a significant difference in the amount of and quality of information in student work. Once again, as the year progressed, students began to increase the richness of the content in their entries by adding more details, examples, conversations, and personal thoughts and feelings. They seemed to enjoy the range of topics and informal tone of writing, often asking out of class what they would be writing about that week.

In this research many journal entries demonstrated great sincerity of personal voice and students developed clear individuality in their journal writing styles. Levels allocated for the final writing samples showed that one student was working at 2P level (an increase of two levels) and the other nine students were all at 3B or 3P (increases of between two to four levels).

S8 was particularly motivated by the Senses Poem early on in the programme and this was the first occasion in which he initiated a conversation with the teacher, asking for help as he tried to convey his

thoughts from Malay into English. This is his poem which resulted in a huge smile from him.

*The Beach*

*Birds singing on the branch of a huge tree,*

*An aeroplane is flying in the sky.*

*The sun shines with a bright smile,*

*A wind blows my kite high up in the sky.*

*Someone is cooking nasi goreng ... makes me hungry.*

*I am so hot, like I am touching a fire.*

Here are some further examples of improved details of content:

For the Superpower topic, S1 *decided to be a rubber person "... because if my pen left at home and I too tired to go back home again, so I take it with my hand and no need to go back home again."*

S2 wrote about her mother for the topic Someone Special to Me – *"My mum is very important to me because she birth me and keep me until now. I very love my mum...I want to give my mum happy every day. She is beautiful. I like my mum's style. I don't want my mum crying because of me."*

Fear was probably the topic that motivated the most students. S3 wrote about her experience when her little brother put a plastic spider in her bedroom. *"I was say 'Help help somebody help me, help, help' and my brother came into my room. He was laugh and he say 'this is a plastic spider' and I say 'I will kill you' . He ran outside and I said 'come back you little brother'. After than I just laugh at my bed and go sleeping."*

Although the majority of students found the topic Music one of the harder topics to write about, S10 enjoyed writing her entry: *"The kind of music I like to listen to is hip-hop. When I have a chance I listen to music just an hour. For sure I can't play a musical instrument but I can sing a bit. My*

*favourite music is Justin Bieber like Never Say Never. Music means to me most happiness.”*

### **Structure**

The third deeper feature studied was the structure and organisation of work. Again, as expected, there was a range of skill in this area when assessed at the start of the year. The lowest achieving student was placed at level 1ii with four more able students showing good skills at paragraphing and sequencing work logically and clearly to be at level 3B. It was noted that many entries during the year did not appear to be well organised and sometimes lacked some clarity, but on closer analysis often this appeared to be due to students writing as they thought without preplanning. Some entries were just a linking of feelings and ideas as students reflected on the topic, however this is seen as one of the benefits of journal writing in that students can learn to use writing to clarify their own thought processes and develop individuality in thinking (Zhenhui, 2001). It is difficult to judge journal writing against the criteria for a final copy of a written text as it should be seen as a raw view of a writer's ideas. However the levels given to students at the end of the year did show that students had improved from between one to three levels with final levels ranging from 2B to 3P.

### **Language**

Language was the final deep feature that was considered. This involved examining the choices that students made in their writing vocabulary and whether they used words or language features that would add interest and appeal. This included noting the variety of adjectives, nouns and verbs in the journal entries and how precisely and confidently they were used. The use of direct speech was also considered. The beginning samples showed low ability and skill in this area of writing as could be expected of second language learners. Two students began at 2ii, four at 2iii and four at 2B. End of year levels showed an increase for all students of one or two levels with final levels being either 2B or 2P.

Students increased their richness of language by using words from the exemplars or those which arose through pre-writing discussion, which was considered an important part of the writing process. This method meant that students began to regularly use more unusual or personal words and phrases in their writing from early on in the year:

*"Pink is .... my cute teddy bear, my mother's lipstick, my flowery blanket, my lovely pencil case."* (Colour poems).

*"Two boys playing with a purple diamond kite. A delicious vanilla ice cream dripping from the cone".* (Senses poems)

S9 asked if she could write about being in her house instead of being at the beach for the senses poem and was delighted to be told she could. She spent a lot of time listing words and phrases very decoratively in different coloured pens and asked for help to correct spelling. She asked to take her journal home and finish writing her poem out as a good copy for homework. This is the result:

*In My House*

*My white cat Shiro always eats his food in the kitchen.*

*I see my big sister cooking there. I smell delicious cookies.*

*I hear the wind blow through the window.*

*I see my brother playing his computer in his room.*

*My father likes to read the newspaper in the living room.*

*I feel the air-con in my bedroom – it's turned on so cold.*

*I taste the ice lemon tea in the glass – too sour.*

S6 debated which super power would be best and asked for help with the vocabulary she needed to communicate her ideas:

*"If I was a rubber person, I would be Elasticman. If I can see the future, I would be a unique person. If I can invisible, I would teasing my friends. If I*

*can fly, I would play with the birds. If I can breathe under water, I would be like a mermaid.”*

From these examples it appears that all of the ten students significantly improved their motivation and their ability in using the deeper features of writing beyond what would be considered normal maturation.

Although the journal writing programme was not focused on improving surface features, an analysis of these features provides some findings relevant to this study.

### **Surface Features – Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar**

Surface features of writing were not a focus of this study. At the commencement of the journal writing class, it was emphasised to students that their writing would not be marked in a similar manner to their usual English class work so there would be no corrections for surface writing features. Some surface features were discussed with individual students as I made observations during class time, but usually only when they interfered with clarity of meaning. Oral and written responses to students also were modelled using correct English.

It is however noted that evidence collected indicates that students did not put **less** effort into grammar, spelling and punctuation even though they received very little explicit feedback on them and understood they would not be marked on them. This is significant in a Bruneian context, as local teachers consider accuracy a major writing focus for students and many would be reluctant to use journal writing if they thought writing accuracy would decrease.

### **5.4 Students’ Written Reflections**

Students were asked to write an entry in their journals midway through the year, reflecting on the different topics they had written about. They were also asked whether they felt that journal writing was enjoyable and if they thought it was helping them improve their English. One student was absent. The remaining nine students’ comments were varied but all were mainly positive as the following samples illustrate:

S1 – *“It’s about journal writing what subject I love the most. In the January, I was not entering Creative Writing. I was entering the badminton club. When I’m playing badminton I thinking I want to enter the Creative Writing because I said “It can help me to pass PSR.” So I quit from badminton club and enter Creative Writing. First day I enter it was fantastic and I enjoy it....Teacher Heather good at English. If she teach me it was very interesting and I very enjoying it.”*

S2 - *“I really enjoyed writing about music. It was easy. This topic make me happy. Yes I found useful because I can improve my writing. I can express my feeling through writing.”*

S3 – *“I love to writing a journal it is so far so good. I enjoying because I love to write in my journal..... Best topic, oh yeah I know the best topic is Fear.”*

S4 – *“I really enjoyed writing about fear. It’s a topic that I know a lot about and really liked putting my love of fear down on paper. It was the best topic for me! ....I want to talk again of fear.”*

S5 – *“I really liked putting my fear of animals down on paper. I like this topic..... I love writing a journal.”*

S6 –*“ The best topic that I like is Biopoem because it is easy to understand. But now I know how to translate Malay to English and now I feel so easy to write in English. I love English creative writing very much.”*

S7 –*“I think I enjoy my journal because it was easy to write my journal. My favourite topic is Places. ... I am getting better writing. I loved write my journal because it is fun...”*

S8 –*“My favourite English journal is writing about my favourite animal.”*

S9 – Absent

S10 – *“When I first started writing in this journal I found it difficult to write. I found it’s still a bit difficult and I want to learn more.”*

Students also described the topics that they found difficult.

S1 – *“Hardest topic is Country, Culture and Celebrations.”*

S3 – *“I don’t like topic The Internet.”*

S5 – *“ The hardest topic is Activities. It very difficult topic that I write.”*

S6 – *“ The hardest topic is Music because I don’t understand anything about it.”*

One student talked about the exemplars that were used for each topic which were often journal entries ‘written’ by a student named Ali.

S8 – *“It so hard to thinking about how to start my journal English like Ali are writing lots of words to use. He must be very, very clever wasn’t he?”*

Overall, there appeared to be considerable evidence that students enjoyed this style of writing and found it quite different to their normal English classes. The topics that seemed to be particularly motivating were those that students were able to talk knowledgeably about and understand from personal experience and which were personally meaningful to them, such as fears, their families, and themselves. These findings appear to support Galbraith’s (2010) study on journal writing in her Bruneian secondary school. Even though her students were upper secondary age, she found that journals were her class’s favourite style of writing and that they enjoyed most topics.

Further evidence to support Galbraith’s view is provided by comments found in the teacher’s journal. This journal also provides an excellent context from which to reflect upon the success of the journal writing programme itself.

### **5.5 Teacher’s reflective and observation journal**

In the reflective and observation journal it was noted that even in one of the earlier topics, *Superpowers*, students were becoming more interested in communicating new ideas rather than using simple, well known words:

*“This topic has generated the most discussion so far with lots of laughing and talking in small groups or pairs. Students are now quite at ease in putting up their hand for assistance with language or just to have the*

*activity explained to them again. I have found that putting up words and phrases that students ask for or which I think might be useful on the whiteboard as we go through the lesson is a good way of generating ideas and vocabulary for those students who might be struggling a bit. It is interesting to read work now as students are trying hard to convey messages to me even though it may be difficult for them and even though they don't have the correct grammar. This is a big change from just using simple sentences with basic information as in the first pieces of writing."*

There were also several instances of occasions when students asked to write about something other than the given topic. These requests were always granted as the aim of the programme was to increase writing enjoyment and skills rather than to convey knowledge about particular subjects. By giving a specified weekly topic however it was easier to provide whole class ESL support through vocabulary, ideas and the written exemplar. On the few occasions students did wish to write about a different topic, they already had the ideas and vocabulary to do so and were motivated to write with very little extra support. This is an example of how journal writing can be differentiated to meet individual needs within a class group and to make tasks personally relevant to students – both important humanist concepts (Erikson, 1963; Rogers, 1969; Hamachek, 1977).

The journal also showed evidence of warm and empathetic student-teacher relationships which developed through the year, which is another aspect of the humanist approach. Excerpts taken from the first months show this development:

*The students seem very shy with me and say very little in class. Writing is basic and factual. (January)*

*Several students, although shy, did share some of their ideas with me (conversations are still teacher initiated) and all seemed happy to accept advice and encouragement. (February)*

*A couple of girls from class came up to me in the playground on Thursday to ask what we would be doing in journal writing this week. When I asked if they were enjoying the class they both nodded and smiled. (March)*

*S2 had to leave class early but did write at the bottom with several hearts drawn "I am very happy today because I see my teacher. I love teacher Mrs Heather and teacher Hamdiah." (April)*

*The students enjoyed hearing about my ideas and happily shared their own ideas with partners. Lots of animated discussion before writing! They all seem at ease now in putting up their hands to ask me for help or to share their work. Students wrote stories with interesting openings (many using direct speech), described meaningful events with a strong personal voice, and many asked me questions or invited comments. (May)*

*Frequently students now approach me in the school and chat about their day and ask me how mine is going. Often they ask what the next journal writing topic will be or let me know that they may be absent from class because of a clash with other school commitments. They are always so apologetic! (June)*

By the end of the programme, a strong rapport with students from the case study had developed although they only attended a maximum of 20 classes over the year. It could be expected that this bond would have strengthened even further if journal writing had been done with a regular class English teacher. During the year, students become at ease writing about quite personal topics. One student (S7) chose to write voluntarily in his journal at home on three separate nights after taking it home to write some more for his weekly entry and each topic was of a personal nature. The first night he told about a close family member going for blood tests because he had been unwell. The second entry was about visiting a cousin's house on a Friday after praying at the mosque. The third entry was about his mother working night shift as a nurse.

One very positive aspect noted was the way many students began to self-correct and rewrite work even when it was not required, demonstrating ownership and pride in their work. One example related to S7 and S8. As

the only two boys in the class, they both usually sat and worked together, often discussing the topic and helping each other with vocabulary. After listening to a conversation this researcher was having with S7 one day, S8 decided to write about the television show 'Tom and Jerry' and without any support completed a paragraph quickly. After it was finished, it was read through and a couple of suggestions were made to improve its sense. It was also suggested he write another paragraph, and further ideas were provided as he had lots of time left. However he chose to rewrite his first paragraph out again neatly including the changes suggested. He read it out aloud again and checked that it made sense and was correct. He seemed very satisfied with his day's work. This was the start of what became regular self-motivated correction by this student, an eagerness to share his writing and obvious pride in his finished work.

Early in the year, comments in the journal showed that differentiation was naturally occurring, with students writing at the level of their individual ability and often displaying self-motivation in challenging themselves to communicate ideas at their own level of understanding. Individualised positive feedback was able to be regularly provided for mixed ability levels and enabled each user to perceive English as a means for enjoyable and meaningful communication.

The journal on several occasions notes that students were most motivated in writing about topics that were personally meaningful and which they had a good knowledge and understanding of. The topics which they found difficult to write about were ones which they found difficult to link to personal experiences such as the topics Music or My Favourite Book. Student comments about the writing being more fun or easier than their usual English class work are regularly mentioned in the journal.

A final point derived from journal observations was the increased oral sharing of ideas between partners and the importance of pre-writing discussion. On many occasions, students used the Malay language to talk about the topic with each other asking for clarification of vocabulary or meaning in the exemplar text. They also asked each other in Malay for the correct English vocabulary, spelling or grammar when writing their own

ideas down. The finished journal entry though was always written completely in English. This ability to code-switch between two languages enabled students to write at a higher level than they would have been able to do on their own or if they had been compelled to use only English within the classroom.

An examination of the journal yielded very few negative comments. The withdrawal of the two students from the programme was disappointing. It is noted that as journal writing seeks to improve writing skills, students such as S11 need to first possess basic writing ability or else a journal writing programme becomes a negative experience instead of a positive one. There was also frustration due to the number of lessons that were missed and the frequency that some students were absent due to other school commitments. A final negative comment was in regard to the difficulty in administering the programme in isolation, rather than in conjunction with being the regular subject teacher. Many teaching points arose from the journal entries which ideally should have been taught explicitly to the students as part of the class English programme.

These observations and reflections from the teacher's journal provide further strong evidence that journal writing was a successful addition to the regular class English writing programme in this case study. The following section summarises the main findings after an overall analysis of the success of the journal writing programme.

### **5.6 Analysis of the Journal Writing Programme**

This research indicates that journal writing was highly effective in improving deeper writing skills in case study participants and is therefore likely to be effective in improving the writing of other primary students in Brunei. Key findings regarding the journal writing programme are as follows.

Firstly, an essential part of the journal writing programme was the pre-writing section of the lesson in which students were prepared for the writing task. The introduction of targeted vocabulary and language both orally and visually as well as relating the topic to prior experiences or

existing personal knowledge was considered integral in setting students up for success in their writing task.

Secondly, the provision of a dedicated exercise book emphasised to students that journal writing was different to their regular writing activities. It served as a 'safe' context to air personal viewpoints, experiment with ideas and have fun with language. Students entered the classroom anticipating that topics would be relevant to them and often personally meaningful. Perhaps most significantly, as long as an entry could be read and understood by the reader, a student was assured of 100% task success in every lesson – an important benefit when many students fail to achieve success in writing tasks.

Thirdly, by the end of the programme students showed significant improvement in the important areas of personal voice, awareness of audience, content details and richness of language. Although the focus of the journal writing programme was these deeper features, ignoring surface features made no difference to students' use of grammar, punctuation or spelling.

Fourth, despite the improvement in writing which signified successful learning was occurring, students' considered journal writing much easier and more fun than regular English lessons. They were highly motivated by many topics and demonstrated great pride and ownership in their work, often self-correcting and re-writing for their own personal satisfaction.

Fifth, although this researcher was not the class teacher, a strong and caring student – teacher relationship developed based on the sharing of personal ideas and experiences. Students were clearly established as individuals rather than just names. Many felt safe to volunteer information or ask questions through the forum of the journal. This is seen as particularly important when teachers deal with large numbers of students from different classes by providing one-on-one time with students who may otherwise get 'lost in the crowd' and for non-Malay speaking teachers who may find it more difficult to build a rapport with students.

Sixth, journal writing proved to be an easily administered classroom activity which took up no more time than a traditionally marked piece of writing. It provided automatic differentiation as students wrote at their own skill level. Sharing of vocabulary and information and the use of exemplars provided ideas and vocabulary for all ability levels as well as both oral and visual learners. The flexibility to allow students to write on a different topic to that set if they requested it, provided motivation and student directed extension opportunities.

Seventh, modelling of correct language and focusing on meaning rather than 'marking' errors encouraged the teacher to look at student writing as a whole rather than sentences in isolation. Important teaching points from reoccurring errors were clearly evident and this knowledge would have supplied excellent assessment data to plan future whole class lessons and the setting of individual goals or next learning steps.

Finally, encouraging discussion in Malay improved understanding of English vocabulary and language use. As long as the writing was completed in English, students were allowed to talk about the subject in Malay if necessary and assist others. Students were encouraged to think about what they wanted to say in their mother tongue, then to discuss how to write it in English, rather than trying to use known simple English words and structures to convey meaning. This approach stopped repetition and the overuse of simple sentences which characterised many early journal entries.

In conclusion, the findings provide strong evidence that this journal writing programme was indeed highly beneficial in improving the deeper features of ESL students' writing. Often it provided differentiation, improved writing motivation, promoted a deeper understanding and enjoyment of language, used critical thinking skills and encouraged self correction. A further important benefit was the building of strong teacher student relationships.

This completes the research findings from the different types of data obtained from both the cohort and the case study groups. The final chapter discusses these findings in relation to the literature, provides links to the research questions, outlines conclusions from this study, lists

limitations of the research and suggests areas for further research from queries that have been raised.

## CHAPTER 6 - DISCUSSION

*The outcome of any serious research can only be to make two questions grow where only one grew before.*

*(Thorstein Veblen - sociologist/philosopher - 1857-1929)*

In Chapters 4 and 5 findings from the data analysis were presented. This chapter now discusses the major findings in relation to the research questions and examines the implications for educators. Firstly, the findings from the Cohort group are used to answer the first two research questions related to attitudes towards learning and challenges for writers. The topics discussed in this section are beliefs towards English, examination anxiety, gender differences, task completion, beliefs about other English medium subjects and teacher feedback on writing. Following that, findings from the Case Study provide evidence to answer the final two research questions which pertain to the journal writing programme. The topics for this section are student engagement, student teacher relationships, modeling in context, explicit teaching of vocabulary, code switching and improvements in writing.

### 6.1 Discussion of the Cohort Group Findings

The two questions that this part of the research sought to answer were:

1. What are the learning attitudes of Bruneian primary age students towards the English language?
2. What do students perceive as the challenges involved in becoming effective English writers?

#### 6.1.1 Positive beliefs towards English

This research clearly demonstrates that Bruneian primary school students have many positive beliefs towards learning English. Most students consider English very important academically and would like to achieve good results in this subject. This study found that primary students value English as an international language for communication via the internet, when travelling or to converse with the large number of non-Malay speakers living in or visiting their country. They predict their personal future need for English skills will be high for the same reasons and accept

that secondary schooling and employment opportunities will be strongly linked to academic success in English. This finding may also be related to the strong perception by many students that their parents have good skills in English which are useful to them in a variety of social, employment and cultural contexts.

This type of positive language attitude, as described by Crystal (1992), is a powerful affective variable of learning. The knowledge that English is a highly relevant and practical language is a major source of motivation to learners in Brunei at primary school level. Even at a young age it is clearly understood and accepted that English is an integral part of the country and culture, unlike second language learning in some countries where students may perceive a subject to be of little interest or use to them.

Enjoyment of a subject is another highly influential factor and this study showed a high percentage of students enjoy learning English at school and it is also used by many regularly outside of school hours. Chastain (1988) emphasises the importance of this variable, describing how emotions control the cognitive domain with the result that a strong dislike for a subject is likely to hinder or prevent learning. In contrast, a high level of enjoyment is likely to encourage learning. Certainly this study indicates that students who consider English important and relevant within their lives and who also enjoy learning it, are more motivated to overcome learning challenges.

There are useful implications suggested here for primary teachers of English in Brunei. The positive personal and cultural attitudes towards English provide a strong foundation for educators to build further positive attitudes towards learning the language and achieving the academic success which many students desire. However the importance of obtaining good examination results concerns many students and this is now discussed.

### **6.1.2 Examination anxiety**

Examination anxiety was a major finding of this study with 90% of students stating they often or sometimes are anxious about forthcoming

examinations. This high level of examination anxiety by primary students towards their English examinations reflects the importance placed on academic success in this language by parents and teachers. This research suggests three contributing factors account for such high anxiety levels.

As writing is a main component of the English examinations, writing anxiety is likely to be a major reason why so many students worry. ESL students are especially likely to suffer from general writing anxiety, often having more negative and anxious attitudes towards writing tasks than native writers (Liao & Wong, 2010; Betancourt & Phinney, 1988). Secondly, students are well aware that results from Year 6 will affect their Year 7 secondary school placement, which will profoundly impact future education and employment choices. This is frequently reiterated by both parents and teachers and their anxiety is likely to be communicated to students. Finally, a low level of prior success in completion of classroom tasks and examinations or assessments would also be a probable reason for anxiety and ways this issue can be addressed are discussed further in 6.1.4.

So, although it was found students generally had a very high level of self-efficacy towards English, their self-efficacy towards English examinations, as evidenced through their responses about examination anxiety, was much lower. Raising self-efficacy would enable students to approach examinations with more confidence and decrease examination anxiety.

This is an important implication as when students envisage themselves being able to complete the task successfully, for example through the explicit teaching of strategies, they often try harder and consequently usually perform well in tasks (Shah, Mahmud, Din, Yusof and Pardi, 2011). Alternatively, learners who start an examination thinking they won't succeed, put little effort in and often do not even utilise the skills or knowledge they do have. Thus, when students are of a similar skill level, those with higher self efficacy are likely to try harder and have a better chance of success than peers with low self efficacy. A number of Asian researchers concur that high self efficacy is therefore a language attitude

which is worth instilling in students and is a significant predictor of success as supported by the Taiwanese studies cited by Su and Duo (2012).

In this study it was concerning to discover that boys had less self-efficacy than girls in regard to writing and this issue is discussed further in the following section.

### **6.1.3 Gender differences**

One interesting finding was the gender differences highlighted in two particular areas of the study - attitudes towards writing and examination success. Boys had significantly lower self-efficacy than girls in regard to writing ability with nearly half of all boys in each year level ranking it as the hardest English macro-skill when compared to listening, speaking and reading. Examination results also significantly favoured girls - possibly because the examination format requires strong writing skills.

These results regarding gender imbalance in self-efficacy coincide with the findings of Su and Duo (2012). Although their study involved secondary school students in Taiwan, their research found the gender difference was explained by females being much more likely to have a wider range of learning strategies than males. The increased confidence in using these explicitly taught strategies enabled females to improve their academic achievement.

This finding therefore implies that primary students need to improve their confidence in their ability to complete tasks. Pajares (2000) insists that the most effective method of raising confidence and self-efficacy is through regular success and mastery of classroom tasks. This is of interest to this study as the next topic demonstrates – it discusses the important finding from this research regarding the low task success rate of students.

### **6.1.4 Task completion**

The most unexpected finding of this research was the low classroom task success rate of many primary students. More than half the students in Years 4, 5 and 6 stated that they rarely or only sometimes completed tasks set by their teacher. Although most students stated that they usually

tried hard, nearly all students indicated that the main reason they fail to complete tasks is because they don't have the necessary skills or knowledge. Many students also responded that sufficient time was not allocated for tasks and they were often rushed. A majority of the cohort indicated that they would like teachers to provide clearer explanations of new information or tasks, to allow more time for practise or discussion before an independent task is begun, and to provide more time for students to try and work answers out for themselves before answers are supplied. A significant number of students also mentioned that teachers become angry if they did their work incorrectly or failed to complete tasks.

This finding has major implications for future learning. The primary years are hugely influential in creating a sense of industry or inferiority in students whereby students either become confident workers due to regular successful task completion or start to believe that they are not capable of completing tasks (Erikson, 1963). As discussed previously the self efficacy of students towards tasks is important in that self belief in ability to manage a situation successfully impacts choices students make, the effort expended when facing challenges, and determines the degree of task anxiety (Bandura, 1986). Opportunities to actively construct understandings of language also provide extremely effective learning (Piaget, as cited in Wood, 1998) particularly in a co-operative context (Erikson, 1963). Even at primary age students appear aware that practicing language and finding out answers for themselves, enables them to learn more successfully than when they are supplied with information passively by a teacher. This research puts forward a strong case for the necessity for primary teachers to change their pedagogy and approach the teaching of English in a different way.

The importance of possessing the knowledge and skills necessary to complete tasks is also crucial in the other two core subjects taught in English – Mathematics and Science.

### **6.1.5 Beliefs about other English-medium subjects**

It was found in this study that students had strong beliefs about the other two English-medium subjects and were evenly divided as to whether

Mathematics and Science should be taught using English. Although nearly all considered they would achieve higher grades if these subjects were taught in Malay, many felt that success gained in a Cambridge Mathematics or Science examination was of higher value and importance, both nationally and internationally, than any success gained in a Bruneian based examination.

A large number of students however stated they had difficulties in learning and understanding the English vocabulary for these subjects. This finding is supported by a recent analysis by the Ministry of Education in Brunei (as cited in the Borneo Bulletin, 2013) which discovered that a 6.82% decrease in the pass rate for the 2012 Year 6 examination can be attributed to poor understanding of vocabulary in Mathematics and Science. The same article quotes His Majesty the Sultan of Brunei as saying:

*“... the recent Primary School Assessment (PSR) result should be looked into and serious efforts must be undertaken to improve it and find the root cause as to why some of the students could not master these basic skills.”*

This comment by the country's leader highlights the relevance and importance of this research to current school issues in Brunei. Significantly students perceive that the four most important academic subjects are the three English medium subjects (English, Mathematics and Science) and Bahasa Melayu, which shares a number of translatable language skills with English.

Examination results in this study provide evidence that English ability is an important indicator of overall academic success at primary school. Therefore retaining a strong focus on English and providing intervention to support struggling students is considered crucial to improving learning outcomes. This study is particularly timely as the primary school curriculum in Brunei is currently being revised and this may include altering the number of periods allocated to different subjects. It is strongly indicated by the findings in this study that any reduction in English periods

at primary school could have major implications towards success in all three English-medium core subjects.

#### **6.1.6 Teacher feedback on writing**

This finding concerns the type of feedback received by students about their writing. Commonly, feedback from teachers appears to be highly focused on surface features with students often having grammar corrected by the teacher or mistakes underlined for them to correct themselves. Although comments are written by many teachers, it is suspected that the majority of these may not provide supportive individualised feedback about the lesson's specific learning objectives. It was found that although students enjoy receiving praise for a task, they would like more explanations about errors and a better understanding of the specific steps they need to improve their own work. Most students would prefer a mix of both oral and written feedback with more opportunities to correct their own errors and ask questions. The benefits of written feedback are seen as providing examples of correct modelling, increased understanding of language when displayed visually, and the ability to review feedback at a later stage. All students indicated that the main benefit of oral feedback is the ability to ask questions to clarify understanding.

This finding fully supports literature which shows that feedback which focuses on the learning objective of the lesson and supports next learning steps is of much greater benefit than generic comments that do not provide any information as to what has been done well or poorly (Black and Williams, 1998). Ferris, Pezone, Tade and Tinti (1997) also note that particularly for ESL learners, written or oral feedback needs to be clear and any terminology or written symbols fully understood by students.

The current introduction of Assessment for Learning practices into primary schools in Brunei is also strongly supported by this research finding.

#### **6.1.7 Summary**

This discussion has so far focused on the findings from the Cohort group which are relevant to the first two research questions.

These findings have clearly demonstrated the positive learning attitudes of Bruneian primary age students towards the English language and the importance of its role in this multicultural society. Most students find English one of the more enjoyable subjects at school and hope to perform well in examinations.

Several learning challenges have been highlighted which may affect students becoming effective English writers. The study of the cohort provides evidence that examination anxiety is a major concern for most students. This may be related to the unexpected finding that half of the students surveyed fail to regularly complete class tasks. In addition, this research highlights a gender imbalance in that boys have significantly lower self-efficacy in writing than girls and are also more likely to fail examinations or receive lower pass grades.

Student responses reaffirm the discourse theory on the importance of teacher feedback. Students clearly indicate it would be more helpful to their learning if they could ask more questions and were more actively involved in task assessment and the error correction process. They would also like more support by teachers in identifying and understanding their next learning steps.

Overall, the research findings for the Cohort imply that increasing opportunities for classroom task success through explicit teaching of language strategies, skills and knowledge, particularly to boys, is likely to increase student self-efficacy towards task completion in the classroom, eventually leading to increased examination confidence and performance.

The next section of this chapter addresses these issues as it discusses how the journal writing programme was able to support the learning and enable task success for the participants in the Case Study.

## **6.2 Discussion of the Case Study findings**

The findings from the Case Study of the journal writing programme were used to answer the third and fourth research questions.

3. How do these attitudes and challenges influence the learning of students participating in a weekly dialogue journal writing programme with a western English teacher?
4. Could a weekly dialogue journal writing programme improve Bruneian primary ESL students' written English abilities?

### **6.2.1 Student engagement**

This study found that this journal writing programme provided students with a safe and supported learning environment in which they enjoyed being able to experiment with and practise language in an authentic context. Journal writing topics encouraged the critical thinking skills and expression of personal viewpoints that are often absent from regular classroom writing tasks in Asia (Zhenhui, 2001). As mentioned previously by Canale (1983), students require opportunities to practise using language skills in authentic situations after explicitly learning knowledge and journal writing provided an effective medium for students to enjoy using the English language for its main purpose – that of communication.

It is thought very likely that the topics chosen were a key factor in the success of the programme. Students enjoyed writing about personal experiences and concepts they were familiar with and discussing their own viewpoints as espoused by Hamachek (1977).

Writing confidence was promoted through the use of a similar lesson plan each week. This meant that students quickly became familiar with the stages of the lesson and developed expectations that they would be provided with the information and support needed to complete the task to the level of their ability. These expectations were possibly a key component to the increased writing confidence the case study students appeared to develop over the year. By the end of the year students were starting their writing more quickly and competently than earlier in the year and all were able to clearly express personal thoughts on the weekly topic without exhibiting any writing anxiety.

The high level of student engagement and confidence as well as the consideration by participants that this class was 'easy and fun' does have an important implication in that when students find a task enjoyable and engaging, learning often occurs naturally. Overall, it was found that students thought journal writing a unique and highly motivating writing context.

### **6.2.2 Student teacher relationships**

The strong relationships built between the case study participants and the researcher through the journal writing programme was a particularly powerful finding from this research. As observed previously in this chapter, many students feel that a Western teacher is harder for them to communicate with and ask questions orally when compared to a local teacher. During the journal writing programme, the journal became an important tool in creating dialogue that built a strong student teacher relationship in which students felt safe to ask questions and share personal feelings and experiences. Students seemed to appreciate the opportunity for everyone's views to be sought and responded to by a teacher, rather than a selected few as often occurs when oral discussion takes place in a large class.

Other researchers agree, their studies concurring that students often try harder to communicate ideas and feel more at ease portraying emotions once they have created a relationship of trust (Alexander, 2001; Liao and Wong, 2010). They add that a strong relationship is another way to lessen writing anxiety in students as they build a rapport with their teacher and no longer fear being penalised for language errors. The absence of marks or grades reduced writing anxiety of students which is common amongst ESL learners (Betancourt and Phinney, 1980; Hsu, 2006).

### **6.2.3 Modelling of language in context**

Correct language was modeled in two ways during the programme.

Firstly, students had access to the weekly exemplar written by the fictitious 'Ali'. Exemplars reminded more able students about language features, scaffolded the next ability tier of students by allowing them to refer to each exemplar as necessary to increase their understanding or usage, and

supported through examples those less able students who were able to copy words, phrases or even occasional whole sentences.

Secondly, the main errors made by students in their writing were correctly modeled in the teacher's reply. This modeling of language in context is seen as an alternative way to correct student errors. As students build a relationship with their reader they wish to communicate as clearly as possible and compare their own language with that of the teacher. Burniske (1994) and Harmer (2004) both describe how students then often begin to imitate the correct writing.

Although explicit teaching of errors may be necessary for some writing tasks, modeling in context provides a more positive means of correcting writing errors and has the advantage of forcing teachers to consider only the most important aspects of the writing that need correcting rather than marking all errors. By highlighting only one or two points, students are more likely to take note of them rather than facing a page covered in red ink. This type of modeled feedback would be a significant change in methodology for many Bruneian teachers but could have exciting implications for future teaching practices.

It is also noted that this study had a small class of ten students, but most regular English classes in Brunei would have much higher numbers. Exemplars and written modeling can be seen as a possible means to provide differentiated levels of support during periods when individual conferencing becomes difficult with large class sizes.

#### **6.2.4 Explicit teaching of vocabulary**

A major finding of this research was the difficulty many students have with vocabulary when faced with a writing task. Firstly, students often found that they were asked to write on a subject without knowing relevant English words so writing was constrained by a limited vocabulary. Secondly, task requirements often directed the use of specific words but students did not know their meanings well enough to use them correctly. Also, instructions often contained words that students did not fully understand and which were not clearly explained.

The need to explicitly teach new vocabulary and revisit it regularly has been advocated for many years (Atkinson and Shiffrin, 1968). Successful memorisation of new words relies on being taught learning strategies, relating them to known words or information and being provided with opportunities to practice language choices. Canale's (1983) view is that it is essential for teachers to establish and teach knowledge first, and then practise it within a skills based activity. He agrees with Piaget (cited in Wood, 1998) that students are more successful when they actively construct meaning about vocabulary for themselves rather than receiving the information passively.

The implication from this research finding is clear. Although teachers have a busy curriculum it appears essential that sufficient time needs to be taken to prepare students for tasks by introducing or revising vocabulary and topic knowledge first. Once students are familiar with these, opportunities should be given to practice and experiment with the new language. Only after successful practice and feedback should students be given the main task to complete.

#### **6.2.5 Code switching**

Providing time for students to talk to peers about their own ideas was an important part of the pre-writing process in journal writing, and encouraged them to ask other students for assistance with language as they clarified their thoughts about the topic. Eastman (1997) also noted that a major benefit of journal writing was how it acted as a bridge from the spoken to the written word as students used an internal dialogue to write at their own level of meaning.

As the year progressed, students participated more and more in these discussion activities, often using a mixture of English and Malay as they asked each other questions they were unwilling or unable to enunciate clearly to the teacher in English – an example of code-switching promoting higher proficiency in a second language as outlined by Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain (2005).

This study found that students placed a very high importance on the ability to code switch to Malay when they need to clarify understanding or ask

questions that they did not know how to say in English. Code switching allows students to expand their English vocabulary and more importantly to understand the meaning of the new words they were learning. Findings from this study also concur with Li (2000) who states that code switching between two languages is just a characteristic of bilingualism and not a language deficiency.

### **6.2.6 Improvements in student writing**

One of the major findings of this case study has been the significant improvement of the deeper features of writing through the use of a dialogue journal writing programme. A greater awareness of audience, improved vocabulary, increased detail, and the development of a strong personal voice characterised the improvements seen in students' journal writing during the programme. In addition, although the focus was not on surface features of writing, regular analysis of journal entries became an excellent diagnostic tool to ascertain reoccurring misunderstandings of grammar, spelling and punctuation. Of significant interest is that errors in surface features did not increase even though students knew they were not being assessed on them. This is likely to be considered an important point in favour of adopting a journal writing programme in Brunei, as this would not undermine the strong traditional focus on these features by many local teachers, whilst still encouraging a greater depth in writing.

It is felt that a focus on achieving grammatically accurate English in writing tasks has tended to stifle creativity and experimentation with the language for many Bruneian students. Journal writing provides a platform to enjoy communicating through the sharing of personal experiences, views or ideas. The opportunity to use humour, to have fun with language, to personalise work through illustration or display, and to receive feedback about the message communicated, all contribute to most students enjoying journal writing and considering it much easier than their usual English classes – even though this study has proved that effective learning is occurring.

This study has found that all but one of the benefits of journal writing as outlined in Chapter 2 of this thesis by Peyton and Staton (1993) had validity when applied to this research. The only benefit this study was

unable to assess was whether the skills students developed in their journal writing were translated successfully into other classroom tasks as the researcher was not their regular class teacher.

As the deeper features of writing are often considered by secondary teachers to be poorly developed in students arriving in Year 7, the finding that journal writing is able to improve these significantly at primary school level is perhaps the most important finding of this thesis. If primary age students can develop an understanding of how to engage a reader, improve their ability to offer personal opinions, and learn to use vocabulary creatively, these skills would be of considerable value in sitting their Year 6 examination and when participating in the secondary school curriculum.

### **6.2.7 Summary**

As an easily administered task that requires few resources, and takes no more time than traditionally marked writing tasks, this study has found that regular journal writing is an extremely useful and practical tool to improve writing, characterized by significant improvements to the deeper features of student writing – in many cases much greater than normal writing maturation. As demonstrated clearly in findings from this study, many Bruneian primary school students find writing tasks very challenging and often fail to achieve success. In contrast, journal writing is described as ‘easy and fun’ and a task in which all writers can achieve success every time. Journal writing is supported by pre-task activities which assist students to write entries confidently and competently.

Regular journal writing provides a long list of benefits to students, many of which have been already described. One of the most important benefits is that it provides opportunities for ESL learners to practise language skills and knowledge often learnt in isolation in a personally relevant and motivating whole language context. Another important finding was the strong student teacher relationships which developed.

In summary, this research finds that journal writing would be an ideal accompaniment to a new Bruneian primary curriculum based on

assessment for learning methodologies, with a goal of promoting 21<sup>st</sup> century critical thinking skills and developing independent learners.

### **6.3 Limitations of the research**

There are several limitations to this research. Firstly, the students in this study represent only one school and therefore any findings should be considered as not being truly representative of primary school students throughout Brunei. However although there were only 10 students involved within the case study, the increased numbers who completed the survey do provide a significant sample size within a Bruneian context.

Also the gender imbalance within the case group means that any findings regarding gender pertinent to the case study have limited reliability. Findings for the case study students have therefore not focused on issues of gender.

A further limitation is that being the regular class teacher would have enabled the researcher to comment on how journal writing affected other aspects of classroom learning. By teaching the journal writing programme in isolation, evidence of translated skills was unable to be obtained – an important aim of a journal writing programme.

### **6.4 Possibilities for further study**

There are a number of possibilities for further study based on this research, some of which have been already suggested within this thesis. These include:

- Translation of skills learned within the journal writing programme to other areas of written English.
- Identification of factors which contribute to the failure of many students to complete English writing tasks.
- Use of written dialogue in a journal to improve student teacher relationships.
- Success of intervention for low achieving writers at primary school age as compared to success of intervention at secondary school level.

- The use of visual resources and oral discussion in improving learning and retention of explicitly taught vocabulary.
- Specific reasons for writing or exam anxiety
- Self efficacy towards specific English skills and knowledge.
- The use of English and attitudes towards the English language by adults in Brunei, including how skill levels change after leaving school.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

The main purpose of this study was to investigate whether a journal writing programme could improve the writing of primary age students and how students' individual attitudes and challenges might influence their participation and learning. During the course of this research the general attitudes of primary age students towards learning English have been discussed as well as the challenges they face in becoming effective writers.

This study revealed that Bruneian primary students tend to have high self-efficacy in English and accept that their achievement in this language will significantly impact their future lives and often their social status. Coupled with the advancement of technology which is rapidly increasing students' desire to access western culture, it is likely that the value students place on English will continue to rise. Teachers are therefore well placed to take advantage of this by offering practical learning contexts which will be seen as personally useful and motivating by students thus increasing their desire to improve their English. The challenge is whether teachers will be prepared to reflect on and make changes to their current teaching practices.

Journal writing is a programme which doesn't involve any more teacher time than many other writing activities and offers a long list of benefits as outlined within this research. One of the most important is giving students opportunities to use a second language to write their personal thoughts and views in an authentic context. Students concentrate on communicating a message as they develop ideas and experiment with language and this helps to build a relationship of trust with a teacher as

well as providing freedom to escape the normal constraint of producing 'correct' writing. Journal writing increases writing maturity and confidence through recognition of a student's personal voice.

Even by Year 4 of primary school, there is a wide difference in academic achievement by students. For students who have little English language knowledge and skill at this stage of their schooling, it appears that English often becomes a lesson in frustration, culminating in the cycle of learned helplessness often exhibited by lower ability students on reaching secondary school. It makes sense that low achieving students should be targeted at this primary age group by returning to the basics of language learning and working at their personal ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) rather than being set tasks above their skill level from their Year level curriculum. Primary school is an extremely important stage of student development and this research suggests that it is highly beneficial to encourage positive student beliefs and self efficacy in English at a young age. The most simple and effective way to do this is by ensuring students successfully complete enjoyable and personally motivating classroom tasks.

The survey responses appear to strongly indicate, that all students, no matter their level of ability, would like support to help them improve their English. Half of all students regularly cannot complete English tasks and this is an area of concern. If self-efficacy is seen as the most significant of all learning variables and is measured as the confidence that a task can be done successfully, repeated task failure should certainly be viewed as being likely to lower self-efficacy. It appears crucial to provide tasks at the right level for students, pre-teach necessary skills and information, allow sufficient time for completion and to provide supportive, detailed feedback that enables all students to improve. The findings of this research would suggest that journal writing is one activity that can provide all these essential components for successful differentiated learning.

In addressing these issues, it has been found that there has been very little research published on Asian students' attitudes towards learning English, particularly at a primary school level. Information on Bruneian

secondary school students is just as rare and this researcher was unable to find any information pertaining to primary age students in Brunei. This research therefore is especially important as it provides possibly the first published information on attitudes of Bruneian primary school students towards learning English.

As has been outlined in this thesis, English is widely spoken and valued in Brunei. Over the coming years the importance of possessing excellent English skills in this small sultanate is likely to increase, as is the case throughout Asia. Therefore this study is highly significant and relevant as it contributes to our knowledge and understanding of how young second language learners learn and the specific problems they face. During the course of this research, important data has been collected on issues regarding improving the writing of ESL students and in particular on the effectiveness of a journal writing programme.

In conclusion, this research has found that the inclusion of journal writing at primary level would be highly beneficial to ESL students in Brunei. Journal writing enables English to be embraced by both teachers and students as an exciting, vibrant and personally relevant language for communication in this multi-lingual country rather than a series of exercises from a textbook.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 – Adapted and Simplified Survey given to Cohort group

English – What do YOU think?

**DO NOT** write your name on this sheet Boy/Girl

Year 4/5/6

Please help me with my university study by taking a few minutes to answer these questions. There are no right or wrong answers so please just put what you really think. Thank you. Mrs Heather

1. Which of these subjects do you think is the most important to get good marks in? (Number them 1-6 with 1 being most important and 6 being least important.)

English \_\_\_ Arabic \_\_\_ Bahasa Melayu \_\_\_ Science \_\_\_ ICT \_\_\_ Mathematics \_\_\_

2. Which subject do you like the most? (Number them 1-6 with 1 being the subject you like the most and 6 being the subject you like the least.)

English \_\_\_ Arabic \_\_\_ Bahasa Melayu \_\_\_ Science \_\_\_ ICT \_\_\_ Mathematics \_\_\_

3. How often do you use English when you are not at school?

A lot \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ Very little/Never \_\_\_

4. When do you use English when you are not at school?

With family \_\_\_ With friends \_\_\_ Shopping \_\_\_ Watch English movies/television \_\_\_

Read English books \_\_\_ Listen to English music \_\_\_ Travel \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. How good do you think you are at English? (Write E – excellent, G – good, P – poor)

Speaking \_\_\_ Listening \_\_\_ Reading \_\_\_ Writing \_\_\_

6. How good do you think your parents are at English?

Father: Excellent \_\_\_ Good \_\_\_ Poor \_\_\_

Does he use English for work? A lot \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ Very little/never \_\_\_ Don't know \_\_\_

Mother: Excellent \_\_\_ Good \_\_\_ Poor \_\_\_

Does she use English for work? A lot \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ Very little/never \_\_\_ Don't know \_\_\_

7. What English material do you have at home?

Reading books \_\_\_ CDs/music \_\_\_ DVDs/movies \_\_\_ Newspapers \_\_\_ Magazines \_\_\_

8. Do you think it will be important for YOU to have good English results when you leave school?

Very important \_\_\_ Quite important \_\_\_ Not very important \_\_\_

If you think it is important, why do you think that?

Going to university \_\_\_ Getting a job \_\_\_ Travel \_\_\_ Internet \_\_\_ Meeting people/making friends \_\_\_ Other? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you pass your English assessments and class tests?

Always/ Usually \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ Never \_\_\_

Do you worry about how well you will do in your English examinations?

Often \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ Never \_\_\_

Do you think English teachers are well trained/good at preparing you for your examinations?  
Yes/No

11. Do you think that English is a hard language to learn?

Yes, it is very hard \_\_\_ Sometimes it can be hard \_\_\_ No, it is easy \_\_\_

Does your teacher explain class work clearly? Yes/ No

Are you able to do the work/activity that is given to you?

Always \_\_\_ Usually \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ Never \_\_\_

12. When writing English, what do you usually find hard or easy? (Write E for Easy and H for Hard)

Grammar \_\_\_ Spelling \_\_\_ Punctuation \_\_\_ Vocabulary/Words \_\_\_ Topic \_\_\_

13. Which English activities do you find easiest? (Number them 1- 4 with 1 being the easiest and 4 the hardest.) Speaking \_\_\_ Listening \_\_\_ Writing \_\_\_ Reading \_\_\_

14. Do you think other subjects should be taught in English? Maths - Yes/No Science - Yes/No

Do you find it hard to understand questions and answer in English? Maths -Yes/No Science - Yes/No

Do you think you would get higher marks if taught in Malay? Maths –Yes/No Science –Yes/No

15. What sort of activities do you find the most helpful for preparing for examinations and tests?

Writing compositions \_\_\_ Translating to/from Malay \_\_\_ Silent reading \_\_\_

Answering questions about texts \_\_\_ Solving problems in groups/partners \_\_\_

Looking at examples of good work \_\_\_ Worksheets \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

16. How does your class English teacher give you feedback about your written work?

Underlines errors for you to fix \_\_\_ Crosses out errors and writes in the correction \_\_\_

Writes comments at the end \_\_\_ Talks to you/ lets you ask questions \_\_\_

17. Do you think feedback from your teacher helps you to improve your English? Yes/ No

18. Do you ever use self or peer(partner) assessment in English? Self – Yes/No Peer – Yes/No

19. What is your favourite English activity?eg reading, spelling, plays, storywriting

\_\_\_\_\_

20. Have you ever had a foreign/CfBT English language teacher? Yes, in Year \_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

Who would you choose to teach you English? Foreign or CfBT teacher /Local Malay teacher

**Appendix 2 – Original survey given to case study participants**  
**Student questionnaire on attitudes to and challenges of English as a second language in Brunei**

1. Rank these school subjects in order of academic importance to you? (Number them 1-6 with 1 being most important to achieve good results in and 6 being least important.)

English \_\_\_ Arabic \_\_\_ Bahasa Melayu \_\_\_ Science \_\_\_ ICT \_\_\_  
 Mathematics \_\_\_

2. Rank these school subjects in order of enjoyment? (Number them 1-6 with 1 being the subject you enjoy the most and 6 being the subject you least enjoy.)

English \_\_\_ Arabic \_\_\_ Bahasa Melayu \_\_\_ Science \_\_\_ ICT \_\_\_  
 Mathematics \_\_\_

3. How often do you use English at home or outside of school?

A lot \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ Very little/Never \_\_\_

4. Describe the main times and places you would use English outside of school?

With family \_\_\_ With friends \_\_\_ At shops \_\_\_ Sports/hobbies \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_

5. How would you rate your English ability?

Excellent \_\_\_ Good \_\_\_ Poor \_\_\_

6. How would you rate your parents/caregivers English ability?

Excellent \_\_\_ Good \_\_\_ Poor \_\_\_

7. Do you have many English language resources at home? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Books \_\_\_ Magazines \_\_\_ Newspapers \_\_\_ Music \_\_\_ DVDs \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_

8. How important do you feel that having good English skills will be for you in the future when you leave school for further education or for getting a job?

Very important \_\_\_ Quite important \_\_\_ Not very important \_\_\_

9. Do you think that having good English skills is becoming more or less important for Bruneians?

Becoming more important \_\_\_ Becoming less important \_\_\_

10. Do you worry about how well you will do or how well prepared you are for your English assessments and examinations?

Often \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ Never \_\_\_

11. Which aspects of writing English as a second language do you find easy?

Grammar \_\_\_ Spelling \_\_\_ Punctuation \_\_\_ Vocabulary \_\_\_ Content \_\_\_

12. Which aspects of writing English as a second language do you find hard?

Grammar \_\_\_ Spelling \_\_\_ Punctuation \_\_\_ Vocabulary \_\_\_ Content \_\_\_

13. Rank these types of English activities from easiest to hardest?

Speaking \_\_\_ Listening \_\_\_ Writing \_\_\_ Reading \_\_\_

14. Do you think that other school subjects (ie Maths and Science) should be taught to you in English? Yes/No What challenges do you face using English in these subjects?

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15. What types of lessons or activities do you find the most helpful and least helpful in preparing you for examinations and assessments?

Most helpful

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Least helpful

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16. What type of written feedback do you receive from your class English teacher when work is marked?

Errors corrected \_\_\_ General praise/comment eg Good work \_\_\_

Correct examples/models \_\_\_ Written comments specific to that work \_\_\_

Other \_\_\_

17. Do you find this feedback useful in improving your English? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

18. Do you prefer written or oral feedback from your teachers? Written \_\_\_ Oral \_\_\_

19. How could lessons or feedback from teachers be changed or improved to be more helpful to you in improving your English skills?

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20. Do you think that being part of a journal writing class with a native English speaking teacher would help you improve your English? Yes/No

Any other comments you have about learning English as a second language

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### Appendix 3a – Letter to Cohort students

Dear Student

This year I am doing research so I can complete my Master of Education degree. Members of my Creative English Writing class on Saturday mornings will be asked to participate in a small case study to find out whether using dialogue journals help them to improve their English writing skills. Also I am wanting to discover what Year 3 to Year 6 students at SR Tungku think about learning English at school and what they find easy or difficult. I am interested in knowing how often you use English outside of school, what sorts of things you do in class that you find helpful when learning to write English and what types of feedback from your teacher helps you improve your writing.

I would like to ask you if you would like to help me with my research by answering a questionnaire with 20 questions written in Malay and English to make sure you can understand it easily. Most questions are multi-choice, but if you do write any answers you can write in either Malay or English. The questionnaires will be anonymous and will be read only by myself unless you choose to write answers in Malay. These will be translated in confidence by a member of the school staff.

You do not have to be good at English to answer the questionnaire. In fact it would be very helpful for students who do not think they are very good at English and find it hard, to be part of my research by answering the questionnaire.

Taking part in this research is your choice. You will not be asked to answer the questionnaire if you do not wish to, but if you do decide to take part you will need to sign the consent form below. Your parents will also need to read the information sheet you have been given and sign a consent form too.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Heather Dallas

PRA English Teacher SR Tungku

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

I have read the information sheet and am satisfied that I am fully informed about my role in this research project.

Yes, I agree that I would like to participate in this research.

No, I do not wish to participate in this research.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3b – Letter to parents

Dear Parents

Today your child has received a letter from me asking if they would like to be involved in research I am undertaking at SR Tungku for the purpose of writing a thesis to complete my Master of Education degree.

Attached to this letter is a sheet outlining my proposed research for your information. If you have any further questions or concerns about your child's participation you may contact myself or Hamdiah Binti Hj. Amat at school. I would like to stress that participation is voluntary and your child will not be penalised for not participating.

If after reading this letter and the information sheet, you would like your child to participate in this research project, would you please sign the consent form below and return it to school by the \_\_\_\_\_.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Heather Dallas

PRA English Teacher SR Tungku

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Name of child \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

I have read the information sheet and am satisfied that I am fully informed about my child's role in this research project.

Yes, I do agree that my child may participate in this research.

No, I do not wish my child to participate in this research.

Signature of Parent/Caregiver \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 3c – Information sheet for all participants**

Title of Project: Improving Written Language and Changing Attitudes towards Learning English in Primary Age ESL Learners in Brunei Darussalam.

Researcher: Mrs Heather Dallas (CfBT teacher working at SR Tungku teaching PRA English)

Background to research: After observing and talking to students and teachers during my time in Brunei, I have found that many students find English a very difficult subject and worry about their ability to achieve good results. Much class work seems to be focused on preparation for examinations and written work is often strictly modelled. The busy timetable leaves few opportunities for students to write freely and creatively.

The research: A group of students were selected to participate in an English Creative Writing club this year, in which I decided to use dialogue journals to allow students the chance to improve their ability to think and write critically about topics and ideas that interest them by corresponding with a teacher. These students will be offered the chance to be involved as case study participants in my research to discover how useful this programme may be in improving their writing and their attitudes towards English.

As a background to this case study, I am also investigating primary age students views about English. Year 3 to 6 students are being asked to answer a questionnaire containing 20 mainly multi-choice questions asking for their views on learning English and taking examinations, the amount of English they use outside of school, the aspects of learning English that they find difficult or easy, the types of classroom activities that they find helpful, and the types of teacher feedback that they find the most valuable in improving their English. The questionnaire will be written in Malay and English so that all children can understand what is being asked and any answers can also be written in Malay or English. This means that it is not necessary for a child to be good at English and it would in fact be

helpful for my research if children with a range of abilities were to participate. English teachers at the school will also be asked to complete a questionnaire based on their views about teaching English to this age group.

Privacy: Questionnaires will be filled out anonymously and kept confidential. They will be read only by myself or, if questionnaires are answered in Malay, a member of staff will assist with confidentially translating responses. Case study students will be referred to only as Student A, Student B etc. Information that will be produced for the thesis will be mainly concerned with general views and trends after all data is collated and when individual comments are used, care will be taken to ensure there is no information contained within them that may identify the writer. Participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage during data collection which will cease on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2011.

Use of the research: An electronic copy of the thesis will become widely available, as the University of Waikato requires that a digital copy of Masters theses will be lodged permanently in the University's digital repository: Research Commons. This research may also be published in academic journals or used at academic conferences. CfBT will also have access to the research.

Ethics: The researcher is bound by the ethical conduct procedures outlined to and agreed with the FOE Ethics Committee through the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

Queries or Concerns: If you require any further information, or have any other queries or concerns about this research you are invited to contact the researcher in person or email [had3@students.waikato.co.nz](mailto:had3@students.waikato.co.nz).

Alternatively you may contact Hamdiah Binti Hj. Amat through the school.

**Appendix 4a – letter to participants in case study**

Dear Student

This year I am doing research so that I can write a thesis to complete my Master of Education degree. As members of the Creative English Writing class on Saturday mornings, I am inviting you to take part in my research. I intend for members of the class to become part of a case study in investigating whether the dialogue journal writing you do during this class helps you to improve your English writing skills. You will also be asked to give your views on learning English by completing a questionnaire and then giving more information about your answers in a short interview. Samples of written work from your journal at the beginning and end of the research period will be compared for any significant improvement in writing skills. All work will be confidential. Any information or comments you make on the questionnaire or during the interview will be shared only with myself, unless you wish to speak or write in Malay, in which case a staff member will confidentially translate your answers. You will be anonymous within the research findings, being referred to as Student A, B etc. The research is expected to take up little or no time outside of your normal class hours.

You do not have to be good at English to take part in this case study. In fact it would be very helpful for students who do not think they are very good at English and find it hard, to be part of my research.

Taking part in this research is your choice. You will not be asked to participate if you do not wish to, but if you do decide to take part you will need to sign the consent form below. Your parents will also need to read the information sheet you have been given and sign a consent form too.

Yours sincerely

Heather Dallas

PRA English Teacher SR Tungku

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

I have read the information sheet and am satisfied that I am fully informed about my role in this research project.

Yes, I agree that I would like to participate in this research.

No, I do not wish to participate in this research.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4b – Letter to parents of case study participants

Dear Parents

Today your child has received a letter from me asking if they would like to be involved in research I am undertaking at SR Tunku for the purpose of writing a thesis to complete my Master of Education degree. They will be participants in a small case study regarding the use of dialogue journal writing which they are already involved in during their Saturday morning Creative English Writing class. All work will be confidential being read or heard only by myself unless your child wishes to respond to the questionnaire or interview using Malay, in which case a school staff member will confidentially translate answers. Any information given or comments your child makes will be anonymous within the research findings. The research is expected to take up little or no time outside of their normal class hours.

Attached to this letter is a sheet outlining my proposed research for your information. If you have any further questions or concerns about your child's participation you may contact myself or Hamdiah Binti Hj. Amat at the school. I would like to stress that participation is voluntary and your child will not be penalised for not participating.

If after reading this letter and the information sheet, you would like your child to participate in this research project, would you please sign the consent form below and return it to school by the \_\_\_\_\_.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Heather Dallas

PRA English Teacher SR Tunku

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Name of child \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Class

I have read the information sheet and am satisfied that I am fully informed about my child's role in this research project.

Yes, I do agree that my child may participate in this research.

No, I do not wish my child to participate in this research.

Signature of Parent/Caregiver \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix 5 - English matrices progress indicators for writing

The English Matrices  
Progress Indicators

ACCESS THE ENGLISH MATRIX PAGES ONLINE AT [www.kiwi.org.nz/assessment/exemplars/](http://www.kiwi.org.nz/assessment/exemplars/)

THE NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM EXEMPLARS



POETIC WRITING (PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND CHARACTER): MATRIX OF DEEPER FEATURES

	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
<b>Audience Purpose</b>	<b>Impact</b> Tells some audience interest through narrative or personal experience or observations of character.	<b>Impact</b> Begins to show awareness of audience interest through personal experience or a character.	<b>Impact</b> Shows awareness of audience interest through a variety of means, e.g. humour, selected anecdotes, choice of language.	<b>Impact</b> Maintains audience interest in a variety of ways through a variety of means, e.g. humour, selected anecdotes, choice of language.	<b>Impact</b> Engages audience interest in a variety of ways through a variety of means, e.g. humour, selected anecdotes, choice of language.
<b>Voice</b>	Records simple, honestly expressed personal experiences or observations of character.	Records personal experiences or observations of character in a way that includes a personal response.	Records thoughts, feelings, and ideas that are personally meaningful in character, adding detail and comment, and showing some selectivity in the process.	Shows personal views, feelings, and responses to experiences or character sincerely and honestly.	Confidently conveys personal thoughts, feelings, and ideas about and responses to experiences or character.
<b>Ideas</b>	Forms ideas and attempts to express them.	Forms and expresses ideas about a personal experience or a character.	Selects thoughts, feelings, and ideas that are personally meaningful in character and begins to add detail selectively in the process.	Selects and explores ideas that are significant in regard to the experience and focuses clearly on developing the main points and specific, interesting events in a personal experience or on developing the main attributes and characteristics of a person, situation, and observation.	Supports main points and observations with substantial illustrations, and observations.
<b>Structure Organisation</b>	<b>Sentences</b> Attempts simple sentences.	<b>Sentences</b> Uses mainly simple sentences and some compound sentences.	<b>Structure</b> Demonstrates some sense of sequence in simple sentences, e.g. "first", "next", "then".	<b>Structure</b> Confidently organises ideas for a particular effect or purpose, usually making logical links within and sometimes between paragraphs.	<b>Structure</b> Links main and supporting ideas within and between paragraphs, using a variety of sentence structures for a particular effect or purpose, e.g. repetition, flashback, and subordination.
<b>Language</b>	<b>Vocabulary</b> Attempts to use personal content words.	<b>Vocabulary</b> Attempts to use personal content words and high frequency words.	<b>Vocabulary</b> Attempts to use varied and precise adjectives, verbs, and nouns.	<b>Vocabulary</b> Attempts to use a range of vocabulary to suit the audience and purpose.	<b>Vocabulary</b> Attempts to use a wide range of vocabulary to suit the audience and the purpose of the writing and to make an impact.

# The English Matrices Progress Indicators

## THE NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM EXEMPLARS



TRANSACTIONAL WRITING AND POETIC WRITING MATRIX OF SURFACE FEATURES

	LEVEL II	LEVEL III	LEVEL III	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
<b>Spelling</b>	Attempts to identify some letter sounds, generally initial letter sounds. Approximates common spellings.	Identifies dominant letter sounds. Spells some high-frequency words correctly (Special Write lists 1-2).	Records dominant sounds in order. Begins to use some common spelling correctly (Special Write lists 1-2).	Shows knowledge of constant sounds, blends, and vowel sounds. Spells most high-frequency words correctly (Special Write lists 2-4).	Demonstrates good understanding of all basic sounds and patterns in written text. Spells most high-frequency words correctly (Special Write lists 1-4).	Demonstrates good understanding of all basic sounds and patterns in written text. Spells most high-frequency words correctly (Special Write lists 1-7).	Uses the writing conventions of grammar confidently. Spells most high-frequency words correctly (Special Write lists 1-7).
<b>Punctuation</b>	Experiments with capital letters and full stops.	With support, understands and uses capital letters and full stops.	With support, understands and uses capital letters and full stops.	Uses capital letters, full stops, commas, question marks, and speech marks with some consistency.	Participates with increasing independence, e.g., uses capital letters, full stops, question marks, speech marks, and the ellipsis.	Uses appropriate punctuation independently, e.g., brackets, dashes, colons, and the ellipsis.	Uses the writing conventions of grammar confidently. Spells most high-frequency words correctly (Special Write lists 1-7).
<b>Grammar</b>	Writes simple sentences that make sense.	Writes sentences that make sense.	Writes simple sentences correctly.	Uses basic grammatical conventions with support, e.g., correctly formed sentences, consistent use of tense, of pronouns, and correct use of prepositions.	Participates with increasing independence, e.g., correctly formed sentences, consistent use of tense, of pronouns, and correct use of prepositions.	Uses most grammatical conventions accurately, e.g., correctly formed sentences, consistent use of tense, of pronouns, and correct use of prepositions.	Uses the writing conventions of grammar confidently. Spells most high-frequency words correctly (Special Write lists 1-7).
<b>Layout</b>	Leaves spaces between some words. Displays some consistency in directionality.	Leaves clear spaces between words. Displays a strong sense of directionality.					

TRANSACTIONAL WRITING (EXPLANATION AND ARGUMENT) AND POETIC WRITING (PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND CHARACTER): MATRIX FOR THE WRITER – CONTEXT AND PROCESS

	LEVEL II	LEVEL III	LEVEL III	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	
<b>LEVEL II</b>	Realises that writing carries a message. Acknowledges that he or she has had an experience or has a responsibility or opinion that can be expressed in writing. Can verbalise his or her writing. Shows some connection with the writer. Uses illustrations to support meaning. Makes some attempt at one-to-one matching in reading his or her writing back.	Understands that print is constant. Understands that writing must make sense. Shows some one-to-one matching, with general consistency, when reading his or her writing back.	Understands that there are different purposes for writing, consistency when reading his or her writing back. He or she is keen to share his or her writing with an audience. Recognises the need to plan his or her writing, particularly, to develop basic punctuation.	Understands the purpose of the writing. Recognises that he or she is writing with a purpose. He or she may not share the same knowledge. Recognises that different audiences and purposes require different writing. Experiments with vocabulary to achieve an intended effect. Draws on his or her own experiences (verbally or in writing) to describe events or his or her own and others' writing. Uses modelled ideas effectively and consistently, begins to revise and edit writing. Attempts to plan writing. Uses a variety of resources to locate words or clearly understood words. Uses a dictionary to improve clarity and meaning. Uses some dictionary skills as a resource.	Writes independently for a sustained period. Responds to and appreciates his or her own and others' work. Uses and responds to feedback. Articulates the language strategies used with audience and audience, extracts criteria from models of written text. Uses a dictionary and begins to use a thesaurus.	Writes independently for a sustained period. Responds to and appreciates his or her own and others' work. Uses and responds confidently to feedback. Uses a thesaurus or dictionary to extend vocabulary. Independently revises and edits work for greater effect.	Writes independently for a sustained period. Responds to and appreciates his or her own and others' work. Uses and responds confidently to feedback. Uses a thesaurus or dictionary to extend vocabulary. Independently revises and edits his or her work for greater effect.	Writes independently for a sustained period. Responds to and appreciates his or her own and others' work. Uses and responds confidently to feedback. Uses a thesaurus or dictionary to extend vocabulary. Independently revises and edits his or her work for greater effect.
<b>LEVEL III</b>								
<b>LEVEL 2</b>								
<b>LEVEL 3</b>								
<b>LEVEL 4</b>								
<b>LEVEL 5</b>								

## Appendix 6 - Tables of results for survey responses from the Cohort Group

Question 1: How do students rank English when asked which school subject is the most important to get good marks in? (Subject choices were English, Arabic, Bahasa Melayu (Standard Malay), Science, ICT and Mathematics.)

Table i Student Ranking of the Academic Importance of English in Comparison with Five Other Subjects

	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	Total responses
All students	45 22%	43 21%	48 23%	39 19%	20 10%	8 4%	203
Females	27 23%	26 22%	36 31%	17 14%	10 9%	1 1%	117
Males	18 21%	17 20%	12 14%	22 25%	10 12%	7 8%	86
CfBT	31 20%	31 20%	40 26%	31 20%	16 11%	3 2%	152
Local	14 27%	12 23%	8 16%	8 16%	4 8%	5 10%	51
Year 4	15 21%	17 24%	17 24%	11 16%	7 10%	3 4%	70
Year 5	9 13%	13 19%	15 21%	20 29%	8 11%	5 7%	70
Year 6	21 33%	13 21%	16 25%	8 13%	5 8%	0 0%	63

Question 2: How do students rank English when asked which school subject they enjoy the most? (Subject choices were English, Arabic, Bahasa Melayu (Standard Malay), Science, ICT and Mathematics.)

Table ii Student Ranking of Enjoyment of English in Comparison with Five Other Subjects.

	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	Total responses
All students	47 24%	47 24%	44 22%	25 13%	24 12%	9 5%	196
Females	26 23%	26 23%	31 27%	15 13%	11 10%	4 4%	115
Males	21 25%	21 25%	13 16%	10 12%	13 16%	5 6%	81
CfBT	37 25%	34 23%	33 23%	18 12%	18 12%	7 5%	147
Local	10 20%	13 27%	11 23%	7 14%	6 12%	2 4%	49

Year 4	12 18%	19 29%	14 22%	5 8%	10 15%	5 8%	65
Year 5	17 25%	16 24%	13 19%	9 13%	9 13%	4 6%	68
Year 6	18 29%	12 19%	17 27%	11 17%	5 8%	0 0%	63

### Question 3: The amount of time spent using English outside of school

Table iii Student Frequency in Using English Outside of School Hours

	Often	Sometimes	Seldom/Never	Total Responses
All students	16 8%	150 70%	48 22%	214
Female	6 5%	84 72%	27 23%	117
Male	10 10%	66 68%	21 22%	97
CfBT	13 8%	113 71%	34 21%	160
Local	3 5%	37 69%	14 26%	54
Year 4	6 8%	46 59%	25 32%	78
Year 5	3 4%	58 83%	9 13%	70
Year 6	6 9%	46 70%	14 21%	66

### Question 4: The main contexts English is used outside of school

Table iv Main Contexts Students Use English Outside of School Hours

	With family	With friends	Shopping	Movies/ Television/ Computer	Read books	Listen to music	Travel	Other	Total responses
All students	114 53%	74 35%	64 30%	85 40%	102 48%	128 60%	37 17%	11 5%	214 students (615 responses)
Females	67 57%	43 36%	37 31%	43 36%	56 47%	77 65%	16 13%	5 4%	118
Males	47 49%	31 32%	27 28%	42 44%	46 48%	51 53%	21 22%	6 6%	96

CfBT	87	54%	52	33%	54	34%	61	38%	81	51%	101	63%	33	21%	9	6%	160
Local	27	50%	22	41%	10	19%	24	44%	21	39%	27	50%	4	7%	2	4%	54
Year 4	38	49%	23	29%	27	35%	33	42%	28	36%	41	53%	9	12%	4	5%	78
Year 5	37	53%	19	27%	13	19%	29	41%	34	40%	43	61%	17	24%	3	4%	70
Year 6	39	59%	32	48%	24	36%	23	35%	40	61%	44	67%	11	17%	4	6%	66

Question 6: How good do you think your parents are at English and how much do they use English for work?

E = excellent, G = good, P = Poor.

O = often, S = sometimes, R = rarely. U = unsure.

Table v Perception of parents' ability in English and use at work.

	Father							Mother						
	Perception of ability (215 responses)			Use at work (219 responses)				Perception of ability (211 responses)			Use at work (219 responses)			
	E	G	P	O	S	R	U	E	G	P	O	S	R	U
All students	65	126	24	30	73	31	85	101	97	13	44	87	12	76
	30%	58%	12%	14%	33%	14%	39%	48%	46%	6%	20%	40%	5%	35%

Question 7: What English material do you have at home?

Table vi English Material in Students' Homes

	Books	CDs/Music	DVDs/Movies	Newspapers	Magazines
All students	131 60%	139 63%	171 78%	73 33%	71 32%

Table vii Number of Different Types of English Material in Students' Homes

Number of different types of English material

	0	1	2	3	4	5						
All students	2	1%	72	33%	28	13%	43	20%	40	18%	34	15%

Question 8: Do you think it will be important for you to have good English skills when you leave school?

Table viii Students Perception of Importance of Possessing English Language Skills on Leaving School

	Very important	Quite important	Not very important			
All students (212)	167	79%	34	16%	11	5%
Females (116)	92	80%	19	16%	5	4%
Males (96)	75	78%	15	16%	6	6%

Question 9: If you think having good English will be important, why do you think that?

Table ix Students' Perception of the Contexts where English Skills will be Important

	University	Employment	Travel	Internet	Meeting People					
All students (214)	146	68%	111	52%	117	55%	104	49%	94	44%
Females (117)	87	74%	67	57%	65	55%	52	44%	53	45%
Males (97)	59	61%	44	45%	52	54%	52	50%	41	42%

Question 10: Do you pass your English assessments and class tests? Do you worry about how well you will do in your English examinations? Do you think your English teachers are well trained/good at preparing you for your examinations?

Table x Students' Self Efficacy Regarding Examinations

	Pass rate frequency (212 responses)			Exam anxiety frequency (211 responses)			Exam readiness (214 responses)	
	Often	Sometimes	Never	Often	Sometimes	Never	Yes	No
All students	75 35%	108 51%	29 14%	58 27%	132 63%	21 10%	146 68%	68 32%
Females	41 35%	64 55%	12 10%	31 27%	80 68%	6 5%	85 73%	32 27%
Males	34 36%	44 46%	17 18%	27 29%	52 55%	15 16%	61 63%	36 37%
Year 4	26 33%	38 49%	14 18%	18 23%	52 67%	8 10%	51 65%	27 35%
Year 5	28 41%	32 47%	8 12%	4 6%	53 79%	10 15%	40 57%	30 43%
Year 6	21 32%	38 57%	7 11%	36 55%	27 41%	3 4%	55 83%	11 17%

Question 11: Do you think English is a hard/difficult language to learn? Does your teacher explain class work clearly? Are you able to do the work/activity that is given to you?

Table xi Students' Perception of Difficulty of English Tasks

	Perception of difficulty in learning English (210 responses)			Clarity of task explanations (210 responses)		Ability to do class tasks (210 responses)		
	Often difficult	Sometimes difficult	Not difficult	Clear	Unclear	Always/usually	Sometimes	Never
All students	31 15%	127 60%	52 25%	173 82%	37 18%	104 50%	97 46%	9 4%
Females	15 13%	72 62%	29 25%	96 83%	20 17%	60 52%	52 45%	4 3%
Males	16 17%	55 59%	23 24%	77 82%	17 18%	44 47%	45 47%	5 6%
Year 4	20 26%	35 46%	21 28%	61 80%	15 20%	31 69%	13 29%	1 2%
Year 5	4 6%	46 67%	19 27%	54 78%	15 22%	15 42%	20 55%	1 3%
Year 6	7 11%	46 71%	12 18%	58 89%	7 11%	14 40%	19 54%	2 6%

## Question 12: When writing English, what do you usually find difficult?

Table xii Aspects of Writing English which Students Find Difficult

	Grammar	Spelling	Punctuation	Vocabulary	Topic
All students (214)	137 (64%)	148 (69%)	96 (45%)	113 (53%)	112 (52%)
Females (116)	81 (70%)	85 (73%)	55 (47%)	63 (54%)	63 (54%)
Males (98)	56 (57%)	63 (64%)	41 (42%)	50 (51%)	49 (50%)

CfBT (160)	98 (61%)	111 (69%)	72 (45%)	84 (53%)	87 (54%)
Local (54)	39 (72%)	37 (69%)	23 (43%)	29 (54%)	25 (46%)
Year 4 (78)	42 (54%)	53 (68%)	28 (36%)	40 (51%)	34 (44%)
Year 5 (70)	42 (60%)	62 (86%)	29 (41%)	35 (50%)	41 (59%)
Year 6 (66)	53 (80%)	33 (50%)	38 (58%)	38 (58%)	37 (56%)

Question 13: Rank these English activities from easiest to hardest.

Table xiii Students' Ranking of the Four English Skills

	Speaking				Listening				Writing				Reading			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
All students (177)	51	20	36	70	36	47	63	31	27	54	38	58	63	56	40	18
	29%	11%	20%	40%	20%	27%	36%	17%	15%	31%	21%	33%	36%	31%	23%	10%
Females (100)	24	11	20	45	18	22	37	23	20	34	22	24	38	33	21	8
	24%	11%	20%	45%	18%	22%	37%	23%	20%	34%	22%	24%	38%	33%	21%	8%
Males (77)	27	9	16	25	18	25	26	8	7	20	16	34	25	23	19	10
	35%	12%	21%	32%	23%	32%	34%	11%	9%	26%	21%	44%	32%	30%	25%	13%
Year 4 (57)	23	5	9	20	6	15	20	16	12	18	16	11	16	19	12	10
	40%	9%	16%	35%	11%	26%	35%	28%	21%	32%	28%	19%	28%	33%	21%	18%
Year 5 (61)	17	4	10	30	13	17	25	6	8	22	12	19	23	18	14	6
	28%	7%	16%	49%	21%	28%	41%	10%	13%	36%	20%	31%	38%	29%	23%	10%
Year 6 (59)	11	11	17	20	17	15	18	9	7	14	10	28	24	19	14	2
	18%	18%	29%	35%	29%	25%	31%	15%	12%	24%	17%	47%	41%	32%	24%	3%

Question 14: Do you think Maths and Science should be taught in English? Do you find it hard to understand questions and answer in English for these subjects? Do you think you would get higher marks for these subjects if they were taught in Malay?

Table xiv Students' Attitudes Towards Being Taught Maths and Science in the English Language

	Maths			Science		
	It should be taught in English	Hard to understand questions and answer	Would get better marks if taught in Malay	It should be taught in English	Hard to understand questions and answer	Would get better marks if taught in Malay
All students (214 responses)	173 81%	110 51%	132 61%	164 77%	111 52%	135 63%
Females (117)	91 78%	65 56%	74 63%	99 85%	65 56%	78 67%
Males (97)	82 85%	45 46%	58 60%	65 67%	46 47%	57 59%
Year 4 (78)	55 71%	36 46%	44 56%	55 71%	32 41%	43 55%
Year 5 (70)	62 89%	33 47%	37 53%	54 77%	35 50%	37 53%
Year 6 (66)	56 85%	41 62%	51 72%	55 83%	44 67%	55 83%

Question 15: What sort of activities do you find the most helpful for preparing for examinations and tests?

Table xv Types of Classroom Activities that Students Find to be Helpful in Preparation for Examinations and Tests.

	Writing Compositions	Translation to/from Malay	Silent reading	Answering questions about texts	Solving problems in groups/ with peers	Looking at examples of good work	Worksheets	Other
All students (214)	117 55%	108 50%	101 47%	104 49%	81 38%	106 50%	101 47%	15 7%
Females (117)	74 63%	55 47%	59 50%	58 49%	48 41%	59 50%	56 48%	5 4%
Males (97)	43 44%	53 55%	42 43%	46 47%	33 34%	47 48%	45 46%	10 10%
Year 4 (78)	37 47%	42 54%	32 41%	42 54%	36 46%	40 51%	35 45%	4 5%
Year 5 (70)	38 54%	32 46%	37 53%	33 47%	21 30%	28 40%	29 41%	7 10%
Year 6 (66)	42 64%	34 52%	32 48%	29 44%	24 36%	38 58%	37 56%	4 6%

Question 16: How does your class English teacher give you feedback about your written work?

Table xvi Ways that Feedback is Provided to Students by Teachers about Written Work

	Underlines errors for student to fix		Crosses out errors and writes in correction		Writes comments at the end of the activity		Discusses orally with student	
All students (214)	135	63%	135	63%	88	41%	112	52%
Females (117)	73	62%	81	69%	44	38%	61	52%
Males (97)	62	64%	54	56%	44	45%	51	52%

Year 4 (78)	49	69%	48	67%	32	41%	35	45%
Year 5 (70)	48	69%	47	67%	37	53%	43	61%
Year 6 (66)	38	58%	40	61%	19	29%	34	52%

### Question 17: Do you think feedback from your teacher helps you to improve your English?

Table xvii Students' Perception of Whether Teacher Feedback on Written Tasks Assists in Improving English Writing Skills

	Yes		No	
All students (214)	186	87%	28	13%
Females (117)	106	91%	11	9%
Males (97)	80	82%	17	18%
Year 4 (78)	62	79%	16	21%
Year 5 (70)	64	91%	6	9%
Year 6 (66)	60	91%	6	9%

### Question 18: Do you ever use self or peer assessment in English?

Table xviii Use of Self-Assessment or Peer-Assessment Activities in English Lessons

	Self-Assessment		Peer-Assessment					
	Yes	No	Yes	No				
All students (214)	148	69%	66	31%	126	59%	88	41%
Females (117)	90	77%	27	23%	68	58%	49	42%
Males (97)	58	60%	39	40%	58	60%	39	40%

Year 4 (78)	48	62%	30	38%	41	53%	37	47%
Year 5 (70)	50	71%	20	29%	38	54%	32	46%
Year 6 (66)	50	76%	16	24%	47	71%	19	29%

### Question 19: What is your favourite English activity?

Table xix Students Favourite English Activities

	Spelling	Plays	Reading	Storywriting	Other
All students	76 36%	89 42%	63 29%	62 29%	19 9%
Females	49 42%	55 47%	38 32%	39 33%	5 4%
Males	27 28%	34 35%	25 26%	23 24%	14 14%
Year 4	24 31%	25 32%	21 27%	20 26%	5 6%
Year 5	22 31%	41 59%	26 37%	13 19%	4 6%
Year 6	30 45%	23 35%	16 24%	29 44%	10 15%

### Question 20: Have you ever had a foreign/CfBT English language teacher? Would you choose a foreign/CfBT or local Malay teacher to teach you English?

Table xx Students' Attitudes Towards Western English Teachers

	Preferred English teacher		
	CfBT/foreign teacher	Local Malay teacher	No preference
All students (219)	45 21%	121 55%	53 24%

CfBT/foreign taught previously (165)	37 22%	85 52%	43 26%
Local Malay taught only (54)	8 15%	36 67%	10 19%
<hr/>			
Females (117)	25 21%	67 58%	25 21%
Males (97)	19 20%	53 54%	25 26%
<hr/>			
Year 4 (78)	8 10%	53 68%	17 22%
Year 5 (70)	25 36%	32 46%	13 18%
Year 6 (66)	11 17%	36 55%	19 29%

**Appendix 7 - Profile paragraphs**

Student 1 – Year 6 female. This student ranks English third in academic importance behind Mathematics and Science. She finds it the second most enjoyable subject after Mathematics. She sometimes uses English outside of school at home, with friends, with teachers, her cousin and when she goes shopping. Most of the time at home she talks in Malay. She rates her English ability as excellent. She also considers both her parents excellent at English – her father is an English teacher and her mother is a History teacher (also taught using the English language). She has a large range of English language resources at home including books, movies, music, magazines and newspapers. She feels English will be very important in the future as she wishes to be an English teacher. She believes that having good English skills is becoming more important for Bruneians because lots of them travel and use the internet and it is important that other countries perceive Brunei as a country that can speak English. She often worries about forthcoming examinations because she is afraid the questions will be very difficult. She finds grammar and vocabulary the easiest part of learning English, and the hardest for her are spelling, punctuation and content. She finds reading easiest, then writing, speaking and listening. She feels that Maths and Science should continue to be taught in English but finds understanding the vocabulary and spelling words difficult. She generally finds most classroom activities useful. She likes the way her teacher corrects her written work and writes comments which praise her such as 'Fantastic' or 'Excellent'. She feels that her teacher is helpful and encourages her to work hard so she can get full marks in tasks. S1 enjoys oral feedback the most because it is easy to understand and she can ask questions if necessary. She would prefer to have more time reading in class and writing compositions. Sometimes work on the whiteboard needs to be explained more before students have to do it. She feels that the journal writing class is helpful in improving her English as the teaching is good but she does like having a local teacher who can explain things she doesn't understand in Malay.

Student 3 – Year 6 female. S3 rates English as the most important subject academically and second behind Mathematics for enjoyment. She states that she uses English sometimes out of school hours mainly when she goes shopping, and playing with her friends. She rates her English skill level as good and her parents' ability as excellent. Her father is a policeman and needs to use English in his job. She considers she has lots of English resources at home including lots of books, music, movies and newspapers. She loves watching movies and prefers ones without subtitles even if she can't quite understand it all. She wants to be a teacher so she feels English will be an important skill for her to have in the future. She believes that it is important for all Bruneians to learn English as Brunei has a lot to do with many English speaking countries and also much of the Internet is in English. S2 often worries about examinations because although her teachers are good, the better the marks she gets, the better her chances are of future success. She usually finds grammar easy as her teachers explain well and give her lots of practice. The hardest aspect of writing in English is not knowing the words she needs or how to spell them. She ranks speaking, reading and then writing as the easier activities but she finds listening extremely difficult. Although she is certain she would find learning Maths and Science easier if they were taught in Malay, she still thinks it is good that they are taught in the English medium. Learning the vocabulary is the hardest challenge for her in those subjects. She finds reading tasks, conversations and writing compositions the most helpful classroom activities in improving her English. She doesn't find homework helpful as it is often different to what has been learnt in the classroom "so it can be hard to know how to do it". Her teacher crosses out errors, writes in corrections and then provides a comment at the end of the work. S3 says that this kind of feedback is usually useful. She prefers it to oral feedback as she can look at it again later and also sometimes the teacher can be angry when she gives oral feedback if the work has not been done well. S3 feels that lessons could be improved by teachers explaining the vocabulary and talking about the task more before students begin. S3 thinks that the journal writing class

is helping her to improve her English as a teacher who is a native speaker knows more than local teachers.

Student 4 – Year 6 female. S4 believes English is very important academically although Mathematics and Science are more important. However English is the subject she finds the most enjoyable. She uses English a lot at home with her siblings but uses mainly Malay with her parents. She rates her English skills as good and her parents' skills as excellent stating that they both use English in their jobs. At home they have a lot of English resources including children's books and music CDs. She does not however usually watch movies in English. S4 plans to attend university so feels that English is an important skill for her as she will need good English results to be accepted. She feels that it is becoming more important for Bruneians to have good English but was unable to elucidate further. She often worries about her English examinations because she has failed in the past. She expects to pass at the end of the year as she has been getting extra help and doing lots of homework. English is the subject she does the most extra work in. She finds grammar and spelling fairly easy but she struggles with finding the right words to use and finds punctuation very hard. She has problems with punctuation when writing in Malay too. S4 considers speaking is the easiest activity followed by reading and writing. Listening is her most difficult activity. She would prefer it if Maths and Science were both taught in Malay as she finds it much easier to learn new things in Malay. She finds both these subjects difficult because she doesn't know the words. S4 finds most classroom activities helpful but finds it most helpful when a topic is discussed first so she can understand it better and learn the vocabulary. She would also like to be able to practice her writing more. Her teacher doesn't usually give her written comments about her writing but just underlines the errors if they are things that she should be able to self-correct. S4 prefers oral feedback to written as she has the opportunity to ask her teacher questions. Although she likes to be taught by Malay teachers as they are easier to understand, S4 thinks that the journal writing class is enjoyable because it is easy.

Student 5 – Year 6 female. English is the third most important subject academically behind Mathematics and Science according to S5. She however doesn't enjoy English as she doesn't understand it and finds the teacher unclear. S5 rarely speaks English outside of school but rates her own English skill level as good. She considers both her parents' skill level as good also. Her father is a soldier and uses English in his job but her mother does not work and seldom needs to use English. There are a number of English resources at her home including children's books and CDs. They also listen to the radio in English sometimes. S5 would like to have more English books at home that are suitable for her age. She doesn't watch English movies at all. She believes that good English skills are important for the future as she would use it for travelling, getting a job and talking to friends. For these reasons she also feels that it is becoming more important for all Bruneians to have good English skills. She only worries about examinations sometimes because she has passed previous examinations and so should pass the Year 6 one. She finds most aspects of learning English fairly easy. The most difficult thing for her is learning new vocabulary. Reading is the easiest type of activity, followed by speaking and writing. Listening is the most difficult. S5 has few problems learning Maths and Science in English and agrees that they should be taught using this language. She believes most classroom activities are helpful in improving her skills and can suggest no changes that could be made. Her teacher gives her feedback about her writing by underlining errors and writing the answer correctly. S5 finds it helpful to have the correct answers modelled. She thinks that the journal writing class is helping her to improve her English but would still prefer a Malay teacher as she can talk to them in Malay if she doesn't understand.

Student 6 - Year 6 female. S6 ranked English in third in importance after Science and Maths. In enjoyment Maths, Science and Malay were ranked ahead of English. She noted that she doesn't enjoy it because although her teacher explains it well she finds it very difficult. S6 says that she does not use English out of school and has few resources at home. These consist of some pre-school children's books and a few subtitled movies which she finds she can understand quite well. S6 perceives her

English ability as good and both of her parents as excellent. Her father works for a large company and uses English a lot whereas her mother uses it only a little in her job as a nurse. S6 does feel that English will be very important for her in the future as she will probably need it for employment. She thinks it would be useful for travelling although not essential. S6 considers that having good English is becoming more important for Bruneians as Brunei is changing rapidly and English, especially via the Internet, plays an important role in those changes. She sometimes worries about examinations. She passes her class tests but still doesn't feel she has a good understanding of English and worries that the examinations will be a lot harder. She doesn't usually have problems with any specific aspects of English although occasionally the grammar is difficult – she considers her understanding of all aspects of English as 'ok' rather than 'excellent' overall. She finds listening easiest, then reading, writing and speaking. Although she finds Mathematics problems hard to understand and Science vocabulary difficult, she believes they both should continue to be taught in English. She seems to find all tasks given by teachers generally helpful with writing compositions and reading comprehensions the most helpful. Her teacher crosses out errors and writes in corrections on her work. She does find this helpful usually (although sometimes she just ignores what her teacher has done) but would find it more useful to find out how to the corrections herself. She likes oral feedback best so she can ask more questions if she needs. She would like her teachers to allow more time before doing tasks to improve her understanding so she can complete tasks independently. She would choose a western English teacher as she considers they would be able to help her improve her English much more than a local teacher would.

Student 7 Year 5 Male. English is the most important subject according to S7 and is a subject he considers himself good at. However he ranks it as only the fifth most enjoyable subject. He notes that he likes writing best but finds it can be hard. He uses English only a little outside of school – just to sometimes talk to family, friends or when shopping. His parents are perceived as having good English with his father using it seldom in his job working in the broadcasting industry and his mother using it sometimes as

a nurse. He has two sorts of English materials at home – books and subtitled movies. He usually can understand the movies quite well. S7 feels that it is very important to have good English as a school leaver because whatever job he wants will probably require English skills. As lots of people live, work or visit Brunei who speak English, he feels that it is becoming more important for Bruneians to speak English well. He often worries about upcoming examinations as although his teachers have helped him prepare he knows they will still be hard. He finds punctuation and vocabulary the most difficult aspects of writing although overall he finds writing the easiest when compared to reading, speaking and listening. Listening is the hardest skill for him. He doesn't agree with Mathematics and Science being taught in English as they are too difficult to understand. He finds all classroom activities helpful usually, particularly exercises involving reading a text and answering comprehension questions. His teacher marks his work by crossing out errors and writing corrections above it. He likes this type of feedback as it helps him to see it written correctly. He prefers written feedback to oral as he understands it better when he sees it written down. S7 couldn't think of any ways teachers could improve their teaching methods but would like to spend more time on English so he can get better. He would probably choose a Malay teacher for English so that they can explain things in that language when he needs them to.

Student 8 – Year 4 Male S8 rates English as the fourth most important subject behind Science, Mathematics and ICT and gives it the same ranking for enjoyment. He adds that he likes English especially spelling as he considers himself very good at spelling. Sometimes he uses English out of school when shopping, with his friends and occasionally at home. He considers himself good at English and although his parents only use English a little for their work, he considers them excellent. His father is a policeman and his mother stays at home. At his house he only has one English pre-school level book and would love to have more that he could read. He likes to listen to English music on the radio and finds that subtitled movies enable him to understand most movies quite well. S8 believes English will be important for him when he leaves school for

employment, travel and using the Internet. As there are lots of people in Brunei from English speaking countries, he thinks it is becoming more important to learn English. He sometimes worries about examinations. He would love to do well as his mother will pay him for any exam passes. He hopes he will pass but thinks it will be hard even though he passes most class tests. He thinks reading is the easiest skill, then writing, listening and speaking. The easiest aspect of English writing for him is spelling. Grammar and putting enough details in the content are harder for him. He also finds punctuation difficult which he finds hard to explain as he feels he is good at punctuation in Malay. S8 ranks reading as the easiest activity followed by writing, listening and lastly, speaking. He considers that both Mathematics and Science should be taught in English. He doesn't have too many problems with Mathematics but finds difficult vocabulary in Science hard to understand. He finds most classroom tasks helpful with reading comprehension activities the most useful. His teacher usually circles any errors in his writing although sometimes crosses it out and writes in the correction. He does find this of some help but would find it more helpful to learn what to do himself. He usually gets written feedback which he thinks is useful but thinks it would be good if he was able to ask questions too. Lessons could be improved by having more time to practice before having to do tasks independently. He thinks he would prefer a Malay teacher for English as explaining about the English language in Malay helps him to understand better.

Student 9 - Year 4 Female. S9 ranked English as the most important school subject noting that her parents want her to do well in it. She considers it the second most enjoyable subject after Mathematics and finds it fun to create sentences in a different language. The only time she uses English out of school is sometimes when she is shopping. She does however rate her ability as excellent. Her father works with a security firm and her mother is at home. She perceives their English skills as good but says they don't need to use it often. She has only a few English resources at home – several books and movies - but she does listen to music and brings books home to read sometimes. She feels English will be quite important for her in the future as she will probably need it for a job. As

many jobs do require English skills she sees it as becoming more and more important for Bruneians to have good English. S9 often worries about examinations as she doesn't think she knows enough to pass. She finds grammar, spelling and punctuation difficult but learning new vocabulary relatively easy. Reading is her easiest activity followed by listening, speaking and writing. She would prefer Mathematics and Science to be taught in Malay as she doesn't understand them very well in English. The class activities she finds helpful involve spelling and dictation. She usually receives oral feedback from her teacher which she finds helpful but would like it written down as well so she can look at it again. S9 believes lessons could be improved by increasing the amount of listening and speaking practice as they don't do a lot. She would choose a Malay teacher so she could talk to them more easily and tell them what she doesn't understand.

Student 10 – Year 4 female. This student also ranked English as the most important subject and the third most enjoyable. She says she likes it a lot, especially reading. She only sometimes uses English out of school, mainly when she goes shopping at the mall. She rarely uses it with her family. She rates her English ability and her parents as good. She believes her parents, both with the police, seldom need to use English in their jobs, however they do however have a large number of English materials at home. S10 has access to books, magazines, newspapers, movies (with subtitles) and music. She feels that English will be quite important for her on leaving school as she will need it for employment and that it is becoming more important for all Bruneians to have good skills. Although she often passes class tests, she still often worries about end of year examinations. She finds spelling, punctuation and vocabulary the easiest aspects of writing with grammar and content the most difficult. Reading is easiest for her, followed by Listening, Writing and Speaking. She doesn't like Science and Malay being taught in English. She doesn't have too many problems understanding questions and answering in Mathematics, but she finds Science vocabulary very hard. S10 generally finds class tasks helpful with the most useful being spelling, dictation and reading activities. Her teacher crosses out any errors in writing tasks,

writes the correct words and then writes a comment or praises her at the end. S10 would like oral feedback rather than written as she would like to ask questions to improve her understanding. She would like to have more chances to speak English and listen to English being spoken during lessons. S10 would choose a Malay speaker for her English teacher as they are easier to understand.

Student 11 – Year 4 male. Although S11 stated that English is the most important subject to learn he also rated it as the least enjoyable subject due to its difficulty. He only uses English at school during classes. Sometimes he watches English television shows which he enjoys even though he does not understand the language being used. His self-efficacy in English is very low – he does not think he is good at it at all. He also considers his parents' ability to speak in English very low although his father sometimes needs to use it a little in his job. He does have a few young children's books at home which he can read and thinks it would be nice to have more at his level. In the future he wants to be soldier and thinks that it will be probably be important for him to know some English. He does worry about English examinations a lot because he doesn't understand English and will find them difficult. Vocabulary is the hardest language aspect for him as he only knows a very few words. Reading is the easiest type of activity, followed by listening, writing and speaking. Not surprisingly, he feels that Science and Maths should both be taught in Malay as they would be much easier for him. He states that he gets very low marks in Science, with Maths only a little better but he thinks that is mainly because they are taught in English. He finds the most helpful thing in class is when the teacher uses Malay to explain the English that is being taught and he feels that reading comprehension activities are the most useful type of activity. He likes it when his teacher talks to him about what he does wrong. She also crosses out his errors in his book and writes the corrections. He finds both these types of feedback helpful. He thinks it would be really great if his teacher could supply him with a list of English words with Malay translations when he has to write a composition as was the case in journal writing. He has liked the journal writing class because the teacher has helped him to correct his work and the topics

have been 'cool'. He would definitely pick a Malay speaking teacher though to teach him because he cannot understand western teachers very well.

Student 12 – Year 4 male. This student ranks English third most important behind ICT and Malay. His most enjoyable subject is Science with English ranked fourth. He rarely uses English outside of school – just sometimes to talk with his Dad who he considers to be a good English speaker and who uses English in his job. His mother does not work and he rates her as a poor English speaker. S12 describes himself as only '*a little bit good at English*'. He does have some young children's books at home which he sometimes reads and also reads some at his friend's house. He listens to and enjoys English music on the radio and also watches movies with subtitles. He has only a limited understand of these but still likes them.

The only other English materials at home are some magazines and newspapers which his father reads. He thinks English will be important to him when he leaves school as he would like to go to university. (His dream is to be a doctor but he doesn't think his grades will be good enough.) He thinks it is becoming more important for all Bruneians to be good at English as there are so many people in Brunei who speak English. He worries a lot about examinations. Even though he usually passes class tests he knows the exam will be a lot harder. He finds grammar, spelling and vocabulary all very hard. Punctuation is easy as it is the same as in Malay. Writing topics are often ones he knows about which is good but his problem is that he just does not know the right English words to use.

Reading is usually the easiest type of activity, followed by writing, listening and speaking. He believes both Maths and Science should continue to be taught in English even though it is very hard. He definitely thinks he would get better marks if they were taught in Malay because they would be so much easier. He usually understands most questions in Maths as the teacher explains them. Science texts and questions are a bit easier so he understands them better. When he makes errors, the teacher underlines them for him to fix. However he doesn't know how to correct them by himself so he often asks his friend who is very good at English to tell him what to do. This method does help him learn English but he would prefer

it if he teacher would help him more and give him the opportunity to ask questions about things he gets wrong. For this reason he would choose a western teacher to teach him English because they not only know more about English but they do not get so angry with him. He said he tries hard in English, Maths and Science but his teachers often get angry with him because he gets it wrong.

## Appendix 8 - Examination Results

Table xxi Year 6 End of Year Examination Results 2011

	A	B	C	D	U
Males (46)	2 4%	10 22%	21 46%	7 15%	6 13%
Females (50)	7 14%	16 32%	14 28%	11 22%	2 4%
Total (96)	9 10%	26 27%	35 36%	18 19%	8 8%

## Year 5

Table xxii – Year 5 End of Year Testing Results 2011

	A	B	C	D	U
Males (41)	4 10%	5 12%	2 5%	10 24%	20 49%
Females (40)	0 0%	8 20%	7 18%	17 42%	8 20%
Total (81)	4 5%	13 16%	9 11%	27 33%	28 35%

**Year 4**

Table xxiii – Year 4 End of Year Examination Results 2011

	A		B		C		D		U	
Males (40)	4	10%	4	10%	1	2%	8	20%	23	58%
Females (57)	5	9%	15	26%	8	14%	14	25%	15	26%
Total (97)	9	9%	19	20%	9	9%	22	23%	38	39%

Table xxiv - 2011 Examination Results for Case Study Participants

	English	B.M.	Science	Maths	MIB	Overall
Year 6						
Student 1	A	B	A	B	A	Pass
Student 2	B	B	D	C	A	Pass
Student 3	B	B	C	D	A	Pass
Student 4	D	B	C	D	A	Pass
Student 5	A	B	A	A	A	Pass
Student 6	A	B	A	B	A	Pass
Year 5						
Student 7	D	U	C	U	D	Pass
Year 4						
Student 8	A	C	B	A	B	Pass
Student 9	B	B	D	A	B	Pass
Student 10	B	C	C	A	A	Pass