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THE CONSTRUCTION AND NEGOTIATION OF AGENTIVE IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY OF A MALAYSIAN STUDENT

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: The success of the government's aspiration to develop holistic Malaysian students not only lies in what has been going on in today's classroom but also outside the classroom in which the fundamental process of seeking knowledge, skills and competencies. Holistic identity is not a construct that is inherited, nor does it remain constant, but it is developed and evolves from different academic encounters faced by the students. Thus, the present study investigated the construction and negotiation of a student's identity from her interaction within academic settings in Malaysian Higher Education Institution (MHEI).

Methodology: This study employed a qualitative linguistic ethnography approach using a case study design to explore identity construction in a Malaysian Higher Education Institution (MHEI). A purposive sampling technique was used to select one Malaysian student, with data collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis identified emerging patterns, while the identity-in-interaction framework examined how the participant constructed and negotiated their academic identity. A triangulated approach ensured data reliability, offering a nuanced understanding of agentive identity formation in academic settings.

Findings: The participant of this study constructed and negotiated an agentive identity while making conscious decisions based on her academic experiences. Agentive identity emerged from her interactions and indexed from her behaviour and opinion during her academic encounters (inside and outside the classroom). The participant's engagement behaviour portrayed could be interpreted as being

agentive from the lens of the two principles in identity framework analysis, namely, the emergence principle and the indexicality principle.

Contributions: Experiencing different educational contexts could help shape Malaysian students to be balanced, academically and morally, as the Malaysia National Education Philosophy (NEP) aspired to. Malaysian students are seen as catalysts who will lead the country. The findings of this study could also be used as a reference for how educational practices reflect on the production of individuals as manifested in the NEP. Examining how students construct and negotiate their identities in a new or/and familiarised academic convention could enlighten the stakeholders, such as the students themselves, lecturers, tutors, parents, and ministry, to be more flexible, allowing students to be empowered within appropriate contexts.

Keywords: Malaysian students, students' identity, higher education, student agency, agentive identity

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The idea of Malaysian identity usually revolves around the identity and its differences across ethnicity. Malaysia is well known for its unique diversity of religions, cultural practices, and beliefs. Identity is one's representation of who they are to themselves and others (Benwell & Stokoe, 2011). Claude (1995) offers a similar viewpoint of identity, in which he states that identity is how we see ourselves and how we think others see us. The identity revolution in Malaysia is greatly influenced by its notion of what constitutes a nation, a series of present and historical social and political events and daily living experiences in Malaysia (Claude, 1995). Hence, ways of being recognised and labelled in Malaysia across nations are complicated and negotiated (Claude, 1995). This is because the recognition and labelling of Malaysians are multiple, shifting and contradictory as it requires them to negotiate with these labels in their everyday life (Claude, 1995). Referring to the Malaysian educational context, the government has been committed to the effort to produce students who are "balanced, resilient, inquisitive, principled, informed, caring, patriotic as well as an effective thinker, communicator and team player" through its education system (MOE Malaysia, 2013). Despite Malaysia's ongoing effort to develop students with the mentioned identities, Malaysian students did not possess some of the attributes highlighted in its education policy. For example, in terms of effective

thinkers, students were found to perform satisfactorily in the international assessment, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), in which these tests examine students' thinking skills. Regarding communication, Malaysian graduates were also reported to lack English language proficiency and skills by the industries (MOE Malaysia, 2013).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

As students' identities are constructed and negotiated through socialisation, it is important to discuss and acknowledge the process and elements involved in students' identity construction and negotiation in an academic setting. According to Vygotsky (1978), Sociocultural theory (SCT) is initially an idea of the development of the mind. From the lens of SCT, one's mind and consciousness are socially constructed in nature, which is believed to be the significant result of one's social internalisation. The theory also regards learning as a social phenomenon contextualised within culture, history, and institutions. SCT highlights that the development of one's thinking and ability to perform certain skills, behaviours, feelings or beliefs are the results of his/her social interactions with others. According to Vygotsky (1978), this social interaction is then internalised and assimilated with others (in terms of behaviours, feelings, beliefs, etc). In relation to the present study, SCT is seen as a social discursive practice that implicates identity construction and negotiation.

Social structure and cultural interpretations of some linguistics forms, practices and ideologies within SCT could be best comprehended by looking at the practical engagement of novices with others (Duranti, Ochs, & Schieffelin, 2012). The practical engagements in this study refer to how students engage and interact with others in an academic setting. These practical engagements could also be seen and analysed by utilising the concept of Academic Discourse Socialisation (ADS). Duff (2007) illustrates ADS as the members' capability to socialise and interact by blending into a new academic discourse community. This ability may develop when the members participate in practical academic engagements between expert and/or novice members within the community and go through the cognitive experiences among them. In short, it is crucial for novices or newcomers to develop such ability if they would want to be recognised or accepted into the targeted community. ADS occurs in co-constructed interactions in academic settings involving a dynamic process where it is socially positioned and contextualised (that are multimodal, in different diverse languages and rich in various kinds of texts) (Morita, 2004; Duff, 2010). Successful socialisation in the academic setting would eventually lead the members to enjoy and embrace increased and improved participation, be

capable of taking different roles, develop adaptability skills, and establish membership in a community (Morita & Kobayashi, 2008). As a novice community member, successful socialisation could be accomplished by engaging in various language-mediated activities (Duff, 2002). In the context of the present study, the Malaysian students' learning experience in the Malaysian Higher Education Institution (MHEI) is a part of the socialisation process occurring within the academic context. ADS is also premised on the involvement of the negotiation of power and identity (Duff, 2010). The student's experience of the journey within the academic community serving academic purposes would eventually lead them to develop their identity and own voice.

Community of Practice (CoP) by Wenger (1998) is another theoretical framework utilised in the present study. Wenger (1998) argues that learning is not an activity that can be de-contextualised from other situations or life experiences. She suggested a model called 'social theory of learning', which incorporates four components: meaning (learning as experience), practice (learning as doing), community (learning as belonging) and identity (learning as becoming). This theory is not meant to replace other learning theory models. Still, it is an effort to provide a better understanding of how learning functions and accommodates within a social structure. CoP begins with the premise that humans are socially constructed, and interaction with the world is a meaningful goal in learning. Wenger asserts that the four components mentioned are essential to "characterise social participation as a process of learning and knowing" (Wenger, 1998, pp. 4-5). CoP is described as participants' mutual engagement, negotiation of a shared enterprise, and development of various shared resources for meaning creation. In other words, as participants engage with others, they are linked by the negotiation of their pursuits, which are connected to the social structure of their academic community. Participants in the CoP share and re-construct cultural and historical resources to define their identities and their relationship to the academic community.

2.1 Identity and Interaction

Identity is socially constructed and involves interaction between one person and another. "Agreeing, arguing, comparing, negotiating and cooperating" are crucial components in identity construction and are hence perceived as social identities (Hyland, 2010, p. 3). Identity is continually shifting, ongoing and constructed through interactions with others (Cameron, 2001; Hyland, 2010). To reiterate, identity is a part of a social construct. Cooley (1902) explores that identity is produced through socialisation with others and produced and reproduced as people interact with others. Identity is not perceived as one's belonging to

oneself but between individuals and within social relations in which they are socially and historically constituted (Vygotsky, 1978). Hence, the notion of identity is in tandem with the constructivist approach, where meaning or reality is seen to be constructed via social interactions (Park, 2007). Social constructivism views knowledge as "neither fixed, autonomous, and free-floating nor contained only as propositional objects in individual minds" (Wells, 1999, p. 140). Social constructivists are advocates of these elements when it comes to the learning process; "1) it is important to have prior experience when reinforcing new learning, 2) during the learning process the learner must participate actively, 3) it is important to negotiate within the learning environment, 4) a social interaction element is required for the construction of an individual's knowledge, and 5) learning arises most effectively in a socio-cultural environment." (Amin & Rajadurai, 2018, p. 499). Hence, knowledge is "constructed and reconstructed between participants in specific situated activities, using the cultural artefacts at their disposal, as they work towards the collaborative achievement of a goal" (Wells, 1999, p. 140).

From the lens of constructivism, in the development of learning, individuals like students are considered unique and complex in how they create meaning in their interactions with not only their physical, historical and sociocultural backgrounds but also with others in academic settings (Rajadurai, 2010). Rajadurai (2010) adds that students could also position themselves and construct new identities during the interactions. He suggests that students construct and negotiate their identity in association with others in their interaction in the academic setting, including their interaction with lecturers and peers. This interaction is an ongoing, emergent process (Giroir, 2014; Winchester, 2013; Rajadurai, 2010). In this context, the negotiation of students' identity emerges as they assert, define, modify, challenge and/or support their reflection of themselves and others (Ting-Toomey, 1999). This could be seen when students are engaged in the dialogic process of socialisation into the expectations of the Community of Practice (CoP) they are in (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2001). Regardless of their cultural, professional or academic goals, the "ways of doing things, ways of thinking, ways of talking, beliefs, values and power relations" emerge from a mutual engagement and the pursuit of common goals with others in CoP that they are in (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p. 464; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In the context of the present study, this mutual engagement and the pursuit of common goals is accomplished by students in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (MEHI). Students may construct their identities in relation to membership in the Community of Practice (CoP) through their attempts to claim academic group membership within the academic

context. Hence, this is where the academic identity of a group or individual is negotiated, reinforced and challenged through daily communication or interaction practices. In other words, identity is a dynamic and negotiated occurrence embedded in the context of social connections and overlapping memberships. The present study investigates the construction and negotiation of a Malaysian student's identity in a Malaysian Higher Education Institution (MHEI). As previously discussed in earlier sections, this study integrates the theory of identity with key frameworks, including Sociocultural Theory (SCT), Academic Discourse Socialization (ADS), and Community of Practice (CoP), to examine students' identities and their interactions within a Malaysian Higher Education Institution (MHEI).

2.2 Agency

Duranti et al. (2012) propose that agency is a trait possessed by individuals, and they perform agency when they use the language. Within this study, the participant's engagement and/or disengagement behaviour could be interpreted as agentive (Houen et al., 2016; Klemencic, 2017; James & James, 2012; Ewald & Wallace, 1994). These researchers assert that agency in students means 'having the ability to decide on tasks, choosing topics for discussion and making decisions regarding what contributions get counted as knowledge' and students' quality of self-reflectiveness and their conscious action and communication with their surroundings. Agentive identity discursively positions oneself as 'active, responsible, authoritative and in control' (Lan, 2020, p. 3). Hence, the agency could be understood as a "socioculturally mediated capacity to act purposefully and reflectively on [one's] world" (Rogers & Wetzel, 2013, p. 63). The notion is also in accordance with Van's (2008) statement that agency is one's ability to act or make consensus in a socially constructed experience (Van, 2008). Jaaskela et al. (2020, p. 3) define student agency as "individuals' capability to engage in intentional, self-defined, meaningful, and autonomous action in circumstances constrained by power relations and structural, contextual factors". Klemencic's (2015) work is heavily influenced by Bandura's socio-cognitive and sociological viewpoint (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), thus identifies student agency as:

> *a process of student actions and interactions during studentship, which encompasses variable notions of agentic orientation ("will"), the way students relate to past, present and future in making choices of action and interaction, and of agentic possibility ("power"), that is their perceived power to achieve intended outcomes in a particular context of action and interaction, but also to self-engagement of a critical reflexive kind*
> *(Klemencic, 2015, p. 16).*

To reiterate, the agency is manifested via discussions of perceived social power and agentic will, which consists of internal dynamics and reactions (including "students' preconceptions and internalised routines") (Stenalt, 2020, p. 3). Student agency is based on two main notions (Klemencic, 2015). The first refers to the agentic possibilities available to students, which encompass their opportunities and positive freedoms to pursue their goals and aspirations within the higher education setting. These possibilities are external to the individual, originating from factors outside of their control. The enabling factor for this idea is students' autonomy, which refers to their freedom to act, think, and exist as they choose. When students have autonomy, their actions are willingly carried out. This notion aligns with MacFarlane's concept of student academic freedom, which encompasses the right to express oneself fully and freely and serves as a means for learners to engage in a truly "higher" education that fosters critical thinking (Macfarlane, 2012).

The alternative proposition refers to the agentic orientations of students, denoting their predispositions and volitional inclinations towards the enactment of the agency. These orientations are internally constructed, originating from internal responses to external circumstances. They encompass internalized elements such as "routines, dispositions, preconceptions, competencies, schemas, patterns, typifications, and traditions" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 973). Two enabling conditions facilitate this premise. The first condition is students' efficacy, which pertains to their assessment and belief in their capacity to control their functioning as students and the higher education environments that influence their educational experiences (Bandura, 2001). The second condition is students' self-regulation, which encompasses how students consciously decide their learning trajectory. This process includes various functions such as task analysis, self-control, and self-evaluation (Zimmerman, 2008). This echoes the concept of identity construction, which is "constantly shifting both as the interaction unfolds and across discourse contexts" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 606). This study views the agency of a student as a complicated and tense phenomenon that may be influenced

by other players, institutional frameworks, morality, and power dynamics (Gurdal & Sorbring, 2018; Hohti & Karlsson, 2012) hence, indicating the significance of conducting the study.

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

This section discusses qualitative research and linguistic ethnography as the approaches employed, utilising a case study as the research design.

A linguistic ethnographic study was chosen as the research approach. This approach was utilised to study the "local and immediate actions" of the participants where the study investigated and represented the participant's view of the world from his/her lenses (Shaw, Copland, & Snell, 2015; Thomas, 1923). Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) and Wieser and Ortega (2020) suggest that the ethnographic approach of a study allows researchers to describe a wide range of practices or activities from the participants' viewpoints within various situations, including social interactions. Hence, linguistic ethnography research practises a holistic approach that describes and interprets all the phenomena of research (Lecompte, Millroy, & Preissle, 1992; Denscombe, 2014).

A case study is a qualitative research study that analyses individuals' feelings, experiences, and thoughts (Fahriye et al., 2019). One of the most significant aspects of a case study is the in-depth investigation of one or more situations. That is to say, factors in a case (individuals, events, the environment, processes, etc) are evaluated holistically and focused on how they affect the linked issue or how they are affected. Hence, a case study's goal is to improve our understanding of a phenomenon, process, individual, or group, not to experiment with and generalise to other populations in the manner of larger-scale survey research (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015) and the context of this study, one (1) participant was chosen (Naemah).

The participant of the study was one (1) Malaysian student, Naemah (pseudonym), from a Malaysian Higher Education Institution (MHEI). The purposive sampling technique was utilised in recruiting the participant. She was chosen based on two criteria: she should be a Malaysian student registered at a Malaysian university and have been there for at least 6 months. The data for the study were collected from classroom observations, an interview and a focus group discussion (FGD). The data collected consisted of observation field notes and video recordings of classroom observation, the interview and FGD were transcribed. These four sets of data were then analysed.

In analysing the data of this study, two analytical approaches, namely thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and identity analysis framework (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), were

employed. After examining this study's data sets, a list of codes and themes was identified utilising thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse classroom observation field notes and interview and focus group transcripts. This method best suits this study as it emphasises the social, cultural, and structural contexts that reflect and influence one's experiences. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that this type of analysis would enable knowledge development, which is constructed through participant engagement or interactions, uncovering the underlying socially constructed meanings. In short, thematic analysis is an appropriate method for understanding a series of experiences, thoughts or behaviours in a research data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These codes and themes were then analysed and interpreted by employing the identity in interaction framework by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), as shown in the table below. However, this study would only highlight 2 out of 5 principles of the framework, namely emergence and indexicality.

(i)	Emergence	"Identity is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistics and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon" (p. 588)"
(ii)	Positionality	"Identities encompass (a) macrolevel demographic categories; (b) local, ethnographically specific cultural positions; and (c) temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles" (p. 592)"
(iii)	Indexicality	"Identity relations emerge in interaction through several related indexical processes, including: (a) overt mention of identity categories and labels; (b) implicatures and presuppositions regarding one's own or others' identity position; (c) displayed evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk, as well as interactional footings and participant roles; and (d) the use of linguistic structures and systems that are ideologically associated with specific personas and groups" (p. 594)"
(iv)	Relationality	"Identities are constructed through several, often overlapping, complementary relations, including similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice, and authority/delegitimacy" (p. 598)"
(v)	Partialness	"Any given construction of identity may be in part deliberate and intentional, in part habitual and hence often less than fully conscious, in part an outcome of interactional negotiation and contestation, in part an outcome of others' perceptions and representations, and in part an effect of larger ideological processes and material structures that may become relevant to interaction. It is therefore constantly shifting both as interaction unfolds and across discourse contexts" (p. 606)"

4.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigates how a student constructs and negotiates academic identity from her interactions in a Malaysian higher education institution setting (MHEI). The study focused on a student, Naemah, in the Malaysian Higher Education Institution (MHEI), who was observed in class, interviewed, and participated in a focus group discussion. The data gathered from this research demonstrated that the Malaysian student was academically engaged inside and outside the classroom, where she may be perceived to construct and negotiate one of the academic identities: agentive. This academic identity was constructed by the student in MHEI. It was identified from her interactional behaviours during classroom observation and her academic experiences throughout the semester via interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The academic identity and interactional behaviour patterns portray a wide range of speech events and reflect that the Malaysian student, Naemah, constructed and negotiated agentive identity inside and outside the classroom.

AGENTIVE IDENTITY: *ASKING AND ANSWERING QUESTIONS*

Based on the excerpts below, the student's engagement behaviour portrayed during classroom interaction, interview, and focus group discussion (FGD) could be interpreted as being agentive from the lens of the two principles of identity framework analysis, namely, the emergence principle where identity is viewed as an emerging product from the interaction and the indexicality principle which regards identity as the way we use the language that positions ourselves and/or others as a certain group of people (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). In this study, Naemah, the participant, constructed an agentive identity while making conscious decisions in her learning. The student's agentive decisions affected her engagement with the subject matter and other community members.

EXCERPT 1

Dr. Emilia:	*Okay, if there's no question, okay, I'm going to ask you another question. So, as you say, literature is a portrayal of a society, basically, right? A portrayal of your society. So how it is with your society today? What do you think is your society today? If someone were to… if you're an author and someone were to review about your work, how would they portray the society of your day? Anybody?*

Naemah:	*If someone reviews our work, it also depends on what we are writing about, aren't they? So, like, about love, they can't say something that, "Oh, this is because during her time, police are corrupted. Politicians are corrupted.", right?*
Dr. Emilia:	*Yes, that's correct. But if you're talking about love, for example, in Pride And Prejudice, you know, Jane Austin… Jane Austin talks about love, about Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth… Elizabeth Bennett. I don't know if you… I'm sure you… you've watched the movie, right?*
Naemah:	*Yes*
Dr. Emilia:	*Okay, so I hope you have some context when I'm talking about Pride And Prejudice. But if you… you've watched the movie, please read the novel. Because the novel is so much better.*
Naemah:	*Yes, I agree. [inaudible] But if you're talking about Pride And Prejudice, it was heavily based on that time social era, you know, where before we meet someone, we have to schedule an appointment. You have to dress correctly. Remember that time when Elizabeth came to their house and she was sweating and she had dirts on her skirts and her socks because she was running to get her sister because her sister was sick and they previewed her as someone very low class, because she just vents straight ahead without riding a car. And that can be attributed contributed to the society as well, right? How they view woman as someone that is… you know what I mean?*
Dr. Emilia:	*[inaudible] Yes. True. So that's why when we talk about if let's say you're writing about love, right, so your writing about love can come from the context of…*

EXCERPT 2

Naemah:	*Can I ask about poem? do we have to use imagery words, alliterations, rhyming etc etc? we dont have to be too colloquial right*
Naemah:	*do we have to explain what our poems means?*
Student 1:	*30 words only right?*
Student 2:	*Do we have to categorize what types of poems we're going to do and follow the rules of rhyme etc*
Naemah:	*but... poem are subjective. what if you view it differently from us?*
Student 3:	*I was about to ask the same q also Naemah*

In the excerpts above, Naemah was seen engaging with the content of the discussion by responding to the lecturer's question and/or answer. In excerpt 1, during an online discussion via Google Meet video, the lecturer, Dr. Emilia, explained what literature is and how one views it from different aspects of life. Then, she verbally asked a question to the whole class how they would portray their current society to others'. In this instance, Naemah quickly unmuted her microphone and responded to the lecturer's question. Her response was rather lengthy not only in this session but also in others. In her response, she not only tried to answer the question but also attempted to look for confirmation of her answer from the lecturer by asking if she was giving the right one. Naemah then gave her opinion on her lecturer's explanation regarding the subject matter by agreeing to what the lecturer said. Naemah's opinion was followed by a lengthy explanation of the subject matter discussed.

A similar situation was also recorded during an online class where Naemah *asked questions* to the lecturer via Google Meet chat. As shown in excerpt 2, Naemah asked the lecturer regarding one of their assignments in the Google Meet chat box. In this instance, Naemah was not the only one who asked the question to the lecturer. A few of her classmates had also done the same. Naemah was seen not only *asking questions* to her lecturer, but she also commenting on her lecturer's explanation regarding the question. The questions that were asked on the Google Meet chat box were responded and/or answered by the lecturer verbally during the online class.

Both excerpts above portray Naemah's act of agency as she was interacting with the lecturer by voluntarily *answering and asking questions* to the lecturer. Throughout the classroom observation, Naemah actively participated by *asking questions* and *responding to questions* verbally and non-verbally via the chat box provided by the Google Meet platform. She also *asked* the lecturer questions to get confirmation and responded to the lecturer's response. Naemah's voluntary act of answering and asking questions aligns with one of the notions of agency: agentic possibilities (Klemencic, 2015). Agentic possibilities refer to the possibilities and freedom the students have to pursue their preferred objectives and aspirations within the academic setting. Students' autonomy, which refers to their freedom to act, think, and live as they like, is a key aspect in making this concept possible. In this study, Naemah exercised her freedom and autonomy when she voluntarily *answered questions* from the lecturer and *asked* the lecturer to get confirmation on the assignments. Her agentic behaviour is also consistent with MacFarlane's idea of academic freedom for students, which includes the ability to express oneself fully and without restraint and enables students to pursue a higher education that encourages critical thinking (Macfarlane, 2012).

Naemah indicated during FGD that she would prefer utilising both verbal and non-verbal (via Google Meet chat box) platforms when it comes to asking questions and responding to questions during online classes. Below is the excerpt from Naemah's FGD session regarding online learning platform preference.

EXCERPT 3

Aina:	*Thank you for sharing, Naemah and also Bella. So lets move on to the next one. I prefer asking questions in chat box rather than asking it verbally during ODL. For my… As for myself, I rather ask verbally because you know, you need… you need time to type your questions and then probably the discussion already ended by that time. So… but you guys might have different point of view on this.*
Bella:	*Okay so as for me, I prefer asking questions in chat box rather than verbally. Because I feel like… I feel more safe asking in the chat box rather than asking it verbally. Because I don't really ask questions… I don't really… I don't really talk a lot in an online classroom. So, I feel that it is… it is the safest for me to only type the question in the chat box.*
Naemah:	*inaudible] I will do both. [inaudible] Sometimes I will type first in chat box and then I will question it verbally [inaudible] some people don't really understand my question [inaudible] further explain what I mean by my question.*

When asked whether she preferred *asking questions* verbally or in the chat box, Naemah responded she would do. She further explained that, at times, she would type the question in the chat box in the first place and would verbally explain the question as some people would not understand her question in the chat box. Naemah's agentive behaviour, as seen in the classroom and during FGD, was coherent to the data from the interview when asked if she ever responded to questions and if she ever asked questions inside the classroom on a scale of 1 (hardly at all) to 5 (often), she rated them 5. The interview excerpts below (Excerpts 4 and 5) suggest that she indexed the agentive behaviour.

EXCERPT 4

Researcher:	*Have you ever responded to questions during lectures, tutorials, group discussion inside classroom? How-how often, on a scale 1-5?*
Naemah:	*5.*
Researcher:	*Okay why?*

Naemah: *I guess because… I have a lot of thoughts in my head? And in a way, I read a lot? So like sometimes I just want to make sure like okay am I… are the things I read about… relates to what my lecturers are trying to tell us. And sometimes I'm just being noisy to make the class fun. Sometimes… online classes are boring. So yeah. Sorry… to my lecturers.*

EXCERPT 5

Researcher: *Have you ever asked questions during lectures, tutorials, group discussion inside classroom? How-how often, on a scale 1-5?*

Naemah: *5.*

Researcher: *Why?*

Naemah: *Why… because when my brain is thinking… and then I just come up with scenarios like what about… from this perspective? You know? So I guess I'm just curious why it happen, how it happen, how is it… what aspired for something to reach that answer, that kind of things, I guess?*

Naemah mentioned during the interview session that she often *responded to questions* and *asked questions* in the classroom. Her reasoning for *responding to questions* in the class was that she had plenty of thoughts inside her head, and she read a lot and wanted to make sure that her readings made sense to what the lecturer had told her. She added that she sometimes responded to questions to make the class fun when the classes were boring. She also stated that she *asked questions* in class because whenever she was thinking of something out of curiosity, she would create scenarios that could happen from different angles. Hence in this case, the questions were asked out of her curiosity.

Naemah's behaviour of volunteering to *responding* and *asking questions* is aligned with the definition of agency outlined by Kumpulainen et al. (2010) and Van (2008). In defining agency, Kumpulainen et al. (2010) assert that agency frequently entails initiating action, such as challenging, disobeying, and acting differently. The agency is defined by Van (2008) concerning volition. Volunteering to answer a tutor's question, volunteering to help other students, and engaging in a dispute with other students in class are all examples of volitional behaviour. He then further described his participants as participative, autonomous, and dedicated. Being agentive requires students to portray additional initiatives, as shown by Naemah's initiative to *respond to questions* and *ask questions*, which Gao (2010) and Klemencic (2015) described as "agentic orientation" and the sense of will, respectively. Showing such a trait requires a strong sense of autonomy (Van, 2008). Naemah's interactional behaviour of *responding* and *asking questions* to the lecturer in class echoes Ewald and

Wallace's (1994) understanding of agency, where they assert that agentive students would be able to establish meaning guiding their behaviours or actions in the classroom as classroom agents. Boud and Molloy (2013) linked the idea of agency with students' identity development, arguing that students may not be receptive to the helpful information about their work, nor will they be able to use it, unless they see themselves as agents of their change and develop an identity as a productive learner who can drive their learning. Possessing the agency traits allows Naemah to have the power to guide and manage her learning process and experience in an academic setting (Klemencic, 2015; Elder, 1994).

On the other hand, when Naemah was asked to rate the frequency of *responding to questions* and *asking questions* outside the classroom, she rated 3 and 4, respectively, in the excerpt below.

EXCERPT 6

Naemah:	*In group discussion… for me, how of-how much I respond would be around 3 actually.*
Researcher:	*Oh… interesting.*
Naemah:	*Unless someone's wants like… if they want me to explain something then I would explain it, but most of the time I would just like guide the conversations on which aspects to look at.*
Researcher:	*Why, I mean why's the difference between, for the inside classroom you rated 5, but 3 for outside classroom?*
Naemah:	*I feel like in classroom, that is where I study, so that's where like my brain is trying to process everything. But then in group discussion, most of the time is like sometimes my friends will… if is-it is requested of me, like hi Naemah, could you maybe explain a term or a concept or subject to us, then I would do it? But in terms of like group assignment, etcetera, most of the time, I just like set the tone on when the-give suggestions on where they want to take the topic but also like hey, what do you guys think on this? What do you guys think on that? Like… try-try to know what they are thinking because most of the time because I am so communicative, they would know what I am thinking, but as I said like I speak a lot, so at the same time, I want to know what my other friends- my other friends are thinking about as well. So most of the times, just try to set the tone and then let you guys say a conversation.*
Researcher:	*So um… so you don't like-you don't respond to question but you guide them?*
Naemah:	*In a way, yes. Unless they ask me like what do I-what do I think? Then I would… give my answer, I guess.*
Researcher:	*Ah, why do you set the tone?*

Naemah: *Because sometimes if I don't set the tone, then… there are… meet-meetings where… we will be in a Google Meet but because nobody really makes like a point to like okay, we will discuss ABC. Because nobody said we will discuss ABC, and what direction we want to look at, we will just be in Google Meet and be like… so what are we doing? And I just don't-I-most of the time, I don't like that because my schedule is very packed… so I-when I'm on Google Meet and I'm spending my time with you guys, I don't want to waste my time. So that's why I kind of like okay, first and foremost, we will-let's talk about A, A1, A2. And then we go on to B, and that kind of stuff. Yeah. Because then we know the direction to look at.*

Naemah rated 3 on *responding to questions* outside the classroom during group discussion. She added that she would explain things if her peers asked her to, but during the group discussion, she would prefer to guide the discussion on the aspects to look at. When asked why she rated 3 for *responding to questions* outside the classroom and rated 5 for *responding questions* inside the classroom, she further explained that she would prefer to give suggestions to others on the direction of the discussion. Naemah mentioned that when it comes to group work, she often sets such a 'tone' and asks the others their opinion on the topics discussed. She consciously made such a decision because she wanted to know what the others were thinking about. She highlighted that at times, nobody wanted to take the lead during group discussion and that she did not want to waste her time waiting for any of them to take the initiative to start the discussion.

EXCERPT 7

Researcher: *What about outside classroom when you know, during group discussion, or you know, peer discussion? 1-5, on a scale 1-5. How often-how often do you ask questions?*

Naemah: *4. Because I want to know what's going on in their brain. Like what-what-what they think of a certain things.*

Researcher: *Why is it important for you to know what they think?*

Naemah: *Because… most of the time in group work, like for example, 5 people, I'm one. I only have my brain alone, but what about the 4 other brains? I'm sure they studied as well…they…they think so the stu-yeah, like their voice matters.*

Researcher: *So you want to know or you want to hear their voice because… because-*

Naemah: *Collectively it's better than one.*

Researcher: *Mmm, not that you think, you know, it's unfair, it's just me, you know, giving my ideas, you know, things like that, but you don't say anything, you know?*

Naemah: *Yeah, in a way also.*

Excerpt 7 above portrays Naemah's response on the frequency of *asking questions* outside the classroom, which she rated 4. She was curious and wanted to know her peers' thoughts. When asked why it mattered to her, she responded that it was better to have a collective discussion and that other people's voices mattered. She also added that it would be unfair for others not to have their voices heard. Regarding the principle of indexicality (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), Naemah's responses during the interview session could be interpreted as agentive. The analysis reveals that Naemah utilised her agency to change how she would normally react or behave in the classroom. During classroom observations, Naemah was seen to always *respond to* and *ask questions* inside the classroom. In this instance, however, she was not always r*esponding to* and *asking questions* outside the classroom with her peers. Her change of behaviour is in line with the definition of agency by Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), who suggest that being agentive may allow individuals to experience some changes and could transform their behaviours, which consequently change their learning experiences. This suggests that Naemah was exercising her agency when she decided to modify her habitual action in class, from being very active in class to being less active outside the class on *asking* and *responding to questions*.

Naemah's conscious decision in *responding to* and *asking questions* outside the classroom among her friends also suggests that she took control of her learning to have the desired learning outcome. Her decision corresponds with Klemencic's (2015) notion of agency, which allows students to determine their educational experiences and experiencing them the way they want them to be. To reiterate, Klemencic (2015) proposes that student agency would enable them to control their learning process and experience. Naemah's behaviour, as portrayed in the extracts above, and her perceptions, as shared during the interview and focus group discussion, could be interpreted along the spectrums of a notion of agency by Charteris, Smardon, and Nelson (2017), where it encapsulates the self-directed learner's imagination, capable of self-selecting and self-initiating learning tasks appropriate to reaching the intended educational objectives required for academic success. This is also in line with a study conducted by Ewald and Wallace (1994, p. 347), where they highlight that agency allows students to exercise their "ability to decide on tasks, choosing topics for discussion and making decisions regarding what contributions get counted as knowledge". They further explained that agency would allow students to comprehend and interpret events and thus influence themselves and their peers in particular classroom events. This echoes Naemah's conditions and behaviours, where she determined the reactions she would have, the situations and experiences she could have, the amount of time she would like to invest in her attempts or efforts and the

choices she would make from the occurring events in class, which as a result, determines her academic experiences.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study aims to investigate how a student negotiates and constructs academic identity from her interactions in a Malaysian higher education institution setting (MHEI). One Malaysian student was involved in the data collection procedure, including classroom observation, interviews and focus group discussion, and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and identity in interaction analysis framework (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The study discovered that the Malaysian student constructed an agentive identity from interactions she encountered in the MHEI setting, inside and outside the classroom. The student's interactions were varied and for different purposes, but the result from her interactions was interpreted as her being an agentive student in a Malaysian academic convention. Malaysian students were generally said not to contribute to classroom discussions and were interpreted as silent and passive. Nonetheless, the Malaysian student in this study was observed to ask questions and respond to questions in classroom discussions. She also shared that her behaviours during classroom discussions were made consciously for several reasons, such as wanting to share her ideas and opinions and rectifying her understanding of the lesson. Her interactions with friends outside of the classroom were also made with the purpose to allow others to share their thoughts and not be dominant during small-group discussions. Her behaviours in the classroom and outside of the classroom and her perceptions of her interactions could be interpreted as *progressing* towards the construction and negotiation of an agentive student who made conscious decisions with regard to her academic experience.

The study then suggests that the stakeholders, such as parents, academics, students and policy makers are highly encouraged to further explore the factors, contexts affecting student agency to ensure that the aspiration of Malaysia National Education Philosophy is implemented. Malaysian academic convention is also encouraged to allow for individual Malaysian students to construct and negotiate multiple and flexible identities as they may come from different backgrounds: family, education, social, economy and economy.

The scope of the present study is however limited to the context of a case study of one Malaysian student as the participant. The findings of the study are also limited to the data obtained from one Malaysian Higher Education Institution (MHEI) as the Malaysian academic setting. As a result, it could not be generalised to other Malaysian students in other MHEI. The study is also limited to the three data collection methods: classroom observation, interview and

focus group discussion with four sets of data obtained: classroom observation field notes, and the recordings of classroom observation, interview and focus group discussion. Hence the study recommends for future research to focus on the identity construction and negotiation of more Malaysian students from different MHEI utilising other methods such as student's diary entry or surveys.

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