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The negotiation of identity in English for Academic Purposes: Investigating international students' experiences in a Scottish university context

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Errata

p.22 (p.36 when scrolling in original PDF) – extra bracket and colon removed in paragraph 1.

p.130 (p.144 when scrolling in original PDF) – omitted word (as) added in paragraph 3.

p.166 (p.180 when scrolling in original PDF) – reflexive changed to interactive in the last paragraph. I have omitted the word ‘both’ in this sentence to keep the page numbers identical to the original.

Abstract

Increasing globalisation and student mobility have given rise to an agenda of internationalisation within Scottish universities. Concerns that the Covid-19 pandemic would precipitate a decline in international student numbers highlighted their importance for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), in terms of both reputation and financial health. However, the diverse needs of this cohort are still not fully appreciated, and more research is needed into their experiences.

For many international students, the first point of contact with their chosen university is a pre-sessional course in English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The main goal of such instruction is to familiarise them with the language and skills required for university study in an Anglophone environment. Despite the growing provision of pre-sessional pathways, EAP students have been neglected in the literature, especially as regards their linguistic practices and identity development. In particular, there is a lack of understanding about how they manage the transition into mainstream tertiary education.

The impetus for my study derives from teaching on pre-sessional EAP programmes and wishing to know more about students' perceptions of their time in Scotland. The main aim was therefore to capture the experiences of a group of international postgraduates by following them over time. Drawing on the theories of investment (Norton, 2013), positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990) and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977), I investigated their identity negotiation in different academic, linguistic and social situations. To the best of my knowledge, no tracking studies of this kind have previously been conducted in a Scottish context.

The mixed-methods study took place in a Scottish university which attracts a high number of international students. An initial online survey was administered to a cohort of postgraduates undertaking its pre-sessional EAP programme to gather their views and demographic information. Following this, 11 focal participants were recruited for three in-depth interviews. Further interviews were conducted with EAP tutors (*n*=7) and academic staff (*n*=7), and observations of EAP lessons also took place. Findings were analysed thematically, and data from the quantitative and qualitative phases were integrated to provide more detailed insights.

Several key categories were generated in the course of thematic analysis. These included: adapting to unfamiliar expectations, perceptions of challenges, classroom participation, changing identities and social interactions. Postgraduate participants' responses demonstrate that they experienced different interactive and reflexive positioning in the EAP and degree programmes. They also encountered more dynamic fluctuations in identity over time, as they tried to come to terms with new expectations. Findings reveal that EAP tutors made efforts to increase learners' confidence, but harboured doubts about how they would be viewed in mainstream university classes. Although academic staff interviewees appeared

willing to accommodate and support students from overseas, concerns were raised about the need to adapt their pedagogy.

The study makes a contribution to knowledge in terms of reconceptualising how international students with a first language other than English are perceived. It adds to a shift away from positioning them as deficient and instead brings their own agency and cultural capital to the fore. There are implications for how we understand the experiences of individuals from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. It is proposed that dialogue with both university staff and home students would lead to an improved awareness of the benefits of intercultural exchange. Further collaboration between EAP tutors and academic lecturers is also recommended. Such steps could help to ensure that international students are treated as legitimate members of the academic community, rather than as problems to be solved.

Lay summary

Scottish universities are continuing to attract large numbers of students from overseas. Even after the COVID-19 pandemic, international applications remained high. Although these students are important for universities' reputation and finances, their experiences are still not well understood.

At the beginning of their stay, many international students take an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. This helps to prepare them for university study in English. While teaching on EAP programmes, I became aware that there is limited research into their experiences. In particular, we need to know more about how they manage the important move into degree subject classes.

This mixed methods study tracked postgraduates from an EAP programme on to their degrees. It is the first of its kind in Scotland to follow a group of students over time. Following an initial online survey, I interviewed 11 volunteers three times: once on the EAP course and twice during the academic year. I also interviewed 7 EAP tutors and 7 academic lecturers and observed several EAP lessons. I used a framework that integrated investment, positioning and cultural capital to investigate students' identity development in different situations.

The results show that international students meet with challenges but also have their own strengths. Postgraduate participants' identities changed as they adjusted to new expectations and ways of learning. EAP tutors focused on introducing the key academic skills needed in higher education. At the same time, they were concerned about how their learners would cope in regular classes. Academic lecturers seemed willing to offer support, but might not know how to meet the needs of students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

This research suggests that universities should see international students as valuable members of the community, not as problems to be solved. It is my hope that the findings will increase our understanding of how to improve intercultural awareness. This could include additional training for students and staff, and improved cooperation between EAP teachers and academic subject lecturers.

Acknowledgements

I began my PhD at a strange time, when we were still living under Covid-19 social distancing restrictions. While this could have been isolating, I always felt connected to the university (and greatly appreciated the loan of an office chair when working from home).

I would like to express gratitude to my supervisors, Professor John Joseph and Dr Kenneth Fordyce, for all their guidance and support. They generously shared their wealth of knowledge and offered valuable feedback and suggestions. As a teacher, I am not used to being on the 'other side' of receiving comments, so I appreciate that this was always done tactfully.

This project would not have been possible without the interviewees, who generously gave up their time to share their experiences and insights with me. I am also grateful to the English for Academic Purposes pre-sessional course organiser for their willingness to facilitate research site access.

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List of abbreviations

EAP English for Academic Purposes

EMI English as a Medium of Instruction

ESAP English for Specific Academic Purposes

ESL English as a Second Language

ESP English for Specific Purposes

HEI Higher Education Institution

PSE Pre-sessional English Programme

SLA Second Language Acquisition

TESOL Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

Glossary of transcription symbols

(0.5) The number in brackets indicates a time gap in tenths of a second

↓↑ Pointed arrows indicate a marked falling or rising intonational shift

Bold Speaker emphasis

= Indicates latching between utterances

The negotiation of identity in English for Academic Purposes: Investigating international students' experiences in a Scottish university context

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Context for the study: Internationalisation in Scottish Higher Education

Internationalisation has been described as 'a process of integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension into the purpose, functions (teaching, research, and service) and delivery of higher education at the institutional and national levels' (Knight, 2008, p.xi). Most Scottish Higher Education Institutions (hereafter HEIs) have an international policy in place (Bell, 2016), with words such as 'global', 'worldwide', 'transnational' and 'diversity' occurring in their publicity material. A report commissioned by the Scottish Government (2018) emphasises the value which international students bring to Scotland, referencing enhanced diversity and cultural awareness as well as economic benefits. Yet, there is a potential disconnect between promoting genuine cultural exchange and prioritising other factors such as recruitment and world rankings (de Wit, 2019). To the undoubted relief of British universities, overseas applications were not impacted during the pandemic to the extent that some had feared (Zhu Hua & Gao, 2021). However, if the continued presence of international students is taken for granted, institutions may neglect to pay due attention to their educational needs and social welfare.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2024) classifies international students as those 'who received their prior education in another country and are not residents of their current country of study.' This definition does not necessarily recognise how their lives at university can differ from those of their home-domiciled peers. At the same time, UK HEIs have been criticised for constructing social groups (standard entry, mature, or international students) in a way which implies a collective identity (Tobell & Burton, 2015). A deeper understanding of international students is needed to avoid stereotypes, as even those who come from the same country will have varied experiences and needs. In addition, all newcomers to university can feel uncertain about its expectations and practices: this is not unique to students from overseas (ibid.).

Universities Scotland (2022) describes Scotland's HEIs as 'proudly European and international.' Kemp & Lawton (2021, p.11) suggest that HEIs have been able to take advantage of the UK's reputation as an international study destination, while offering a clear 'Scottish differentiation.' Indeed, non-EU applications have continued to rise in recent years, despite concerns about the effect of Covid-19 on student mobility. At the beginning of the pandemic, Burki (2020, p.758) suggested that 'a collapse in the international student market [...] seem[ed] inevitable' and would have detrimental consequences for Anglophone universities in particular. Although others noted that a scenario in which all international students would avoid coming to the UK was unlikely (Ahlburg, 2020), there was a clear sense of alarm about a potential drop off in numbers. This only served to emphasise that

applicants from overseas are often viewed as a crucial financial resource (Baker, 2016). The following table from HESA (2023) focuses specifically on Scottish institutions, and shows the number of students domiciled in the UK and overseas. Interestingly, it can be seen that the proportion of non-EU students actually increased between 2019/20 and 2020/21, despite predictions to the contrary.

Domicile	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
UK					
England	26,720	26,715	26,780	29,520	30,665
Wales	850	875	870	1,000	1,105
Scotland	160,875	163,470	167,030	180,170	183,025
Northern Ireland	4,175	4,050	3,940	3,755	3,670
Other UK	250	245	245	250	290
Total UK	192,865	195,355	198,865	214,690	218,755
Non-UK					
European Union	21,605	21,505	20,895	20,550	17,140
Non-European Union	32,740	36,570	40,695	47,630	65,300
Total Non-UK	54,345	58,075	61,590	68,180	82,440
Not known	10	45	35	5	35
Total	**247,220**	**253,475**	**260,490**	**282,875**	**301,230**

Table 1.1 Changes over time: HE student enrolments by domicile (Scotland) (HESA, 2023)

Post-Brexit, there was an expected decline (-56%) in EU applicants (ibid.), presumably caused by the loss of their privileged tuition fee status[1] (Universities Scotland, 2022). The next table highlights that EU students now constitute a small percentage of the university population in Scotland. It is also notable that non-EU students make up the majority of full-time postgraduate enrolments.

[1] Before Brexit, EU students were granted the same fee status as their Scottish counterparts, i.e., tuition was free. Starting from the year 2021-22, new EU students now pay international tuition fees.

PG Full-time	UK 19,220 (29%)	EU 3,980 (6%)	Non-EU 42,675 (65%)
PG Part-time	UK 26,755 (87%)	EU 1,205 (4%)	Non-EU 2,930 (9%)
UG Full-time	UK 136,150 (82%)	EU 11,520 (7%)	Non-EU 18,535 (11%)
UG Part-time	UK 36,635 (96%)	EU 435 (1%)	Non-EU 1,165 (3%)
All student enrolments	UK 218,755 (73%)	EU 17,140 (6%)	Non-EU 65,300 (22%)

Table 1.2 HE student enrolments by level of study, mode of study and domicile: Academic years 2021/22 (Scotland) (Adapted from HESA, 2023)

While British universities have apparently 'embraced internationalisation' (Adams et al., 2023, p.6), many are dependent on a small number of countries when it comes to international student enrolment. China remains the main source of overseas recruitment in the UK, but increasing admissions from India, Nigeria and Pakistan are beginning to change the picture. However, Chinese nationals still dominate in Russell Group and research-intensive universities, as students from the other aforementioned countries tend to enrol in post-1992 institutions (ibid.). Adams et al. (ibid.) suggest that, at a time of increasing geopolitical tensions, it is unwise for HEIs to rely on China as a source of tuition fee income; instead, they should focus on enhancing diversity. As well as reducing the risk of a collapse in international student recruitment (for instance, if diplomatic ties with China were to worsen in the future), this would provide greater opportunity for intercultural exchange.

At the time of writing, international graduates can remain for up to two years after completing their course in the UK (three years for those who have obtained a PhD). In January 2023, the former Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, proposed that six months was a more appropriate duration. While this change in policy was rejected in May 2024 (following a considerable backlash), the previous Conservative government still opted to tighten some of the rules. Only PhD students are now permitted to bring dependants, and individuals cannot switch from a student visa to the work route until they have graduated (UK Government, n.d.). Although the new Labour administration has confirmed that the current graduate route will remain in place, it claims to be more hospitable to international students (Bolton et al., 2024). Similarly, the Scottish Government (2018, p.4) argues that Scotland is 'highly successful' in attracting students from overseas and should remain welcoming to them. However, it does not have control over migration policy, decisions on which are reserved for Westminster.

In recent years, research has increasingly focused on the growth of multiculturalism in UK universities. For instance, Castro et al. (2016) explored perceptions of internationalisation and student mobility, gathered from informants working in 28 universities in 15 countries. Most respondents had strong views about internationalisation being driven primarily by economic motivation, rather than educational ideals. Comments reveal a sense that their universities prioritised the idea of an international 'brand,' without fully considering

students' needs. This is borne out in remarks about classroom teaching, where an international dimension was mentioned only in terms of mixed nationalities and English language problems. The misguided notion that 'with the incorporation of international students, the international aspect in teaching is obvious' (p.9) neglects to account for their different backgrounds and educational needs. Nor does a group of mixed nationalities working alongside each other amount to true internationalisation (Zhu Hua & Gao, 2021). Some of Castro et al.'s (2016) participants referred to the lack of integration of international students and an absence of support at institutional level (as opposed to individual members of staff providing assistance).

Lumby & Foskett (2016) explored how universities can maintain their commercial interests while prioritising diversity. As in Castro et al.'s study (2016), two potentially conflicting standpoints are highlighted: first, that internationalisation adds value to the educational experience of all students; second, that it is primarily a business opportunity. Lumby & Foskett (2016) challenge the perception that internationalisation is always 'win-win' (p.104), instead arguing that its cultural and ethical consequences need to be critically examined. It is evident that 'being international' carries great prestige for HEIs, but this is sometimes conflated with the mere presence of students from overseas (Lewis, 2021). Lumby & Foskett (2016) also question the underlying assumption that, in attracting international students, Anglophone universities offer a superior cultural experience, noting that culture itself is a contested notion. They recommend a radical change in thinking, whereby the cultural capital of international students receives proper recognition, and academics and home students are positioned as deficient (for subconsciously aligning themselves with a monocultural ideology). However, such an approach assumes that staff and home students all come from the same (English-speaking) cultural backgrounds. While enhancing intercultural communication is an admirable aim, there is a danger in essentialising any group.

At a time when calls to widen participation in UK HEIs were becoming more frequent, Ryan (2011) argued for a shift away from both ethnocentric and intercultural approaches towards something more transcultural. She endorses a view of cultures as dynamic and interactive, and advocates a dialogue of mutual respect. Baker (2016) criticises Ryan (2011) for not referring to language anywhere in her discussion. In his opinion, this is a 'major omission' (p.449), as the spread of English, the dominant global lingua franca, plays a major role in the process of internationalisation. However, he proposes the same term – transcultural – to encapsulate the complex, dynamic nature of language and culture in universities. He suggests that there is no longer a binary divide between home country and host community; instead, students need to be prepared to 'negotiate the diversity and fluidity of communicative practices' (p.437) of modern, multicultural universities. In other words, the traditional idea of a 'standard' target language with an associated stable national culture may lack relevance in a globalised world.

1.2 Use of terminology in the thesis

In the writing of this thesis, I considered how to interrogate essentialist notions of 'nativeness' (Birkeland et al., 2024) when employing terminology connected to language use. As I intended to report on the experiences of international students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, it was crucial to steer clear of marginalising or exclusionary word choice. My study frames identity as fluid and dynamic; therefore, references that risked homogenising or categorising individuals would have been unacceptable (Oral, 2015). Unfortunately, the ideology of native speakerism still prevails in the field of ELT (Choi, 2016), not least because acronyms such as TESOL actually contain the word 'other' (Pennycook, 2016). 'Native speaker' has more neutral connotations when referring to other languages, but, when used with English, it relates to a 'global politics which gives it a neo-racist meaning' (Holliday, 2015, p.11). The term is also imbued with a sense of racial injustice, stemming from the assumption that 'native speakers' of English are always white (Kubota & Lin, 2006; Pennycook, 2016).

Although the difficulty of completely avoiding '(non) native speaker/signer' is acknowledged, linguists should aim to challenge these inaccurate and damaging descriptions (Birkeland et al., 2024). Using 'native' and 'non-native' (or acronyms such as 'NS' and 'NNS') as a convenient shorthand is misguided, since no clear definitions or boundaries exist (ibid.; Grammon et al., 2024; Joseph, 2017). Alternatives such as 'L2 users' or 'expert speakers' do nothing to diminish the power imbalance (Grammon et al., 2024) and are likewise best avoided. Such terms fail to recognise the 'rich linguistic repertoires' of multilinguals (Odeniyi, 2015, p.162), and prevent researchers from gaining a deep insight into their experiences (Oral, 2015). We need to move away from the implication that language is acquired at an early age and then remains static, as shifts in language dominance may occur throughout a person's life (Dewaele et al., 2022).

It does seem bizarre to define people by what they are not, with a negative prefix (Dewaele, 2018a). Llurda (2016) points out that, in the natural sciences, 'non-native' often conjugates with 'invasive' to describe foreign species taking over the environment of native varieties. In the absence of suitable alternatives, it is crucial to 'mark the unmarked' to avoid cultural biases (Birkeland et al, 2024). As advised (ibid.), I added inverted commas or the phrase 'so-called' when necessary, in order to create a sense of distance. I also tried to avoid 'L1' and 'L2' user which, though somewhat more inclusive (Dewaele, 2018a), could still be misleading (if the person speaks more than two languages). Although I considered using 'LX,' it is an 'adjacent term' (Birkeland et al., 2024) to 'non-native speaker' and could still denote a monolingual bias. Therefore, I preferred to employ descriptions specific to the postgraduate participants ('EAP student'). However, as several interviewees referred to 'native' or 'non-native' in the course of our discussions, such terms have been retained in direct quotations.

In addition, I gave careful thought to my use of 'international' and 'home' student, common administrative categorisations in UK universities. As Dippold et al. (2019) explain, this

separation might also have an academic purpose, for example, if international students are perceived as requiring extra linguistic support. It is important to remember that 'non-traditional' home students (for instance, those from less privileged economic backgrounds or ethnic minorities) may also be characterised as deficient if they speak a variety of English which differs from elite versions (Odeniyi, 2015; Gayton, 2020). In this research, 'international' means a student who comes from a country where English is not the dominant language in everyday life. 'Home' student refers to someone from the UK who uses English as their first language. However, as Ryan & Viete (2009) state, 'international' and 'home' students come from diverse cultural, economic, social and linguistic backgrounds, so cannot be categorised in an unproblematic way[2]. On a related note, while I refer to 'Chinese' when discussing postgraduate participants' language use, I am aware that there are many varieties (see Li Wei & García, 2022).

Ultimately, I wish to stress that no group of students is homogeneous; rather, due attention must be paid to the individual nature of their experiences.

1.3 English for academic purposes and pre-sessional pathways

For many international students, the first point of contact with their chosen HEI is an intensive pre-sessional course in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (Bond, 2019), typically lasting between six to ten weeks in the summer months. A key aim of such instruction is to familiarise learners with the 'institutionalised use of language' (Davies & Harré, 1990, p.45) required for university level study. For applicants without the necessary English language proficiency scores[3], successful completion is mandatory before they can embark on their degrees (Pearson, 2020a). As Thorpe et al. (2017) note, rising international enrolments have caused such programmes to proliferate in recent years.

EAP began as a sub-division of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in that it has always been goal-directed and based on needs analyses of learners (Hyland, 2006). It gradually evolved from its 'parent' discipline (Ding & Bruce, 2017, p.58), and has come to be seen as a distinct field. Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002, p.2) explain that EAP encompasses 'instruction that focuses on the specific communicative needs and practices of particular groups in academic communities' and is traditionally associated with higher education. In contrast to 'general' English language courses, EAP centres on equipping students with the cognitive, linguistic and academic attributes needed to embark on a degree programme (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018). EAP is different from English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, as it prioritises academic strategies rather than overall language development and conversational English (Fox et al., 2014). Nor is grammatical instruction the focus in EAP (Dooey, 2010); instead,

[2] I recognise that international students who come from English-dominant countries also form part of EAP and home students' cohorts. However, they are excluded from consideration in my thesis because the contrast to UK-domiciled students is the most salient for EAP students.
[3] Usually, a minimum of IELTS 6.0 or equivalent; 7.0 for more demanding programmes (IELTS, 2024).

students are introduced to skills such as critical thinking, analysing academic articles and contributing to seminars.

1.4 Research background and rationale

Since 2018, I have worked as a teacher on pre-sessional programmes in EAP. A key part of this role is to introduce international students to the academic literacy practices required for successful study in a Scottish university. This includes making them aware of important 'graduate attributes,' such as autonomy, critical thinking and problem-solving. I also ensure that they are ready for end of course assessments in reading, writing, listening and speaking. Although I hope to prepare them for university life, there is little time to reflect on what the next stage of their stay abroad might hold. Each year, I have the impression that most students will thrive on their degree programmes, but worry about members of the class who seem less self-assured. The initial impetus for my research was therefore curiosity about how EAP students' new status as international learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds impacts on their sense of identity. I wondered how they manage their lives abroad and to what extent they feel the need to adapt to an unfamiliar culture.

One reason why I can empathise with international students to some extent is that I also lived and worked abroad in my early 20s. I moved to Japan straight after graduating from my first degree to work as an assistant English language teacher in a secondary school. This was in 1999-2000 when the internet was not as advanced as it is today (emails only; no video calls), and few people in the UK owned a mobile phone (although they were already widespread in Japan). Without the ease of communication which we now possess, being 6,000 miles away from home was a disorientating experience. Of course, physical distance was not the only factor: encountering a very different culture and a completely unknown language posed even greater challenges. I claimed in the job interview that I had no preference regarding location, but this was mainly because my knowledge of the country's geography was minimal. In 2011, Miyagi prefecture became known for being one of the areas worst affected by the magnitude-9 earthquake and devastating tsunami but, back then, I had never heard of it. My future colleagues actually sent me information about the region through the post, which seems archaic now.

The town where I was posted, Ōgawara, is famous for a long line of cherry trees which run alongside the river (the name means 'big riverbank') and blossom spectacularly in spring. It is 30 minutes by train from the largest city in the region (Sendai), and has excellent transport links. However, in this semi-rural location, no one around me spoke English, apart from my colleagues in the department. I was surprised that, despite being teachers of the language, they seemed unsure of their ability. Although I had only been taught some 'emergency Japanese' during the orientation programme, I was still expected to give a welcome speech on the first day of term. Somehow, I managed to ascend the stage, face my large audience and articulate the stock phrases I had learned, including どうぞよろしくお願いします *('douzo yoroshiku onegaishimasu*') which was basically a plea to 'treat me kindly.'

To begin with, I felt anxious about the simplest things, such as visiting the supermarket: I had been warned that people would stare at me as the only non-Japanese among them. Fortunately, Ōgawara proved to be a friendly place and I felt welcomed by the local population. Nevertheless, my sense of dislocation from home was profound. While we had been warned about culture shock (see, e.g., Furnham, 2019), what form this might take was not discussed in detail. Being unable to read anything was extremely disconcerting, as was needing assistance with everyday tasks like opening a bank account. All foreign residents were required to carry ID with them at all times: this was referred to as an 'alien card'[4], as if we truly had arrived from another planet.

Although I only stayed in my assistant language teacher post for one year, I returned to Japan a few years later to tutor on a short (three-month) university English programme. Most recently, I visited in 2019 as a tourist: a far more relaxing experience than travelling for work. I mention this because, although neither of my stays was problem-free, I maintain a huge affection for the country. One aspect that made my life there easier was learning the language through a combination of night classes, private tuition and my own study. When I started to acquire basic conversational Japanese, day-to-day tasks became less arduous. I enjoyed learning the writing system too – deciphering once inaccessible Chinese characters was especially satisfying. It was my choice to do so, but I made a deliberate effort to fit in as much as possible. This meant that I wanted to bow on reflex constantly after returning home, and even accidentally inserted Japanese expressions into sentences on occasion (to the bewilderment of my English-speaking family and friends). Some have queried the term 'cultural distance' (see Marginson, 2014); however, I found adjusting to life in Germany (where I later taught in an international school) to be more straightforward. Having previous knowledge of German definitely aided the process, but it was also easier to 'blend in' when going about my everyday life.

When I share my experience of living in Japan with EAP students, I hope to reassure them that they are in a much better position than someone arriving in a foreign country knowing only a few words of the language. As well as already being able to communicate in English, they have access to advanced technology which makes it easy to keep in touch with family and friends back home. Yet, despite these advantages, some could still feel confused and alienated on their arrival in Scotland. While I knew I could not speak Japanese (and nobody expected me to), international students may believe that they will be able to converse effortlessly in English. Encountering colloquial speech and unfamiliar accents could make some lose confidence. In addition, it is no easy task to uproot yourself from halfway across the globe, even with a mobile phone and social media at your disposal. And a year feels like a long time when you are in your early twenties. However, these challenges are not always appreciated by people who have never lived or worked abroad. Although most EAP teachers

[4] The Alien Registration Card was replaced with the Resident Card in 2012. See https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/content/930001517.pdf

will have international experience due to the nature of the job, the same does not necessarily apply to all university staff.

1.5 Research design and questions

To fulfil my aim of understanding EAP students' experiences during their time at university in Scotland, I formulated the following research questions:

1. How do EAP students perceive the identity positions available to them in a Scottish university context?
2. What factors influence EAP students' ability to invest in the linguistic and social practices of new academic communities?
3. What are the implications – of questions 1. and 2. – for pedagogy and university policy regarding EAP programmes and internationalisation?

In the early stages of my project, I considered undertaking a type of action research. I thought that it might be possible to gather interview and observational data while simultaneously teaching on a pre-sessional programme. According to Mackey & Gass (2005), action research is initiated by instructors who wish to understand more about a particular classroom issue. Burns (2010, p.2) introduces the idea of 'the teacher as researcher', which involves evaluating practice with the aim of making improvements, while Schutz & Hoffman (2017) argue that teachers *are* researchers. However, after teaching on a six-week pre-sessional programme at a Scottish university in the summer of 2021, I determined that conducting action research would not be practicable. Although I was still delivering lessons in an online format (and therefore teaching fewer hours than on an in-person course), the intensity of the workload left less time to spend on my research than I would have liked. This was particularly true towards the end of the course when tutors are required to grade multiple assessments in a short space of time. I also began to realise the benefits of increasing my outsider status as someone who would not be teaching the student participants. They would be able to open up to me in interviews without worrying about the need to self-censor, thereby ensuring a more equitable relationship. In a practical sense, it would be easier to arrange classroom observations if I were not teaching on the programme. As all lessons are held at the same time, being a practitioner-observer would have necessitated finding cover for my classes – an additional burden on colleagues which I preferred to avoid.

I adopted what has been described as a pragmatic approach (Dörnyei, 2007): working out a plan to gather and understand data which would fulfil the research aims. I was aware of the need to achieve methodological congruence (Morse & Richards, 2002), whereby research questions, data collection and subsequent analysis cohere. Since I intended to gain a contextualised, deep understanding of participants' experiences, I concluded that qualitative methods were best suited to my exploratory study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). However, I also decided to include an initial quantitative step (as explained in Chapter 4). Having read

several journal articles in which research designs are presented with 'scientific precision' (Rose & McKinley, 2017, p.4), I wish to be more open about the challenges I encountered throughout my study. These included finding a representative sample, gaining access to the site and remaining objective. I realised that compromises would need to be made, as research does not necessarily proceed in a linear manner and often meets with obstacles (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). At the research-planning stage, in-person contact still necessitated a degree of caution, due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, I believed that any disadvantages (such as the requirement to complete extra safety protocols) would be outweighed by the advantage of forming relationships with participants face-to-face.

Dörnyei (2007, p.34) explains that quantitative research methods cannot 'do justice to the subjective variety of an individual life.' In contrast, qualitative research is well-suited to gaining in-depth knowledge of the social and contextual factors which influence language use. Although qualitative studies are sometimes seen as inferior to large-scale experimental research, he argues that this is not an appropriate comparison. Furthermore, he suggests that adding a longitudinal dimension can be valuable and need not involve following participants over many years. By tracking student participants from the EAP programme on to their degrees, I hoped to witness the 'dynamic processes' (ibid., p.81) connected to their learning, language practices and changing identities.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

Following this introduction, a review of the literature is presented in eight distinct sections in Chapter 2. Section 2.1 considers how aspects of identity interconnect, with reference to language acquisition and use. In particular, I draw attention to the concept of transnationalism and its relationship with language and identity. Section 2.2 further contextualises the current study by analysing the concept of acculturation, with a focus on research into international students' experiences. After this discussion, section 2.3 highlights the influence of affective factors on their sense of self and linguistic practices. Section 2.4 explores the idea of being socialised into a new academic community, while 2.5 delves into classroom interactions. 2.6 narrows the focus to EAP students and how they experience the transition into Higher Education overseas. In 2.7, a variety of empirical studies pertaining to university teaching staff and their views of international students are discussed. Finally, section 2.8 moves outside of the academic sphere to examine the significance of social relationships.

Chapter 3 builds on Chapter 2 by delineating the theoretical framework employed in the study, which grounds it within sociocultural perspectives of identity. More specifically, it links key concepts to the research context, with reference to both seminal papers and more recent studies.

Chapter 4 gives an account of the research design, and explains the rationale behind these methodological choices. Issues around site access, researcher positionality, and ethical decision-making are also discussed.

Chapter 5 explains the data analysis procedures, including how integration of the quantitative and qualitative stages was achieved. It also shows how I identified and combined broader themes to develop more focused conceptual categories.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 discuss and analyse the results from the study. Chapter 6 first presents and evaluates the questionnaire results, drawing attention to significant findings. It then reports on the three rounds of student interviews (pre-sessional programme, semester 1 and semester 2). Chapter 7 examines EAP instructors' perspectives, while Chapter 8 concentrates on findings from academic staff interviews. In each case, pertinent excerpts from the full data sets are included and commented upon. Where relevant, data from the student questionnaire and EAP classroom observations are also referred to.

Chapter 9 (conclusion) returns to the research questions and considers the key findings in a broader context. Implications are also discussed, both for university policy and language and identity research, and limitations acknowledged. The process of research dissemination is then considered before areas for future investigation are suggested.

Chapter 2 Literature review

This chapter situates my thesis within the existing literature, and offers a critical review of past scholarly work into language and identity. It begins by outlining the intersection between various aspects of identity, before detailing how moving into a new sociocultural context can precipitate changes to a person's sense of self. I then narrow the focus towards international students by considering investigations into their academic identity development and classroom participation. This is followed by an analysis of previous studies with EAP students, especially how they experience the transition from a pre-sessional programme to a university degree. Since it is important to understand the perceptions of educators who work with international students, I also appraise research which sought their views. Finally, I consider the significance of social interactions through a discussion of pertinent empirical work in this area.

2.1 Interconnected aspects of identity

Exploring the interconnection between different identity categories provides a valuable alternative to 'essentialising [...] constructs that homogenise social categories' (Anthias, 2013, p.3). However, it is not always the case that people identify in ways denoted by groupings such as ethnicity, class and gender (ibid.). Indeed, Dervin & Jacobson (2021) have suggested that using the term 'intersectionality' risks re-essentialising people's complex identities. I have decided to use the term 'interconnected aspects of identity,' in order to avoid inappropriate exaggeration of specific categories. While it is important to acknowledge multiple dimensions of identity, researchers cannot closely examine everything in a single study (Block & Corona, 2016). Nevertheless, we can still consider the influence of different categories on how people 'navigate diverse social contexts, relations and practices' (Darvin & Norton, 2023, p.36).

2.1.1 National identity

National identity arises from a focus on political borders and autonomy, reinforced by a shared cultural heritage (Joseph, 2004). The constructionist turn has influenced the conceptualisation of national identity as 'fluid and arbitrary' (ibid., p.93) rather than fixed and stable. Research with international students suggests that living abroad can strengthen their sense of national identity, especially if they are inclined to compare the new cultural environment to their home country (Block, 2007). Kinginger (2015, p.9) found that students experienced a sense of heightened national identity while overseas, due to feeling 'positioned as outsiders.' In a similar investigation, Gu (2015) discovered that some respondents wished to return home immediately after completing their degree because of a sense that they 'belonged' to China. One added that he had gained a better understanding of his own cultural background during his time in the UK, becoming 'more patriotic' (p.72) as a result.

Kaur (2019) compared the perceptions of Chinese students on degree programmes in a UK university to those who were learning in an English as a medium of instruction (EMI) environment in their home country. Like Gu (2015), she suggests that international experience not only confers economic advantage, but also equips students with 'a particular skill set,' comprising 'knowledge, language, views and skills' (Kaur, 2019, p.464). In focus groups, participants (7 from an English university; 7 from its counterpart in China) were asked questions such as, 'How do you perceive yourself at university?' (p.459). Answers focused primarily on nationality: 'I am a Chinese student,' suggesting that they saw themselves 'as Chinese first and foremost' (p.460). Those studying in the UK seemed to hold dual identities, using the word 'foreigner' to refer both to anyone not Chinese (also see Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017) and themselves. I found this interesting as, when I lived in Japan, I always saw myself as the 'outsider,' and expected to be described as such by Japanese nationals. Although 外国人 (gaikokujin) is the formal term for foreigner, it was more usual to hear 外人 (gaijin), which can be interpreted as having somewhat derogatory connotations (Curtis, 2011).

The fact that Kaur's (2019) participants focused so much on their nationality could also have been due to the wording of her questions. Indeed, she admits to being disappointed that students did not give more insightful responses about how they viewed themselves at university. This highlights that asking people directly about their identity might not always be the most effective strategy. While Kaur (ibid.) had expected to find differences between international students in the UK and EMI students in China, their experiences were largely comparable. Participants expressed a positive attitude towards internationalisation, but still portrayed their 'core identity' (p.467) as nationally and culturally Chinese. Some members of the UK cohort explained that they had deliberately chosen degree programmes with a high number of co-nationals, even though this diminished the international nature of their experience. Moreover, if students can appropriate an international identity through EMI in their home country, then crossing national borders might not be required (ibid.).

In research with Chinese students learning English in the UK, Gao (2010) describes how participants (*n*=6) reconstructed their national identities inside and outside the classroom through 'cross-cultural interactions' (p.288). Although they were all attending General English courses in language schools, the findings could also be applicable to university EAP students. Gao (ibid.) took an emic approach, befriending students and speaking to them informally. While this persuaded them to open up to her, it does call into question the reliability of some findings (especially as certain conversations were not recorded but written up afterwards from memory). Nevertheless, participants expressed thought-provoking views about their national identity, such as gaining a stronger sense of patriotism and feeling responsible for representing their country while abroad. Interestingly, for some, having a heightened awareness of their Chinese national identity became the impetus for speaking English (to explain different aspects of China and correct misunderstandings) or reading English (to gain knowledge of events in China as reported in British newspapers).

2.1.2 Ethnic identity

According to Joseph (2004), ethnic identity centres on common descent and shared cultural heritage. Lytra (2016) argues that, even in a globalised world, ethnic identity remains a relevant category, most likely because people still tend to think in these terms. In her view, examining the relationship between language and ethnic identity can add to our understanding of 'societal and individual beliefs about languages,' 'asymmetrical relations of power,' and 'language users' own views of how they see themselves and others' (p.132). Trofimovich & Turuševa (2015) conceptualise ethnic identity as a subjective experience, encompassing the feelings, experiences and behaviours through which individuals position their membership in single or multi-ethnic groups. They contemplate how ethnic identity might be implicated in second language learning, raising the prospect of a bidirectional association. As elsewhere, the authors endorse a view of identity, including ethnic identity, as dynamic and negotiable (e.g., Block, 2007; Norton & Toohey, 2011). It is striking that they include a quotation which draws attention to the significance of accent: 'Your self is inseparable from your accent' (Matsuda, 1991, p.1329). As well as being part of our identity, the way we speak is one of the ways by which others will judge us. Zhu Hua (2016) refers to discourse that brings one's ethnicity or group membership to the fore as Nationality and Ethnicity Talk (NET). While asking someone, 'Where are you from?' may demonstrate genuine interest, it can also result in othering, especially if framed sceptically ('Where are you *really* from?'). Similarly, comments such as 'Your English is so good!' are patronising rather than complimentary (also see Dovchin, 2022).

In their review of relevant research, Trofimovich & Turuševa (2015) suggest that a sense of ethnic belonging can lead to positive or negative language learning outcomes, or may not be connected to L2 performance at all. Positive effects include the adoption of a new cultural identity, which results in a 'double-positive' (ibid., p.239) orientation to both the home and host nation. On the other hand, people are more inclined to react negatively if they feel stigmatised by the L2 community. The authors posit that the ethnic identity-language link might be reciprocal and self-reinforcing. In other words, individuals who reach a certain level of proficiency will seek out more opportunities for cross-cultural encounters, leading to effective linguistic progress. Conversely, those who struggle with communicating in the other language will avoid situations which require it, thereby missing out on the chance to gain confidence. While the first group are likely feel more included and thus have a positive attitude towards their interlocutors, the second group may (subconsciously) project negative emotions onto a community from which they feel excluded.

2.1.3 Transnationalism

I now turn to transnationalism, which Vertovec (2009, p.3) defines as 'a condition in which, despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders [...] certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified.' Although migrants in the past also participated in long-distance communication (for instance, by sending letters and

money home), this does not equate to how transnationalism is seen today. Technological advances have made it easier to maintain connections with home (Vertovec, 2007), leading some migrants to adopt a 'transnational consciousness' (Vertovec, 2009, p.6). Although 'transnationalism' is often conflated with 'international,' 'multinational,' 'global' and 'diasporic,' Vertovec (ibid.) suggests that it specifically confers a sense of economic and social privilege. It is possible to view international students as 'transnationals,' since they are globally mobile individuals who cross national boundaries for the purposes of education (also see Dovchin, 2022).

De Fina & Perrino (2013) posit that we need to critically reflect on the relationship between language and identity in the face of growing transnationalism. They argue that the perception of speech communities as homogeneous entities requires interrogation, as urban centres in particular are becoming 'super diverse' (Vertovec, 2007). People construct and perform different identities as they cross borders and become part of (or establish) new communities. De Fina (2016, p.164) adds that transnationals' identities are influenced by different 'processes and practices' (for example, employing multilingual resources) which are less relevant for people who 'are firmly grounded in one place.' Duff (2015) stresses the interconnection between language, identity and transnationalism, linking this to 'how people see or imagine themselves, how they relate to the social world, and how they are seen or positioned by others in their various social, cultural, and linguistic settings' (p.61). This implies that a person's sense of self can fluctuate, depending on context. Duff (ibid.) also notes that transnationalism can occur in the virtual as well as the physical world, something which was especially relevant during 2020-21 when Covid-19 restrictions were in place.

Most research on transnationalism in the field of EAP focuses on students from China, probably because they make up the largest overseas contingent in British universities (Universities UK, 2023)[5]. For instance, Gu (2015) investigated the experiences of Chinese undergraduates and postgraduates in the UK through a series of three connected questionnaire and interview studies. She suggests that overseas study is not simply a process of acquiring new skills in an unfamiliar environment; instead, it is an 'emotional journey' which results in 'profound identity transformation' (p.63). Her participants described a range of feelings, including the sense that they still 'belonged' to their home country, rather than to the host society. However, some comments suggest the positive nature of change, for instance, in terms of learning more about themselves and gaining a broader worldview. Although loneliness was highlighted as an issue (also see Wawera & McCamley, 2020), it seems to be regarded in a positive light, as a means of providing students with the space to calmly reflect on their new circumstances. Given the potentially serious effects of isolation on psychological and emotional well-being (Richardson et al., 2017), this stance might be

[5] Chinese nationals also account for the majority of international students in the United States and Australia, but not in Canada, where more come from India (Statista, 2023; Erudera, 2023).

overly optimistic. Gu (2015) stresses the agency of her participants, but it is questionable whether all individuals would have the same ability to cope with isolation. Therefore, the suggested connection between feeling lonely and enhanced self-awareness is not entirely convincing. On the other hand, when research tends to emphasise the struggles of international students, it is refreshing to consider their successes. For example, language is not framed as a problem; in contrast, 92% of participants in the third study reported an improvement in their English skills.

In a similar vein, Anderson (2019) investigated the national and transnational ideologies, identities and outlooks of two Chinese doctoral students in a Canadian university. Findings from semi-structured interviews and participant-generated narratives centre around the idea of 'haigui' or 'sea turtles': Chinese students who return to China after completing a degree overseas. One participant perceived this term negatively, characterising returnees as failures who are unable to succeed abroad. The other, while acknowledging the label's pejorative connotations, chose to frame it in a more positive light. She suggested that any criticisms are founded on jealousy and do not apply to PhD students like herself. Interestingly, the student with a critical view of the 'haigui' phenomenon was accepting of the instability that results from being globally mobile, stating, 'home can be everywhere' (p.239), and expressing his intention to remain in Canada. In contrast, the other found living in a transnational 'flowing space' (p.239) to be unsettling and alienating. Even after two years abroad, she had not established a sense of belonging and intended to return home after her PhD. Anderson (ibid.) recognises that both respondents created narratives which were ultimately self-serving, but their comments nonetheless offer insight into the complexity of negotiating identity in an unfamiliar environment.

Li Wei (2011) has considered the transnational experiences of Chinese students who do not fit into the traditional definition of 'international', due to living in the UK long-term. The idea of 'translanguaging space' encapsulates the creativity and criticality which multilingual individuals draw on in their social interactions. In this space, 'new identities, values and practices' (p.1223) may be constructed. Li Wei (ibid.) proposes a method termed 'Moment Analysis' to examine significant instances in which individuals employ criticality and creativity, for example, when pondering their own and others' use of language. During semi-structured interviews, the three male participants were able to reflect insightfully on their multilingual identities. They could mix languages with ease and clearly enjoyed doing so, inventing puns and humorous nicknames. In one interesting extract, a participant described how he had made friends with China-domiciled students and mentioned speaking Chinese with them due to their low level of English proficiency. This illustrates that UK universities are increasingly multilingual spaces, despite the majority of teaching being carried out in English. Unlike international students in other research (e.g., Soltani, 2018), Li Wei's (2011) participants were not constrained by language; rather, they were at ease with themselves and constructed wide social networks through their ability to 'behave differently in different

situations' (p.1231). However, their global outlook and confidence – 'We belong to the world' (p.1233) – denotes a degree of privilege which is not available to all.

2.1.4 Other identity dimensions: Social class and gender

Although social class is often implicitly present in research connected to international students (Gao, 2010), Block (2015) argues that it has generally been a neglected concept in the field of applied linguistics. When clarifying the fundamental elements of class, he refers to education and its connection to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977); symbolic behaviour (including how one speaks) and mobility (the opportunity to travel). Each of these could be relevant to EAP students, as is the correlation between wealth or privilege and access to English language learning resources. Gao (2010) argues that gaining proficiency in English can lead to better educational, employment and social mobility prospects for Chinese nationals. This has resulted in parents who can afford to (or have property enough to borrow on) investing in their children's education, something which not all can do. For some Chinese people, English may be more than a foreign language if they envisage living and working abroad: 'not simply a mark of distinction but a critical toolkit for leading a transnational life' (Kanno, 2014, p.120).

Preece's (2018) research with less privileged university students in the UK demonstrates the significance of social class (and how it connects with gender identity). Her participants were not a homogeneous group (some UK-born; some having arrived at a young age; a few first-generation migrants), but all came from working class backgrounds and were unfamiliar with the expectations of higher education. In terms of language, most used English together with heritage languages, as well as the local vernacular. As Gayton (2020) points out, far from being valued, such linguistic repertoires are often marginalised in academic contexts. Preece (2018., p.10) affirms that class is relevant to academic English, as it focuses on 'the literacy practices of groups with high social status.' Students on the EAP programme she taught and observed did not choose to attend but were referred based on their language test results, potentially leading to feelings of insecurity. Gender is also framed as a social construct that forms 'part of a language learner's social world' (ibid., p.10). For instance, her male participants enacted 'laddish' behaviour and engaged in 'banter' in order to form alliances and a stronger sense of identity.

Norton Peirce's (1995) work with immigrant women in Canada demonstrates the intersection of class, gender and ethnicity for L2 language learners (Jones, 2016). For one participant, investment in learning English was connected to her maternal role. As her linguistic proficiency improved, she was able to take on more responsibilities without depending on her children to translate. Despite feeling insecure about her English ability, she nonetheless entered into dialogue with Anglophone Canadians (her landlord, customers in the restaurant where she worked) in order to appropriate a more powerful position for herself. Norton Peirce (ibid., p.22) explains how she used 'her symbolic resources as a mother' to reframe power relations with her young co-workers. Instead of being intimidated

by their fluent English, she refused to be ordered around by teenagers who were younger than her own child. It is true that international students appear to be in a more privileged situation (economically, at least) than the respondents in Norton Peirce's (ibid.) research. However, they could still find their previously competent sense of self being undermined in the new educational context. They may also have to contest unjustified assumptions, for example, that their English language skills are insufficient for academic work or social interactions.

2.2 Acculturation

Having discussed interrelated aspects of identity with reference to language use, I now turn to studies which consider the impact of acculturation on a person's sense of self. Moving to an unfamiliar environment can create confusion about one's role, values and identity, resulting in anxiety, depression, frustration or anger (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). Such feelings of disorientation are often encapsulated in the phrase 'culture shock' (e.g., Furnham, 2019). Oberg's (1960) early model of culture shock, which comprises a honeymoon stage, a crisis stage, recovery, and final adjustment, has been called into question in more current research. While this 'U-curve' hypothesis is often taken for granted (Brown & Holloway, 2008), there is little empirical evidence that people always feel positive at the beginning of their stay overseas (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). Indeed, Brown & Holloway's (2008) research with international postgraduates at a UK university found that many were disconcerted on initially encountering an unfamiliar culture. Participants described feelings of fear, stress and uncertainty, and referred to communicating in English as a particular cause of anxiety. In a more recent investigation into international students' process of adjustment across academic, sociocultural, and psychological domains, Zhao & Schartner (2024) found that participants were affected by both internal factors (such as language ability and personal relationships) and external influences (such as host university support). Notably, the majority rejected the 'U-curve' as an accurate representation of their experience, intimating that 'adjustment' is rarely a straightforward process.

In questionnaires and interviews with Chinese students at an English university, Gu & Maley (2008) uncovered what they describe as 'learning shock': interviewees explained their bewilderment on being met with an alien learning environment, different forms of teaching, and new academic demands. Comments about being too nervous to answer in class suggest that participants were also anxious about their English proficiency, at least initially. However, most reported positive changes throughout their stay, such as increased levels of confidence and independence. Similar research with East Asian postgraduates studying in the UK (Wu & Hammond, 2011) found that the majority encountered only 'culture bumps' (Chen, 2007) rather than full-blown culture shock. Nevertheless, their first term was especially taxing, as they tried to come to terms with unfamiliar educational expectations and communicating with English-speaking classmates. It is suggested that participants worried less about everyday interactions as the year continued, and focused more on their academic

performance. By the time of the final term, interest in improving their English had decreased, most likely because they planned to return home. This added to the sense that their adjustment was temporary (also see Zhao & Schartner, 2024). Wu and Hammond (ibid.) argue that, instead of 'adjusting' or becoming marginalised, students can adapt to an 'international student culture' (p.435) which involves using English as a lingua franca, interacting with various nationalities (but not 'home' students) and prioritising academic achievement.

It seems clear that people who move from one cultural context to another can undergo a complex process of change as they try to come to terms with life in an unfamiliar place (Berry, 1997). Berry (2005) emphasises that individual responses will differ. Some may attempt to assimilate by discarding their own heritage and becoming immersed in the new environment. This differs from integration, whereby an individual adapts to some extent, but remains attached to their own culture. In contrast, rejecting interaction with the new culture is denoted as separation, while a disconnect from both the new society and the heritage culture results in marginalisation (ibid.). Berry (1997, p.9) believes that integration is generally the most successful acculturation strategy, but requires 'mutual accommodation': acceptance on the part of both groups and the absence of prejudice or discrimination. Rather than being free choice, acculturation is influenced by the attitudes of the 'dominant group' (ibid., p.10), and it is important to note that they might not always be accepting.

Establishing one's life in a different cultural setting involves alterations to behaviour and, while some of these will be uncomplicated, others can result in conflict or tension, precipitating what Berry (2005) describes as acculturative stress. He prefers this term to 'culture shock,' which carries only negative connotations and does not capture the sense of interaction between cultures. In terms of international students, Smith & Khawaja (2011) suggest that acculturative stress encompasses language issues, academic difficulties, loneliness, discrimination, and practical problems related to everyday life. They highlight that the potential consequences for students' well-being are severe, for instance, maladaptive coping strategies, depression, or other forms of psychological distress.

At the same time, Marginson (2014) has rightly contested the idea that international students should be expected to 'adjust' during their stay overseas. Adjustment implies that they are deficient in relation to host country 'norms,' and should therefore strive to achieve 'harmony' with local behaviour and habits. Instead, Marginson (ibid.) theorises that they draw on multiple identities during a process of 'continuous self-formation' (p.12). In challenging the mistaken notion that 'Euro-American values' (2023, p.30) are superior, he reminds us that international students bring their own cultural capital (see §3.5) to the new educational environment. It should therefore not be assumed that they will automatically wish to rescind their own heritage and sense of identity to 'become like us' (Marginson, 2014, p.8).

2.2.1 Encountering prejudice

Discrimination has been recognised as a specific acculturative stressor which can lead to psychological and emotional problems (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The Equality Act 2010 prohibits direct and indirect discrimination, and protects characteristics such as age, disability, race, religion and sexual orientation (UK Government, 2015). However, international students might not be aware of this legislation, and research has found that they can unfortunately be a target for prejudice. Some studies reported an increase in Sinophobia on university campuses after the outbreak of Covid-19, due to the perception that it originated in China (Gray & Hansen, 2021; Nam et al., 2021; Cowie et al., 2022). In an earlier investigation of international postgraduates' experiences, Brown & Jones (2013) found that several respondents had been victims of verbal and/or physical abuse while in the UK. In interviews, they described their ensuing emotional reactions, including sadness, disappointment, homesickness and anger. As the authors note, encountering racism has a detrimental effect on people's morale, and might cause some to associate only with co-nationals in order to feel safe (Brown, 2009). None of Brown & Jones' (2013) participants had made an official complaint, indicating that recorded numbers might not be a true representation of such incidents. As HEIs have an 'ethical duty' (ibid., p.1017) to do everything possible to safeguard their international student body, measures should be put in place so that victims of discrimination know where to turn for advice.

While Moosavi (2022) acknowledges that the diverse nature of many university campuses creates a sense of relative safety, ethnic minorities may still experience racism or microaggressions. He suggests that East Asian students tend to be seen as 'the other' in Anglophone universities, causing them to be 'discreetly patronised, marginalised and ostracised' (p.484). In his view, discrimination is sometimes related to the academic context, as unconscious bias impacts on the way Chinese students are perceived. Common stereotypes include the notion that they lack critical thinking, and therefore undergo culture shock when entering into Western education. However, as Moosavi (ibid.) states, it is too simplistic to talk about 'the Chinese learner' since individuals will have different backgrounds and experiences. It is concerning that East Asian students are sometimes depicted as 'a nuisance who can only be begrudgingly tolerated' (p.488) in a place where they should feel welcome.

Dovchin (2022, p.2) warns that international students may suffer from 'an adverse impact of transnationalism' if they become the recipient of language-based discrimination. Instead of being appreciated for their English usage, they sometimes find that members of the L1 community devalue their skills. Experiencing translingual discrimination makes it more difficult to participate in social interactions, with detrimental consequences for emotional and psychological well-being. Dovchin (ibid., p.55) advocates the idea of the 'translingual safe space,' in which people can express themselves freely without fear of negative

judgement. In a classroom context, it is instructors' responsibility to promote cultural diversity and create an inclusive environment.

2.3 Affective factors

From the literature discussed in §2.2, it is clear that the concept of 'adjustment' requires interrogation. Although start of university can be a challenging time for all first-year undergraduates and postgraduates (Taylor & Ali, 2017), international students face the additional burden of interacting in an unfamiliar setting and a foreign language. Gaining a place in an overseas university is indicative of high academic achievement, but may come with 'social and emotional costs' (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016, p.1). Therefore, it is imperative to consider the influence of affective factors on students' academic and social lives, especially as the emotional dimensions of language learning and teaching have frequently been overlooked (Swain, 2013; Miyahara, 2015).

Anxiety is regularly cited as causing difficulties for students without English as their first language. In an ethnographic study which aimed to gain an understanding of international postgraduates' emotional lives, Brown (2008) found that apprehension about linguistic proficiency was widespread, especially at the beginning of their stay in the UK. Although most had previously obtained a minimum of IELTS level 6.0 and completed an intensive English course, they used powerful terms – 'shock' and 'panic' (p.80) – to describe their reaction to the new environment. While discussion often centres on the demands of academic reading and writing, Brown (2008) uncovered greater concern about using English in social contexts. The perception that their language skills were inadequate for accomplishing everyday tasks resulted in her participants feeling embarrassed and helpless. Brown (ibid.) claims that they experienced reduced anxiety as their English language skills improved, but no direct evidence of this is provided. Nevertheless, this research reminds us not to assume that all international students are excited and positive on arrival – some will be more vulnerable.

Operating in a new culture can be emotionally draining, not least because everyday tasks which once required little thought suddenly become difficult and anxiety-inducing (Gebhard, 2012). This is demonstrated in Copland & Garton's (2011) investigation into how participants (*n*=39) on a 15-week EAP pathway at a UK university communicated in English outside the classroom. Drawing on the concept of agency (Ahearn, 2001), they explored how students positioned themselves and were positioned by others in various situations. Both successes and failures in service exchanges (at the accommodation office, at the bank) and social interactions are described, showing that empowerment and disempowerment were experienced on different occasions. Respondents usually blamed their inadequate English skills for any breakdown in communication, revealing a tendency to perceive themselves as linguistically deficient. Copland & Garton (2011) advise that EAP students require instruction in how to gain co-operation from other interlocutors (such as asking for a phrase to be repeated), and need to be shown how to manage conversations which go 'off-script' (p.252).

However, the short duration of most pre-sessional courses could make it difficult to include such content in the curriculum. The practicality of urging students to 'seek out casual encounters' (p.252) is also dubious: not only is a great deal of resilience needed to overcome the fear of rejection (Cervatuic, 2009), but superficial relationships can be seen as lacking in value (Wawera & McCamley, 2020).

Another factor which merits attention is how fluctuating levels of anxiety impact on a person's willingness to communicate in another language. MacIntyre (2007) conceptualises willingness to communicate as a 'volitional' process, suggesting an element of choice: 'the probability of speaking when free to do so' (p.564). At the same time, he acknowledges that someone can simultaneously be motivated to speak and apprehensive about doing so. People are not necessarily aware of the 'driving and restraining forces' (ibid., p.571) which affect their decision to instigate communication in another language. Gallagher (2013) suggests that it is the voluntary use of the L2, rather than proficiency per se, which enables cross-cultural adaptation. It makes sense that individuals who are keen to initiate communication when living abroad will feel less socially isolated. However, we need to question what makes a language learner 'cross the Rubicon' (Dörnyei, 2001, p.88) from silence to speech. There are various factors at play, including linguistic investment and attitudes towards the new discourse community (Yashima, 2019).

Indeed, international students are not always successful in their attempts to exercise agency (Ahearn, 2001) and negotiate more powerful positions for themselves. In educational contexts, learners may be marginalised if contributions from 'native' English speakers are prioritised (Ryan & Forrest, 2021). This can be seen in Morita's (2004) study of how Japanese female postgraduates in a Canadian university participated in class discussions. Consistent with other studies (e.g., Brown, 2008), respondents expressed concerns that they would make mistakes and be negatively judged when speaking English. This was a particular worry for those taking a master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), whose imagined identities (Norton, 2016) as educators could have been undermined by not meeting certain standards. Notably, comprehension problems and nervousness were exacerbated by the attitudes of some lecturers and 'home' students. While in one tutorial, a student felt valued and therefore enjoyed contributing, the atmosphere of a different class made her feel 'voiceless' (Morita, 2004, p.593). Another participant commented that she sounded 'stupid' (p.583) when using English, suggesting internalised negative self-positioning. Seeking advice from instructors was not always an effective strategy, as some were reportedly dismissive, blaming any problems on students' supposed 'language barrier' (p.593).

Karas (2017) points out that being able to contribute their ideas to whole class forums is a crucial skill for international students who plan to embark on degree programmes in Western universities (also see Dippold et al., 2020). However, addressing a larger audience can be intimidating, and not knowing how to join fast-paced interactions creates additional

difficulties. Some learners may deliberately use silence in order to enhance their language skills, for example, by memorising vocabulary or listening carefully to their classmates' speech for any errors. Karas (ibid.) references Bao's (2014) interesting distinction between silence, which is voluntary and controlled, and reticence, which is imposed due to outside influences. While being reticent has negative connotations, silence can be used actively: to express identity, to give others the opportunity to speak, and to show respect to both the teacher and peers (ibid.).

Nonetheless, academic staff who are familiar with teaching in an interactive environment might feel it necessary to actively persuade international students to contribute. In lesson observations at a British university, Zhu Haiping & O'Sullivan (2022) found that Chinese members of the class usually remained silent when a question was asked. Whereas British lecturers reported that prolonged silence felt uncomfortable and awkward, student interviewees provided sound reasons for not speaking out. These included lacking experience in vocalising their ideas and feeling anxious about their English language proficiency. Although carefully preparing for classes made it easier for respondents to contribute, one commented that extra thinking time is often required when expressing oneself in another language. The authors suggest that some academics might not make the effort to find out why Chinese students are quiet, jumping to the erroneous conclusion that they are passive or disengaged. They advise that lecturers should explain the importance of asking questions, and insist on mixed-nationality groups during collaborative tasks.

It is significant that Murray & McConachy (2018) refer to 'participation' in inverted commas and describe it as a 'culturally variable notion' (p.254). In Anglocentric contexts, students are usually expected to 'actively' engage in learning, for example, by contributing orally to group work, discussions, or debates. Instructors themselves can feel under pressure to facilitate this kind of 'student-centred' approach, as too much 'teacher talk' is viewed negatively (Wang et al., 2022). When being outspoken is favoured, quieter members of the class can be labelled as incompetent or, in the case of international students, insufficiently proficient in English (Straker, 2016). The prospect of speaking spontaneously in classroom dialogue often precipitates language anxiety based on the prospect of making mistakes and losing face (Holliman et al., 2024). International students potentially fear being seen as less capable if they cannot articulate their ideas as effectively in English (Ryan & Viete, 2009). However, some might deliberately prefer to remain quiet and listen carefully to others (Wang et al., 2022; Wei & Cao, 2024). Focusing on their reasons for not speaking out only reinforces the idea that non-verbal forms of participation are less valid (Murray & McConachy, 2018).

Holliday (2006) argues that the preference for learner-centred tasks is another sign of native-speakerism, which labels 'non-Western' practices as passive. Although English-speaking 'home' students can also feel anxious about speaking out in class, they are socialised to believe that this is the only way of demonstrating engagement (Jin & Cortazzi, 2017; Wang et al., 2022). In essence, it is crucial to take into account different views of participation,

rather than labelling any group of learners as deficient for not conforming to 'UK linguistic and academic norms' (Dippold et al., 2019, p.324). Questioning the notion that Western approaches to learning are superior could enable international students to develop positive identities in the new academic environment (Ryan & Viete, 2009).

2.4 Academic identity development

The formation of a higher education learner identity is essential to student achievement (Briggs et al., 2012). Managing academic work is important, but other factors are equally relevant, for instance, the extent to which someone feels accepted and positioned as competent. In research with students from different educational and cultural backgrounds, Tobell & Burton (2015, p.26) found a 'fundamental struggle to negotiate the self in the new university context', regardless of nationality and level of prior academic attainment. Participants generally felt that they were lacking in crucial knowledge, and their previous experience did not necessarily ease the adjustment process. Interestingly, some respondents from overseas blamed their difficulties on nationality, which presumably included English language proficiency. The authors question this view since students from all backgrounds may encounter difficulties during their transition to HE. However, Anglophone home students do not face the additional challenge of 'translating their lives – and themselves – from one linguistic world to another' (Benzie, 2010, p.453).

Taylor & Ali (2017) also investigated difficulties encountered by international students moving into university in the UK. Interviews with five 3rd year undergraduates revealed that several issues had an impact on their learning: language competence, cultural assimilation and social relationships. Participants referred to their difficulties with group work and class discussions, including the need for more thinking time when trying to communicate in such situations. One described herself as feeling 'very clever' in her home country but 'stupid' (p.11) in the UK, which she attributed to low linguistic proficiency and being too shy to speak in class. Indeed, most quotations about struggling with the academic adjustment process are from this (Korean) student, even though other nationalities (Indian, Bulgarian, Bangladeshi and Nepalese) took part. The implication that someone from East Asia would encounter more problems perhaps reflects the researchers' own preconceptions. Nevertheless, their argument that academic staff need to be aware of international students' potential challenges (which are due in part to different values and expectations) remains pertinent.

Adding to this line of enquiry, Adisa et al. (2019) explored how international students navigate the transition into UK higher education, noting the overlap between academic and social/emotional development. Based on previous research and their findings from interviews, they propose a three-stage model to conceptualise international students' adjustment (p.1105): the 'stormy' stage (in which students struggle with the new environment), the 'acclimatisation' stage (in which they begin to overcome difficulties and adapt) and the 'functioning' stage (when they are as equally able to cope as their British

counterparts). However, they acknowledge that not everyone will experience a smooth journey through the different phases.

Student respondents indicated that they encountered problems related to language/accent, impaired communication, adjusting to the British education system and culture, and aspects of everyday life (transport system, food and weather). Linguistic issues were mentioned by 92% of respondents and, as in other research (e.g., Copland & Garton, 2011), their concerns related to social as well as academic encounters. It is significant that they reported feeling unable to participate in class due to limited English skills – something which could clearly hinder their progress. Lecturers generally expected students to adapt quickly – within six to eight weeks of arrival – and implied that failure to do so could have negative consequences for their studies and overall university experience. However, comments from student interviewees show that they found it challenging to become used to an unfamiliar system (teaching style and ways of being assessed) and expectations (being active in class discussions). The authors' recommendation that universities could offer more effective help to international students pre- and post-arrival seems sensible, but there is no mention of training for staff (or home students), suggesting that acculturation is being framed as a one-way process.

Other research has focused on the potential connection between IELTS entry scores and subsequent academic performance. For example, Thorpe et al. (2017) examined data from full-time undergraduates and postgraduates (*n* = 17,925) attending a UK HEI, 4,342 of whom were international students. A key finding was that undergraduates (irrespective of subject discipline) who had completed an additional English language course were not as successful academically as those who possessed the requisite IELTS score (or equivalent) on arrival. The authors speculate that this could be due to failings in the courses, academic weaknesses in the students, or a combination of both. Postgraduates who had taken a pre-sessional English programme seemed to perform less well than their peers, possibly because of the greater demands (and shorter duration) of a master's degree. According to data from a similar study (Trenkic & Warmington, 2019) enrolment in an EAP summer course might only demonstrate a lower proficiency in English on arrival, and does not guarantee a faster rate of improvement. The authors claim that meeting the minimum language requirements for university entry 'may be sufficient for completing a programme of study, but not for fulfilling one's academic potential' (ibid., p.362). If English language and literacy skills do not reach a certain threshold (which they suggest is not currently aligned with minimum entry requirements), there could be a detrimental effect on academic performance. Of equal concern is the negative impact on students' self-esteem, especially if they are used to being academically successful.

2.4.1 Academic writing

Helen Fox's (1994) seminal work argues that students' diverse cultural heritage affects how they interact in academic contexts, with the strongest impact being on how they write. In

her work with postgraduates and their instructors in the US, she found that those from backgrounds which favour indirect communication and discourage disagreement with authority experienced problems – even if they had previously been published (sometimes in English) in their home country. A preference for indirectness and digression can cause issues when students produce written work in Western universities, where getting quickly to the point is expected. The resulting sense of confusion can be seen in the comments of one participant, who struggled to adopt American customs while still preserving her Japanese identity. According to Fox (ibid.), this presents questions about individuals' perception of themselves, since writing 'touches the heart of a student's identity' (p.12). Some of her respondents expressed anxiety over giving up their identities for unfamiliar writing conventions; others felt that adding a different form of writing to their repertoire broadened their view of the world. An alternative reaction was to resist writing in a style which seemed unnatural. Fox (ibid., p.19) warns that we should avoid attributing students' difficulties solely to language issues or 'inadequate academic preparedness that can be alleviated with remedial work in English or basic skills.' Writing in another language contributes to how students construct their sense of self, a process which involves 'identity transformation and academic acculturation' (Flowerdew & Wang, 2015, p.82).

Canagarajah (2004, p.270) argues that 'writing itself is a linguistic activity that shapes the self in complicated ways', suggesting that it has an important role in identity formation. He cautions against categorising linguistic varieties as deficient, pointing out that people often draw on all their language resources to communicate. However, although translanguaging is often accepted in spoken interactions, it may not be well received when it comes to academic writing (ibid.). If written texts are framed as 'static products' that can take 'only one code at a time' (Canagarajah, 2011, p.7), then any variations might be perceived as errors (Ryan & Viete, 2009). However, in Canagarajah's (2011) view, making meaning involves negotiation between the writer and the reader. During this process, it is possible to challenge conventions. Writing in 'standard' English could constrain students who are from other language backgrounds, whereas accommodating diversity provides the opportunity for greater creativity and freedom. Yet, although Canagarajah (ibid.) suggests that such a change is achievable, research continues to show that the monolingual (English) bias still prevails in higher education (see Jenkins, 2013).

The requirements of 'standard' written English potentially inhibit international students' own voices (Maringe & Jenkins, 2015), and leave little scope for flexible linguistic practices. In a survey of academic instructors (*n*=166) from 24 different countries, Jenkins (2013) found that most denied the existence of an official English language policy at their institution. Instead, they described 'unwritten rules' around linguistic proficiency, referring to the need for 'correct,' 'near native,' or 'good' English in written work. Those working in countries where English is the dominant language tended to be of the view that no 'allowances' should be made. However, others were concerned about the privileged position of English in HE, suggesting that it has a detrimental impact on 'L1 and identity' (p.131). Lecturers

working in countries where other languages are spoken were more accommodating as regards 'variation from native academic English' (p.135). This suggests that they had a better understanding of the demands of writing in another language, and valued students' diverse linguistic repertoires.

When researching international doctoral students' experiences of academic writing at a UK university, Maringe & Jenkins (2015) found that they sometimes felt stigmatised as international students with inadequate literacy skills. In focus group interviews, participants (*n*=12) spoke of their uncertainty when trying to conform to gatekeepers' (such as examiners and publishers) expectations, bringing to light the ambiguity around what constitutes 'good English.' They had to adopt different conventions, for instance, in terms of how to structure a piece of writing, and meet the challenge of expressing complex ideas in another language. Instead of undergoing a fundamental shift in identity, they generally viewed themselves as 'contextualised users of English' (p.617): doing what they needed to perform well academically, but not necessarily investing in the language long-term. Some comments demonstrate their resistance to negative positioning, for example, the fact that they should be viewed as 'genius' (p.619) for embarking on a PhD abroad, in another language. Like Canagarajah (2011), Maringe & Jenkins (2015) advise that universities could value diverse practices more highly, rather than stereotyping writers from non-Anglophone backgrounds as deficient. However, how to put this into practice is not made clear.

In a study conducted in Ireland, Garska & O'Brien (2019) gathered data from questionnaires (*n*=108) and interviews (*n*=3) to determine international students' perceptions of writing in English and its connection to identity. Some participants in the wider survey had completed a pre-sessional EAP programme, or were attending in-sessional language classes. However, this did not apply to any of the interviewees, suggesting that they possessed a higher level of linguistic proficiency. Findings from the questionnaire show that most respondents were confident when writing in their first language (78.7%), and believed that it allowed them to convey their personality effectively. Fewer stated that they were confident writing in English (56.5%) and only a minority (19.4%) claimed to find it easier to express their identity in the language. At the same time, over half believed that English represented their 'academic writing identity' at least partially, indicating that they were trying to adjust to expectations. While there are few direct quotations from interviewees, the authors report that, as elsewhere (Maringe & Jenkins, 2015), they were anxious about meeting gatekeepers' demands. Some were also frustrated by what is described as the 'neutrality' (p.77) of academic writing, feeling that this was a constraint on how they expressed themselves. One respondent referred to the fact that 'native' English speakers apparently 'know best' (p.82), suggesting that other writers may position themselves as inadequate while trying to meet sometimes elusive standards.

Drawing on a second language socialisation (SLS) framework, Anderson (2021) examined the co-constructed nature of feedback, including how comments on written work influence

learners' affective stances and identities. Interestingly, his call for volunteers was phrased as seeking those with self-reported 'written academic language problems' (ibid., p.137). Therefore, despite being enrolled on doctoral programmes, the participants possibly felt their writing skills to be inadequate. When reflecting on feedback, one explained that she had received harsh comments on a submitted journal article but was able to overcome challenges (and eventually achieve publication) by seeking advice from her supervisor. It seems that she was provided with intensive assistance in terms of language: 'he rephrase and worked out what I want to express into REAL english (sic)' (p.141). Similarly, the supervisor of another student provided what are described as 'surgical comments' (p.143) – critical feedback on specific aspects of her writing which required correction. Anderson (ibid.) suggests that this enabled her to identify as a 'publishable author,' rather than as a 'deficient error maker' (p.143). In contrast, another student explained that vague comments such as 'your writing is a big problem' (p.141) did not show him how to improve. Receiving negative written feedback impacted on his sense of identity at first, as he was made to feel like 'a primary school student' (p.142). For a previously high-achieving individual, this could be humiliating. However, he gained positive reinforcement from other sources (such as his supervisor) which bolstered his sense of legitimacy in the academic community.

2.4.2 Language issues in academic writing

Referencing is a crucial aspect of academic writing, and can be connected to how students negotiate their identities and develop a sense of belonging in the academic community. Gravett & Kinchin (2021) suggest that students from non-Anglophone backgrounds often encounter challenges when trying to adopt necessary citation conventions. English proficiency tests such as IELTS do not prepare students to reference correctly, meaning that they are sometimes unfamiliar with what is acceptable on arrival at university (Fatemi & Saito, 2020). Individuals from different cultural backgrounds may find it challenging to integrate the views of others in their work if they have been used to quoting verbatim (see Fox, 1994). They could also struggle with paraphrasing, due to having a limited vocabulary, or finding it difficult to identify the key points in an article.

Pecorari (2023) views plagiarism – presenting the work of others as one's own – as a linguistic act, and thus of interest to EAP educators who are closely involved in writing instruction. As she suggests, plagiarism might occur because new students, especially those without English as their first language, are still coming to terms with academic conventions. However, the rules make no allowances, nor do they fully elucidate whether the intention to deceive should be included in any definition of plagiarism. Although Pecorari (ibid.) suggests that patchwriting – substituting different words and phrases but leaving the original sentence structure unchanged (Thompson et al., 2017) – is a stage which many writers go through, rather than plagiarism per se, it would still be flagged as such. In a Hong Kong-based case study of two students (one Cantonese speaker; one Mandarin speaker) undertaking a writing assignment in English, Li & Casanave (2012) discovered that they did

not intend to plagiarise and were anxious about being accused of doing so. Nevertheless, their writing contained inappropriate borrowing (copying chunks from the original text) and inaccurate citation (confusion about authors' names and primary/secondary sources). The authors argue that their participants were not plagiarists but novice writers who had not yet gained the necessary skills to integrate sources effectively. They suggest that, instead of penalising students automatically, more distinction between deliberate and unintentional plagiarism is required. Students also need to be shown strategies for using sources and paraphrasing effectively. Flowerdew & Li (2007) note that the re-use of common phrases (such as 'in this article') and specific terminology is generally acceptable, whereas extensive copying is a form of academic misconduct (Fatemi & Saito, 2020). Fatemi & Saito (ibid.) point out that even students with a high level of English can commit accidental plagiarism if they are unsure of accepted practices. To advance their understanding, the authors advise holding workshops throughout the academic year – not only at the beginning of term when they might not have an impact.

Recent technological advances mean that it is necessary to consider the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in academic writing, especially new large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT. Since it was released in November 2022, ChatGPT has been a source of controversy, both in universities and in the domain of publishing. Although authors do not always disclose their use of AI, this can sometimes be identified by the retention of phrases such as, 'as an AI language model, I...,' or 'tortured phrases,' whereby standard terminology is translated strangely (Conroy, 2023). Other tell-tale signs are the use of plausible but fictional references and overly formulaic writing (Cotton et al., 2023). However, it may be difficult for time-pressed gatekeepers to detect whether an author has incorporated AI-generated content into their work. Interestingly, some researchers have published papers in which they acknowledge using ChatGPT only in the conclusion (ibid; Jarrah et al., 2023), presumably to show how easy it is to capture a convincing academic tone. I did find both these articles to be suspiciously repetitive in places, but such clues could be easily missed when assessing pieces of writing to a tight deadline.

Of greater concern is the fact that GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) writing detectors are potentially biased against writers whose first language is not English. Liang et al. (2023) explored how GPT detectors judged TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) essays written by Chinese students, and found that over half were wrongly identified as AI-generated. In contrast, work produced by American middle school students (who are presumed to be Anglophones) was accurately classified. The authors suggest that writers from diverse linguistic backgrounds may be penalised if their vocabulary and expression do not appear to match 'native' expectations. This could lead to false accusations, raising levels of anxiety and mistrust. Many students turn to GPT when trying to improve their writing (for example, checking grammar and spelling), but there needs to be clarity about what constitutes acceptable use. Instead of being employed as a tool to 'catch' students

'cheating,' GPT detectors might be adopted as an educational aid, drawing writers' attention to clichéd phrases and thus encouraging greater creativity (ibid).

2.5 Classroom interactions: Group work

A particular focus of research with international students is how they experience group work in the university classroom. Several studies have found that tensions can arise when home and international students are obliged to work together (especially for the purposes of assessment). Harrison & Peacock (2010) question whether the presence of overseas nationals in tertiary institutions raises home students' intercultural awareness, suggesting that 'mere contact' (p.879) between groups is not enough to form meaningful relationships. They define culture as 'the collection of socially learned rules, norms, values and shared meanings that influence individuals' behaviour within a population' (p.881). Without a shared cultural understanding, it can be difficult for home and international students to connect with each other (also see Hajar, 2020; Jarvis & Stakounis, 2010; Keefe & Shi, 2017).

Harrison & Peacock's (2010) findings from focus groups held in two English universities indicate that home students can remain quite separate from their international peers. In theory, participants had the opportunity to mix in tutorials and seminars, but they usually stayed in monocultural groups. Some British nationals believed that classmates from other countries deliberately isolated themselves by sitting together and, as elsewhere (Wang & Moskal, 2019), were frustrated by their perceived reluctance to contribute to discussion. Drawing on Stephan & Stephan's (2000) Integrated Threat Theory, the authors tried to account for domestic students' feelings of discomfort. One key threat was related to academic success, especially as regards collectively assessed group presentations. L1 English speakers believed that some international group members lacked linguistic proficiency or were liable to misunderstand instructions. They were inclined to label overseas nationals as 'other' and to view communication with them as awkward.

Several respondents used disparaging stereotypes to describe Chinese students, who were perceived as having inadequate English language skills and being reluctant to mix. Chinese students, as one British participant put it, 'flock together' (Harrison & Peacock, 2010, p.892) to feel safe and secure; unfortunately, this may make home students less likely to approach them. Although Harrison & Peacock (ibid.) claim that they did not uncover any openly hostile views or racial prejudice, UK interviewees expressed considerable negativity towards international encounters. As they were all undergraduates, this could be partly due to their youth and inexperience: the authors indicate that the small number of mature students in their research held more open-minded views. While a lack of empathy about the challenge of functioning in a foreign country is somewhat understandable, 'passive xenophobia' (p.894) represents a threat to universities' rhetoric of internationalisation.

In an Australian context, Moore & Hampton (2015) investigated domestic and international students' views of how group diversity affects communication, learning, task performance

and grades. The concept of 'othering' is invoked to suggest how the so-called 'in-group' distances itself from the 'outgroup,' i.e., those who are regarded as different. A clear majority (76%) of home students favoured working with classmates from the same cultural/linguistic background, while 64% of overseas students expressed a preference for being in mixed nationality groups. The main reason for disliking intercultural group assessment was perceived communication difficulties, with 33% of English-speaking students citing this as an issue. International participants also referred to cultural differences, for instance, adapting to a new way of working and contributing to fast-paced discussion. As elsewhere (Morita, 2004; Wang & Moskal, 2019), silence was seen as a problem by English-speaking home students, who also referred to their international counterparts' scant knowledge of academic conventions. Although no explicit mention was made of international students bringing down their peers' marks, domestic students did comment on the disadvantages of working with group members whom they believed lacked proficiency in English. In this situation, some felt responsible for ensuring that the task was completed to a high standard, implying that users of other languages were something of a burden. No insight is provided into the views of academic staff, but student participants claimed that intercultural group work was not well-organised, and their valid concerns ignored. They suggested that more guidance in how to manage such interactions, for instance, how to negotiate effectively, would be of benefit.

In another Australia-based investigation, Freeman & Li (2019) interviewed international undergraduates (*n*=6) about their experiences of studying abroad. Despite the small number of participants, their study provides insight into students' academic socialisation and identity construction. Respondents described feeling anxious when communicating with Anglophone Australians, due to a fear of not being understood. At the same time, they reported that home students were not interested in getting to know them, and even ignored their presence in class. In terms of group work, some claimed that their domestic counterparts were reluctant to collaborate effectively, and did not seem to care about their academic performance. One mentioned that he had felt obliged to fix careless work done by his Australian peers; another had to practise for a presentation alone when other members of his group refused to meet with him. This forms an interesting contrast with Moore & Hampton's (2015) research, in which only home students' concerns were noted. Although Freeman & Li's (2019) interviewees positioned themselves as motivated and willing to engage, the learning environment (rather than any individual failings) initially caused them to feel isolated and uncertain. However, the authors claim that they were able to gain confidence in the second semester, and form bonds with Australian classmates during field trips. Some also started to recognise that their English-speaking home counterparts had an equal responsibility for initiating communication.

Other research has specifically explored how students perceive the impact of English language proficiency on group work. In interviews with mixed nationality undergraduates in the UK, Straker (2020) uncovered a belief that successful collaboration is hindered if some

members of the group cannot communicate effectively. While British participants expressed concerns about a language barrier, international students felt that they were being deliberately positioned as deficient in order to justify their exclusion. Home students appeared unsympathetic about the use of languages other than English, with no recognition of the benefits of multilingualism. Tensions also arose when some group members were seen as not contributing enough. Another issue was 'native speakers' being positioned as experts, simply because of their fluency in English. While some were happy to offer support, others found this to be frustrating and stressful. Straker (ibid.) suggests that, to better prepare their students, pre-sessional EAP tutors need a greater understanding of what they might face on degree programmes. As he found, their experiences of working with home students will not necessarily be positive.

2.6 Transition from EAP pre-sessionals to degree programmes

From the literature cited in §2.4 and §2.5, it is evident that international students do encounter new challenges when they embark on their degree programme, even if they have completed a pre-sessional EAP pathway. To give a specific example, in a case study of one Chinese student in New Zealand, Soltani (2018) detected a clear contrast between how he interacted in EAP classes and mainstream university tutorials. Data from interviews and journals show that during the 12-week EAP course, the participant constructed himself as a 'knowledgeable member' (p.25) of the class and was similarly positioned as confident and enthusiastic by his fellow students and tutor. However, once he began the degree programme, his active contributions stopped, and he became almost silent. Despite being motivated, he did not seem to be invested in the practices of his new educational environment. As reported by participants in other studies (Morita, 2004; Moore & Hampton, 2015), he found it difficult to speak in discussions because of the pressure to form coherent sentences rapidly. English-speaking members of his group sometimes (wilfully) misunderstood the points he tried to make, or sought to correct him. The resulting loss of confidence affected him so deeply that he described feeling like a different person.

Some researchers have criticised EAP pre-sessional provision for being too generic (e.g., Jenkins & Wingate, 2015), or have queried whether it offers adequate preparation for university study (Pearson, 2020b; Dooey, 2010). Variations in how such programmes are implemented and assessed might make it difficult to judge their effectiveness. However, as an EAP practitioner, I find the framing of pre-sessional EAP as 'remedial' (Pearson, 2020b, p.421) to be contentious, as this ignores its focus on higher level academic skills. I would also question the claim that EAP students need help to fix their 'deficits' (ibid.), which positions them unfairly as wanting.

Evidence indicates that EAP pre-sessional programmes do in fact provide added value. For instance, Keefe & Shi (2017) followed and interviewed eight students who completed an 8-week EAP programme at a Canadian university before starting their degrees. Their investigation continued into the first academic term to discern the extent to which

undertaking an EAP course prepared participants (all Chinese apart from one Korean national) for disciplinary study. Findings from interviews suggest that, although some initially had low expectations of the EAP programme, they believed it had introduced them to key aspects of university study such as structuring essays and participating in discussion. However, several voiced anxiety about how they would deal with the academic and linguistic content of their degree programmes and, as elsewhere (e.g., Copland & Garton, 2011), were worried about the lack of opportunity to speak English outside of class. It is significant that respondents commented on the benefits of effective instructor feedback, as other research has shown that this can sometimes be inadequate (Fox, 1994; Jenkins & Wingate, 2015; Maringe & Jenkins, 2015).

As anticipated, respondents did meet with difficulties in their first term, especially in terms of listening to lectures and understanding the requirements of academic writing. Being expected to think in a different way, due to the focus on autonomous learning, also caused strain. Keefe & Shi (2017) generally adopt a positive stance on the impact of EAP courses on international students' subsequent performance, although they acknowledge that their small sample cannot necessarily be taken as representative. Nevertheless, the recognition that it takes time for EAP students to engage with their new educational environment is important. The authors suggest that pre-sessional programmes could prepare students for their degrees by integrating authentic subject lectures into the curriculum (also see Thorpe et al., 2017).

Also in Canada, Fox et al. (2014) reported on the questionnaire responses of 641 international students across 36 English language programmes in 26 universities. Investigating ESL provision in addition to EAP meant that both similarities and differences could be identified. To test their hypothesis of a connection between English language programmes, course outcomes and academic and social engagement, the questionnaire included Likert-scale items on language use, anxiety, stress and motivation. Findings indicate that both the EAP and ESL courses had a direct impact on participants' academic and social interaction, although correlation with the latter was predictably weaker for EAP (in which less priority is given to extra-curricular events and social skills). Both programme types also introduced students to strategies for navigating the new academic milieu. Fox et al. (ibid.) use this evidence to argue that the retention of English language pathways is crucial, as they 'make a significant difference in L2 students' transition to a new academic study culture' (p.78). Feeling ready for life and study abroad could enable students to adopt a confident identity, making it less likely that they will experience disengagement and isolation. However, the limitations of this study are acknowledged, such as relying solely on respondents' perceptions as a source of data. In addition, although the authors suggest that individual personality can add to or detract from the impact of language support, it is difficult to pick up on such characteristics in quantitative analysis.

2.7 Perceptions of academic staff who work with international students

As the number of international students in Anglophone HEIs remains high, it is important to understand the views of academic staff who teach them. For example, in a US-based study, Haan et al. (2017) surveyed lecturers about their experiences of working with multilingual classes. Findings demonstrate tension between participants' amenable attitude towards internationalisation and their feelings about how it is put into practice at university level. Several participants expressed cynicism regarding appropriate admission standards for international students (which are based in part on English language proficiency). One comment that 'importing a large population from China does not really provide "diversity," it simply provides more students' (p.42) shows a disconnect between the ideals of internationalisation and the reality. When Chinese students can choose to live, work and socialise together, their presence may do little to enhance intercultural communication. Some respondents claimed that the university prioritises the economic benefits of international enrolment, rather than focusing on strategies which allow students to thrive in an English-medium environment.

Likewise, in the UK, Hennebry et al. (2012) explored the perceptions of international postgraduates and academic staff with teaching responsibilities. Although the sample size was small (43 postgraduates returned a survey questionnaire and 10 were interviewed; 6 staff were interviewed among whom 4 agreed to be observed), findings could be relevant to other universities with a substantial intake of students from overseas. Questionnaire feedback indicates that the majority of student respondents wanted lecturers to modify their delivery for a multilingual audience, for instance, by speaking clearly and defining terminology. In addition, they desired guidance on how to interrupt appropriately and ask questions (see Karas, 2017). Speaking in tutorials was a cause of anxiety, as the fast pace of some classroom interactions left little time for formulating their thoughts. Students appreciated tutors who checked their comprehension and tried to draw them into discussion; however, some reported that they often felt ignored. As has been elucidated elsewhere (Morita, 2004; Freeman & Li, 2019), this can further inhibit participation, making it difficult to gain confidence. A lack of familiarity with academic conventions in English and inadequate feedback made written assignments a challenge. Respondents perceived a connection between their linguistic ability and academic attainment, and some believed that content should be assessed above language.

Hennebry et al.'s (2012) study is unusual in that it includes direct views from lecturers about teaching multinational classes. Most reported clear differences between 'home' and 'international' cohorts, and assumed that students from Asian backgrounds would be reluctant to contribute. While students themselves tended to blame their reticence on language issues, lecturers were more likely to attribute it to cultural differences. This finding is reflected in other research in which students' struggles were linked to their nationality, without other aspects of identity being considered (Freeman and Li, 2019). Although half the

instructors in Hennebry et al.'s (2012) study claimed that they included everyone equally in discussion and facilitated multinational group work, evidence of this (from observations conducted by the researchers) was inconsistent. This suggests that there might be a mismatch between what lecturers believe they are doing and what actually takes place in the classroom.

Some studies show that academic staff have varied perspectives on language socialisation. In the US, Schneider & Jin (2020) interviewed 15 lecturers to gain their perspectives of language socialisation. According to the authors, most interviewees (*n*=11), while not formally trained in SLA theories, nonetheless aligned themselves with the theory of language socialisation to a certain extent. Within this group, four are described as being conscious of the role of socialisation in second language learning and claimed that they actively try to help students navigate this process. Significantly, each of these lecturers was bi- or multilingual and had spent extensive time overseas. Another seven participants did not directly acknowledge the relationship between language learning and socialisation, but demonstrated an awareness of the theory, and believed they had a role in improving students' linguistic proficiency. Although some members of this group were monolingual, all had travelled abroad for various purposes. Participants who were aware of language socialisation stated that they attempt to make students feel welcome and at ease in their classrooms, sometimes through the sharing of personal information (for instance, about their own experiences of being an international student).

The remaining four participants (none of whom spoke other languages), tended to minimise their role in enhancing students' linguistic proficiency. They referred to a lack of training in how to manage multilingual learners, and articulated cynical views about linguistic entrance requirements. These 'resistant language socialisers' (ibid., p.11) were in the minority: most faculty generally had a more positive attitude towards international students. Nevertheless, Schneider & Jin (ibid.) admit that participants were self-selecting (having a declared interest in teaching international students) and could also have been reluctant to express negative opinions during interviews. In addition, the reasons behind less enthusiastic attitudes to international students were not explored, nor were findings corroborated with data from classroom observations or student interviews. The authors posit that faculty with additional language skills and experience of living or working abroad are more likely to empathise with and offer help to international students. However, their suggestion that these factors should be considered when universities recruit candidates for academic positions is somewhat dubious. Bias or discrimination might result if applicants were hired on an alternative basis to their intellectual and professional credentials.

It cannot be assumed that all academic staff adapt their pedagogy to meet the needs of an international cohort. Instructors in Haan et al.'s (2017) survey appeared to be unclear about the meaning of 'instructional techniques for international students' (p.43), and could therefore provide no opinion on whether such 'techniques' benefit all learners. Lecturers

were inclined to underplay their own role in students' linguistic development by referring to the provision of extra language tuition, or the need for more stringent admissions requirements. In addition, some equated meeting international students' needs with lowering standards, sometimes expressed in negative terms: 'remedial skills,' 'dumbing down' (p.43). This reveals a worrying tendency to view speakers of other languages as deficient. Although participants were generally positive about internationalisation, they were not so accepting of the practicalities of teaching users of other languages (which was seen as requiring additional work on their part). In addition, comments such as 'I don't feel capable of teaching them (users of other languages) better English' (Haan et al., 2017, p.45) are telling. First, they indicate that subject lecturers do not always feel qualified to advise students with English language issues, even though every subject discipline will have specialised linguistic requirements. Secondly, they reinforce the attitude, identified by Ding and Bruce (2017), that EAP or ESL are not worthy academic subjects in their own right but exist to compensate for students' apparent deficiencies.

International students may be surprised by the lack of specific guidance provided by their lecturers regarding assessment. Jenkins & Wingate (2015) found that help was only forthcoming when individual students directly requested it and then sometimes reluctantly. They mainly uncovered assimilationist views, including the suggestion that students should be explicitly taught linguistic and cultural aspects of Western academic literacy while undertaking their degree programmes. However, one forward-thinking lecturer proposed that, instead of expecting students from overseas to adapt to Anglocentric teaching and learning styles, curricula could be altered to take account of their diverse cultures and educational backgrounds. This reflects the view that dismissing their problems as 'a language issue' is often too simplistic (Hyland et al., 2008, p.17). Although Jenkins & Wingate (2015) claim that students no longer require competence in English to succeed at an 'international' university, evidence suggests the opposite. In their own study (ibid.), several lecturers were of the opinion that international students should conform to so-called native standards of English, and failed to understand that such expectations could be 'degrading' and 'demoralising' (p.66).

2.8 Social interactions

Moving away from the academic sphere, I will now consider research into how identity is affected by communication in social contexts. For any group of university students, friendships are likely to be a crucial source of support. In a seminal paper that investigated the personal connections of international undergraduates in Hawaii, Bochner et al. (1977) proposed the existence of three distinct networks. In their view, the most central of these is co-national ties, through which individuals maintain and express their cultural identity. Next in line are relationships with host nationals, who provide a useful source of practical information and academic advice. In contrast, bonds with other international students only have a 'recreational' (ibid. p.277) purpose, and are therefore classed as less important. The

authors go so far as to claim that a ‘cosmopolitan friendship circle’ does not result in ‘any obvious extrinsic rewards’ (p.280), thereby diminishing the value of intercultural relationships. However, it should be noted that participants had more access to Americans, who constituted the largest single national group both on and off campus. In addition, there is no recognition of how friendship groups may change over time, nor of the limitation of basing conclusions on data from a relatively small sample (*n*=30).

Unsurprisingly, research in more recent years has contradicted Bochner et al.’s (ibid.) findings. For instance, in a study of the adjustment of international postgraduates at a UK university, Brown (2009) found that participants wished to mix with host nationals for various reasons: to learn more about the UK and cultural norms, to understand social etiquette, and to improve their English language skills. However, they were disappointed by their reception from British people, who reportedly preferred to socialise with each other. Brown (ibid.) describes her respondents as outgoing and keen to make contact, but suggests that they felt detached from home students. This caused them to reach out to their international peers, who were in a similar situation. They also depended on co-nationals for reassurance and advice, even though this restricted their opportunities to communicate in English. While British nationals were generally described as indifferent, rather than hostile, a minority of participants reported incidents of prejudice (see §2.2.2). Brown (ibid.) advises that a better understanding is needed of how both home students and members of the local community perceive international students.

In another UK-based study, Schartner (2015) found clear evidence of Bochner et al.’s (1977) three friendship groups, but states that they fulfilled different purposes. Her interviewees had similar motivations to Brown’s (2009) participants for wishing to mix with British students: enhancing their cultural knowledge, improving their linguistic skills, and seeking out practical information. However, at a basic level, respondents did not know how to go about meeting UK nationals, commenting that international social events did not provide an effective chance to mix. To compensate for not making local friends, the majority formed close relationships with their compatriots. Interestingly, although this provided an important source of comfort at the beginning of their stay, most participants wished to widen their social circle as time progressed. Although they enjoyed the ease of co-national friendships, they were concerned about the detrimental impact on their language skills. Interacting with fellow international students allowed them to use English as a lingua franca, and were a vital source of mutual empathy and emotional support. Schartner (2015) suggests that co-national friendships thus became a secondary network over time, with host ties being least important. However, on courses with a high number of postgraduates from overseas, it is probably inevitable that international friendships are established more easily. Again, the question of how to achieve more ‘integration’ is raised, with possible solutions – mixed accommodation; multinational group work – recognised as not being problem-free.

Spencer-Oatey et al. (2017) gathered both home (British) and international students' views about friendship groups, working with different nationalities, and intercultural communication. While most survey respondents described being content with their social lives, there was less satisfaction among Chinese nationals, who reported finding it more difficult to meet people from other countries, especially British students. It was difficult for the authors to know exactly who students from China were socialising with, as they tended to use the word 'foreigner' to describe anyone not ethnically Chinese. Other nationalities deployed negative stereotypes to characterise their Chinese peers (unwilling to mix, reluctant to participate, and overly reliant on speaking their own language). At the same time, Chinese participants themselves complained about the high number of their compatriots, suggesting that there were 'too many' at the university. Some interviewees believed that cultural differences create a barrier, whereas friendships with co-nationals are easier because of shared world views. They reported disinterest (rather than overt hostility) on the part of their British peers, and seemed to hold themselves responsible for initiating contact. This research highlights the importance of individual differences: while some respondents were keen to extend their social networks, others prioritised academic study. It is clear that students sometimes choose to invest in specific aspects of university life, and not in others (also see Chang, 2011).

EAP students might have unrealistic expectations about their ability to make 'local' friends. In a study of the experiences of Arab postgraduates on a pre-sessional programme at a UK university, Hajar (2020) found that participants arrived with high hopes as regards their language development and social interaction. However, interview extracts reveal that their strongest social connections, at least at the beginning of their stay, were with each other. This might have been expected, as there were only nine Arab students on the EAP course, and opportunities to meet 'home' students are limited during the summer months (when most are off campus). Nonetheless, interviewees expressed disappointment at not making British friends. Like participants in previous studies (Jarvis & Stakounis, 2010; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017), several positioned students from East Asia as 'introverted and less competent English speakers' (Hajar, 2020, p.232) and were somewhat reluctant to mix with them. This shows that deficient labelling can occur within a pre-sessional context, even when all students appear to be in a similar situation. EAP students are often hopeful of befriending British nationals once term started, but evidence suggests that this wish often goes unfulfilled (Schartner, 2015; Beech, 2016; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017).

In their original study, Bochner et al. (1977, p.292) stressed that co-national friendships 'should not be administratively interfered with, regulated against, obstructed, or sneered at.' Chen & Ross (2015) likewise suggest that 'ethnic enclaves' (the high concentration of an ethnic group with a distinctive cultural identity) are a key source of both practical information and social connections. The authors found that their Chinese undergraduate participants relied on advice from peers when adjusting to life in an American university. In class, they were reassured by the presence of co-nationals, and felt that they all 'looked

after' each other. Conversely, there was a sense of anxiety about being in a mostly 'white' classroom. Respondents in this research had formed their own clubs and student societies, and communicated through social media such as WeChat. While this was a source of comfort, it also kept them apart from the wider university population, as they had no need to associate with Americans. Chinese students often produce 'a new campus culture' (p.164), living within their own communities rather than mixing more widely. This approach could be viewed as insular, but it is another valid way of engaging with university life. Some interviewees commented that it took real effort to break away, for instance, deliberately choosing courses which attracted fewer Chinese students. Furthermore, Chen & Ross (ibid.) point out that home students also have some responsibility for initiating communication.

Beech (2016) employs another term – 'cultural cliques' – to explain why students from overseas mainly bond with those from a similar cultural background and/or with a language in common. Data from interviews with international postgraduates at three UK universities suggest that they hoped to meet a diverse range of people while studying abroad. However, some found that their courses were populated almost entirely by fellow international students, which limited their contact with British nationals. Uncertainty about their proficiency in English caused several participants to interact almost exclusively with co-nationals, thus avoiding the need to interpret UK nationals' slang and keep up with their fast-paced speech. Although 'clique,' like 'ghetto' (see Hyland et al., 2008; Jenkins & Wingate, 2015; Holliman et al., 2024) has negative connotations of exclusion, Beech (2016) suggests that such cultural groupings allow students to avoid homesickness and gain a sense of belonging. However, membership of a 'clique' might make it difficult for those who desire a more multicultural experience to get the most out of their overseas stay.

Many students experienced increased isolation during Covid-19, with potentially detrimental effects on both health and well-being and learning (Besser et al., 2022). With regard to those from overseas, evidence suggests that adjusting to unfamiliar 'norms and rules' impacts on social interactions and heightens stress (Wawera & McCamley, 2020, p.1264). Wawera & McCamley (ibid.) found that most (72.13%) of their international student participants (*n*=61) had encountered feelings of loneliness since arriving in the UK, regardless of socio-demographic status. Linguistic proficiency is not directly referenced; however, the fact that interviewees (*n*=6) were selected partly on how well they would cope with an extended conversation in English highlights its potential significance. Descriptions of feeling disorientated and vulnerable are prominent in the findings, along with missing family and friends back home. Although the small number of (all female) interviewees is a limitation, the conclusion that HEIs should attend to the issue of loneliness and how it can be tackled remains pertinent. Interestingly, the authors suggest that international students who engage more frequently with university services report being less lonely, yet there is hesitancy around asking for support and a tendency to associate doing so with failure or weakness. In addition, organised university events that purport to bring people together do not automatically result in meaningful interactions.

2.9 Summary

This literature review has considered theoretical and empirical studies related to language and identity. As can be seen in the cited examples, a largely qualitative approach has been taken when it comes to investigating respondents' sense of self. Consequently, previous research tends to be small-scale, prioritising depth over breadth of data collection. Although this limits the wider applicability of the findings, it does provide deep insight into participants' experiences.

In terms of international students, there seems to be a special focus on how they adapt to unfamiliar academic, social and linguistic settings. Empirical evidence suggests that a multitude of factors impact on their investment and self-positioning. It is certainly valid to draw attention to the various challenges (both academic and language-based) that they encounter. However, if too much emphasis is placed on these difficulties, students' own abilities and cultural capital might be overlooked. More recognition of their individual strengths would help to contest deficient positioning, not to mention the essentialist notion that 'international students' form a homogeneous entity. While some scholarly work has specifically considered EAP students, further work is needed to address the gap in knowledge regarding their linguistic practices and identity negotiation. Notably, only two studies in this wide-ranging review (Keefe & Shi, 2017; Soltani, 2018) tracked EAP students from a pre-sessional programme on to their degrees. Thus, there is a pressing need for further longitudinal research into how they navigate the crucial transition process.

The discussions in this chapter highlight the complex, dynamic nature of identity and its profound connection to language practices. This conceptualisation is especially relevant when researching the experiences of people who move into new sociocultural settings. Therefore, my study aims to build on these strands of research by focusing on EAP students in a Scottish university: a context which has not previously been investigated. It has an exploratory agenda and seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do EAP students perceive the identity positions available to them in a Scottish university context?
2. What factors influence EAP students' ability to invest in the linguistic and social practices of new academic communities?
3. What are the implications – of questions 1. and 2. – for pedagogy and university policy regarding EAP programmes and internationalisation?

Chapter 3 Research framework

The ideas put forth by scholars in Chapter 2 have informed my understanding of identity and its compelling connection to language. In what follows, I discuss the broad conceptual framework on which the present study is based. These premises will collectively inform the philosophical underpinnings and methodological approaches adopted throughout.

3.1 Language and identity

The social turn in SLA research (Block, 2003) provided a complement to theories which conceptualise language as a set of fixed rules, and learning as a primarily cognitive process (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). In the 1990s, Firth & Wagner (1997) highlighted what they saw as an imbalance between cognitive orientations towards SLA and social and contextual approaches:

> Language is not only a cognitive phenomenon, the product of the individual's brain; it is also fundamentally a social phenomenon, acquired and used interactively, in a variety of contexts for myriad practical purposes (p.296).

According to the authors, previous SLA research tended to position the language learner as 'a deficient communicator struggling to overcome an underdeveloped L2 competence, striving to reach the "target" competence of an idealized native speaker' (ibid., p.285). While Davies (2004, p.437) defines a native speaker as 'a person who has early acquired the language', he also points out that it is an elusive concept, based on 'myth-like properties' (see §1.2). Firth & Wagner (1997) challenge the notion that 'native speaker' and non-native speaker' denote defined groups whose members are homogeneous. Furthermore, they argue that language learning is not simply an individual process, dependent on aptitude and knowledge. Instead, the significance of social and discursive contexts needs to be considered.

Block (2007, p.863) observes that Firth & Wagner's 1997 article was part of a 'general trend' towards research into the connection between second language learning and identity, which is conceived of as fragmented and contested, rather than fixed and stable. He clarifies that moving to a different sociocultural setting is not a straightforward process of adding 'new to old' or becoming 'half and half' (p.864). In fact, it can result in changes to identity which are complicated and may result in 'the uncertainty of feeling a part and feeling apart' (ibid., p.864). In this article, as in his later work (Block, 2013), he suggests that identity researchers tend to emphasise people's individual agency without considering the social structures which potentially constrain their choices. Instead of assuming that people always have the ability to shape their social realities, Block (2013, p.36) asserts that not all aspects of identity 'are up for negotiation at any given moment.'

While the impossibility of accurately defining identity is well-recognised, Benwell & Stokoe (2006) explain two different positions. One aligns with the view that, although people may change how they present themselves depending on specific circumstances, underpinning

this is a ‘private, pre-discursive and stable identity’ (p.3). Conversely, a social constructionist perspective frames identity as open to interpretation by others and denies the existence of ‘an absolute self, lurking behind discourse’ (p.4). Blommaert (2005, p.203) posits that, although identity is ‘who and what you are’, it is dependent on a variety of factors: context, occasion and purpose. In his view, all identity categories ‘have to be enacted and performed in order to be socially salient’ (p.205). Furthermore, how others respond is significant: whether they recognise someone’s desired identity or label them in ways which are unwelcome, leading to the ‘social categorisation called *othering*’ (p.205). The role of power relations is also recognised, as not everyone will have equal access to ‘identity-building resources’ (p.207). Blommaert (ibid.) uses the term ‘indexicality’ to describe how the whole phenomenon of identity attributes are read off a person’s language and other forms of behaviour. A complex indexicality is incorporated in every speech act (Cowie et al., 2022), and it is the principal means through which a linguistic form and its social interpretation are connected (Hall-Lew et al., 2021). However, qualities that are esteemed in one setting are sometimes under-valued in another, leading to exclusion:

> [...] socially recognisable, valid identities in one part of the world may not correspond to their perceived counterparts in another part of the world. And the key to the process is indexicality. The indexicalities that provide opportunities for inhabited group identities *there* are different from the indexicalities that provide opportunities for ascriptive, categorical identities *here* (Blommaert., 2005, p.211).

The possible tension between ‘inhabited and ascribed identity’ is relevant to language learners, who sometimes find themselves being negatively labelled on the basis of their linguistic ability or cultural background (Beinhoff & Rasinger, 2016). How a person perceives their sense of self may come into conflict with others’ interpretations, resulting in tension and making identity ‘a site of struggle’ (De Costa & Norton, 2016, p.594).

What a person says and how they speak can also convey a sense of who they are. Joseph (2016) states that others will use our linguistic practices as a means of judging us, and this is something over which we have little control. Identities are not fixed or ‘essential’ (ibid., p.22), but constructed (for instance, among interlocutors during communication), and affected by context. Similarly, Ivanič (1998) argues that we possess multiple identities which are not necessarily always in harmony. In her view, identity crises occur, not because of individual failings, but because of a disparity between how identities are formed in familiar and new social settings. While she is writing in the context of mature students returning to education, this line of thought could be equally applicable to people embarking on university study overseas. As Jindal-Snapes & Rienties (2016, p.2) note, they undergo ‘multiple contextual transitions – moving to a new country, moving to a new educational system, and moving to programmes for a higher education degree.’ Crossing geographical and sociocultural boundaries can itself be a destabilising influence on one’s sense of self (Block, 2007).

Block (2007) comments that little research was conducted into identity as a site of tension before the publication of Norton Peirce's (1995) seminal article. In this paper, she calls for 'a comprehensive theory of social identity' (p.9) and stresses the hitherto disregarded role of power relations. She challenges Krashen's (1981) idea that individual levels of motivation, confidence and anxiety combine to form an 'affective filter' which impacts on language learning. In her view, affective factors are socially constructed, influenced by inequality, changeable and contradictory:

> [...] language is not only a linguistic system of words and sentences, but also a social practice in which identities and desires are negotiated in the context of complex and often unequal social relationships (Norton, 2016, p.476).

In a report on her research with immigrant women in Canada, Norton Peirce (1995, p.13) demonstrates that 'it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self.' She introduces the concept of investment (see §3.2) as a more appropriate lens than motivation through which to analyse the complex, sometimes ambivalent relationships between language learners and their new community. Bourdieu's (1977) economic metaphor is invoked to suggest that, if individuals invest in another language, they expect to increase their cultural capital (see §3.4) in return. Although Norton Peirce (1995) describes her participants as highly motivated, they were not always able to view themselves as 'legitimate speakers' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.21) in social interactions. However, on other occasions, they resisted the subject positions ascribed to them by Anglophone Canadians, such as being an inferior speaker of English. These findings pertain to international students, as they too may find themselves being marginalised and labelled as deficient. Despite their generally more affluent backgrounds than the immigrant women in Norton Peirce's (1995) study, it is questionable whether they can exert more power. In any case, we need to consider the factors which cause someone to speak or remain silent, feel confident or anxious, or be motivated or unmotivated (ibid.).

Bendle (2002, p.5) advises against conceptualising identity wholly as a 'product of discourse and inherently fragmented, multiple and transient.' He cautions that this can lead to the under-theorising of identity, whereby it becomes whatever researchers require to advance their argument. In addition, he queries the idea that essentialist views of identity always reinforce oppression, whereas constructionist perspectives automatically lead to positive social outcomes. Viewing identity as an 'elastic category' (p.12) ignores the potential social and psychological limitations on people's capacity to adapt. According to Pavlenko & Blackledge (2004), identities are best approached in their entirety, instead of through the lens of one particular aspect. On the other hand, people might sometimes wish to present their identity as unitary by focusing on gender, ethnicity, class, or another category (Norton, 2013).

The notion that 'identity work shapes language learning and language learning shapes identity work' (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p.32) has key implications for educational contexts.

As Gayton & Fisher (2022, p.299) state, the classroom is 'a productive site for learners to participate in the construction of their linguistic (and specifically multilingual) identities.' Similarly, Joseph (2004) views the classroom as a social grouping like any other, in which languages are constructed and maintained. He adds that, in moving away from perceiving language as purely cognitive, identity research contributes to the '*rehumanising* of linguistics' (p.226). This has resonance when considering how the educational and social needs of international students can be met. For the current study, Norton's (2013, p.4) definition of identity as 'the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future' is therefore salient.

3.2 Investment

In Norton's (2013, p.50) view, theories of motivation in SLA (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005) attempt to 'quantify a learner's commitment to learning the target language', and do not 'capture the complex relationship between power, identity and language learning.' She explains that the concept of investment 'signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language, and their often-ambivalent desire to learn and practice it.' Investment moves away from viewing someone in binary terms such as motivated/unmotivated, extroverted/introverted, or uninhibited/inhibited, and instead considers the connection between identity, language learning and social context (Darvin & Norton, 2015). According to Norton (2013, p.47), greater attention also needs to be paid to power relations, which determine how 'symbolic and material resources [...] are produced, distributed and validated.' As well as asking whether a student is motivated, it is thus crucial for instructors to question whether they are invested in the practices of a given classroom or community. Even if a learner is highly motivated, certain conditions may constrain their ability to invest, for example, if the classroom practices are prejudiced in some way (Norton, 2016).

In view of globalisation, Darvin & Norton (2015) re-visited the notion of investment, recommending an expanded model which integrates identity, ideology and capital. They suggest that examining ideology – defined as 'a normative set of ideas' (p.43) – offers insight into how power is manifested in communicative events. As migration has become more fluid, and people move between virtual and face-to-face settings, the 'asymmetric distribution of power no longer rests on the simple dichotomy of native speaker and language learners' (p.41). They advise that 'systematic patterns of control' (p.42), and ideologies need to be interrogated, explaining that these dominant modes of thinking determine who is included or excluded. In an institutional context, such as higher education, certain socially available positions will be granted more prestige than others (Ivanič, 1998). Thus, instructors need to discern which identity positions offer the potential for 'social engagement and interaction' (Norton, 2013, p.6) and avoid reinforcing those which marginalise or silence students.

In a recent paper, Darvin & Norton (2023) further elucidate the difference between investment and motivation, suggesting that they are 'complementary rather than contradictory constructs' (p.30). Unlike theories of motivation, investment acknowledges that learners cannot always choose the conditions in which they interact and participate, due to unequal distribution of power in the social world. The focus on power thus distinguishes investment from motivation, recognising not only learner 'differences' but also 'inequalities' (p.35). Furthermore, this conceptualisation highlights the tension between agency and structure and considers how much freedom individuals have to make choices (see Block, 2013). The 'socially constructed nature of language learning' (Darvin & Norton, 2023, p.32) means that the conditions under which communication occurs need to be taken into account.

3.2.1 Investment strategies

Evidence suggests that individuals may decide to invest or not to invest in the new community according to their past experiences and future trajectories. For example, Chang (2011) investigated how the academic and professional backgrounds of two male Taiwanese students impacted on their investment when undertaking a PhD in the US. Interview excerpts show that the participants were selective in their investment, depending on their desired roles in imagined communities. In their discipline (engineering), English language proficiency was not a major factor in academic success, but both viewed it as playing a part in their future goals (working in American industry; publishing in academic journals). Although the limited nature of their social networks is highlighted, this is not presented as a problem. One student focused only on his academic work, while the other, along with his wife, did not wish to spend money on socialising when their stay in the US was temporary. Being somewhat isolated from the host community did not seem to have a detrimental effect on either respondent's achievement. Rather, they appeared to deliberately invest in aspects of life which they deemed worthwhile: 'picking which battles to fight' (p.226). As mature students, the interviewees had previous academic and professional experience, which possibly granted them more agency. However, the fact that a metaphor of combat is used indicates that their experiences in the US were not entirely free from struggle. Indeed, Chang (ibid.) acknowledges that they were affected by 'contextual and structural constraints' (p.226), such as how their academic credentials would be valued in the US and Taiwan, and the availability of financial support.

Crowther's (2020) study of two female Chinese students' level of investment during their first year at an American university reveals that successful academic and social adjustment is a complex process. Although both research participants had completed their final years of schooling in the US, this did not guarantee a smooth transition into higher education. Data from interviews show that one student's positive experience of American high school, where she had a strong social network and sense of belonging, led to her feeling like a legitimate user of English. Consequently, she continued to invest in her language skills, which in turn

motivated her to establish a full social life at university. In contrast, the other participant had a much more mixed history with overseas study. While initially optimistic about attending high school in the US, she encountered rejection and racism from her American peers, which resulted in a lack of investment in her English language skills. At university, she remained more integrated with her co-nationals, a coping strategy which has been noted elsewhere (e.g., Brown, 2009; Schartner, 2015; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017). Interestingly, she also claimed that she did not require a high level of English to succeed academically, since she could pay Chinese tutors to explain and proof-read her work. Relying on two narrative accounts means that findings are not necessarily applicable to other settings. Nonetheless, the study demonstrates how apparently similar individuals might have very different levels of investment in the new academic community.

In another context, Shahri (2018) invokes the concept of voice (e.g., Kramsch, 2003), Bakhtin's (1981) notion of appropriation, and investment theory (Darvin & Norton, 2015) to present case studies of two young men learning English in Iran. Drawing on Bucholtz and Hall (2005), he argues that learners invest not only in English, but 'in specific personae or identities mediated by English' (Shahri, 2018, p.89). The findings of his study seem to confirm this idea, as interview extracts indicate that the respondents invested in different voices and identities. One positioned himself as an enthusiastic user of English (to the extent that he often chose not to speak his first language) and was proud of being able to employ informal idioms gleaned from American films and TV shows. Conversely, the other student used formal expressions in order to make his English sound more sophisticated. Shahri (ibid.) postulates that this was connected to his future plans: continuing his education abroad and starting a PhD. Both participants appeared to perform identity through voice in a conscious way, thereby gaining some kind of capital. This is evidenced by their ability to explain (in interviews) specific language choices. However, the high level of agency they displayed in identity construction could be due to their status as successful users of English. Their sense of confidence, while clearly discernible, may not be usual among other students in similar situations.

Lee (2014) investigated the experiences of a Korean postgraduate studying engineering in the US through the lens of investment. The author states that the participant's ('Mina') English was different from that of other students from comparable backgrounds, but does not provide specifics about her language level. Nonetheless, she gives the impression that Mina was highly motivated and determined. Instead of being demoralised by not being able to understand Americans at the beginning of her stay, she set up her own 'self-directed curriculum' (p.444), focusing on pronunciation, accent and pace in 'natural' conversation. Notably, Lee (ibid.) reports that Mina described (in an interview) encountering 'negative stereotypes' (p.446) when trying to find an academic advisor. The first (American) lecturer she tried to work with made her feel uncomfortable, and his other advisees in the lab tended to ignore her. Mina seemed to assume that her English was the issue ('he [...] makes me feel that I am not a native'), as does the author herself, who posits that 'Dr X' did not

understand her participant's language difficulties. There is no evidence to prove that this was indeed the case: perhaps the student's research interests simply lay outside the lecturer's area of expertise. However, even if Mina misunderstood his reasoning, Lee's (ibid.) description of her distress is credible. Although she considered leaving the programme, she was eventually able to find another advisor (like herself, from a non-Anglophone country), who was more encouraging and empathetic. In addition, she was happy speaking English with this lecturer's other advisees, who are described as coming from diverse backgrounds. Being in a 'safe, non-threatening and supportive' (p.448) environment allowed her to re-invest in both her studies and English language skills.

Li & Li (2020) note that most insights into language learner identity have been gleaned from studies conducted in ESL or EFL settings. There is plentiful work based on students in the Anglosphere (Li, 2015), but less attention has been paid to those acquiring other languages abroad. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore alternative contexts in depth, I am wary of reinforcing the assumption that linguistic investment equates to investment in English. In fact, some research has considered the experiences of English speakers studying in China. Li (ibid.) explored how international postgraduates with an advanced level of Chinese developed a sense of belonging, while Tian & Lowe (2014) focused on American students' (with little or no Chinese ability) struggle to establish an intercultural identity during an exchange programme. In a similar vein, Du's (2015) work on American students in China found that most embraced their 'foreigner' identity and were proud of being able to make themselves understood in Chinese. Elsewhere, Bae (2012) showed how Korean families in Singapore sought to attain an 'elite multilingualism' by investing in English and Mandarin, sometimes at the expense of their first language. In a different context, Miao & Wang (2023) concluded that various factors, including teaching approaches, economic reasons, and attitudes towards the language affected Arabic learners' level of investment.

People may wish to acquire another language in order to adopt a specific type of identity. For example, Bemporad & Jeanneret (2016) showed how learners of French or Spanish associated being able to read literary texts with increased cultural capital and social advantage. Interestingly, McManus et al. (2014) note that a period of residence in Europe (often France) traditionally played an important role in the education of English-speaking elites[6]. They suggest that British students who opt to take a year abroad are a select group with a high degree of motivation to develop their linguistic skills. At the same time, some

[6] Facilitating overseas exchange in Europe has arguably been made more difficult by Britain's withdrawal from the Erasmus+ programme post-Brexit. Its replacement, the Turing Scheme, has been criticised for a lack of reciprocity (Lewis, 2023). At the time of writing, the Labour government has not committed to re-joining Erasmus+ and the Scottish government's proposal for a separate, two-way mobility scheme continues to experience delays (Universities Scotland, 2023).

students undertaking this kind of sojourn only invest in the language and culture in a limited way (ibid), preferring to maintain ties with home, or to associate mainly with others from English-speaking backgrounds (Kinginger, 2013, 2015).

3.3 Imagined communities

In Benedict Anderson's original conceptualisation, the term 'imagined communities' referred to nations. He explains that:

> the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (1991, p.6).

In terms of language learning, Darvin & Norton (2023, p.36) posit that people invest 'to realise the identities, relationships and communities they have imagined and desired for themselves.' Imagined identities can encompass a wide variety of options, unlike the ideal self in theories of motivation (Dörnyei, 2005), where the focus is only on becoming a proficient language user. Norton (2013) argues that imagined communities, which offer opportunities to appropriate a desirable future identity, are key to understanding someone's investment in a new language community. She elucidates that imagined communities refer to 'groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible' (p.8) who are associated with our future lives. Membership is desirable because of the potential for wider opportunities and better social experiences (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). However, societal constraints also influence a person's ability to envisage a different future (Kanno & Norton, 2003). Kanno & Norton (ibid.) refer to an adult immigrant learner whose ESL tutor commented that her language level was not high enough to take a computer course. The student had been a teacher herself in her home country, and continued to seek an imagined community of professionals. She resisted being labelled as a newcomer by withdrawing from the ESL class and (successfully) completing the computer course.

The above example shows that, in the context of language learning, 'imagination should not be equated with fantasy or withdrawal from reality' (ibid., p.244). In contrast, imagined communities hold just as much substance as a person's lived experience in terms of shaping their investment and goals (Norton & Toohey, 2011). In order to understand learners' needs, teachers should appreciate that the scope of their desired communities may well extend beyond the classroom (Norton & Gao, 2008). As Ushioda (2011, p.204) suggests, learning another language 'enables us to expand and express our identity or sense of self in new and interesting ways': therefore, it is important that instructors encourage students to form a holistic picture of their future selves.

3.4 Positioning theory and agency

Davies & Harré (1990, p.45) affirm that positioning is a 'conversational phenomenon', with conversation being framed as 'a form of social interaction.' Positioning theory recognises 'the ways in which people actively produce social and psychological realities' (p.45). Instead

of being a fixed entity, our sense of self is constructed through participation in discursive practices: who we are 'is always an open question' (p.46) depending on which positions are made available. Harré et al. (2009, p.10) elucidate that positioning is a discursive process because it 'happens in the course of an interaction.' Interactive positioning is when what one person says positions another, while reflexive positioning is carried out by the individual themselves. The negotiation of identities embodies interaction between reflexive and interactive positioning (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004), both of which are often unconscious (Davies & Harré, 1990). People may adopt multiple or contradictory positions, or negotiate a new position by resisting that which was initially offered. In effect, 'position' offers a dynamic alternative to the more fixed concept of 'role' (Kayi-Aydar, 2013).

Language learners can be categorised 'before they even speak' due to the existence of accepted criteria (which might relate to race, ethnicity, gender, or social class) that determine their inclusion or exclusion (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p.43). Positioning theory provides an interesting lens through which to view classroom interaction, for instance, in terms of whose voices are heard (Kayi-Aydar & Miller, 2018). Kayi-Aydar (2019) notes that it also affords insight into participation in multilingual contexts, forcing us to rethink our assumptions about language teaching and learning. Gaining access to learning opportunities in a social setting does not only depend on personal characteristics such as being extraverted, motivated, or self-confident. Social context and power relations also play a significant part in the level of access granted (ibid., 2019). In a classroom setting, students who adopt a proficient identity, or who are positioned as capable by the teacher, are more likely to participate. Kayi-Aydar (2013) refers to observing English language lessons in which one student had a propensity to take over discussions and sometimes challenged the teacher's authority. She suggests that he restricted his classmates' contributions by assuming a position of dominance, showing that power relations are not always equal even among learners.

Anderson (2009) argues that acts of positioning (whether explicit or implicit) occur at both the ideological level and in everyday communication. In his view, the theory has been too focused on the latter (momentary interactions) without taking notice of how positioning occurs across interactions (outside of a particular episode). He argues that we need to acknowledge the relationship between immediate social interactions and larger social structures. In educational settings, students are 'located culturally and historically as learners who are certain kinds of people within trajectories of knowing and being' (p.293). Multiple factors are relevant when deciding what a 'successful' learner looks like, including their interactions, academic performance, and social connections. For instance, 'quiet' could equate to being intelligent or respectful in one situation; confused or disengaged in another. Depending on the perceptions of others in the classroom (such as the teacher and other students), such positioning could influence future interpretations of the student's actions, or might be completely irrelevant.

According to Ahearn (1991, p.110), language is 'a form of social action', as meanings are co-constructed by interlocutors in particular contexts. She defines agency as 'the socioculturally mediated capacity to act' (p.112). However, in her view, it is a mistake to equate agency with free will, as this neglects the influence of social and cultural factors on a person's actions and behaviour. Although social structures shape and constrain individual agency (Block, 2013), they do not entirely determine language learning or use (Norton, 2013). Language learners who struggle to make their voices heard from one position can employ agency to challenge dominant meanings and appropriate a more powerful identity for themselves (ibid.). Ivanič (1998, p.12) likewise suggests that identity is 'socially constructed rather than socially determined.' While powerful ideologies can restrict people's sense of self, they also have the potential to resist and find alternative identities. Indeed, the notion of multiple identities grants agency to those who may be disempowered, allowing them to negotiate a more advantageous position (Baxter, 2016). However, the degree of influence they can exert is not equal across all contexts, as power relations always play a role in communication with others (Douglas Fir Group, 2016).

3.5 Bourdieu: Capital and habitus

The French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, theorised that social space is constructed by different forms of capital: 'those properties capable of conferring strength, power and consequently power to the holder' (1987, p.4). Economic capital is 'immediately and directly convertible into money' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.242), while social capital is connected to membership of a group. Cultural capital may be 'institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications' and is 'convertible into economic capital in certain conditions' (ibid., p.242).

The notion of cultural capital originally sought to explain the contrasting academic attainment of children from different social backgrounds, but can also be applied to other contexts. In Bourdieu's (ibid.) view, it is not acceptable to blame lack of achievement on individual shortcomings: instead, we need to understand how the education system itself reinforces inequalities. He also delineated three varieties in which cultural capital can exist (ibid, p.243). The 'embodied' state refers to 'long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body;' the 'objectified state' to cultural goods such as books and artwork; and the 'institutionalised state' to the way cultural capital is manifested in the form of academic qualifications. Both embodied and objectified forms of cultural capital take time to accrue, and their distribution is constrained by social structures.

For a practice or a property to function as a 'sign of distinction' (Bourdieu, 2013, p.297), it needs only to be viewed in relation to other properties or functions in the social context. While such signs of distinction are often treated as 'innate attributes' (ibid., p.297), Bourdieu argues that they are in fact relational. Symbolic capital is 'the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognised as legitimate' (Bourdieu, 1987, p.4). This can result in 'symbolic violence,' whereby capital 'imposes itself as an authority calling for recognition' (Bourdieu, 2013, p.299). Some forms of language will bring symbolic capital to

their speakers (those which are deemed legitimate); others will not (Joseph, 2020). If someone does not conform to social norms, they can be met with symbolic violence in the form of 'condescending speech acts and withering glances' (ibid., p.109).

Symbolic capital is linked to a speaker's position in the social structure. Bourdieu (1977, p.648) emphasises that language 'is not only an instrument of communication or even of knowledge, but also an instrument of power.' His notion of legitimate language highlights that not everyone will have the same ability 'to impose reception' (ibid., p.648); in other words, to make others listen. Symbolic power relations mean that some people are '*not in a position to speak*' (ibid., p.650, italics in the original), whereas others easily gain the attention of their audience. According to Bourdieu (ibid., p.651), discourse is 'a symbolic asset which can receive different values depending on the market on which it is offered.' It is not only related to a speaker's supposed competence, but is always socially situated (Bourdieu et al., 1994). Consequently, 'linguistic practices are measured against legitimate practices, i.e., the practices of those who are dominant' (Bourdieu, 1991, p.53). Our sense of what constitutes acceptable language usage in a given situation may cause such constraint that 'some will be reduced to silence' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.655). Although Bourdieu is writing in the context of social class when he mentions the 'severe linguistic insecurity' (1977, p.658) experienced by individuals in formal situations (such as giving a speech), this could equally apply to international students in Anglophone universities.

People's experience can be conceptualised through the notion of the habitus, which Bourdieu & Passeron (1990, p.40) define as 'a system of schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action.' It is also a practical sense of what is appropriate in a given situation (Bourdieu, 1994). Habitus is transmitted 'without passing through language or consciousness' but is 'inscribed in our bodies, in things, in situations and everyday lives' (Bourdieu, 1991, p.51). As the internalised mental structures through which a person engages with the world are generally reproductive rather than transformative (Bourdieu, 1989), some have suggested that the habitus is far removed from the concept of free will (Ahearn, 2001). However, Bourdieu (2000, p.180) affirmed that 'habitus is not a destiny', suggesting that individuals can seek out opportunities to increase their symbolic capital. Joseph (2020) argues that the habitus represents 'the tension between individual agency and social forces' (p.109): although we are 'defined by the system' (p.116) to some extent, we still experience the ability to make active choice.

3.6 Overview

This chapter has discussed how identity is conceptualised within the present study. As explained herein, social constructionist perspectives frame it as dynamic, influenced by context, and a potential site of tension. Such an approach is valuable when researching the experiences of EAP students, who can undergo changes in their sense of self when moving to a different linguistic and learning environment. Investment, which has been described as a sociological complement to the psychological notion of motivation (Norton, 2016), is a

useful lens through which to explore their perceptions. It moves away from the idea of personal failings and recognises the effect of sociocultural factors on a person's ability to participate in discourse communities. Furthermore, it is crucial that we acknowledge research participants' own ideas about themselves – including their imagined, future identities – rather than resorting to harmful categorisations. Relatedly, positioning theory provides valuable insight into the potential conflict between self- and ascribed identity categorisations. In terms of language and identity, EAP students may be marginalised, for instance, as less proficient users of English. However, it is possible to contest such negative labelling, and adopt a stronger position from which to speak.

Bourdieu's (e.g., 1977) concept of cultural capital helps to explain how speakers are perceived within social structures, emphasising the impact of inequitable power relations. Although the idea of agency (Ahearn, 1991) suggests that people can resist the influence of dominant ideologies, this might not be feasible for all. Of particular relevance to my thesis is the fact that an EAP student's habitus will likely experience a clash with the expectations and presumptions of the people they encounter in the new environment. It is also necessary to ask whether their own cultural capital is appreciated in a setting which might place greater import on adapting to new demands.

Taken together, this theoretical framework enables a thorough exploration of EAP students' identity negotiation as they embark on university life overseas. It fits well with a qualitative approach (explained in Chapter 4), which seeks an in-depth understanding of individual human experience.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Mixed methods research design

Operationalising identity is always a challenging process in applied linguistics research, as we can never really 'know' how a person views themselves. I knew that I wanted to speak directly to participants when gathering data, but, as will be explained in this chapter, decided to adopt a mixed methods approach. I believed that this would allow me to fully probe the three research questions:

1. How do EAP students perceive the identity positions available to them in a Scottish university context?
2. What factors influence EAP students' ability to invest in the linguistic and social practices of new academic communities?
3. What are the implications – of questions 1. and 2. – for pedagogy and university policy regarding EAP programmes and internationalisation?

While there is no firm agreement around how to design and carry out a mixed methods study (Mackey & Bryfonski, 2018), Creswell & Plano Clark (2011, p.5) explain that this type of research gathers and analyses 'both qualitative and quantitative data in order to gain in-depth understanding of a phenomenon.' They add that the two forms of data are then integrated, either sequentially or by embedding one within the other. The researcher needs to consider the relationship between both strands, the order in which they will be conducted, and whether they will carry equal weight. According to Hashemi & Babaii (2013), including qualitative and quantitative steps does not automatically result in genuine mixed methods research. If the findings are not properly integrated, they suggest that the study is best described as 'quasi-mixed.' However, it is possible for researchers to employ both qualitative and quantitative strategies while remaining firmly in one camp (Mackey & Bryfonski, 2018).

Mackey & Bryfonski (ibid., p.104) define mixed methods research as 'a strategy of inquiry that allows the researcher to explore a research question from multiple angles.' Like Hashemi & Babaii (2013), they believe that such designs enhance our understanding of language practices in different settings. In the field of applied linguistics, neither quantitative nor qualitative methods alone may adequately address a researcher's questions (Mackey & Bryfonski, 2018). Johnson et al. (2010, p.68) describe three broad types of mixed methods research: qualitative-dominant, quantitative-dominant and equal status or 'pure' mixed methods, suggesting that this is better viewed as a continuum, rather than precise separation.

My research was designed to be qualitative-dominant, but with an initial quantitative step. The motivation behind this was largely pragmatic: I hoped to gain a broader sense of international students' experiences and to recruit interview participants. Therefore, while clearly not forming a separate study, the questionnaire data could be seen as secondary to findings from interviews. However, it is possible to integrate quantitative and qualitative data by connecting questionnaire answers to interview comments. Creswell et al. (2008)

point out that one way of merging data from each strand is to use comparable question topics in both a closed-ended survey and open-ended interviews. Yin (2006) goes further, suggesting that interview questions might repeat some of those posed in an initial survey. Although my interview questions were more in-depth than the Likert statements in the survey, they did converge around broadly similar areas.

Pragmatism is an appropriate philosophical lens through which to conduct mixed methods studies, as the researcher selects the approaches best suited to fulfilling their aims (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004, p.16) remind us that the idea of 'fully objective and value-free research is a myth' (p.16), given that even quantitative investigators need to make subjective decisions about what to study, which instruments to use, and how to evaluate findings. However, they also clarify that rigorous research entails more than statements of individual beliefs. From a pragmatic point of view, knowledge is 'both constructed *and* based on the world we experience and live in' (ibid., p.18). According to Creswell et al. (2008, p.81), researchers need to 'display ingenuity in building customized solutions to their methodological dilemmas using their research experience.' When deciding which approach to take, the specific purpose and context of the study has to be considered so that the research questions can be suitably addressed (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Darvin (2018, p.779) advises identity researchers to 'adopt, modify, and design methodologies that fit their specific purposes': mixed methods offers this flexibility.

A particular challenge of mixed methods design is the requirement for researchers to acquire skills in both quantitative and qualitative areas. While it would be ideal to form a collaborative team, in which each member possesses both sets of skills, this is not always feasible (Creswell et al., 2008). Another complication is the length of time needed to implement the study. Creswell et al. (ibid.) suggest that, for doctoral students, an unequal treatment of phases is acceptable, for example, a larger initial survey followed by a few interviews. I was also reassured that some mixed methods studies in the field of linguistics (e.g., McCrocklin & Link, 2016) had a similar numbers of participants to my own. At the same time, I realised that integrating the quantitative and qualitative stages would not necessarily be a straightforward process. Mackey & Bryfonski (2018) remind us that findings might diverge, for instance, if the focal participants do not correspond to patterns noted in the wider sample. However, contradictions are not necessarily a problem, and may reveal 'interesting patterns at the individual level' (ibid., p.116).

4.1.1 Convergent mixed methods design

Integration was confirmed in my study, as I gathered both quantitative and qualitative data about the same phenomenon (Plano Clark, 2019). My sample of student interviewees was drawn from the more widely distributed survey, a strategy Yin (2006) refers to as nesting. According to Woolley (2009, p.7), components need to be 'mutually illuminating', resulting in findings that are 'greater than the sum of parts.' Yet, it can be difficult to combine the analyses and interpretation from each source, especially if the researcher has methodological preferences (Bryman, 2007). I am more comfortable working with text than numbers, but still had to decide how to make effective use of findings from the questionnaire.

The aim of my qualitatively driven mixed methods study (Creswell et al., 2006) is to provide a comprehensive picture of international students' identity negotiation during their time in Scotland. As Hands (2022) notes, Likert scale questionnaires alone cannot provide rich insight into participants' thoughts and experiences. In contrast, qualitative interviews can 'capture authentically the lived experiences of people' (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006, p.49). While the former do not offer much scope for nuance, the latter provide more detailed information and the opportunity to follow up responses. Although I was not concerned about the study dividing into two separate components (Yin, 2006), I wished to go beyond presenting findings in parallel (Bryman, 2007). My initial survey contributed to answering the research questions in its own right, but also enhanced data gathered from student interviews and classroom observations. With this in mind, I adopted a convergent mixed methods design (Fitzpatrick, 2016; Plano Clark 2019), whereby quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analysed separately, within a similar time frame. The findings are then merged during the interpretation stage, with the aim of achieving greater understanding and new insights (Fetters et al., 2013).

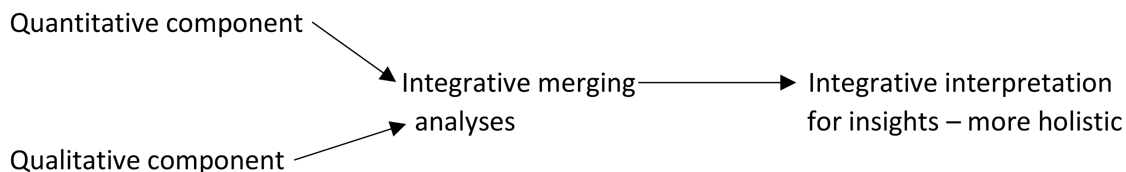

Figure 4.1: Integrating findings (Plano Clark, 2019, p.107)

Unlike in sequential design, where one strand emerges from the other, concurrent design involves the simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). Although I began with an online questionnaire, the main purpose of the interviews was not to explain findings from this quantitative stage. In addition, there was some cross-over regarding the time frame: the first round of student interviews took place while the survey was still open. I analysed each source of data separately before determining how they could be merged; however, this process was iterative rather than sequential, as it necessitated revisiting all the findings more than once (O'Cathain et al., 2007; Fetters et al.,2013). After separate analysis, findings from each strand were merged and interpreted.

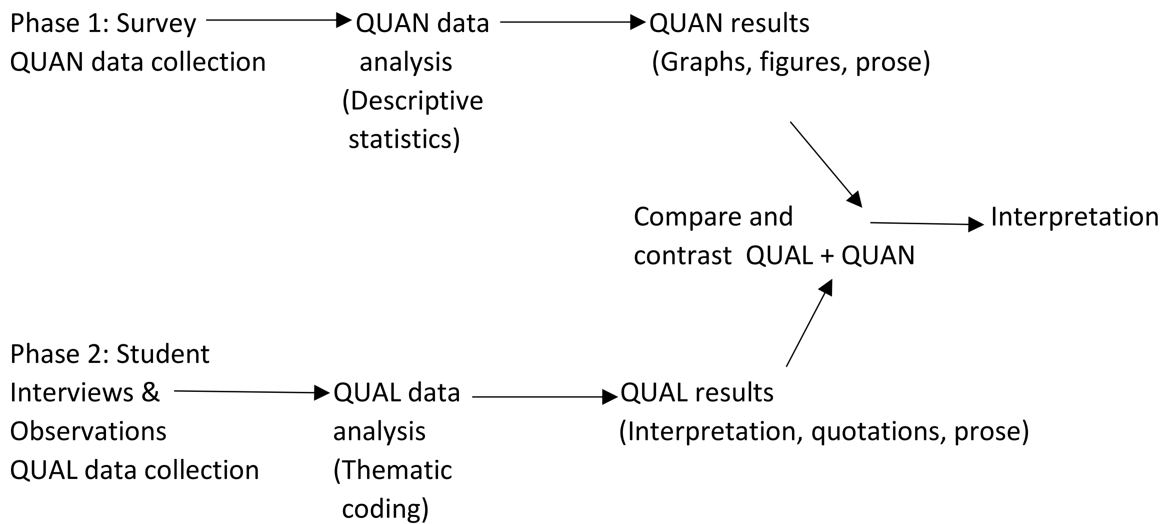

Figure 4.2 Concurrent sequential design of the study (adapted from Fitzpatrick, 2016, p.279)

Uprichard & Dawney (2019) highlight an apparent contradiction: if mixed methods are used in order to represent the complex social world, how can quantitative and qualitative data be neatly integrated in a coherent fashion? They query the assumption that integration is an appropriate goal, as findings do not always 'add up' (p.29). Instead, they suggest paying attention to what they term diffraction – 'patterns of difference, movement, and entanglement' (p.26). Fitzpatrick (2016) cautions that attaching labels to data, while convenient for depicting connections between quantitative and qualitative findings, may result in over-simplification. In addition, comparing findings which stem from different sample sizes could result in misinterpretations (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). However, this was not a major concern in my study, as both the questionnaire and student interview participants were drawn from the same, restricted population.

4.1.2 Participant sampling

Barkhuizen (2014) makes the important point that there is no 'right' answer when deciding on the number of participants; instead, the purpose of the study needs to be considered. When the aim is to investigate people's experiences in detail, he suggests that recruiting a large sample would not be practical. Purposeful sampling involves engaging respondents who can 'best inform the researcher about the research question under examination' (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.149). Miyahara (2020) explains that this kind of non-probability sampling concentrates on the individual, rather than pursuing representativeness and generalisation. In my case, it was crucial to attract volunteers who could exemplify relevant aspects of the research framework such as identity and positionality. I also had to accept that participant attrition was likely, as the demanding nature of longitudinal research often causes people to withdraw before the research is complete (Seals, 2017).

In mixed methods research, participants in the qualitative phase will sometimes simply be those who volunteer in the quantitative phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), as it is not always possible to select cases based on significant or interesting quantitative responses. The qualitative data collection will come from a considerably smaller sample than the quantitative phase, and this need not be seen as problematic (ibid.). However, Collins et al.

(2007) caution against merging inferences from the quantitative and qualitative phases which represent inappropriate statistical generalisations. I was careful to relate findings to the sample of participants, and avoided assuming that they would have relevance for a wider population.

4.2 Questionnaires

The initial stage of my data collection involved recruiting as many students as possible (from both a 6- and 10-week pre-sessional pathway) to respond to an online survey. Although my intention was not to conduct detailed statistical analysis, I hoped to gain an overview of their thoughts and attitudes, as well as demographic information. The questionnaire was also an effective way of recruiting interviewees for the next research stage.

Dörnyei & Taguchi (2010, p.3) describe questionnaires as 'self-completed' since they are filled in by willing respondents. Similarly, Brown (2001, p.6) denotes a questionnaire as any 'written instrument that presents participants with a series of questions or statements to which they should react either by selecting from existing possibilities or writing out their answers.' Dewaele (2018b) notes that questionnaires have long been used in applied linguistics studies, in paper-based, or as is now more common, online formats. Despite the proliferation of online questionnaires, he argues that not enough regard has been given to their potential merits and drawbacks. As Dörnyei & Taguchi (2010) suggest, the ease of setting up and running online surveys can hide their complexity. In fact, multiple factors need to be considered, including question formulation, overall length, and the criteria for participation. According to Dörnyei (2007), a major benefit of online questionnaires is that respondents remain anonymous. However, the idea that this results in a greater level of honesty could be disputed. While anonymity possibly emboldens some people to disclose accurate responses without fear of consequence, others might rush through the questions, answering in a random manner in order to finish quickly. What Dewaele (2018b, p.271) refers to as 'the inevitable self-selection bias' means that only those who are willing to invest in the questionnaire give full and truthful answers.

To some extent, administering the questionnaire to all students on the pre-sessional English programme (hereafter PSE) at the research site meant that they were a 'captive participant pool' (ibid., p.272). However, as taking part was voluntary, this did not guarantee a high response rate. Dewaele (ibid.) explains that imbalances related to age, education level and gender can occur when surveying participants. For instance, it is very common for more females than males to sign up to online surveys (Dörnyei, 2007; Joinson & Reips, 2007). Although there is usually a balanced female-male ratio on the PSE at the research site, I suspected that this might not be represented in my sample. I did not expect participants to be diverse in terms of age, education level, or nationality since the majority of students who undertake the course are Chinese postgraduates in their early 20s.

Although it seems obvious that 'without appropriate items, the researcher will not be able to collect good quality data' (Iwaniec, 2020, p.328), as someone with little experience of writing questionnaires, I paid close attention to this advice. My background as a language teacher meant that I understood the necessity of writing 'in plain language that is free of

jargon' (ibid., p.328). Iwaniec (ibid., p.328) suggests that the use of scales containing multiple items can help to avoid unfortunate word choice – something which is especially relevant when 'measuring abstract concepts such as beliefs, attitudes or interests.' As Likert scales (Likert, 1932) were originally designed to measure attitudes, they were an appropriate choice for my questionnaire. Nevertheless, I was aware that participants might avoid choosing extreme options – a tendency among East Asian students identified by Chen et al. (1995). Selecting the middle option could also indicate uncertainty, rather than the absence of a strong opinion (McCrocklin & Link, 2016). On the other hand, some respondents might genuinely belong to the 'neutral' category (Krosnick & Presser, 2010); therefore, I chose to include it.

Iwaniec (2020) also points out that questionnaires are different from tests: instead of being designed with 'correct' answers in mind, they seek people's views and demographic information. She advises against formulating leading questions or statements which seem to suggest an answer. This was essential for my own questionnaire design, as I did not wish to create anxiety among respondents by giving them the sense that it was in any way an examination. Students who come from certain educational backgrounds might associate lists of questions with academic assessment. Therefore, I emphasised in the information sheet that agreeing to take part would have no bearing on EAP course grades or subsequent academic attainment.

I prioritised clear wording of the questions in order to make them unambiguous and accessible. As advised by Dewaele (2018b), I ensured that the appearance of the questionnaire was clear (without any blocks of dense text) and kept statements brief to avoid taking up too much of informants' time (see Appendix A). While selecting focal interviewees from their Likert-scale answers could have facilitated interesting comparisons, I did not believe this to be practicable. Students may have felt obliged to take part if I had contacted them directly; in addition, it is not clear how criteria for 'typical participants and outliers' (ibid., p.282) should be applied. Instead, they were given the option of leaving their contact details at the end of the questionnaire. 87% of respondents provided an email address, allaying my fears that nobody would be willing to share this information. Finally, before publishing the survey, I checked that it could be accessed and read on both laptops and mobile phones.

4.3 Interviews

Interviews lend themselves well to exploratory research which seeks to understand people's different experiences and perspectives (Kvale, 2007). Holstein & Gubrium (2004) see the interview as a 'special form of conversation' (p.141), in which respondents are not 'passive vessels of answers' (p.144) but create meaning with their interlocutor. Similarly, Prior (2018, p.226) posits that it is a 'dynamic interaction' rather than a 'neutral transaction', emphasising the co-constructed nature of knowledge. Bearing in mind the social-constructionist framework of my investigation, I decided on a semi-structured approach which I hoped would provide both flexibility and openness. To this end, I created interview schedules with questions which could be adapted as necessary (see Appendix B).

Rolland et al. (2020) advise that opening with an introductory question can establish a relaxed atmosphere. I also spent a few minutes chatting to participants before starting to record, in order to put them at ease. While probes are important for acquiring in-depth information, beginning with the word 'why' could make the interviewee feel that they are being cross-examined. Instead, Charmaz (2014) suggests posing questions which demonstrate interest and acceptance ('Could you tell me more?') and softening potentially sensitive topics ('Could I ask you...?). As she notes, it is important to avoid making the interviewee feel threatened or defensive by inopportune word choice. In addition, I was careful not to continue with a line of questioning if anyone appeared uncomfortable.

Although interviews are a widespread method of gathering information (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Rolland et al., 2020), this does not mean that they should be taken for granted. Instead of guiding their respondents to answer in a preferred way, active interviewers (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004) enter into a dialogue which offers various possibilities. The idea of improvising was daunting to a novice interviewer like myself, but I understood that allowing for spontaneity on both sides could lead to a more interesting and worthwhile encounter. However, I also took note of Prior's (2018) advice to plan beforehand. I wanted interviewees to think deeply about the questions and avoid a situation where they would give only one-word or shallow replies. On the other hand, Blommaert & Dong (2010) offer reassurance that 'bad' interviews do not exist: those which fail to produce one (expected) type of data can still yield equally valuable (unexpected or different) information.

4.3.1 Potential limitations of qualitative interviews

As with other qualitative methods, interviews have attracted criticism for their supposed inability to generalise, yet even accounts of individual experience can have resonance in other contexts (Kvale, 2007). Nonetheless, measuring the credibility of interviews can be difficult (Roulston, 2010), given that much depends on the researcher's judgement. Furthermore, facts and details which interviewees are willing to share may have been different if the question had been asked at another time, meaning that findings are unlikely to be reproducible (Kvale, 2007). However, as Holstein & Gubrium (2004, p.145) point out, replicability is not an appropriate means of assessing interviews which are conceptualised as 'dynamic, meaning-making occasion[s].' Although the content of responses still matters, how the interviewer and interviewee communicate in a particular set of 'interpretive circumstances' (ibid., p.145) is even more important.

Talmy's (2010) argument that there is a need to interrogate how qualitative interviews are conducted remains pertinent. In a critique of relevant literature, he explored 'the ideologies of interviewing' (p.129), drawing a distinction between two approaches: 'research instrument' and 'social practice.' In the former, interviews are perceived as a means of collecting facts and beliefs from respondents, with the purpose of revealing the 'truth' about their experiences. In contrast, the latter conceptualisation questions the notion that language is a 'neutral medium' (p.131) through which information is communicated (also see Holstein & Gubrium, 2004). Importantly, the 'social practice' approach also recognises

the existence of power inequalities related to institutional standing, age, language expertise, or class status.

Talmy (2010) claims to have uncovered a tendency in qualitative research to present interview findings as participants' uncontested reports of reality. He suggests that this results in data being displayed as 'decontextualised, stand-alone quotes' (p.136) which do not acknowledge the interviewer's presence. In such cases, the interviewee is treated as a 'passive subject' (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004, p.145) who discloses some kind of objective truth. Blommaert & Dong (2010) also found that the interviewer's questions are often omitted from quotations, with the result that respondents' views lack context. To demonstrate the researcher's influence, Kvale (2007) suggests that the question which prompted an answer should be included. Importantly, the interviewee's answers can also affect the interviewer's line of questioning (Yin, 2018); in other words, meaning is co-constructed between both parties. In a similar vein, Mann (2011) cautions against assembling 'selected voices' in what is described as 'a journalistic tableau' (p.6). Although this might be an appealing way of presenting findings, it does not provide satisfactory details about context or methodology, and also lacks critical reflection. Narratives should not be treated a 'true' account of someone's experiences, as they are likely to contain ambiguities and contradictions (Brinkmann, 2017). In addition, it is possible that respondents will self-censor, or answer in a way which they feel is desirable to the interviewer (Kvale, 2007).

4.3.2 Silence

Blommaert & Dong (2010) draw attention to the value of silence: interviewees need time to process the question and organise their thoughts before replying. Therefore, the interviewer needs to listen carefully, rather than asking a barrage of questions without pause. While it could be interesting to analyse a participant's reticence (ibid.), silence is often uncomfortable, making the temptation to keep talking difficult to resist. As a teacher, I am aware of the benefits of thinking time (Burns, 2010), but have sometimes been guilty of intervening too quickly when an answer is not immediately forthcoming. However, hesitations and pauses might be of equal significance as spoken words (Charmaz, 2014). Simons (2009) recommends active listening: judging when to remain quiet and when to intervene. She reminds us that silent gestures (nods or smiles) can encourage the respondent to continue just as effectively as probes.

When there is a demand to generate data (i.e., interview transcripts for analysis), silence might be seen as a problem, or a failure on the part of the investigator. However, Kawabata & Gastaldo (2015, p.5) suggest that 'silence is not an absence of communication but rather a communication strategy.' They argue that attitudes towards silence are culturally dependent and caution Western, English-speaking researchers to be aware of their assumptions. For instance, in Japan, silence is viewed as a key aspect of communication, to the extent that people may use it to construct their identity. Rather than using probes to elicit a response, Kawabata & Gastaldo (ibid.) suggest that participants' silence should be respected as a means of saving face or gaining control of the interaction. Although I followed their advice to include silences in my transcriptions, I avoided speculating on their

underlying cause. I also included details about body language and tone, as these form emotional aspects of conversation (Kvale, 2007). It was crucial to put respondents at ease so that each interview was 'an open and interactional space' (Charmaz, 2014, p.57) in which they could speak about their experiences in depth. As I met with student participants several times, it was my hope that they would become more comfortable and willing to share information from one interview to the next (Adler & Adler, 2001).

4.3.3 Limitations related to language use

When researching international university students, it might be assumed that English is both the academic lingua franca and the 'natural' means of communication (Bonacina-Pugh et al., 2022, p.1115). However, we need to carefully consider how power relations impact intercultural exchanges (Kramsch & Zhu Hua, 2016), including in interviews. As Cortazzi et al. (2011) point out, language can impact the quality of data, for instance, if Chinese-speaking interviewees are expected to articulate their thoughts and feelings in English. In a study which involved respondents being interviewed first in English and then in Chinese (using translations of the same questions), it was found that they tended to be more open when using the latter (ibid.). Language choice can influence how participants articulate themselves, the level of detail given, and even which experiences they choose to share (Rolland, 2023). In particular, interviewees may worry about making mistakes or misunderstanding the question when using a foreign language, and consequently feel disempowered (Rolland et al., 2009). Some could be concerned about saving face in front of an English-speaking researcher (Cortazzi et al., 2011) and therefore withhold certain information. Conversely, others might welcome the opportunity to adopt the stance of a competent multilingual (in contrast to a monolingual interviewer).

I realise that postgraduate respondents were expected to engage in my research through the medium of English. I could not offer the Chinese and Thai participants the option of using their first language, since I have no knowledge of these. While I spoke informally with Tatsuo in Japanese pre- and post-interview, I was not confident enough to conduct our main exchange in the language. Employing an interpreter was not possible due to cost and potential issues around data protection (Cortazzi et al., 2011). Nor did I have the time or resources to recruit a multilingual research team, as is sometimes advised (Rolland et al., 2009). Although interviewees may have felt comfortable talking about academic issues in English – the language in which such knowledge was acquired – (Cortazzi et al., 2011; Rolland, 2023), our conversations also involved discussion of more personal issues. There were no breakdowns in communication, yet I cannot be sure if their answers would have been the same in their first language. Since I could not give respondents the opportunity to use their full linguistic repertoires, I remained attentive to any signs that they were modifying their answers due to my positionality as an English speaker and teacher.

4.4 Observations

Curdt-Christiansen (2020, p.336) defines observation as a method 'systematically observing events, interactions, behaviours, relationships and artefacts related to and around language(s) in a given social setting.' In observations, the researcher witnesses what people do, resulting in a more detailed picture of their experiences than interviews alone (Dörnyei, 2007; Simons, 2009; Prior, 2018). My decision to conduct observations during the EAP pre-sessional was influenced by linguistic ethnography, which suggests that language and social life are 'mutually shaping' (Hardman & Hardman, 2016, p.572). I intended to explore the social context of the classroom to gain a 'situated understanding' (Dörnyei, 2007, p.178) of participants' identity positioning. While not embarking on a fully ethnographic study, I adopted relevant strategies such as combining data from fieldnotes with analysis of transcribed interviews (Copland, 2018; Spada, 2019). The aim of my study was not to encapsulate a whole culture, but to focus on the 'lived experiences of specific people' (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011, p.170). As Curdt-Christiansen (2020, p.337) states, observation is not a 'random exercise.' Rather than examining everything which took place in the classroom setting, I wished to connect my observations directly to the research questions (Copland, 2018). I was more interested in classroom 'processes' than 'outcomes' (Hardman & Hardman, 2016, p.572): in other words, I did not measure students' academic performance, but contemplated the reasons for certain behaviour and responses.

4.4.1 Participant vs. non-participant observation

'Observer-as-participant,' is a researcher who clearly identifies their purpose and takes part in the observed group's activities to a limited extent. This allows the researcher to gain a thorough knowledge of respondents, but could also result in a lack of objectivity. In contrast, a 'complete observer' is more detached and tries to create a sense of distance (Cohen et al., 2018). Cases where the researcher does not distinguish themselves from the people they are observing, but acts like a member of the group, can result in covert observation (ibid.). Cohen et al. (ibid.) suggest that covert observation is sometimes acceptable, for instance, when gaining access to marginalised groups who would be unlikely to agree to the researcher's presence. However, this could be viewed as exploitative. Even in cases where participants are not classed as vulnerable, informed consent must be gained to avoid breaching their rights (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011). While it is true that people inevitably alter their usual behaviour during overt observation, making them aware of the researcher's presence avoids deception.

Although Curdt-Christiansen (2020) states that the majority of researchers adopt an observer-as-participant role, non-participant observation is more usual in classroom settings (Dörnyei, 2007). However, as Morse & Richards (2002) note, the distinction between participant and non-participant observation is not always clear-cut. By taking on an observer role, one cannot be a complete participant; likewise, it is not always possible to observe without at least some participation (especially in social or educational contexts). Angrosino & Rosenberg (2011, p.151) argue that, although 'naturalistic observation' was the goal of traditional ethnographers, it is necessary to question the notion of 'unobtrusive, objective observation.' I knew that student participants might be uncertain about why they were

being observed (Burns, 2010) if I failed to fully explain my purpose. I did not wish them to feel like they were being tested in any way, for instance, on their linguistic ability. Similarly, as a teacher myself, I am aware that many instructors associate observation with having their pedagogy critiqued. As Copland (2018) states, the presence of someone in the classroom taking notes can be discomfiting; therefore, I had to approach the situation with a great deal of sensitivity. It was essential to assure EAP tutors that my presence in class would not include any evaluation of their teaching.

4.4.2 Structured vs. unstructured observation

Dörnyei (2007) explains that structured observation, which is associated with quantitative investigations, focuses on specific categories of data and often takes the form of an observation scheme. Conversely, unstructured observation is commonly used in qualitative studies, and relies on detailed narrative field notes to determine what is significant. However, the supposed dichotomy between structured and unstructured observation is not always obvious, and researchers frequently combine the two approaches (ibid., 2007). Others (Mackey & Gass, 2005; Patton, 2015; Cohen et al., 2018; Curdt-Christiansen, 2020) describe observation as existing on a continuum of highly structured – semi-structured – unstructured.

Structured observation employs a 'predetermined [...] scheme to collect data confirming or refuting the hypotheses of a research project' (Curdt-Christiansen, 2020, p.338). Mackey & Gass (2005, p.200) rightly suggest that structured observation schemes yield valid results 'only when they are appropriate and applicable to the research question.' It was clear that my research questions did not lend themselves to systematic observation categories such as the classification of verbal and non-verbal interactions (Hardmann & Hardmann, 2016). Identity is linked to mental processes which cannot always be directly observed (Dörnyei, 2007; Spada, 2019); thus, a highly structured observation scheme resulting in statistical analysis would not have been suitable. I wished to avoid simplifying complex behaviours and ignoring important 'emergent information' (Spada, 2019, p.193). Nevertheless, although the research questions were not based on any firm hypotheses, observing with no plan in mind would have been unproductive. Employing a semi-structured approach allowed me to gather significant and relevant information without being restricted by narrow observational categories. By concentrating on participants' engagement in class, for example, their contributions to group discussion, interactions with the teacher, and English language use, I was able to gain insight into their investment and positioning.

As an inexperienced observer, I also tried to strengthen my understanding of field note procedures before visiting classes. Copland (2018) states that fieldnotes record features which the researcher believes are pertinent, so will always be subjective to some extent. Although making judgements about what is significant is often difficult, noting down one's thoughts, questions and reflections can be of benefit. Fieldnotes do not have to be written with a reader in mind, as they are private and can therefore be 'subjective and impressionistic, emotional or poetic' (Blommaert & Dong, 2010, p.38). However, they can be transformed into clear findings by identifying themes which are relevant to the research

questions (Copland, 2018). I also followed advice to write my notes while present in the class, in order to avoid selective memory (Cohen et al., 2018).

4.4.3 Challenges

Potential disadvantages of observational methods are those which often arise in qualitative research, for example, ethical concerns and ensuring reliability and validity (see §4.5 & §4.7). Another common hurdle, highlighted by Copland (2018) is gaining access. Even when attempting to be unobtrusive, the researcher will likely have a visible presence which might cause others to feel uncomfortable. In addition, approval needs to be granted at both administrative level and from the individuals involved in observations (Mackey & Gass, 2005). This proved to be the case in my situation, as I could only make arrangements with teachers who were amenable to a classroom visit. Copland (2018) suggests that the validity of observations can be enhanced by providing a full description of how decisions were taken and the analytical processes behind the findings. This involves identifying codes in fieldnotes which can eventually form thematic categories. She adds that another possibility is 'member validation' (p.257) – sharing findings with participants – but I doubted that this would be viable, given the time-constricted nature of my project. I was also reluctant to burden respondents with further demands. Nonetheless, I aimed to ensure that data from observations would bolster the relevance and value of my study (Hammersley, 1992) by viewing a somewhat familiar setting (the EAP pre-sessional classroom) from a different perspective.

The 'Hawthorne effect' has long been recognised: as people's behaviour and actions are impacted by the researcher's presence, it is impossible to ascertain whether an observed class proceeds in the same way as it would have if unobserved (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Even when the researcher tries to be discreet, there is no guarantee that participants will act in exactly the same way as in an unobserved situation. At the same time, to gain valid data, classroom observation needs to be managed in such a way that events are as 'natural and unstaged as possible' (Dörnyei, 2007, p.190). As a great deal of responsibility is placed on the researcher for gathering relevant information, 'an objective account of events and behaviours' (ibid., p.185) cannot be assured. Interestingly, others have argued that individuals behave more like themselves when being observed (Blackledge & Creese, 2019), rather than putting on a performance.

Observations entail other practical considerations. Video or audio recording equipment can be intrusive, and it is sometimes difficult to identify who speaking in a specific extract (Blommaert & Dong, 2010). Fixed cameras cannot turn to interesting events as they occur, while moveable cameras might be too disruptive (Cohen et al., 2018). It became clear that, at the research site, recording lessons would not be possible (see §4.8), hence my reliance on fieldnotes. I did not wish my presence to have any kind of negative impact, such as distracting students from their work.

4.5 Reliability and validity

Although the concepts of 'reliability' and 'validity' are traditionally associated with quantitative research and positivist perspectives, their place in qualitative studies is

nevertheless much discussed. Reliability is concerned with whether observations and/or results can be replicated; validity considers whether measurement instruments align with the purpose of the research (Golafshani, 2003). However, these explanations do not necessarily account for what happens in qualitative research, due to the different nature of inquiry and view of how knowledge is constructed. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.300) suggest referring to 'dependability' instead of 'reliability', and 'trustworthiness' as a replacement for 'validity', but others are not convinced that substituting different words adds any value. For instance, Morse et al. (2002) assert that there is a lack of clarity about Lincoln & Guba's (1985) terms and the criteria on which they need to be evaluated.

Tracy (2010, p.839) proposes that it is reasonable to agree on 'common markers of goodness' without connecting these to a specific research paradigm or methodology. She identifies eight markers: a) a worthy topic; b) rich rigour; c) sincerity; d) credibility; e) resonance; f) significant contribution; g) ethics; h) meaningful coherence. She suggests that terms such as reliability, replicability, consistency and accuracy are quantitative measures which lack resonance within qualitative research. Instead, there are other ways to achieve credibility, including thick description (Geertz, 1973), triangulation and crystallisation (Ellingson, 2009). Morse et al. (2002, p.2) recognise that qualitative researchers may undergo a 'crisis of confidence', due to their lack of 'hard' data such as numbers and p values. To establish faith in the project, they propose that reliability and validity are considered at every stage. Research is conceived of as an iterative process that involves moving 'back and forth between design and implementation to guarantee congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection and analysis' (ibid., p.10).

According to Maxwell (2002), generalisability means the degree to which an account of a particular situation or population can be applied to other people, times or settings. While findings from a qualitative study might not be generalisable, they could still be transferable to similar contexts (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Moreover, it has been suggested that researching people's lived experiences incorporates a degree of emotional resonance (Dadds, 2008). Dadds (2008) describes this as 'empathetic validity', which is the capacity of research to 'transform the emotional dispositions of people towards each other, such that greater empathy and regard are created' (p.279). As she explains, empathetically valid reports still aim to share clear arguments from the research, but in such a way that knowledge is also revealed about the emotional dimensions and depths of the human phenomenon under investigation. In a similar vein, Cho and Trent (2006) introduce the notion of transformational validity. In contrast to transactional validity, which achieves credibility through the use of strategies such as member checking or triangulation, transformational validity requires the researcher to consider their relationship with participants and reflect deeply on the study outcomes.

In terms of mixed methods research, it could be misleading to compare quantitative and qualitative findings, as these often derive from different population samples (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Onwuegbuzie & Johnson (ibid.) propose using the term 'legitimation' to capture the sense of going beyond a 'singular [truth]' (p.48). Like Cho & Trent (2006), they

emphasise that legitimation is a process rather than a product, and needs to be considered at every stage of research. Teddlie & Tashakkori (2003) highlight different forms of transferability: population (to other individuals or groups); ecological (to additional contexts or settings); temporal (to other time periods); and operational (to alternative methods of measuring behaviour). For instance, in my study, findings could be relevant to various groups of international students attending different universities.

4.6 Researcher positionality

As previously explained, my background as an EAP teacher of international students provided the initial motivation for studying their identity formation during pre-sessional and degree programmes. Therefore, I realise that it is necessary to acknowledge the 'place of the personal' (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p.150) in this study.

Being self-aware and recognising one's positionality are increasingly recognised as valuable assets in qualitative research. This challenges the view of knowledge as objective, as something which is produced independently from the researcher. Instead, reflexivity is important: the 'conscious and deliberate effort to be attuned to one's own reactions to respondents and to the way in which the research account is constructed' (Berger, 2015, p.221). More weight is thus given to researcher subjectivity: how 'who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel' (Pillow, 2003, p.176) influences the collection and interpretation of data. We need to consider our identity in relation to the research participants and reflect on our own knowledge and experience (Norton, 2013). This is especially important in interviews, which are affected by the researcher-respondent relationship and contextual factors such as culture and status (Rabbidge, 2017).

Berger (2015) suggests that it can be beneficial to draw parallels between one's personal experience and that of the research respondents to create a sense of empathy. At the same time, researchers need to avoid imposing their beliefs on others. In my study, this was relevant when interviewing EAP teachers with whom I shared a similar background. I had to be careful not to pre-empt their answers, or assume that we would share the same views. Likewise, while I informed student participants that I had lived abroad and learned foreign languages, this did not mean that our experiences were comparable. As Berger (ibid.) cautions, viewing their answers through the lens of events in my own life could have led to misinterpretations. Being familiar with the EAP context aided my understanding of how to approach postgraduate interviewees, but also heightened the possibility of bias (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is conceivable that I subconsciously adopted the position of 'teacher' in some of our conversations, while students may have framed themselves as 'learners' of English. While establishing a degree of closeness with student participants was beneficial, I also had to maintain an appropriate measure of distance (Greene, 2014) and not become too emotionally involved.

Like Berger (2015), Pillow (2003) ponders how much of themselves the researcher should make transparent. While self-reflexivity might encourage us to position ourselves more closely to the respondents, she queries whether our confessional details are needed in order to understand the data. In addition, embracing a reflexive stance does not guarantee

research validity. Even if an attempt is made to avoid power imbalances and give value to participants' voices, the researcher's own aims will still take priority. As De Costa et al. (2021) remind us, it can be difficult to remain objective and to see the situation from others' point of view. Pillow (2003, p.192) recommends adopting what she terms 'a reflexivity of discomfort', accepting that encounters with people during the course of research will not necessarily reveal everything about them.

To avoid relying on preconceptions, Charmaz (2017, p.35) advises taking on a stance of 'methodological self-consciousness', which involves dissecting our 'positions, privileges, and priorities', and examining how they affect interactions with participants. Charmaz & Belgrave (2019) suggest that it is useful to have one's assumptions challenged, for example, by receiving unexpected answers from interviewees. They also highlight the need to examine ourselves in the research process, being aware of how our personal or professional backgrounds influence data collection and analysis. My positionality as an L1 user of English and a Western researcher and teacher inevitably impacted on how I interpreted participants' words (see McKinley, 2017) and influenced how they were portrayed when writing up the findings.

Zhu Hua (2020) highlights that, as well as influencing participants' lives (sometimes in subtle ways), researchers' knowledge and practice can be transformed during the course of a study. For example, we may refine the project design, rethink initial assumptions, or reframe personal experience. It is therefore important to treat respondents, not as passive suppliers of data, but as active agents of change. Indeed, my own thoughts and beliefs evolved during the time I spent with participants. Gaining insight into their perspectives made me consider what I wished to achieve, for instance, whether my research findings could have a positive impact on the lives of international students. Listening to postgraduates' accounts of how they experienced university classes also made me consider my own teaching practice, and if there are aspects I might change or develop in future.

4.7 Ethical issues

Researchers who work closely with people need to consider the welfare of everyone who is involved in the study. Even if participants are unlikely to be put in physical danger, every effort should be made to protect their psychological well-being (Burns, 2010). As Braun & Clarke (2013, p.62) stress, ethics are integral to the whole research process, not simply a 'hoop to jump through.' Gray (2017) likewise points out that ethical dilemmas can arise at every stage of a project: during planning, implementation, and reporting. Punch (2014) recommends asking whether the expected outcome of the research justifies the burden placed on participants, for example, in terms of time commitment. When embarking on my study, I had additional risks to consider. Although social distancing restrictions were no longer in place by the time of the first round of interviews, Covid-19 was still circulating widely. Thus, I sat apart from participants and ensured that windows were left open. I also understood why some interviewees chose to wear a mask, although this did make it more difficult to hear them clearly.

The ethical process involves reflecting on the implications of one's own presence in the research site and how subsequent findings are reported. According to Wiles & Boddy (2013, p.1), 'no research is ever risk-free.' They advise adopting the principle of 'ethical literacy' (p.1), whereby high moral standards are viewed as fundamental to research integrity. Crucially, study participants need to be fully aware of what they are agreeing to. Informed consent necessitates providing 'information about the project [...] that is sufficiently full and accessible for their decision about whether to take part to be considered informed' (Crow et al., 2006, p.83). At the same time, there needs to be a balance between providing people with essential facts while not overwhelming them with superfluous details. Gaining informed consent should be treated as a continuous process, rather than as a one-off, 'tick-box' exercise (Best, 2013, p.). Indeed, I frequently reminded participants that they were free to withdraw at any point without consequence.

De Costa et al. (2021, p.58) describe core ethical principles as follows: 'respect for persons; yielding optimal benefits while minimising harm [and] justice.' Being ethical is not 'a purely intellectual exercise' (ibid., p.60); instead, it involves careful consideration of how the study is conducted and how respondents are treated. Kubanyiova (2008) delineates a difference between 'macroethics', that is, meeting the requirements of the appropriate ethics board, and 'microethics', which takes into account context and day-to-day ethical dilemmas. The latter involves making sometimes quick decisions, for instance, deciding whether to continue with a line of questioning if someone appears uncomfortable. She also suggests that, while it is important to establish rapport, this does not guarantee ethical practice. In fact, becoming too close to respondents could lead to coercion, for instance, if they feel obliged to assist someone they have come to see as a friend.

As regards anonymity, Best (2013) queries the validity of studies which attempt to protect participants' identities by changing so many details that the reader can no longer gain insight into their specific circumstances. On the other hand, De Costa et al. (2021) argue that a genuine effort needs to be made to protect confidentiality, otherwise it may be possible to track down the respondents and/or the research site. Although I anonymised the university in my study, there is a chance that it could still be recognised. It was therefore important to ensure that respondents (both students and teachers) could not easily be identified. To preserve anonymity, I used pseudonyms when referring to individuals in the findings and did not to make any voice recordings public. Email addresses provided by survey respondents were also kept secure and separate from other data. These details are explained in the information sheets (see Appendix C), which were approved by my institution's ethics committee and signed by all participants.

Although I did not expect any harm to come to respondents during the course of my research, there were still concerns to be addressed. In particular, I was cognisant of the need to avoid negative effects on people's emotional and mental health during interviews, and remained alert to any signs of distress conveyed by body language or paralinguistic cues (Rolland et al., 2020). As a teacher myself, was also wary of making unreasonable demands on instructors' busy schedules. I tried to arrange meetings at a time which suited them and did not encroach on their breaks during the teaching day. I aimed to strike a balance

between making the interviews long enough to gather rich data, but not too onerous for participants. I was not asking EAP or academic staff to directly comment on their pedagogy, yet still had to be careful that questions would not be viewed as face-threatening or undermining their professional identities. As previously stated, I reassured EAP tutors that my intention in visiting classes was not to assess their teaching practice in any way. It was crucial to ensure that all teachers and students (including non-participants) were fully informed and agreeable to my presence in the class. I hoped that the fact I was not recording and only taking notes would make everyone present feel more comfortable. While visiting additional classes would have allowed me to collect more data, De Costa (2014), points out that researchers have an ethical duty to respect teachers' space and not take up too much of their precious time.

4.8 Research site access

In research which takes place in educational settings, building positive relationships with gatekeepers is crucial. Ideally, a gatekeeper's role is to 'support the research process by providing an efficient and expedient conduit for access between researcher and participants' (Clark, 2010, p.486). Clark (ibid.) suggests that, in negotiations about access, it can be useful to show how the project will have a tangible benefit for the gatekeeper and/or their organisation. Conversely, any potential disruption needs to be kept to a minimum. In addition, when seeking teacher participants, it is important not to make unreasonable demands. Richard & Bélanger (2018) suggest that busy professionals might be less willing to complete tasks which seem burdensome, for example, writing post-lesson commentaries in a reflective journal.

My original intention was to conduct research in a university where I had previously worked as a pre-sessional EAP tutor. However, although the head of EAP at this site seemed open to my proposal, gaining access proved to be problematic. It was difficult to identify who had authority to grant permission for the project, an issue noted in other research (Spacey et al., 2021). The relevant administrators voiced concerns about my intention to carry out classroom observations and how to arrange consent for these. I was also surprised to learn that the course would continue to be run mainly online, making face-to-face contact with participants less likely. Despite having some reservations, I tried to continue negotiations with the appropriate gatekeepers for several months, but my emails were not always answered. Although I understood their position – I was a PhD candidate at another institution, which raised issues around confidentiality – I began to worry that the tentative arrangements would fall through. Therefore, after consulting with my supervisors, I made enquiries about recruiting participants from an alternative university.

I was concerned that time was rapidly moving on, but managed to agree on a viable plan with one of the pre-sessional EAP course organisers. We agreed that I could deliver a presentation about my research to teachers on both the 10- and 6-week programmes during their induction week[7]. After learning about the aims of the project, tutors would be

[7] At the research site, students with lower linguistic proficiency scores complete four weeks of 'General' EAP before moving into the second phase, which is termed 'English for Specific Academic Purposes' (ESAP) and

more likely to advertise it to students and perhaps come forward as volunteer interviewees themselves. In the interim, I finished writing my questionnaire and sent it to the course organiser for comments. Following her feedback, I adjusted some questions and clarified in the information sheet that non-participation would have no impact on students' academic performance. The survey link was then posted on the programme's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) page for ease of access. I also made a short video in which I introduced myself to students, explained my research, and invited them to take part if they were amenable.

I received a positive reaction after talking to the EAP instructors, although I realised that this did not guarantee a high response rate. Indeed, after the 10-week PSE had commenced, it took some time before completed questionnaires began to trickle in. I understood that teachers have many things to cover at the beginning of the course, and reminding students about my survey would not be top of their priorities. Likewise, students were possibly feeling overwhelmed by their arrival in Scotland and not in the right frame of mind to tackle any extra tasks. I was also conscious that, while several EAP tutors expressed a wish to be interviewed after my presentation, this would not necessarily remain the case once they started teaching and had more pressing demands on their time. While I tried to 'sell' my study by highlighting the benefits of taking part (Hobbs & Kubaniyova, 2008), I was not offering any tangible reward. Nevertheless, I hoped that respondents would appreciate the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and enjoy sharing their views.

Most EAP teacher and student participants were recruited from the 10-week programme, perhaps because they had a little more time. In the end, more students left their contact details than I could have tracked, given the in-depth nature of my research. I arranged initial interviews with 13 students, but two withdrew after the first stage. Eight of the remaining 11 focal participants were enrolled on the 10-week course. Seven EAP teachers in total agreed to meet with me (five from the 10-week programme; two from the 6-week). Arrangements were made via email, with the majority of participants (except for one EAP tutor and one student) stating a preference for a face-to-face meeting.

Observations proved more troublesome to facilitate because I needed the consent of my focal participants' teachers (none of whom I had interviewed), and non-participant students. The course organiser supplied me with the relevant tutors' details, and I then contacted them directly. I sent one polite reminder to non-responders; after that, I assumed that they were unwilling or unable to invite me to a lesson. In the end, I observed six classes; unfortunately, one of these involved a student who dropped out after the first interview. Non-participant consent forms were provided for other students to sign, plus a version for instructors (see Appendix D). This provided assurance that their data would not be used in the writing up of the study. Although I made clear that I would not be evaluating teaching practice during observations, some instructors may nonetheless have feared negative judgement (see Richard & Bélanger, 2018). The difficult experience of arranging

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focuses on their subject discipline. Those with higher IELTS grades (or equivalent) can enter directly into the 6-week course.

observations during the PSE influenced my decision to focus only on interviews in the later research stages.

After the first semester interviews with student participants, I emailed them to ask for details of their course tutors. Although I had over 20 names, ultimately only seven agreed to meet with me and, as seen in the participant information (Chapter 8), they came from a limited range of disciplines. Again, I realised that university instructors have other priorities and might not have been interested in my research. Four interviews were conducted online as this was the respondent's preference. I appreciated them taking the time to speak to me, and was happy to be flexible in terms of arrangements. Of course, it might have been possible to widen the search for volunteers by sending out a request to all members of academic staff. However, as I originally planned to observe subject classes in which the student interviewees were present, I only contacted lecturers who were teaching them. Despite the fact that this resulted in a restricted pool of participants, I still hoped to gather a wide variety of insights.

It was challenging to manage multiple rounds of data collection. Therefore, I kept a research journal in order to keep track of each stage, as well as recording my thoughts about the process. In addition, I transcribed interviews and wrote up observation fieldnotes immediately, so that key points and incidents were fresh in my mind. I was also able to consider preliminary themes while listening to interview recordings. Analysis of questionnaire data began after the survey closed at the end of the pre-sessional course.

Chapter 5 Analysis of data

5.1 Constructivist grounded theory

In the original version of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), data stand on their own in 'a knowable, external world' (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019, p.748); in other words, the data 'speak for themselves.' In contrast, later conceptualisations reject the notion of value-free inquiry (Charmaz, 2017). While Glaser & Strauss (1967) linked research quality to making new theoretical contributions, grounded theory can be used for other valuable purposes aside from or in addition to theory construction (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). For instance, strategies such as constant comparison can be used in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While the researcher's analytic focus generally emerges during the investigation (rather than being pre-determined), taking a more flexible approach permits a critical prior reading of the literature.

Charmaz (2014, p.3) suggests that grounded theory methods offer a 'set of general principles' rather than 'formulaic prescriptions.' This notion was important for my own research, as the inclusion of an initial quantitative step does not conform to a traditional grounded theory approach. I therefore aligned myself with what Charmaz (2014) describes as constructivist grounded theory, which focuses on how (and sometimes why) people create meanings and actions in a specific context. Importantly, it offers scope to use specific aspects of grounded theory, without claiming adherence to all of the 'rules.' Charmaz (2017) also draws a connection between pragmatism (a way of approaching critical qualitative inquiry) and constructivist grounded theory (strategies for carrying it out). In her view, this necessitates 'asking probing questions about the data and scrutinizing the researcher and the research process' (p.34). Both pragmatism and grounded theory see individuals as embedded in their social realities and take an open-minded stance to acquiring new knowledge.

Charmaz (2014) has proposed four key principles on which grounded theory studies can be appraised. First, credibility: gathering sufficient, relevant data in order to ask pertinent questions, make systematic comparisons and conduct a detailed analysis. Secondly, originality, which provides fresh insights or a novel way of seeing a pre-existing problem. Thirdly, resonance: ensuring that the data-gathering methods clarify participants' experiences and improve others' understanding. Finally, usefulness: how research findings can contribute to policy and practices and identify areas which require further investigation. However, researchers need to be realistic about their contributions, which may only reach a limited audience (Charmaz, 2017). One clear challenge of constructivist grounded theory is connected to its emergent nature. Researchers cannot 'predict in advance what concepts they will develop, what comparisons they will subsequently need to make, and what other directions the research process may take beyond the initial research question' (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019, p.746). To account for potential gaps which arise during the comparison stage, Charmaz (2017) suggests collecting additional data (which may involve sampling new participants or settings). However, the longitudinal nature of my project meant that it would have been difficult to gain further ethical approval and still meet the necessary deadlines.

5.1.1 Coding and constant comparison

Charmaz & Thornberg (2021) explain that grounded theory is a strategy which involves 'simultaneous data collection and analysis' (p.306). Comparisons take place during each stage of the research process, beginning with data and ending with categories and relevant literature. Glaser & Strauss (1967) cautioned against conducting a literature review before embarking on a study in order to reduce bias and preconceptions. However, avoiding theory could mean missing important connections between the data and research questions (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). I conducted a systematic review of the literature prior to data collection, but remembered that previous studies are best treated as 'provisional and fallible, not as the Truth' (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021, p.322).

Whereas other qualitative methodology takes a general approach to organising topics, grounded theory involves the formation of 'abstract analytic categories through an iterative process' (Charmaz, 2014, p.15). To ensure that data are rich and sufficient, Charmaz recommends asking oneself the following questions (ibid., p.15):

- Have I collected enough background data about persons, processes, and settings to have ready recall and to understand and portray the full range of contexts of the study?
- Have I gained detailed descriptions of a range of participants' views and actions?
- Do the data reveal what lies beneath the surface?
- Are the data sufficient to reveal changes over time?
- Have I gained multiple views of the participants' range of actions?
- What kinds of comparisons can I make between data? How do these comparisons inform my ideas?

She goes on to elucidate that coding means naming segments of data with a label which categorises them appropriately. The aim is to move from concrete accounts towards analytic observations. However, researchers need to avoid applying conceptual labels hastily, without initial, more descriptive, coding. It is also crucial to code actions and processes rather than 'types' of people since respondents themselves are not the unit of analysis. Categories suggest more than participants' personal feelings (as expressed in interviews) and relate to wider social issues and structures (Charmaz, 2017). Hadley (2020) suggests that writing codes as gerunds can keep the focus on participants' actual words and actions, thereby avoiding premature theorising.

Open coding is formed of succinct descriptions of key issues which occur in the data (Hadley, 2020). Based on Glaser & Strauss' (1967) instruction to compare and code the data, Charmaz & Thornberg (2021) propose doing this line-by-line in the first instance. Conducting such an in-depth examination brings the researcher close to the experiences and perceptions of respondents. After identifying the most significant codes, 'tentative analytic categories' (p.308) can subsequently be explored further: this allows us to move away from verbatim interview questions and answers towards more conceptual ideas. Codes are not fixed but can be altered and omitted, as necessary. Charmaz (2014, p.120) advises researchers to:

- Remain open
- Stay close to the data
- Construct short codes
- Preserve actions
- Compare data with data
- Move quickly through the data

Although line-by-line coding is usually suggested, when the data are observational, it may be more effective to compare incidents (ibid.). Fieldnotes inevitably contain a structure, by virtue of the order in which they were taken down, from which information can be inferred about the researcher's thought processes.

By comparing the data, looking for patterns and identifying similarities and differences, I was able to decide on focused codes. For instance, I compared both statements within one interview and statements across different interviews (Charmaz, 2014). Some codes were in the participants' own words (in vivo codes); others I devised. This iterative process involved comparing data with data, then data with codes, which helped to refine them (Charmaz, 2014). Using comparison at each stage of the research process meant that the data evolved throughout. Sometimes my initial interpretations changed (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019) as I moved 'further into analysis out of data immersion' (Charmaz, 2014, p.145).

5.1.2 Theoretical sampling

The purpose of theoretical sampling is to achieve, not generalisation, but theoretical saturation: when researchers can no longer find 'new properties or characteristics of their categories' (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021, p.309). Hadley (2020) explains theoretical sampling as searching for people, places and scholarly literature which can yield more information about the focused codes. However, when re-examining previous studies, these should not be taken as absolute truth but given the 'same status as other research informants' (ibid., p.267). Hadley (ibid.) reminds us that constant comparison looks for cases which do not fit, as well as those which correspond to identified patterns. He also notes that when to stop comparing requires judgement on the part of the researcher as to whether the interrelated categories form 'a fair and truthful representation of the human interactions taking place in the arena being studied' (p.268). Charmaz & Thornberg (2021) argue that theoretical sampling and saturation can contribute to the trustworthiness of a study, as the result is stronger analysis on which convincing claims can be made.

5.2 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a flexible approach which is appropriate for interpretive qualitative research. A theme 'captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set' (Braun & Clarke 2006, p.82, italics in the original). Themes can originate from both the data (inductive) and the researcher's understanding of the area under investigation (a priori) (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Although I did not approach the findings with any fixed ideas in mind, it would be dishonest to claim that my own values and beliefs had no impact on the

analysis. Indeed, Pavlenko (2007, p.167) suggests that the idea of emerging themes is 'naïve and misleading' and ignores how sociocultural factors impact on the researcher's 'conceptual lens.'

It was beneficial to transcribe the interview recordings myself, as this allowed me to conduct a first, tentative analysis of findings. The process of transcribing means that data is no longer 'raw,' but is shaped by the transcriber's interpretations of recordings (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Pavlenko (2007) contends that including repetitions and false starts can enhance our understanding of the speaker's intentions and thought processes. However, Corden & Sainsbury (2006) caution that retaining hesitations and errors could result in an unfair representation of participants, or be viewed as patronising. Therefore, I took careful decisions about how much to edit, also bearing in mind issues around readability. Braun & Clarke (2013) advise that, unlike in conversation analysis, a verbatim transcript does not need to include every phonetic and paralinguistic feature. I aimed to represent interviewees' words (and sometimes actions) as accurately as possible without getting weighed down by unnecessary details. This involved revisiting the recordings and transcripts several times to be sure of capturing a representative picture.

Charmaz (2014) highlights that comparison is a neutral tool which can be utilised even when the researcher is not strictly adhering to grounded theory, with which it is often associated. Employing the constant comparison method enables key similarities and differences in the data to be identified, for instance, within the same interview or across separate interviews. Coding involves 'naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorises, summarises, and accounts for each piece of data' (ibid., p.111). I began with open coding, marking obvious codes quickly during my first reading of the transcripts, then searching for other, more subtle codes on subsequent readings (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). While repetition can be important, I also focused on concepts which encapsulated key aspects of participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006), highlighting interview statements with particular resonance.

As advised by Ryan & Bernard (2003), I began with a wide range of themes early on in the analysis, and then considered which merited further investigation. Instead of counting how many times a theme arose, as in a quantitative approach, I considered its significance in light of the research objectives. I then reduced the data by combining codes into broader categories, as suggested by Creswell (2007). This involved moving beyond concrete statements in the interview transcripts to a more abstract meaning. I checked that the categories would hold by re-reading the transcripts and asking myself whether anything had been missed. Since I wished to ensure that I had not only found what I was (subconsciously) searching for, alternative interpretations were considered (Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the later stages of analysis, I revisited the literature to check for any interesting connections or contradictions. This helped me to judge when theoretical saturation had been reached.

Although I am aware of various computer programmes which can facilitate qualitative analysis, I preferred to code manually. I found that reading and writing on paper made it easier to fully absorb and analyse large amounts of information. In addition, jotting down

memos in the margins was useful for questioning or clarifying various thoughts and ideas. Throughout this process, I was able to move beyond mere description of participants' experiences to a deeper theoretical understanding (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). As more focused codes were identified, I began to develop tentative thematic categories; however, I heeded Charmaz's (2014) warning not to apply labels hastily, without thorough interrogation of the data. With regard to observations, by taking fieldnotes I had already decided what to record and what to omit (Ryan & Bernard, 2003); thus, potential themes were generated at an early stage. As I did not have recordings to confirm incidents, it was necessary to read through my fieldnotes carefully in order to implement a similar process of coding and memo-writing. With both interviews and observations, coding was recursive, rather than linear, as I continually reviewed and refined main themes and sub-themes.

Charmaz (2014) recommends that coding full interview transcriptions can uncover ideas and interpretations which might be missed in a less thorough reading. However, as this process is still selective, there is a risk of data becoming fragmented and decontextualised (Punch, 2014). Citing participants' words directly results in a stronger analysis and allows their views (whether similar or contrasting) to be heard (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, I highlighted any quotations which would elucidate key themes, ensuring that these were kept in context (for example, by including both my question and the participant's response). I realised the necessity of not simply paraphrasing our words (Braun & Clarke, 2006), but aimed to interpret what was said and demonstrate how this was relevant to both the research questions and underlying theory. It was equally important to reflect on how participants' accounts of their experiences were located in the wider sociocultural context (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2014).

When connecting my findings to the theoretical framework, I was cognisant of Pavlenko's (2007, p.163) remark that a 'summary of participants' observations, richly interspersed with quotes' does not equate to meaningful analysis. Following her advice, I decided on a procedure for matching instances to thematic categories, and to consider any interesting events which did not seem to 'fit.' I am of the view that verbatim quotations can provide deep insight into people's opinions and feelings. At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that, in selecting excerpts for discussion, the power and choice remain with the researcher. In order to give participants a voice, I had to avoid using quotations simply to illustrate themes or issues which I expected to find (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). As Corden & Sainsbury (ibid.) state, verbatim quotations should not be used as a substitute for evidence or genuine analysis. Therefore, when choosing which words to report directly, I considered whether they were representative of the wider data set, and if my interpretations made sense in terms of the conceptual framework. Finally, as my study is concerned with linguistic practices, it was relevant to consider how interviewees employed language to interpret experiences and position themselves (Pavlenko, 2007).

5.3 Analysis of quantitative data

The survey questions covered several key areas regarding participants' attitudes towards English language use, their feelings about beginning the PSE and the degree programmes, interacting with others, and studying at university in Scotland. I hoped that the responses

would provide an overall picture of a sample of EAP students' sense of identity and investment. While the final questionnaire was self-developed, I was influenced by previous attitudinal surveys targeted at overseas students/migrants and language learners. I modified several measurements from Ward & Kennedy's (1999) sociocultural adaptation framework, such as expressing ideas in class, making friends, coping with academic work, and adapting to local etiquette. In order to write suitable Likert-scale items, I referred to similar instruments. First, Gardner et al.'s (1997) examination of the relationship between variables such as language attitudes, anxiety, and self-confidence. Secondly, Lou & Noels' (2019) survey of international students' beliefs about language ability and intercultural communication. In each case, I adjusted statements so that they applied to students embarking on an EAP pre-sessional programme.

5.4 Analysis of qualitative data

As advised by Braun & Clarke (2013), I have avoided the phrase 'themes emerging from the data.' Identifying noteworthy themes is not a passive process, and was influenced by my own positionality. I generated an initial list of themes through line-by-line coding and comparing what participants said within and across interviews. This involved examining the data multiple times to decide on areas of significance. Once I had come up with an extensive list of possible themes, I began to group them into sub-sets. While doing this, I compared the data again and checked that I had not omitted any key aspects. This process was carried out after every round of data collection: Student Interview Pre-sessional, Semester 1 and Semester 2; EAP Tutor Interviews; and Academic Staff Interviews. Some themes appeared across more than one data set and were cross-checked by reading the full transcripts again. I always remembered to examine a) what the respondent was saying and b) how their words could elucidate a particular phenomenon.

I highlighted potential themes manually, on printed out copies of the interview transcripts, and added hand-written notes where necessary. I found that this was essential in order to hold vast quantities of information in my head. I identified key quotations and organised these by theme, examining precisely what participants had said. This was particularly useful when looking for points of similarity and difference between individuals, and also when comparing the views of EAP instructors and academic staff, or EAP/academic instructors and students. The first phase of analysis involved basic coding, then advanced coding at a higher level of abstraction (Punch, 2014). When combining themes into categories, I tried to move beyond literal statements in interview transcripts towards deeper analysis (Charmaz, 2014).

When analysing data pertaining to the student respondents, I first condensed initial codes into themes and sub-themes. Next, I noted which appeared across the three sets of student interviews (Pre-sessional, Semester 1 and Semester 2), as these were likely to be significant. Data from observations were merged with interview themes so that they could be considered in tandem. The following table shows how original themes were distilled into more focused areas for discussion.

Initial themes	Main theme
Adapting to life abroad Investment in the pre-sessional and future degree programme Developing cultural capital Future plans	Academic and linguistic investment
Encountering new academic concepts and skills Coping strategies Transition from PSE to degree programme Fluctuating confidence Linguistic anxiety	Coming to terms with different expectations
Asking for support Self-perceived challenges Writing in English Receiving instructor feedback Self-positioning / comparing self to others	Developing an academic identity
Participating in class Interacting with English-speaking students Using Chinese in class Feeling marginalised Gaining confidence	Classroom participation
Making friends Experiencing loneliness / isolation Communicating with other international students Communicating with 'home' students Encountering prejudice Dealing with everyday situations Choosing where to invest	The impact of social interactions on identity
Individual differences Perceptions of linguistic and academic progress Personal development 'Adjusting' to life in Scotland	Changing identities

Table 5.1 Development of themes: Student interviews and observations

When identifying key themes from the EAP tutor and academic staff interviews, it was evident that there was some cross-over. This confirmed which areas were most salient, and provided the opportunity to compare perspectives. The final themes are similar to those resulting from student interviews and observations, offering different angles on shared points of interest. The next two tables illustrate how major themes were developed in each case.

Initial themes	**Main theme**
Changing expectations Impact of the PSE on students' academic development Areas of academic / linguistic difficulty for students Students' investment	Perceptions of challenges encountered by EAP students
Managing students' expectations Providing feedback Offering support	Initial changes to student identity
Participating in the EAP class Students' linguistic anxiety Using Chinese / English	Views of classroom participation
Interacting with 'home' students Coping with academic work Interacting with academic staff	Perceptions of EAP students' experiences on degree programmes
Making friends The 'Chinese enclave' Choosing where to invest	Perceptions of EAP students' social adjustment
Personal experience (of studying abroad and/or learning languages) Avoiding stereotypes Appreciating individual differences Being empathetic	The influence of identity on EAP teachers' beliefs

Table 5.2 Development of themes: EAP tutor interviews

Initial themes	**Main theme**
Views of internationalisation Teaching multinational classes Avoiding stereotypes	Attitudes towards increasing diversity
Conveying expectations Providing feedback Disciplinary differences Areas of academic difficulty	Perceptions of academic challenges encountered by international students
International students' participation in group work Interacting with 'home' students	Views of classroom participation
Using Chinese / English Awareness of linguistic anxiety	Perceptions of international students' English language use
Encountering teaching challenges Adjusting pedagogy Meeting students' needs	Views of support for international students and academic staff
Making friends The 'Chinese enclave' Choosing where to invest Being empathetic	Perceptions of international students' social adjustment

Table 5.3 Development of themes: Academic staff interviews

By presenting the above information, I intend to show that the final themes did not appear from nowhere. Instead, I conducted multiple checks and cross-checks of the data sets – a

complex process, given the lengthy nature of interview scripts. This was necessary in order to create a coherent narrative and to allow scope for pertinent comparisons to be made.

5.5 Integration of data

I decided to use data labels (Fitzpatrick, 2016; Hands, 2022) to bring together quantitative and qualitative strands. I revisited the questionnaire statements, then read through the interview transcripts and observation fieldnotes to identity any data which addressed the same theme. The interview questions were more detailed, but still broadly aligned with the survey (Plano Clark, 2019), for example, through avoiding direct mention of the word 'identity.' I looked for agreement, partial agreement, silence, or dissonance between the findings from different components (O'Cathain et al., 2010). This involved examining whether participants gave similar or contrasting responses in the survey and interviews. Findings from both types of data may match (confirmation), describe complementary aspects of the construct (expansion) or contradict each other (discordance) (Fetters et al., 2013). Instead of triangulation, I approached integration through the lens of crystallisation (Ellingson, 2009), which necessitates identifying 'convergence, divergence, and discrepancy between different methods' (O'Cathain et al., 2007, p.137). Rather than seeking a single 'truth,' crystallisation recognises the multiple, subjective and socially constructed nature of knowledge (Ellingson, 2009). Although I aimed to represent participants' views as honestly as possible, neither their words, nor my interpretations, can be taken as entirely objective.

When trying to generate a complete representation of student participants' views and experiences, I faced the inherent challenge of comparing fundamentally different types of data. Marking one answer on an ordinal scale is clearly different from giving in-depth responses during an interview. As well as considering what parallels could be drawn between the quantitative and qualitative data, I had to examine the themes identified in my observation fieldnotes. As represented in Table 5.1, nine survey items were directly discussed in interviews, or witnessed in classroom observations (Confirm). For another six, there were different perspectives of the same phenomenon (Mixed). It was expected that results would vary in instances where participants were trying to predict the nature of their future experiences. However, on two occasions, there were no qualitative data that addressed the same topic (Absent). This was partly due to timing issues, which meant that respondents had already embarked on the pre-sessional programme before the first interview. The data diverged in one instance (Contradict) but, given previous findings on international students' difficulties in making 'local' friends, this was not a surprise.

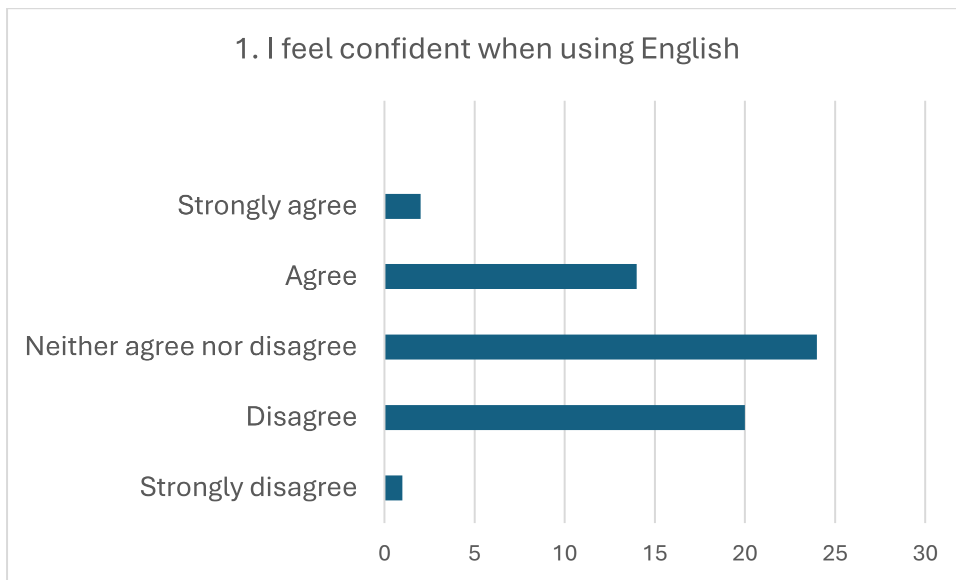
Convergence type	**Main qualitative theme (student interviews and observations)**	**Survey Likert-scale item**
Mixed	Classroom participation The impact of social interactions on identity Developing an academic identity Academic and linguistic investment Coming to terms with different expectations Changing identities	I feel confident when using English
		I enjoy communicating with people in English
		I am excited about beginning my degree programme
		I am nervous about beginning my degree programme
		I think I will cope with the work on my degree programme
		I feel confident about working in a group
		I feel confident about working independently
		I feel confident about contributing to class discussion
		I will try to adapt to local customs while living in Scotland
Confirm	Classroom participation The impact of social interactions on identity Coming to terms with unfamiliar expectations Developing an academic identity Academic and linguistic investment Changing identities	I worry about making mistakes when using English
		I think I will cope with the work on the pre-sessional programme
		I think I will make friends on the pre-sessional programme
		I think I will make friends with other international students on my degree programme
		I expect to encounter a new way of working at university in Scotland
		I believe that studying in Scotland will change me in certain ways
Absent	Academic and linguistic investment Coming to terms with unfamiliar expectations	I am excited about beginning the pre-sessional programme
		I am nervous about beginning the pre-sessional programme
Contradict	The impact of social interactions on identity	I think I will make friends with British students on my degree programme

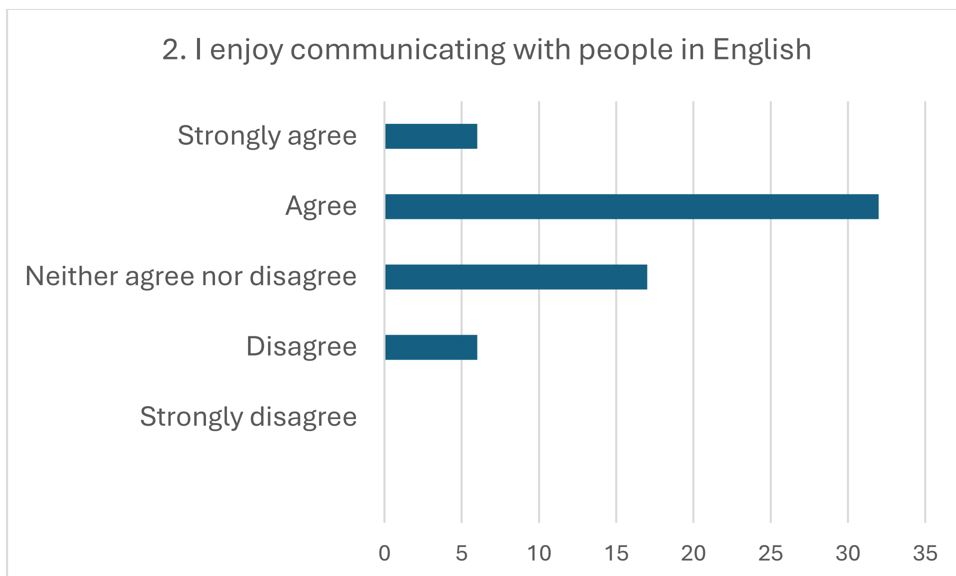
Table 5.4 Integrating findings from the quantitative and qualitative stages: Convergence table
(Adapted from Fitzpatrick, 2016 and Hands, 2022)

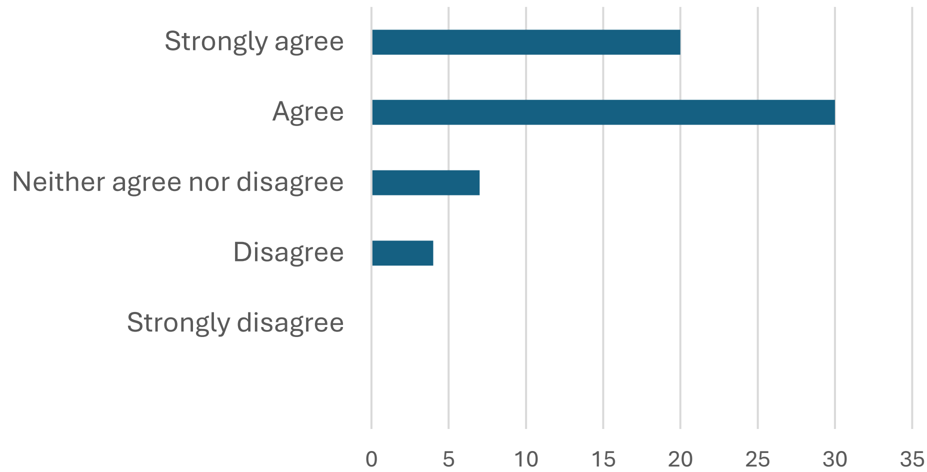
Chapter 6 Results and discussion: Student survey and interviews

6.1 Survey

In this case, conducting detailed statistical analysis would not necessarily have been beneficial when trying to fulfil the research aims. Briggs Baffoe-Djan & Smith (2020) recommend that Likert-type data are treated as ordinal, rather than being used to calculate a mean (which could result in inappropriate inferences). As they advise, I have presented the frequencies in bar chart form, and have collated descriptive data in a table (see below).






3. I worry about making mistakes when using English
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
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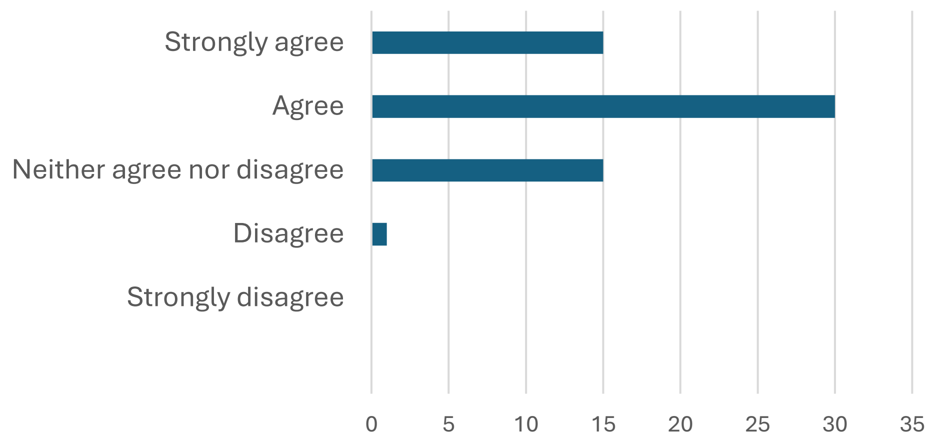
4. I am excited about beginning the pre-sessional programme
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
0
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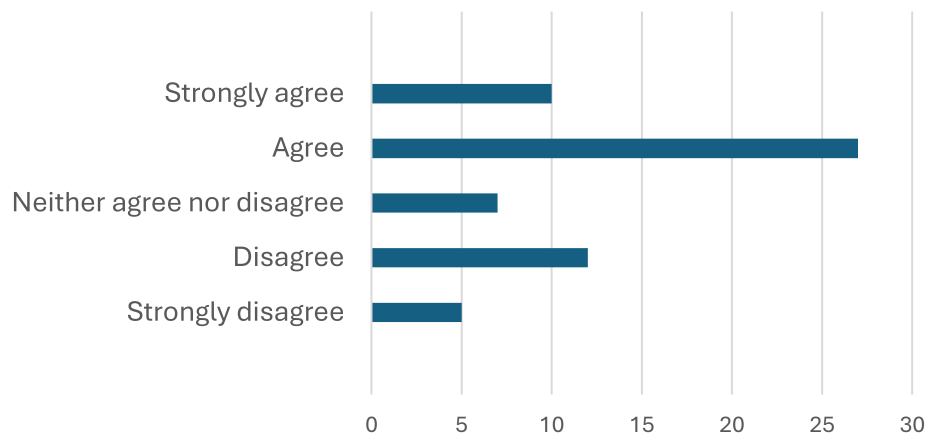
5. I am nervous about beginning the pre-sessional programme
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
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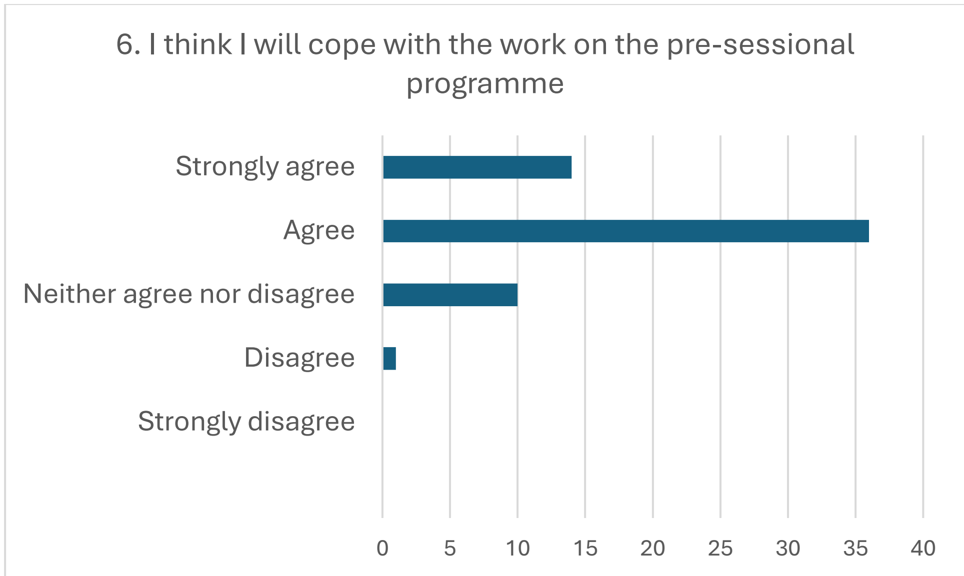
6. I think I will cope with the work on the pre-sessional programme
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
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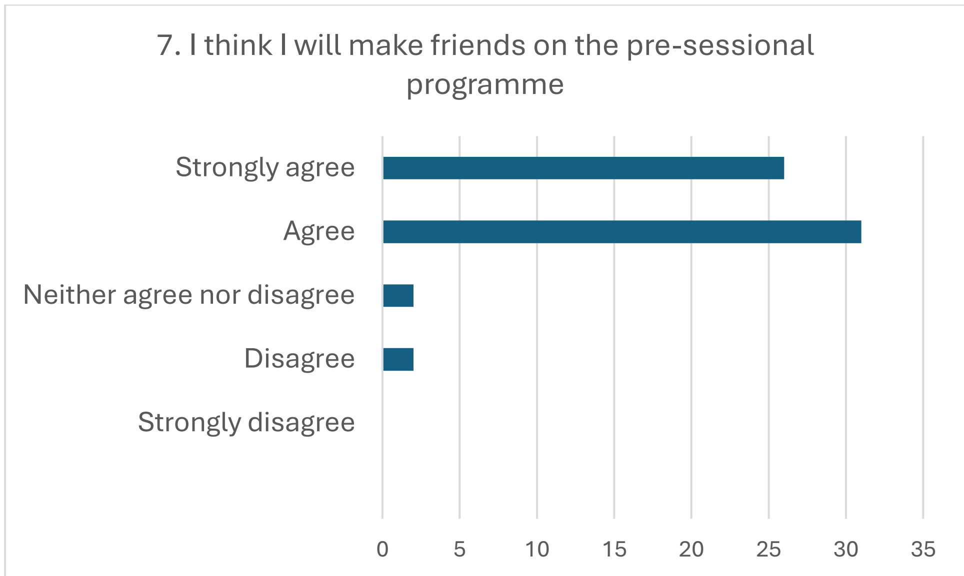
7. I think I will make friends on the pre-sessional programme
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
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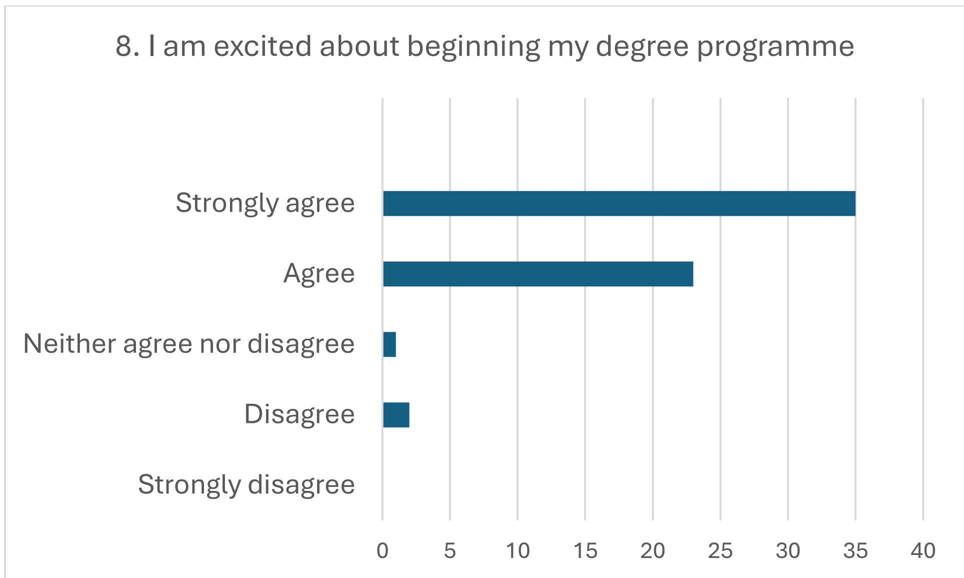
8. I am excited about beginning my degree programme
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
0
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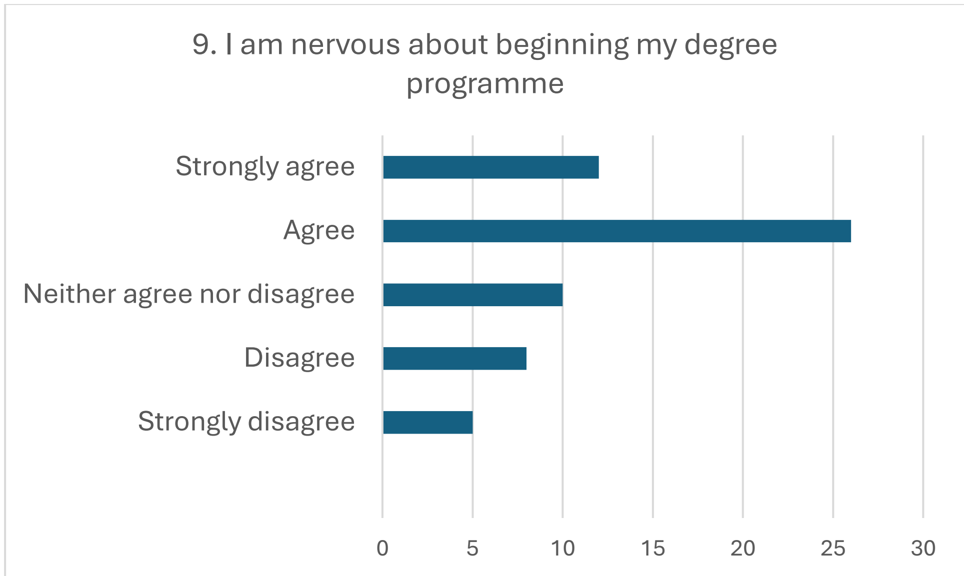
9. I am nervous about beginning my degree programme
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
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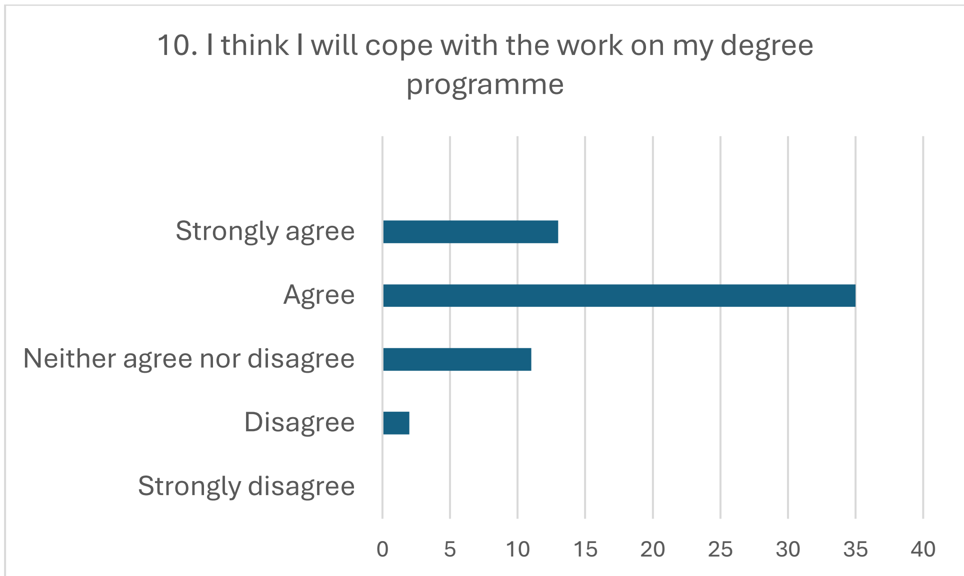
10. I think I will cope with the work on my degree programme
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
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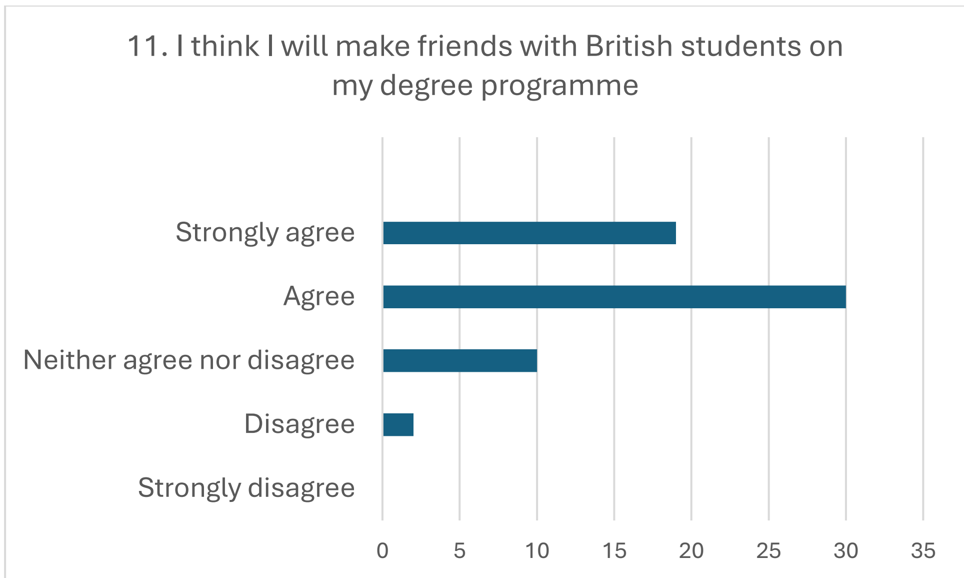
11. I think I will make friends with British students on my degree programme
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
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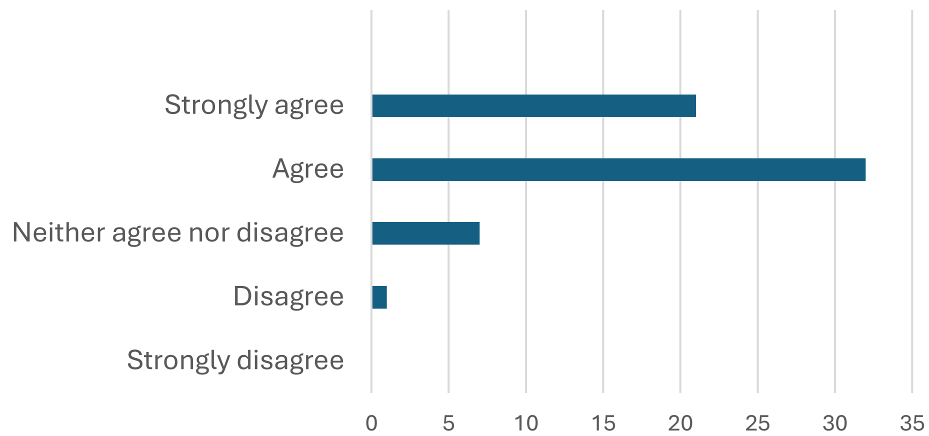
12. I think I will make friends with other international students on my degree programme
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
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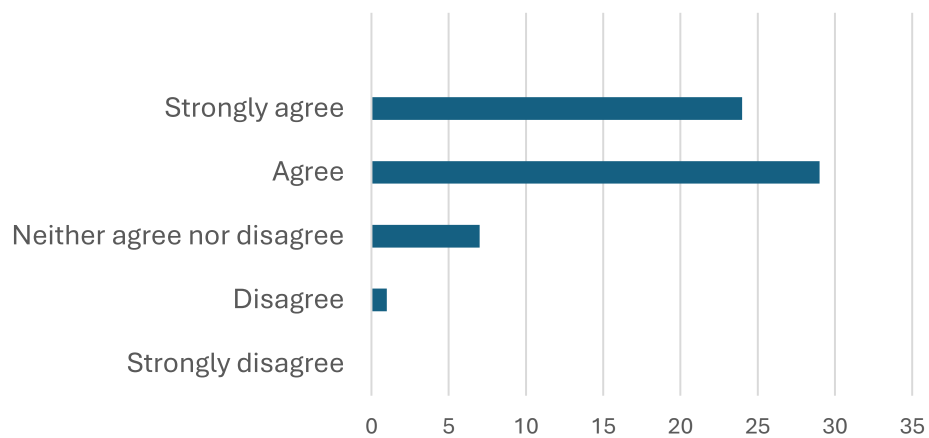
13. I expect to encounter a new way of working at university in Scotland
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
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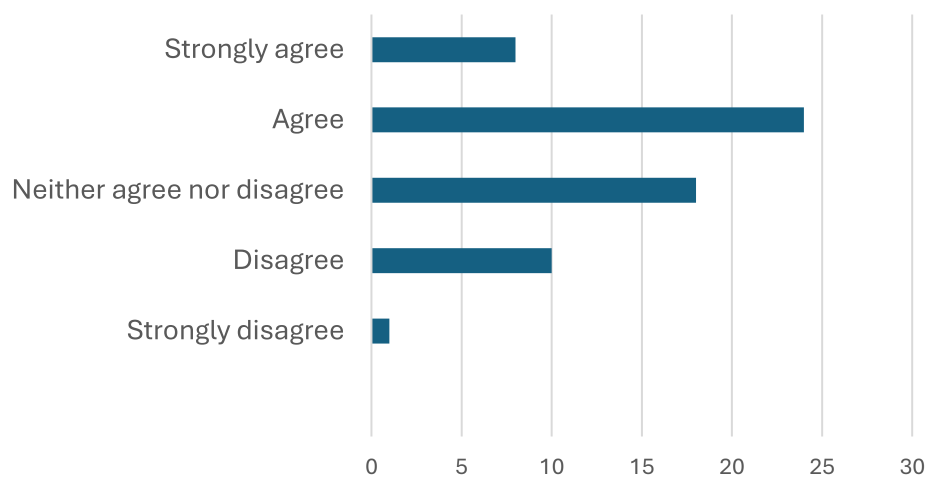
14. I feel confident about working in a group
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
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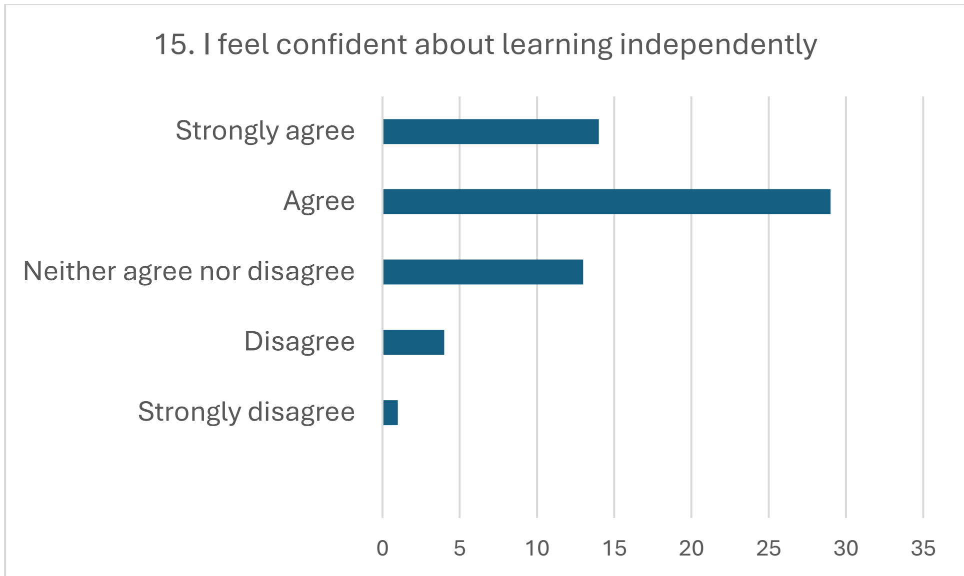
15. I feel confident about learning independently
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
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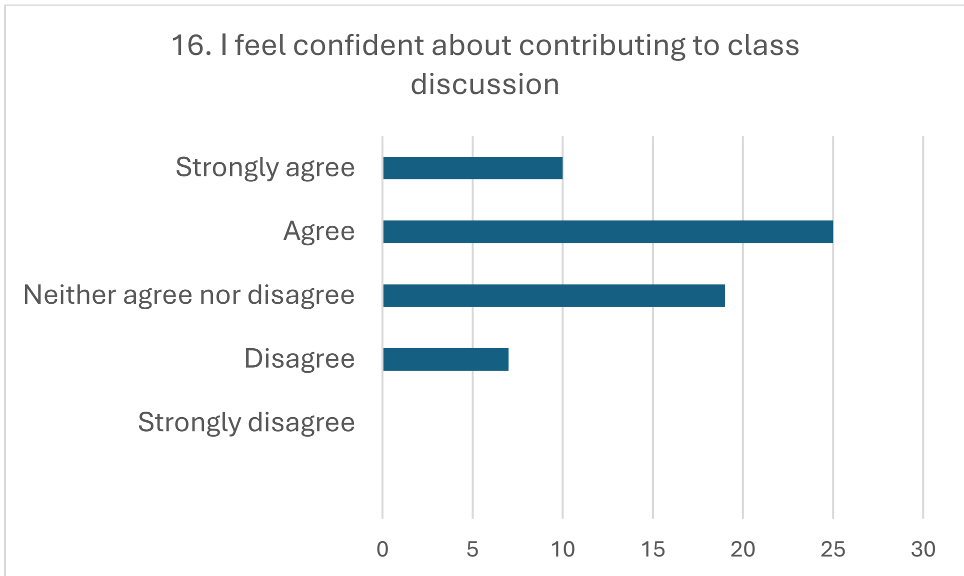
16. I feel confident about contributing to class discussion
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
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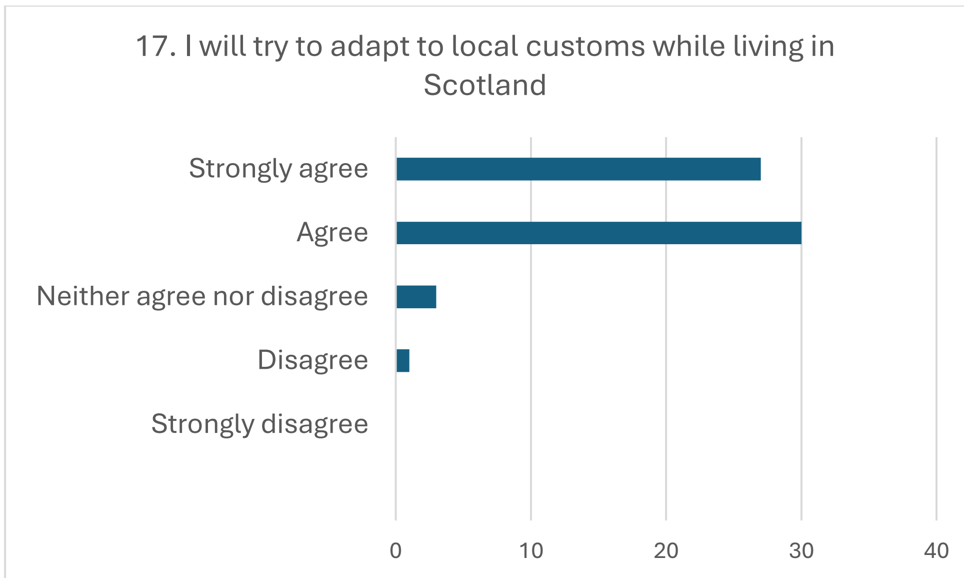
17. I will try to adapt to local customs while living in Scotland
Strongly agree
Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
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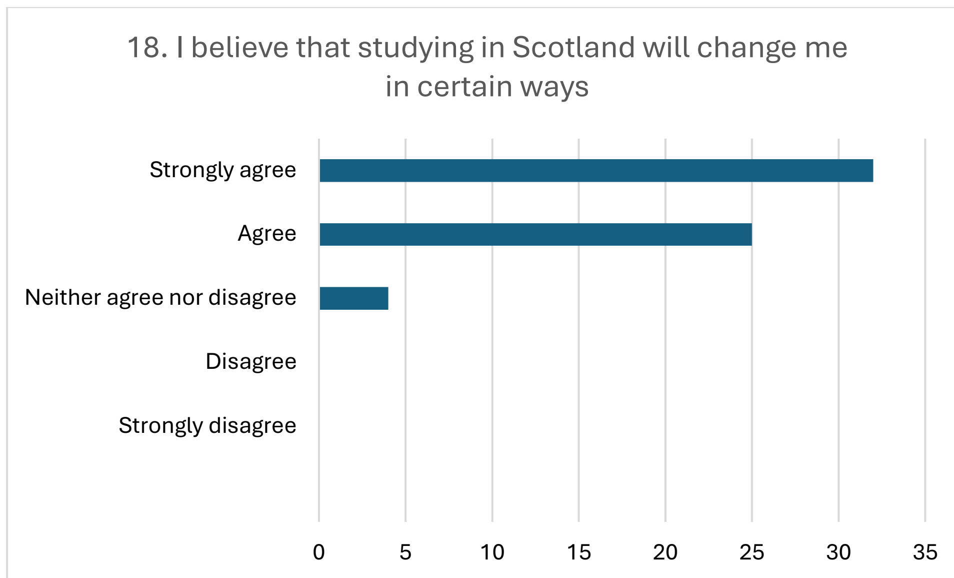

Figure 6.1 Likert scale questionnaire responses

Nationality	Gender	Age	Length of time studying English	Intended degree programme
China = 57	Female = 54	21 = 11	1-5 years = 5	Arts & Humanities = 19
Japan = 1	Male = 7	22 = 26	5-10 years = 22	Design = 15
Kuwait = 1		23 = 16	10+ years = 34	Education = 10
Thailand = 1		24 = 1		Social Science = 7
Turkey = 1		25 = 1		Psychology = 5
Total = 61		26 = 1		Law = 3
		28 = 1		Business = 1
		29 = 1		Science = 1
		32 = 1		
		38 = 1		
		42 = 1		

Table 6.1 Demographic information of questionnaire respondents

In general, survey respondents were ambivalent about their confidence when using English, as seen by the majority indicating either neutral or disagree for statement 1. However, a similar number answered that they enjoy speaking the language in statement 2, suggesting a combination of anxiety and willingness to communicate. The assumption that they will make errors (statement 3) indicates potentially negative self-positioning, as doubting one's linguistic proficiency might result in greater apprehension about making mistakes. Students were perhaps also considering scenarios they would encounter while in the UK. They may have feared negative judgement when interacting with 'native' users of English (as opposed to, for example, studying and speaking the language in their home country).

The majority expressed feelings of excitement about beginning the PSE (statement 4), but levels of nervousness (statement 5) were more mixed. Indeed, this was one of the questions which attracted a higher number of 'strongly disagree' responses, along with feeling nervous about starting their degree programme (statement 9), being confident about working in a group (statement 14), and learning independently (statement 15). Participants generally felt

confident that they would manage the work on the PSE (statement 6). It is conceivable that they had researched the programme beforehand and/or spoken to alumni, and therefore knew what to expect. In addition, possessing relatively high IELTS grades might have provided reassurance about their capabilities. However, a similar number indicated anxiety about starting their academic studies (statement 9), most likely because they would be stepping into the unknown by embarking on a master's degree in Scotland. Feeling nervous did not preclude being excited at the same time (statement 8), demonstrating participants' fluctuating emotions even at this early stage. There were also few concerns about coping with degree level work (statement 10). If students have previously been academically successful, then perhaps they have no reason to believe this will not continue.

Nearly all were anticipating a different way of working from their previous educational experience (statement 13). Interestingly, questions about specific aspects of university learning in Scotland (statements 14, 15 and 16) attracted a relatively high number of neither/nor answers. This suggests that students may not have had much previous experience of group work in their home countries. As confirmed in interviews, coming from a classroom culture which is less interactive means that many are also unfamiliar with contributing to discussion and being autonomous. Nevertheless, most respondents claimed to be confident in these areas, undermining the assumption that Chinese and other Asian learners are 'passive' and reluctant to vocalise their ideas. At the same time, students who were happy to answer a questionnaire about their attitudes to English were clearly more enthusiastic than average about the language.

The answers to questions about making friends are interesting. The majority thought that they would meet people on the pre-sessional EAP course (statement 7), perhaps because their classmates were in a similar situation to themselves. Chinese students have a possible advantage, as they can speak their own language after class and easily bond with each other. Socialising might be more difficult for those who are in the minority (either because of their nationality or age). However, other factors also come into play, and having a nationality / language in common is not necessarily a strong basis for the beginning of a relationship. There was a firm belief (most answered strongly agree or agree) among participants that they would make friends with both British (statement 11) and other international students (statement 12) on their degree programmes. At this stage, they appeared not to have thought about the barriers which can diminish contact with UK nationals. For instance, they may not have realised that their university subject classes would contain a high number of Chinese students.

Notably, when it came to the question of adapting (statement 17), most signalled that they would try to fit into the local way of life. This suggests that they were open to new experiences and wanted to encounter a different culture. All agreed that studying abroad would change them in certain ways (statement 18), and this was corroborated in later interviews with focal volunteers. Survey respondents appeared to be adopting a positive outlook towards their prospects at the beginning of the PSE. Nonetheless, a lack of confidence in their English proficiency was also conveyed. This is unsurprising, considering that, for the majority, it was likely to be their first time living in an Anglophone environment.

Moving far away from home to embark on a degree in another language probably requires a spirit of optimism and adventure. Feelings of both anticipation and anxiety are also normal during any period of change.

6.2 Interviews

Several students expressed reservations about their English proficiency when replying to my email request for an interview, wondering whether they would be able to make themselves understood. As previously explained in §4.3.3, interviewing someone in English when it is not their first language can affect both how they articulate themselves and the depth of certain responses (Cortazzi et al., 2011). Notwithstanding such issues, few comprehension difficulties occurred, and participants often gave detailed answers. My experience of working with EAP students meant that I could usually decipher any unclear expression or non-standard pronunciation. Participants also self-corrected and used compensation strategies (such as choosing an alternative word) to convey what they wished to say. On occasion, they asked for clarification (or simply looked confused), but I quickly noticed these cues and repeated or rephrased the question. Sometimes I intervened with a follow-up probe in order to elicit further details, but avoided direct interruptions. Although research has suggested that male interviewees can be especially reticent (Adler & Adler, 2001; Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001), I did not generally find this to be the case. Cognisant of the potential strain caused by expressing oneself in another language, I kept meetings to a manageable length (between 35 and 50 minutes).

As with the survey, I avoided asking direct questions about identity, as this might not be the best strategy for gaining meaningful responses (Eppler & Codó, 2016). Nonetheless, participants sometimes referred to the concept of identity without specific prompts. In all three rounds of interviews, I recognised that our conversations only provided a snapshot of their thoughts and feelings. How much they wished to open up to me and what they were willing to share could have depended on multiple factors, such as their mood or their level of tiredness that day. Although wary of becoming emotionally involved, I did not wish to come across as cold, uncaring, or only interested in collecting data. I never forgot that I was dealing with real people – each with their own hopes, fears and insecurities. I expressed sincere appreciation of students who gave up their time so willingly without tangible compensation. My hope is that all participants felt the same as one who emailed me afterwards:

> Although we are a researcher-respondent relationship, I felt like I was being listened to and cared for. I knew I wouldn't be judged talking with you, and it's even OK to keep silent (Kexin).

Pseudonym / Gender	Age (at 1st interview)	Nationality	Degree	Years learning English
Chen (M)	23	Chinese	Physical Education	5-10
Dian (F)	26	Chinese	Education	>10
Haoran (M)	23	Chinese	Education	>10
Jianyu (M)	22	Chinese	History	5-10
Kexin (F)	23	Chinese	Social Anthropology	5-10
Meilin (F)	21	Chinese	Design	>10
Sumana (F)	23	Thai	Design	>10
Tatsuo (M)	38	Japanese	Business	5-10
Xinyi (F)	22	Chinese	Law	>10
Yao (F)	23	Chinese	Social Science	5-10
Yuming (F)	22	Chinese	Psychology	5-10

Table 6.2 Student participant information

In what follows, I aim to authentically represent participants' voices, quoting verbatim in order to interpret any significant comments. Hesitations, variations in tone, word stress and paralinguistic features have been retained where applicable (see Glossary of transcription terms). I have also included my questions when these offer extra insight. Selected excerpts are intended to be representative of the interviews in their entirety, thereby presenting a detailed picture of the focal respondents' experiences. The relevant number of each interview is cited to show the stage it comes from: interview pre-sessional English programme (Pre-S); interview semester 1 (Sem 1); interview semester 2 (Sem 2).

6.3 Academic and linguistic investment

Embarking on a postgraduate degree abroad provides students with an opportunity to expand their capital (Crowther, 2011), in terms of both material and symbolic resources. The participants were clear about their reasons for coming to Scotland, commenting on the university's 'QS ranking' and 'high reputation.' The longer duration of postgraduate courses in China and stiff competition for places (Iannelli & Huang, 2014) were additional factors in guiding their decision. The opportunity to enhance their career prospects (Gao, 2010) was also mentioned, as well as the wish to experience life in an English-speaking country. In addition, parental approval had likely been forthcoming, given the high cost of studying overseas. Although social class is not a significant aspect of my findings, a couple of respondents did refer to financial matters, for instance, parents 'not having enough money' to fund prospective PhD study (Dian, Sem 1) and needing to move home after graduation to save money (Haoran, Sem 2). Interestingly, some Chinese interviewees mentioned the prospect of greater intellectual freedom when living in the UK, as encapsulated in 6.1 and 6.2:

(6.1) I think in this place I can freely and bravely express myself without saying something wrong (Xinyi, Pre-S).

(6.2) I think the, um, the Chinese government maybe censored the academic research, yeah, so this is why I don't want to go back to China (Kexin, Pre-S).

It is fairly common to change discipline when moving from undergraduate to postgraduate level, and this applied to several of the interviewees (Yao, Dian, Kexin, Meilin and Haoran).

However, opting for a new subject could be challenging (even in one's home country), as students will encounter unfamiliar concepts and disciplinary requirements. For those returning to education after previous work experience (Tatsuo, Dian and Sumana), giving up their professional identity could also be difficult. Nonetheless, in the early stages of their sojourn, participants tended to position themselves as outgoing, adventurous and self-reliant, characteristics of the 'good language learner' (see Cervatiuc, 2009):

(6.3) I don't want to stay in the place that can make me comfortable, and I want to communicate with other students from different country (Meilin, Pre-S).

(6.4) In London or in other places in main UK they have too many Thai students and I just want to, like, be on my own, learn to be independent, so I picked to come here instead (Sumana, Pre-S).

Naturally, students were committed to the PSE since they had to pass its assessments (sometimes with high marks) in order to meet the requirements of their conditional offers. However, another key reason for their ability to invest was the welcoming classroom atmosphere and level of instructor support, something which I witnessed in observations. As Norton & McKinney (2011) emphasise, students may choose to invest (or not) in the practices of a specific community. The teacher's influence on respondents' linguistic and academic confidence is illustrated in the following comments:

(6.5) If we ask a fool question, [EAP tutor] will still answer us patiently, so we are not afraid of some problem caused by our language (Yao, Pre-S).

(6.6) My teacher is excellent, an amazing teacher, always motivating and, uh, always caring for the student [...] so that's why I really like her (Tatsuo, Pre-S).

There seemed to be a non-competitive atmosphere in PSE classes, with respondents' use of 'we' and 'us' suggesting a sense of togetherness. When learners feel that they will not be looked down upon or reproached for making mistakes, their investment is likely to increase. This in turn can strengthen their identity as a capable user of English. However, my belief that EAP teachers are universally patient and encouraging would be tested by the account of one student (see §6.4.3).

Connected to investment is the notion of imagined selves (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2013). Participant comments demonstrate how visualising an imagined community influences learning trajectories and future plans (Norton & McKinney, 2011). For instance, those who expressed a desire to remain abroad (Dian, Yao, Sumana, Kexin and Tatsuo) might view themselves as belonging to a transnational community (see Wu & Hammond, 2011; de Fina & Perrino, 2013; Duff, 2015). Some interviewees' imagined identities were focused on study or career options. For one aspiring PhD candidate, language was not necessarily a barrier, but she was concerned about a potentially taxing workload:

(6.7) I want to do a PhD but lots of my PhD friends they just said no, don't do it, it's quite hard, it's really hard, it's difficult to do this. I think I want to try↑. I want to stay↑ (Dian, Sem 2).

In contrast, although another had ambitions to embark on further study, she felt very anxious about the level of English required:

(6.8) There is one thing that made me feel a little hesitated is the language [...] Because I know when

maybe one day I can be a PhD student, I have to (0.3) talk, talk more with my peers, with my professors, so I don't know whether I can undertake that kind of suffering of language (Kexin, Sem 2).

Contemplating undertaking a doctoral degree demonstrates a longer-term investment in the academic community. Others were more focused on employment options, either in the UK or elsewhere. I was interested to find out whether the prospect of using English influenced participants' career decisions. Unfortunately, they were not always able or willing to go into detail, as can be seen in the following exchange about accepting a position in the US:

(6.9) Jenny: But I guess working for [an international company] abroad would make using English really important.
Tatsuo: Yes, I think so (0.3). Continuously I have to study English as much as possible (Sem 2).

Whether students intend to remain in Scotland (or move to another country where English is the dominant language) could affect their investment in university life and the wider community. However, their day-to-day experiences both inside and outside the classroom also have a significant impact.

Interviewees realised that the PSE would be less demanding than a master's degree, but were not free from pressure. On arrival in Scotland, they had already invested a great deal of time and energy in researching university courses, applying, arranging finances and organising accommodation. At the research site, students cannot re-submit pre-sessional coursework or re-take examinations. Therefore, when I asked participants if they had any concerns, some referred to getting through the PSE successfully. As Tatsuo's word choice in 6.10 demonstrates ('pressure;' 'fail'), this could put them under extra strain:

(6.10) Jenny: Do you have anything you're worried about, starting the degree in English or –
Tatsuo: Oh, eh, pre-sessional examination (0.3). I'm really worried about passing.
Jenny: So, you feel under a bit of pressure?
Tatsuo: A lot of pressure. If I fail the exam, I need to go back to Japan (Pre-S).

The pass rate of pre-sessional programmes is extremely high (Pearson, 2020a, 2020b), but not every EAP student will automatically meet their degree programme requirements. For some, this could result in the loss of a competent academic identity. In addition, feeling overly anxious might lead to decreased investment or maladaptive coping strategies such as avoidance. One respondent described how she tried to 'escape' when under stress, which then resulted in further worry about meeting coursework deadlines (Yuming, Interview Pre-S).

6.4 Coming to terms with different expectations

6.4.1 EAP programme: Coping with the initial transition

It is evident that students are immediately faced with new expectations on starting the PSE. The postgraduate interviewees were generally aware that gaining a high IELTS score does not equate to being familiar with the demands of university-level work in English (Jenkins & Wingate, 2015; Thorpe et al., 2017):

(6.11) IELTS is, you just put your own ideas into your composition but for this essay, I need to read

lots of books and write down about their ideas and try to find some evidence (Dian, Pre-S).

(6.12) The (EAP) teacher told us, forget about some of the rules in IELTS (Haoran, Pre-S).

International postgraduates might encounter a degree of 'learning shock' (Gu & Maley, 2008) on arrival, as exemplified in 6.13:

(6.13) Jenny: How's the pre-sessional going so far?
Sumana: Um, on the first day I was a bit shocking of the listening test cos it's super-hard, I think it's even harder than the IELTS test =
Jenny: = really?
Sumana: It **is**↑ because I got a bit higher score on the listening, I got like 7.5 already, but when I tried the practice (0.3) I couldn't do well (Pre-S).

Sumana's word choice of 'shocking' and 'super-hard' indicates her surprise at the difficulty of an initial assessment and the negative impact this had on her confidence: 'And I thought, oh my God, this is only the first day, and I couldn't, like, do it.' Another respondent described the same task in more detail (summarising a lecture) and explained why she found listening and taking notes at the same time problematic:

(6.14) Sometimes the professor, he says so quickly, and I couldn't follow him and maybe I'm writing down the key words and next I want to write down the next one and I **forget** what I need to write down, it's too quickly for me (Dian, Pre-S).

Dian's own unbroken sentence demonstrates the fast pace of the lecturer's speech and her related struggle to understand his message. While listening challenges will be considered in further detail in §6.3.1 and §6.3.2, these extracts show that students' sense of competence can quickly be destabilised. As participants in the shorter, 6-week programme, Sumana and Dian also had less time to adjust to unfamiliar requirements.

A key aim of EAP pre-sessional programmes is to prepare university candidates for academic study in English (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018); therefore, content typically introduces notions such as critical thinking, autonomy and tolerating ambiguity. International students' unfamiliarity with Western academic conventions has been much discussed (Fox, 1994; Gu & Maley, 2008; Adisa et al., 2019), but I wondered if participants might contest such opinions. However, accounts of their previous education aligned with descriptions of the Chinese system as less interactive and more inclined to position the teacher as an authority figure (see Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). Sumana and Tatsuo articulated similar views about the curricula in Thailand and Japan, respectively. On the PSE, students encountered a more independent way of working, rather than rote learning or, as one put it, the lecturer 'instilling' knowledge (Xinyi, Pre-S). 6.15 shows another participant suddenly realising how the EAP classes differed in one important aspect:

(6.15) Meilin: In China, our teacher will give me the answer [...] but in this seminar discussion [EAP teacher] always told us to discuss and discuss and we put all our opinion together. So, for our discussion and maybe to (0.2). Oh↑. It's **our** opinion, not the teacher.
Jenny: Did that surprise you, that the teacher didn't give you the answer? (Meilin hesitates). Were you surprised?
Meilin: I (0.2) because I just realised it just now (Pre-S).

Meilin's raised tone on 'oh,' and her emphasis on 'our' indicate the novelty of students coming up with their own ideas, rather than being given the 'answer.' Respondents were also being introduced to concepts such as independent learning in the first few weeks of the PSE, and were keen to explain how this contrasted with their previous experience: 'in China, lots of teachers, they just teach us, but I think it's lack of autonomy' (Chen, Pre-S); 'in Thailand, the professors told us everything, what to do, and we just delivered that' (Sumana, Pre-S).

Perhaps because it is a difficult notion to define precisely (Rear, 2019; Moosavi, 2022), some interviewees seemed unsure about the meaning of critical thinking. Previous disciplinary knowledge could affect their understanding, for example, if their undergraduate degree had not involved evaluating different arguments in literature: 'it's just focused on how to cope with this maths problem, and I don't need to do some resource and think if they're right' (Yao, Pre-S). However, participants realised that being able to think critically would be necessary on both the PSE and their intended degree. The following comments demonstrate varying levels of comprehension; however, it should be remembered that students with English as their first language can also find this academic skill challenging:

(6.16) [Our EAP teacher] told us, you need to be critical, you need to be critical and, uh, you know, you need to balance the things, positive and negative point, uh, so, that is totally different (Chen, Pre-S).

(6.17) [Our EAP teacher] talked about critical thinking, you must have some criticise about a problem even if you think it's positive and always to be, uh, critical. But (0.2) I am really not in the practice (Jianyu, Pre-S).

(6.18) [...] you have to, like, digest what you have read and transform the information by your own words and output it and that's the most challenging. And that creates the criticality (Xinyi, Pre-S).

Participants also described having more opportunities to contribute to discussion, a topic which will be elaborated on in §6.4: 'speaking in class I found more time students talking to each other than teacher talking' (Haoran, Pre-S). In the following exchange, an interviewee interrupted my question in her eagerness to explain that many aspects of the PSE course were entirely unfamiliar. Her brief, one word response, repeated twice, emphasises the distance between prior learning and new demands:

(6.19) Jenny: Are there any other differences, any other things that you've experienced on the course that you haven't =
Meilin: = every. Every (Pre-S).

For students who had experience of studying or working in English, there was sometimes a mismatch between previous linguistic standards and what they were now being asked to do. Although Haoran had been required to write several essays in English while briefly attending university in Hong Kong, he 'didn't get too much feedback' about his work and linguistic errors were not corrected. Sumana had studied in an international programme at school in Thailand, and had later been an exchange student in the US. However, she realised that learning in a Scottish university was going to be 'really academic' in comparison. Tatsuo had

produced technical reports in English but claimed that these were ‘not good’ because his teachers at school were Japanese who he described as ‘not good English users.’ As Blommaert (2005, p.211) reminds us, identities do not always have ‘the same range or scope, nor the same purchase across social and physical spaces.’ Speakers can ‘lose voice’ (ibid., p.77) if their linguistic resources do not fulfil required functions. Differences in the use of language often result in inequalities, for example, if a particular variety is stigmatised. An international student who is used to functioning well in English could find it disconcerting to be evaluated negatively in the new academic environment. If they do not conform to the ‘norms’ or ‘rules’ of language (ibid., p.73), others may identify them as a ‘non-native’ learner of English. In turn, this could lead to their exclusion from certain aspects of the community.

Overall, participants believed that the PSE played a part in preparing them to undertake a degree by introducing new educational practices. Sumana had been told by other students (in online forums) that ‘if you go straight to your degree you’ll be really confused because you haven’t learned the system yet’ (Pre-S). Xinyi described the PSE as ‘eye-opening,’ highlighting that, for her, this was a completely different ‘studying style’ (Pre-S). Yuming remarked that EAP students are ‘lucky,’ as they have more time to adapt: ‘we have already learned how to use English in learning, so maybe [in] the master’s studies we are more confident’ (Pre-S). Whether students do manage to transfer knowledge, not to mention confidence, from the PSE on to their degree programmes will be considered later in this chapter.

6.4.2 Degree programme: Taking on new challenges

Most students, regardless of background, encounter considerable pressure when embarking on a master’s degree, but this is amplified for those learning in another language. It was notable that, in semester 1 interviews, several participants replied to my opening question – asking them to give a brief outline of their courses – by immediately describing their exhaustion. Similarly, when I enquired what they were enjoying so far, some hesitated or evaded the question, focusing instead on their self-professed difficulties:

(6.20) Jenny: So, first of all, can you describe a little bit about your programme and the courses you’re doing?

Dian: **Wow**, I think it’s really hard for me, cos, hm, you know, my background, I learned Japanese when I was in the undergraduate and this is Education [...] It’s really hard for me to understand while I’m reading lots of abstract concepts (Sem 1).

(6.21) Jenny: What are you enjoying so far about your programme?

Meilin: Um, I should say that it’s **so** tired. It’s so, it’s so tired (Sem 1).

It is interesting that, as shown by 6.20 and 6.21, linguistic issues were not always referred to. Instead, changing subject, or coping with a heavy workload might be of more significance for some international students. Postgraduates can draw comparisons with earlier experiences of HE (Jenkins, 2013), as shown by the following comment on adapting to new demands:

(6.22) Jenny: Is anything worrying you at the moment?

Sumana: Yeah, actually, because I was a Design student as well in my undergrad back home

> and we didn't have to do lots of academic things like reading and writing [...] but here I actually have to read a lot of reading list and I'm not enjoying that too much↑ (Sem 1).

However, others did mention the challenge of studying at a high level in English: 'using the second language to understand, it's really hard' (Kexin, Sem 1). Even when individuals already have a good grounding in their subject, they may be unable to access key information using a different language:

> (6.23) Maybe there are lots of knowledge we have learned in our undergrad degree but [now] it is in English so sometimes we don't know↑ what that mean, or what our teacher said. But when we translate it, we found, oh, so it is blah blah blah (Chen, Sem 1).

Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that students will possess 'common knowledge' if they have a different cultural heritage, something which was confirmed during interviews with academic staff. As one participant explained when describing an Irish History course: 'you need a certain context to know about this, what this word is and what is these people' (Jianyu, Sem 1).

It is clear that the intensity of master's programmes calls on students to be organised and to manage their time effectively. Although interviewees described themselves as coming from educational backgrounds where autonomy is not favoured, they did not seem disconcerted by having to work independently. Nonetheless, while most seemed to be flexibly navigating the new habitus, a degree of uncertainty remained:

> (6.24) [...] now we're all just confused students, like, about the system (0.3), like, we talk a lot about, do we have to read this before? Do we have to do anything before this class? Because we're quite confused (Sumana, Sem 1).

As there were no British nationals on Sumana's programme, her use of the word 'we' presumably refers to fellow international students (who perhaps lack experience of the UK university system, regardless of their first language). Again, this shows that she was not alone in her feelings of confusion.

Even at the beginning of semester 1, respondents displayed a notable degree of agency when dealing with academic and linguistic challenges (see Cervatuic, 2009), and were implementing individual coping strategies. The determination to succeed highlights their investment but, at the same time, they tended to be realistic about their potential achievements:

> (6.25) I think I can at least pass; I get 50% or a little more than 50 because I think my diligent [...] But I'm not sure whether I can get the higher, uh, score (Haoran, Sem 1).

> (6.26) [...] for the international student, I think we need to study hard but maybe we can't get the high grade, but we learn lots of things about critical thinking and, uh, actually at least we try. So, I will proud of myself (Chen, Sem 1).

However, previously high-achieving students, whose sense of identity is partially based on academic success, could experience a decline in self-esteem if they find themselves performing less well in the new educational context.

6.5 Developing an academic identity

6.5.1 EAP programme: Perceived challenges

During discussion of how they were coping academically, participants referred to a variety of perceived challenges. At the time of the first interview, they had not completed a great deal of writing. Nonetheless, several homed in on it as an area of concern:

(6.27) In China, I don't know how to write an academic essay, yeah, I don't know how to use citation and reference in, uh, English academic essay (Meilin, Pre-S).

(6.28) Reading the reference is very difficult because there are lots of specific academic words (laughs) in the reference [...] Maybe I understand it in Chinese, but I don't understand in English (Chen, Pre-S).

One interviewee was concerned about accidental plagiarism (see Fatemi & Saito, 2020), since in Japanese 'it's better for our understanding [to use] the **same** phrase, same words' (Tatsuo, Pre-S). As academic integrity is a crucial aspect of university study, it is understandable that he was 'really afraid' of breaking the rules. Similarly, another explained the difficulty of using her own words: 'I know how to paraphrase in Chinese, but I don't know how to use it in English' (Yuming, Pre-S). Moreover, international students from diverse backgrounds will not always know how to produce written assignments which conform to expected standards. Some may doubt their competence when conveying ideas in English, despite being capable writers in their own language: 'I think my academic writing skills, it's good in Chinese but in English I'm not quite sure about my expression' (Jianyu, Pre-S). In addition, organisation and argumentation can be quite dissimilar in the first language, as elucidated by 6.29:

(6.29) Jenny: Could you tell me a little bit about how it's different from writing in Japanese, in your first language?

Tatsuo: In Japan, always we don't say directly (laughs). Always still some space, implying, implying, implying (0.3). And finally↑ just say **something**, a little bit, as a conclusion (Pre-S).

If students transfer their previous writing practices into writing in English, they could be penalised by markers for being too vague in their arguments. Being unable to express themselves as precisely as they wish is another source of frustration for writers using another language. Haoran reported receiving feedback on his first (PSE) written submission which indicated that he had misunderstood the topic. He was 'surprised' by this, suggesting that he had felt secure in his ability to produce an acceptable piece of work. This highlights the importance of making expectations clear to students, as well as the need for constructive feedback about how to improve (Jenkins & Wingate, 2015).

When discussing reading on the PSE, interviewees did not report problems with finding sources, but were concerned about synthesising and evaluating information – tasks which are also demanding in one's first language. However, the strain of reading in English does need to be considered, especially if EAP students are trying to understand everything:

(6.30) I like reading, but I also feel confused because I don't know what is important for me [...] like,

um, I just need to understand all the sentence, all the words. If I don't, I will worry about, um, do I just ignore some impression or something? (Yuming, Pre-S).

Others remarked on the laborious nature of deciphering complex information in English: 'some vocabularies I couldn't understand the meaning, I need to check one by one, yeah, it made me so tired' (Dian, Pre-S); 'I think my reading speed is very slow, and my vocabulary is not enough' (Kexin, Pre-S).

Listening was another cause of anxiety for participants, as they described not being able to understand guest subject lecturers if the pace of their speech was too fast. While EAP instructors realise the importance of modifying their delivery to account for a multilingual audience, the same might not be true of academic staff in other disciplines. Students' previous experience of lectures does not necessarily prepare them for listening and notetaking in a UK university context, with linguistic issues and the requirement to be more autonomous both playing a role:

(6.31) We learn notetaking in China but it's different from the UK because the teacher will [tell us], take the notes, this is the point [...] But in the UK, like a lecture, we need to distinguish which one is important thing and the key points, um, in this lecture by ourself (Chen, Pre-S).

The PSE is intended to act as a bridge between students' past experience of using English and undertaking a degree in the language. However, my findings disclose that pre-sessional programmes themselves can present new linguistic and academic challenges.

6.5.2 Degree programme: Learning shock?

Although I wish to avoid stereotypes about former EAP students being bewildered by Western university requirements, the participants did encounter certain issues on beginning their degrees. For example, in semester 1, several mentioned the burdensome nature of reading multiple academic articles in English. Conscientious individuals might fear missing crucial information if they do not understand everything; on the other hand, it is difficult to judge how long to spend on interpreting a single text. The following remarks describe some common difficulties:

(6.32) It's hard to – how can I say this? – filter out the key information in English (Kexin, Sem 1).

(6.33) [Reading in English] is slower, and I need to spend more time to read it again and again until I can understand (Yuming, Sem 1).

(6.34) Jenny: So, is the reading, is that textbooks and academic articles?
Dian: Yes. And we need to compare it, and we need to tell our teacher what we understand, we don't just repeat the concept, but we need to have our critical thinking, so it's quite hard (Sem 1).

Dian's description of reading requirements as 'quite hard' was possibly an understatement, as she went on to explain her uncertainty about whether she could manage the work: 'Every time I just told my friends, can I graduate from here? It's really hard.' However, interviewees also showed that they were making deliberate decisions about how to manage their reading, as seen in 6.35 and 6.36:

(6.35) I seldom translate whole paragraph; I only translate just a few words which I could not understand. Some Chinese students, they translate the whole page. I don't do so (Haoran, Sem 1).

(6.36) The reading is hard and especially for me, using the second language to understand, it's really hard, yeah. But I think [...] for the reading I can, uh, use the translator and my experience in China to help me understand (Kexin, Sem 1).

During the semester 1 interviews, listening remained a concern for some individuals, for example, the cognitive load of trying to absorb spoken information and take notes at the same time:

(6.37) One thing I've noticed in class, I've seen a lot of students are taking notes on their laptops when the professor is speaking, but I a little bit can't do that cos when my attention's on what he's saying I can't do the typing thing (Jianyu, Sem 1).

Overall, interviewees' ability to understand lectures seemed to depend on several factors: the pace of an instructor's speech, their accent, and prior knowledge of the content. One explained that, when a lecturer spoke too fast, she felt unable to engage with the subject:

(6.38) Jenny: So, you don't understand what he said immediately? You need more time to think?
Yao: And after I understand him, he is talking some other point, so I can't enrol in his discussion, yes, um, hm (0.3). Um (0.2), so I don't have enjoy feel in this class (Sem 1).

In real time activities, it can be difficult for students from different language backgrounds to process what is being said in English (Norton, 2013). In this case, not being able to keep up with the content of lessons led to feelings of stress and exclusion. However, another respondent noted that (unlike English-speaking 'home' students), his lecturers made an effort to modify their delivery for an international audience:

(6.39) Thanks to the lecturer, they're always trying to explain slowly, clear English to understand for us, but once we started discussion with native speaker, quite difficult to listen to their conversation (Tatsuo, Sem 1).

In order to understand lectures, it is important that students can view the slides in advance, and recordings (with English subtitles) afterwards. If this is not provided, users of other languages could be denied a level playing field on which to learn. Tatsuo went on to explain that if subtitles were not included on lecture videos, he had to 'listen twice or three times, take a long time.' Some interviewees were using technology which simultaneously translates spoken English, but this could be distracting: Yao mentioned that it caused her to lose 'focus' on the lecture.

It is notable that, in semester 2 interviews, participants did not comment so much on reading and listening issues (although the amount of reading was still daunting for some). This could have been because they were gradually adjusting to the new linguistic environment. In addition, for most, the second term was proving to be more enjoyable than the first, as they were able to choose courses which interested them rather than having to complete compulsory modules. At this stage in the academic year, they tended to focus on writing, possibly because of approaching deadlines for final papers. Indeed, the connection

between writing and identity was demonstrated in both semester 1 and semester 2 interviews. Lecturers might make assumptions about overseas students' ability in this area (e.g., Maringe & Jenkins, 2015; Garska & O'Brien, 2019), without considering the burden of expressing complex ideas in a second language:

(6.40) If I write it in Chinese maybe it is very easy but in English is not that easy [...] I'm trying to adopt the critical thinking and the English academic writing, so it might consume lots of time (Chen, Sem 1).

Students who are confident when writing in their first language can feel less sure about communicating effectively in English (Fox, 1994; Flowerdew, 2019), especially if they lack experience with western academic conventions. Not knowing how to meet gatekeepers' demands was mentioned in participants' comparisons with international peers who had not attended the PSE:

(6.41) [...] It's really mean without pre-sessional, no-one know, like, a lot of them don't know how to start, how to write (Sumana, Sem 1).

(6.42) The basic essay writing skills I think I have learned in the pre-sessional course [...] Some friend [who did not complete the PSE], they failed the essays. I think they, their thinking frame, mm, haven't been built (Yao, Sem 2).

Even students who have gained some knowledge about new expectations during a pre-sessional course are required to quickly grasp multiple demands (see Adisa et al., 2019): this steep learning curve was a cause of anxiety, especially when coupled with tight deadlines. Jianyu highlighted disciplinary differences, suggesting that he needed specific advice to show him 'how to argue, how to debate one topic in the area of History, but not in, like, Economics or other majors' (Sem 1). Unlike participants in other studies (Maringe & Jenkins, 2015; Garska & O'Brien, 2019), the interviewees did not seem to feel that writing in English would involve giving up their L1 identity. However, 6.43 and 6.44 encapsulate different opinions about whether it is possible to express themselves without translation:

(6.43) Kexin: It's not very difficult to, uh, come up with an opinion or idea but I think it's hard to translate them into English.
Jenny: Do you find that you think about it in Chinese first and then try to translate it over?
Kexin: Yeah, because now, I've also discussed this problem with my friends, and for me, I cannot think in English; I think in Chinese (Sem 1).

(6.44) [I used to] always use some translator to truly translate Chinese into English. But now I think sometimes I can, I can write it directly, so it's make me feel, maybe I feel more confident in using English (Meilin, Sem 1).

As Klekovkina & Denié-Higney (2022) point out, injudicious use of translation software does not necessarily help students to adopt an identity as a competent writer in English. Some participants were aware of such pitfalls, as illustrated in 6.45:

(6.45) If you just put the **whole** paragraph in Chinese into translator, that's disaster (laughs). It totally, you will say, what is that actually? (Jianyu, Sem 1)

At the present time, it is still unclear how attitudes towards AI writing tools will evolve (see §2.4.2). Academic integrity was not mentioned by the interviewees, but nor did any report receiving a high similarity score or a warning about plagiarism. They seemed to be more concerned with how to convey their precise meaning or specialised knowledge when using translation. In the third interview, Meilin appeared to contradict her previous statement (see 6.44) about no longer using a translator:

(6.46) I do not know whether the translation truly translate my Chinese words into correct English. So, sometimes I don't know the logic is really as the English speaker do. So, sometimes I think these things make it wrong (Meilin, Sem 2).

Her concerns about accuracy and cohesion highlight that the use of translation tools is not a panacea when it comes to academic writing. Another respondent had adopted a more flexible, or even translanguaging (García et al., 2016) approach to using her first and second languages, stating, 'it doesn't matter whether I'm thinking in Chinese or thinking in English, most important is to keep thinking and keep being critical' (Kexin, Sem 2).

Writing in English was not necessarily a constraint for interviewees. Written assessment allows more time to formulate relevant ideas, in contrast to class discussion where an immediate response is expected: 'for me, writing is more relaxing because during the process I can think and modify it' (Yuming, Sem 2). Kexin described feeling 'free' when working on her essays, notwithstanding the requirement to use English. As Canagarajah (2004, p.270) suggests, writing 'can create a safe haven from the identity conflicts one experiences in society in everyday life.' It follows that teaching staff should avoid negative labelling of individuals who present as quiet in class, as they may prefer other ways of expressing themselves. There could also be a conflict between demonstrating a good understanding of the subject and producing flawless language. As one participant noted, possessing the requisite knowledge means that words just 'flow;' in contrast, trying to explain unfamiliar concepts might cause words to dry up:

(6.47) [For two courses] when I developing my essay, I thought it was much more, uh, smooth↑, much more successful than I imagined. As for [another course], I think it's, uh, I always start in one point and I cannot go further (Xinyi, Sem 2).

This reminds us that writing difficulties are not necessarily caused by a 'language barrier,' but can be related to disciplinary content.

6.5.3 The effect of instructor feedback on student identity

Feedback plays a key role in academic socialisation (Duff, 2010; Anderson, 2021), as learners receive expert guidance and become acquainted with new expectations. Their identities can also be affected by how advice is communicated, either affirming or undermining self-confidence. At the time of the semester 1 interviews, participants had not yet been given any formal feedback as they were still in the process of completing assignments. However, when we met in semester 2, I made a point of asking them about this aspect of university study. One mentioned her delight at receiving positive comments on an essay into which she had put a great deal of 'emotion and passion' (Kexin, Sem 2). This provided a feeling of 'safety' and reassurance that she was a legitimate member of the academic community.

Others likewise stated that they had found tutor feedback valuable – both in terms of knowing what they had done well and how to enhance the quality of future submissions:

(6.48) Jenny: So, did you feel that the feedback was helpful?
Haoran: Mm, sure. Mm, although I could not improve it immediately, but I know more about myself and my work (Sem 2).

(6.49) [Feedback] is helpful, it's good for me, it's useful to know what is good or what are the benefits of my writing, or what are the drawbacks of my writing (Dian, Sem 2).

6.48 and 6.49 confirm that respondents were trying to internalise the requirements of academic writing in English by following the marker's advice. Even when the evaluation was mainly negative, it was possible to learn how to do better in subsequent assignments. This demonstrates the pedagogical value of being realistic about any shortcomings, while at the same time avoiding deficient positioning: 'the professor said it's a **good** start' (Jianyu, Sem 2). However, as Jenkins & Wingate (2015) suggest, not all feedback is constructive. Some interviewees reported receiving minimal or unclear comments, leaving them confused about why a certain mark had been awarded:

(6.50) It's so weird because the Design teachers don't really wrote us feedback [...] They just hate to write, just like me (laughs) (Sumana, Sem 2).

(6.51) Every time I got my mark, I will see the feedback and [most of the] time I feel that my grade, my mark can be better, but what makes my mark into better is that (0.2) I should express it with more details because (0.3) almost every month, every feedback said I should do it (Meilin, Sem 2).

As the comments on each of Meilin's written assessments were similar, it is possible that she had not been given constructive advice about what to do differently. Vague feedback about work needing more detail can leave students uncertain about how to make further progress (see Jenkins & Wingate, 2015).

6.6 Classroom participation

6.6.1 Contributing to EAP lessons

As previously discussed (see §2.3), university instructors and students hold a variety of beliefs about what constitutes valid participation. Reflecting previous research (e.g., Soltani, 2018), my findings highlight potential differences between the pre-sessional EAP and degree programme classroom contexts.

On pre-sessional EAP courses, students are expected to work together and be willing to actively contribute their ideas. Group and class discussion played a part in every lesson I observed. Interviewees seemed mostly positive about classroom participation, although, as previously mentioned, their willingness to speak to me suggests a determination to overcome any linguistic anxiety. They tended to position themselves as enthusiastic about discussion, in contrast to more reticent peers, who again, are inevitably underrepresented in the interviewee group. One participant explained her reasons for speaking out, implying that she did so in order to save the teacher's face:

(6.52) Xinyi: One of these is that I think I came here, I attend the EAP in order to learn English, so I have to try all the chances [...] and the second thing (laughing) is that when teacher look around the whole classroom, I think it is quite, quite embarrass for her having no one answer the question, so I mean=

Jenny: = yes, that's true. Teachers, we don't like silence. When everybody's silent we feel, oh **no**, no one's answering, somebody say something (laughs)! (Pre-S)

During this exchange, Xinyi's demonstration of corresponding body language (silent with arms folded) depicted her classmates' reluctance to speak and resulting awkwardness (see Zhu Haiping & O'Sullivan, 2022). Another participant had a similar experience at the start of the course:

(6.53) Dian: I think it's interesting knowing others' ideas but sometimes, mm, you know, Chinese people always shy to say something at the beginning, so some students they don't want to talk.

Jenny: Do you feel OK about answering in class and speaking?

Dian: Yes. I feel great (Pre-S).

It is interesting that Dian referred to a typical stereotype of Chinese learners and positioned herself differently. Her phrase 'at the beginning' suggests that some members of the class simply take longer to feel comfortable speaking in front of others. Reasons for silence can be complex (see Wang & Moskal, 2019); the next excerpt emphasises the importance of not labelling students as 'quiet' or 'passive':

(6.54) Jenny: Do you think it's a personality thing, then? They're [Chinese peers] a bit shy and you're maybe a bit more outgoing?

Jianyu: Well, in Chinese, if you speak to them in Chinese they are confident and they are ready to talk to people, but since it is their first time to travel abroad to study, they may feel a little bit uncomfortable communicating with others (Pre-S).

Willingness to communicate might not only depend on individual levels of confidence, but also on power relations connected to, for example, the presence of 'native' speakers (Darvin & Norton, 2023). In addition, conveying complex ideas in another language is undoubtedly a challenge. As Jianyu described, 'I can't just reach the point I want to express, I must, well, express a lot, explain a lot to make the point well' (Pre-S). Additional thinking time is therefore often required (Zhu Haiping & O'Sullivan, 2022), as suggested by another comment: 'I think in Chinese, and I need to translate my ideas into English' (Kexin, Pre-S).

Unlike findings in previous research (Zappa-Hollman, 2007; Duff, 2010), spoken presentations did not seem to cause a great deal of anxiety for respondents. They generally felt more confident about speaking when they had time to plan ahead and practise. That said, giving a presentation to a large, mixed-nationality class on the degree programme is a different prospect from addressing a small (and sympathetic) audience during the PSE. Indeed, although most interviewees believed that they would maintain their high levels of participation in mainstream university classes, some admitted to worries:

(6.55) I think I will [prepare] before the class to avoid the silly mistakes. But, yeah, if anybody's, everybody's native speakers [...] I will be (laughs) stressed, but, um, I think I just need more time to practise (Kexin, Pre-S).

The prospect of being in a class of mostly English speakers could be intimidating for some international students, and make them more reluctant to voice their ideas.

6.6.2 Language use in the EAP class

As Chinese nationals often make up the majority of learners in EAP classrooms, they may choose to use Mandarin to communicate. However, this proved to be a somewhat contentious issue for participants. While it is tolerated (and sometimes encouraged) by instructors, they suggested that English should be prioritised. EAP teachers, many of whom hold a master's degree in TESOL or Linguistics, are likely to be aware of the potential benefits of translanguaging. Indeed, Chinese interviewees gave legitimate reasons for interacting in their first language, such as not knowing a specialist term or more abstract concept in English. When I heard students using Mandarin during observations, they seemed to be collaborating about the work (see García et al., 2016) rather than simply chatting. Being in a class of all co-nationals inevitably increases the likelihood of this scenario:

(6.56) Jenny: Is everybody in your class Chinese?
Yuming: Yes (laughs).
Jenny: So, is it quite difficult sometimes to speak in English during discussion?
Yuming: Oh (laughs). Yes, I think some of my classmates, uh, sometimes unconsciously speak Chinese. Um (0.3) but I don't know how to deal with this situation because um (0.3) sometimes we just can't remember how to express it in English (Pre-S).

Although Yuming initially set herself apart from classmates by referring to 'they,' she later reverted to 'we,' suggesting that she shared their difficulties. Her hesitation and pauses when answering my question indicate uncertainty about how to avoid Chinese when linguistic problems arise.

It is somewhat ironic that several Chinese participants complained about the prevalence of their nationality on the PSE (cf. Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017). Comments such as, 'our classmates are all Chinese, so it's not very helpful to improve our [English] ability' (Yao) and 'I think it's quite helpful if there are more international students from different countries' (Jianyu) were typical. Reactions when I asked about the make-up of classes were not always positive:

(6.57) Jenny: Is everyone in your class from China?
Dian (sighs): Yes.
Jenny: Does that make it more difficult to keep speaking in English?
Dian: Yes. Some people, they try to speak Chinese during the class and after class, so I think sometimes we don't have a whole English environment at the moment (Pre-S).

Dian's sigh suggests frustration with the situation; in addition, her use of 'some people' shows that she was distancing herself from classmates who spoke Chinese. Kexin made a similar remark about 'some people' who 'want to say Chinese' (Pre-S). She added that, although she sometimes did so during group work to be polite, it was not desirable for 'polishing' her speaking. Another described using English in the UK as 'respecting' the culture (Chen, Pre-S). For students who are keen to speak English, it could be disappointing

to have their opportunities for doing so reduced. In addition, there seemed to be no place in classroom interactions for languages that were not shared widely (see Bonacina-Pugh et al., 2022). Sumana, who had deliberately chosen a university where she would be in the minority as a Thai national, understood why her peers were using Chinese but nonetheless found it frustrating:

(6.58) I wish they would speak in English but it's hard because they are Chinese. I think it would be better if we have less Chinese or, like, more nationality in the class so everyone will speak English to each other (Sumana, Pre-S).

Tatsuo experienced similar problems during the 4-week phase of the programme and seemed to be more negatively impacted than Sumana (who added, 'it's still better than [having] lots of Thai students, cos then they're just going to speak Thai'). Perhaps it was more difficult for him as a mature student in a class of young Chinese women. The exchange in 6.59 demonstrates both his annoyance and reluctance to confront classmates about their language choices:

(6.59) Tatsuo: I have one concerning point. Except for me, every student were from China. So, sometimes in the class, the Chinese people would speak Chinese. So, at that time, I didn't feel comfortable,

Jenny: Hm mm. Do you mean when you were doing group work and group discussion, they would speak in Chinese? How did that make you feel?

Tatsuo: Eh, uh, this is, I thought this is an English class, you know, why, why don't you, why did you speak Chinese in the class? Every time I felt but I didn't say anything (Pre-S).

While the literature understandably often focuses on Chinese students, it is important to note that those from other countries can feel excluded even before their degree programme has begun. EAP teachers may therefore need to question the extent to which Mandarin is accepted in class.

6.6.3 Degree programme: Finding a voice

As Norton (2013) reminds us, personal motivation is not always enough to guarantee participation. Factors such as the classroom atmosphere, the number of students in attendance, and how groups are arranged can be equally influential. The assumption that learners 'choose' to be passive would be mistaken in the case of these interviewees; instead, some met with obstacles outside their control which made engagement difficult. For example, whole class discussion could be hard to access (Karas, 2017), as elucidated by one participant:

(6.60) [...] another student asking a question, the teacher answering, and this process I can't understand a little bit about it because first, I can't understand the student's question; second, maybe sometime I can't understand what the teacher is trying to respond (Jianyu, Sem 1).

While it is easier for tutors to engage with members of the class who can express themselves fluently, this might put others at a disadvantage. Interestingly, the presence of students from English-speaking backgrounds had a variable effect on participants' feelings about contributing. For some, it caused a rise in linguistic anxiety, possibly because they sensed

that 'native speaker' standards were privileged (Ryan & Forrest, 2021; Darvin & Norton, 2023). The potential for loss of face was heightened in larger classes:

(6.61) I can understand the question and I have my opinion, and I can express my opinion in Chinese very well but it's hard to speak it in English [...] In the seminars I think there are around 20 students there so, I always keep in silence (laughs) because, yeah, I feel pressured in big groups (Kexin, Sem 1).

(6.62) For me, for some Chinese students, even we understand what the professor say but we are afraid to express ourselves comparing to the British student because we are afraid that if we speak something wrong, there are many students (Meilin, Sem 1).

It is clear that, for these interviewees, understanding the lesson content and having original ideas was not a problem. Instead, their participation was inhibited by the fear of being judged negatively by others when speaking English. Meilin went on to describe her reluctance to ask a question in front of the whole class (something she had done happily during the PSE), repeating the word 'afraid' seven times in her response. She concluded that 'if my mother language is English, maybe I can be more happy with this course.'

Staying quiet in class might cause an individual to feel invisible (Morita, 2004; Freeman & Li, 2019), leading to emotional distress. In addition, there is a risk that even highly motivated students will withdraw from learning opportunities in contexts where they feel marginalised (Darvin & Norton, 2023). This is captured in 6.63:

(6.63) Jenny: How are you feeling about being quiet in that class?
Kexin: Uh, really **upset**, actually. And, uh, I think the main difficulty is that I am very confident when I speak Chinese, I'm a confident girl, but um, now I'm very unconfident and I'm fed up with that feeling (Sem 1).

Kexin certainly did not feel that she was expressing her identity through silence (see Bao, 2014); instead, she mourned the loss of her outgoing personality. She seemed to hold herself responsible for her reticence, without considering the behaviour and attitudes of her classmates or tutor. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to break free from such thought patterns (see Morita, 2004): the less an individual speaks in class, the fewer chances they have to become more self-assured. In contrast, other interviewees were able to adopt a more powerful position by employing specific participation strategies:

(6.64) Maybe I, um, would miss some questions from the, from some long sentence of question, but I could re-engage during the discussion (Xinyi, Sem 1).

(6.65) Many of my classmates, they know too many things, they can keep talking with teacher during the class, sometimes I couldn't catch up with them (0.3). But if teacher asks me or if I have some ideas, I can say (Dian, Sem 1).

Individual differences are apparent in one interviewee's description of how being in a class with 'local' English speakers actually increased his enthusiasm for sharing ideas:

(6.66) Chen: In my class, I think it's pretty good because there are lots of local people, they like to answer the question and I think it's pretty good.
Jenny: And maybe that will give you the confidence as well, to join in that discussion?

Chen: Yeah, and I found, uh, if I want to answer a question, I need to be the first one, because the first one have lots of choice (laughs) (Sem 1).

Another described how taking the first, daunting step and vocalising one's opinion can be self-affirming, especially if they receive positive feedback (through both spoken comments and gestures):

(6.67) At the beginning, I'm a little afraid because of my, uh, pronunciation or my (0.3) poor grammar, will they, uh, what will the foreign classmate think of me? But they just nod their head and, um (0.3) looks agree with me, so I feel more confident (Yuming, Sem 1).

One significant point discussed with interviewees when we met in the first semester, was the obligation to prepare thoroughly for tutorials and seminars in order to take part (cf. Zhu Haiping & O'Sullivan, 2022). As Dian explained, 'you **need** to finish [the assigned readings] before the class, or you just sit there and don't know what they are talking' (Sem 1). However, students were not always sure about exactly what is required: 'sometimes I read, and we didn't get a chance to talk about it at all, so I just don't know if it's really necessary to read it but sometimes it is' (Sumana, Sem 1). An English-speaking classmate might be able to get away with minimal preparation, but, for the participants, this was not an option if they wished to play an active role in seminars:

(6.68) English-speaking people, they don't have to prepare, but for me, I must know about the question and do some research on the question. I can't improvise (Jianyu, Sem 1).

Finally, the impact of teacher feedback on students' oral contributions cannot be underestimated. I had assumed that EAP instructors always provide encouragement, but the experience of one interviewee suggests otherwise. I first spoke with him during the first phase of the PSE, when he seemed happy and self-assured. As previously mentioned (see §4.8), students are put into different classes for the ESAP component, depending on their specialism. The new teacher did not appear to consider the impact of his responses on students:

(6.69) At first, I like to answer the question and say something. But I found, um, my teacher don't like me to do that [...] If I give a wrong answer, he will say, 'You are wrong, it's not, no.' So, sometimes I don't want to answer the question anymore (Chen, Sem 1).

On this occasion, gender seemed to play a role, as Chen felt that his EAP instructor had singled him out for criticism as a man. He explained that female students were told, 'Thank you for trying', regardless of the accuracy of their answers. Receiving such abrupt, negative reactions caused a decline in his confidence and emotional well-being, to the extent that he had attended student counselling. Unfortunately, this loss of self-assurance was transmitted on to the degree programme. Despite being keen to emulate his English-speaking peers in their level of participation, he worried about how others would respond to him:

(6.70) Sometimes I **want**, I really want to answer the question, and I just say it in my mind and the answer is correct, but I didn't say that [...] I just think if I say it, our teacher said, 'You are wrong.' So, it's kind of psychological problem (Chen, Sem 1).

This demonstrates that silence is not always voluntary, but can be imposed (Bao, 2014). Nevertheless, Chen expressed resilience, stating, 'I can't just give up because [of] my EAP course teacher.' If what he reported is true, it is disappointing that such insensitivity can occur in what is meant to be an encouraging environment for all students.

In the second semester, several interviewees reported an increased level of participation in class, either because they felt more invested in the course, or had generally gained in confidence:

(6.71) I need to understand everything so that I can participate in class all the time and give some ideas and do group discussion. It's better↑ compared to last semester (Dian, Sem 2).

(6.72) I enjoy [my courses] more than last semester, so I'm more confident and more happy (laughs) (Yao, Sem 2).

However, if they are in the minority, users of languages other than English may hesitate to express themselves (see Chen & Ross, 2015) due to feeling uncomfortable and isolated. This was explained by one interviewee who was the only Chinese student in what she described as an 'all-white' tutorial group:

(6.73) Jenny: How are you feeling about participating in classes this term?
Kexin: Mm (0.2) still feel a little stressed but mm (0.3) tch, yeah but I think I can use more of the chance of office hour. Like, yeah, you know, sometimes I cannot, although I got a lot of emotion and feelings with the text, but when the tutor asks me I cannot give he or she an instant response (Sem 2).

For Kexin, the inability to speak spontaneously was 'like living in a state of delay.' Although she had been distressed by her lack of participation in our second interview, she now described herself as becoming 'numb' to the situation. This implies self-protection through avoiding emotions, plus a degree of resignation. As Kexin subsequently explained, students can also employ alternative means of demonstrating their engagement, such as approaching the tutor after class.

6.6.4 Group interactions: Mixed experiences

Participants mentioned similar problems in group work to those in other studies (Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Moore & Hampton, 2015; Straker, 2020), some of which were related to language. In the first semester, several referred to the difficulty of trying to understand the fast-paced, idiomatic speech of fluent users of English when working in groups. As indicated by the following comments, they tended to blame their own perceived lack of linguistic proficiency for not fully comprehending others:

(6.74) Sometimes I ask them, 'Oh, I couldn't understand, could you rephrase?' and then they finally understand, oh [he has] some weakness of English skill (Tatsuo, Sem 1).

(6.75) Jenny: Do you speak in [group] discussions?
Yao: Yes, I tried, but some of my classmates, they don't understand me (Yao, Sem 1).

(6.76) Sometimes they will slow down and repeat for me, but I think most of time, I must **try** to grab more points by myself (Jianyu, Sem 1).

As others have pointed out, trying to 'think on the spot' can be a struggle when using a second language (Straker, 2020). Jianyu went on to articulate the problem of interjecting in free-flowing conversation, especially when expected prosodic cues are missing (Ryan & Forrest, 2021): 'they have no **stop** in their words, just drrrr, drrrr!' He spoke clearly and at length during interview, but his unfamiliarity with 'authentic' English (despite some previous experience of studying abroad) made it difficult to follow some exchanges. Despite these problems, Jianyu tried to identify chances to speak, as he did not wish to remain silent: 'I want myself to be a part of this discussion, and I don't want to just listen sometimes.' Although Anglophone students do not necessarily intend to exclude other interlocutors, they might not understand the effect of not modifying their delivery. This lack of language accommodation has previously been observed in research into intercultural group work (Moore & Hampton, 2015).

At the time of the first semester interviews, not much reference was made to assessed group work and its associated complications. However, collaborating with others during seminars and tutorials is a common requirement in UK universities. As on the PSE programme, using Chinese in order to save time or explain key terms was a possibility for those in classes of mostly co-nationals. It might feel strange to speak English in this situation; nonetheless, interviewees tended to state a preference for doing so:

(6.77) We have a classmate, she is from Finland, yeah, it's quite great with the group discussion, she sit beside me so we can talk in English. Because you know, if all is Chinese, maybe we will speak in Chinese, we won't communicate in English (Dian, Sem 1).

Others resisted the label of the 'quiet Chinese student' and instead took an active role in group work:

(6.78) No one want to talk first, so I just try to break up the ice, eh, atmosphere (laughs), yeah↑. I'm willing to be, I'm not sure actually, it's not the leader, but just one who discuss [...] I'm a person who likes communicating with others (Yuming, Sem 1).

Alternative strategies included prioritising listening over speaking, and taking on a specific role in group tasks, as illustrated in the following exchange:

(6.79) Tatsuo: Always I'm trying to be my position to summarise or make or set up the strategy, so I don't talk too much, always.
Jenny: Do you feel that the English speakers **dominate** the discussion?
Tatsuo: Yes, I think so.
Jenny: And how do you feel about that?
Tatsuo: It's OK. Because even if it is Japanese language, I don't want to dominate the group (laughs) so it's OK for me (Sem 1).

This excerpt suggests that an individual's willingness to participate can be similar in each of their languages: staying quiet is not necessarily connected to linguistic anxiety. The same participant described international students' problems when trying to establish the right to be heard (Bourdieu, 1977) at the beginning of term:

(6.80) Jenny: I just wondered when the English speakers are speaking a lot, if it's difficult to interrupt.

Tatsuo: Firstly, first one, no, couple of weeks, that was real, only native speaker, uh, discussed and they never cared for us. But recently they are trying to listen to all members' voices (Sem 1).

This raises the question of where responsibility lies for including students from different linguistic backgrounds in collaborative tasks. If English speakers make no concessions, they may unwittingly deny their international peers access to the discussion. Furthermore, even when students wish to join a mixed nationality group, barriers might be put in their way: 'simple proximity' is not enough to achieve meaningful interaction (Harrison & Peacock, 2010, p.880). Two interviewees described 'home' students (and Europeans) gravitating towards each other, while Chinese nationals often ended up in the same group by default. For one participant, politeness led him to accept when fellow Chinese proposed working together, even though he felt that this was limiting his interactions:

(6.81) Chinese people, they just want, uh, want to be together and sometimes they don't want, they don't be in a group with native, like, um English speaker or other language speaker, but I want to try it (Chen, Sem 1).

Any kind of segregation (even if it is unintentional) could cause learners to feel othered and decrease their sense of belonging. In the course of telling me about his experiences, Chen realised that his tutor could change how groups were organised in order to facilitate intercultural communication:

(6.82) Jenny: Do you think there's anything the university should be doing to connect international students and local students?

Chen: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Actually, I, uh, just realised something. In our class, the teacher just, you need to divide, like, 10 groups by yourself. I think it is very free for the people, but it is an international class, and you know, like I said, the phenomenon, Chinese people, they want to be together. And I think maybe the teacher can divide us up (Sem 1).

Another respondent expressed a similar preference for random, mixed-nationality groups. However, her suggestion that English speakers could take a leadership role keeps them in a position of unmerited power (see Zhu Hua & Kramsch, 2016):

(6.83) Jenny: Do you think the university could do anything to help Chinese and British, European students to mix?

Yao: Mix (0.3). Um, so (0.3) I don't know if the English speakers they are OK with that. I think they have their free to choose their group members, but for the, uh, the teachers, hm, he can make some English speaker students to be the group leader, and we can join in their groups (Sem 1).

Yao seemed unsure whether home students would welcome multinational group work. Indeed, previous research has shown that, while not overtly hostile, home students can unfairly position their international counterparts as deficient, for instance, by assuming that they will produce an inadequate standard of work (Moore & Hampton, 2015; Straker, 2020).

In the second semester, segregation in group work continued to be mentioned. However, the propensity to 'stick together' is by no means only a Chinese trait, as one interviewee was discovering: 'I just found sometimes, maybe the local students, they just want to work with

themselves' (Chen, Sem 2). Another expressed amazement at being approached by a home student for the first time:

(6.84) Yuming: In the last tutorial, one of the girl students [...] she asked me can she join us, and this made me very surprised. It's the first time that, um, some foreign student from our class tried to join us.

Jenny: So, usually they don't ask to join your group?

Yuming: Because, um, in semester 1, the common, most common situation is that Chinese students have a group together and foreign students have a group together (Sem 2).

Interestingly, Yao's self-esteem had been bolstered by supportive comments from English-speaking students. Instead of blaming herself and feeling disheartened if they did not immediately comprehend her message, she was willing to persevere:

(6.85) Yao: My groupmates are all the native speakers, so, mm, but I'm not afraid. I hope I have grow a lot than the last semester.

Jenny: So, you don't feel nervous anymore to talk to people with English as their first language?

Yao: Yeah, but I will get a little sad when they didn't understand what I thought but I will speak once again. Mm (0.4) don't worry! (Sem 2)

It may be the case that lecturers do not always wish to intervene in arranging groups. Perhaps they believe that doing so would be unwelcome, but all learners might benefit from working in a more diverse setting. Encouraging inclusion could reassure international students that they are valued members of the class.

6.7 The impact of social interactions on identity

Forming meaningful relationships is a crucial factor in how well students settle into their new lives abroad, and whether these friends need to be local or international has long been discussed (Bochner et al., 1977; Schartner, 2015; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017). It was evident that interviewees were socialising exclusively with fellow PSE attendees in the early stages of their sojourn. The EAP students are housed together; however, this does not always result in mixed nationality flat shares because of Chinese dominance. Living in a close co-national setting is beneficial for the initial transition, but limits opportunities to speak English, as one participant explained:

(6.86) Jenny: Do you find you're just speaking Chinese at home?

Yuming: Yes, yes. I think, actually, my life envi- sorry, environ- is it environs? Yes. Are all full of Chinese. So, maybe it just help me not feel so homesick, yeah, but uh (0.2) maybe during the master study I can [meet] more, uh, international students (Pre-S).

The Thai and Japanese participants each met with specific challenges due to their minority status. Sumana was trying to connect with her classmates, even building on the basic Chinese she had learned at school: 'when I speak they really like it, so OK, I'm gonna make friends this way, I'm gonna speak Chinese' (Pre-S). Even though she admitted this was not what she had expected ('I thought I gonna find at least one not Asian friend'), she seemed accepting of the situation ('I just need to adapt'). Tatsuo, whose flatmates were all young

Chinese, was finding his living arrangements difficult. He described 'sitting at the desk by myself, closing the door [...] because very noisy' (Pre-S). Even when he tried to interact with them, they were unwilling to speak in English. Despite coming from a so-called 'collective culture' himself, he described 'the Chinese culture is together, accompany with same culture.' I tried to ask about his feelings of isolation, but he was reluctant to elaborate, stating only that things were 'getting better.'

In the first interviews, most participants expressed a wish to make friends with people from outside their home country, for cultural enrichment, and to make progress with their English. They understood that they would not meet UK nationals on the EAP programme, but, as elsewhere (Copland & Garton, 2011; Hajar, 2020), hoped this would change once they started their degree:

(6.87) I hope during my main course there are some foreign people in our flat, our student flat, maybe can meet some friends, Because I want to, hope to stay in an environment that's all English. I think it's a good way for me to improve my English speaking, listening (Dian, Pre-S).

(6.88) I really eager to meet more foreign friends because, um, I think it's one reason I come here, yeah (Yuming, Pre-S).

(6.89) Sometimes I think, if all the people around me are Chinese, why I choose to study abroad? (Meilin, Pre-S).

Meeting others who speak English as another language was generally viewed as less daunting than interacting with 'native speakers.' Students from overseas share the experience of living in a foreign country and can therefore empathise with each other. Respondents viewed speaking to their international peers in English as a less pressured situation: 'they are facing the same difficulty as me [...] so maybe I will feel less stressed' (Kexin, Pre-S). Although using English as a lingua franca might limit linguistic progress (Schartner, 2015), it can also increase self-assurance when speaking.

The prospect of making British friends, while appealing, was seen as more problematic. Some interviewees were aware that there would be few UK nationals on their degree programme (especially in Design and Education). In addition, home students tend not to stay on campus in the summer when the PSE takes place, as one had noticed: 'I trying to find the local students cos so far I'm making friends with international students from Thailand, Korea, but none of them are British' (Jianyu, Pre-S). Language is often cited as the main reason why intercultural friendships are difficult to establish (Young et al., 2013; Schartner, 2015; Beech, 2016; Mittelmeier & Kennedy, 2016), as demonstrated in the following exchange:

(6.90) Yuming: If I talk to English-speaking countries' students, um, um (laughs), it may make me feel embarrassed or, uh, worried, yeah.

Jenny: What would you worry about?

Yuming: Um, because I'm the person who always try to make me look perfect so if I (0.3) uh, perform not so well in there, yep, I just worry about, will they, um (0.2) do I look silly or (laughs)? I don't know how to say it.

Jenny: No, I understand (Pre-S).

From Yuming's remarks in 6.90, it is clear that international students may put pressure on themselves to speak flawless English, assuming that they will be evaluated on their 'performance.' Her word choice of 'embarrassed' and 'worried' demonstrates the emotional strain of not knowing how other interlocutors will react.

Interestingly, the Thai participant took a different stance. She explained her preference for communicating with Anglophones, as this meant that she did not need to alter her own expression:

(6.91) Jenny: Is it easier to talk to other international students who are also using English as a second language?

Sumana: Actually, I don't think so because everyone has a different level of English [...] I still keep in touch with my pre-sessional Chinese friends and, like, sometimes I have to think what word I would use to make them understand [...] But I really glad, like, I talk to the American friend, she understands everything I say (Sem 1).

This shows that it is possible for students to gain confidence from interactions with peers from English-speaking backgrounds, and even appropriate an identity as a competent user of English.

International students might be hesitant about making the first move to connect with others, both in face-to-face situations and on social media. While language anxiety can play a role, unfamiliar cultural references create additional barriers (Schartner, 2015), as one participant described: 'I meet some committee members in the [music] society. I'd say they're very friendly, but that's back to the topic about context, you can't understand' (Jianyu, Sem 1). Personality could also be significant, as well as an individual's willingness to talk to strangers:

(6.92) Dian: Sometimes we [Chinese students] will be shy and don't know how to communicate, how to talk with them.

Jenny: Is that because of speaking English, or is it just because it's new people?

Dian: Just new people, yeah, and every time don't know (Sem 1).

Although acculturation is best viewed as a 'bi-dimensional process' (Smith & Khawaja, 2011, p.701), the onus for instigating contact is often unfairly placed upon international students. They may feel under pressure to make the first move when approaching their home-domiciled peers, realising that 'no one will come to me' (Kexin, Sem 2). However, the idea that it is necessary to make friends with British nationals in order to have a fulfilling university experience needs to be challenged. It seems to be another measure by which to judge international students' level of 'integration' when they can in fact establish their own social networks and sense of community.

Indeed, as Norton (2013) points out, even when speakers from other linguistic backgrounds are keen to initiate intercultural friendships with users of English, the latter are not always receptive. One interviewee related a troubling experience of being excluded while attending a social event at the beginning of term. She explained that other attendees were able to talk and mix easily and, while they probably did not mean to ignore her, she felt invisible:

(6.93) Kexin: All the other students, they come from the UK, Europe or the United States, so this means that they speak English very well. So, I'm the only one who cannot speak English very well. Um, so I think this is a terrible experience because during the two hours I was so pressured and uncomfortable.

Jenny: Did you worry about your English in that situation?

Kexin: I think it's not about me. Other students they, uh, I think they didn't notice me maybe. So, that was really terrible. Uh, even now when I talk this thing with you, I feel very upset (Sem 1).

I wondered what Kexin was judging herself against when singling herself out as an inadequate speaker of English – an elusive 'native' standard, perhaps. Her emotional distress was apparent as she tried to describe the incident without breaking down. Although I offered to stop recording at this point, she wanted to continue and explain her feelings. Having negative experiences could lead to more hesitancy about seeking out connections, and lead to the individual becoming 'marginalised, introverted and sensitive to rejection' (Cervatuic, 2009, p.255). It was striking that this participant blamed herself for what she described as 'failing to fit in': as Baker (2016) notes, it is not a 'failure' if international students do not engage with the local community. The role of other interlocutors also needs to be considered. However, those who are secure in their 'insider' status are not necessarily able to show empathy:

(6.94) When I talk [about] my feeling of being marginalised to the foreigners, uh, some of them will give me a response like, oh, I feel sorry for this, but what I really need is not, is not this, I really don't need someone to feel sorry for me. What I need is understanding, is the people who feel what I felt (Kexin, Sem 2).

The above excerpt highlights the importance of feeling heard by others, rather than being fobbed off with empty platitudes.

Although it has been suggested that universities should do more to encourage international students to integrate socially (Beech, 2016; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017), others have questioned whether this is beneficial (Schartner, 2015; Wawera & McCamely, 2020). People who are anxious about being judged (for instance, on their English language skills) might feel uncomfortable attending organised social events. This was captured in my last interview with Kexin, when she contrasted a conversation group at church with activities arranged by the university:

(6.95) It's OK I make some mistakes [in the English conversation group at church] because I know the purpose is to practise my English. But if I went to the event in the university, people always keep the purpose of making friends; this makes me feel pressure (Kexin, Sem 2).

This shows that students can use agency in seeking out connections beyond the university environment. Although Kexin is not a Christian, she described feeling 'safe' at church, as she felt welcomed and able to communicate freely without fear of criticism.

Some international students may decide that trying to establish a wide circle of friends while managing the academic side of university life would take too much time and energy. In both term-time interviews, Haoran indicated that he had made a deliberate 'choice' to focus on

his studies, an approach reportedly shared with his 'hard-working' Chinese peers. The demands of undertaking an intensive master's degree clearly played a role when setting his priorities:

(6.96) Jenny: So, you feel OK about your social life. You need to spend a lot of time on work, though?
Haoran: It's hard to say. I looking forward to getting more emotional support from friends but it's hard. The time is always fast-paced (Sem 2).

He also mentioned finding it difficult to join social gatherings where the majority of participants were international students (not Chinese). The effort needed to understand their different accents during fast-paced conversation meant that he did not regularly attend such events ('it will make me tired'). Another respondent referred to similar concerns about maintaining a social life while becoming familiar with what she described as 'a new space of learning' (Xinyi, Sem 1). In the final interview, she explained further:

(6.97) Many of my friends and my family members told me to hang out with my friends when I was, when I'm free. But I was always thinking about my overwhelming, my long reading list, and I want to spend more time on study (Xinyi, Sem 2).

As both these respondents implied, balancing academic work and social activities is difficult enough without feeling under pressure to make British friends. It is understandable that some international students make deliberate decisions to only invest in certain aspects of university life (see Chang, 2011).

6.7.1 Safety in numbers?

Unfortunately, not all international students will have a trouble-free stay abroad. I was concerned to hear about participants' encounters with prejudice, both personal and reported:

(6.98) I think most of the Scottish people, they are kind and, uh, they are enthusiastic to help me. Um, but, uh (0.4) when I listen to my Chinese friends, they will share some stories, like some foreign, uh, people will, hmm (0.3) say something not so good to them, and their attitude maybe not so patient (Yuming, Pre-S).

(6.99) Jenny: So, there's nothing you're finding difficult [about life in Scotland] really?
Meilin: Oh well, only one thing. Only one thing is what I, I (0.4) it's what my friends told me [...] some people [...] just do some bad things to Chinese students (Sem 1).

Interviewees' hesitancy in telling me about friends' negative experiences suggests a certain reluctance to share this information with a Scottish interviewer. Indeed, others might have chosen to keep such incidents to themselves. Meilin continued to explain that she knew of a Chinese girl who had been both verbally and physically attacked. Learning about such shocking incidents, even when not personally affected, could cause anxiety and acculturative stress (Smith and Khawaja, 2011). Other respondents described hearing insults being directed towards them while going about their everyday lives:

(6.100) Sumana: There's a time that I just walk home with my friend, and people just shouting, 'Nǐ hǎo!' to me and I'm not even Chinese, yeah.

Jenny: What is wrong with people?

Sumana: But that one is not. There's another one, like, three of us walking from the library to the restaurant [...] me and another Thai friend and another Chinese friend [...] And there's just like, a lady behind us who said, 'If you walk that slowly, just f*** off' (Sem 1).

(6.101) I don't know what to say, but teenagers here, a lot of them kind of like they are speaking rude to you [...] They also make some, I don't want to say racist word, but it could be discrimination (make a high-pitched noise). And I will just look at them (frowns). And they will just go (Jianyu, Sem 1).

Both Sumana and Jianyu insisted that they felt safe in the city and could shrug off such incidents, displaying remarkable resilience: as Sumana said (while laughing), 'I'm so strong!' However, other individuals could be adversely affected, as experiencing discrimination has a negative impact on victims' confidence and self-esteem (Brown & Jones, 2013). Two participants had also fallen victim to crime: Jianyu lost money through an online scam and Dian was robbed while travelling in America during the Christmas holidays. Not only are these distressing occurrences in themselves, but the students involved had to seek assistance in English. In fact, Jianyu had contacted the Chinese embassy first, perhaps so that he could report what had happened in his first language. However, when they explained that it was necessary to contact the police, he did receive appropriate advice (the police also made the university aware of his situation). As seen in 6.102, being put in a vulnerable position could undermine someone's sense of self:

(6.102) At that time [...] I was so scared, I don't do anything, I just stay in my room. Cos, like, I was a guy who like to talk with people, like, randomly in the street and I feel [...] depressed and I don't want to do anything (Jianyu, Sem 2).

Jianyu also used the word 'trauma' when describing this experience, underlining the impact it had on his emotional well-being.

If students undergo psychological distress while overseas, it could lead to them cutting short their stay. One interviewee stated that she had been 'lucky [not to] experience some bad things' (Yao, Interview Sem 2) and referred to friends who had returned home prematurely because they were unhappy. Hearing such anecdotes reminded me of most of the participants' youth, and how hard it can be to manage your life thousands of miles away from home, in another language. It seems that both male and female students can be vulnerable, even though, as one interviewee put it, parents might worry more about 'girls' being 'abroad, alone' (Xinyi, Pre-S). As previously mentioned, Chen had contacted student counselling, and did not appear daunted by the requirement to explain his situation in English:

(6.103) Jenny: And was speaking to the counselling service helpful?

Chen: Yeah, it is very helpful, mm, because they will give me some advice and I just told all of the things to them, and I will feel better.

Jenny: Because it's not easy doing that in English as well. I mean, you're explaining it very

well to me, but it's not your first language.
Chen: Yeah, but I will try to explain what I want to say (Sem 2).

Conversely, Kexin initially decided not to access student counselling because of her ongoing linguistic anxiety:

(6.104) In the middle of the [first] semester, I feel so stressed and so upset, so at that time I feel like, OK, maybe I should find a psychological counsellor, but [...] I thought that, OK, I still need to speak English (laughs) with them. So, um (0.2) so I just give up that plan (Kexin, Sem 2).

However, she later told me (by email) that she had started to attend counselling sessions at the university, which must have taken some courage. Respondents also mentioned that they tried to manage any difficulties independently, for example, Dian had not told her parents about her experience. While Jianyu had to seek financial help from family after being scammed, he did not provide them with all the details, explaining, 'they can't do anything and they will feel bad for me, but I don't want them to worry about me' (Sem 2).

6.8 Changing identities

6.8.1 Academic identity

As Marginson (2014, p.7) elucidates, all international students will undergo some kind of change while overseas, 'whether through learning, through graduating with a degree, through immersion in the linguistic setting, or simply through growing up.' This was certainly true of the participants as they navigated an unfamiliar environment and new experiences.

In the first semester, interviewees positioned themselves in a variety of ways when discussing perceived academic achievement. Some conflated it with English language ability, as seen below:

(6.105) [...] my basic knowledge is not so, uh, strong, so I (0.3) find it a little difficult, uh, when I compared with classmates, especially some English speaker classmate (Yao, Sem 1).

As previous research has found (Cervatuic, 2009), judging themselves against 'native speakers' can have a detrimental effect on other users' of English self-esteem. Others compared themselves to co-nationals with prior experience, either in the subject, or in English-medium education:

(6.106) And their undergraduate was this, their major was this, so maybe they can catch, they can understand (Dian, Sem 1).

(6.107) Tatsuo: The other Asian countries' student, they also studied English at university.
Jenny: So, do you feel that you've got a bit less experience in using English?
Tatsuo: Yes. It's difficult. Tough situation (Sem 1).

Tatsuo's short sentences may indicate his reluctance to elaborate further, but also highlights the unforgiving nature of his circumstances. However, he was far from alone. As in the first interviewees, some Chinese participants used 'us' and 'we' when discussing challenges, implying membership of a group. This is illustrated in a comment about overall linguistic proficiency:

(6.108) I found that, um, most of Chinese students have the same difficulties as me [...] although there are many international students in this university, but it seems like, uh, only Chinese students, their spoken English and their English skills is the worst (Kexin, Sem 1).

Such negative self- (and collective) positioning could have a detrimental effect on both confidence levels and investment. Furthermore, certain subjects require learners to critique each other's work. While this exercise might be useful for creativity and the sharing of ideas, it also leads to an unwelcome sense of competition, as one respondent described:

(6.109) [...] we can see many different students' work and compare, comparing it with ourselves, so I can say some students are doing very, very, oh, unbel↑**ie**vable things [...] So, it's make me feel a little bit stress, yeah (Meilin, Sem 1).

The raised tone and stressed syllable in 'unbelievable' suggests that Meilin was taken aback by the high standards of produced by her peers. Her feelings of insecurity in this case were not connected to English language skills, but to her sense of being a competent designer. For another interviewee, comparing herself to others was having a detrimental effect on her self-confidence, as she labelled herself as 'in the worst level' in the class; 'in the last 30%':

(6.110) Yao: I will find myself less confident than in the pre-sessional course because I think, hm, my classmates or my friends, they are all work hard than me and their skills and their brain↑ is much (0.3) they are actually someone who is more brilliant, hm. I can't get over them, tch (0.3). I find myself not so good.
Jenny: It sounds like you're comparing yourself to your classmates =
Yao: = yes.
Jenny: And that's making you feel =
Yao: = down (Sem 1).

It was not clear whether Yao's self-doubt related to her linguistic or academic ability, or a combination of both. Although she acknowledged that 'we shouldn't care about others, we should care about ourselves,' she stressed that her feeling of inferiority was 'real.' Experiencing impostor syndrome can happen to anyone, but some international students have the additional worry of whether their English language skills are acceptable. I found it ironic that interviewees sometimes made harsh evaluations of their proficiency while engaging in complex and detailed conversations with me.

As participants moved from semester 1 to semester 2, how they viewed themselves academically also fluctuated. Some were keen to share their grades (even though I did not ask for this information), suggesting that educational attainment was a priority. Those who felt they had done well were in no way boastful; instead, they seemed relieved to have succeeded in high-stakes assignments. Receiving positive appraisals of their work can strengthen confidence and self-esteem, thus enhancing their sense of being a competent student. This can be seen in the following remarks from two respondents who had previously doubted themselves:

(6.111) This semester I got two As on my essays, so it's quite nice and I, actually I didn't expect that, but it's very good, very positive, um, cos now I still have a lot of passion about [my subject] (Kexin, Sem 2).

(6.112) Yao: The last semester, uh (0.2) I think it's very good, I achieve a good mark, maybe not very good, just merit.
Jenny: That is good! (Sem 2)

Yao continued to compare herself unfavourably to English-speaking classmates ('there's still some gap from my essay writing skills to the native speakers') yet believed herself to be 'doing a better job' than Chinese peers. Meilin made a similar observation: 'I think maybe my mark is, it's better than most of the Chinese student [...] but it's not as well as some English speaker student' (Sem 2). It is interesting that they seemed to be connecting linguistic proficiency to academic ability (see Ryan & Viete, 2009), as English-speaking 'home' students can also struggle with the demands of a postgraduate degree. Others reported solid performances, despite their doubts about marks in the 60s being 'good':

(6.113) At first I think my grade is bad but I kind of like overhear other people's grades and it's not that bad [...] And I think the grade system here is more harsh cos I heard that maybe 60 here is equal to 75↑ (Sumana, Sem 2).

(6.114) Jenny: It sounds like your marks were very good (interviewee looks doubtful) if you're getting 65 and 70.
Haoran: Yes, but it depends on pathways [...] most of the students are hardworking so I don't have detailed data, but personally speaking I found that almost every score is high (Sem 2).

Two participants reported receiving low marks, which they each attributed partly to the negative impact of dealing with difficult personal circumstances. The word choice of 'upset' and 'disappointed' indicates their feelings about performing less well than expected, as seen in 6.115 and 6.116:

(6.115) I feel a little bit upset cos back in China, when I do it in Chinese writing I can do it quite well [...] Yeah, it could be shocking, I get a very low mark (Jianyu, Sem 2).

(6.116) Sometimes I disappointed about why I just study harder and harder, but I get lower and lower grade [...] I think I'm losing my confidence (Chen, Sem 2).

Previously high-achieving students could undergo a change in identity if they no longer feel capable. Nonetheless, the interviewees were trying to be proactive when it came to improving their marks. Jianyu blamed himself for not checking the course handbook's citation guidelines and described himself as 'lazy' when writing formal essays: 'I mean, yeah it's difficult writing in English but I should do better.' Chen positioned himself as needing to 'try harder' and to 'change [his] approach or method.' Both seemed to find it necessary to justify themselves, even though I sympathised with their problems and did not believe they were making flimsy excuses. Chen was the only respondent who articulated serious concerns about gaining his masters. He was conscious of the financial costs to his family (see Wu & Hammond, 2011), and the potential humiliation of failure:

(6.117) I just worried because my average mark, my grade, so I'm, so I feel more pressure than last semester [...] If I can't get the master's degree [...] if I come back to China, it's like I just cost lots of money and to travel, not to study, so it's very, very stressful (Chen, Sem 2).

6.8.2 Linguistic identity

With regard to linguistic identity, several participants positioned themselves as enthusiastic language learners, highlighting that they had studied English from an early age:

(6.118) I love languages, that's the reason why I choose to study Japanese [...] I studied English when I was five, it's pretty earlier than other students (Dian, Pre-S).

(6.119) I like English since I was really young, like it was my favourite subject (Sumana, Pre-S).

(6.120) I have learned English from, like, when I was five, six years old, but it's, I don't think it's valid English cos you don't have the environment to express yourself (Jianyu, Pre-S).

It is interesting that Jianyu questioned his legitimacy as an English speaker, despite his long experience of studying the language. He also described having two linguistic identities (unprompted by any specific questions on the topic): 'when I use Chinese, maybe I will be shy or I will be, well, in a different personality.' Another respondent suggested that using English makes her feel freer and more expressive:

(6.121) Jenny: How do you feel about speaking English generally? Do you quite enjoy it?
Sumana: I like English, I think it's better than Thai, I think it's more, like, it's more fun to express ourself, like using a different tone can give a different interpretation (Pre-S).

In semester 1 interviews, both these students stated that they were no longer translating from their first language before speaking, but were thinking in English. In contrast, as another explained, it can be a huge leap to imagine yourself fully functioning in a different language. This could even involve giving up part of one's identity, which some individuals might resist: 'my whole life now is thinking in Chinese, so I'm not sure whether in the future I can think in English' (Kexin, Pre-S).

In our last conversations, some participants remarked on their perceived linguistic progress. As expected, there were clear individual differences. Tatsuo continued to doubt his proficiency, yet did acknowledge some changes: 'I feel listening skills improved, but speaking, writing skills are not changed drastically.' Meilin was keen to vocalise her ideas, but remained unsure about how to employ more sophisticated language: 'I can express what I think but if we want to do some academic question, I'm afraid to do that because my words is not enough.' Another described herself as contributing frequently in class, but expressed concerns about her speaking and listening skills in other contexts (such as communicating with hotel staff while on holiday). Living in an all-Chinese environment had, she feared, caused these to stagnate or even decline:

(6.122) Xinyi: Somebody may have some accent, I think most of them are speaking standard English, but they speak so fast (laughs). In my mind it sounds like blah, blah, blah, and I have never, I even have no time to hear what they have spoken.
Jenny: How did you feel in that situation?
Xinyi: It made me feel stressful because I thought I, my listening was going down.
Jenny: But, you know, sometimes it's the fault of the other person, speaking too fast and –
Xinyi: I would say, 'Sorry?' and they would repeat (Sem 2).

As seen from the above excerpt, I suggested to the participant that she may not have been wholly to blame for her lack of comprehension. From my own experience of speaking other languages, I realise that confidence in one's ability can fluctuate, and therefore wished to provide some reassurance.

6.8.3 Personal development: A sense of belonging?

It is clear that individual approaches to the adjustment process will vary. Most interviewees reported being reasonably content with their lives in Scotland, explaining that the move had not caused them many difficulties: 'I think I get used to the life here. There is no problem for me' (Meilin, Sem 1); 'everything is very easy for me' (Xinyi, Sem 1). Even if they had encountered challenges at the beginning, such as feeling homesick, some displayed resilience and a willingness to adapt:

(6.123) I adjust myself better and better to the life [...] At the beginning, I just struggle to, uh, live here and I just, uh, often make a phone with my mum and tell her that I want to come home and I don't want to live here. But now, because of some nice experience (0.3) I really enjoy here (Yuming, Sem 2).

In the semester 2 interviews, several participants stated that their sense of belonging (to the university and the city) had increased, or expressed sadness at the prospect of leaving after graduation:

(6.124) I don't want to go [...] if I come back to China I'll miss everything here, all my friends, so I want to get a job or keep on study here (Dian, Sem 2).

(6.125) I feel I belong to this university and I'm a part of this. I'm, very (0.3) positive (Yao, Sem 2).

(6.126) When I'm talking about where I'm from, I was talking about, I'm from Scotland. And [people] ask next, what's your nationality? But yeah [...] even I don't speak Scottish English, I feel like I kind of belong (Jianyu, Sem 2).

As Zhu Hua & Li Wei (2016) observe, the perception of whether someone is an 'interloper' is connected to expectations and power inequality. Nonetheless, although his claim to be from Scotland was met with scepticism, Jianyu did not seem to mind his dual status as an insider/outsider. Others were more ambivalent, even if they had had a mainly positive experience. One interviewee disagreed with the suggestion that re-adjusting to life in China might be difficult. I was basing this question on my own experience of reverse culture shock (see Gaw, 2000) after returning home from Japan:

(6.127) Jenny: How are you feeling about going home after being in Scotland?
Xinyi: OK, I was very, mm, expect (0.2), yeah, I was very, mm (0.4) I don't know how to say that.
Jenny: I just mean because then you'll have to re-adjust =
Xinyi: = no↑.
Jenny: = to being back or will it be easy to just =
Xinyi: = I think it will be easy because, honestly, my heart was always in my home [...] I always thinking of the plan after my graduation in my home. I don't think it will be difficult to re-adjust (Sem 2).

Another interviewee took a thoughtful attitude to remaining an outsider in Scotland, claiming that it had certain advantages:

(6.128) Sometimes when I talk with foreigners, I feel like, um, my body's present [...] but I can also divorce my body to observe my reaction and to observe the people who talk with me, their reaction. So [...] this kind of feelings made me feel like, yes, maybe being marginalised is not a bad thing (Kexin, Sem 2).

Although usually viewed as detrimental to a person's sense of self and wellbeing, Kexin believed that being on the periphery allowed her to be more objective – an important attribute in her field of Social Anthropology. It is unsurprising that those who experience some hostility from the host culture will be less likely to integrate. However, this participant took ownership of her status, and was perhaps appropriating a more fluid, transnational identity (see de Fina & Perrino, 2013):

(6.129) I realised that I don't need to belong here, yeah, this is very important because maybe (0.4), like, I don't want to [go] back to China, but I also feel I don't belong to the UK. So, like, I am in the (laughs), how can I describe this? Like, um, but I think maybe for me, uh, it's OK that I don't have any home (Kexin, Sem 2).

However, the process of adaptation may involve resistance, rather than a desire to integrate (Berry, 2005). Another participant who had worked overseas nevertheless found it difficult to adjust to life in Scotland. This might have been influenced by his shift in status – from a self-assured professional to a new postgraduate learning in another language. While I tried to elicit reasons for his dissatisfaction, he seemed unable or unwilling to elaborate in depth:

(6.130) Jenny: I know you're very focused on the academic side of things, but how is life in [the university city] at the moment?
Tatsuo: (laughs) Actually, I didn't enjoy the life [here].
Jenny: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Is there any reason why? Is it just lots of different things?
Tatsuo: Eh, uh (0.3) quite difficult [...] especially the **food**. I tried some restaurants, but I couldn't find a good restaurant, so I always cooked by myself but I'm tired of [it] (Sem 1).

While complaints about unpalatable food (and the Scottish weather) might seem trivial, dealing with such issues could add to students' level of stress. However, when I asked Tatsuo if the situation had changed in our final interview, he focused more on academic factors:

(6.131) Jenny: I know that maybe adjusting here has not been that easy. I remember last time we spoke you said you weren't really enjoying life here. Has that got any better?
Tatsuo: (laughs) No, getting worse!
Jenny: Oh no! I'm sorry.
Tatsuo: Because, hm, a lot of assignment and lecture (Sem 2).

Despite Tatsuo's view that Scotland was 'the most difficult country' he had lived in, he conceded that the English-speaking environment was an advantage. As he explained, when working in Brazil, Germany and Singapore, 'if I went to the outside, every signboard were written by national language, so it was stressful for me, but here no stress for the signboard, conversation, communication' (Sem 2). Furthermore, working as a graduate teaching

assistant of Japanese had provided the opportunity to appropriate a positive role away from his degree programme. He appeared to enjoy being an expert in the subject and conveying his knowledge to others.

Each participant's journey from the PSE on to their degree programme (and beyond) was unique, emphasising the importance of not labelling international students as a homogeneous group. Some conveyed satisfaction with their achievements, demonstrating with gestures as seen in 6.132 and 6.133:

(6.132) Jenny: So, thinking back to the pre-sessional course in the summer compared to now, do you feel you've made progress?
Dian: Yes (indicates upward arrow) (Sem 2).

(6.133) I think my experience is very (0.3) hm, I don't know, motivating, yeah [...] my confidence is this (gestures upwards). It has been a long time down, so I'm glad you can share my experience (Yao, Sem 2).

Yao described how her self-belief had oscillated: from confident on the PSE, to less assured in the first academic semester, to regaining a voice by the time of our third meeting. We cannot assume that the adjustment process is always linear, especially since individual experiences will vary. Other interviewees suggested that living and studying abroad had enabled them to acquire valuable qualities such as connecting with others, questioning prior assumptions, and becoming more independent:

(6.134) I think it's my year to experience, explore everything [...] So, I think I changed a lot, much more open-minded and willing to explore things (Sumana, Sem 2).

(6.135) I think I actually become outgoing, more open and also, because of the cross-cultural, um, environment, I think I'm more, just be more open to embrace all kinds of people (Yuming, Sem 2).

(6.136) My independent study or independent ability is better than before, I think (Chen, Sem 2).

As shown throughout this chapter, identity development was a complex, variable process for the participants. They did not necessarily undergo a 'smooth' adaptation to life in a new linguistic and educational environment. In contrast, the interview data demonstrate that their sense of self was impacted by different contexts, other interlocutors, and personal perceptions. This highlights the importance of seeing EAP and international students as individuals, rather than a homogeneous group. While the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 tends to focus on the struggles faced by students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, my findings indicate that they are often resilient and positive. However, we still need to question whether universities could be doing more to fully meet their needs, thereby giving them the opportunity to have a rewarding and worthwhile overseas stay.

Chapter 7 Results and discussion: EAP tutor interviews

The EAP instructors had varied levels of experience: several had been working on pre-sessional programmes for many years, while others were relatively new to the field. They frequently spoke of previous teaching positions when sharing their perspectives. Some interviewees made direct mention of identity, possibly in an attempt to help me fulfil my research aims, but others referred to it more obliquely. I interviewed three teachers (Lin, Hannah and Elena) who had moved to the UK from overseas (China, Germany and Bulgaria respectively) for the purpose of academic study. As former international students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, they had a sense of shared experience with the learners in their classes. The other four were from English-speaking countries: Scotland (Alasdair), England (Claire and Ralph) and Ireland (Tom). However, they had each lived and worked abroad and had experience of acquiring foreign languages.

I was not overly concerned about power relations when conducting these interviews. Perhaps I expected to be on a similar wavelength to fellow EAP professionals; indeed, I found myself referring to 'we' during some discussions. However, while our opinions mostly correlated, this was not always the case, and I had to be careful not to project personal perspectives on to interviewees' answers. As with student participants, I presumed that volunteers had a pre-standing interest in my research area. Although several teachers expressed a willingness to be interviewed after my presentation in induction week, only seven came forward in the end.

Part of our role as EAP instructors is to assure students that they are capable individuals who can go on to be successful on their degree programmes. Even on a 6-week pre-sessional, the intensity of teaching means that it is possible to get to know them as individuals, and to offer personalised support. At the same time, due to the pressured nature of the job, we may not always take time to interrogate our own underlying assumptions and biases. In what follows, I present EAP teachers' views and provide interpretations of their key insights. I believe that including their voices has contributed to a richer, more detailed picture of EAP students' experiences. They have unique insight into the crucial transition phase, and are likely to hold views on how this impacts students. It was also my intention to uncover their thoughts about how former EAP students' identities might alter once they finish the pre-sessional and embark on a postgraduate degree. Extracts have been considered in the context of interviews as a whole. All names are pseudonyms.

7.1 Perceptions of challenges encountered by EAP students

Including the loaded word 'challenge' (Dippold et al., 2019) in my questions (see Appendix B) possibly caused respondents to focus on EAP students' perceived deficiencies. On the other hand, asking instructors for their impressions provided crucial insight into how learners manage various demands while on the PSE. Most referred to course content, with writing singled out as a potential area of difficulty. As student interviewees confirmed (e.g., Dian, 6.11; Xinyi, 6.18), being unfamiliar with how to produce a successful piece of work in English can cause problems. If they only have experience of opinion-based and formulaic

IELTS-style essays, they could flounder when faced with requirements such as synthesising information, using citation effectively, and taking a critical stance. Learning the 'rules' of academic writing is a key part of students' language socialisation (Duff, 2010, p.180), but is not necessarily a straightforward process:

(7.1) Jenny: Which areas do you think students have most difficulty in, in terms of academic work?
Tom: Anything to do with sources causes problems from, 'Why do we have to use them, why can't I give my opinion?' It is your opinion; you just need to support it now and back it up. I'm trying desperately to steer students away from, 'There are positives and there are negatives.' And then the conclusion.

Tom's comment highlights that IELTS essays do not require students to formulate a complex argument or include academic references. As others have pointed out, English language test scores are not necessarily a reliable indicator of learners' future performance on degree programmes (Jenkins & Wingate, 2015; Pearson 2020a). The student participants realised that the requirements of the EAP course are quite different to those of linguistic proficiency examinations (e.g., Haoran, 6.12). However, one tutor questioned the negative attitude towards IELTS:

(7.2) I mean, there's always the comparison with, this is an IELTS essay, oh it's so bad it has to be an IELTS essay. It's like, OK, well, y'know, they've obviously spent a lot of time perfecting and honing these IELTS skills, let's (0.2) try and bring those skills into the academic writing (Alasdair).

Alasdair's remark suggests that IELTS essays are often perceived as lacking in sophistication compared to university level academic writing. However, in his view, it would be beneficial to build on students' previous experience of learning English, instead of positioning them as novices in the EAP context. At the same time, other interviewees stressed the challenge of quickly having to meet both academic and linguistic demands:

(7.3) I've found with the writing, a lot of points where it's quite incomprehensible because they're grappling with a new language but they're also grappling with extremely complex structures (Ralph).

Ralph's repeated use of the word 'grappling' implies that new skills are not always easy to acquire. Indeed, postgraduate respondents articulated their unfamiliarity with academic writing during the first interviews. As Fox's (1994) seminal paper reminds us, coming to terms with different expectations (such as constructing a direct argument) could be especially problematic for those who come from different educational and cultural backgrounds. Alasdair described students as being preoccupied with linguistic accuracy, at the expense of audience awareness:

(7.4) Cohesion is terrible; I mean, you read an essay and you're like, what were you thinking, what is the crux here? Where is the heart? I think they're focused on getting down a pristine version of English, rather than something that's readable by an academic reader (Alasdair).

To a reader who is used to working within the dominant discourses of the English-speaking Western academy (Ryan & Viete, 2009), the structure of a piece of writing might seem 'terrible' if it fails to get to the point quickly enough or is too oblique (see Fox, 1994). However, it is culturocentric and counterproductive to position students as deficient when they are used to expressing their understanding in a different way. One EAP teacher, herself a Chinese national, had personal insight into why such tension arises:

(7.5) The language distance between Chinese and English is far, far away, and, uh, how we think is very different as well and how we express. A very simple example: in Chinese writing, or in Chinese speaking, we would put the most important thing at the end. So, sometimes you are trying to see in a Chinese student's essay, where exactly is your point? (Lin)

As Lin suggested, students who lack knowledge of conventional discourse patterns will sometimes attempt to transfer the structure of an essay written in their L1 into English: 'background-before-main-point' (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006, p.18). An instructor without her level of understanding might perceive a 'Chinese style' assignment as inadequate and be unsure about how to provide constructive feedback.

Another interesting finding was that EAP tutors and students can have different opinions about what is the most demanding area of academic work:

(7.6) Jenny: So, you feel it's mainly in the writing, then, that they have the most difficulty?
Hannah: Yeah, oh yeah. I mean, they always say it's the listening (laughs) [...] But generally, I think listening is just practice, you know, you get used to people.

(7.7) In terms of what they think is more of a challenge, I think they would say the speaking. But I think in terms of what they actually find challenging in terms of the quality of their work or the results of what they produce, I would say the writing (Ralph).

It is logical that EAP tutors would focus on writing, as it is the main means of assessment on pre-sessional courses. However, these observations suggest that some students are more anxious about interacting with others, in social as well as academic contexts (see Copland & Garton, 2011). For example, communicating with local people or contributing to whole class discussion are potentially face-threatening situations (Karas, 2017). In contrast, receiving feedback on written work, while anxiety-inducing, is at least private between the teacher and student. Nevertheless, those without experience of writing an academic essay in English might wonder if the teacher will 'accept what they've written' (Ralph). Unfamiliar academic requirements were also identified as potentially problematic, sometimes with serious implications. One interviewee related an incident where a student was 'very proud' to have completed a long essay. However, the final result was different from her expectation:

(7.8) And then once she submitted, it came back 50% plagiarised and she was in tears. And we had this really difficult conversation where she was saying, 'Is that what you mean by plagiarism in the West?' So, she had had experience of writing in English but not according to the same standards, um, as what we expect (Elena).

By reporting her student's confusion and emotional response, Elena implied that this was not a case of deliberate plagiarism, but of misunderstanding academic conventions (see Fatemi & Saito, 2020).

Instead of focusing on writing, one respondent took a different stance by drawing attention to listening issues. She thought that, while writing strategies can be taught, it is difficult to 'make [students] understand what they hear.' Her opinion had partly been shaped by witnessing classes react to guest subject lecturers who neglect to accommodate their way of speaking for an international audience:

(7.9) We often have those things where a lecturer from their programme will come to talk to them [...] and that lecturer will often not grade their language at all, blah-blah-blah-blah-blah-blah-blah, and the students are (intake of breath) deer in headlights (Claire).

Using 'blah blah blah' instead of meaningful words shows how such rapid-fire delivery is incomprehensible to EAP students, who are then left bewildered when trying to decipher the speaker's meaning. Indeed, several postgraduate participants expressed anxiety about their listening comprehension, particularly during the first semester (e.g., Jianyu, 6.37; Yao, 6.38). Unfortunately, not all academic lecturers will modify their delivery, instead speaking too quickly or employing incomprehensible idioms (Jenkins, 2013; Keefe & Shi, 2017).

The obligation to contribute actively in Western university classrooms (see Dippold et al., 2020) means that EAP teachers need to introduce learners to seminar discussion. As other studies have shown (e.g. Zhu Haiping & O'Sullivan, 2022), users of other languages often need more time to organise their thoughts in English and can find it difficult to keep up with fast-paced debate. The next comment recognises the 'safe space' of the EAP classroom, and indicates that students could find themselves in a less sympathetic situation in degree subject tutorials:

(7.10) With the seminars, we can practise, and we can practise, but we're practising in a group where everyone, you know, it's safe, isn't it, and it's not authentic (Claire).

Even in this apparently protective environment, not everyone will be keen to voice their ideas. Something as innocuous as re-arranging the seating plan can intensify students' fear of losing face and have a detrimental effect on their ability to communicate:

(7.11) Once it's the whole class, in a horseshoe arrangement, a lot of the quieter students are quiet again, and they **don't** find the right spot to contribute, and they don't feel comfortable with [...] facing other students. Although they've individually spoken to each one of their classmates (Elena).

In addition, turn-taking conventions might affect someone's ability to contribute (see Karas, 2017), for example, if they are not sure how to interrupt appropriately. As mentioned in student interviews (Jianyu, 6.60), this becomes especially problematic if people are speaking too quickly, and prosodic cues are absent. While linguistic anxiety causes some students to retreat into silence, others may talk at great length (but incoherently). As one EAP respondent explained:

(7.12) Some of them will be more kind of honest about [linguistic anxiety], some will try to hide it. I mean, I'd a girl literally say, 'Oh no, I'm very shy.' **You're** standing up to answer! And some of them will waffle, and in some cases I think it's because they've genuinely not understood and in some cases [...] you can kind of see it in their faces, thinking, is he going to ask me? (Ralph)

Ralph's ironic tone when making the comment about asking a nervous student stand up to answer suggests that he was not being serious. Nevertheless, this excerpt shows that learners might view themselves as unconfident speakers, and thus feel intimidated by the prospect of publicly voicing their ideas. It is important to remember, though, that students can still be engaged in whole class discussion even if they remain silent (Karas, 2017; Murray & McConachy, 2018).

It was recognised that the amount of reading required on the PSE can be overwhelming, especially if students are under the impression that they must decode every individual word in a text. This could even provoke an emotional response, as described in 7.13:

(7.13) Alasdair: I had a girl in tears yesterday.
Jenny: Oh no, that's awful.
Alasdair: Because she was like, this is so much reading, and I was like, you need to understand, we're not expecting you to understand every single part, every single word, every single sentence.

For those who are used to being academically successful, encountering barriers when reading could undermine their sense of a competent self. However, as Alasdair suggested, it is important to manage EAP students' expectations, especially as they will be faced with a much greater workload on their degree programmes.

As previously stated (see §2.5.3), the use of language learning software is on the rise, and EAP tutors indicated that students can be reluctant to give up the 'safety net' of direct translation:

(7.14) They are not trying to check, like, every word, but they do want to grasp the general idea by looking at the Chinese translation for some reason – which might not be accurate (Lin).

Lin added that, when marking the first formative assignment, she could identify members of the class who had attempted to translate from their first language by the disjointed nature of their work. Her comments reflect those of postgraduate interviewees (e.g., Jianyu, 6.45; Meilin, 6.46), who expressed concern about the reliability of translation software. Students may need advice on how to use such tools effectively (Klekovkina & Denié-Higney, 2022), but this requires good knowledge on the part of instructors.

7.2 Initial changes to student identity

Embarking on an intense, high-stakes EAP course means that students need to quickly come to terms with what is being asked of them, causing potential confusion and insecurity. EAP tutors described a tension between learners' previous experience of English lessons (often based on grammar) and the new focus on academic skills. As one explained:

(7.15) I think it's just such a stark entry into academic English, the pre-sessional. It's like, forget everything you've ever known before, this is your new life, and so I think the liaison or sort of ease into it needs to be a bit softer than (hits desk) (Alasdair).

Alasdair's word choice of 'stark' and 'new life,' accompanied by his physical gesture, emphasises the abrupt nature of the transition process. The short duration of pre-sessional

programmes could make it difficult to accommodate any bridging activities. However, bearing in mind the impact of anxiety on learners' sense of self, perhaps more time could be spent on decreasing their apprehension. As one experienced instructor elucidated:

> (7.16) I've noticed what really makes a difference, at least within the scope of the EAP course, for them, about whether they succeed or not, is their levels of anxiety during the course (Elena).

Elena also suggested that the 'common atmosphere of the classroom' influences students' achievement. Her comments imply that success does not depend on personal motivation alone (see Darvin & Norton, 2023), but is also influenced by both affective and contextual factors. However, I wondered whether this is something that EAP tutors can in fact 'notice' in a short space of time. In-depth investigation would be required to establish whether there is a cause-effect relationship between students' anxiety and their performance on the course.

Individuals who have previously seen themselves as competent and articulate could experience a loss of identity when met with unforeseen demands (Ryan & Viete, 2009). As another EAP tutor noted:

> (7.17) I imagine in their own country [that] is part of their identity, it's like, I'm a good English speaker and I'm going to the UK to study, and then of course if they move into that situation and they're struggling, then that's obviously gonna have horrible effects on their self-esteem (Claire).

Indeed, some postgraduate respondents described losing confidence in themselves after they had embarked on their degree programmes (Kexin, 6.63; Yao; 6.110; Chen, 6.116). International students' own abilities and cultural capital might be overlooked if universities place more emphasis on 'adjusting' to linguistic and academic expectations. It would be more helpful to offer reassurance that they are valid members of the new community.

Some instructors mentioned the taxing nature of the PSE itself, for instance, the fact that students only have one chance to achieve the grades required for their degree programme. Although there are potentially other options for those who are unsuccessful (such as a different HEI with less stringent entrance requirements) they are likely to be invested in their chosen university. As indicated in postgraduate interviews (Tatsuo, 6.10), the prospect of failure is stressful:

> (7.18) Elena: Obviously, they want to study at [name of university]; they feel like they've already kind of earned that by now.
>
> Jenny: Yes, because they're here, aren't they? They probably feel a connection, they've been around the university and the campus and they're living here.
>
> Elena: Exactly [...] I mean, there's a bit of a mixed message here, I feel, about, OK, you are already part of this community, versus, but actually, you know, we've got quite tough gatekeeping so you're not really there yet, and that, I think, affects how they feel and maybe their self-worth.

7.18 suggests that we need to query when exactly EAP students are able to establish a sense of belonging. Furthermore, EAP teachers might need to find a balance between encouraging individuals without giving them what Elena described as 'false hope.' The idea of a self-

fulfilling prophecy is also relevant: if learners are anxious and doubtful about passing crucial assessments, this could have a detrimental impact on their investment:

(7.19) I think that knocking of your confidence can perhaps knock on to what you think about yourself academically [...] That thing where they're just kind of, 'I'm rubbish, I'm no good at this, I can't, I can't do this, therefore I'm not going to bother to do this' (Claire).

The preceding remark highlights the idea that students do not necessarily lack motivation, but are afraid of underperforming. As highlighted in postgraduate interviews (Yuming, §6.1), this can lead to the adoption of maladaptive coping strategies such as procrastination or withdrawal. However, tutors also commented on learners' dedication and determination: the same interviewee went on to explain:

(7.20) They don't seem stressed, they just go, OK, I've gotta do this, then I've gotta go and do this, and then I'll do this, then I'll achieve this, and if I need to stay up to 3am, I will (Claire).

Claire's fast-paced, unbroken sentence is indicative of the multiple demands EAP students face, and their impressive resilience in managing these.

7.2.1 Support for students on the PSE

EAP tutors emphasised the valuable individual support provided on the PSE, for example, tutorials in which students can discuss both academic and pastoral issues. They were uncertain about the situation on mainstream degree programmes since none of them work at the university all year round. Lin asked me about the provision of in-sessional academic writing instruction, as she had attended similar classes when studying at another institution. She added that she had found out about these through her own initiative – something which also appeared to be true of the postgraduates I interviewed. If support options are not well-advertised, then they become more difficult to access (see Straker, 2020). Learners therefore require 'problem-solving skills' (Lin) in order to find the appropriate help, creating an extra burden. In addition, postgraduate respondents mentioned that, due to the limited availability of additional English classes, they had to enrol quickly or else miss out.

Ralph recalled that, in a previous workplace, bilingual staff could step in to translate if a Chinese student needed extra input to make themselves understood. Similarly, another interviewee recognised the difficulty of elucidating academic and welfare concerns in another language:

(7.21) Even if you have to access [...] the support that's on offer, maybe you're having issues, and you want to access that support, homesickness, loneliness, struggling with your English, struggling with settling in – you then have to access that support in English (Claire).

Indeed, one student participant (Kexin, 6.104) was initially deterred from accessing counselling, as she found the prospect of explaining difficult, emotive topics in English unnerving. It would be beneficial if universities could offer services with qualified, bilingual counsellors – online when none are available locally.

Tutors did not directly criticise the PSE curriculum. However, some pointed to a 'huge gap' (Lin) between where students are on arrival and where they need to be by the end of the

course. Expecting them to acquire higher academic skills without detailed instruction or scaffolding could be seen as unreasonable. Several postgraduate interviewees referred to the complex nature of paraphrasing and synthesising information (e.g., Meilin, 6.27; Tatsuo, 6.29), suggesting that more support would be welcome. However, the time-pressed nature of EAP programmes means that not everything can be covered in depth. In addition, if teachers are uninformed about students' educational backgrounds and future trajectories, it can be difficult to build on previous skills:

(7.22) They're expected to forge a new identity, an entirely new identity, but we don't know what we are working with. We have some preconceptions about their academic skills, but we really know very little about their overall experience, the way they see themselves, and how they project a future identity (Elena).

While it is impossible to know everything about learners' wishes, being aware of potential imagined selves (Kanno & Norton, 2003) could enable teachers to meet their needs more effectively.

One EAP tutor emphasised the financial drive behind EAP pre-sessional programmes, and expressed cynicism about the high pass rate (see Pearson, 2020a; 2020b):

(7.23) PSE is big business, for the universities it is **big** business [...] There is a **lot** of money coming in. And **obviously,** the universities want to keep that happening every year [...] The pass rate is in the 90th percentile. What exams anywhere in the world have a pass rate in the 90th percentile? (Tom)

I cannot determine whether Tom's remark is accurate, as other exams elsewhere may have equally high success rates. Interestingly, his perception that the PSE is easy to pass contrasts with views articulated by postgraduate respondents, some of whom were anxious about failing (e.g., Tatsuo, 6.10). At the same time, Tom suggested that the research site's PSE delivers a worthwhile curriculum and is staffed by dedicated teachers. He contrasted this with his experience of working at another university, where learners on an EAP pre-sessional were treated like a financial resource or 'cash cows' (cf. Schartner & Cho, 2017). Instead of focusing on their academic achievement and social welfare, the programme was run like a 'factory,' with profit the main goal. While it is not the aim of my research to investigate the effectiveness of pre-sessional provision, the priorities of different institutions could impact on students' experiences and their identity construction. Even high-quality courses are not a panacea or, as one interviewee put it, a 'magic bullet' (Ralph). Furthermore, as another EAP tutor recognised, an individual's level of success on the PSE is not an accurate predictor of future performance:

(7.24) Someone may pass their pre-sessional and still perhaps not do so well in the following stage, but it could also be the other way round (Elena).

It should not be assumed that short EAP programmes provide students with all the skills and attributes required for successful transition to mainstream university education. However, as indicated by some postgraduate participants, pre-sessional courses can introduce key academic concepts, improve their confidence when communicating in English, and familiarise them with a new way of working.

7.2.2 Positioning of students in the PSE

During EAP tutor interviews, my main impression was that they positioned international students as 'assets' (in a scholarly, rather than a financial sense) instead of 'problems to be solved' (Ryan, 2011, p.631; also see Jin & Cortazzi, 2017). They claimed to see them as capable and tried to challenge negative labels regarding, for example, critical thinking. This is evident in 7.25:

> (7.25) People always say, 'Oh, they struggle with critical thinking.' They **don't**. They really, really don't. I mean, when I talk to them [...] they are able to look at things from different perspectives and debate things and take a stance (Hannah).

Hannah's use of emphasis and repetition shows her strong disagreement with a common stereotype. One purpose of the PSE is to strengthen learners' self-belief, which includes offering reassurances about their linguistic proficiency, as captured in 7.26 and 7.27:

> (7.26) Claire: I'm telling them they have great English and [...] building their confidence.
> Jenny: Yeah, we bolster their confidence, don't we? You can do it!

> (7.27) I told them that they're here to understand, to recognise that they have learned English to build up the confidence to be able to use it (Ralph).

A couple of respondents described specific instances where they had praised their class for coping with a demanding task. One described how students had identified the presence of writer's voice when reading an extract from a journal article:

> (7.28) I was asking them, 'How many voices are there?' [...] I would say the majority of them said two and then one said three, and suddenly everyone is looking, oh yes, it's three, the writer's voice is there as well, very clear. I was like, **yes**! Yes, **good**, you noticed that (Lin).

Another reported that her students had managed to understand and accurately summarise what she considered to be a difficult lecture:

> (7.29) I thought they were going to be like, 'Oh my God, that was terrible, that was so bad' [...] but actually, they didn't. They had maybe listened twice, cos it was difficult, and they had notes that impressed me, and they were kind of good, selective notes (Claire).

These excerpts show how EAP teachers can look for opportunities to give students positive affirmation, inspire them to feel like capable scholars, and thus increase their investment in both the English language and academic work.

7.3 Views of classroom participation

Several teachers had been pleasantly surprised by students' willingness to participate during lessons: 'what's lovely this year is that [they] are very talkative [...] I'm getting great responses' (Tom); 'they understand enough of what I say to be able to really follow the class well, and so they have the confidence to contribute' (Claire). They referred to students asking questions, voicing opinions, and using strategies to aid their comprehension. Overall, they believed that their classes were coping well with an interactive style of learning, while acknowledging that not everyone will find it easy to contribute. There was a clear wariness

about resorting to clichés such as positioning those from China as quiet and passive in discussion (see Zhu Haiping & O'Sullivan, 2022; Wang & Moskal, 2019):

(7.30) I don't like this idea that the Chinese students are reticent. I don't like that idea, and I think it's reductive and it's inaccurate a lot of the time as well (Tom).

As Tom's remark suggests, it is important for EAP teachers to view students as individuals, instead of grouping them together under mythical national traits (see Moosavi, 2022). However, Tom went on to compare Chinese students to more outspoken Italians, which perhaps shows a belief in some kind of cultural difference. It is important to remember that willingness to communicate can fluctuate between the L1 and L2 (Yashima, 2018), with power relations also playing a role. Some postgraduate participants described their linguistic anxiety when interacting with 'native' users of English (e.g., Yuming, 6.90), fearing that they would be shunned for speaking less than 'perfect' English (see Jenkins, 2013). EAP tutors appeared to recognise the importance of social context (as opposed to innate characteristics), for example, Alasdair stated that he would avoid using the word 'shy,' as this would unfairly label students who may well be 'chatty' in their first language.

In order to prepare students for university education in Scotland, it is necessary to encourage contributions in a whole class setting. This is partly because, as one EAP tutor noted, extraversion is generally favoured in Western universities. However, alternative forms of participation can also be valid (see Murray & McConachy, 2018), as she suggested:

(7.31) We tell them that they're going to fail if they are quiet, but sometimes they can offer very meaningful contributions just once for the whole class, or perhaps later, as reflection (Elena).

Being aware of non-verbal cues is also important. One interviewee had watched a presentation about cultural differences which suggested that, in East Asia, people tend to look at the teacher if they want to speak, rather than raise their hand or interrupt: 'I really notice that, OK, someone's looking at me, that means they're ready to talk now' (Hannah). She added that, in her opinion, Europeans do the same thing; therefore, there is less of a divide than is often assumed.

When I asked EAP tutors about students' language choices during lessons, the following views were typical. While they qualified their acceptance of Chinese with phrases such as 'to an extent' and 'I won't let it go on for too long,' most seemed to believe that it has a valid role in their classrooms:

(7.32) They do have a tendency still to lapse into Chinese when they're discussing things in class, but I mean, to an extent I think that's fine if that gets their point across (Claire).

(7.33) I have allowed them to speak Chinese if they want to, if they need to check understanding or anything [...] And I've just said, you know, try to speak English if you can, if you want to and, um they do (Hannah).

(7.34) I'm happy for them to use their first language to support each other, you know, I won't let it go on for too long (Ralph).

Another tutor explained how she employs humour to avoid censoring the use of students' first language while still encouraging them to communicate in English:

(7.35) I just needed to say, '50p' [financial penalty for speaking Chinese] and they would smile rather than feel told off cos they're speaking their first language which no one should be (Elena).

It is probable that completing a master's degree in TESOL had introduced some interviewees to the potential benefits of accessing learners' full linguistic repertoires. One teacher with this qualification highlighted how his attitude had changed over the years:

(7.36) When I started my career I was like, 'English only, English only,' and then coming into, you know code-switching, translanguaging, all of that, I'm more flexible at using other languages in the classroom now (Alasdair).

In contrast, another EAP tutor (Tom) described trying to 'stamp out' Chinese usage because 'the common language' of the university is English. Instructors may take this approach to ensure that students can face the challenge of learning in an Anglophone environment, rather than because of any negativity towards multilingualism. Notably, the only Chinese-English bilingual among the EAP teachers also preferred students not to use their first language during lessons, believing it to be detrimental to their linguistic progress:

(7.37) Lin: Even now, because I am Chinese, and sometimes they tend to (0.2), if they struggle, they'll try to speak Chinese with me.
Jenny: So, do you have to kind of tell them, nicely, that they can't do that?
Lin: Yeah, yeah, I have to, I have to, because this is the course that's supposed to build up Their English skills, not give them a shortcut. I'm not here to give them a shortcut.

Several postgraduate interviewees expressed frustration with their classmates' propensity to lapse into Chinese (e.g., Yuming, 6.56; Dian, 6.57), so it could be argued that teachers need to take a firmer stance. On the other hand, we cannot expect students to give up their L1 identity, especially when they are in a class composed solely of co-nationals. Many will find themselves in a majority Chinese cohort on their postgraduate degree, and therefore have less incentive to communicate in English.

7.4 Perceptions of EAP students' experiences on degree programmes

A key aim in undertaking this research project is to advance our understanding of how students experience university life once they have completed a pre-sessional programme. Although EAP instructors did not have firm answers to this question, their opinions were still of value. Several interviewees believed that interacting with their Anglophone counterparts would be challenging for some former EAP students. They suspected that being in a class with people from English-speaking backgrounds (who are not necessarily welcoming) might damage their confidence. As has been established, not all members of a community will be sympathetic towards newcomers and provide them with opportunities to interact (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2013). When group work is a vital part of university work (and sometimes assessment), any kind of hostility – including 'passive xenophobia' (Harrison & Peacock, 2010; also see Moore & Hampton, 2015) could pose a real problem. During our conversation, one respondent adopted the role of a hypothetical Scottish postgraduate who was unhappy with the presence of international students on their course: 'I'm here to do my master's, I don't have time to contend with you and your sub-par English.' Surprisingly, this

was based on his own encounters with such attitudes when undertaking an MSc in TESOL. It is concerning that even future English language teachers could harbour prejudices. The sense of othering (Blommaert, 2005) is apparent in his use of stress on the word 'they':

(7.38) I think the individual I'm thinking about, the attitude was, 'I'm here, I'm paying this money, why are we having to go over things several times because **they** aren't understanding? Why am I in a group with people who don't communicate with me?' (Alasdair)

Alasdair suggested that home students could perceive large numbers of Chinese students as 'all banding together,' which makes them seem unapproachable (cf. Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017). Although, in his view, this is 'really horrible rhetoric,' he admitted that any cohort who 'want to keep to themselves' could provoke feelings of frustration in others: '[it] can be aggravating for the home student.' Anxiety about speaking to 'native' English-speaking classmates was also highlighted, as demonstrated in an exchange about EAP students' concerns:

(7.39) Tom: I was saying, 'What are you nervous of, what are you afraid of?' '**Oh**, we're afraid of the native speakers and we're afraid of the home students.'
Jenny: Were they able to explain to you where their fears came from?
Tom: They were predominantly language-based because, um, 'They won't understand me, I won't understand them, they'll think I'm stupid.'

Here, Tom described how students positioned themselves as inadequate English speakers in interactions with hypothetical 'native' speakers. Furthermore, as reflected in interviews with postgraduate respondents (see §6.8.1), they seemed to be conflating fluency in English with academic ability (see Ryan & Viete, 2009). He had tried to assure them of their rightful place in the academic community, making the valid point that 'the worst student in the class might be from Scotland!'

EAP tutors expressed concerns that students' confidence could be undermined if they encountered less sympathetic attitudes. The scenario outlined below was experienced by some postgraduate respondents, as well as being described in other studies (e.g., Soltani, 2018; Freeman & Li, 2019):

(7.40) On their degree programmes there would be like, native speakers who probably would talk too fast or, uh, do not really understand what they are talking about, or may not be so tolerant or patient. So, that could [make someone] suddenly become less confident, from very confident in the language programme and then become less so in the degree programme. I really hope not (Lin).

When working on pre-sessional courses, I also worried about students losing confidence when making the transition to mainstream university classes. Therefore, I could understand Lin's concerns. Some postgraduate participants (such as Yao and Kexin) did, at least initially, experience a decline in self-assurance. However, as another tutor pointed out, individual responses will vary: some thrive on new challenges, while others become self-conscious and reticent:

(7.41) They've got the skills, it's just whether they have the confidence to use them, whether they don't kind of get battered down by a few scenarios, a few situations that maybe make them

feel uncomfortable and then they kind of lose that confidence that they had with us, with me (Claire).

The expression ‘battered down’ emphasises the damage which can be done if someone feels that others are judging them harshly, connoting weariness and dejection. I found this to be reminiscent of Kexin’s description of becoming ‘numb’ to her isolated situation in class. This reminds us that, while pre-sessional EAP instructors cannot always fully prepare them for interactions in degree programme classes. One EAP instructor posited that former EAP students could ‘clam up’ (Ralph) if they feel criticised by their classmates, again suggesting a retreat into silence. He added that they would probably wish to avoid ‘wasting the class’s time,’ for instance, by taking too long to articulate their thoughts. There was also significant uncertainty among EAP tutors as to how academic staff perceive international students in their classes. This is encapsulated in 7.42:

(7.42) Jenny: What perceptions do you think academic lecturers have of ex-EAP students without English as their first language?

Alasdair: So, my experience would be TESOL, where they’re obviously quite considerate of it, but in a standard Geography, Biology one, pfff, I don’t know. I mean, is there even any training and sort of like awareness of where these students backgrounds lie?

Alasdair’s expulsion of breath conveys the sense that international students’ needs might simply be ignored. Another interviewee articulated similar ideas:

(7.43) Jenny: Do you have any thoughts about how university lecturers see ex-EAP students who don’t have English as their first language?

Tom: I’m quite sure that there are lecturers who see them as, oh God, here we go again, I’m gonna have to slow down my speech and all the essays will be jumbled.

Tom added that ‘he would like to think that the majority of lecturers would view [overseas nationals] as students,’ rather than making unfair distinctions, although he did wonder if this was ‘naïve.’ Another EAP tutor reflected on the importance of having realistic expectations, especially when assessing written work:

(7.44) I mean if a student can make their points clearly, using understandable English, I think perhaps that’s enough [...] Maybe they’re expecting, you know, native speaker kind of levels of English and they’re obviously not going to get that (Claire).

Notably, it can be seen in 7.42, 7.43 and 7.44 that EAP tutors referred to university subject instructors as if they were monolingual English speakers who would be frustrated by international students’ apparent deficiencies. The failure to acknowledge that lecturers also come from various linguistic backgrounds sets them in opposition with students and emphasises a power differential (Pennycook. 2016). In fact, at the research site, many members of academic staff are multilingual, as evidenced in even my small interview sample (see Chapter 8 for details).

In terms of class participation, the Chinese EAP teacher clarified why misunderstandings might arise:

(7.45) I don’t know if [academic lecturers] understand, for example, if someone is being less, uh,

seems like they're not engaging, they're being quiet, do they see that as, oh, this person might not understand, or are they seeing that as, oh, this person is being respectful and maybe waiting to ask me later, after the class? (Lin)

As Lin suggested, not every instructor will be fully aware of the different reasons why a student might stay quiet in class. EAP tutors had different opinions about how guidance for subject lecturers working with international students would be received, as illustrated in 7.46:

(7.46) Jenny: Do you think there needs to be more training, maybe, for academic staff?
Alasdair: Absolutely. Um, I mean, we can see it in the TESOL department, how considerate **they** are, so it can be easily extended. If they're **aware** of what an EAP student is expecting from a lecture, they can have slides online. Um, it's such a minimal effort, and you will reduce so much anxiety and increase motivation, I think, just by simple, basic training.

It is interesting that Alasdair referred to modifying the delivery of lectures, as some student participants confirmed that they had experienced listening problems, especially when slides or subtitles were not provided (e.g., Tatsuo, §6.5.2). While he suggested that most lecturers would welcome additional training, another interviewee articulated doubts:

(7.47) What I think could be helpful is for them to get some kind of – I don't know if training would be the word, but I think kind of intercultural competence [...] I know lots of EAP teachers would love that we move into this area, but I don't know who we are to think we should be and are qualified to do this (Claire).

As has been found elsewhere (Noakes, 2020), academic staff do not necessarily welcome input from their EAP counterparts regarding teaching practice. Claire's expression, 'I don't know who we think we are' suggests that it could be viewed as interference rather than collaboration. There could also be some disquiet about the presumption of superior knowledge. Moreover, when lecturers have to manage demanding workloads and increasing class sizes, additional claims on their time (however worthy) would be difficult to accommodate, as acknowledged in 7.48:

(7.48) I feel in a way we may put expectations or some pressure on lecturers to be more accepting of students, but I'm also thinking about how overworked lecturers are (Elena).

Nonetheless, as suggested by Jenkins (2013), it could be beneficial if Anglophone staff and students were better educated about what studying in another language actually involves. It is also important that lecturers do not assume that learners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds need to fully 'fit in,' as another EAP tutor put it. She continued:

(7.49) It would be very helpful if they could be more empathetic and accept this as, uh, part of our university identity: we have people from everywhere (Lin).

Instead of assuming that lecturers know how to include international students from diverse linguistic backgrounds in their classes, more guidance might be required. Other studies (Wingate, 2018) have shown that co-operation between EAP staff and academic departments can increase understanding of multilinguals' needs. It would seem that the

question of how to deliver professional development related to intercultural communication needs more consideration at a higher administrative level.

7.5 Perceptions of EAP students' social adjustment

In interviews with postgraduate participants, it became clear that their friendship groups consisted mainly of co-nationals and, to a lesser extent, other international students. As Norton Peirce (1995) suggests, EAP teachers should ensure that students can claim the right to speak in social, as well as classroom, situations. However, as has been well-documented (Schartner, 2015; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017; Hajar, 2020), it can be difficult for someone from overseas to connect with British nationals. Most interviewees had heard their students express a wish to make local friends, but doubted whether it would be fulfilled. Some shared their personal experiences to illustrate why meeting people from the UK might be problematic:

(7.50) You might kind of make, superficially make friends, but the real friends with British people will always be fellow Brits who get their [culturally based] humour (Hannah).

This reflects findings of other research (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006), in which Chinese students rated understanding humour in English as 'very difficult.' Postgraduate interviewees also mentioned their struggle to join in conversations based on popular culture. Hannah stated that she advises students not to become fixated on making British friends ('that's almost impossible') and to reach out to a more international network. Indeed, this can be an effective way of finding support (see Wu & Hammond, 2011), not least because it is less intimidating to use English as a lingua franca. As another EAP tutor noted, 'if you're with people for whom that language is a second language too, you're much more comfortable and confident' (Elena). Postgraduate interviewees confirmed that they had less fear of being positioned as inadequate when interacting with their international peers. It allowed them to feel on an equal footing, rather than be disempowered by comparisons with 'native' English 'norms.'

The Chinese EAP teacher explained that she had only made friends from other countries while at university in the UK by becoming involved in social events. Without making this active effort, she believed her friendship group would have consisted only of compatriots. Interestingly, she also suggested that other students can hold prejudices which prevent them from approaching their Chinese peers:

(7.51) Lin: Like, local students, or other international students, I doubt that many of them would actually make the effort to make Chinese friends.
Jenny: Hm hm. It works both ways.
Lin: Yeah. Yeah. Because, well, um, if you read the news, nothing good about China (laughs).

Similarly, another participant suggested that political sensitivities might discourage communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds:

(7.52) I think that home students and other international students, they have, um, ideas about China and they'd love to talk to Chinese people about it, but that's the one thing Chinese people don't want to talk about (Hannah).

If acculturation in international universities is to be a two-way process (see Bell, 2016), then home students also need to be educated in how to approach those from overseas. Hannah went on to suggest that 'buddy schemes' could be put in place to '[force] people together,' but such measures might not always be practical. Having little contact with their home-domiciled peers is not a uniquely Chinese experience: those from elsewhere in Europe can find themselves in the same situation. As Elena described, 'I found in my PhD [at a UK university] that international students were mostly together and then the local, British students hung out together.' How to identify genuine opportunities to bring students from diverse backgrounds together is an issue which remains unresolved. Moreover, as confirmed in postgraduate interviews (e.g., Haoran, 6.96; Xinyi, 6.97), establishing a social life may not be their primary concern. EAP tutors recognised that some choose to invest only in the academic side of university (see Chang, 2011):

(7.53) Jenny: Do you get the sense when you speak to students on the EAP programme that they want to make British friends?

Tom: They say they do; they say they do. **I'm** sceptical [...] My sense is that, this is all so new. It's all so culturally bizarre that we are going to stick together. We've got so many other things to think of that making friends with a Scottish person is really quite low down the list of priorities.

In contrast to participants in other studies (Hyland et al., 2008; Jenkins & Wingate, 2015), none of the EAP tutors (or academic staff) I interviewed used pejorative terms such as 'ghettoes,' or criticised students for staying in co-national groups. Instead, some stated that they would do the same thing if living abroad:

(7.54) I don't want to give the impression that it's kind of a Chinese thing; it definitely isn't because I know that if I went with a big group of British people to, you know, Kazakhstan or somewhere with a very different culture, we would stick together a lot (Ralph).

Another pointed out that approaches to making friends might vary, for example, in terms of the amount of time needed to form a genuine bond:

(7.55) Maybe friendships in other cultures are built up slower than the sort of immediate, like (hits desk) 'We're on the same course (hits desk), let's band together!' (Alasdair)

I used to believe that the considerable population of Chinese nationals in the university city would make them feel less conspicuous and provide some sense of protection. I admit that this was based on comparing their situation to my experience in Japan, where I stood out as the only foreigner in a small town. However, in interviews with both students and EAP tutors, it became clear that any notion of 'safety in numbers' was flawed. As one EAP instructor suggested:

(7.56) Other than [feeling], 'Well, I suppose I should, really,' they don't really have an incentive to integrate. And I think that maybe it is causing problems, maybe there's kind of unavoidable segregation forming as they become more noticeable (Ralph).

Ralph went on to explain that some of his students had reported distressing incidents where they had been the target of racist abuse. While only two postgraduate participants reported personal experience of prejudice (Sumana, 6.100; Jianyu, 6.101), it is clear from the

literature (e.g., Dovchin, 2022) that it is a more widespread issue. As Moosavi (2022) reminds us, prejudice need not take the form of outright Sinophobia, but can manifest in more subtle ways. In either case, being faced with discriminatory attitudes has a detrimental impact on students' emotional well-being and sense of belonging (see Gray & Hansen, 2021; Nam et al., 2021). It is a subject which universities cannot afford to ignore. Even less overly hostile encounters might cause anxiety, as people's words and actions can be misinterpreted. This is noted in 7.57:

> (7.57) I think especially in some parts of the UK, people can come over as a bit gruff, and they don't mean to be and it's just the way, [but] it's those kinds of little things that students maybe don't pick up on and they think, is that person angry with them? (Claire)

Some postgraduate participants described their anxiety about accidentally causing offence, or not knowing how to approach English speakers (e.g., Dian, 6.92). EAP instructors were also recognised the difficulty of deciphering Scottish accents: 'they struggle to understand anyone outside of the university' (Hannah). Although Hannah sympathised with their predicament, she also stressed that they should be speaking English as much as possible, telling them 'it is **your** choice.' However, a considerable amount of bravery is required to overcome embarrassment and the fear of rejection. As another tutor elucidated, 'you need a thick skin to speak a language well' (Lin).

7.6 The influence of identity on EAP teachers' beliefs

Darvin and Norton (2023) affirm that language teaching is itself identity work. As they suggest, instructors will 'bring their own linguistic and personal histories to the classroom' (p.37). During interviews, I uncovered a connection between EAP student and teacher identity. Far from labelling learners as deficient, tutor interviewees displayed a great deal of empathy and sensitivity. This contrasts with earlier research (Norton Peirce, 1995; Morita, 2004) which found that students were sometimes positioned negatively in the English language classroom.

Several EAP tutors noted how their own background in language learning provides greater insight into international students' experiences (Schneider & Jin, 2020):

> (7.58) Jenny: Do you think that having had the experience of living abroad yourself gives you more empathy?
>
> Alasdair: **Hundred percent**. Hundred percent. I've been in a setting where my L2 has been poor and I've had to communicate with a group of people speaking in their L1 and (0.3) it's anxious and you know, you don't want people to feel like you're an idiot.

This response highlights that it is natural to worry about how others perceive us when trying to communicate in another language. Alasdair also related his understanding of learners' academic difficulties to feeling 'like a fish out of water' while an undergraduate in his first year at university. In his view, coming from a working-class background meant that he was less familiar with scholarly demands (see Gayton, 2020): 'I wasn't able to write an essay that they were expecting.' While social class is generally not a significant part of the findings, his anecdote shows that factors other than language can play a role in a person's sense of

identity. The fatiguing nature of living one's life abroad (see Brown, 2008) was also acknowledged, something I myself have experienced:

(7.59) Jenny: And it's just tiring when you're living your life when you can't (0.2), when you're not fully fluent.
Claire: I know I've experienced that. I lived in Mexico for a bit, um, about nine months, and I spoke Spanish – B1ish – and, I mean, it just wasn't enough [...] Everything was hard.

Another comment captures the demands of dealing with both academic and social aspects of university life:

(7.60) Jenny: Do you think that your experience of not being a UK student here gives you a sense of empathy as well?
Elena: Definitely, definitely, because I've experienced, I mean, it's the language, it's also the whole, um, academic culture, what's expected of you [...] what kind of writing you need to produce, um, social challenges, finding friends.

One participant described an incident where she was perceived as a deficient L2 speaker of English. This contrasted with her self-positioning as a capable, multilingual student:

(7.61) Hannah: At university, I was doing brilliantly, getting great marks, and then one day I took the bus and I had a conversation with the bus driver, and I thought, I can't keep asking him to repeat what he's saying so I'm just gonna guess what he said and say yes, no. And at one point he just went, 'You do speak a **little** English, don't you?'
Jenny: Oh.
Hannah: Yeah. You should see me at university. I'm doing fine **there**.

This reminds us that communication challenges are perhaps more likely to arise outside of the classroom, in everyday interactions (see Copland & Garton, 2011). Hannah possessed enough confidence to laugh off the incident ('part of me thought it was hilarious') but others could experience a loss of self-esteem. As individual confidence or anxiety about linguistic skills exist in a state of flux, responses could even depend on how someone is feeling in that moment.

The Chinese EAP teacher reported that she herself had encountered somewhat patronising attitudes during the PSE induction week:

(7.62) I did have three, four↑ colleagues who pointed out that, 'Oh, you are the only Chinese [EAP] teacher that I've seen [...] One of them said, 'You could be my student.' I was like, OK yeah, I could but I'm not! (Lin)

Lin resisted this deficit positioning, stating that she saw herself as no different to other instructors. She acknowledged that some colleagues had more teaching experience, but did not think they were justified to position her differently because of her nationality.

The above experiences show why EAP instructors are able to empathise with their students. However, interviewees were unsure whether the same level of understanding would be present in degree subject classes. One interviewee's closing comment shows that anyone can be guilty of prejudiced attitudes:

(7.63) Most students are great, they're lovely and motivated and interesting (0.3) and I don't know

what Einstein[8] was on about when he said [Chinese people] are all the same (Hannah).

[8] Albert Einstein kept travel diaries during his time in Asia (1922 – 1923). When these were published in 2018, they revealed racist stereotypes, particularly of Chinese people. See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-44472277

Chapter 8 Results and discussion: Academic staff interviews

Interviewing a sample of academics at the university was, I believe, an effective way of understanding their perceptions of international students at the university. Importantly, it allowed me to consider their responses alongside those of student participants and EAP instructors, thereby identifying points of agreement and disagreement. My extensive reading of the literature turned up no previous studies in which such comparisons are made. It is important to remember that instructors who agreed to be interviewed were probably interested in international students and, by association, curious about my research. I contacted over 20 individuals, but some did not reply or said that they could not offer a useful contribution. Despite the variety of degrees undertaken by the student participants, lecturer interviewees came from a more limited range of disciplines: History (Dr Allen), Psychology (Dr Bahl and Dr Cruz), Law (Dr Duran) and Design (Dr Edwards, Dr Filipov and Dr Gilchrist)[9]. Although academic respondents provided a rich range of insights, it is possible that my study only attracted those with mostly positive views of internationalisation. The aforementioned limitations mean that, while the findings may have resonance in other contexts, caution is required when extrapolating to a wider population (staff working in different departments or universities).

Unlike other researchers, (e.g., Norton, 2013; Morita, 2004; Schneider & Jin, 2020), I did not find evidence of individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds being positioned as deficient members of the class. Lecturer interviewees acknowledged that international students may encounter various challenges, but also highlighted their achievements. In addition, all seemed willing to facilitate their socialisation into the academic community. At the same time, some did express concerns that making necessary adaptations to pedagogy could result in an even heavier workload.

Participants referred to various issues they had encountered when working with international students. As elsewhere (e.g., Haan et al., 2017), most discussion of support strategies focused on the students themselves, rather than on additional training for staff. In the absence of university or department level guidance, several had taken personal decisions about how to modify the curriculum to meet learners' needs. However, I did not think it was appropriate to interrogate lecturers about their teaching practices, as this is not the focus of my thesis.

Overall, the respondents were wary of making generalisations when discussing international students. They avoided negative stereotypes such as those described by Moosavi (2022, p.484): 'lacking critical thinking skills; being more prone to plagiarism; and harming the educational environment.' Although references were made to the propensity of Chinese nationals to stick together in both academic and social contexts, negative references to 'ghettoes' (cf. Hyland, 2008; Jenkins & Wingate, 2015) were avoided. Instead, lecturers acknowledged how coming from a different educational and cultural background might create ambivalence about 'integrating.' Four out of the seven staff interviewees are multilinguals with experience of living abroad (Dr Bahl, Dr Cruz, Dr Duran and Dr Filipov),

[9] All names are pseudonyms.

potentially giving them a greater sense of empathy. But informants from English-speaking backgrounds also expressed admiration for students whom they perceive as being brave enough to embark on a degree abroad.

8.1. Attitudes towards increasing diversity

Increasing student mobility has clearly changed the composition of university classes in recent years. All interviewees stated that the majority of students on their postgraduate courses are from overseas, and mainly from China, as typified in the following comments:

(8.1) I'm also doing a master's class and that is over half [international students]. So yes, I've seen a significant rise (Dr Allen).

(8.2) I would say that there have been years that probably 85, 90% of the group were from China (Dr Duran).

(8.3) I think after Brexit, the number of European students has gone quite low, so it's mainly international students (Dr Bahl).

One participant suggested that the increasing dominance of Chinese nationals is beginning to affect the culture of the university (see Chen & Ross, 2015). He referred to a recent debate about whether Scottish HEIs should maintain Confucius Institutes, contrasting the research site with another university whose chancellor has openly disapproved of some Chinese government policies:

(8.4) And that university doesn't have a Confucius Institute, probably wasn't allowed to, or didn't want to and anyway, in the last three or four years, there's been a decline in Chinese students there. And yet, the whole city, where it is, was geared up to [...] Chinese investors putting money into student accommodation (Dr Edwards).

Dr Edwards went on to describe the 'political dimension' of attracting a large number of Chinese applicants as 'the elephant in the room,' implying that universities ignore any controversies. He added that 'maybe we think some of them are spies' and, while his tone was tongue in cheek, the threat of Chinese interference in UK academia was outlined in a recent report (Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, 2023). In addition, how China is portrayed in the British media could affect attitudes, as noted in EAP tutor interviews (Lin, 7.50).

While the comments in 8.4 indicate some cynicism about the university's internationalisation agenda, most respondents focused on the advantages of teaching students from different backgrounds. When I asked about their thoughts on diversity, 8.5, 8.6 and 8.7 were representative:

(8.5) If there is a diverse pool of people in the course, that helps a lot to just take different perspectives (Dr Cruz).

(8.6) It's nice to have diversity [...] because they share different practices, different, um, traditions that they've taken from their own country and they're integrating in the work that they do (Dr Filipov).

(8.7) I think diversity's a wonderful thing. I think multicultural classes are fantastic, particularly if

you have time to be able to draw on that (Dr Gilchrist).

Interviewees highlighted the benefits of sharing knowledge and experience, not to mention learning about other cultures. However, some did have concerns, as seen in 8.8:

(8.8) Jenny: What do you think are some of the benefits of having students from diverse backgrounds in your classes?

Dr Edwards: Well, we get to learn a fair bit about other countries (laughs). I mean, I often look at it selfishly, what are the benefits to me, what are the pay offs? [...] But the downside of so many students from China is that they leave, and they're not sort of contributing to the intellectual, uh (0.2) culture of Britain.

Although the Scottish Government (2018) is keen to stress both the economic and cultural benefits of attracting international students, not all of them will wish to invest long-term. The above remark suggests that, while it is possible to facilitate cultural exchange, this might be more of a one-sided process. Another academic suggested that the dominance of one nationality decreases opportunities for true intercultural communication. This is especially the case on courses which no longer attract many home students, as she explained:

(8.9) I think that diversity, that multicultural quality is really important, but I do think it has to be a mix and when there aren't any people from the area [...] it means that it's difficult to make the studio or the classroom or the lecture hall or whatever a place of exchange (Dr Gilchrist).

Dr Gilchrist's view reflects those of academic staff in other studies, who queried whether recruiting mostly from one country results in true diversity (e.g., Haan et al., 2017). Notably, the Law lecturer referred to problems with mixed-nationality classes first, ahead of any advantages (even though I framed my question in a positive way):

(8.10) Jenny: What do you think are some of the benefits of having students from diverse backgrounds on the programme?

Dr Duran: I think there are two issues with diversity. The first one is an issue of substantive content, or, you know, analysis of the issues that we discuss in these courses [...] And then obviously [it is easier for] the students who don't have to worry about reading the material for hours and hours because it is not easy, and it brings very difficult terms that they have to learn.

The nature of a postgraduate degree in Law means that students are required to analyse dense, complex texts (see Noakes, 2020), something which is more challenging when working in a second language. 'Students that don't have to worry' likely refers to users of English, who are able to process the material more quickly, at least at a surface level. Indeed, the postgraduate participant who was studying Law (Xinyi, 6.97) described feeling overwhelmed by her long reading list in both term-time interviews.

As subsequent sections in this chapter will demonstrate, the lecturers I spoke to were mostly positive about the presence of international students. However, it is clear that taking an inclusive approach requires careful thought. Using 'diversity' to refer to nationality also runs the risk of perceiving national groups of students as homogeneous (Gayton, 2020), without considering individual differences.

8.2 Perceptions of academic challenges encountered by international students

When beginning a master's degree, postgraduates from all backgrounds need to acquire deeper disciplinary knowledge and develop higher level language skills (Haan et al., 2017). For international students who have been academically successful in their home countries, coming to terms with new expectations can be especially demanding (Tobell & Burton, 2015). Pre-sessional programmes aim to acquaint students with academic work, and focus on transferable skills, but students will still encounter different expectations in degree subject classes. The lecturer interviewees did not refer to any specific timeline of adjustment (see Adisa et al., 2019), but I did not question them directly about this. However, they each highlighted specific areas in their discipline which are sometimes problematic. For instance, in History, students need to read primary sources containing archaic words and phrases, which are often obscure even for those with an English language heritage:

(8.11) I think there may be greater challenges, in terms of, um, vocabulary and syntax, when people are writing in longer sentences, using words that we now probably would not (Dr Allen).

Therefore, instructors need to reassure students prior to reading such texts that they are not expected to understand everything. In addition, as confirmed by the History postgraduate (Jianyu, §6.4.2) during interview, it cannot be taken for granted that all members of the class will possess the same understanding of key events in the past:

(8.12) Because I teach largely British subjects, there is always the feeling that there are certain people in the class who clearly have pre-knowledge and therefore the context is already reasonably clear to them, whereas context is clearly not there (0.3) for **some** [...] One has to take a step back and ensure that you're trying to explain as fully as possible without (0.2), uh, patronising those who do know (Dr Allen).

If academic teaching staff are to avoid making assumptions about what students 'should' know, it is crucial that they recognise the impact of coming from a non-UK background. The previous comment also suggests the need for a balance between lengthy explanations (which might be required by international members of the class) and maintaining everyone's interest. During another exchange, the Law lecturer elaborated on why reading can be a burden in her subject. As well as reading textbooks and articles, students are expected to familiarise themselves with quality journalism and be aware of significant current affairs. Aside from any linguistic issues, an absence of contextual knowledge could lead to uncertainty:

(8.13) I think the amount of reading is quite difficult because they have to read decisions of arbitral tribunals [...], court decisions, they are very long sometimes and, more than the fact that they have to read, they're still learning to find what is important, what is not important, what they can leave behind (Dr Duran).

The conscientious approach of many international students is captured in 8.13: indeed, some postgraduate participants mentioned their anxieties about missing vital information if they did not read through everything carefully. Again, it is of benefit if lecturers can

recognise this challenge, rather than concluding that they lack the necessary linguistic skills to access a text. Those who are multilingual, like Dr Duran, possibly have greater insight into the greater demands of processing information in another language. I also recognise this: while I can read and understand academic articles in French, it is definitely a slower process than doing so in English.

In Psychology, the delicate nature of certain topics (such as mental health) needs to be considered. Therefore, course content, rather than linguistic anxiety, might explain a student's reluctance to contribute, as described below:

(8.14) Dr Bahl: Especially when we're talking about say, mental health, we end up talking about vulnerable issues or maybe potentially sensitive subject matter. [...] So, I think that becomes quite challenging, which is why having smaller groups, especially with international students, [makes it] easier.

Jenny: That's a really interesting point that you make about sensitive topics. Because I was just thinking - sometimes it's assumed that the reason students are not engaging is because of the English language.

Dr Bahl: Yeah.

Jenny: Suggesting that they're afraid to express themselves in English, which does add another level of challenge, but it might not be that in some cases, it might be that it's the subject.

Dr Bahl: Yeah, absolutely. Like, for some students, it is definitely when the subject matter potentially might be very, um, kind of sensitive or triggering [that they contribute less].

As we cannot read students' minds, it is vital to create an empathetic classroom environment in which everyone feels safe. Vandrick (1997) reminds teachers that vulnerabilities are not always apparent, so difficult issues should be approached with care.

As reflected in postgraduate interviews (e.g., Sumana, 6.22), Design lecturers mentioned that their students are often confident when producing creative work, but less so when writing academic assignments or giving presentations. While not denigrating the talents of international students, one lecturer recognised that a lack of linguistic proficiency can cause problems:

(8.15) These are people who have learned to express themselves in other ways than through language. And that is kind of an extra challenge that you need to overcome because they may be very good on the keyboard or with the paintbrush, when it comes to speaking and writing it's another story, so, it adds an additional layer of difficulty (Dr Filipov).

Interestingly, another Design lecturer noted that 'there's a tension maybe between previous education [of international students] and what we're asking for now' (Dr Gilchrist), reflecting an EAP tutor's comment that 'we don't know what we are working with' (Elena, 7.22). A shortage of knowledge about students' past experience might cause instructors to misunderstand what kind of support they require. However, it is probably unrealistic to ask academic staff to become experts in other educational systems.

8.2.1 Specific issues: Writing

Students' attainment on postgraduate degrees is still evaluated mainly through written submissions, despite the rise in other methods of assessment such as oral presentations. Some academic lecturers suggested that those using English as another language do not always produce effective essays: like EAP tutor participants (Ralph, 7.3; Alasdair, 7.4), one attributed this to poor structure:

(8.16) Some struggle with, first, focusing on the question asked, you know, there are very long, unfocused introductions and then they go very **far** behind to then go back to the question and then they have lost a lot of space in saying perhaps not much (Dr Duran).

Elsewhere, it has been observed that individuals from different educational backgrounds are used to digressing (Fox, 1994; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006) and might feel confused when they are criticised for being too indirect. However, Dr Duran believed that some students 'are much better writers than speakers' and therefore 'have the opportunity to show what they have learned' when working on a written assignment. Indeed, two postgraduate interviewees (Kexin and Yuming, §6.5.2) described feeling relaxed and under less pressure when writing. Perhaps, as Canagarajah (2004, p.271) suggests, this means of expression can provide an 'empowering sense of self.' In contrast, another lecturer participant expressed cynicism about the quality of (formative) written work produced by students who contributed little during lessons:

(8.17) You get nice little vignettes as responses, which are very articulate and surprisingly so. So, I wonder sometimes (laughs) whether they're running it through text editors, or cutting and pasting from somewhere else (Dr Edwards).

However, as elucidated in previous research (Murray & McConachy, 2018; Wang & Moskal, 2019), quiet members of the class can engage in other, equally valid ways. Therefore, it is inadvisable to use oral participation as the only measure of a student's ability – especially as some will prefer to express themselves through writing.

I did not get the sense that international students were being labelled as deficient writers (see Flowerdew, 2008; Maringe & Jenkins, 2015; Garska & O'Brien, 2019). Rather, interviewees acknowledged the demands of adapting to new educational experiences, as captured in 8.18:

(8.18) Jenny: I'm interested in how they cope with [academic] writing, critical reflection and being more analytical.

Dr Gilchrist: Critical reflection's a very good way of putting it, yeah, it's a little bit tougher for them [...] But in some ways that's the case across the board maybe, irrespective of where people have come from.

Dr Gilchrist's statement acknowledges that critical thinking poses a challenge for all students, not just those from overseas. In addition, it is a difficult concept to define (see Rear, 2019), as pointed out by another lecturer: 'no one knows what critical thinking is and no one can explain it to them' (Dr Duran). Not every student participant had a firm grasp of critical thinking during the first interviews (e.g., Chen, 6.16; Jianyu, 6.17), but some gained a better understanding as they became more experienced in writing in English.

Specific disciplines require students to adhere to particular conventions when writing, potentially adding to the strain for those who are communicating in their L2 (Flowerdew & Wang, 2019). Both Psychology tutors used the verb 'struggle' to imply that some can find it difficult to come to terms with new demands:

(8.19) We have a very specific style of academic communication as a discipline, and I think that's where most students struggle when they are formulating their arguments or just conceptualising their own understanding as well (Dr Bahl).

(8.20) I think the main focus and the main point that some students sometimes struggle with is the critical evaluation, how far they need to go to convey an idea they have formed based on evidence but still not deviate too much from the purpose of the essay (Dr Cruz).

Dr Bahl posited that international students' problems stem from not knowing how to communicate their ideas, rather than a lack of comprehension. She also stated that it is possible to identify when an essay has been submitted by someone using English as another language, even though 'blind' marking is in place: 'I just have a hunch that this might be an international student based on their writing style.' The extent to which variations of 'standard' English should be accepted (see Jenkins, 2013; Baker, 2016) will be considered further in §8.4.

Instead of directly answering my question about his perceptions of how students cope with academic work, one respondent focused on a problem which staff need to manage. His insights demonstrate how those from overseas might be positioned as not meeting the necessary standards of academic integrity:

(8.21) Well, I mean, the overarching challenge is plagiarism. And we have Turnitin, which is good, but of course if something's been translated automatically from Chinese or ripped off, or if (0.3) obviously we don't know if people are recruiting third party essay writers (Dr Edwards).

When I mentioned that postgraduate interviewees had told me that the method of referencing is different in China, Dr Edwards was doubtful ('I don't believe that, necessarily'). In order for international students to understand their university's policy on plagiarism (Thompson et al., 2017), clear explanations need to be provided. Otherwise, as noted by Fatemi & Saito (2020), they could accidentally break the rules:

(8.22) The instructions are very clear for a native English speaker, but I think, you know, telling students to look at a web link [for more information on plagiarism] isn't enough. You can rattle this stuff off, as happens when they're given an induction by one of my colleagues at the beginning of semester [but] they're so zonked anyway with all of this (Dr Edwards).

The informal word 'zonked' captures the sense of students' fatigue and possible culture shock on arrival: they have so many things to deal with that certain information (even if it is important) can go over their heads. Stating that the guidelines on plagiarism are 'very clear for a native English speaker' infers that they might not be for speakers of other languages. The speed of the explanation, suggested by 'quickly' and 'rattle this stuff off' likely makes it difficult for them to understand. Dr Edwards actually had a positive view of some translation technology, for instance, the simultaneous transcription that student participants reported

using: ‘it’s worth sort of embracing this, or recognising that it exists [...] I don’t think it’s in any way cheating, really.’ Conversely, other lecturers were wary, echoing the concerns of some EAP tutors (e.g., Lin, 7.14). For example, one expressed disapproval of her students ‘translating and then back translating’ (Dr Bahl), as this leads to inaccurate expression.

8.3 Views of classroom participation

Discussion and interaction are expected in all subject disciplines, but academic interviewees recognised that this might prove anxiety-inducing for some individuals. They were wary of resorting to generalisations, with one stressing that there are ‘wide variations’ between students (Dr Allen). As well as finding the initial confidence to participate, users of other languages might need to manage being judged against ‘elite native (English) speaker’ standards and subsequent deficit positioning (see Norton, 2013). Although they did not necessarily have this understanding, academic staff indicated that they would never ‘force’ someone to participate:

(8.23) [...] the one thing I’ve never wanted to do with anyone, regardless of background, is to say, ‘You must now speak!’ or anything like that. It’s more just to create the atmosphere (0.3), you’re grateful for any kind of contribution (Dr Allen).

8.23 highlights the role of the instructor in establishing an environment where no one fears that they will be ‘put on the spot’ or criticised for giving a less than perfect answer. Dr Allen also noted that the size and physical organisation of the class can impact on participation, echoing remarks made in EAP tutor interviews (Elena, 7.11). Similarly, the Law lecturer stated that she does not put pressure on students to speak:

(8.24) Jenny: Do you do anything to encourage [Chinese students] to vocalise their ideas?
Dr Duran: I **try**. Um, I think it is very difficult to try to push them because you don’t know the anxiety they might have inside; some students will react to it.

It is significant that Dr Duran acknowledged the role of affective factors, such as anxiety, in students’ willingness to participate. However, her stress on the word ‘try’ indicates that silence can be a difficult issue for instructors to manage. As recognised by some postgraduate participants (Xinyi, 6.52), asking a question and being met with no response can be face-threatening for the instructor (Zhu Haiping & O’Sullivan, 2022). The awkwardness of silence is conveyed in the following exchange:

(8.25) Jenny: How do you find the students in terms of speaking and communicating, interacting with each other and with you?
Dr Filipov: In the first semester it’s very hard. They’ve just moved to [university city] and everything is new and we’re trying to get them to speak, to answer questions, like even basic questions. It’s a bit difficult, to be honest.

This aligns with findings of previous research, in which teaching staff expressed frustration at being met with a ‘blank wall’ (Murray & McConachy, 2018, p.259) when trying to engage with students. As a teacher myself, I sympathise, as it can be discouraging when no one responds to a question. Dr Filipov described Chinese nationals as ‘super shy, really, really shy,’ but some might only be reserved when using English. In addition, from a sociocultural perspective, a power imbalance can lead to students feeling positioned as inadequate

speakers of English (Darvin & Norton, 2023). However, as students become used to the new environment, they can appropriate a more self-assured identity:

(8.26) Jenny: Do you find, though, that they gain in confidence as you move into the second semester?

Dr Filipov: Yes, because they know they've done it. They've taken the first three courses and they survived [...] and, of course, they've been in [university city] for a while, so that's helpful.

8.25 and 8.26 also demonstrate instructors' uncertainty about possible reasons for silence – cultural, linguistic, or a combination of both (see Murray & McConachy, 2018). One attributed Chinese students' reticence to 'a combination of shyness' and 'a cultural difference to not speak too much in class unless you are asked' (Dr Duran). This recognises that coming from a different educational background could be more significant than character traits such as introversion. Another interviewee, who offered additional insight into why some students are quiet in class:

(8.27) It's quite cultural, I've noticed as well [...] I come from a very hierarchical education system, and I think a lot of international students, especially from Asia, have this habit of not speaking up to their teachers (Dr Bahl).

Dr Bahl went on to observe that many international students prefer to approach her after class, in contrast to 'Western students [who] do not have that power imbalance.' Postgraduate participants had different reasons for favouring one-to-one conversations with their tutor: some harboured linguistic anxiety about speaking in front of a larger audience, whereas others were wary of taking up class time. This finding is resonant with previous studies (e.g., Jin & Cortazzi, 2017), which emphasise that respect for the teacher is paramount in some educational cultures.

Nonetheless, academic staff were cautious about making assumptions and tried to demonstrate their awareness of individual differences. Sometimes they made comparisons between groups in their class: 'one is very interactive and just very keen to keep talking. Another one [...] is a little bit more passive and needs a bit of direction' (Dr Cruz). Other comments also indicated a desire to avoid negative labels:

(8.28) Jenny: I don't want to fall into the stereotype about Chinese students being reticent, but do you find that they need encouragement to speak out?

Dr Gilchrist: Very generally, yes, I'd say that's a trend. But [...] this year, I noticed that the people that were making up the class were actually more confident and more vocal right from the word go than in previous years.

As can be seen from the wording of my question, I too am aware of how easy it is to resort to clichéd views. I could relate to Dr Gilchrist's pleasant surprise at members of her class being more willing to communicate than she had perhaps anticipated. Unlike respondents in other studies (e.g., Hennebry et al., 2012), who reported differences between home and international students' participation, the interviewees were careful not to oversimplify:

(8.29) Jenny: Do you think there is a difference in terms of classroom participation and contributing to discussion between international students and home students?

Dr Allen: I wouldn't want to generalise. I think it varies: individuals sometimes are just happier to contribute and break a silence (laughs); others [are] unwilling to do it.

It would be erroneous to assume that all 'home' students will be vocal in open discussion. On the other hand, the presence of English-speaking students could make those from other language backgrounds nervous about contributing:

(8.30) Well, they're quiet if there's an American in the group, in particular, or someone else (laughs) who's sort of, it's stereotyping here, but people who are sort of trained to be pretty out there, you know. I think they find that very intimidating and they will sort of sit there very quietly (Dr Edwards).

Some student respondents (e.g., Kexin, 6.55) explained that being in the minority would heighten their anxiety around speaking. Furthermore, they suggested that turn-taking issues (see Karas, 2017), such as being unsure of how to enter an exchange, inhibited their participation (Jianyu, 6.60). The dynamic between tutors and students can also affect the ability of multilinguals to take part in class discussion:

(8.31) If there's someone who's articulate in English, what invariably happens is that the tutor of that group [...] will engage with that person more than the rest of the class, and the other students sit there, and you try to bring them into the conversation (Dr Edwards).

Indeed, several postgraduate interviewees mentioned that they find it difficult to follow rapid interactions between a lecturer and an English-speaking classmate (e.g., Jianyu, 6.60; Dian, 6.65). The description of international students 'sitting there' implies passivity; however, it may be the case that they feel overlooked or excluded (see Freeman & Li, 2019). While silence might be a deliberate choice and a valid way of participating for some (Bao, 2014), instructors need to ensure that everyone who wishes to can make their voices heard.

The fact that more thinking time is required when articulating oneself in another language was recognised by some lecturers. Not only can this affect how quickly international students respond, but also the quality of their contributions:

(8.32) By the time they have translated the thought that they are ready to speak, we have moved on [...] I have to admit for myself that I tend to sometimes speak quite fast, or I want to cover material because, you know, time is short (Dr Duran).

Even if lecturers wish to provide more thinking time, the pressured nature of teaching means that they cannot make any concessions. Another interviewee stated that it can be challenging for some students to express original, complex points in English, leading them to echo what the instructor has said:

(8.33) Sometimes, this may be, I wouldn't say weaker, but those who are less confident in their use of English, what they will tend to do is give you back what you've said [...] And then of course, you say, 'Thank you very much, yes, that's a very good point' (Dr Allen).

It is important that Dr Allen avoided deficient positioning ('I wouldn't say weaker') and also claimed to provide encouraging feedback, even for repetitive contributions. Therefore, EAP tutors' concerns about academic staff lacking patience with their former students (e.g., Tom, 7.43) may not always come to pass. In addition, some international students

(particularly those from China) are often used to delivering presentations and feel more secure about speaking when they are able to prepare in advance (see Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). Other research (Freeman & Li, 2019) found that they can perform better in presentations than their Anglophone peers, as described in 8.34:

(8.34) [East Asian students] will do presentations, when it's time for a group to present or whatever, they're up there and doing it. Whereas often the British students, hm, are actually not as articulate and more reluctant. So, presentations they do **well**, um, but when it comes to free form discussion: not so good (Dr Edwards).

It is striking that international students can be positioned as more capable than their home-domiciled peers in some situations. Therefore, academic staff might seek out opportunities to increase their confidence and sense of belonging. Even asking pertinent questions after a presentation could reassure someone that they are seen as a valued member of the class.

8.3.1 Group work interactions

Reflecting findings of previous research (Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Moore & Hampton, 2015; Straker, 2020), academic staff reported limited interaction between Chinese nationals and students from the UK (or elsewhere). Although some student participants stated a preference for mixed groups (Chen, 6.82; Yao, 6.83), lecturers were generally reluctant to intervene:

(8.35) Jenny: Do you have any thoughts about how international students mix in the class with home students?

Dr Allen: In this case, I wouldn't say there's very much happening [...] If they're comfortable being with their peers from similar backgrounds then I would never oblige people to mix and match [...] It might just create uncertainties and tensions for them.

(8.36) Jenny: Do you find Chinese students tend to work together or is there mixing of nationalities?

Dr Duran: No, I think that is very unfortunate. They have always worked together. You know, they just stick to each other.

Dr Duran's use of the word 'unfortunate' makes clear that segregation is not considered ideal, yet lecturers might be hesitant to change the make-up of groups. Although the preceding comments are not devoid of sympathy, they nevertheless imply that it is the responsibility of international students to initiate contact with their home-domiciled peers. As became clear during postgraduate interviews, this is not necessarily straightforward, as UK nationals share a tendency to stay with their compatriots. The potential difference of opinion between instructors and students regarding group work has not previously been highlighted.

In subjects where one nationality dominates, opportunities for intercultural communication are inevitably limited, as explained by a Psychology lecturer:

(8.37) Jenny: Do you get a sense in your particular classes that – I know you said about 60% of them are Chinese – but do they tend to work together or is there intermingling of nationalities when they do group work?

Dr Cruz: That's a tricky question because the groups were randomly allocated at the

beginning of term. So, there are some [groups where] every one of them is Chinese (laughs).

If co-national groups are created by default (Harrison & Peacock, 2010), then there may be little either academic staff or students can do to change the situation. In contrast, when practicable, creating mixed-nationality groups promotes the sharing of knowledge while interacting in English:

(8.38) I just, like, invite them to kind of make those cross-cultural groups, if that makes sense, cos then [...] they're not only left communicating with people in the same language and then kind of forced, but in a nicer way, to just talk in the language of instruction (Dr Bahl).

As Dr Bahl also suggested, speaking with others in a small group can be less intimidating. However, even in this situation, some members might appropriate more powerful positions or dominate discussions (see Morita, 2004; Kayi-Aydar, 2013).

8.4 Perceptions of international students' English language use

I was circumspect about asking questions which implied criticism of international students' English proficiency, not least because of some interviewees' own multilingual backgrounds. The lecturers generally saw language entrance requirements as administrative issues and thus outside of their remit. In addition, focusing on former EAP students' IELTS grades or performance in the PSE could lead to unfair judgements being made:

(8.39) Dr Allen: If you weren't being told [where to find details about students' language proficiency scores], where would you look?

Jenny: That's a good question and I don't actually know. Presumably, the information is held somewhere.

Dr Allen: Maybe on [the university portal] but I don't want to be looking in (0.3), there isn't any reason for the most part, so one just accepts that people are here.

If students possess the requisite IELTS scores and/or have passed a pre-sessional EAP course, then it is generally assumed that they are capable of undertaking their degree programme. However, whether cut-off scores are always set appropriately remains a point of debate (see Pearson 2020a, 2020b). The Law lecturer commented that her department has tightened up requirements, so that only applicants with a realistic chance of success are admitted:

(8.40) We require higher grades, especially in speaking and writing. And I think that idea came because of discussions about how students were struggling with the courses and, you know, would fail (Dr Duran).

Other studies have queried whether IELTS grades are an accurate predictor of academic success at degree level (see Jenkins & Wingate, 2015). One respondent even wondered if students' official English proficiency level can always be trusted, although he did concede that cheating is probably rare: 'because there are such large numbers [of international students], you're bound to get three or four who are playing the system' (Dr Edwards).

All new postgraduates, regardless of background, need to cope with an intensive workload and a variety of pressures. It might therefore be difficult to separate linguistic issues from

other challenges. However, since language problems are potentially the most noticeable and, as one lecturer put it, seen as ‘fixable,’ they become the focus. As she explained:

> (8.41) So, you might not know if other students [...] who are, say, native English speakers, have similar yet different issues, but they are not being highlighted because of the language barrier. Because I think the language problem is the easiest visible issue. But sometimes it might not be the language issue, there are other factors at play (Dr Bahl).

Such remarks seem to minimise the distance between international students and those from Anglophone backgrounds by suggesting that they sometimes encounter the same difficulties. These might be academic, or relate to sociocultural factors such as the classroom atmosphere and the individual’s own emotional state.

If international students take up opportunities to speak English in different contexts, then they will likely feel more comfortable doing so in class. Conversely, when co-nationals interact only with each other, it is difficult for them to appropriate a confident linguistic identity. This is captured in 8.42:

> (8.42) Jenny: Is there anything else in terms of linguistic issues that you feel impacts on how they do on the course?
>
> Dr Duran: I would think that the more they practise before we start the course, the more they speak in English rather than in Chinese [...] practise their ear and their ability to construct sentences quicker and to convey ideas in English. Obviously, this doesn’t happen because the first reaction is to meet people that come from the same country.

It is interesting that Dr Duran used the same expression as one of the EAP tutors (Claire) – ‘practise their ear’ – when considering international students’ ability to communicate in English. Listening issues could be the result of not living in, as one postgraduate participant put it, ‘an all-English environment.’ As in previous studies (e.g., Schartner & Cho, 2017) lecturers realised that international students sometimes find it easier to connect with each other, using English as a lingua franca:

> (8.43) Often they understand somebody who has a thick, non-English accent [...] because it’s not your first language, you work with a minimal vocabulary. It’s the fluid stuff they have trouble with, Americans who gabber, and Scots likewise, and Australians [...] and everybody who’s comfortable with their own language (Dr Edwards).

The word ‘gabber’ suggests that fast paced conversation containing disjointed sentences and idioms is almost unintelligible to anyone using English as another language. Postgraduate respondents tended to focus on their difficulties with understanding ‘native’ English-speaking classmates, but some suggested that other accents are more problematic (e.g., Haoran, §6.7). Interestingly, Dr Edwards also asked, ‘There’s such a thing as global English, isn’t there?,’ showing an awareness of language variation (see Baker, 2016). Previous research has shown that academic staff can take a flexible approach to spoken exchanges, where communicating the message is more important than ‘perfect’ expression (Jenkins, 2013). In addition, it is beneficial if students’ existing linguistic repertoire can be respected (Gayton & Fisher, 2022), rather than being seen as a hindrance.

As with my analysis of EAP tutor interviews (see §7.3), there were some important findings regarding the extent to which academic lecturers accept Chinese being spoken. Advantages and disadvantages were noted by a Psychology lecturer, who described a typical situation in one of her classes:

(8.44) I've got one group that most of the time [...] they are talking in Chinese. Which I don't particularly mind because it's their group discussion and, yeah, I mean, they can do it if that's helpful for them. But I find it hard when I try to get into the group and say, like, 'Oh, OK, what are you discussing? OK, like, come on guys, in English, I cannot do it in Chinese' (Dr Cruz).

Taking a sympathetic approach to students using Chinese encourages the sharing of ideas during discussion; however, as suggested by 8.44, it also causes issues for the tutor. However, as a multilingual herself, Dr Cruz understood that students might find it difficult to quickly switch between languages and was willing to spend more time with them in order to 'connect in English.' A Design lecturer stated that she emphasises how opting for English can help students to make progress, both linguistically and academically. Like Dr Cruz, she noted the challenge of accessing group discussion if English is not being spoken:

(8.45) I stress that if they're talking amongst themselves in whatever language and it's not a language that myself or the other tutor can understand, then we can't sort of listen in to what they're talking about their work (Dr Gilchrist).

This suggests that tutors may have valid reasons for discouraging Chinese use, based on a desire to bond with their students. Dr Gilchrist added that she frequently reminds her class about using English, but in a way which is non-judgemental:

(8.46) So, I make that statement [about using English in class], and I follow it up, and I'm still following it up – with humour – but every now and then I'll hear a bit of chatter and I'll be like, 'Remember the language of the studio!' (Dr Gilchrist)

As observed by one of the EAP tutors (Elena, 7.35), employing humour avoids a situation where students feel that they are being reprimanded for speaking their own language. However, another Design lecturer took a firmer stance, possibly because her course was being run in a hybrid format. It can be difficult to monitor discussion which is taking place in online breakout rooms:

(8.47) If you have a dominant group of students from one particular country, they often tend to speak their own language within, you know, the [online] meeting. And so that's the challenge and we have to kind of keep moderating meetings and kind of telling them, look, you need to speak in English so that everyone can understand (Dr Filipov).

Dr Filipov's concern seemed to be that speakers of other languages will be excluded from discussion if the majority group tend to avoid English. This appears to put Chinese students in a more powerful position, without considering possible reasons why they make this choice. Although interacting in English could be seen as 'a matter of respect' (Dr Filipov), it is unlikely that students intend to be discourteous. As highlighted in postgraduate interviews (e.g., Yuming 6.56), they might do so in order to ease communication, for example, by explaining unknown terms. Unfortunately, in a UK university, this could be viewed as somewhat inconsiderate behaviour by both their instructors and peers.

8.5 Support for international students and academic staff

Universities have a duty to assess the needs of international students so that proper support and guidance can be put in place (Gayton, 2020). At the classroom level, lecturers referred to several strategies, some of which would be useful for all. However, my impression was that certain adjustments to pedagogy were intended to specifically help those without English as their first language. As previously mentioned, interviewees claimed to welcome any contributions during discussion sessions and to provide positive feedback. This creates an atmosphere of mutual respect, as described in 8.48:

(8.48) We all take our time to listen sometimes when [international students], you know, repeat things that we have said, but because they were thinking they didn't realise we already said this [...] So, I think for this the whole class is polite and just waits and tries not to discourage them to speak (Dr Duran).

While referring to 'we' and 'they' could create a sense of othering, Dr Duran's tone was in no way harsh; instead, she emphasised the need for patience in intercultural classrooms. This contrasts with the views of some academic staff in other studies (Haan et al., 2017; Murray & McConachy, 2018), who appeared to be less understanding of international students and implied that they hold up the rest of the class. Indeed, EAP tutors expressed unease about their students meeting with less empathetic attitudes on their degree programmes (e.g., Alasdair, 7.42; Tom, 7.43). However, the small sample of lecturers in my study seemed to have thought carefully about how to accommodate everybody. One explained that the blended format of some Design degree programmes offers certain advantages. For instance, broadcasting live lectures on Teams means that subtitles and recordings are automatically provided: 'they're listening to me but they're also reading the transcription because it helps them' (Dr Filipov). This decreases apprehension around listening to lectures and simultaneously taking notes, something which student respondents reported as a challenge. Dr Bahl explained that one of her English-speaking home students suffered from social anxiety and had therefore asked to view the lecture slides in advance. She realised that this would be equally beneficial for other members of the class, for instance, by providing the opportunity to 'get acquainted with the terminology that is being used in the tutorial.' Giving everyone the same support is a more inclusive approach than singling out users of other languages (which could cause them to feel belittled or excluded).

With regard to giving lectures, interviewees recognised the need to modify one's pace of speech and vocabulary when addressing a multilingual audience:

(8.49) We also adopt a particular mode of delivery when we're speaking to people whose first language isn't English (Dr Edwards).

(8.50) I try to explain, use examples from, like, layman terms, not only academic terms (Dr Bahl).

(8.51) I try to speak a bit slower, not to overcomplicate sentences: when I mention a word that I'm not sure they will understand, but it's important that they understand, I try to also explain it in different ways (Dr Filipov).

It cannot be assumed that every academic shares the insight demonstrated by these interviewees. One mentioned that some of his colleagues (especially those who lack teaching experience) neglect to alter their delivery:

(8.52) I sort of sense, my God, they're just talking in the same way that they would talk to a very knowledgeable, high vocabulary British person, um, and mumbling certain words (Dr Edwards).

This reminds us that lecturers, rather than the students themselves, could be responsible for any lack of comprehension. However, another respondent was reluctant to change her vocabulary and expression, as she believed that this could be limiting:

(8.53) I spend a lot of my time, actually, even in lectures, talking about what words mean and giving definitions [...] But I don't really like the idea of sort of having to reduce my vocabulary, simplify things, sort of dumb down [...] I kind of want to include people in a discursive space that is challenging, that's rich, kind of evocative (Dr Gilchrist).

The use of the phrase 'dumb down' to describe a restricted vocabulary is different from attaching it to international students lowering academic standards. Dr Gilchrist stated that she aims to 'bring everyone up,' gesturing enthusiastically to emphasise her point. It is possible to challenge students without alienating them through the use of, as she put it, 'pretentious' language.

Lecturers in subjects with a substantial amount of reading, such as History and Law, stressed that they give clear instructions about what to focus on:

(8.54) I always try to prioritise, indicate which readings are most significant (Dr Allen).

(8.55) I [advise], read from this paragraph to this paragraph **only** and that's it. But even **there**, you know, they could still skim some stuff and ignore other stuff (Dr Duran).

Dr Duran understood that students often worry about omitting important information when reading, as some related to me during interview (e.g., Yuming, 6.30). Even if guidance is offered, they still need to take independent decisions about how to manage a demanding workload. Lecturers also acknowledged the need to provide more input with summative assignments, with two making specific reference to essay writing workshops. In addition, it is useful for students to receive specific disciplinary input in order to understand expectations. For example, the History lecturer described a recent change in assessment:

(8.56) Dr Allen: Rather than just asking them to do the essay and then assessing them on that, it will be inviting them to do an outline, some kind of written outline that we can give feedback on.
Jenny: So, they'll submit that first so that they know they're on the right path.
Dr Allen: Indeed, intended to give them confidence (0.2), or if they are going slightly astray anywhere, to try and highlight that so they can address it before they commit themselves to the final piece.

Providing constructive comments on an essay plan gives students the chance to perform well, and avoids a situation where they have to rely on 'trial and error' (Jenkins & Wingate, 2015, p.64).

In previous studies, lecturers working with international students were often reluctant to take responsibility for language instruction, making comments such as ‘I am not an English teacher’ (Dippold et al., 2020) and ‘I am not an English support teacher’ (Jenkins & Wingate, 2015; also see Haan et al., 2017). The interviewees in my study appeared to have more ‘linguistic tolerance’ (Schneider & Jin, 2020, p.9), and did not expect essays to be flawlessly written. Overall, they prioritised comprehensibility over accuracy, as shown in 8.57 and 8.58:

(8.57) I mean, in terms of English, I myself am not a native English speaker, so [...] if I understand what they’re saying then it’s fine by me. It’s not an English class at the end of the day (Dr Duran).

(8.58) In my course, um, we’re not penalising for typos or for one sentence that is wrong. Or if there is something that is not reading very clearly, I’d probably mention it, but it’s not something I would change the mark for (Dr Filipov).

This shows that international students are not always positioned as unskilled writers (cf. Maringe & Jenkins, 2015; Garska & O’Brien, 2019). Of course, as multilingual users of English themselves, Dr Duran and Dr Filipov possibly had more insight into the challenge of producing an essay in another language. However, Dr Edwards, who comes from an Anglophone background, stated that ‘on average the writing is good’ and referred to ‘allowances’ being made when necessary. Elsewhere (Jenkins, 2013), student participants reported that having every surface error corrected on their work could be disheartening, so this kind of flexibility is important. At the same time, even students who have completed a pre-sessional EAP course may be unprepared for dealing with the demands of academic assignments in English. Some lecturers suggested that they need more guidance in how to meet expectations:

(8.59) It would be helpful for international students to have some more support about how to formulate their essays and how to formulate their coursework [...] it would be very helpful if they learn how to construct arguments (Dr Bahl).

(8.60) A week introduction, perhaps alongside the English courses of, you know, getting acquainted to read news, what it means to think critically (Dr Duran).

In one instance, the structure of a course itself had been altered to better meet the needs of students from overseas:

(8.61) To me it has become obvious that they need a, uh, quite a comprehensive presentation perhaps at the beginning of the class [...] And so we are adopting a new approach where each class just lasts for one hour and, in that class, we focus very much on the simple concepts that they need to know (Dr Duran).

Although she did not use the phrase ‘dumbing down,’ Dr Duran expressed concerns about ‘narrowing down’ the curriculum, thus frustrating ‘students who have been able to read much more of the material and have more complex questions.’ Balancing the needs of the whole cohort is not a straightforward task. Furthermore, it seems that the onus is on instructors to make necessary adjustments, as illustrated in 8.62:

(8.62) Jenny: Has your department put any specific support measures in place to kind of account for international students?

Dr Gilchrist: The short answer is no. There's been nothing at the school level and then the subject area level. Em, I think really it's just been down to individuals everywhere.

This suggests that tutors are largely being left to their own devices (Dippold et al., 2020, p.27) when teaching international students. However, I did not ask interviewees directly if they would like more guidance. This was because, as seen in the excerpts, they described various difficulties during interview and explained individual strategies for mitigating these. Although I have a teaching background, I am not an academic member of staff, and was afraid of coming across as condescending or critical. Interestingly, there was no mention of referring students for in-sessional English language classes, perhaps indicating that lecturers are unaware of their existence. On the other hand, some might be reluctant to engage with this provision (see Noakes, 2020). Likewise, no views (either positive or negative) were expressed about the PSE, suggesting that participants either lacked an opinion or did not wish to voice reservations about its effectiveness to me.

I did not get the impression that anyone was positioning themselves as a 'saviour' (Moosavi, 2022) who could show international students how to overcome their supposed failings. However, one respondent voiced disquiet about the changing student population in the university and its potential impact on teaching staff. Her comment suggests that others share these concerns:

(8.63) The university's making a huge amount of money [from international student fees] and doesn't seem to be putting any of it back into supporting the people actually on the ground. Cos a lot of the staff seem to be really, really, you know, troubled (Dr Gilchrist).

While not labelling international students as a burden, Dr Gilchrist noted that there needs to be a balance between meeting their needs and ensuring that others 'maybe much more proficient in their language skills are not disadvantaged.' She suggested that smaller class sizes, plus training on how to work with multilinguals, would be welcome. However, such measures would require both money and time, and might not be given precedence by the university. In addition, as stated by one EAP tutor (Elena, 7.48), academic staff are already under an immense amount of pressure, meaning that any extra demands on their time could cause stress or even resentment. Elsewhere, it has been shown that collaboration between EAP and disciplinary subject departments can be successful (Zappa-Hollman, 2018; Wingate, 2018; Noakes, 2020); however, developing mutual trust between both parties takes both time and effort.

8.6 Perceptions of international students' social adjustment

Lecturers were aware of international students' investment in the academic side of university. However, they generally thought that the majority only stay for the duration of their degree and then return home. As one participant remarked, 'for them it's like [...] I'm doing my masters and maybe then I have to move back to China' (Dr Bahl). Perhaps, then, the postgraduate interviewees in my research are not typical, as several expressed a wish to remain overseas, either for work or further study. It is clear that students have personal

reasons for their investment (see Darvin & Norton, 2023), such as better career prospects or the prestige of gaining a qualification from a well-regarded institution. Academic interviewees realised that the intense nature of master's programmes can make it difficult for individuals to maintain a social life. In terms of the adjustment process, opportunities to meet and mix with home students are often limited. As has been well-documented (Schartner, 2015; Chen & Ross, 2015; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2016), the participants realised that it is easier to stay with people from the same background:

(8.64) I think they don't have that much time to acquaint themselves with people who they are not familiar or comfortable with (Dr Bahl).

(8.65) It's kind of difficult, I would say [...] to meet nationals from the UK if you're a student in [name of university] because there is a lot of international community here, and then you stick with your own community (Dr Cruz).

Dr Cruz's use of the phrase 'stick with' gives the strong impression that international students make friends mainly with their compatriots. The preceding views are strikingly similar to those articulated by EAP tutors (see §7.5). Nonetheless, postgraduate respondents tended to regret their lack of contact with British nationals, something which is reflected in 8.66:

(8.66) Jenny: Do you get the sense that students – I'm talking mainly about Chinese students here – tend to socialise together as well?

Dr Duran: I have that feeling, yes. And it's quite sad because, you know, I have had students that have said, 'I want to meet people from other parts of the world,' and some might have managed, I don't know. But I would think that they mainly, you know, hang out among themselves.

Even when international students wish to widen their social network, they are not always successful. As explained in previous research (Brown, 2009; Freeman & Li, 2019), and by some participants in my own study, it cannot be taken for granted that they will be welcomed into the new community. Another lecturer observed that 'integration' might not even be possible:

(8.67) Dr Edwards: I'm not sure what [Chinese students] could integrate to because it's not a – I mean, they will say, I'm sure, um, you know, 'I'm not really getting to know many **Scottish** people.'

Jenny: They do say to me that they've not met many British people and home students.

Dr Edwards: Yeah. And there isn't any opportunity, plus also with sort of cultural shyness and just the comfort of hanging out with your own people (0.3), cos they wouldn't have travelled much before coming here.

The preceding exchange shows that academic staff, as well as EAP instructors, can understand Chinese students' reasons for interacting only with each other. Although they are certainly not a homogeneous group, there could still be prevailing tendencies when it comes to how they make friends. Again, lecturers were careful to avoid stereotyping, with one stressing that she witnesses 'a huge variety of individuals' attending her classes each year. She went on to consider possible reasons for differences between students' social interactions:

(8.68) I've definitely noticed a correlation [when students are living in multinational flats] in terms of how, um, how confident people are and how their language has developed. There's a bit of a pattern with, I guess, shyer girls sometimes clubbing together and sticking together a wee bit too much and not really pushing (Dr Gilchrist).

It could be argued that Dr Gilchrist's focus on female students strays close to stereotypes about 'quiet Asian women' (see Morita, 2004); on the other hand, it might simply reflect the make-up of her course. Postgraduate participants who were living in multinational accommodation did report that this was a valuable means of making more connections. However, some were living only with their (Chinese) compatriots. The use of the word 'pushing' in 8.68 reveals that lecturers may hold international students responsible for widening their social circle without considering whether their domestic peers are welcoming. Furthermore, others might choose to resist what Adisa et al. (2019, p.1100) describe as 'cultural assimilation.' At the same time, Dr Gilchrist commented that some students do invest more in the local community and/or life in Scotland, and even manage to 'put down some roots' by the end of the course. Indeed, when I questioned the postgraduate sample about their sense of belonging, there was considerable variation in their responses (see §6.6.1).

8.6.1 Empathy

As Norton (2016) reminds us, teacher identity influences learners' investment. Therefore, it was reassuring to find that lecturer interviewees demonstrated empathy and respect for international students. They appreciated that moving abroad – especially somewhere with a different culture – is daunting:

(8.69) I'm always impressed by anyone's readiness to come over here, travel such distances, to take on things which sometimes must be very unfamiliar and sometimes try to deal with ways of speaking that are so varied even to our ears (Dr Allen).

(8.70) We also have to understand that for them it's leaving their environment that they're very comfortable with and moving to a new country (Dr Bahl).

Although 8.69 and 8.70 show a certain admiration for students who embark on a degree overseas, we cannot assume it is always their free choice to do so. Postgraduate interviewees did not directly mention parental pressure, but this is a potential factor in making such a decision.

Lecturer respondents also had insight into the potential difficulty of communicating in another language, sometimes referring to their own experience:

(8.71) Being a non-native English speaker myself, I appreciate the effort that the students have to put in. I can only imagine. I mean, I'm from Europe, but if you come from Asia, or, you know, where the language is completely different; the letters are completely different (Dr Filipov).

Others positioned themselves alongside international students as individuals who have encountered various trials when learning in English. Their comments highlighted the demands of conveying nuanced ideas when writing or speaking another language:

(8.72) I know that my first essays when I was studying in English [...] were terrible [...] I don't want

to read those essays again (Dr Duran).

(8.73) My entire education was in English [...] Still, I do find it sometimes difficult to communicate my ideas from a very specific academic standpoint (Dr Bahl).

(8.74) It is of course a barrier when you try to put together your thoughts in English as a second language. And I can easily identify with that. Yeah, I can feel the struggle that I know what I want to say, but it's kind of difficult and I need to take some time (Dr Cruz).

One lecturer actually expressed guilt about not being able to interact with students in their own language, holding herself partly accountable for communication issues:

(8.75) One of my sort of ongoing embarrassing regrets is that I just haven't had time to try to pick up any language [...] I can't even do simple phrases and probably even my pronunciation's atrocious (laughs) (Dr Gilchrist).

This type of approach is far removed from the attitude that any problems lie only with international students themselves. Instead of judging international students harshly, or becoming frustrated with their supposed shortcomings, interviewees appeared to welcome them into the academic community. Nevertheless, as described in 8.75, even academic staff who are willing to embrace intercultural communication cannot necessarily find a place for the required training in their busy schedules. In addition, I realise that their views are not necessarily representative of university staff as a whole. Some could also have been reluctant to express negative opinions during interview, despite my guarantee of confidentiality.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

The ultimate purpose for conducting this study was to gain a deeper understanding of international postgraduates' identity development as they navigate new educational and linguistic settings. My thesis sought to extend previous work in the field of language and identity, focusing specifically on a hitherto neglected population (EAP students in Scotland). While the research was grounded in concepts established by other scholars, I developed new perspectives based on my specific context. The first two research questions provided the opportunity to gain rich and varied insights into how student participants were positioned (by themselves and others) and the factors which impact on their level of investment. It also became apparent that my findings raise important issues for policymakers within Higher Education (the focus of question 3).

1. How do EAP students perceive the identity positions available to them in a Scottish university context?
2. What factors influence EAP students' ability to invest in the linguistic and social practices of new academic communities?
3. What are the implications – of questions 1. and 2. – for pedagogy and university policy regarding EAP programmes and internationalisation?

Applying a framework based on the concepts of language investment, cultural capital, and positioning theory allowed me to investigate the complex nature of EAP students' experiences. While I make no claims about providing definitive answers (given the relatively small-scale and interpretive nature of the study), significant contributions will nonetheless emerge. These centre on the following areas: recommendations with practical value for academic teaching staff, suggestions for wider university policy, and implications – both theoretical and methodological – for applied linguistics and identity research. Of particular resonance is the discovery that each of the postgraduate respondents had a fundamentally unique experience during their time abroad. This reminds us that research participants should be treated as individuals, even when they share apparently similar backgrounds.

The initial impetus for this research was a wish to find out what happens to EAP students once they complete a pre-sessional programme and move into mainstream university education. I was keen to understand the impact of a new environment and different expectations (academic, linguistic, and social) on their sense of self. I also harboured a concern that HEIs might take international students for granted, and prioritise financial revenue above meeting the students' needs. Although numbers did not decline in the UK during the pandemic, other unpredictable events could have a negative impact on future overseas recruitment. My findings add to the view that there is potential tension between the positive rhetoric around internationalisation in HE and what is happening in reality.

This thesis has addressed a significant gap in the literature concerning the transition of international students from pre-sessional EAP pathways on to their postgraduate degrees in

Scotland. The mixed methods study design resulted in more comprehensive findings which would not have been possible if only one approach had been selected. Adopting a longitudinal approach enabled me to recruit focal student participants at the beginning of their stay and to follow them throughout an academic year. To the best of my knowledge, this had not previously been done in a Scottish context. The initial survey allowed me to collect a wider range of opinions through employing Likert-scale statements about language learning and identity. Rich data were subsequently gathered from semi-structured interviews with students and instructors. The Likert-scale statements and interview questions converged around broadly similar areas. However, the latter allowed for in-depth discussion of participants' experiences which cannot be facilitated when administering focused instrument items (see Hands, 2022). While the survey statements were intended to gather respondents' opinions on aspects of language learning and identity, the interviews were designed to elicit rich and detailed answers about their experiences. Classroom observations during the PSE provided additional insights, as I was able to witness students' interactions first-hand. Integrating the qualitative and quantitative phases at the analysis stage uncovered areas of similarity and divergence.

Most earlier work has focused on students either in EAP or on degree programmes, without tracking changes to their identity formation over time. In addition, it has tended to investigate one aspect of students' experience (such as classroom participation or social interactions), whereas I have aimed to achieve a more complete picture. In contrast to literature which emphasises their difficulties, my findings draw attention to participants' resilience and ability to cope with change. This contributes to a move away from positioning them as deficient, and instead takes their own agency (Ahearn, 2001; Marginson, 2014) and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) into account. Comparing the perspectives of international students, EAP tutors and academic staff also added a valuable angle to research in this field.

9.1 Return to the research questions

By revisiting the research questions at this stage, I aim to show how each one has been answered in turn. In order to gain a holistic picture of EAP students' identity development, I will compare data sets where appropriate. As shown in the findings (see §5.5), there were aspects on which the quantitative and qualitative findings converged and differed. In addition, points of similarity and difference were uncovered across the student and instructor interviews.

1. How do EAP students perceive the identity positions available to them in a Scottish university context?

With regard to the first research question, my findings support the conceptualisation of identity as fluid, dynamic, and a potential site of tension. Examples from the data show that postgraduate participants experienced a variety of self and interactive positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990). Overall, there were similarities between the quantitative and qualitative

findings; indeed, it is possible that absences or contradictions may simply have been caused by the different nature of the data sets (see Hands, 2022). Results from the initial survey indicate that the majority began their stay in Scotland with a sense of optimism. They reported feeling relatively confident, both in terms of commencing the PSE and coping with their future academic studies. In the interviews, it became clear that participants were indeed managing various transitions (beginning the PSE and embarking on their degree programmes). At the same time, the Likert-scale data show that there were more mixed views about interacting in English, participating in group tasks, and working independently. The data gathered from interviews suggest that these areas did cause anxiety, especially the first two (which were interrelated to an extent). As anticipated, confidence levels fluctuated over time – both in terms of academic study and English language use. However, the clearest incongruity concerned making local friends during their time in Scotland. Although most survey respondents believed that they would connect with both fellow international and British students, focal interviewees described a lack of contact with their home-domiciled peers. However, most were able to form alternative networks which helped them to establish a sense of belonging in the university community. Interestingly, both the survey and interviews gathered mixed reports of how far participants were able and/or willing to 'adapt.'

Through the course of my study, a picture emerged of participants' changing identities. At the time of the first interviews (PSE), they mainly told of feeling like valued members of the EAP class, where they were introduced to different ways of working (such as being required to contribute their own ideas to discussion), and encouraged to think critically. The PSE also familiarised students with the requirements of writing postgraduate-level essays, for instance, in terms of structure and referencing. The rapid transition from their previous (IELTS-based) experience of learning English to an EAP context meant that they had to quickly adapt to new demands. While this could have resulted in a loss of their competent academic identity, the reportedly supportive environment of most PSE classes enabled them to build confidence. In lesson observations, I heard teachers inviting everyone to share their opinions, and giving positive feedback on contributions. Student respondents emphasised the importance of this kind of encouragement, with the one account of a less empathetic teacher standing out as an anomaly. Indeed, EAP tutor interviewees stressed that they try to avoid stereotyping learners, and aim to increase their confidence. The safe space of the PSE possibly reduced students' linguistic anxiety, especially in terms of speaking.

The postgraduate interviewees frequently positioned themselves as enthusiastic language learners, and therefore felt frustrated when others did not speak English during EAP lessons. The lone Japanese and Thai participants, for whom English was the only option, experienced a sense of isolation when their peers spoke predominantly in Chinese. EAP instructors, who are often well-informed about translanguaging and the benefits of multilingualism, need to consider carefully what works best for the whole class. The emphasis on group and class discussion on the PSE undoubtedly helped students to gain confidence when articulating

themselves in English. However, EAP tutors were aware that this self-assurance would not necessarily transfer to mainstream university settings. Several expressed reasonable concerns about how international students would be positioned in the new learning context – both by their students from Anglophone backgrounds and academic staff. I also found a sense of tension between the supportive and gatekeeping role of the PSE programme. Some postgraduate interviewees were afraid that they would fail and have to return home without beginning their degree. Students who have gained a conditional place in an English-medium university are likely to see themselves as 'good' users of English (Cervatuic, 2009), and feel anxious if this identity comes under threat. However, EAP tutor respondents seemed focused on strengthening their self-belief by offering reassurance and praise. This suggests that they viewed them as capable members of the academic community, rather than as deficient users of English in need of 'remedial' support.

While survey respondents and focal participants were mostly looking forward to progressing on to their chosen degrees, it was unsurprising that they also felt somewhat nervous. In the first semester, several interviewees did report a decline in confidence, referring to their struggles with understanding lectures and contributing to discussion. For some, this resulted in feeling marginalised, especially if they were in the minority (in an 'all-white' class). Those who were less sure of their academic and/or linguistic ability were inclined to compare themselves unfavourably to their peers. However, others were already developing coping strategies at this stage, using their agency to adopt more powerful positions. They resisted being stereotyped as 'quiet' or 'passive' and were determined to make their voices heard: something which undoubtedly required effort on their part. It is striking that they generally held themselves responsible for making the first move, and seemed not to recognise the impact of other interlocutors on their sense of identity.

Like EAP tutor interviewees, the academic staff I spoke to claimed to avoid negatively labelling international students and instead stressed their achievements. Nevertheless, generalisations were made, such as the description of Chinese students being shy and reticent. As reasons for silence can be complex (Murray & McConachy, 2018; Wang & Moskal, 2019), it is important to avoid making assumptions about why someone might choose not to, or feel unable to, speak. Notably, lecturer respondents were reluctant to insist on mixed nationality groups during collaborative tasks. Although working with co-nationals might feel more comfortable, some student participants wished to challenge themselves by interacting with a wider range of people. However, as was suggested during both student and instructor interviews, it is natural for compatriots (or those who share an L1) to draw together.

Unlike some other researchers (Maringe & Jenkins, 2015; Garska & O'Brien, 2019), I did not get the sense that postgraduate interviewees were being positioned as deficient academic writers. Both EAP and academic instructors seemed aware that writing in another language is challenging, but realised that some students prefer this way of expressing themselves to

speaking. Although student interviewees discussed the difficulty of articulating complex ideas in assignments, they were not necessarily constrained by the requirement to use English. In both the EAP and degree programme contexts, receiving constructive feedback was crucial for respondents' ability to invest. Some became more confident about their academic writing during semester 2 after receiving positive appraisals of their work, although this was not the experience of all.

2. What factors influence EAP students' ability to invest in the linguistic and social practices of new academic communities?

Investment was an effective lens through which to view student participants' experiences. Taking account of factors other than personal motivation and temperament meant that unhelpful labels (such as 'unmotivated' or 'introverted') could be avoided. It was also important to acknowledge respondents' imagined selves, especially when discussing their future plans.

Each interviewee was invested in the PSE, as they had to pass the course (often with high marks) in order to progress on to their chosen degree. Although they all appeared enthusiastic about the prospect of studying in Scotland, we need to remember that some may have been under pressure to do so. Chinese students in particular could have been influenced by parental expectations, not to mention the competitive nature of master's degrees in their home country. Indeed, most referred to the cultural (and, by association, economic) capital of attending a prestigious institution overseas. At the same time, I would argue that participants did not invest in the PSE only because of instrumental reasons (see Dörnyei, 2005). Interview data show that they were able to adopt a competent academic identity as they gained an understanding of new expectations (supported by their EAP tutors and classmates). In addition, the majority stated that they found the pre-sessional course useful, suggesting that it had gone beyond introducing them to 'basic' skills (see Jenkins & Wingate, 2015).

In contrast to findings from other studies (e.g., Soltani, 2018; Freeman & Li, 2019), some postgraduate participants gained confidence in the presence of 'native' English-speaking classmates instead of feeling intimidated or sidelined. Nonetheless, there were certainly different power dynamics in degree subject tutorials. The attitudes and responses of their instructors and classmates had an effect on whether students felt included and able to contribute. As previous research has shown (e.g., Morita, 2004), this could change depending on the situation, reinforcing the idea that identity is not a stable construct. Evidence from academic staff interviews (§8.5) reveals that certain modifications are being made to account for the needs of international students. These include pedagogical strategies that are beneficial for everyone, such as clear explanations of tasks, intelligible delivery of lectures, and the provision of subtitles on lecture slides and recordings. However, in certain cases, the curriculum itself had been altered, and there was some doubt as to whether this benefits all students. Data from postgraduate interviews highlight that

embarking on a master's degree and managing the heavy workload it presents can be daunting, especially in another country and language. Coming from a different linguistic background does not fall into the same category as having specific learning needs (see Jenkins & Wingate, 2015), but such students may require greater input to understand expectations.

My results demonstrate the significance of affective factors in students' ability to invest. Linguistic anxiety influenced postgraduate participants' willingness to communicate in English, in both academic and social contexts. As shown in survey and interview data, some feared making mistakes and being judged negatively by others. Interestingly, there was a tendency to measure themselves against an 'ideal' form of 'native speaker' English that they had perhaps internalised. Emotion also played a critical role (see Swain, 2013). Experiencing personal difficulties, or performing less well than they had hoped, caused stress and worry which could have led to decreased investment. However, the respondents were often resilient, as indicated by their explanations of how they were coping in the face of adversity.

Building on previous literature (e.g., Schartner, 2015; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017), my findings indicate that friendship groups are key to students' investment in the social side of university life. The difficulties of making friends with UK nationals were partly related to language, but cultural differences also contributed (not sharing common knowledge, or the same sense of humour). Being unsure of how to approach their British peers, or fearing rejection by them, could account for the prevalence of co-national friendship groups. At a practical level, the dominance of Chinese postgraduates on some degree programmes might have restricted opportunities to mix more widely. However, interviewees seemed more realistic about connecting with home students than those in other research (e.g., Hajar, 2020). Some had developed an international network which enabled them to use English as a lingua franca and establish a sense of belonging. Other approaches were also mentioned, such as attending community-based language classes, or working in a part-time job. As elsewhere (Chang, 2011), it was apparent that some invested more in the academic side of university, prioritising their studies above having a busy social life.

Universities do not have complete control over what international students experience outside the classroom. Interview data suggest that participants were mostly made to feel welcome when going about their everyday lives off campus. Unfortunately, as in other studies (e.g., Brown & Jones, 2013), there were a few reports of prejudice. Being the victim of racism (or other crime) might cause students to remain detached from the host community, although this did not seem to be the case for respondents. While this again demonstrates their tenacity, it is also possible that they were reluctant to share experiences of discrimination with a white, Scottish interviewer. It was not the case that every interviewee felt fully 'at home' in Scotland. Some remained more attached to their home country, while others had adopted a transnational identity to some extent (see Li Wei, 2011). The 'Chinese enclave' (Chen & Ross, 2015) allowed students to feel secure, but perhaps kept

them separate from the wider university population. However, we need to remember that there are other ways of investing, and having a worthwhile stay abroad, than full 'adjustment.'

3. What are the implications – of questions 1. and 2. – for pedagogy and university policy regarding EAP programmes and internationalisation?

The results of this study raise important questions for universities in terms of how international students are positioned in both EAP and degree subject classes. Gaining students' perspectives could help instructors to better meet their needs and result in improved teaching materials and strategies. Evidence from each interview data set suggests that any deficient labelling needs to be avoided; in contrast, they should be provided with opportunities to appropriate a capable academic and linguistic identity.

All of the EAP tutor interviewees stated that they take steps to increase learners' self-assurance during the PSE, for example, by encouraging contributions during group discussion and offering constructive suggestions on written work. As indicated in data from postgraduate interviews, giving abrupt responses or unclear feedback can have a detrimental effect on students' confidence and performance. Even if the majority of teachers are sensitive to such issues, it would do no harm to provide reminders, perhaps during the induction week of pre-sessional programmes. The tolerance of spoken Chinese in EAP classes also merits careful consideration. Interacting in their first language enables them to feel secure and express complex ideas more easily, but restricts opportunities to communicate in English. I am not suggesting that there necessarily needs to be a specific policy on this (though an 'English only' mindset is best avoided), but tutors could be made more aware of the potential advantages and disadvantages. For instance, students might face an environment that is less welcoming towards their first language once they move into university subject classes. Lecturer participants indicated that they do not expect 'native speaker' standards from international students, but this is not necessarily the attitude of all academic staff.

Indeed, one issue that is continually raised in the literature and in my own research is how university teaching staff can be supported to work effectively with international students. Lecturers may feel let down if they are left to take their own decisions without departmental or university guidance. I am aware that the notion of training in intercultural communication is often vague, which perhaps explains why specific suggestions are missing in other research. At the very least, it would be useful for instructors to understand that students from diverse linguistic backgrounds might not be familiar with expectations around writing conventions or classroom participation. Reminders (conveyed in a non-patronising manner) about how to pitch lectures for a multilingual audience could also be of benefit. Lecturers with experience of living abroad and/or learning languages may well have more empathy with international students, and it would be beneficial if others were able to share this understanding. Yet, the question of how to bring this about does not have a straightforward

answer. Any kind of intercultural training (for university staff and home students) would need to be perceived as worthwhile to have real value. Making such courses mandatory might cause resentment, but low uptake could be an issue if they were optional.

There is certainly a strong argument for increased communication between English language specialists and university subject departments. This would be mutually beneficial, allowing EAP instructors and academic lecturers to share knowledge about how best to support international students. Direct input from disciplinary specialists could give EAP tutors a better understanding of degree programme requirements. Likewise, by their own admission, academic lecturers are not necessarily experts in the English language. However, there are potential obstacles to facilitating this type of collaboration. On a practical level, it would not be easy to find time for instructors to meet, given the pressured nature of their schedules. Even factors such as having to travel to a different location on campus could add to the difficulty of making suitable arrangements. Possible attitudinal barriers would also have to be overcome. Previous research indicates that there can be a power imbalance between EAP and academic staff (see Noakes, 2020): who is positioned as the 'expert' in this situation? EAP tutors, who are often employed on temporary contracts, may feel insecure about putting forward their thoughts in discussion with a permanent academic member of staff. If lecturers believe that their pedagogy already serves international students well, they may not welcome being given unsolicited advice.

As regards EAP pathways, universities might consider adopting the same kind of approach as the research site, whereby students are placed in ESAP classes for some of the programme. As verified by both postgraduate and lecturer interviewees, different disciplines involve specific linguistic demands. Although six weeks is not long enough to familiarise learners with every expectation of a postgraduate degree, including an ESAP component could certainly ease the transition process. Another point raised in my study was the delivery of in-sessional language support, which at present does not necessarily meet demands. Extending this provision would benefit not only international students with English as another language, but also home students who might not be fully prepared for the demands of their degree programme. It is true that home students from non-traditional backgrounds are more likely to feel themselves poorly equipped for university (Gayton, 2020). However, as a former secondary school English teacher, I believe that many young people would benefit from continued instruction in areas such as how to write an academic essay. Making this type of training available to all might help to challenge the idea that it is 'remedial' and consequently remove some of the stigma. However, recruiting greater numbers of suitably qualified English language specialists would create more financial pressure on already stretched university budgets.

In terms of internationalising the curriculum (see Jin & Cortazzi, 2017), some support strategies are beneficial for all students, such as allowing more thinking time when asking a question, giving clear instructions, and providing formative feedback before a final

submission. Putting such measures in place for everyone also has the added advantage of not singling out any group of students. Nevertheless, it is apparent that multinational classes require careful management to ensure that no one feels marginalised or excluded. When working with classmates is a key part of a lesson, instructors need to consider how groups are organised and try to minimise segregation. As pointed out in lecturer interviews and other studies (e.g., Haan et al., 2017), the presence of students from overseas does not result in diversity if co-nationals only interact with each other. However, it is not advisable to 'force' home and international contingents together, as this might result in feelings of discomfort. It would be more useful to arrange extra-curricular workshops for all students on how to interact effectively with people from different backgrounds. This could help international students to realise that it is not always their responsibility to initiate communication. Furthermore, educators have a crucial role in challenging assumptions (Dovchin, 2022) and preventing discrimination connected to language (for instance, by not allowing fluent users of English to dominate discussion). Acknowledging international students' own cultural capital and multilingualism enables them to adopt more powerful positions. While we cannot ask teachers to become experts in other educational systems, openings could be found to ask learners about their previous experience (and future trajectories).

Expecting all international students to adapt to the new academic and social community easily and willingly is unrealistic. Some will have a worthwhile and satisfying overseas stay without fully 'adjusting.' As Zhu Hua & Gao (2021) state, they should not be made to feel that they have 'failed' if they stay mainly in compatriot groups and do not make British friends. At the same time, those who do wish to invest in wider aspects of university life (outside of the academic sphere) should be offered opportunities to do so. As seen in my data, social events that purport to bring different cohorts together are not always fruitful. I understand the value of preparing students for social interactions during pre-sessional EAP programmes (see Copland & Garton, 2011), but time would need to be found for this in what is already a packed curriculum. Perhaps it is more important to manage students' expectations about their future encounters with British nationals. The instructor interviewees realised why monocultural groups prevail, and, unlike participants elsewhere (e.g., Haan et al., 2017), avoided pejorative descriptions of 'ghettoes.' However, this is not to say that all university staff have this level of understanding. Crucially, students need to know where to seek advice if they are having problems, and be assured that asking for assistance is not a weakness. In-sessional English language classes, while important, are not always able to accommodate everyone who wishes to attend. It is vital that institutions consider extending such provision so that students are not put at a disadvantage. As regards other support, recruiting bilingual staff could reduce students' linguistic anxiety when accessing services such as counselling.

At the present time, UK universities are continuing to accept large numbers of overseas applicants without necessarily making considered decisions about how to accommodate

their needs. International students may be changed by their time abroad, but the university is also changed by their presence. Taking them for granted neglects the moral responsibility which HEIs have to offer all students a positive learning experience. In addition, the risks associated with over-reliance on China as a source of international fees cannot be ignored. End of cycle data from the Universities and Colleges Admission Service for 2023 showed a decline in the number of undergraduate applications from China (-1%) for the first time since 2014, and a decrease in the number of acceptances (-6%) for the first time since 2015 (UCAS, 2023). HEIs also need to resolve the potential conflict between recruiting high fee-paying international students and ensuring that admissions requirements are appropriate. Postgraduate respondents all completed the PSE successfully, yet this did not prevent them from experiencing various difficulties during their degree programmes. Universities need to consider whether enough support is being provided to international students as they transition into UK education, especially at the beginning of term.

9.2 Implications for language and identity research

This thesis makes an important contribution to operationalising research into language and identity, both methodologically and theoretically. While identity cannot be directly observed or measured, my results demonstrate the efficacy of interviews in gaining a fuller understanding of people's real-life experiences. Speaking directly to respondents from different backgrounds allowed a wide range of perspectives to be gathered, analysed and compared. The longitudinal design could be applied elsewhere, providing the opportunity to assess changes over time and space. This is especially relevant in contexts such as language learning, where self-positioning can fluctuate within short intervals. I have also drawn attention to ethical considerations within linguistics research, such as language choice in interviews and the importance of avoiding essentialist terms. As researchers, we need to consider power relations in interactions and challenge our pre-existing assumptions, for instance, those connected to the idea of 'nativeness.' My study demonstrates that acknowledging one's own positionality can add to a study's methodological transparency, even if this results in limitations. As Bucholz and Hall (2005, p.607) state, any account of identity will inevitably be 'partial' since the researcher's choice of focus impacts on which aspect is brought to the fore.

Based on the notion that language is a fundamental part of identity, my study enriches applied linguistics literature by providing empirical evidence of how international postgraduates navigate their sense of self when embarking on university study in Scotland. A social constructionist framework is beneficial when exploring identity negotiation in various contexts, including how people employ their linguistic repertoires to establish a sense of self. While EAP students were the focus of this thesis, a similar approach would be equally effective in researching different people's experiences (including, but not limited to, language learners). In any case, it is crucial to move away from the detrimental categorisation of individuals (see Birkeland et al., 2024); rather, their varied linguistic

practices need to be appreciated. Challenging discourses of deficiency (see Dippold et al., 2019) and creating a greater sense of inclusiveness is not only important when working with international students, but also other groups with a marginalised status.

Studies such as this one can contribute to cross-cultural understanding and contest misconceptions. I have highlighted the tension between international students being able to negotiate language and identity in a context (university) which does not always appreciate their own cultural capital (see, e.g., Martin, 2009). Other people may find themselves similarly disempowered, and it would be valuable to investigate their identity perceptions. Resulting insights might form the basis for further dialogue on how to promote multilingualism and social justice. Investigating the impact of different sociocultural contexts on language investment and identity raises the possibility of interdisciplinary collaboration, something which I touched on in my own research (the crossover between applied linguistics and language education). Ultimately, my work confirms that the role of language in constructing individual identities remains a rich area for linguistics research.

9.3 Limitations

I realise that my study does have some limitations. In terms of the methodology, opting for a mostly qualitative design restricted the pool of focal participants. I expected the majority of questionnaire respondents to be Chinese, as this reflects the cohort of the PSE. Nor was I surprised, based on findings of previous research (Dörnyei, 2007; Joinson & Reips, 2007), that most were female. Nevertheless, both these factors did decrease the data's representativeness to some extent. While findings from student and teacher interviews likewise cannot be assumed to speak for a wider population, a great deal of rich data resulted from these interactions. The reports of students' experiences could resonate with others in a similar position; similarly, insights from instructors could be relevant to people working in comparable contexts. Key findings are potentially transferable, for instance, to other universities which run pre-sessional EAP programmes for international students.

I also recognise that my original intention to conduct observations during the university term was not fulfilled. This was partly due to the complications of organising EAP lesson visits: I anticipated that making similar arrangements for degree subject tutorials would be even more challenging. In addition, difficult personal circumstances at this point in the data collection process meant that I could not always be physically present on campus. While it is straightforward to arrange online interviews, in-person lesson visits cannot be transferred to a virtual format. While arranging further interviews could have added to my understanding of both students' and instructors' perspectives, I was wary of over-burdening them.

Likert-scale questions invite participants to self-assess, so survey answers cannot be assumed to be fully accurate. There is always the possibility that an individual has rushed through the questions, or has not fully processed what they were being asked. In addition, the relatively low response rate makes generalisation difficult. However, the survey results

provide an overview of respondents' overall outlook which could reflect the attitudes of other pre-sessional EAP students.

There are further limitations connected to gathering data through interviews. First, as previously explained, I am aware that my study attracted a limited pool of participants, both in terms of students and instructors. Although my findings contain rich and varied insights, they cannot be taken as generalisable to a wider population. In order to obtain a greater range of views, more respondents would need to have been recruited. However, I have no way of knowing for definite how this might have altered my results. Secondly, as outlined in §4.3.3, the fact that postgraduate respondents were interviewed in English may have affected the nature of our discussions. Again, without any means of comparison, it is difficult to ascertain whether they expressed themselves as wished, or chose to withhold information.

There were also some practical constraints to the study over which I did not have complete control. I started my PhD in 2020, when we were still in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the early stages, I was faced with the uncertainty of whether data collection would even be able to go ahead as planned (i.e., face-to-face). The longitudinal nature of the project meant that I had to be able to track students through different stages of their university lives. In the summer of 2021, pre-sessional programmes had not yet returned to a fully in-person format, and I was still reviewing the literature and firming up my conceptual framework. I also had to deal with the previously mentioned site access issues. Therefore, it was necessary to wait until the next round of the PSE had started in 2022 before I could embark on data collection. Timing issues meant that I was not able to fully pilot the survey, although I did check the wording of questions and the format with the PSE course organiser before it was made available to students.

9.4 Research dissemination

As this study has implications for both university policy and teaching practice, it is important to explain how key findings will be disseminated to relevant audiences. First, I will continue to submit abstracts to conferences in the fields of ELT and applied linguistics. I already have substantial experience of speaking about aspects of my research, both at university conferences and in CPD (Continuing Professional Development) sessions with EAP teacher colleagues. Previous areas of focus include *Identity construction and positioning in the transcultural classroom*, *Language awareness and reflexivity in the international university classroom*, *Perceptions of participation in the international university classroom*, and *Appreciating the power of quiet in the international university classroom*. I will also seek further opportunities to deliver CPD workshops, for instance, if I take on another pre-sessional teaching post in future. In terms of publication, I intend to target suitable academic journals by refining significant points my PhD and adapting more recent presentations. By doing so, I hope to further emphasise the potential tension between appreciating EAP

students' own cultural capital and expecting them to 'conform' to the demands of UK higher education.

As I am aware that journal articles reach a somewhat restricted readership (and conferences are attended mostly by disciplinary specialists), I have thought carefully about how to move beyond the academic sphere. Other audiences are likely to be formed of people who are not necessarily linguists or educators – but who have the power to effect change. Using personal contacts within Universities Scotland, I have identified potential ways in which policy makers could be targeted. For instance, I will contribute to ongoing discussion on international students in the UK by proposing an article to Wonkhe[10]. I am especially keen to emphasise the individual nature of their experiences and how to counteract deficient perspectives. I will also contact The Pie News[11], another forum for publishing online articles centred on developments in the international education community. Both these forums have a wide circulation amongst policy makers (Universities Scotland, 2024, personal communication); therefore, if successful, there is a good chance that my findings would be seen by people with real influence.

I am keen to collaborate with other researchers on potential projects and will therefore continue to connect with EAP colleagues to share ideas and expertise. I will also expand my current network through social media and by staying in touch with my university's research engagement and impact team. This provides another means of reaching out to the public, for example, at future conference or festival events. The new insights gained into international student identity could make a difference to their real-life experiences, as well as affecting the nature of public debate.

9.5 Recommendations for future research

In light of my findings, there are several potential directions for future research. Subsequent investigations might recruit a more diverse pool of international students (in terms of nationality, gender, or stage of study) in order to compare their perspectives. Another natural progression would be to facilitate further comparisons of EAP tutors' and academic lecturers' views on working with multilinguals. Observing both EAP and degree subject classes could add to our understanding of how international students are positioned in different educational settings. Spending more time with participants, for instance, in social contexts, could provide additional insights about how they manage their lives abroad. In both cases, recording exchanges in addition to taking fieldnotes (if feasible) would likely be of benefit.

I did not gather any examples of students' written work, but it would be useful to continue explorations into the impact of teacher feedback on their confidence and self-esteem. In

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[10] Wonkhe (https://wonkhe.com) provides an online platform for the publication of articles connected to current debates concerning Higher Education policy.
[11] The Pie News (https://thepienews.com) accepts articles from writers working in the field of international Higher Education.

addition, as the use of AI becomes ever more prevalent, more research will likely be required into its effect on writer identity.

Although it was not my intention to assess the effectiveness of EAP pre-sessional programmes, consideration of how effectively they prepare students for university life is warranted. As there is a continuing gap in knowledge about what works when trying to enhance intercultural communication, universities might be encouraged to share examples of good practice.

This study confirms that language and identity remains a rich area of investigation. Specifically, the findings are relevant to current discussion about diversity and internationalisation in Scottish universities. Studying abroad is often a transformative experience, but the impact of coping with a different language and culture needs to be acknowledged. While I had worked with many international students before beginning this research, the privilege of interviewing a small sample gave me a deeper understanding of their experiences. Stepping away from the EAP classroom provided a different perspective on how they manage their lives in an unfamiliar environment. Instead of undergoing a linear process of 'adjustment,' students' sense of belonging is impacted by both sociocultural factors and their individual responses to new situations.

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Appendix A EAP student questionnaire

The following survey will ask you some questions about using English and studying in Scotland. It is not a test, so please answer as honestly as you can.
This survey does not form part of the pre-sessional and will have no impact on your progression through the programme.
Responses will remain completely anonymous unless you choose to leave your contact details at the end.
All the information you provide will be handled in accordance with Data Protection Law.

Q1 Please rate the following statements in terms of how much you agree.	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I feel confident when using English.	○	○	○	○	○
2. I enjoy communicating with people in English.	○	○	○	○	○
3. I worry about making mistakes when using English.	○	○	○	○	○
4. I am excited about beginning the pre-sessional programme.	○	○	○	○	○
5. I am nervous about beginning the pre-sessional programme.	○	○	○	○	○
6. I think I will cope with the work on the pre-sessional programme.	○	○	○	○	○
7. I think I will make friends on the pre-sessional programme.	○	○	○	○	○
8. I am excited about beginning my degree programme.	○	○	○	○	○

9. I am nervous about beginning my degree programme.	○	○	○	○	○
10. I think I will cope with the work on my degree programme.	○	○	○	○	○
11. I think I will make friends with British students on my degree programme.	○	○	○	○	○
12. I think I will make friends with other international students on my degree programme.	○	○	○	○	○
13. I expect to encounter a new way of working at university in Scotland.	○	○	○	○	○
14. I feel confident about working in a group.	○	○	○	○	○
15. I feel confident about learning independently.	○	○	○	○	○
16. I feel confident about contributing to class discussion.	○	○	○	○	○

17. I will try to adapt to local customs while living in Scotland.	○	○	○	○	○
18. I believe that studying in Scotland will change me in certain ways.	○	○	○	○	○

Q2 What is your nationality?

____

Q3 What is your intended programme of study? (E.g. MSc TESOL)

____

Q4 How long have you been studying English?

○ 1-5 years

○ 5-10 years

○ More than 10 years

Q5 How old are you?

____

Q6 How would you describe your gender?

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female
- ◯ Prefer to self-describe as (please specify) ________________________________
- ◯ Prefer not to say

Q7 I would like to invite you to be interviewed about your experiences of studying at university in Scotland.
If you would like to take part in the next stage of the research project, please provide your name and email address below.

- ◯ First Name ________________________________
- ◯ Last Name ________________________________
- ◯ Email ________________________________

Q8 By submitting this questionnaire, I agree that my answers, which I have submitted voluntarily, can be used for research purposes.

- ◯ Submit

Appendix B Interview schedules

Pre-sessional student interviews

1. Could you please tell me about your decision to study in Scotland?

2. How are things going on the pre-sessional programme so far? What are you enjoying / finding difficult? Are there any differences with how you have studied English in the past?

3. Do you have any worries about speaking English in front of others (e.g., 'native speakers')?

4. How do you feel about asking questions in class / contributing to discussion / remaining silent?

5. Could you describe some of the assignments you have been given? How are you finding the academic work? Any specific areas of difficulty, e.g., reading, writing, listening?

6. Have you made friends with your classmates / other people on the course? Who do you usually turn to for help and support? How easy do you think it will be to make friends with local students once you have started your degree?

7. Are there any aspects of life in Scotland which you are finding challenging? To what extent do you want to 'adapt' to life here?

8. How are you managing in everyday interactions outside of class? Could you describe any successes / difficulties?

9. Have you experienced any feelings of loneliness or isolation? Why do you think this might be?

10. How prepared do you feel for your degree programme? Do you think the pre-sessional programme is helping you to prepare – academically / linguistically?

11. Could you tell me a little about your future goals? How does using English fit into these?

Semester 1 student interviews

1. Can you describe your programme of study? What courses are you currently taking?

2. What are you enjoying so far about your studies?

3. What concerns, if any, do you have about your programme? Has anything been surprising to you?

4. How are you coping with the academic work, for example, writing essays? How are you managing any difficulties?

5. How are you participating in your programme (classroom activities, etc.)? Are there any differences in how you participate between different courses? Reasons.

6. Are there any differences in your class participation (for example, in group discussion) between the pre-sessional course and now? Possible reasons why / why not.

7. Have you been able to use what you learned on the pre-sessional programme when doing academic work on your degree?

8. Is there a mix of nationalities in your class, or is it mainly Asian / mainly home students? What are your feelings about this?

9. How would you describe your interactions with classmates? And with tutors?

10. What opportunities do you have to use English inside and outside the classroom? Do you notice any improvement in your language skills / confidence level?

11. What are your friendship groups like? How is your social life? Feelings about this.

12. Are you experiencing any difficulty in adjusting to life in Edinburgh? Have you experienced any feelings of loneliness or isolation?

13. Is there anything your tutors or the university could do to make your life easier?

14. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Semester 2 student interviews

1. How have things been since we last spoke? Any changes / improvements?

2. What courses are you taking this semester? Do you have any concerns about the academic work?

3. How did you get on with your assignments last term? Were you satisfied with the amount / quality of feedback received?

4. How would you describe your confidence level in tutorials / seminars? Is there any variation between different courses?

5. Have you faced any challenges since we last met? How did you solve them? Did anybody help you / in what way?

6. Are you happy with your progress, e.g., in speaking English?

7. How easy has it been to make friends? What have you done to meet people? Any experience of loneliness / isolation? Do you feel socially integrated into the university?

8. Do you have any thoughts about the support offered by the university? Is there anything that would make your life easier?

9. Did you feel well prepared before you came here? Did you expect anything to be different?

10. To what extent do you feel like you belong here / have adapted?

11. Has the way you see yourself changed since coming to Scotland?

12. What are your future plans? How do you feel about returning home / staying abroad?

EAP tutor interviews

1. Please describe your current experience of teaching international or EAP students.
2. In your view, what are the areas of difficulty / in which they lack most confidence?
3. Do you (for)see any changes in their confidence / skills as the course progresses?
4. What are your perceptions of students' interactions in class (e.g., group work, contributing to discussion sessions, etc.)?
5. How would you describe their level of preparation for university study?
6. What challenges do you think that they will face on their degree programmes (academic, linguistic and social)?
7. How do you think their English language skills impact on their ability to achieve academically / integrate socially?
8. Do you think that EAP students can / wish to integrate?
9. How do you think these students are viewed by university subject lecturers / home students?
10. How do you think students see themselves?
11. Do you think more could be done to support them (either on pre-sessional programmes or on degrees)?
12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Academic staff interviews

1. Could you tell me your general thoughts about and experiences of teaching international students?
2. What are the benefits of having international students on campus?
3. Could you tell me about the typical challenges which multilingual international students experience?
4. Are you aware of the support which is offered to these students? Is it sufficient?
5. Could you describe any challenges related to teaching international students without English as their first language?
6. Do you ever make any adjustments to your teaching to accommodate them?
7. Is there anything which would help you in your teaching of these students?
8. How would you describe international students' participation in class?
9. What is the interaction between 'home' and 'international' students like?
10. Do you make any concessions when assessing international students' written work?
11. What are your perceptions of the English language skills of international students? Could you give some specific examples? If students have language challenges, in which area(s) do they need extra help?
12. How do you think international students' English language skills affect their broader efforts to integrate socially? Could you give me any specific examples?

Appendix C Information sheets (interviews)

Student interviews

Information sheet for participants

What is this document? This document explains what kind of study we're doing, what your rights are, and what will be done with your data. You should keep this page for your records. After you read this, continue to the next page.

Nature of the study. The aim of my study is to understand the perspectives of international postgraduates who have chosen to study in Scotland. I hope to learn about your experiences while taking the pre-sessional English programme and during your degree. If you agree to participate, then I will invite you to meet with me at a time which is convenient for you. Interviews should last for around 30-45 minutes and will be audio-recorded. You don't need to do any preparation. You just need to be ready to tell me (in English) a little about yourself and your thoughts on language learning and identity. There are no 'correct' answers to the questions, as I am interested in hearing your opinions.

Benefits. Although there are no tangible benefits, there are several reasons why taking part might be useful. The process of answering questions in interviews could help you to reflect on your own linguistic practices and sense of identity. Being involved in a real research project will give you an understanding of the process (e.g., informed consent, interview procedures) which could prove helpful in future. You will also be making a valuable contribution to our knowledge about international students' experiences in Scotland.

Participation is completely voluntary. Non-participation will have **no effect** on your course work and assignments.

Risks of participation (COVID-19)

We have taken specific steps to minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 during the study by adhering to the most up to date Scottish Government guidance. These routine measures include making every effort to ensure i) good ventilation; ii) by default, continued use of face coverings; iii) good hand and respiratory hygiene; and iv) suspension of research if the researcher(s) or participant(s) have COVID symptoms. Further, university facilities used for research are subject to an enhanced cleaning regime.

However, even with these control measures, there remains some risk of exposure from participating in this study.

What if I am unwell prior to the research interaction?

If you feel unwell or experience COVID-19 related symptoms, then please contact me by email ( ) or telephone ( ), and we will postpone or cancel the research interaction.

Confidentiality and use of data. All the information we collect during the course of the research will be processed in accordance with Data Protection Law. In order to safeguard your privacy, we will never share personal information (like names or dates of birth) with anyone outside the research team. Your data will be referred to by a unique participant number rather than by name. We will store any personal data (e.g., audio/video recordings, signed forms) using a password protected, encrypted hard drive

laptop or in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Edinburgh. The anonymised data collected during this study will be used for research purposes. With your permission, identifiable data such as recordings may also be used for research or teaching purposes and may be shared with other researchers or with the general public (e.g., we may make it available through the world wide web or use it in TV or radio broadcasts).

What are my data protection rights? The University of Edinburgh is a Data Controller for the information you provide. You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance Data Protection Law. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure and objection. For more details, including the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the University Data Protection Officer at dpo@ed.ac.uk.

Voluntary participation and right to withdraw. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time and for any reason. If you wish to withdraw from the study during data gathering, we will delete your data and there is no penalty or negative consequences for your academic progress. Please note that after 31/08/22 you will no longer be able to withdraw from the study. If you decide to withdraw after the specified date, we may not be able to delete your anonymised data from e.g., public repositories of research data, but we will be able to delete all of your personal data from our records.

If you have any questions about what you've just read, please feel free to ask, or contact us later. You can contact me by email at .

This project has been considered and approved by the PPLS Ethics committee. If you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant, they can be contacted at 0131 650 4020 or ppls.ethics@ed.ac.uk.

If you have any questions about what you've just read, please feel free to ask them now.

Thank you for your help! **Now please complete the consent form on the next page.**

PLEASE MARK EITHER 'YES' OR 'NO' BELOW:

Consent for participation:	**Yes**	**No**
I consent to take part in the above study, including audio recording.	☐	☐

I am aware that participating in this study at the current time may carry risks in relation to potential exposure to COVID-19, and I understand the steps that have been taken in relation to minimising the risks of exposure and transmission.

EAP tutor interviews

Information sheet for participants

What is this document? This document explains what kind of study we're doing, what your rights are, and what will be done with your data. You should keep this page for your records. After you read this, continue to the next page.

Nature of the study. This study investigates the linguistic practices and identity formation of students taking a pre-sessional programme in English for Academic Purposes (EAP). If you agree to participate, then I will invite you to meet with me at a time which is convenient for you. I would then ask you some questions about your perceptions of EAP students in your class. The interview should last around 45 minutes and will be audio-recorded.

As I hope to gain insight into how students interact using English, I would also like to observe some of your lessons. The number and timing of observations can be mutually agreed to keep disruption to a minimum. As a teacher myself, I realise that observations can be uncomfortable, but my purpose is **not** to comment upon your pedagogy. I would only be looking at students' actions and behaviour.

Benefits. There are no tangible benefits to taking part; however, you will be contributing to our knowledge about EAP students' language practices and identity formation. The interview might offer an opportunity to reflect on some of your beliefs in greater depth. In addition, I hope that findings will influence the provision of support for international students in the future.

Risks of participation (COVID-19)

We have taken specific steps to minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 during the study by adhering to the most up to date Scottish Government guidance. These routine measures include making every effort to ensure i) good ventilation; ii) by default, continued use of face coverings; iii) good hand and respiratory hygiene; and iv) suspension of research if the researcher(s) or participant(s) have COVID symptoms. Further, university facilities used for research are subject to an enhanced cleaning regime.

However, even with these control measures, there remains some risk of exposure from participating in this study.

What if I am unwell prior to the research interaction?

If you feel unwell or experience COVID-19 related symptoms, then please contact me by email or telephone (/), and we will postpone or cancel the research interaction.

Confidentiality and use of data. All the information we collect during the course of the research will be processed in accordance with Data Protection Law. In order to safeguard your privacy, we will never share personal information (like names or dates of birth) with anyone outside the research team. Your data will be referred to by a unique participant number rather than by name. We will store any personal data (e.g., audio/video recordings, signed forms) on a password protected, encrypted hard drive laptop or in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Edinburgh. The anonymised data collected during this study will be used for research purposes. With your permission, identifiable data such as recordings may also be used for research or teaching purposes and may be shared with other researchers or with

the general public (e.g., we may make it available through the world wide web or use it in TV or radio broadcasts).

What are my data protection rights? The University of Edinburgh is a Data Controller for the information you provide. You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance Data Protection Law. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure and objection. For more details, including the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the University Data Protection Officer at dpo@ed.ac.uk.

Voluntary participation and right to withdraw. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time and for any reason. If you wish to withdraw from the study during data gathering, we will delete your data and there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please note that after 31/08/22 you will no longer be able to withdraw from the study. If you decide to withdraw after the specified date, we may not be able to delete your anonymised data from e.g. public repositories of research data, but we will be able to delete all of your personal data from our records.

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Thank you for your help! **Now please complete the consent form on the next page.**

Consent for participation:	**Yes**	**No**
I consent to take part in the above study, including audio recording.	☐	☐
I am aware that participating in this study at the current time may carry risks in relation to potential exposure to COVID-19, and I understand the steps that have been taken in relation to minimising the risks of exposure and transmission.		

Participant name

Participant signature

Today's date

Academic staff interviews

Information sheet for participants

What is this document? This document explains what kind of study we're doing, what your rights are, and what will be done with your data. You should keep this page for your records. After you read this, continue to the next page.

Nature of the study. This study investigates the linguistic practices and experiences of students who have previously completed a pre-sessional programme in English for Academic Purposes (EAP). If you agree to participate, then I will invite you to meet with me at a time which is convenient for you. I would then ask you some questions about your perceptions of international students (with English as another language) in your class. The interview should last for around 45 minutes and will be audio-recorded.

As I hope to gain insight into how these students interact in subject tutorials, I would also like to observe some of your lessons. The number and timing of observations can be mutually agreed to keep disruption to a minimum. As a teacher myself, I realise that observations can be uncomfortable, but my purpose is **not** to comment upon your pedagogy. I will only be looking at students' actions and behaviour.

Benefits. There are no tangible benefits to taking part; however, you will be contributing to our knowledge about EAP students' language practices and identity formation. The interviews might offer an opportunity to reflect on some of your beliefs in greater depth. In addition, I hope that findings will influence the provision of support for international students in the future.

Risks of participation (COVID-19)

We have taken specific steps to minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 during the study by adhering to the most up to date Scottish Government guidance. These routine measures include making every effort to ensure i) good ventilation; ii) by default, continued use of face coverings; iii) good hand and respiratory hygiene; and iv) suspension of research if the researcher(s) or participant(s) have COVID symptoms. Further, university facilities used for research are subject to an enhanced cleaning regime.

However, even with these control measures, there remains some risk of exposure from participating in this study.

What if I am unwell prior to the research interaction?

If you feel unwell or experience COVID-19 related symptoms, then please contact me by email or telephone (/), and we will postpone or cancel the research interaction.

Confidentiality and use of data. All the information we collect during the course of the research will be processed in accordance with Data Protection Law. In order to safeguard your privacy, we will never share personal information (like names or dates of birth) with anyone outside the research team. Your data will be referred to by a unique participant number rather than by name. We will store any personal data (e.g., audio/video recordings, signed forms) on a password protected, encrypted hard drive laptop or in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Edinburgh. The anonymised data collected during this study will be used for research purposes. With your permission, identifiable data such as recordings may also be used for research or teaching purposes and may be shared with other researchers or with

the general public (e.g., it may be made available through the world wide web or used in TV or radio broadcasts).

What are my data protection rights? The University of Edinburgh is a Data Controller for the information you provide. You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance Data Protection Law. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure and objection. For more details, including the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the University Data Protection Officer at dpo@ed.ac.uk.

Voluntary participation and right to withdraw. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time and for any reason. If you wish to withdraw from the study during data gathering, we will delete your data and there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please note that after 30/06/23 you will no longer be able to withdraw from the study. If you decide to withdraw after the specified date, we may not be able to delete your anonymised data from e.g. public repositories of research data, but we will be able to delete all of your personal data from our records.

If you have any questions about what you've just read, please feel free to ask, or contact us later. You can contact me by email at .

This project has been considered and approved by PPLS Ethics committee. If you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant, they can be contacted at 0131 650 4020 or ppls.ethics@ed.ac.uk.

If you have any questions about what you've just read, please feel free to ask them now.

Thank you for your help! **Now please complete the consent form on the next page.**

PLEASE MARK EITHER 'YES' OR 'NO' FOR EVERY STATEMENT BELOW:

Consent for participation:	**Yes**	**No**
I consent to take part in the above study, including audio recording.	☐	☐
I am aware that participating in this study at the current time may carry risks in relation to potential exposure to COVID-19, and I understand the steps that have been taken in relation to minimising the risks of exposure and transmission.		

Participant name	Participant signature	Today's date

Appendix D Information sheets (observations)

Student research participants

Information sheet for participants

What is this document? This document explains what kind of study we're doing, what your rights are, and what will be done with your data. You should keep this page for your records. After you read this, continue to the next page.

Nature of the study. This study investigates the linguistic practices and experiences of international students taking EAP pre-sessional programmes and university degrees in Scotland. If you agree to participate, I will observe an agreed number of your pre-sessional classes. Once you have started your degree programme, I will observe an agreed number of subject tutorials. I will take notes during the observations, and they may also be audio-recorded.

Benefits. There no tangible benefits to taking part; however, you will be contributing to our knowledge about EAP students' language practices and sense of identity. I hope that findings will help to improve the experience of international students in the future. If you choose not to participate, this will have no impact on your success in the EAP programme or subsequent degree. **Your academic performance will not be assessed during classroom observations**.

Risks of participation (COVID-19)

We have taken specific steps to minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 during the study by adhering to the most up to date Scottish Government guidance. These routine measures include making every effort to ensure i) good ventilation; ii) by default, continued use of face coverings; iii) good hand and respiratory hygiene; and iv) suspension of research if the researcher(s) or participant(s) have COVID symptoms. Further, university facilities used for research are subject to an enhanced cleaning regime.

However, even with these control measures, there remains some risk of exposure from participating in this study.

What if I am unwell prior to the research interaction?

If you feel unwell or experience COVID-19 related symptoms, then please contact me by email or telephone /), and we will postpone or cancel the research interaction.

Confidentiality and use of data. All the information we collect during the course of the research will be processed in accordance with Data Protection Law. In order to safeguard your privacy, we will never share personal information (like names or dates of birth) with anyone outside the research team. Your data will be referred to by a unique participant number rather than by name. We will store any personal data (e.g., audio/video recordings, signed forms) using a password protected, encrypted hard drive laptop or in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Edinburgh. The anonymised data collected during this study will be used for research purposes. With your permission, identifiable data such as recordings may also be used for research or teaching purposes and may be shared with other researchers or with the general public (e.g., we may make it available through the world wide web or use it in TV or radio broadcasts).

What are my data protection rights? The University of Edinburgh is a Data Controller for the information you provide. You have the right to access information held about you. Your

right of access can be exercised in accordance Data Protection Law. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure and objection. For more details, including the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the University Data Protection Officer at dpo@ed.ac.uk.

Voluntary participation and right to withdraw. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time and for any reason. If you wish to withdraw from the study during data gathering, we will delete your data and there is no penalty or negative consequences for your academic progress. Please note that after 31/08/22 you will no longer be able to withdraw from the study. If you decide to withdraw after the specified date, we may not be able to delete your anonymised data from e.g., public repositories of research data, but we will be able to delete all of your personal data from our records.

If you have any questions about what you've just read, please feel free to ask, or contact us later. You can contact me by email at .

This project has been considered and approved by the PPLS Ethics committee. If you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant, they can be contacted at 0131 650 4020 or ppls.ethics@ed.ac.uk.

If you have any questions about what you've just read, please feel free to ask them now.

Thank you for your help! **Now please complete the consent form on the next page.**

PLEASE MARK EITHER 'YES' OR 'NO' BELOW:

Consent for participation:	**Yes**	**No**
I consent to take part in the above study.	☐	☐
I am aware that participating in this study at the current time may carry risks in relation to potential exposure to COVID-19, and I understand the steps that have been taken in relation to minimising the risks of exposure and transmission.		

Participant name ____________________ Participant signature ____________________ Today's date ____________________

EAP tutor consent form for observations

I am a 2nd year PhD student whose research focuses on international students taking EAP pre-sessional programmes at the University of Edinburgh. Some of your students might have completed my survey which asked about their use of English and feelings about studying in Scotland.

Earlier this month, I interviewed a member of your class to ask for more information about their experiences. I would now like to visit this student in one of their lessons. If everyone agrees, I will come into a class at a time which is convenient for you. It doesn't need to be for the whole lesson. I won't be actively involved, but may take some notes.

I will not be evaluating your teaching in any way and will be as unobtrusive as possible.

As you are not a research participant, none of your details or data will be used when writing up my project.

Thank you for your help!

PLEASE MARK EITHER 'YES' OR 'NO' BELOW:

Consent for classroom observation:	**Yes**	**No**
I consent to classroom observation of a research participant. I understand that my data will not be used in the study.	☐	☐

Participant name | Participant signature | Today's date

Non-participant student consent form for observations

I am a 2nd year PhD student whose research focuses on international students taking EAP pre-sessional programmes at the University of Edinburgh. Some of you may have already completed my survey which asked about your use of English and feelings about studying in Scotland.

Earlier this month, I interviewed a member of your class to ask for more information about their experiences. I would now like to visit this student in one of their lessons. If everyone agrees, I will come into a class at a time which is convenient for your teacher. I won't be actively involved, but may take some notes.

This observation **does not** form part of the pre-sessional course assessment. I will not be evaluating you in any way.

As you are not a research participant, none of your details or data will be used when writing up my project.

Thank you for your help!

PLEASE MARK EITHER 'YES' OR 'NO' BELOW:

Consent for classroom observation:	**Yes**	**No**
I consent to be present during classroom observation of a research participant. I understand that my data will not be used in the study.	☐	☐

Participant name   Participant signature   Today's date