

An Analysis on Compliment Responses in English among Javanese People

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Abstract

An Analysis on Compliment Responses in English among Javanese People. The study aims at exploring the differences of compliment responses in English among Indonesian males and females. The study consists of 20 English learners in University State of Yogyakarta. The participants are expected to respond five scenarios in a modified Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The participants' responses are submitted to SPSS and Paired Samples T-Test is applied. It reveals that each scenario has different responses but since the p value is at 0.594 which means it doesn't have significant difference among male and female participants in responding the compliments. Both male and female participants tend to agree the compliment using appreciation token.

Keywords: compliment, gender, female, male, responses

Introduction

Compliments are used in many situations. Compliments is saying good thing of others. These can be responded in many ways. Compliment expressions have been discussed for the past few decades. These are followed by compliment responses between native and non-native English speakers. Compliment and compliment responses are types of speech acts commonly used by people in daily communication and these are influenced by the culture of the speakers or addresser. The culture of the speakers make different perception towards the certain utterance. It may lead people to have a misunderstanding. When this happens, the objectives of communication cannot be fulfilled. To avoid any misunderstanding, people need to understand the socio-cultural values of the speakers.

Many studies had conducted compliment behaviors based on cultural values and norms. Herbert (1997), stated that compliments provide interesting information on the socio-cultural values and structures. So, a compliment reflects the speaker's linguistic choices in relation to socio-cultural norms. The use of compliment

expressions and compliment responses differ depending on the specific of socio-culture. The two socio-cultures are the background culture of speakers and genders. Both can influence the speakers to compliment or respond compliment.

Some studies conducted compliment responses are Cedar, 2006; Al Falasi, 2007; Morales, 2012; and Khan and Rustam, 2017. Cedar (2006) conducted the differences among Thai and American's responses to compliments. It revealed great variation in American and Thai participants' responses to English compliments. Cultural background of the speaker influenced the strategies used to respond the compliment. Al Falasi (2007) supported by conducting a study in Emirates. It showed Female English learners did not respond compliment like what English native speaker did. They used some Arabic expressions which might lead misconception. In addition, genders might influence the choice of strategies to respond compliments. However, Morales (2012) found that both males and females in Philippine referred to use direct speech acts to express their appreciation for and return compliments. In his research, he discovered that gender had no relation on compliment response strategies in the Philippines.

Few studies of compliments and compliments responses had been conducted in Indonesia. Sukarno (2015) conducted a study discussed the politeness strategies used by Javanese in responding to compliments in Javanese. The researcher found only one study discussing Indonesian responses to compliments in English. Ibrahim and Riyanto (2000) discussed the sociolinguistics study and the implication in teaching English of compliment responses among Americans and Indonesian. The study was categorizing the types of responses used by the participants. Hence, it is essential to conduct further investigation on the socio-cultural influences in responding compliment and the differences of males and female strategies used to respond the compliment in English.

To reach out the aim of this study, the research questions are organized as follows:

- a. How Javanese respond to compliment in English?
- b. Is there any difference between males and females compliment responses?

The organization of this study is introducing the background of the study and then followed by the theories which are tied into the problems and the results. The method will be explained in the third part of this study. Then, it is continued with the findings and discussions. The last part of this study is the conclusion to sum up the study.

Literature Review

Compliment expressions as well as the responses are types of speech acts to express politeness, praise someone, or show solidarity. These are parts of social activities which mean socio-cultural is also tied. Compliments are said for something good. What for compliments are addressed might be different to the listener. It also happens to compliment responses. The way a listener responds to a compliment may have different perception toward the speaker though both are using their first language. Then, when people say something in their foreign language, it increases the possibility of having misconception because of different culture between the speaker and listener. In addition, the nature of males and females perception are different. It also may lead misunderstanding between both.

Compliment Topics

Generally there are four common topics used in the studies of compliment. Those are appearance, personality/characteristic, skill/ability, and possession. Appearance is a visible feature of a person or item that can be observed by others. People are easily impressed by the looks of others especially women. When they look others which have pointed nose, big eyes, or long hair, they might say that what they see are beautiful. Then, the second is personality/characteristic. The form of compliment is to express the admiration of someone's competence of interacting both interpersonal and intrapersonal. It usually happens when someone give a hand to others. They might say, "You're so kind. Thank you". The third is skill/ability which means that a person praises someone toward his/her knowledge or skill competence of something. The last is possession. People might compliment something of someone's, complimenting something belongs to someone for example, someone's new phone, new car, or new home. Two studies used these four topics are Furkó and Dudás, 2012; and Khan and Rustam, 2017. While Al Falasi (2007) used only three of them though he used six different situations. The topics were appearance, skill/ability, and possession. The first situation is when someone has just finished her/his presentation and got a compliment from her/his friend. The second is someone makes coffee and bakes a cake and being complimented. The third and fourth are similar. The situation is where someone is being complimented for the skirt by female or male stranger. Then, the fifth situation is some friends come to someone house and compliment her/his clock. The last situation is a compliment for someone of her/his new skirt.

Compliment Responses

Compliments and compliment responses have been extensively investigated across cultures, including those speaking English, German, Chinese, and Japanese. Golato (2002) presented his study that German speakers prefer to say “Yes” rather than “Thank you”. Wang and Tsai (2003) said people in China use compliments to praise someone rather than showing solidarity. They feel ashamed receiving compliments. Chinese speakers don't use the words "like" and "love" as frequently as English speakers do. They tend to use negative responses such as disagreement and asking question when receiving compliments. Brown and Levinson (1987) defined compliments are used to show politeness.

Compliment responses are categorized in order to discover compliment response behavior of speech communities. Herbert (1986) analyzed American English speakers toward compliment responses. He collected samples compliment responses from American university students. Then, he categorized compliment responses into twelve-type taxonomy of three categories.

Herbert’s Taxonomy of Compliment Responses (Herbert 1986)

Response type	
Agreement	Acceptances <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation Token • Comment Acceptance • Praise Upgrade Comment History Transfers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassignment • Return
Non-agreement	Scale Down Question Non-acceptances <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disagreement • Qualification
Other Interpretations	No Acknowledgment Request

There are three categories of compliment responses: agreement, non-agreement, and other interpretations. In agreement, there are several types of compliment responses such as acceptances (i.e. appreciation token, comment acceptance, and praise upgrade), comment history, and transfers (i.e. reassignment and return). Appreciation token is a verbal or non-verbal expression to show acceptance of a compliment. It can be simple by saying “Thank you” or nodding.

Comment acceptance is when someone accepts a compliment and gives relevant comment to the topic being appreciated (e.g. “Yeah, the exam is quite difficult for me, too”). Praise upgrade is a contribution to the force of a compliment (e.g. “It makes me look prettier, isn’t?”). Comment history is used to offer a comment of the object being complimented or tell information how he/she has acquired the object for example, “I got it from Disney Land last summer”. Reassignment is transferring the compliment strategy to a third person (e.g. “My mother bought it for me”). The last type of agreement is return. It is shifting a praise to the compliment giver (e.g. when someone praises you that your shirt is nice then you answer, “Yours looks prettier”).

In non-agreement, there are four types of compliment responses. Scale down is pointing that a compliment is overstated and the compliment taker disagrees for example “It’s quite old actually”. Questions is used when the compliment taker disagrees and questions the sincerity of a compliment like “Really?” Non-acceptances are divided into two that is disagreement (i.e. compliment taker rejects a compliment because the praise is not worthy for example, “I hate it”) and qualification (i.e. compliment taker adds assertions to the response like *though, but, well*). The last type of agreement types is no acknowledgment which means compliment taker gives no response after getting a compliment. Other interpretations have explicit meanings. Rather than a simple compliment, it can be a request something.

Compliment Responses Related to Gender

The different gender might influence the way people respond to compliments. Holmes (1988) found that females give compliments to each other more than males. He also stated males evade and avoid to respond the compliments. Several studies conduct compliment responses related to gender. Khan and Rustam (2017) showed that based on their result of Independent-Samples T-Test presented that there is no significant statistical different types of responses used between males and females in Pakistan except on appearance. They added that females tend to use shift credit and return compliment rather than males on appearance type. While Nan Sun (2013) revealed women in English and Mandarin Chinese accept compliments more than man and men avoid compliments more often than women. In Philippine, two studies conducted by Morales (2012) and Jin-pei (2013) presented males and females tend to receive and return the compliments.

Javanese Concepts

Javanese people in Indonesia are shaped by some concepts which are culturally entrenched in Javanese culture, such as *tata krama*, *andhap-asor*, and *tanggap ing sasmita*. *Tata karma* is the arrangement of *bahasa* or speech levels. The speech levels are used according to whom you are speaking. Poedjosoedarmo (1979) stated speech levels are employed to express the speaker's formality and respect. The lowest level is *Ngoko*. It is less formal and polite. It can be used in addressing younger people or friends. Intermediate level is called *Krama Madya*. It is semi-formal and semi-polite. It can be used in addressing to neighbors who are not very close or acquaintances. The last is highest level or the honorifics called *Krama Inggil*. It is formal and polite which can be used in addressing people who are older or have higher status. In terms of lexical items, each level differs from the others. The term *andhap-asor* then refers to the act of lowering oneself while exalting others. *Andhap-asor* is connected with the concept of *tata karma*. If Javanese people communicate to older people, they will exalt the older people by using arrangement of language called *Krama Inggil* which can be illustrated as follows:

(1) *Ngoko* : *Apa kowe wis mangan?*

(2) *Krama Madya* : *Napa sampeyan mpun nedho?*

(3) *Krama Inggil* : *Menapa panjenengan sampun dhahar?*

“Did you already eat?”

“Have you had breakfast?”

Javanese people should also have a feeling of *tanggap ing sasmita*, which translates to "the ability to comprehend the speaker's hidden will." When Javanese people get compliments from others, they tend to deny the compliments or make any excuses. In Javanese culture they are usually humble to not show being arrogant.

Methodology

To explore the differences of males and female responses to compliment in English, this study consists of 20 Indonesian males and females. The participants are students of the Department of English Language Education in Yogyakarta State University. The participants are specified as students from Java. They are 10 male and 10 female students.

The researcher utilizes a modified Discourse Completion Test (DCT) that is originally designed by Blum-Kulka (1982). The DCT consists of five scenarios in different situations based on the common topics that have been discussed. Each scenario presents a short description of a situation and is followed by a compliment.

The participants require to respond all the compliments. The scenarios are developed to find out the difference of responses from males and females. Moreover, the study can find the difference responses mostly used by Indonesian male and female participants.

The data taken from the DCT are separated between the male and female participants. The data are analyzed based on Herbert's taxonomy of compliment responses. The data are continued by classifying into the Herbert's taxonomy. The purpose of the classification is to establish which kind of responses are more commonly utilized by male and female participants. After classifying, the difference responses will be submitted in SPSS and a non-parametric Paired-Samples T-Test is applied. This type analysis is used because the objective is to find out the comparison between categorical data.

Findings and Discussion

4.1 Male and Female Responses

The compliment responses are classified according to Herbert's taxonomy. The classification of compliment responses: Agreement, Non-agreement, and Other interpretations. The results are divided into the male and female responses. Table 1 reveals the responses of male participants, while table 2 presents the responses of female participants. From both tables, there is 137 responses in total that are made from the five scenarios and twenty participants.

Table 1. Male Responses

Type of Responses	Σ responses	Percentage (%)
Appreciation Token	21	31.8%
Comment Acceptance	18	27.2%
Praise Upgrade	2	3.0%
Comment History	1	1.5%
Reassignment	2	3.0%
Return	3	4.5%
Scale Down	2	3.0%
Question	7	10.6%
Non-acceptances	0	0.0%
Disagreement	3	4.5%
Qualification	5	7.6%
No Acknowledgment	1	1.5%
Request	1	1.5%
Total	66	100%

Table 2. Female Responses

Type of Responses	Σ responses	Percentage (%)
Appreciation Token	26	36.6%
Comment Acceptance	23	32.4%
Praise Upgrade	0	0.0%
Comment History	0	0.0%
Reassignment	2	2.8%
Return	2	2.8%
Scale Down	1	1.4%
Question	5	7.0%
Non-acceptances	0	0.0%
Disagreement	2	2.8%
Qualification	9	12.7%
No Acknowledgment	0	0.0%
Request	1	1.4%
Total	71	100%

Comparing the responses of the male and female participants, it can be seen that the male and female participants tend to respond using appreciation token in five scenarios. This is shown from the number of the use appreciation token is higher than other responses i.e. 21 (31.8%) responses from the males' and 26 (36.6%) responses from the females'. Comment acceptance is in the second place for both male and female responses. There are 18 (27.2%) responses from males and 23 (32.4%) responses from females. Both male and female participants have similar attitudes in using the responses, as it is shown from the distribution of the appreciation token and comment acceptance because the total number of responses utilizing these two types among the five scenarios is very similar.

By looking at the two tables above, the compliment responses are variations. Compliment responses of the males' are more varied than female responses because there is only one type that no one chooses, it is non-acceptance. On the other hand, there are four types of responses that are not chosen by the female participants. Those are praise upgrade, comment history, non-acceptance, and no acknowledgment.

To find out the difference of male and female responses to the compliments, this study applies comparison test using Paired-Samples T-Test. The result of the test presented in table 3.

Table 3. Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	MALE - FEMALE	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
					Lower	Upper				
		-.385	2.534	.703	-1.916	1.147	-.547	12	.594	

A Paired-Samples T-Test is used to find out if there is any significant difference between the male and female responses to the compliments. In Significance column of table 3, p value (2-tailed) is at 0.594 which is higher than 0.05. Then, it can be concluded that “there is no significant difference between the male and female responses to the compliments”.

Moreover, this study opposes the theory stated by Holmes (1988) which men tend to refuse compliments. This study finds out men use appreciation token as much as women which is included as agreements to compliments. These can be drawn that males agree to the compliment. These support the study conducted by Bartram (2019) which showed that males were likely to accept compliments. This study revealed 67% of males accepted the compliments while females were only 48%.

4.2 The Variances of Male and Female Responses to the Compliments

After classifying the responses into Herbert’s taxonomy of compliment responses, the study examines the participants’ use of various responses of each scenario. The variation of male participants in responding to compliments can be seen in table 4 while the female participants are in table 5. The scenario from the DCT is represented by the letter 'S' and number at the top of the table, such as S1. Therefore, S1 symbolizes scenario one, S2 is for scenario two, and so on.

Table 4. The Variances of Male Responses to the Compliments

Type of Responses	S1	S2	S3	S4		S5	Total
				a	b		
Appreciation Token	6	2	3	5	5	0	21
Comment Acceptance	1	1	3	3	5	5	18
Praise Upgrade	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Comment History	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Reassignment	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Return	1	1	0	1	0	0	3
Scale Down	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Question	3	0	2	2	0	0	7
Non-acceptances	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disagreement	0	2	0	1	0	0	3
Qualification	0	1	0	0	0	4	5
No Acknowledgment	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Request	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	12	10	11	13	10	10	66

Table 5. The Variances of Female Responses to the Compliments

Type of Responses	S1	S2	S3	S4		S5	Total
				a	b		
Appreciation Token	7	1	3	6	9	0	26
Comment Acceptance	3	8	7	3	1	1	23
Praise Upgrade	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Comment History	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reassignment	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Return	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Scale Down	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Question	1	0	2	2	0	0	5
Non-acceptances	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disagreement	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Qualification	0	0	0	0	0	9	9
No Acknowledgment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Request	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	14	11	13	13	10	10	71

According to the previous discussion, compliments and compliment responses are used to express politeness, praise someone, or show solidarity which means these are valued as a positive behavior. However, accepting and agreeing compliments can be considered as a self-praise in Javanese culture. It wouldn't be seen as a good behavior by Javanese people. They tend to deny or reject compliments to avoid self-praise. It is appropriate as Sukarno's (2014) study that he found two types of compliment responses used by Javanese people were by disagreeing and denigrating, and by disagreeing and raising a question. While in the table 4 and 5, it shows the opposite results. Appreciation token and comment acceptance are mostly used by the participants.

The participants are English learner who are Javanese. Javanese people commonly tend to deny compliments. They have learned the culture of English

speakers who receive compliments by simply saying “Thank you” or “Thanks”. The participants mostly receive the compliments. Since the compliments are written in English, the participants exclude their background culture and apply the English-speaking culture to avoid misunderstanding.

Each scenario has different topic of compliments. The topic of scenario 1 is appearance. The participants are given a situation and their appearances are complimented by someone. The situation given to the male participants are little different from the females.

Scenario 1 for male participants:

You are attending a farewell party at the school. You cut your hair, and it turns so great with your style. Many people compliment you. What will you say?

Bill : Cool, I like your hairstyle.

Scenario 1 for female participants:

You are attending a farewell party at the school. You wear a blue dress, and you look so beautiful on your dress. Many people compliment you. What will you say?

Rose : Wow, you look so nice.

By looking at the table 4, the male participants receive the compliment using five types of compliment responses. Those are appreciation token, comment acceptance, return, question, and no acknowledgment. Appreciation token has the highest number of responses. It has six responses. A response of this type is “Thanks, Dude”.

Table 5 presents the female participants using six types of compliment responses. Those are appreciation token, comment acceptance, reassignment, return, question, and disagreement. Similar to male participants’ responses, appreciation token has the highest number of responses with seven responses. One of them is by simply saying “Thanks”. Then, it can be concluded that both male and female participants have similar tendencies in the use of appreciation token to respond compliment about their appearances.

Scenario 2, 3, and 4 have the same topic but have different situations. The topic is about skill or ability of the participants. In scenario 2, the participants are complimented of their ability in a test.

Scenario 2 for the participants:

You and your friends get your results of the final exam. You get an A while your friends get only A- or B. they are amazed by your results. They compliment you, then what will you say?

Anna : You got an A for Math? You're a genius.

Male participants have no tendency to respond the compliment. There are seven types of compliment responses used in the scenario 2. Each type has only one or two responses. While female participants tend to respond the compliment using comment acceptance. For example "Thank you. It is just a luck", it indicates that the participant accepts and deserves the compliment because she believes that she is luck. Other responses used by female participants are appreciation token, reassignment, and disagreement which each of them has one response. It can be concluded that male participants have more variances to respond to the compliment than the females.

In the scenario 3, the participants are complimented by their skill to make coffee and a cake.

You have some friends and relatives over for coffee and cake that you bake

Ted : Tastes Yummy!

Male participants use five types of compliment responses. Appreciation token and comment acceptance have the same number of responses. Each has 3 responses. The participants respond by saying "Thanks" or "Thank you" in using appreciation token. While "Thanks a lot. I keep trying to make it better" is one of responses using comment acceptance. It shows agreement and gives a comment to the compliment. Then, there is only one response using praise upgrade and two responses for each scale down and question.

Compare to the female participants, they tend to respond using comment acceptance. It has seven responses for example, "I'm glad you're enjoying it" and "Thanks, please enjoy". The first response indicates that the participant accept the compliment and being happy because of it. The second response shows that the participant accept the compliment in verbal and she adds "... please enjoy" to show politeness to the relatives. The other responses are appreciation token, question, and request. It can be said that male participants have no tendency and female participants are more likely to use comment acceptance to respond the compliments.

The participants are complimented by their presentation performances in scenario 4. The scenario has two parts. In part A, the participants are complimented by their college while in the part B they are complimented by their lecturer.

Scenario 4 for the participants:

(Part A)

You have just finished presenting your research paper. At the end of the class (when you are just leaving the classroom), one of your classmates/lecture compliment you.

Chris : “You did an excellent job! I really enjoyed your presentation”.

Male participants tend to respond the compliment by using agreement in part A. Type of agreements used by the male participants are 5 responses of appreciation token, 3 responses of comment acceptance, 1 response of comment history, and 1 response of return. “You are flawless tho” is used to return the compliment. It indicates that the participant using Javanese concept of *andhap-asor*. It means the participant tries to lowering himself while praising. Other responses are included into non-agreement. Those are question and disagreement. The participant says “Really?” because he don’t believe or he is questioning the sincerity of the compliment. The respond of disagreement is “Hehe you did it better”. The participant rejects and tries to avoid the compliment. Javanese people do not always express their emotions and opinions explicitly since they have the concept of *tanggap ing sasmita* or implicature. So, the response of disagreement can be given indirectly.

Female responses are similar to male responses. Female participants also tend to agree to the compliment using 6 responses of appreciation token, 3 responses of comment acceptance, and 1 response of return. There are three responses non-agreement included. Those are scale down and question. The scale down type is used when someone disagrees to a compliment and claims the praise is overstated. In this scenario, it is said “I’m actually very nervous”. The participant shows the disagreement and states the fact the she is very nervous. Then, it can be concluded that both male and female participants tend to use appreciation token to respond a compliment of their presentation performance.

Scenario 4 for the participants:

(Part B)

You have just finished presenting your research paper. At the end of the class (when you are just leaving the classroom), one of your classmates/lecture compliment you.

Prof. River : “That was a great presentation”.

In the part B of scenario 4, the participants given a compliment of their presentation performances by their lecturer. Male participants has only two variances which each variance have five responses. It is similar to female participants has only two variations. Appreciation token has the highest number with nine responses and comment acceptance has only one response. So, it is said that all the participants agree to the compliment given by their college or lecturer and appreciation token has the highest number from the total of male and female responses.

Compare to part A, part B has less variance of types. It can be indicated that in part A, the compliment is given by a friend, so it is informal. The participants can express their true feelings. While in part B, the compliment is given by a lecturer, the participants take the situation more formal. Then, they tend to agree and say "Thank you". It can be seen that the response to a friend and a lecture is different. It indicates that there is polite behavior to respond someone older. In Javanese it can be included into *andhap-asor*.

The topic of the last scenario is a compliment about personality or characteristics.

Scenario 5 for the participants:

Your friend has recently moved to a new apartment. She asks you to help her arrange the things. After finishing it, you are about to leave, and your friend says something.

She : "Thank you! You are really kind and helpful."

From ten male responses, five participants respond the compliment using comment acceptance, for examples "You're welcome, hope that is helpful for you" and "Glad that I can help you". The other five responses are 4 responses of qualification and 1 response of request. On the other hand, qualification in female responses have nine responses and comment acceptance has only one response. The qualifications are such as "No prob", "Don't mention it", "Nevermind", and "Anytime". The participants tend to qualify the compliment given to them.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, the objective of the study can be answered. First of all, it has been concluded that male and female participants are more likely to apply appreciation token to respond the compliments. There are 31.8% from male and 36.6% from female responses. There is only slight difference the use of

appreciation token. Secondly, from the table 3, it is shown the p value is at 0.594. It is said that male and female participants have no significant difference variances of using the type of compliment responses. Third is the discussion of the variances of male and female respond the compliments. There are different tendencies to respond the compliments. It depends on the topics of the compliments. In the scenario 1, the participants tend use appreciation tokens to respond compliment about their appearances. In the scenario 2, 3, and 4 have different tendencies even they are in the same topic about skill or ability. The female participants tend to use comment acceptance while male participants have more diverse responses in the scenario 2 and 3. Scenario 4 has similar tendency to scenario 1 because the participants has the highest number in appreciation token. The last is scenario 5 which qualification has the highest number of responses. Last is because the participants are English learner who are Javanese. They have learned the culture of English speakers who receive compliments. The participants mostly receive the compliments. Since the compliments are written in English, the participants exclude their background culture and apply the English-speaking culture to avoid misunderstanding. In conclusion, it can be said that among Indonesian males and females have no significant difference variances to respond to the compliments and applied English-speaking culture to accept a compliment.

Limitation

Since all of the participants in this study were students of the Department of English Language Education at Yogyakarta State University in Java, the researcher does not attempt to generalize or make conclusions about other non-Javanese and English Education learners. Therefore, researcher recommends that future studies of compliment responses include subjects from specific Javanese or general Indonesians with a wider range of objects of studies in term of ethics, social status, and variety of situations. In addition, the DCT was not tested before it was used as a data collection method. It would be better if the triangulation of the instrument is checked and observed against the participants in order to give the research findings more credible.

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