

English language proficiency, academic language difficulties
and self-efficacy: A comparative study of international
and home students in UK higher education

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Abstract

In many Anglophone countries, international students constitute a significant proportion of university students. These students generally achieve lower academic performance than home students, with English language proficiency playing an important role. However, limited studies have compared international and home students' academic expectations and experiences, explored how language proficiency relates to reported academic difficulties, and teased apart the influence of domicile (home vs. international) and language status (English as a foreign language, EFL vs. English as a native language, ENS). Furthermore, many studies overrepresented Chinese students, potentially affecting the generalisability. This study addresses these gaps by comparing UK home students and three international student groups: international ENS students, Chinese EFL students, and other EFL students worldwide.

Employing both cross-sectional and longitudinal approaches, the study conducted a large-scale survey of university students across the UK ($N = 1163$) and a follow-up survey from a smaller subset of students at one university ($N = 59$). Students self-rated their a) English skills, b) academic language difficulties, and c) self-efficacy. They also completed an embedded English vocabulary test to estimate their language proficiency. In addition, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews ($N = 18$) to get in-depth insights into students' language-related experiences.

The findings confirmed that EFL groups had lower English proficiency than ENS groups, irrespective of ENS students' domicile. Chinese students had the lowest proficiency and reported the most difficulties in their studies. However, home students, despite scoring high on both objective and subjective measures of English proficiency, reported more difficulties with academic English than both international ENS and mixed EFL groups, and lower academic self-efficacy compared to international ENS students. While challenges for EFL students (especially those from China) were mainly linguistic, those for ENS students were mostly academic. This emphasises the need for tailored language-related academic support for all student groups.

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Author's declaration

I, Xiaqian Shi, hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is original. Any additional sources have been cited. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research context

Driven by the development of the free market and a global economy, higher education has been considered as an international service (Wu, 2014). This means that higher education has become global and studying abroad has become prevalent. Over the past few decades, the numbers of students studying abroad have skyrocketed (Deuchar, 2022). Specifically, the number of international students in the world rose from 3.8 million in 2010 to 6.3 million by 2020 (UIS, 2023).

The United Kingdom has consistently been one of the most popular educational destinations for international students to pursue their studies. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the UK is the second most popular destination country for higher education, just behind the United States (OECD, 2022). This report also highlighted that 9% of the world's international students selected the UK as their educational base in 2022. In sheer numbers, this translates to over 650,000 international students enrolled in UK universities during the academic year 2021-2022, making up 23.75% of the entire university student population in the country (HESA, 2023).

Over the past few years, the total numbers of international students' enrolments in the UK have increased significantly every year, with an increase of more than 70,000 from the academic years 2020–2021 to 2021–2022 (HESA, 2023). With this momentum, the UK's Department for Education aims to consistently host at least 600,000 international students annually (International Education Strategy, 2021). However, the proportion within the group of international students is not static. In 2021-22, the total number of non-European Union (non-EU) students grew by 23.8% whereas EU students fell by 21.4% (Universities UK, 2023a).

Despite occasional fluctuations, Chinese students consistently make up the largest group of international students in UK higher education in overall numbers. According to the data from HESA (2023) for the academic year 2021-2022, over 150,000 Chinese students were enrolled in the UK. India and EU countries constituted the second and third largest groups of international students respectively, while India and Nigeria had the largest growth in student numbers (HESA, 2023). The

consistent predominance of Chinese students as the largest international group in UK higher education provides the rationale for focusing on this specific group in this research.

1.2 Statement of the problem

As mentioned in the previous section, there has been a growing number of international students studying in the UK. However, when it comes to academic outcomes, international students on average perform notably worse than home students (Crawford & Wang, 2014; Iannelli & Huang, 2013; Morrison et al., 2005; USSU, 2021). One important dimension in which home and international students differ is language, with international students generally arriving with lower English language proficiency than home students. This limited proficiency appears to pose barriers for many international students in their studies, negatively impacting their academic performance (Andrade, 2006; Eddey & Baumann, 2011; Eze et al., 2015; Trenkic & Warmington, 2019).

When exploring home and international students' English language proficiency, the previous research has mainly followed two approaches: empirical investigations and self-perception studies. However, the existing literature has overlooked some important aspects. For example, empirical studies often overrepresented Chinese students among international students (Knoch et al., 2015; Trenkic & Warmington, 2019), neglecting students from other regions, particularly those who are from neither China nor Europe. While there has been extensive exploration of international or English as a Foreign Language (EFL¹) students' self-perceptions about their language experiences (Andrade, 2006; Gu & Maley, 2008; Korzilius et al., 2007; Lin & Scherz, 2014; Rabia, 2016; Liu, 2009; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Wang, 2018; Zhang & Zhou, 2010), the perceptions of English Native Speaking (ENS) students and how the perceptions vary across different linguistic and domicile backgrounds are underexplored. Another issue is the conflation of domicile (home vs international) and language status (native vs non-native English speakers) in some studies (Mackiewicz, 2022; Trenkic & Warmington, 2019). Since they compared international EFL students with home ENS students without distinguishing between their domicile and language status, it is difficult to determine whether certain difficulties international EFL students faced stem from their language proficiency or unfamiliarity with the UK educational system. Moreover, some studies only focused on students' international status without considering their language status (Andrade, 2006; Knoch et al., 2015; Li

¹ In this paper, "EFL students" refers to all the students who do not speak English as their first language. Given the research focus on comparisons between native and non-native English speakers, distinctions between EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESL (English as a Second Language) students are not addressed, as such differentiation goes beyond the scope of this dissertation.

et al., 2010; Taylor & Ali, 2017), potentially leading to overgeneralisation since the challenges faced by international EFL students can differ from those faced by international students from English-speaking countries. Therefore, this study intends to address these overlooked issues (A comprehensive review of the literature and identification of research gaps are provided in Chapter 2).

1.3 Research aim and research significance

The aim of this study was to explore international and home students' academic experiences and expectations in terms of their English language proficiency, academic language difficulties and self-efficacy within UK higher education. The rapid growth of international student enrolments in UK higher education, as described in the background, highlights the UK's prominence as a leading destination for higher education. Therefore, understanding these students' academic experiences and expectations is significant for several reasons.

First of all, as universities host students with diverse linguistic and domicile backgrounds, there is a need to understand different student groups' English language proficiency levels, academic language difficulties they may face, and their confidence in studies. Recognising and understanding their language-related challenges can help universities refine their support services, thus creating a more accommodating academic environment to suit the diverse needs of different student groups. Furthermore, international students are potentially at a higher risk of dropping out or underperforming compared with home students (Crawford & Wang, 2014; Iannelli & Huang, 2013; Kehm et al., 2019; Morrison et al., 2005). Addressing these language-related challenges can possibly improve their retention rates and overall academic success, benefiting both the students and the institutions. Lastly, to maintain its position as a popular destination for international education, it is important for the UK to offer an environment where all students, irrespective of their linguistic background and language competence, feel supported and empowered to succeed.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This chapter has provided an overview of the research background, statement of the problem, aim, and significance. Chapter 2 offers a view of the relevant literature, including the following sections: the reciprocal benefits of international students in the UK; academic achievement and English language proficiency; English language proficiency of international and home students; academic language difficulties for native and non-native English speakers; the relationships between English

language proficiency, self-efficacy and academic performance; summary, research gaps and research questions. Chapter 3 introduces the general methodology, which includes the paradigm, approaches and design of this research, as well as data collection instruments and ethical considerations.

This research comprises three distinct studies, elaborated in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 respectively. Each of these chapters provides details about introduction, participants, study design, data collection procedure, analysis process, challenges, results, discussion and conclusion for each study. Chapter 7 presents a general discussion which combines the findings of the three studies in relation to the research questions. It also shows implications and limitations of this research. The final section, Chapter 8, summarises the whole research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The reciprocal benefits of international students in the UK

2.1.1 The importance of international students to the UK

International students are a vital asset to UK higher education and the UK's society. They have made contributions financially, academically and socially.

First of all, international students have brought considerable economic value to the UK. These students represent a large part of university populations in the UK, and they also account for a notable proportion of university revenue, with China standing out as the single largest market for all the universities (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008). Beyond paying for tuition fees, international students also spend on housing, food, books and various other expenses, such as spendings when their families visit (Walker, 2013). A recent report highlighted that between 2018/19 and 2021/22, the net economic contribution of international students increased from £31.3bn to £41.9bn due to the rapid growth of number of non-EU students (Cannings et al., 2023). The report also stated that the economic boost is spread throughout the whole UK, with international students contributing £58m to the UK's economy for each parliamentary constituency during their studies, which is equivalent to £560 per member of the resident population. Even after considering dependants and other costs, international students significantly benefit the UK economy, and there is a net economic contribution of £1 million to the UK's finances for every 11 non-EU students (Cannings et al., 2023). The income generated from international students can significantly benefit both universities and broader UK communities. Universities can utilise these funds to support academic research, enhance campus infrastructure, and improve the quality of teaching, thereby enriching the overall student experiences. Beyond the campuses, the broader UK economy also gains. International students contribute to economic growth in diverse ways, from their routine living expenses like accommodation, groceries, and recreational activities during term time. Additionally, during holidays, their expenditures can possibly rise as they travel with friends and family, spending on hotels, tourist sites, and transport.

In addition, international students contribute academically to the UK universities. They enhance the academic viability and enrich the research environment within universities (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008;

Hegarty, 2014). A notable number of these students, particularly those pursuing research degrees, further contribute by taking roles as research assistants in various projects, or by teaching as lecturers or tutors in undergraduate courses (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008). University academic staff acknowledge the value and importance of these students. In Sawir's (2013) study which investigated internationalisation of Australian higher education, academic staff indicated that international students brought a diversity of cultures that inspired them and provided them with teaching resources and a source of cultural enrichment. Besides benefiting university staff, international students also positively impact home students. In Barger's (2004) study, which examined the perspectives of home students on their international peers at US universities, local students recognised international students' positive influence on the academic environment and reported to gain valuable cross-cultural sensitivity and competency skills from them. Beyond their academic journey, international students continually play a vital role in the scientific field and promote social development after graduation. Chellaraj et al.'s (2008) study explored the relationship between the enrolment of international graduate students and US innovation. Their findings suggest a significant correlation between the rise in enrolments of international students and an increase in the number of patents granted to both university and non-university institutions.

Finally, international students enrich UK higher education and the broader UK society through their cultural and social contributions. In university campuses, their presence broadens the perspectives of home students and increases their appreciation for cultures around the world (Lee, 2007). As pointed out in Schreiber's (2011) interview study where home students' perceptions of international students in an American university were explored, a majority of local participants perceived the presence of international students as the potential cultural exposure to different cultures without having to travel. They also generally looked favourably on the presence of international students on campus and the diversity they bring. Other than universities, many international graduates remain in the UK, further contributing to the nation's workforce and cultural diversity. Increasing the recruitment of international students was considered by many community colleges as a way to bring more diversity to both campuses and the surrounding communities (Blair et al., 2001). In 2022, nearly 4 million non-UK nationals were part of the UK's workforce (Home Office, 2022). International graduates contribute significantly to the country's socioeconomic and cultural growth through taxes, innovative ideas, patents, or intellectual endeavours (Nghia, 2019). These workers, often with younger ages, positive attitude and work ethic, specialised skills, are invaluable in filling labour gaps and make contributions to the UK labour market (Green et al., 2008).

To sum up, international students benefit the UK in various ways, providing huge financial support, academic vitality, cultural diversity, and social contribution.

2.1.2 The benefits of studying in the UK for international students

International students who choose to study in English-speaking countries like the UK often find numerous benefits in doing so. These benefits range from experiencing a diverse culture and enhancing their English language skills to obtaining globally recognised qualifications.

Firstly, studying in a foreign country allows international students to immerse themselves in a new environment and culture, which not only offers them a chance to expand their cultural horizons but also provides a unique learning experience. While these students introduce new cultures to their host institutions, they in turn gain deeper understandings of the local traditions and practices (Lee, 2007). For example, many international students enjoy their friendships with students from different countries (Sherry et al., 2010). Such interactions in a multicultural environment can help students broaden their educational, social, and cultural horizons (Fakunle, 2020). Secondly, the dominance of the English language makes countries like the UK attractive choices for international study (Iannelli & Huang, 2013; Zhai et al., 2019). The improvement of English skills and the availability of English language teaching facilities are highly valued by international students when choosing programme and place of study (Russell, 2005). However, the area and extent to which language skills improve during study varies (further discussed in Section 2.3.2). Lastly, UK universities' prestigious academic reputation further attracts international students (Iannelli & Huang, 2013; Russell, 2005). Their world-leading research (Universities UK, 2023b) and high-quality degrees (Ayoubi & Massoud, 2012) make the UK one of the top choices for higher education.

In conclusion, studying in the UK offers international students cultural, linguistic, and academic benefits.

2.2 Academic achievement and English language proficiency

Despite the benefits highlighted in Section 2.1.2, international students, on average, perform less well academically compared to home students, with English language proficiency playing a significant role. This section will discuss in detail the academic achievement of international students and the impact of English language proficiency on their performance.

2.2.1 Academic achievement of international students in the UK

As mentioned above, one of the main motivations for international students to study in the UK higher education is the academic reputation and worldly recognised qualifications. These students come all the way from their home countries to the UK, aiming to obtain globally recognised qualifications and competitive degrees. In fact, attaining a higher class of honours from a UK university not only enhances employability in high-skilled jobs (Pigden & Moore, 2019) but also boosts the earning potential in the job market (Feng & Graetz, 2017).

UK degree classification in higher education

Within the UK education system, bachelor's degrees are typically classified as either honours (bachelor's with honours) or ordinary degrees (bachelor's without honours). According to British undergraduate degree classification system illustrated by multiple UK universities such as Imperial College London (2023), the highest honoured degree achievable in UK undergraduate programmes is a "First-Class Honours" (First or 1st), typically representing a score of 70% or more. Following this are "Upper Second-Class Honours" (2:1, 2.i) and "Lower Second-Class Honours" (2:2, 2.ii), which typically represent scores of 60%-70% and 50%-60% respectively. The last band is a "Third-Class Honours" (Third or 3rd), with a score range of 40%-50%. A "good" bachelor's degree is commonly understood to be a degree with either a first or upper second-class honours (Richardson et al., 2020). Master's degrees in the UK are sometimes graded in a slightly different way. Integrated master's degrees, which extend the traditional bachelor's programme to include postgraduate-level study, generally follow the same grading system as bachelor's honours degrees. However, typical master's degrees are graded as "Distinction" for grades 70% and above, "Merit" for 60-69%, and "Pass" for 50-59% (Postgrad, 2023).

Attainment gaps between international and UK home students

Despite the motivation to obtain competitive higher education degrees, international students generally perform less well in academic studies compared to their UK counterparts. Although *some* international students excel as top academic performers at UK universities, they are, as a whole, less likely to achieve upper-tier honours degrees than home students. (Crawford & Wang, 2014; Iannelli & Huang, 2013; Morrison et al., 2005; USSU, 2021).

Data from over 20 years ago revealed that international students achieved fewer “good degrees” (first or upper second-class honours) than UK home students (Morrison et al., 2005). Morrison et al. (2005) analysed the academic performance and outcomes of international students in UK higher education, comparing them to UK-domiciled students. Their study used multi-level modeling on data collected from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for the years 1995 and 2000, considering factors such as age, sex, domicile, and discipline to assess academic outcomes. When assessing by domicile, the study observed that students from the EU, Asia (especially those from China), Africa, and the Middle East consistently underperformed relative to UK students, while those from North and South America, non-EU Europe and Australasia were similar to UK-domiciled students. This suggests that while international students, as a whole, tend to underperform academically compared to home students, those from certain regions or with certain backgrounds may achieve academic outcomes similar to those of home students.

More recent data also support the finding of the achievement gaps between international and home students. In 2019, 85.6% of UK domiciled students achieved a good degree, compared with 52.9% for non-UK domiciled students, resulting in a gap of 32.7 percentage points (USSU, 2021).

Chinese students’ further disadvantage

Crawford and Wang (2014) conducted a more specific study comparing the academic performance of 112 undergraduate students from the UK and China enrolled in Accounting and Finance programmes at a UK university over an entire degree course. Using longitudinal data and variables such as gender, prior academic achievement, and degree programme, the study found that although Chinese students initially outperformed their UK peers, they fell behind in subsequent years. In the end, 80% of UK students graduated with a good degree (i.e., a first or upper-second degree), compared to just 43% of Chinese students. The performance of UK students was influenced by multiple variables, including gender and prior academic achievement, but these factors did not significantly affect the performance of Chinese students. The study suggests that factors other than prior academic achievement may explain these differences and calls for further research.

In addition, Iannelli and Huang (2013) examined the academic performance of Chinese students obtaining their first degrees in the UK using data from the HESA between the years 1998 and 2009. Their analysis further revealed that Chinese students consistently achieved lower academic honors

compared to not only UK students, but also other international students. This suggests that among all international students in the UK, Chinese students were particularly affected in their academic outcomes. Specifically, Chinese students were most likely to obtain lower-second-class degrees, followed by upper-second-class degrees. They performed notably worse than UK home students, with this gap widening over time. The odds of a Chinese student getting a good degree (i.e., a first or upper-second degree) were only 37% compared to UK students in 2001, a percentage that rose slightly to 40% but then fell to 32% in 2009. Similar trends were observed when comparing Chinese students to “other EU” students.

It appears that academic studies in the UK may pose greater challenges for Chinese students compared to other international students. Li et al.’s (2010) study further confirmed lower academic success among Chinese students. The study compared the performance and the effects of various factors on the performance of 88 Chinese students with those of 90 international students from various countries in one school at a UK university. These 90 non-Chinese international students, who were from 24 different countries such as Greece, Thailand, and Nigeria, were combined into a single group due to the small sample sizes of each nationality. The study found that the average academic grade of Chinese students was significantly lower than that of their non-Chinese peers.

To sum up, international students generally perform less well in their academic outcomes than home students -- they are more likely to obtain lower-tier honours degrees than UK students. Performance among international students may vary based on their countries of origin, and some may perform no differently than home students. Students from China, in particular, appear to be at risk when it comes to academic achievement, with their academic grades typically lagging behind not just UK students but also other international peers.

2.2.2 The influence of English language proficiency on academic performance

A lot of previous studies have investigated the factors that influence the academic performance of international students in English-speaking countries. One key factor that consistently emerges is English language proficiency. In the UK, home students generally grow up speaking English and consider it their first language. In contrast, for many international students, English is not a native language but rather a subject they have studied in school. Research has consistently shown the significance of language for international students’ academic success in higher education, with

vocabulary knowledge being particularly predictive of success (Eddey & Baumann, 2011; Masrai & Milton, 2021; Qian, 2002; Roche & Harrington, 2013; Trenkic & Warrington, 2019;).

Country-specific variances in academic performance and language proficiency

Section 2.2.1 shows that international students generally underperform compared to home students in studies. However, there are exceptions based on the country of origin. For example, students from North and South America, non-EU Europe, and Australasia tend to perform similarly to UK home students (Morrison et al., 2005). On the other hand, Chinese students, as the largest proportion of international students in the UK (as mentioned in Section 1.1), generally achieve less well academically than other international students (Crawford & Wang, 2014; Iannelli & Huang, 2013; Li et al., 2010). It is possible that English language proficiency may play a role in the performance differences. An international education company called Education First (2022) has developed the EF Standard English Test (EF SET), which was validated and shown to be as reliable as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores. From their results on English skills in 2022 based on data from 2.1 million adults across 111 countries and regions, Europe was ranked as the region with the highest English proficiency (average score: 558), followed by Asia (500), Latin America (495) and Africa (490), with the Middle East scoring the lowest (445). In terms of individual countries, China was categorised under “low proficiency”, scoring lower than all European and nearly all South American countries listed. This suggests that English proficiency levels could be contributing to the academic performance gaps observed among international students in the UK.

The significant role of English language proficiency in international students’ academic performance

The importance of English language proficiency in international students’ academic performance has been highlighted by many studies. A consistent finding is the direct correlation between international students’ proficiency in English and academic outcomes. Eddey and Baumann (2011) found that students who were proficient in English (those who did not need a remedial English programme on arrival) demonstrated better academic achievements compared to those who were not (those who needed). Their extensive research study was conducted at an Australian university between 2004-2007, analysing data from 2,253 postgraduate business students, of which 83% were international students from 62 countries. This study also found that students with the lowest level of academic

achievement were those who had a business background but required a remedial English programme. In contrast, English proficient students, irrespective of their academic background, achieved a higher level of academic performance. This indicates that English language proficiency had a stronger influence on performance than academic background (i.e., prior academic skills). Furthermore, Trenkic and Warmington (2019) found that individual differences in language and literacy skills significantly predict academic grades for international students, but not for home students. Their study provided a comparative analysis between 63 Chinese international students and 64 UK home students at a UK university, with a particular focus on language and literacy skills. These language and literacy abilities were significant predictors of academic grades for Chinese students, but not for UK students, highlighting the importance of international students' English proficiency upon university entry for their academic success. It also suggests the presence of a proficiency threshold in English language skills; once surpassed, language ceases to be a determinant of academic success. Unfortunately, many international students, upon their university entry, have yet to achieve this threshold, potentially limiting their academic potential.

Beyond the direct correlations between English language proficiency and academic outcomes, some studies have looked deeper into international students' perceived experiences and their adjustment process, showing a broader impact of English proficiency in adapting to both new learning and social environments. For example, Eze et al. (2015) investigated key factors that influence international students' academic performance by interviewing 10 international students in one UK university. The results from their thematic analysis showed that the language barrier emerged as a primary concern for international students, especially for those from Asian and Middle Eastern backgrounds. Besides its obvious academic implications, a lack of language proficiency also hindered their cultural and social integration, posing challenges in adapting to new teaching methodologies or even forming new friendships. The study suggests that English language proficiency plays a vital role in determining international students' academic success and overall well-being, calling for universities' language support to ensure a positive experience for these students. Additionally, in a comprehensive review by Andrade (2006), the experiences and challenges international students faced in English-speaking countries were thoroughly examined. One of the key factors affecting both the academic adjustment and achievement of international students was English language proficiency. Notably, many students reported that their limited participation in class discussions was often due to their language limitation. Furthermore, some professors also observed that the level of students' language skills could negatively impact their course performance. Interestingly, the effect of language proficiency could vary based on several factors, including the specific academic discipline.

For example, international students in Australia performed relatively better in subjects like accounting, possibly because such fields do not require extensive reading and writing skills, thus moderating the role of English language proficiency.

The role of vocabulary in university students' academic performance

Among the components of English language proficiency, vocabulary knowledge stands out as an important predictor for academic performance. Numerous studies have indicated that vocabulary knowledge, both in breadth and depth, is a strong indicator of academic achievement for international students at the higher education level (Masrai & Milton, 2021; Qian, 2002; Roche & Harrington, 2013).

Vocabulary knowledge serves as a significant predictor of reading comprehension performance. Qian (2002) examined the relationships and predictive values of three vocabulary measures (i.e., Vocabulary Size, Depth of Vocabulary Knowledge, and TOEFL Vocabulary Item) on reading comprehension performance, as measured by the TOEFL-RBC test among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in University of Toronto. The results revealed each vocabulary measure independently and significantly predicted reading performance, and their combined use enhanced predictive power. It highlights the crucial role of comprehensive vocabulary knowledge in reading performance, particularly in academic settings.

Beyond its impact on reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge is essential for academic writing. Roche and Harrington (2013) explored the relationship between vocabulary knowledge, written academic English proficiency and academic performance of EFL students in Oman. These students ($N = 70$) were from the first and fourth years of faculty study in an English language medium higher education institution, with Arabic as their first language. Through assessments including a writing proficiency test and a computerised timed YES/NO vocabulary knowledge test, it was found that both academic writing skills and vocabulary knowledge were significant predictors of academic performance. Additionally, vocabulary knowledge strongly correlated with written academic English language proficiency, suggesting its importance in academic success.

In a broader context, vocabulary knowledge seems to be important for overall academic success. A recent study by Masrai and Milton (2021) examined the influence of academic and general vocabulary knowledge on the academic success of EFL learners in a Saudi university. The research

was conducted with 61 male Arabic-speaking students enrolled in a language and translation programme. The results showed that while both the academic vocabulary test and the general vocabulary test moderately correlated with GPA, general vocabulary knowledge explained 46.7% of GPA variance. Additionally, the academic vocabulary test contributed a further 11.5%, leading to a combined 58.2% explanation of the variance in GPA. This suggests that vocabulary knowledge, both general and academic, plays a vital role in academic success -- while general vocabulary remains essential for academic success, academic vocabulary offers a distinct and supplementary advantage.

In conclusion, language proficiency is fundamental to academic achievement in higher education. For international students studying in English-speaking countries, their English proficiency significantly influences their academic performance. A lack of this proficiency can hinder their full academic capabilities. Vocabulary knowledge, regardless of its range or specificity, particularly plays a significant role in shaping students' academic performance.

2.3 English language proficiency of international and home students

2.3.1 Understanding English language proficiency gaps

Topics related to university students' language skills, language experiences and language support needs have been extensively explored in educational research (Andrade, 2006; Cheng et al., 2004; Conroy, 2010; Eddey & Baumann, 2011; Gu & Maley, 2008; Lin & Scherz, 2014; MacKiewicz, 2022; Rabia, 2016; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Trenkic & Warmington, 2019; Wang & Halenko, 2022; Zhang & Zhou, 2010).

In English speaking countries, the examination of English language proficiency across various student groups has predominantly followed two main approaches: empirical investigations and studies focused on self-perceptions. Empirical investigations offer straightforward ways to assess students' actual linguistic abilities. These studies typically use standardised and validated tests with linguistic tasks to measure and compare proficiency levels among different groups. On the other hand, studies focused on self-perceptions explore how students perceive their own English language skills and language-related issues, providing insights into students' subjective experiences and beliefs about their language competence. This section provides a review of both areas of study, from the perspective of proficiency differences among students and proficiency development over time.

2.3.1.1 Empirical investigation of English language proficiency

Proficiency gap between home and international students as well as within international subgroups

International students' English language proficiency is generally lower than that of home students in UK higher education, with the proficiency of Chinese EFL students being lower than European EFL students (Eddey & Baumann, 2011; Education First, 2022; MacKiewicz, 2022; Trenkic & Warmington, 2019).

When looking at Chinese students, the largest subgroup of international students in the UK, their English language proficiency is generally significantly lower than that of UK home students. Trenkic and Warmington (2019) investigated home and international university students' language and literacy skills. Their study compared UK and Chinese students upon their arrival at a UK university and then again after around 8 months. The UK participants ($N=64$) were all native speakers of English and Chinese participants ($N=63$) were all native speakers of Mandarin. The study revealed significant and large differences in language and literacy skills between the two groups. Specifically, compared with UK students, Chinese students had smaller vocabulary size, weaker abilities of reading comprehension and written summarisation, slower English processing speed and lower phonological skills. Although both groups made some improvement over time, the gap between them remained constant.

In similar studies that included both European students and Chinese students, language and literacy gaps were also found, but they were smaller for the European students than for the Chinese students. MacKiewicz (2022) expanded upon Trenkic and Warmington's (2019) research by including students who speak one of the European languages as their first language among the international students studied. Therefore, three student groups from a UK university took part in the study: native English speakers ($N=59$), speakers of one of the European languages ($N=60$), and Chinese speakers ($N=58$). These participants were undergraduate students and their language and literacy skills (knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, writing, and phonological skills) were evaluated at the beginning of their first and second academic years. While results confirmed the large and significant differences in language and literacy skills between UK and Chinese students, the European students displayed initial language and literacy skills much closer to the UK students than Chinese students. Furthermore, European students managed to narrow the gap with UK students over the course of

one year, while Chinese students still lagged behind both groups. Therefore, this research broadened the scope of Trenkic and Warmington's (2019) study and suggested that Chinese EFL students' English language proficiency is not just lower than UK students but also European EFL students. Both studies, however, lacked representation from other linguistic backgrounds of international students beyond native languages being Chinese or one of the European languages, leaving a gap in the broader comparison of proficiency levels.

Expanding the focus beyond international students from only China and Europe, students from countries where English is a dominant language generally have higher English language proficiency than those who do not. Edey and Baumann's (2011) study included international students from a more diverse range of backgrounds. They studied 2,253 business school graduates from an Australian university, of which 1,870 were international students from 62 countries. Chinese students were the largest subgroup of international students ($N = 669$). Although the research focus was not on English language proficiency, the data indicated a relationship between English proficiency and the students' country of origin. Specifically, students from countries where English is the official or dominant language (such as North America), as well as from those where English is widely spoken or well understood (such as India or Western Europe), had on average higher English proficiency than those who were from countries where English was not widely used (such as China, Thailand and Indonesia). Despite including participants with notably more domicile and linguistic backgrounds, this study broadly categorised students as either "English proficient" or "English deficient" based on whether a student met the minimum cut-off scores for unconditional entry or needed a remedial English programme on arrival. This oversimplified the varied proficiency levels, making it impossible to capture the diversity of language skills.

While most studies focus on specific groups in higher education, a broader assessment of English proficiency has been conducted on a global scale. As mentioned in Section 2.2.2, Education First (2022) developed an on-line EF SET English test. The test facilitates free, convenient English assessment for any non-native English speakers who have internet access in the world, which drew participation from 2.1 million adults across 111 countries. The test was found to have moderate positive correlations with both IELTS and TOEFL English tests. When split into geographical regions, test-takers from Europe had the highest average regional score (average score: 558), followed by Asia (500), Latin America (495), Africa (490) with closely similar average scores, and the Middle East (445) was at the bottom. Among the countries, Netherlands (661) ranked highest and Laos (364) lowest. China (498), with a rank of 62 out of 111, had scores below all tested European countries. This report,

despite large-scale with a huge sample size, did not include native English speakers as a baseline, and the context was not limited to higher education in English-speaking countries.

To sum up, in UK universities, international students' English proficiency is generally lower than that of home students, with Chinese students' proficiency being lower than their European counterparts. However, the past research has the limitation of Chinese students being over-represented for international students. The English language proficiency of international students other than Chinese or European students in the higher education context remains under-researched.

Factors influencing proficiency gaps

The English language proficiency gaps between student groups are likely to be related to many different factors including differences in English exposure, linguistic typology, and geographical and economic connections.

Firstly, native English-speaking students grew up immersed in the language, both in classrooms and everyday life. In contrast, many international students, particularly from non-English dominant countries, lack this immersion. European students generally receive more English exposure in both educational and daily contexts than Chinese students: In higher education, English is increasingly the medium of instruction in many European countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, and Finland (Björkman, 2016). In China, however, English is mainly taught as a foreign language subject in classrooms and the majority of Chinese students complete their education without obtaining fluent communication skills in English due to limited English usage (Yang, 2006). Furthermore, while English is prevalent in European media (Lindgren & Muñoz, 2013), Chinese media remains dominated by the Chinese language (Bi, 2011). Secondly, linguistic typology also plays a role. Decades of research suggest that there are strong constraints of linguistic similarity on adult language learning (Jarvis, 2014; Schepens et al., 2020). Most European languages, including English, are from the Indo-European family, while Chinese is Sino-Tibetan. Chinese uses a logographic system (Martínez-Adrián & Del Puerto, 2017), whereas most European languages use alphabetic scripts (Levin et al., 2013); Chinese is tonal, while most European languages are not (Wang, 1973); while most European languages use morphemes to modify root words, each Chinese character generally represents one morpheme (Li et al., 2015). Therefore, European languages are typologically closer to English than Chinese, making it easier for European language speakers to learn English than Chinese speakers. Lastly, Europe has more geographic and economic connections to English-speaking countries. The

geographical proximity of Europe to English-speaking countries like the UK and Ireland offers more opportunities for linguistic exchange than China. Economically, Europe engages more deeply with English-speaking countries than China does, evidenced by the US being the EU's top trading partner and the UK being the EU's second-largest export destination after the US in 2022 (European Commission, 2023). These close connections may create a greater need and provide more opportunities for English language learning and use in Europe.

2.3.1.2 Self-perceptions related to English language proficiency

While some empirical studies have suggested that the English language proficiency of international students tends to be generally lower compared to home students, a substantial body of other research has looked into how these students self-perceive their experiences in English-speaking countries, and language has stood out as a primary concern.

When it comes to international students' experiences and adjustments, language is often seen as a significant challenge. Many international students perceive the English language as a barrier, impacting not only their academic studies but also their cultural adjustments (Andrade, 2006; Gu & Maley, 2008; Lin & Scherz, 2014; Rabia, 2016; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Zhang & Zhou, 2010).

Although it is widely recognised that numerous international students find English difficult, little is known about how various student groups' perceived language proficiency correlates with objective measurements. Tomoschuk et al. (2018) examined the validity of self-rating of language skills by comparing it to more objective measures, such as the MINT (a picture naming test) and the OPI (Oral Proficiency Interviews, a more comprehensive test). Participants included Spanish-English bilinguals, mostly from San Diego ($N = 992$), and Chinese-English bilinguals, either from China studying in San Diego or those of Chinese heritage born in the U.S. ($N = 223$) from an American university. The findings revealed that for the same self-rated score, English dominant Spanish-English bilinguals consistently outperformed English dominant Chinese-English bilinguals in objective tests. Moreover, Chinese-English bilinguals showed different self-ratings based on their backgrounds: those from China studying in San Diego tended to overestimate their English proficiency, possibly due to comparing themselves against the prevalent proficiency in China, leading to a higher self-rating. In contrast, American-born Chinese speakers, showed different self-assessment, possibly using American standard as a reference. The research suggests that linguistic upbringing and background

might influence participants' self-ratings, as different speakers may use different frames of reference when comparing their language abilities against others, leading to different self-ratings.

Nevertheless, within the context of UK higher education, whether differences in self-perception exist among different student groups, such as Chinese and other EFL speakers, remains under-researched. Given the results of Tomoschuk et al.'s (2018) study, and considering significantly more exposure to and usage of English in English-speaking countries and regions outside China, such as Europe (as illustrated in Section 2.3.1.1), it is plausible to speculate that Chinese students are likely to overestimate their English proficiency despite having lower objective English skills than other international students. Whether this assumption is true and whether various student groups in UK higher education are intuitively aware of their English abilities compared with other groups remain to be explored.

2.3.2 Progress in proficiency over time

2.3.2.1 Empirical investigations of language process

It is commonly assumed that studying in an English-speaking environment enhances international students' English language proficiency (Storch & Hill, 2008). However, this is not always the case. In fact, research has shown that significant proficiency gains for international students can be hard to achieve. Trenkic & Warmington's (2019) study highlighted that Chinese students did not catch up with home students on language and literacy skills after eight months of English language exposure at a UK university. The limited improvement may be attributed to their lack of opportunities for English practice in non-academic settings since international students, especially those from China, are more likely to interact with their compatriots or other international students over local students (Gomes, 2014; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Ranta & Meckelborg, 2013; Sherry et al., 2010; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Therefore, despite living in an English-speaking country, their real-life English communication opportunities remain limited.

Even over extended periods of time, it is a controversial issue as to how much language develops during the course of studies. Rogier (2012) and Yuksel et al.'s (2021) studies both indicate that obvious progress tends to unfold over a number of years, although the extent of the gains varies between the studies. Rogier (2012) observed the development of English language skills over four years among students in English-medium classes at a UAE university. Despite most of the participants'

exposure to English being predominantly within the university, a significant improvement with a large effect size in all English skill areas was shown on the IELTS test for 59 Emirati undergraduate students, with speaking skills improving the most. Similarly, Yuksel et al.'s research (2021) demonstrated a significant improvement in English language proficiency over four years for Turkish university students across both social science and engineering disciplines (with medium and small to medium effect sizes). These studies suggest that while the impact of studying in an English environment on language improvement may not be immediately evident, language progress tends to be gradual and becomes noticeable over an extended period. In contrast, Birrell's (2006) study suggests that many international students graduate from Australian universities without having made significant improvements in their English language skills, despite having spent several years in an English-speaking academic environment. Birrell argues that the expectations of universities' language development for international students are often overoptimistic, due to the admission of students with insufficient English proficiency levels and the lack of sufficient ongoing language support throughout their studies.

Interestingly, some subpopulations of international students improve more quickly than others, closing the language and literacy gaps with home students faster (DeKeyser, 2007; MacKiewicz, 2022). Unlike the aforementioned studies which largely treated EFL students as a homogeneous group, MacKiewicz (2022) explored proficiency development among home students, Chinese students, and European students in a UK university. The findings revealed that Chinese students did not have significant improvements in language and literacy proficiency, nor did they close the gap with home or European students after about a year. However, European students made slight gains in several areas over the course of a year, narrowing the gap with home students, indicating that not all international EFL students make progress at the same pace. In fact, students with more advanced proficiency in English might experience greater benefits from studying abroad, especially in the long term, due to more interactions with locals and more exposure to media input (DeKeyser, 2007).

It is also worth noting that some language aspects can be easier to improve than others (Knoch et al., 2015; MacKiewicz, 2022). Knoch et al. (2015) focused on various aspects of writing skills development and investigated international students' improvement after three years of studying in an Australian university. There were 31 participants, of which most were either native speakers of Chinese or Malay. It was found that students' fluency significantly improved, indicating their ability to produce more words in a given time. However, accuracy, content, form, organisation, and style did not show significant improvement. The possible reasons for the limited progress, identified through

follow-up interviews, were limited extensive writing practices during their degree and a lack of substantial feedback. Similarly, in MacKiewicz's (2022) research, European students narrowed the gap with home students after one year in the aspects of reading rate, time-constrained reading comprehension and writing measures, but not other aspects such as vocabulary knowledge and English grammar. These findings suggest that not all language areas improve at the same rate -- some skills, such as fluency, might be easier to improve than others, such as structural knowledge.

In conclusion, the effect of studying in an English environment on English language improvement for EFL students can be gradual, possibly due to limited English usage outside the classroom and a lack of academic language support and feedback for students. Progress rates can also vary among students, and some international student subpopulations may find it easier than others to narrow language and literacy gaps with home students. Furthermore, some language skills, such as fluency, might be easier to improve than others, such as structural knowledge. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that existing studies have not extensively investigated the improvement of non-Chinese international students or international English speakers in English-speaking countries.

2.3.2.2 Self-perceptions of language progress

When studying in English, students often perceive a growth in their language proficiency, feeling that language barriers diminish over time (Korzilius et al., 2007; Wang, 2018). Wang (2018) explored the academic adjustment of international Chinese students who studied in the UK for more than three years. These students were asked to describe their experiences over this period. The study suggests that while Chinese students face considerable linguistic difficulties initially, with time and exposure, they perceive linguistic improvements and reduced language barriers. Similarly, Korzilius et al. (2007) found that Dutch students' self-assessed English proficiency improved after four years of studying foreign business in English at two Dutch universities.

However, not all language-related skills are perceived to improve over time. In Wang's (2018) study, although most language skills were seen as improved, the improvement in speaking skills did not meet students' expectations. Furthermore, despite linguistic progress, they still perceived academic challenges such as finding it hard to apply critical thinking in writing, suggesting that general linguistic ability and academic language proficiency are two distinct skills, and mastering English language proficiency does not guarantee the development of higher order academic skills.

Interestingly, students' perceptions of progress can vary, and those with initially lower English proficiency might perceive more language improvement. Liu (2009) investigated university students who had varying levels of English proficiency in EFL classes at a Taiwanese university. The study explored confidence in their English by examining changes over the course of one academic year. It was found that low-performing students demonstrated a significant increase in confidence, while students with high English proficiency remained relatively stable. Given that *lower-proficient* students may *perceive* more progress, while Section 2.3.2.1 suggests that *higher-proficient* students may *achieve* more actual progress (DeKeyser, 2007), it is possible that perceived language improvement can differ from actual improvement. However, no research so far has investigated and compared the gap between perceived language improvement and actual improvement in higher education.

Despite these insights, previous research has overlooked some aspects. The majority of studies have focused on the English proficiency or language confidence of EFL students, while little is known about the language-related perceptions of ENS students. Since ENS students can also be susceptible to language-related difficulties (Berman & Cheng, 2010), it seems crucial to explore this overlooked area. Additionally, limited research has been conducted within higher education in English-speaking countries, especially in terms of how different students from different backgrounds perceive their development in language over time.

In summary, students studying in English often perceive improvements in their language proficiency over time, however, the extent and areas of improvement can vary. Moreover, perceived language improvement might differ from actual progress. The existing literature reveals a gap in understanding the perceptions of language progress among various students from different linguistic backgrounds, especially within higher education contexts in English-speaking countries.

2.4 Academic language difficulties for native and non-native English speakers

The previous section discussed a narrower concept of English language proficiency. However, this proficiency does not guarantee academic success, as a broader concept of academic English skills also matters. Academic language proficiency influences academic success (Davies, 2007) and even students with well-developed English language proficiency may experience language-related academic difficulties (Berman & Cheng, 2010).

As a matter of fact, there is an ongoing debate among academic scholars, especially within the context of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The debate focuses on whether the language-related difficulties experienced by non-native English speakers are any different from those experienced by native English speakers. Some advocates that even though native English speakers use English as their first and dominant language, academic language is a skill that must be mastered separately, known as “Academic language is no one’s mother tongue”. In contrast, others emphasise the unique and additional linguistic challenges faced by non-native English speakers. This section, drawing upon the insights from Ding’s (2019) article, reviews the diverse perspectives.

Misinterpretation of Bourdieu et al.’s perspective

The quote “Academic language is ... no one’s mother tongue” (Bourdieu et al., 1994, p. 8), has been widely cited in EAP discussions to indicate a universal struggle with academic language for all students, regardless of their academic status and first language. However, Ding (2019) pointed out a misinterpretation, as Bourdieu et al.’s initial viewpoint was about the challenges experienced by different social classes when dealing with academic language. The complete quote is:

Academic language is a dead language for the great majority of French people, and is no one’s mother tongue, not even that of children of the cultivated classes. As such, it is very unequally distant from the languages actually spoken by the different social classes. To decline to offer a rational pedagogy is, in this context, to declare that all students are equal in respect of the demands made by academic language. (Bourdieu et al., 1994, p. 8)

This misinterpretation prompted Ding (2019) and me to explore deeper into what academic language really means for people from diverse linguistic backgrounds. It seems that there has been a debate on this topic. The debate is about challenges native English and English as an Additional Language (EAL) authors may encounter in academic publishing. Although they focus on authors in academic publishing instead of students in higher education, the topic is still highly relevant to my study since it provides valuable insights into whether native English and non-native English speakers face similar difficulties in academic writing. The next two subsections review this debate.

Hyland’s argument: beyond linguistic challenges

Hyland (2016a) discussed the topic of linguistic injustice and bias in academic publishing, mainly focusing on whether authors who are non-native English speakers are put at a disadvantage during the academic publication process. Through a critical review of relevant literature and interviews with scholars working in Hong Kong, Hyland found that linguistic skills were neither consistent nor the primary reason for paper rejection, instead, many editors and reviewers emphasised the scientific or academic content and quality of research above linguistic perfection. Both native English and EAL authors often face similar challenges regarding content, methodology, and clarity. Challenges like mastering the norms of academic writing, establishing relevance and contribution to the field, and designing robust research are common to all scholars, regardless of their linguistic background (Hyland, 2016b). Moreover, authors who are native English speakers also encounter difficulties and challenges in academic writing and publishing, indicating that these challenges are not exclusive to non-native English speakers. Therefore, Hyland challenges the perceived linguistic disadvantage in academic publishing and advocates for a broader focus on comprehensive writing and research skills, focusing on robust research methodologies, clear academic writing, and significant contributions to respective fields for all scholars, irrespective of their linguistic background.

Flowerdew's counterpoint: recognising linguistic challenges

Flowerdew (2019), in contrast to Hyland, urged the acknowledgment of EAL writers' linguistic challenges and disadvantages in academic publishing. He argued that the linguistic challenges encountered by EAL writers should not be downplayed as Hyland did. Despite their academic expertise, EAL authors often face additional challenges in manuscript preparation and peer review due to language barriers and potential biases, which may hinder comprehension and potentially affect publication decisions. Flowerdew also stressed that even though they manage to get published, it does not diminish the difficulties they face in writing for publication. As EAL writers have significantly contributed to international research, recognising and addressing the linguistic challenges they face is crucial to enhance global knowledge generation and dissemination in academia.

Towards a deeper understanding of academic language difficulties

The debate around academic language, particularly in relation to non-native English speakers, highlights the complexity of the issue. Having a balance in understanding the universal challenges for all writers (Hyland, 2016a; Hyland, 2016b) and recognising the unique barriers for EAL writers

(Flowerdew, 2019) appears to be important. Aizawa et al.'s (2020) study offered some insight that may support both Hyland and Flowerdew in some ways. The study examined the relationship between Japanese undergraduate students' English language proficiency and English language-related challenges they faced when studying business management in English at a Japanese university. It was found that proficiency is a significant predictor of challenges, however, it is not the only determinant for English Medium Instruction (EMI) readiness or admission, as even highly proficient students still experienced notable challenges. The study suggested that language proficiency alone is important, but it should not be the only factor considered to mitigate challenges. Hence, the study called for educational institutions to implement more comprehensive and tailored academic and language support systems for EMI students across all proficiency levels.

In conclusion, there has been a debate about the role of linguistic competence (or being non-native English speakers) in academic success within the context of EAP. On the one hand, both native and non-native English speakers face similar challenges beyond linguistic disadvantage; on the other hand, non-native speakers may face additional challenges due to their language barriers. It is likely that linguistic competence is crucial for any academic success, yet linguistic competence alone cannot guarantee success. In the context of UK higher education, however, a more in-depth exploration of the academic language difficulties faced by students from various linguistic backgrounds appears necessary, especially to investigate the similarities and differences in the academic language challenges they experience.

2.5 The relationships between English language proficiency, self-efficacy and academic performance

Self-efficacy refers to “judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (Bandura, 1982, p. 122). Academic self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs in their ability to successfully perform given academic tasks at designated levels (Ferla et al., 2009). Since there is insufficiency of relying on English language proficiency alone to predict or ensure academic success (Aizawa et al., 2020; Hyland, 2016a; Hyland, 2016b), self-efficacy emerges as another significant factor in academic performance (Doğan, 2015; Elias & MacDonald, 2007; Galyon et al., 2011; Gore, 2006; Schunk & Pajares, 2002).

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between students' academic self-efficacy and academic performances, revealing that academic self-efficacy is a significant predictor of students'

academic achievements (Doğan, 2015; Elias & MacDonald, 2007; Galyon et al., 2011; Gore, 2006; Schunk & Pajares, 2002). For example, Elias and MacDonald (2007) examined the ability of prior academic performance, proxy efficacy (students' confidence in their college faculty's ability to function well on their behalf), and academic self-efficacy to predict academic performance in higher education among 202 American university students. The results suggested that self-efficacy had a significant influence on predicting academic performance, even when controlling for past performance. Additionally, as a task becomes more familiar, efficacy beliefs take on more importance than past performance. Therefore, the authors advocated for academic strategies that enhance academic self-efficacy by providing students with opportunities to succeed through instructor support. Similarly, Galyon et al., (2011) explored the relationship between academic self-efficacy, engagement in class discussion and exam performance among 165 undergraduate students, revealing that students with high academic self-efficacy were more likely to engage in high class participation and perform well in exams compared to those with mid and low self-efficacy levels. However, this connection is most evident at high levels of self-efficacy and does not necessarily hold consistently across a continuous scale, highlighting the important role of having high self-efficacy for positive impacts on academic performance. In fact, Bandura (1997) also emphasised the crucial role of self-efficacy in academics, suggesting the combination of it and skills to be a better predictor of intellectual performance than skills alone.

Given the vital role of self-efficacy in academic performance and the fact that international students tend to have language barriers, it seems necessary to understand the relationship between students' language proficiency and self-efficacy. Wang et al. (2018) investigated the relationships among the self-efficacy in English abilities, self-efficacy in using English to learn, and academic self-efficacy among international EFL students at an American university. The study involved 216 participants, more than half of whom came from Asia. Employing a non-experimental quantitative methodology, the study revealed that students' confidence in social and communicative English abilities predicted their confidence in using English to learn, which in turn predicted their academic self-efficacy. Notably, using English to learn in academic contexts was distinctly different and more impactful than using it in social settings, highlighting the importance of using English to learn in achieving academic success. The insights emphasised the impact of English language proficiency on academic experiences and highlighted the significance of English language support, particularly academic English support for EFL students.

In summary, academic self-efficacy is a significant predictor of students' academic performances, with international EFL students' confidence in their English proficiency playing a vital role in their academic self-efficacy. Nonetheless, the differences in academic self-efficacy between home and international students, and how various groups of students' objective English language proficiency affects their self-efficacy in UK higher education, remain under-researched.

2.6 Summary, research gaps and research questions

Summary

As shown in the literature review, international students are important to UK society financially, academically and socially. In turn, these students can obtain cultural, linguistic, and academic benefits by studying in the UK. Nevertheless, international students tend to have lower academic performance compared with home students, with limited English language proficiency being an important factor. Despite being immersed in an English-speaking environment, improvement in their language skills is often subtle and gradual. Although many international students recognise language as a significant challenge, they might misestimate their language skills due to their frame of reference, as they often compare their proficiency with peers from different countries (Tomoschuk et al., 2018). Non-native English speakers may face unique challenges in academic language due to their linguistic skills, however, native English speaker also report difficulties with academic English skills. Apart from linguistic skills, students' academic performance is also influenced by their self-efficacy. For international students, their confidence in English language proficiency plays an important role in their academic self-efficacy.

Research gaps

Despite the insightful findings from existing literature, several research gaps have been identified, which this research intends to address.

First of all, the empirical studies that measured, compared and tracked English language proficiency in higher education often had an overrepresentation of Chinese students for international students (Knoch et al., 2015; Trenkic & Warmington, 2019). While European students were sometimes included and compared (MacKiewicz, 2022), those from neither China nor Europe were frequently overlooked. Therefore, this research intends to probe further and broader by having EFL participants

from regions outside of China, offering a comparative analysis with Chinese students and home students in their English language proficiency and improvement over time.

Secondly, while the existing research has explored the self-perceptions of international or EFL students regarding their experience and language confidence as a whole group (Andrade, 2006; Gu & Maley, 2008; Korzilius et al., 2007; Lin & Scherz, 2014; Rabia, 2016; Liu, 2009; Taylor & Ali, 2017; Wang, 2018; Zhang & Zhou, 2010), limited research has investigated the language-related perceptions of ENS students. Moreover, how students from different linguistic and domicile backgrounds perceive their language abilities in higher education, and how these perceptions might differ, remain under-researched. This study aims to address this research gap by exploring how various groups of students perceive their language abilities, how the perceptions differ between groups, and how their perceptions change over time.

Thirdly, some previous research of higher education has conflated two key variables: domiciles and language status. For example, some studies compared international EFL students with home ENS students (MacKiewicz, 2022; Trenkic & Warmington, 2019), which conflated domiciles (home students vs. international students) and language status (native English speaker vs. non-native English speakers). This conflation makes it difficult to determine whether certain difficulties are purely linguistic (related to language status or language proficiency) or system-specific (coming from unfamiliarity with the UK educational system). Moreover, some studies only focused on the international status of students, instead of both domiciles and language status, potentially leading to overgeneralisation (Andrade, 2006; Knoch et al., 2015; Li et al., 2010; Taylor & Ali, 2017). For example, international EFL students might encounter different language-related challenges compared to international ENS students (e.g., American students in the UK). Therefore, this study includes a separate participant group of international students whose first language is English, allowing for a clear distinction between domiciles and language status, helping to better understand which difficulties faced by international EFL students are linguistic and which are broader challenges common to all international students.

Fourthly, while previous studies often focused on either the measurement of students' objective language proficiency (Eddey & Baumann, 2011; Education First, 2022; MacKiewicz, 2022; Trenkic & Warmington, 2019) or their perceived language-related experiences (Gu & Maley, 2008; Lin & Scherz, 2014; Rabia, 2016; Taylor & Ali, 2017), little research has been conducted to integrate both aspects, making it hard to understand whether students are intuitively and accurately aware of their language

skills. This research, therefore, investigated various groups of students' English language proficiency using both validated tests and self-assessment. Given Chinese bilingual students' tendency to overestimate their language skills (Tomoschuk et al., 2018) and given their generally lower exposure to and usage of English compared to other international students (Bi, 2011; Björkman, 2016; Lindgren & Muñoz, 2013; Yang, 2006), it is possible that Chinese students in UK higher education may also perceive their language proficiency to be higher than what objective measures would suggest. This study aims to explore and test this assumption.

Fifthly, while the debate regarding academic language difficulties showed that all students, regardless of linguistic backgrounds, may encounter difficulties (Flowerdew, 2019; Hyland, 2016a; Hyland, 2016b), the details of how these difficulties differ across students with different language status remain underexplored. This study intends to address this by comparing various student groups' academic language difficulties in terms of both levels and areas of difficulty.

Lastly, while the impact of self-efficacy on academic performance has been well-researched (Doğan, 2015; Elias & MacDonald, 2007; Galyon et al., 2011; Gore, 2006; Schunk & Pajares, 2002), limited research has investigated how international students' English language proficiency influences their self-efficacy, especially when distinguishing between Chinese and non-Chinese EFL students. This research explores the self-efficacy of students with different linguistic backgrounds and examines the relationship between their English language proficiency and self-efficacy.

Research questions

Based on the literature review and identified research gaps, this study aims to answer the following three research questions:

Q1. How does **English language proficiency** differ between home and different groups of international students in UK higher education? How does this change over the course of one academic year?

Q2. What are students' **self-perceptions** regarding their English language proficiency, academic language difficulties and confidence in academic studies? How do these self-perceptions differ between home and different groups of international students, and how do they change over time?

Q3. What are the **relationships** between students' English language proficiency, self-perceptions of English language proficiency, academic language difficulties and confidence in studies?

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Methodology refers to the systematic and theoretical analysis of methods used in a field of study (Patel & Patel, 2019). It is important and the ability to align a suitable existing research approach with a specific research problem, or to develop an appropriate innovative methodological solution, is an essential research skill (Stanley, 1997; Walker, 1997).

This chapter presents the methodology of this study, which mainly includes research paradigms, research approaches, research design, data collection instruments and ethical considerations. The purpose of this study was to investigate university students' experiences and expectations in terms of their English language proficiency, academic language difficulties and self-efficacy in UK higher education. In order to explore these aspects, a mixed-methods research approach was used, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. Specifically, a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design (Creswell et al., 2003) was implemented, with the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data within the same study. Quantitative data were collected through on-line surveys, while qualitative data came from semi-structured follow-up interviews.

This chapter starts with a discussion of research paradigms, followed by research approaches and research design. After that, two data collection instruments, on-line survey questionnaires and semi-structured on-line interviews, are presented. In the end, ethical considerations, including general ethical issues, ethics related to consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and data storage and protection, are discussed. Given that this research comprises three separate studies, which are detailed in Chapters 4-6, this general methodology chapter excludes specific discussions on participants, study design and analysis approach for each study. Instead, these details are covered in their respective chapters (Chapters 4-6).

3.2 Research paradigm

The research paradigm that underpins my research is pragmatism, offering a balanced approach that includes elements from both positivism and interpretivism. Positivists in social science argue that

phenomena can be observed, measured and studied in a scientific way (Thomas, 2017), often producing data expressed in numerical scales (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). On the other hand, interpretivism focuses on people's perceptions and their understanding of the world (Thomas, 2017). While positivism mainly uses deductive reasoning, often seeking to confirm well-established theories through primary data, interpretivism typically relies on inductive reasoning with the aim to develop theories (Parvaiz et al., 2016). Pragmatism, however, can be used as a guide for both deductive and inductive research (Feilzer, 2009), supporting the use of mixed methods in social and behavioural research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1999). In the context of this study, pragmatism provides a suitable framework for investigating university students' experiences and expectations concerning their English language proficiency, academic language difficulties, and self-efficacy in UK higher education. This is due to its ability to examine both the objective and subjective aspects of the research topic, utilising the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Therefore, this flexible paradigm enables me to draw on the strengths of both positivist and interpretivist approaches, making it particularly appropriate for a mixed-methods study.

3.3 Research approaches

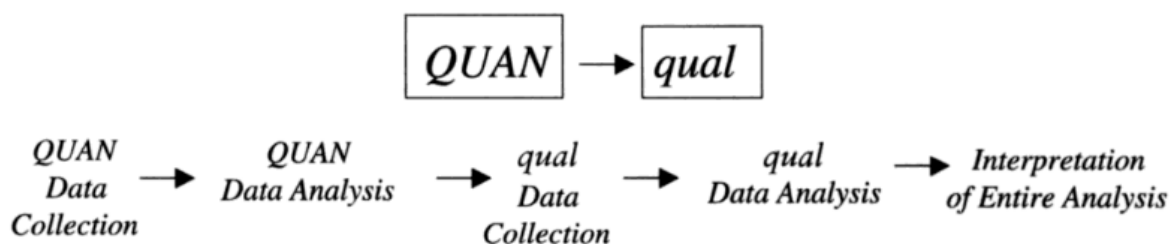
This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, as it is a way to seek convergence across qualitative and quantitative research in the social sciences (Creswell, 2003). As mentioned earlier, the aim of this study was to explore international and home students' academic experiences and expectations in terms of their English language proficiency, academic language difficulties and self-efficacy within the context of UK higher education. When a question at the macro-level (e.g., the group) as well as at the micro-level (e.g., individual) is explored, the research often demands that more than one research strategy be used in the same project (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). This study is no exception. Since it explored broader group differences in terms of their English language proficiency and confidence (a macro perspective), as well as students' specific academic experiences and language-related difficulties (a micro perspective), a mixed-methods approach fits the purpose of this study.

Combining approaches can help better understand the phenomenon of a study (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Such combined research enhances the robustness of social science and strengthens its claims (Gorard & Taylor, 2004). Thomas (2017) also advocated for mixed-methods approach, holding the view that different elements of research, related to different questions, will almost certainly need different methodological responses. Therefore, the combination of both quantitative and qualitative research provides a comprehensive understanding of research problems.

Indeed, relying solely on either quantitative or qualitative research can sometimes be limiting and incomplete to address a research question comprehensively. While quantitative research, such as surveys, provides a broad view, they have the potential for a variety of sources of error (Ponto, 2015). Thomas (2017) pointed out challenges with exclusively using quantitative tools like questionnaires: written items can sometimes be unspecific, and there is a risk of overlooking crucial details. On the other hand, qualitative methods, such as interviews, have their limitations too (Thomas, 2017). For instance, participants might hesitate to share or may modify their responses due to various reasons (Gubrium, 2012). Yet, adopting a mixed-method research design can help mitigate these issues. The anonymity of questionnaires tends to make respondents more honest, while interviews allow researchers to explore details and seek clarifications (Ponto, 2015). Thus, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research designs, using anonymous questionnaires and in-depth interviews, can address most of these research limitations and deliver more comprehensive insights.

The specific mixed-methods design that this study employed was sequential explanatory design, as articulated by Creswell et al. (2003). According to Creswell and colleagues (2003), the process of this design consists of two phases: the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data within one study (see Figure 3.1). The strength of this design lies in its structure. Initially, quantitative data offers a general understanding of the research issue, and subsequently, the qualitative data refine and explain it by exploring participants' perspectives and insights in more depth (Ivankova et al., 2006). This design's main benefits are its straightforwardness and opportunities for the exploration of the quantitative findings in more detail (Ivankova et al., 2006).

Figure 3.1
Steps of a Sequential Explanatory Design



Note. From Creswell, J. W., Plano Clark, V. L., Gutmann, M. L., & Hanson, W. E. (2003). Advanced mixed methods research designs. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook on mixed methods in the behavioral & social sciences* (pp. 209–240). CA: SAGE.

This study began by gathering quantitative data through a large-scale survey. This enabled me to explore and compare the language-related academic experiences of different student groups, offering a wide-ranging perspective. Following an initial analysis, an interview study was designed to collect qualitative data. This captured detailed personal perceptions for a richer understanding. In addition, a follow-up survey was conducted, tracking a subset of students from the initial survey to observe any changes over time. Together, these three study phases offer a comprehensive insight into the language-related academic experiences and expectations of diverse student groups.

3.4 Research design

This research employed a combination of both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic. While both research designs make use of data from large numbers of individuals or groups, they are different in several ways (Thomas, 2017). Cross-sectional studies focus on capturing data from various groups at one specific point, mainly aiming to understand different stages or to compare group differences (Coolican, 2017). However, catching a frozen moment in time may be ineffective for studying changes over time (Cohen et al., 2007), as cross-sectional studies cannot observe changes within the same individuals (Coolican, 2017). That is where longitudinal studies come in handy. They track the same sample over a duration, often employing the same methods, offering insights into how specific factors evolve over time (Payne & Payne, 2004). Since I aimed to explore different groups of university students' academic experiences as well as how their language proficiency and perceptions change over time, the design combining both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies was essential. It enabled comparisons of students from different linguistic and domicile backgrounds at a specific moment (cross-sectional), while also tracking the changes in expectations and experiences within the same group over time (longitudinal).

In the cross-sectional study, data were gathered from university students across the UK, including both undergraduate and postgraduate students. The study compared how students' English language proficiency, perceived academic English difficulties and confidence in studies differ based on their language status and domicile. Specifically, a large-scale survey involving 1163 participants was

conducted, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with 18 of them (see Chapter 4 for details of the survey study and Chapter 6 for the interview study).

Following the cross-sectional data collection, a subset of the initial survey participants was selected for the longitudinal study. This study explored how students' English language proficiency, perceived academic English difficulties and confidence change after one academic year. On a smaller scale, it focused on postgraduate (taught) students from a single university who had participated in the initial cross-sectional survey. Specifically, fifty-nine participants from the University of York took part in the initial survey as well as a follow-up survey (see Chapter 5 for details on the longitudinal study). The two points of this data collection are referred to as Time 1 (T1) and Time 2 (T2).

3.5 Data collection instruments

3.5.1 On-line survey questionnaires

For quantitative data collection, on-line survey questionnaires were used.

Questionnaires offer a straightforward method to gather information from a large number of people efficiently (Mosdell & Davies, 2006). For this study, an on-line survey software called Qualtrics was used to design my questionnaires and collect quantitative data. Using on-line surveys not only accelerates response times (Sue & Ritter, 2011) but also simplifies data analysis through software tools (Selm & Jankowski, 2006). Since my university provides the license for Qualtrics, I had no difficulties using it for this research. Given that the data collection took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, on-line surveys were particularly useful for efficient distribution and data gathering.

As mentioned earlier, my quantitative data collection had two phases. The first phase involved distributing an initial survey as part of the cross-sectional study. In the second phase, a follow-up survey was released for the longitudinal study. Both surveys had largely similar questions, as the longitudinal analysis aimed to examine if participants' English language proficiency and language-related academic perceptions changed over time.

The initial survey was designed carefully, and the follow-up survey had similar questions with slight modifications (see Section 4.3 for initial survey design and rationale; see Appendix A for initial survey questions; see Appendix B for follow-up survey questions). To refine the survey design and identify

potential problems, two pilot studies were carried out and improvements were made based on the feedback received (see Section 4.4 for the pilot study of the initial survey). Since additional guidance and approval from professionals such as supervisors are essential (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2004), both surveys were thoroughly reviewed and approved by my supervisor. Any modifications were discussed and finalised in consultation with her.

3.5.2 Semi-structured on-line interviews

For qualitative data collection, semi-structured on-line interviews were used.

Interviews are a powerful method for obtaining information directly from individuals (Vonk et al., 2007). Conducting interviews on-line, through platforms like Zoom, offers participants advantages such as convenience, comfort, and cost savings, while also enabling researchers to potentially increase the number of participants (Olliffe et al., 2021). In order to gain sufficient interview data conveniently and efficiently during the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted all interviews on-line. The semi-structured nature of the interviews combined the advantages of a planned set of questions with the flexibility of unstructured discussions, allowing for dynamic interaction with the participants (Salmons, 2014). While I mostly used the questions I had prepared, I also added other questions based on the interviewees' answers whenever necessary to find out more details. At the end of each interview, each participant was given a chance to share any additional thoughts as they wish regarding the interview topic (see Section 6.3.1 for interview design and rationale; see Appendix C for interview questions).

Interviews were designed and conducted after the preliminary analysis of the initial survey, which allowed me to explore unexpected and particularly interesting phenomena in more depth during interviews. For example, the unexpectedly high level of academic language difficulties reported by UK home students in the initial survey was considered when designing interview questions, and specific areas they found difficult were explored during the interviews. The interview process was refined through a two-phase pilot study (see Section 6.4). Based on feedback from the pilot, certain adjustments were made. Both my supervisor and my Thesis Advisory Panel (TAP) member also reviewed and approved the interview design and its questions, ensuring their relevance and appropriateness.

3.6 Ethical considerations

3.6.1 Ethical issues

Ethics are principles of research conduct concerning what is right and wrong, and maintaining ethical standards in any research is important (Thomas, 2017). Therefore, I considered the ethical issues carefully for this research. Prior to data collection, an ethics form was submitted to the Ethics Committee of the Department of Education in the University of York in order to get clearance, and ethics approval for the study was obtained.

3.6.2 Consent, anonymity and confidentiality

Informed consent is widely regarded as a key strand of ethical research practice across the social sciences (Heath et al., 2009). Most ethical research guidelines require all participants to agree to the research before it begins, ensuring that their consent is informed and voluntary (Israel & Hay, 2006). Before taking part in the research, all participants provided their formal approval via consent forms.

Initial survey study:

Before beginning the survey, participants answered pre-survey questions to filter out those ineligible for the study. Eligible participants were then presented with information sheets and consent forms (see Appendix D). The information sheets illustrated details of this research including what the research was about, what their participation would entail, how their personal information and the data would be stored and used, and how to raise concerns. For example, participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw at any stage without providing a reason before the data were fully anonymised. They had to read the information sheet as well as consent form before progressing further into the survey. Following that, they were required to tick a compulsory box which acted as their consent (see Figure 3.2 below for a screenshot of the consent form).

Figure 3.2

Sample Screenshot of the Initial Survey's Consent Form

Title of the study: Expectations and experiences of international and home students at UK universities

I confirm that I was given information about this study and I understand what my participations will involve.

I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and I am happy to take part.

I understand that any information about me will be held confidentially in accordance with the University regulations and GDPR.

Please tick 'YES' below only if you agree with all of the above statements and wish to proceed with the study.

YES

Participants' privacy was protected carefully. A primary strategy to maintain confidentiality is to remove any details from the data that could make participants easily traceable and identifiable (Punch, 2014). Identifiable information, such as email addresses, were stored separately from survey responses and were destroyed within 12 months after data collection. Only data that had been fully anonymised was used in this thesis, presentations, research reports, project summaries or similar. Throughout the research, only my supervisor and I could access the on-line survey on Qualtrics.

Follow-up survey study:

Similar to the initial survey, participants were presented with an information sheet and a consent form at the start of the survey (see Appendix E). This information sheet, similar to the initial survey's, provided details on the research purpose, procedure, and data storage and usage plans. Participants needed to read and sign the consent form before proceeding with the survey. All personal details that could identify participants were kept separate from their survey responses and were removed after the study's completion. Only data that had been fully anonymised was used in this thesis, any presentations and reports. Confidentiality was also followed strictly in this study. Access to the on-line survey on Qualtrics was restricted to my supervisor and me.

Interview study:

I reached out only to those participants who had voluntarily expressed interest in participating in the interviews. Once potential interviewees made their appointments using the Doodle poll, which was linked in the invitation email, they found an information sheet on the Doodle platform (see Appendix F). The same information sheet was also attached in the booking confirmation email, which was sent as a reminder one day before the interviews. This sheet outlined the interview's purpose, data collection methods, and data storage and usage plans. For example, it informed interviewees that the interviews would be audio-recorded, but personal details would be removed. Before starting the interviews, I verbally reiterated ethical considerations. For example, I encouraged interviewees to ask any questions they might have, and I emphasised that they were not obligated to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with. After that, I confirmed participants' verbal consent and then asked them to complete a digital consent form on-line (see Appendix G). All interviewees signed this form prior to the interviews.

After collecting the data, I anonymised all interviewees by assigning them unique codes reflecting their language background and domicile (e.g., EFL_China_1; ENS_USA_2). I deleted their real names and any other identifiable information such as contact details. These pseudonym codes were the only identifiers used throughout the research.

3.6.3 Data storage and protection

The survey and interview data were stored on my password-protected computer. I was the only one who had access to them on the computer. The interview data were also stored in my university filestore (a function of my university account) and on the University Google Drive account. Some data were shared with my supervisor and my TAP member for discussion and feedback purposes. Since consent and data collection were both achieved on-line, there were no paper materials. After the completion of the research, the original audio recordings of interviews and any data that could potentially identify individuals were destroyed.

Having discussed the general methodology of this study, the next three chapters will discuss the three studies in this research, each including its own introduction, participants, study design, data collection procedures, analysis approach, challenges, results, discussions and conclusion.

CHAPTER 4 STUDY ONE: INITIAL SURVEY STUDY

4.1 Introduction

This initial survey study investigated students' English language proficiency, perceived academic language difficulties and self-efficacy at the beginning of an academic year. It also examined the differences among home and different groups of international students. In addition to this initial survey, a follow-up survey was conducted at the end of the academic year to examine potential changes, with the analysis presented in Chapter 5.

The research questions for this initial survey study were:

Q1. How do students' English language proficiency and self-perceptions regarding their language and learning differ between home and different groups of international students in UK higher education?

Q2. How do different groups of students experience their learning, particularly in terms of language-related learning experiences?

This chapter presents a cross-sectional large-scale survey study, collecting data from university students across the UK at the beginning of the academic year 2020.

4.2 Participants

4.2.1 Criteria and sampling strategy

To be eligible for the study, participants had to meet two criteria:

1. Being enrolled in a UK university
2. Being registered as an undergraduate student or master's student in a taught programme

To obtain data from a sample that would be representative of the population (home and international university students in the UK), this study mainly used purposive sampling, along with convenience sampling and snowball sampling.

Purposive sampling involves selecting participants who meet specific criteria for the study (Gideon, 2012). In this case, UK universities with both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes were

targeted for survey distribution. In order to maximise responses from international students, I focused the distribution on the 30 universities with the highest number of non-UK students according to HESA in the 2018-2019 academic year (HESA, 2021). As a result, these 30 UK universities were approached on-line for survey circulation (see Appendix H for the list of universities).

Furthermore, the convenience sampling technique was employed. Due to my direct access to three university campuses (University of York, York St John University, University of Liverpool), I disseminated survey invitation posters across the campuses. Given my easy on-line access to contact details for my own university's departments and societies, I sent out survey distribution requests to all departments and various student organisations at University of York. The survey was also shared within my accessible networks. Additionally, the snowball sampling technique was used, as all contacts and participants reached by email were encouraged to share the survey link with other UK university students in their networks, potentially increasing the sample size.

4.2.2 Description of participants

The survey elicited 1835 responses, of which 1163 met the study inclusion criteria and provided sufficient information for analyses. The remaining 672 responses were excluded for various reasons: 128 respondents did not fit the study's scope (15 were non-university students, 65 were non-UK university students, 10 were doctoral students, 17 were research master's students, and 21 were non-native English speakers with UK domicile). Additionally, 544 participants stopped survey early and did not complete the domicile section, making it impossible to categorise them into any student group.

Among the 1163 participants included in the analyses, 623 were home students, domiciled in the UK with English as their first language (ENS_UK). The remaining 540 were international students, who were from various regions outside the UK. Out of these international students, 117 were native English speakers (ENS_other), while 423 were non-native English speakers. Among the 117 international ENS students, 36 different domiciles were reported, with the most represented domiciles being the USA ($N = 29$) and Hong Kong ($N = 10$).

The largest group within the non-native English speakers was the 153 students from China (EFL_China), who reported their first language to be Chinese or its variants such as Mandarin Chinese or Cantonese Chinese. The remaining 270 students came from 68 different domiciles (EFL_other).

Among them, the largest number came from Poland ($N = 21$), with most domiciles represented by fewer than 10 students.

A detailed description of the domiciles and first languages of EFL_China, EFL_other and ENS_other groups is presented in Appendix I.

Therefore, this study mainly compared and discussed the following four groups of students:

Group 1: EFL_China

- Chinese EFL Students: International students from China with English as a foreign language.

Group 2: EFL_other

- Non-Chinese EFL Students: International students with English as a foreign language from the rest of the world.

Group 3: ENS_UK

- UK ENS Students: British domiciled students who are native English speakers.

Group 4: ENS_other

- International ENS Students: International students who are native English speakers.

Table 4.1

Demographic and Background Characteristics of Survey Participants by Group

Group	N	Gender N (%)	Age M (SD)	Programme N (%)	Duration staying in the UK M (SD)	Socio- economic status M (SD)	Previous academic success M (SD)
EFL_China	153	M = 43 (28.10%) F = 101 (66.01%) Other = 0 (0%) NI = 9 (5.88%)	22.46 (2.56)	UG = 58 (37.91%) PGT = 95 (62.09%)	0.96 (1.44)	3.42 (1.05)	3.75 (1.18)
EFL_other	270	M = 81 (30.00%) F = 173 (64.07%) Other = 3 (1.11%) NI = 13 (4.81%)	21.91 (4.45)	UG = 188 (69.63%) PGT = 82 (30.37%)	1.79 (2.50)	3.66 (1.19)	3.85 (1.34)

ENS_UK	623	M = 184 (29.53%)	20.63 (4.37)	UG = 530 (85.07%)	20.39 (4.73)	3.41 (1.14)	3.78 (1.24)
		F = 425 (68.22%)		PGT = 93 (14.93%)			
		Other = 4 (0.64%)					
		NI = 10 (1.61%)					
ENS_other	117	M = 29 (24.79%)	22.09 (5.08)	UG = 73 (62.39%)	2.64 (4.21)	3.81 (1.06)	4.05 (1.19)
		F = 87 (74.36%)		PGT = 44 (37.61%)			
		Other = 0 (0%)					
		NI = 1 (0.85%)					

Note. M: male, F: female, NI: No information, UG: undergraduate, PGT: postgraduate taught; “Duration staying in the UK” is presented in years; “Socio-economic status” is drawn from reported maternal education level on a scale from 1 to 5: 1 - some or no secondary education, 2 - secondary school education, 3 - post-secondary education with vocational training, 4 - university degree, 5 - post-graduate degree or professional education; “Previous academic success” was self-rated based on participants’ perceived past academic success relative to their classmates, mapped onto a six-point scale: 6 - top 5%, 5 - top 10%, 4 - top 25%, 3 - top 50%, 2 - top 75%, 1 - other.

As for gender distribution, a total of 786 participants identified as female, 337 as male, 7 as other, 12 chose not to disclose their gender, and 21 did not complete the survey up to the gender question. Table 4.1 provides detailed demographic information on the survey participants. Participants who either did not respond to the gender question or preferred not to disclose are grouped together under “NI (No information)” in the table. To determine whether the proportion of gender was equal between male and female students, chi-square goodness of fit tests were conducted. The results indicated that the number of female students significantly outnumbered male students overall ($\chi^2(1, N = 1123) = 179.52, p < .001$) as well as within each group (EFL_China: $\chi^2(1, N = 144) = 23.36, p < .001$; EFL_other: $\chi^2(1, N = 254) = 33.32, p < .001$; ENS_UK: $\chi^2(1, N = 609) = 95.37, p < .001$; ENS_other: $\chi^2(1, N = 116) = 29.00, p < .001$). The results suggest that female students were predominant compared with male students within the sample among all groups.

The participants’ ages ranged from 17 to 55, with a mean age of 21.30 ($SD = 4.34$). As shown in Table 4.1, Chinese EFL students reported the highest average age, whereas UK ENS students had the lowest. To determine if mean ages were significantly different across the four student groups, a one-way ANOVA test and subsequent post hoc test were conducted. The One-way ANOVA result revealed a significant difference ($F(3, 1137) = 11.60, p < .001$, with a small effect size, $\omega^2 = .01$). Due to unequal variances indicated by Levene’s test for equality of variance ($p < .001$) and unequal group sizes, a

Games-Howell post hoc test was performed. The result indicated UK ENS students were significantly younger than all other groups (ENS_UK and EFL_China: $p < .001$, $g = 0.45$; ENS_UK and EFL_other: $p < .001$, $g = 0.29$; ENS_UK and ENS_other: $p = .023$, $g = 0.33$). No further significant age differences were observed among the groups. The lowest mean age of UK participants may be attributable to the highest proportion of undergraduate students (85.07%), who tend to be younger than postgraduate students. Conversely, the highest mean age reported among Chinese EFL students, albeit not significantly higher than EFL_other and ENS_other, could be in some ways explained by their largest proportion of postgraduate students (62.09%).

Out of the total 1163 participants, 849 were undergraduate students while 314 were postgraduate taught students. Among the 849 undergraduates, 403 were newly enrolled first-year students, while 446 were continuing students who were in their second, third or fourth year of study (see Appendix J for a detailed description and statistical comparison for new and continuing undergraduate students). Table 4.1 provides a detailed programme distribution in each group. It shows that apart from the Chinese EFL student group, all other groups had a higher proportion of students enrolled in undergraduate programmes compared to postgraduate programmes. To further assess whether the distribution between undergraduate and postgraduate programmes was equal, chi-square goodness of fit tests were conducted. The results revealed that undergraduate students significantly outnumbered postgraduate students overall ($\chi^2(1, N = 1163) = 246.11$, $p < .001$). Within each group, the differences were also significant. While EFL_China group suggested postgraduate students significantly outnumbered undergraduate students $\chi^2(1, N = 153) = 8.95$, $p = .003$, other three groups indicated undergraduate students significantly outnumbered postgraduate students (EFL_other: $\chi^2(1, N = 270) = 41.62$, $p < .001$; ENS_UK: $\chi^2(1, N = 623) = 306.53$, $p < .001$; ENS_other $\chi^2(1, N = 117) = 7.19$, $p = .007$). The results suggested that undergraduates, rather than postgraduates, dominated the sample across almost all groups, except in the Chinese EFL group where postgraduates were predominant. Within undergraduates, however, the number of new students compared to continuing students showed almost no difference (see Appendix J).

In terms of the duration of stay in the UK, UK home students, understandably, had notably longer stays compared to other groups (see Table 4.1). Among international student groups, international ENS students had the longest stays while Chinese EFL students had the shortest. A one-way ANOVA test and a subsequent post hoc test were conducted to examine differences among the international groups. The ANOVA confirmed a significant difference ($F(2, 537) = 12.50$, $p < .001$, with a small effect size, $\omega^2 = .02$). Considering the unequal variances indicated by Levene's test for equality of variance

($p < .001$) and unequal group sizes, a Games-Howell post hoc test was performed. The results confirmed that Chinese EFL students had the shortest stays (EFL_other and EFL_China: $p < .001$, $g = 0.38$; ENS_other and EFL_China: $p < .001$, $g = 0.56$), however, non-Chinese EFL students and international ENS students showed no difference in their duration of stay ($p = .112$, $g = 0.27$).

With regard to socio-economic status, Table 4.1 shows that international ENS students had the highest average socio-economic status while UK ENS students had the lowest. An analysis of these differences was conducted using one-way ANOVA test, revealing a significant difference among the groups, $F(3, 1106) = 5.96$, $p < .001$, with a small effect size, $\omega^2 = .004$. Since the assumption of homogeneity of variances was violated ($p = .032$) and sample sizes were unequal across groups, a post-hoc Games-Howell test was performed for pairwise comparisons. The results suggested that the socio-economic status of international ENS students was significantly higher than both Chinese EFL students ($p = .022$, $g = 0.37$) and UK ENS students ($p = .002$, $g = 0.36$). Moreover, the socio-economic status of non-Chinese EFL students was also significantly higher than UK ENS students ($p = .026$, $g = 0.22$). No other significant differences were observed. It is surprising that home students had lower SES than most international students. One possible factor could be the high cost of international tuition fees (Marginson, 2018), which means only those from higher socio-economic backgrounds in their home countries can afford to study abroad. In comparison, home students usually pay lower tuition fees with the opportunity to receive government loans. Moreover, the UK government has made efforts to provide extra financial help for students with disadvantaged backgrounds, which mainly targets UK home students (Home office, 2024). This may contribute to a higher proportion of UK students coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds compared to international students.

As for previous academic success, Table 4.1 shows that international ENS students reported the highest level of past academic success among all groups, while Chinese EFL students reported the lowest. To assess the statistical differences in these perceptions across groups, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted, revealing no difference among groups, $F(3, 1139) = 1.68$, $p = .171$, $\omega^2 = .001$. Despite the lack of overall significance in the ANOVA, a Hochberg's GT2 post hoc test was conducted due to unequal sample sizes and homogeneity of variance ($p = .075$). The results confirmed the ANOVA results and found no significant differences in any pairwise group comparisons. The results suggested that perceived previous academic achievement did not differ significantly among the various groups.

Table 4.2 shows the distribution of participants' majors. To easily present diverse majors reported, participants' majors have been classified into five broad categories, as proposed by Cho and Bridgeman (2012). Among these categories, sciences and engineering was the most frequently reported major across all groups, followed by social sciences (for EFL_China, EFL_other and ENS_other) or humanities and arts (for ENS_UK). Some participants reported majors that could be classified under two categories (e.g., Physics and Philosophy) and they were grouped as "OT (Other)". Detailed information on participants' specific reported majors and their classification into these categories is presented in Appendix K.

Table 4.2

Distribution of Major among Survey Participants

Group	EFL_China	EFL_other	ENS_UK	ENS_other
N	153	270	623	117
	BU = 21 (13.73%)	BU = 13 (4.81%)	BU = 9 (1.44%)	BU = 5 (4.27%)
	HA = 17 (11.11%)	HA = 47 (17.41%)	HA = 154 (24.72%)	HA = 23 (19.66%)
Major	SE = 52 (33.99%)	SE = 129 (47.78%)	SE = 289 (46.39%)	SE = 48 (41.03%)
N (%)	SS = 41 (26.80%)	SS = 52 (19.26%)	SS = 147 (23.60%)	SS = 35 (29.91%)
	OT = 7 (4.58%)	OT = 16 (5.93%)	OT = 23 (3.69%)	OT = 6 (5.13%)
	NI = 15 (9.%)	NI = 13 (4.81%)	NI = 1 (0.16%)	NI = 0 (0.00%)

Note. BU: business, HA: humanities and arts, SE: sciences and engineering, SS: social sciences, OT: other, NI: No information.

Considering the atypical year marked by COVID-19 restrictions, participants were asked how they experienced their teaching and learning (see Table 4.3 for the distribution of mode of studying among different groups of students). A large majority Chinese participants (55.56%) reported to have entirely on-line studies. In contrast, most participants from other groups had a mix of on-line and on-campus learning, with on-line being the primary mode. The different studying modes among different groups reflects the fact that it was probably more difficult for some people to travel than others. Chinese participants' mode of studying may be attribute to the strict restrictions they faced, resulting in most of their learning to be completely on-line. The fact that most participants experienced their studies primarily or entirely on-line indicates that the sample in this study was representative of the atypical circumstances.

Table 4.3

Distribution of Mode of Studying among Survey Participants

Group	EFL_China	EFL_other	ENS_UK	ENS_other
N	153	270	623	117
Mode of studying	Everything on-line = 85 (55.56%)	Everything on-line = 110 (40.74%)	Everything on-line = 187 (30.02%)	Everything on-line = 39 (33.33%)
	Mostly on-line with some on campus = 47 (30.72%)	Mostly on-line with some on campus = 124 (45.93%)	Mostly on-line with some on campus = 370 (59.39%)	Mostly on-line with some on campus = 62 (52.99%)
	Half on-line, half on campus= 8 (5.23%)	Half on-line, half on campus = 18 (6.67%)	Half on-line, half on campus = 41 (6.58%)	Half on-line, half on campus = 13 (11.11%)
N (%)	Mostly on campus with some on-line = 4 (2.61%)	Mostly on campus with some on-line = 1 (0.37%)	Mostly on campus with some on-line = 6 (0.96%)	Mostly on campus with some on-line = 2 (1.71%)
	Everything on campus = 2 (1.31%)	Everything on campus = 0 (0.00%)	Everything on campus = 1 (0.16%)	Everything on campus = 0 (0.00%)
	Other = 0 (0.00%)	Other = 5 (1.85%)	Other = 17 (2.73%)	Other = 1 (0.85%)
	No information = 7 (4.58%)	No information = 12 (4.44%)	No information = 1 (0.16%)	No information = 0 (0.00%)

Furthermore, EFL groups were compared on dimensions that were only relevant to these populations. These are summarised in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

English Language Background of EFL Participants

Group	Age started studying English <i>M (SD)</i>	English learning duration <i>M (SD)</i>	English-speaking countries duration <i>M (SD)</i>	English levels on enrolment <i>M (SD)</i>	Pre-sessional courses attendance (%)	Education in English experience (%)
EFL_China	7.88 (3.70)	14.62 (4.62)	1.23 (2.02)	3.80 (1.32)	45.64%	48.65%
EFL_other	7.31 (3.58)	14.58 (5.00)	2.06 (2.79)	5.30 (1.13)	6.49%	42.51%

Note. “English learning duration” represents the number of years participants have learned English; “English-speaking countries duration” represents the total number of years participants have stayed in any English-speaking countries; “English levels on enrolment” are based on various reported English scores, which are converted to Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels and then represented on a seven-point scale: 1- B1, 2- B1/B2, 3 - B2, 4 - B2/C1, 5 - C1, 6 - C1/C2, 7 - C2 (Detailed conversion tables for the corresponding CEFR levels are presented in Appendix L). “Pre-sessional courses attendance” and “education in English experience” respectively represent the percentages of participants who have attended pre-sessional courses and have previously received education where every subject was taught in English.

To have general ideas of differences among the first four measures between the two EFL groups, the independent *t*-test was used to compare the means. Levene’s test was used to assess the equality of variances between the groups, and the results showed that the assumption of equal variances was met in age started studying English ($p = .781$), whereas the assumption of equal variances was not met in English learning duration ($p = .024$), English-speaking countries duration ($p = .002$) and English levels on enrolment ($p = .003$). Accordingly, results from the *t*-test indicated that there was no significant difference in age started studying English ($t(418) = 1.56, p = .060, g = 0.16$) and English learning duration ($t(321.591) = 0.081, p = .935, g = 0.01$) between the two EFL groups. However, Chinese EFL students had a significantly shorter length of stay in English-speaking countries compared to other EFL students ($t(391.835) = -3.50, p < .001, g = -0.33$) and their English levels on enrolment was significantly lower than other EFL students ($t(288.098) = -11.09, p < .001, g = -1.24$). This indicates that although Chinese EFL students did not differ in terms of the age at which they started learning English or the duration of their English learning compared with non-Chinese EFL students, they had less immersion in an English-speaking environment and lower language proficiency when enrolling in their studies. The possible reasons for the low English language proficiency of Chinese students upon arrival include limited exposure to English, the distinct linguistic differences between Chinese and English, and the prevalent test-preparation industry in

China, which produces inflated proficiency scores. These factors are discussed in detail in Section 7.2.1.

In terms of pre-sessional courses attendance and education in English experience, Table 4.4 shows that a notably higher percentage of Chinese EFL students attended pre-sessional courses (45.64%) compared to other EFL students (6.49%), whereas a slightly higher percentage of Chinese EFL students (48.65%) had educational experience where all subjects were taught in English compared to other EFL students (42.51%). To assess the differences between the two EFL groups in terms of these two variables, chi-square tests of independence were conducted. The tests revealed a significant association between group and pre-sessional course attendance ($\chi^2 (1, N = 411) = 88.74, p < .001$). Specifically, Chinese EFL students were more likely to attend pre-sessional courses compared to other EFL students. However, no significant association was found between group and education in English experience ($\chi^2 (1, N = 355) = 1.31, p = .252$). Given the lower English language proficiency of Chinese EFL students upon enrolment, it is likely that they had difficulty in meeting the language requirements for unconditional entry to universities, resulting in a higher demand for pre-sessional courses.

4.3 Survey design and rationale

A web-based survey software called Qualtrics was used to design the on-line survey and collect the data. Compared with traditional survey research methods, internet-based survey research provides easier access to groups and individuals (Wright, 2005). A complete list of survey questions is provided in Appendix A.

Before beginning the survey, participants were asked a few pre-survey questions (see Section 1 of Appendix A) and provided with an information sheet and a consent form (see Appendix D). These initial questions were used to screen out ineligible participants (e.g., students enrolled in universities outside the UK) and to direct participants to the correct version of the survey (e.g., only EFL students were presented with additional questions about their English learning experiences).

The main survey questions were designed to cover five primary sections, each focusing on a specific outcome measure: self-rated English proficiency, vocabulary knowledge, language-related academic difficulty, self-efficacy, and demographic information.

The first section asked students to self-assess their own English skills in the areas of speaking, reading, writing, and listening. The second section evaluated students' English language proficiency via a vocabulary test. The third section examined language-related difficulties experienced in their studies. The fourth section gathered data on students' confidence levels in their studies, and the final section collected participants' demographic information, as well as their linguistic and educational backgrounds. The scaled questions in the first four sections were mandatory, requiring participants to select from scales without the option to skip. Nonetheless, for certain questions, an "N/A" option was made available for those who hadn't encountered particular learning experiences. The following subsections will elaborate on each survey measure and provide the rationale behind it.

4.3.1 Self-rated English proficiency

The first section of the survey asked the participants to self-rate their speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills in English on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost none) to 7 (exceptionally good).

Figure 4.1
Screenshot of the Self-rated English Proficiency Section

Your English skills

On a scale from 1 to 7, how would you rate your English skills?

1 - Almost none
7 - Exceptionally good

For example, if you think your English speaking skill is **exceptionally good**, please choose '7' for the item 'Speaking'.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Speaking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Listening	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

When designing the questions, Tomoschuk et al.'s (2018) study was adopted with minor adjustments. Instead of labelling "7" as "like a native speaker", this survey rephrased it to "exceptionally good" to make the questions applicable for both EFL students and ENS students.

In terms of scoring, each participant's response directly corresponded to their selection on the scale. For example, if a participant selected "1", their score for that question was 1, and if they selected "7", their score was 7. Thus, a higher score reflected a higher self-rated English proficiency. In the analysis, the average across the four responses for each participant was calculated and used as an index of self-rated English proficiency (with detailed skill-specific analysis presented in Appendix M). Consequently, the maximum possible score for each question and average score was 7 and the minimum was 1.

4.3.2 Vocabulary knowledge

Vocabulary knowledge is often used as a proxy for language proficiency (Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010; Mohd Nasir et al., 2017; Uchihara & Saito, 2019; Zareva et al, 2005), thus this section measured participants' vocabulary knowledge as an indication of their English proficiency. Dörnyei (2003) noted that people might not always give true answers about themselves in surveys mostly due to social desirability or prestige bias. Even when participants do not intend to provide untrue answers, their self-reports may still be biased. A meta-analysis of second language self-assessment studies conducted by Ross (1998) revealed a wide variation in accuracy, highlighting the need for caution when using self-reported measures in evaluating language skills. Therefore, in addition to self-ratings (a subjective measure) in the last section, a validated measure of English proficiency was also employed.

English vocabulary knowledge was assessed using a validated vocabulary test called Lexical Test for Advanced Learners of English (LexTALE), which was developed and validated by Lemhöfer and Broersma (2012). The test instructions and question examples are provided in Section 3 of Appendix A.

The LexTALE consists of 60 items (40 words and 20 non-words), requiring participants to decide for each whether it is an existing English word or not. The test belongs to the Yes/No formatted vocabulary tests (Ferré & Brysbaert, 2017; Lemhöfer and Broersma, 2012), which offers the benefits of simplicity and cost-effectiveness in assessing vocabulary knowledge (Read, 2007) as well as its speed and ease of administration and scoring (Masrai & Milton, 2017; Mochida & Harrington, 2006). The Yes/No format can also be a viable alternative to tests like the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) (Mochida & Harrington, 2006), which is a useful measurement tool for second language learners'

vocabulary size (Li & Macgregor, 2010). Moreover, it can be an indicator of students' overall language proficiency (Meara and Buxton, 1987), and a predictor of subsequent academic performance (Masrai & Milton, 2017; Roche & Harrington, 2013).

In Lemhöfer and Broersma's (2012) large-scale study, the LexTALE was evaluated as a useful and valid measure of English vocabulary knowledge, and an indicator of general English proficiency which is generally superior to self-ratings as a predictor. A recent study also suggested that the LexTALE scores correlated significantly with a global measure of English proficiency (i.e., TOEFL ITP®) (Tatsuya et al., 2020). Due to its convenience and high efficiency, the whole vocabulary test with all the items was adopted with the addition of time limitation (see the following paragraph for a detailed explanation). The results of the LexTALE test enabled group comparisons on an objective measure of English proficiency.

The full LexTALE test, including 3 practice items and 60 test items, was incorporated in the survey. To facilitate a smooth progression through the survey and to minimise the likelihood of using external help in completing the test, a time limit of 7 seconds was set for each test item. If a participant failed to provide a response within that time, the next item was presented automatically, and the unanswered item was marked as incorrect. The decision to use a 7-second limit was based on a combination of previous research experience and mathematical theory. In Lemhöfer and Broersma's (2011) study, the LexTALE test took an average of 3.5 minutes to complete with a standard deviation of 1.15 minutes (SD). Mathematically, in a normal distribution, 68% of values are less than one standard deviation (1SD) away from the mean value, 95% of values are less than two standard deviations (2SD) away from the mean value, and 99% of values are less than three standard deviations (3SD) away from the mean value. It means that 68% of responses are likely to lie within 1SD of the mean, 95% in 2SD of the mean and 99% in 3SD of the mean. Therefore, in order to find the upper limit of time for 99% of the population, mean + 3SD, the upper limit of time spent on the test was calculated to be $3.5 + (1.15) \times 3 = 6.95$ minutes or 417 seconds, resulting in a maximum time of 6.62 seconds per question ($417/63 = 6.62$). As a result, 7 seconds per question was deemed sufficient for participants, and the pilot study confirmed this (see Section 4.4 for details). Introducing a time limitation was deemed acceptable and sensible since this study aimed to compare the generated data within itself (i.e., group comparisons within the study, rather than against other iterations of the LexTALE test). The scoring method adhered to Lemhöfer and Broersma's (2012) instruction, providing a standardised score out of 100%: $((\text{number of words correct}/40 \times 100) +$

$(\text{number of nonwords correct} / 20 * 100) / 2$. Consequently, the maximum possible score for the test for each participant was “100” and the minimum was “0”.

4.3.3 Language-related academic difficulty and open-ended questions

This section included 12 self-rated questions and two open-ended questions (see Section 5 of Appendix A for instructions and questions). The 12 questions focused on potential language challenges students may face in an academic context and evaluated whether language posed a barrier in their studies. The open-ended questions allowed students to share thoughts that might not be covered in the survey.

The 12 self-rated questions contained potential academic challenges across four English skills: reading, listening, writing and speaking. The advanced development of these skills is crucial for students to communicate effectively in both everyday and academic situations (Scarcella, 2003). The questions were designed to be relevant to both EFL and ENS students, as academic English can be challenging for both groups. Studies have shown that both native and non-native speakers experience English language-related difficulties in their academic studies, although the difficulty and magnitude may vary (Berman & Cheng, 2010; Morita, 2000; Zhao, 2017). The majority of language-support units in higher education institutions offer English language support and services to students, regardless of whether English is their first language (Huang, 2013). Despite this recognition, there is limited research on the specific linguistic struggles both groups face in academic settings. Researchers like Olson and Torrance (2014) have urged for more attention to be given to the difficulties encountered by native speakers in academic English. This section, therefore, intended to investigate this under-researched area.

Figure 4.2

Screenshot of the Language-related Academic Difficulty Section

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
1. During class time, I often miss important points because lecturers are speaking too fast.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. My lecturers use many words that I do not understand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. In lectures, I often feel lost.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I rarely ask questions or volunteer answers in my classes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I often find it hard to express myself successfully in class discussions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I find giving presentations hard.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. When reading assigned academic texts, I often run out of time as they are too long.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. There are many words that I do not understand in my required reading materials.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. After completing a required reading, I often find that I do not know what it was all about.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. When writing assignments or sitting exams, I often struggle to find the right words.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. When writing assignments or sitting exams, I often run out of time to complete the work to my satisfaction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. I often find it hard to express and organise my ideas clearly in academic writing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The first three questions (Q1-Q3 in Figure 4.2) explored students' *listening* skills concerning *listening efficiency*, *vocabulary knowledge* and *global understanding* respectively. Hellekjær's (2017) study suggested that students may experience similar lecture comprehension difficulties in English and their first language, implying that both EFL and ENS students may struggle to comprehend lectures. Comprehension difficulties can result from limited English language proficiency, mainly affecting EFL students, but from other factors like limited working memory capacity, which potentially affects both EFL and ENS students. Limited working memory capacity in students can restrict their ability to process lecture information efficiently (Cerbin, 2018), which suggests that slow processing can interfere with comprehension, causing students to fall behind. In addition, limited academic vocabulary and new terminology can be obstacles for both EFL (Flowerdew & Miller, 1992) and ENS students (Milton & Treffers-Daller, 2013). Thus, it is necessary to investigate listening efficiency and vocabulary factors. Nevertheless, having no problem in speed of processing or vocabulary does not guarantee excellence in overall lecture comprehension. Factors other than vocabulary knowledge contribute to EFL students' listening comprehension (Stæhr, 2009), such as culturally-based knowledge gaps (Littlemore, 2001). Therefore, the global understanding question was worth asking.

Questions 4-6 (Q4-Q6 in Figure 4.2) were concerned with students' *speaking* skills in the context of *lectures, class discussions* and *presentations*, evaluating three primary classroom speaking situations: *unplanned speech in front of the whole class and the tutor (formal context)*, *unplanned speech within a peer group (informal context)*, and *prepared speech in front of the whole class and the tutor (formal context)*.

Questions 7-9 (Q7-Q9 in Figure 4.2) assessed students' academic difficulties related to *reading*, analysing *reading efficiency, vocabulary knowledge* and *global understanding*. Milton and Treffers-Daller's (2013) study found that native English students' vocabulary size may be smaller than generally believed, and this limited vocabulary can pose challenges in comprehending university-level texts. However, a large vocabulary size does not guarantee high academic reading ability, as factors such as depth of vocabulary knowledge (Moghadam, Zainal & Ghaderpour, 2012), content knowledge (Hammadou, 2000), metacognitive and syntactic awareness (Nergis, 2013) also influence reading comprehension. Therefore, the global understanding of reading comprehension was worth exploring.

Questions 10-12 (Q10-Q12 in Figure 4.2) evaluated students' academic difficulties regarding *writing*, examining *vocabulary (lexical choice), speed (time-constraints)*, and *clarity and coherence*. Academic staff often attribute structure and argument development as the two key factors in high-quality student writing across disciplines (Lea & Street, 1998). Thus, in addition to vocabulary and speed, clarity and coherence related to idea expression and argument development are significant in academic writing.

To maintain consistency and coherence, a 7-point scale was used, with 1 being "not at all true of me", and 7 being "very true of me". An additional "N/A" option was used in this section to accommodate participants who might not have certain experiences presented in the questions. For example, if a student has not given any presentation, "N/A" would be the most appropriate response to question 6. In terms of scoring, when participants chose a number, that number directly became their score for the specific question. For example, if a participant selected "1", their score for that question was 1, and if they selected "7", their score was 7. If they selected "N/A", however, no score was calculated for that question. Consequently, a higher score indicated a higher level of difficulty. In the analysis, an average score of the 12 questions was calculated and used to indicate the overall academic language difficulty score for each participant (with detailed skill-specific analysis presented

in Appendix N). The maximum possible score for each question and average score was 7 and the minimum was 1.

Regarding the two open-ended questions (see Q5.2 and Q5.3 in Section 5 of Appendix A), participants were asked about experiences they found challenging and/or positive in their studies. The open questions aimed to explore what students find challenging and positive respectively when studying in the UK. Participants were encouraged to share any of their academic and/or social experiences (but with no obligation to do so). Both questions were optional rather than forced responses in case participants had no relevant experiences or were not willing to share.

4.3.4 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as “judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (Bandura, 1982, p. 122). In an educational context, it is concerned with an individual’s confidence in one’s own personal capability to perform educational actions or achieve educational goals. This section focused on participants’ confidence in their ability to complete various aspects of their studies (i.e., academic self-efficacy). Additionally, for participants whose first language was not English, extra questions were included to measure their confidence in studying in English (i.e., English self-efficacy). Consequently, all students were presented with eight questions on academic self-efficacy, and EFL students were given two extra questions on English self-efficacy (see Section 4 of Appendix A for instructions and all the self-efficacy questions).

The eight academic self-efficacy questions were adopted from Pintrich, Smith, Garcia and McKeachie’s (1991) Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ). The MSLQ consists of 81 self-reported items corresponding with six motivation subscales and nine learning strategies scales, which can be used collectively or independently. Pintrich and colleagues developed the MSLQ through a series of studies involving university and community college students, refining the items after each study before finalising the questionnaire. The MSLQ and its subscales have been widely used in empirical research in different languages, in different countries, and in diverse samples and settings for both theoretical and applied purposes (Duncan & McKeachie, 2005). The self-efficacy subscale adopted here has been extensively used in modern research on academic efficacy (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016). Pintrich and colleagues (1993) confirmed the reliability and predictive validity of the MSLQ, establishing its usefulness, reliability, and validity for assessing higher education students’ motivation and use of learning strategies.

The specific scale adopted in this study is *self-efficacy for learning and performance* (see Pintrich et al., 1991, p. 13), which is one of the motivation subscales. It measures students' expectancy (performance expectations) and self-efficacy (self-appraisal capabilities to master tasks) (Pintrich et al., 1991), which are consistent with the concept of academic self-efficacy as well as the research aim of this study. All eight questions from the MSLQ's self-efficacy subscale were adopted with slight modifications (see Q1-Q8 in Figure 4.3). Changes were made to better suit the UK higher education context (e.g., "teacher" to "lecturer", "test" to "exam") and to simplify and ensure consistency (e.g., removing "in this class" and "in this course" to reduce unnecessary repetition). Modifications in constructing self-efficacy scales were encouraged in Bandura's (2006) guide since it strongly recommended self-efficacy scales to be tailored to the particular domain of functioning that is the object of interest. Consistent with the original MSLQ and the entire survey, a 7-point Likert scale was used in this section, ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 7 (very true of me). The eight questions together measured students' academic performance expectations, confidence in assessment performance and academic achievement, confidence in learning through reading and lectures, and confidence in mastering learning skills and theoretical concepts.

Figure 4.3

Screenshot of the Self-efficacy Section

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. I expect to do well in my studies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Considering the difficulty of the course, the lecturers, my academic abilities and my English skills, I think I will do well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I am confident I can do an excellent job on the assignments and exams.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I believe I will receive excellent grades.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I am certain I can understand the most difficult material presented in the readings for this course.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I am confident I can understand the most complex material presented in lectures for this course.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I am certain I can master skills being taught.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. I am confident I can understand the concepts being taught.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. I am confident I can do as well studying in English as I was able to in my native language.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. I expect my proficiency in English will allow me to fulfil my academic potential.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

In addition to the above eight questions, two more questions were posed to EFL students to explore whether they expected English proficiency to be a barrier in their academic learning and performance (see Q9-Q10 in Figure 4.3).

The scoring method for self-rated English proficiency and academic language difficulty measures was applied here as well, where each participant's response directly corresponded to their chosen number on the scale. Hence, a higher score indicated a higher level of self-efficacy. In the analysis, an average score of the eight academic efficacy questions was calculated to represent academic self-efficacy level, and an average of the two English self-efficacy scores was calculated to represent English self-efficacy level. The maximum possible score for each question and average score was 7 while the minimum was 1.

4.3.5 Demographic and background information

This section collected demographic information about participants including their language and educational backgrounds (see Section 6 of Appendix A).

All participants were asked demographic questions about age, gender, and domicile, as well as what major they studied and the duration of their stay in the UK, as an index of the length of immersive exposure to British English.

To gauge the participants' previous academic success and to understand if the groups differed along this dimension, they were also asked to estimate their academic success in previous studies compared to their classmates, i.e., "Thinking about your previous studies, how do you see your academic success relative to your classmates? (We are interested in how you see it, not necessarily the actual ratings produced by your school)." Participants chose whether their academic success was in the top 5%, 10%, 25%, 50%, 75%, and other, which were coded as 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. A recent meta-analysis of relations between achievement and self-concept (Möller et al., 2020) summarised three prominent comparison processes in the development of academic self-concepts: social, temporal, and dimensional comparisons. Social comparison uses others as *interindividual* standards, while temporal comparisons use one's past achievements as *intraindividual* standards for self-assessment. This survey question evaluated students using both comparisons. Tomoschuk et al.'s (2018) assumption that frames of reference may influence people's language self-perception aligns with the theory of social comparison, as individuals with the same language proficiency but different upbringing and background rate themselves differently. Moreover, previous academic performance plays a vital role in both students' self-concept and subsequent performance, serving as a strong predictor of university performance (Mckenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Salanova et al., 2010). Language proficiency alone is insufficient to determine academic success likelihood. Admission offices also consider applicants' previous academic performance when recruiting, providing evidence of academic ability beyond English proficiency scores (Neumann, Padden & McDonough, 2018). This survey question offered insight into participants' perceptions of their past academic performances relative to their peers.

Moreover, this survey included a question about socio-economic status (SES), since it often correlates significantly with academic success (Ahmar & Anwar, 2013; Bae & Wickrama, 2014; Gorard & See, 2009; Islam & Khan, 2017; Singh & Choudhary, 2015; White, 1982). Understanding participants' SES can help understand if the research groups differed on this factor. In this survey, mothers' highest level of education was used as a proxy for SES. Compared with *paternal* education, *maternal* education is a better predictor of children's various cognitive and health outcomes (Jackson et al., 2017; Nepal, 2018; Park et al., 2013) as well as their academic attainment (Chevalier et al., 2013). Ideally, both paternal and maternal education levels would have been considered. However,

since SES was not the focus of this study, and to keep the demographic section concise, only a question about maternal education was asked. The options ranged from low to high and were coded as 1-5: 1 for some or no secondary education; 2 for secondary school education; 3 for post-secondary education with vocational training; 4 for university degree; and 5 for post-graduate degree or professional education.

In addition, participants were asked how they attended classes. Given the COVID-19 restrictions during the research period, with many courses being delivered on-line, it was worth understanding whether the research sample was representative in terms of their study mode. Participants had the following options to choose from: everything on-line; mostly on-line with some on campus; half on-line, half on campus; mostly on campus with some on-line; everything on campus and other.

For EFL students whose first language was not English, additional questions related to previous English study experiences and language test grades were asked exclusively to them. For example, they were asked to provide the results of their English language tests (if applicable). Despite having the language measurement of self-ratings and LexTALE vocabulary test, EFL students' English proficiency levels on enrolment often determine whether they have a long-term academic advantage or disadvantage (Li et al., 2010). These questions enabled an understanding of potential differences in language background and language learning experiences between the two EFL groups.

4.4 Pilot study

Pilot studies are essential for developing a good study design, serving various functions and increasing the likelihood of study success (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). Two pilot studies were conducted using the on-line survey before data collection to gather valuable feedback for improvements.

Before initiating the first pilot study, the question items and the survey flow were thoroughly and iteratively reviewed. The pilot studies began approximately two months before the official study and lasted for one month.

Ten participants voluntarily participated in two pilot studies, with seven in the first survey pilot and three in the second. They were all registered students at the time. The pilot studies sample included both male and female participants, some speaking English as their first and dominant language, and

others speaking it as a foreign language. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic preventing face-to-face communication, all pilot studies were conducted through web-based software (Zoom or Discord). To optimise the piloting process, nine participants completed the pilot survey one at a time while screen-sharing with me. They were asked to “think aloud”, enabling me to observe them, take notes, and calculate the time spent in each section. After completing the survey, detailed feedback was obtained from each participant, and improvements were made based on their feedback.

The aims of the first pilot were to:

1. Evaluate time effectiveness;
2. Identify potential problems or ambiguities in instructions and items.

For example, since I added the time limitation in the vocabulary test, the first pilot study paid extra attention to whether participants found the time duration for each item adequate. Feedback from participants as well as observations and timing results indicated that the time allocation was sufficient. However, some participants expressed boredom in the vocabulary section, and the total completion time for EFL students averaged 31.4 minutes. Several improvements were therefore made in this section to enhance survey completion efficiency. To address the issue of participants losing interest and patience due to uncertainty about the test’s length, the total number of items was disclosed in the instruction (i.e., “the quiz has 63 questions”) and each item was numbered (e.g., changing “scornful” to “scornful (5/63)”). To further improve survey efficiency, customised HTML code and JavaScript were added to the entire section, enabling items to automatically advance once participants selected “Yes” or “No”.

In addition, EFL participants found some survey questions difficult to understand, leading to longer completion time. As a remedy, these questions were rephrased. For example, “I am a newly-arrived student” was replaced with “I am in the first year of my studies”; words like “peers” and “perceptions”, which were unfamiliar to an undergraduate EFL participant, were replaced with simpler words. To enhance the clarity of the entire survey, some key words in questions or instructions were bolded to ensure participants’ understanding. For example, one participant overlooked the keyword “every subject” in the question “Before your current studies, did you attend any school or university where every subject was taught in English?” which led to an incorrect answer. The phrase “every subject” was then bolded to show emphasis.

The aims of the second pilot were to:

1. Assess the feasibility and effectiveness of the changes made;
2. Identify any further issues.

Similar to the first pilot study, participants' completion time for each section and the entire survey were recorded. A satisfying result was shown as the average survey completion time was 12 minutes 48 seconds, which was deemed acceptable. Based on the feedback from the second pilot, only minor changes were needed, such as adjustments to question settings and the survey layout. For example, some demographic questions were changed from obligatory to optional in case participants could not or did not wish to answer them.

4.5 Data collection procedure

The data collection process lasted two months, from 2nd November 2020 to 2nd January 2021. The survey link and QR code were distributed to potential participants in various ways to maximise the response rate. Using publicly available contact details for departments, colleges and schools, 31 universities were contacted on-line by email to request distribution to their students. As mentioned in Section 4.2.1, these universities included 30 universities with the highest number of non-UK students (see Appendix H for names of the universities) as well as the University of York. Additionally, posters advertising the study were posted on campus at the University of York, York St John University and University of Liverpool (see Appendix O for survey invitation emails and posters). The posters were placed on public bulletin boards in university department buildings and student accommodations. The survey was also distributed through personal networks and other on-line social media platforms such as WeChat groups and Facebook pages. To boost the participation of international students, international student societies were contacted (e.g., Japanese society, Arabic society) through email and/or Facebook messenger at the 31 universities previously mentioned.

4.6 Challenges

The main challenge in conducting the initial survey research was its distribution.

Since the survey distribution took place during the COVID-19 period, face-to-face contact was limited. Many buildings on the campuses were closed, and few students were physically present. Nevertheless, I tried to access every department and student accommodation that was open to post my leaflets. During this process, I encountered inconsistent access to campus facilities due to the

varied decisions made by gatekeepers. Specifically, different reception staff within the same departments could have different opinions on whether to allow me to enter or not, even for the same building. This inconsistency taught me the importance of making the most of every available opportunity to disseminate my research invitation (e.g., preparing sufficient posters to minimise revisiting the same buildings). In addition to off-line distribution, I also made great efforts to recruit participants on-line. Although most of my initial request emails to university departments received no response, I was not discouraged. Instead, I sought various other ways to reach more participants, such as contacting student societies and using social media platforms. In the end, I was able to obtain a satisfying number of participants ($N = 1163$) with a satisfying balance of group (623 home students and 540 international students).

4.7 Survey outcome measures

4.7.1 Analysis approach of survey measures

4.7.1.1 Normality of distribution

Before conducting the analysis, the normality of distribution was assessed for each outcome measure (i.e., Vocabulary, self-rated English proficiency, academic self-efficacy, English self-efficacy and language-related academic difficulty). Since there were four groups of students, the normality of the data within each group was evaluated (e.g., Vocab_EFL_China, Vocab_EFL_other, Vocab_ENS_UK and Vocab_ENS_other) to determine whether the distributions were approximately normal. Specifically, Shapiro-Wilk tests together with histograms and normal Q-Q plots were utilised to examine the normality of the data within each group.

The Shapiro-Wilk test of normality revealed that a vast majority of datasets were not normally distributed (see Appendix P). The histograms and Q-Q plots displayed similar results, with most of the datasets showing a visually non-normal distribution (see Appendix Q). In my research, it was not surprising that most datasets were not normally distributed and that data points were clustered at one end of the scale. This is because university students are expected to have proficient English abilities, either due to their English native-speaking status or their language entry requirements. It was actually expected that only a small number of students achieved low vocabulary scores, rated themselves with low English proficiency, perceived themselves to have great language-related academic difficulties, and showed low confidence in their studies. However, what was surprising was

that some datasets, such as language-related academic difficulties for Chinese students, were normally distributed, indicating that some of them might have lower English abilities than what is typically expected of university students.

Since significance tests of normality, histograms, and Q-Q plots suggested that most of the data were non-normal, non-parametric tests were used.

4.7.1.2 Outliers

When checking and cleaning the data, it was discovered that two Chinese participants displayed unusual responses throughout the whole survey. They consistently assigned a value of “1” to all 7-point scale questions (a total of 26 questions). Such indiscriminate responses suggested lack of meaningful engagement with the survey (For example, they gave the lowest ranking both to their English skills *and* to the difficulties they experienced with English). In addition, three extreme outliers (scores of 0, 3.75 and 7.50 out of 100) were observed on the LexTALE vocabulary test, suggesting a lack of engagement with this section of the survey. Finally, two UK participants stood out in the dataset of self-rated English proficiency levels. One participant performed extremely well on the LexTALE vocabulary test with a perfect score of 100/100, reported high academic self-efficacy with a score of 5.89/7, and low language-related academic difficulty with a score of 3.75/7. However, she rated all her language skills as “1” (indicating almost none), suggesting a possible misunderstanding of the scale. The other participant had an average self-rated English proficiency of only 1.5 out of 7, despite being a native English speaker, which was also extraordinarily low. However, upon reviewing the responses of his survey, it was found that he may have had low confidence in his skills and was overly critical in his self-evaluation, as evidenced by his low average academic self-efficacy level of 2.25/7.

Despite these anomalies, the results were consistent whether these data points were included or excluded. Therefore, an analysis with the full dataset is reported for the sake of completeness.

4.7.1.3 Analysis process

The data were initially presented visually using a combination of descriptive tables and boxplots. To further analyse the data, inferential analysis was performed using SPSS. Mann-Whitney tests and Kruskal-Wallis tests along with their post hoc tests were conducted to compare the following groups:

1. Students whose first language is English and those whose first language is not English (ENS vs. EFL)
2. EFL students from China and EFL students from the rest of the world (EFL_China vs. EFL_other)
3. British domiciled ENS students and international ENS students (ENS_UK vs. ENS_other)

Specifically, Mann-Whitney tests were initially conducted to compare ENS and EFL groups. After that, Kruskal-Wallis tests were performed to determine if there were any differences among all four student groups. Finally, pairwise comparisons were made using post hoc tests to identify differences between EFL groups or between ENS groups (Significance values reported have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests).

However, for the English-efficacy measure, only a Mann-Whitney test was employed since only two EFL groups (EFL_China vs. EFL_other) were being compared.

Furthermore, correlation tests were employed to examine the relationships between students' vocabulary knowledge and their self-perceptions, including self-rated English proficiency, perceived academic language difficulty levels, and academic self-efficacy. As the data were mostly non-normally distributed and self-reported, which tends to be ordinal (Field, 2018), Spearman's rank-order correlations were used to identify any potential associations among these variables.

4.7.2 Results of survey measures

This section presents the results of the survey study, where the outcomes of each measure were analysed. The findings for different groups of students' vocabulary test, self-rated English proficiency, perceived academic language difficulty and self-efficacy were all examined respectively.

4.7.2.1 Vocabulary knowledge

In the survey, students' proficiency in English vocabulary was measured using a vocabulary test called LexTALE (Lemhöfer & Broersma, 2012). Participants took a timed version of the LexTALE test, which was embedded directly in the Qualtrics survey. The test had a maximum score of 100. Table 4.5 and Figure 4.4 below provide detailed descriptive results.

Table 4.5

Descriptive Statistics for the LexTALE Vocabulary Scores

Group	N	M (SD)	Mdn	Range
EFL_China	153	59.53 (13.87)	60.00	90.00
EFL_other	270	79.64 (12.87)	82.50	100.00
ENS_UK	623	89.60 (9.75)	92.50	61.25
ENS_other	117	87.97 (11.19)	91.25	43.75

Figure 4.4

Boxplot of LexTALE Vocabulary Scores Organised by Group

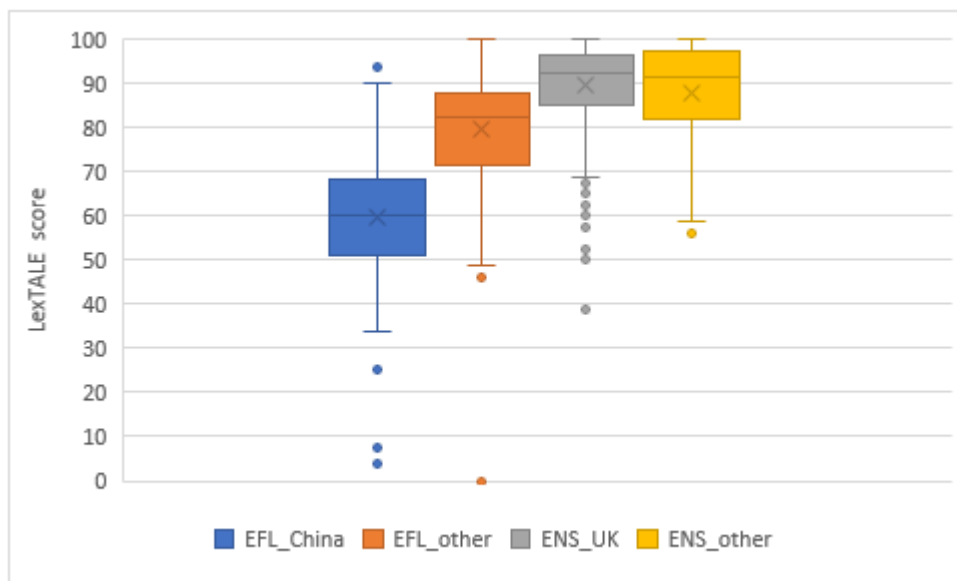


Figure 4.4 shows that EFL students' scores were notably lower than those of ENS students. Specifically, Chinese EFL students had the lowest scores, followed by non-Chinese EFL students. No meaningful differences were observed in the ENS group between UK ENS students and international ENS students.

A Mann-Whitney test was run to determine if there were significant differences in vocabulary scores between EFL and ENS students. The results confirmed that ENS students had significantly higher vocabulary scores than EFL students, $U = 56243.50$, $z = 18.21$, $p < .001$, $r = .53$.

Additionally, a Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a significant difference in vocabulary scores among the four student groups, $H(3) = 416.85$, $p < .001$. A post hoc test with pairwise comparisons confirmed that Chinese EFL students had significantly lower vocabulary scores compared to non-Chinese EFL

students ($p < .001$, $r = -.45$). However, within the ENS group, no significant difference was found between UK students and international ENS students ($p = 1.000$, $r = .04$).

The above analysis mainly focused on group averages, however, individual performances within each group, as shown by the ranges and Figure 4.4, reveal a wider distribution of vocabulary scores, particularly among EFL students. Notably, within the Chinese EFL group, there were individuals who matched or even surpassed the vocabulary scores of some ENS students. This suggests that there is variability within each group and every student, regardless of their background, has the potential for high language achievement.

4.7.2.2 Self-rated English proficiency

The survey participants were asked to rate their English proficiency for their reading, listening, writing and speaking skills on a scale from 1-7, with 1 being defined as “almost none” and 7 as “exceptionally good”. An average rating, based on the four language skills, was calculated for this analysis. A detailed skill-specific analysis (self-rated reading, self-rated listening, self-rated writing and self-rated speaking) is presented in Appendix M.

Detailed descriptive results are provided in Table 4.6 and Figure 4.5 below.

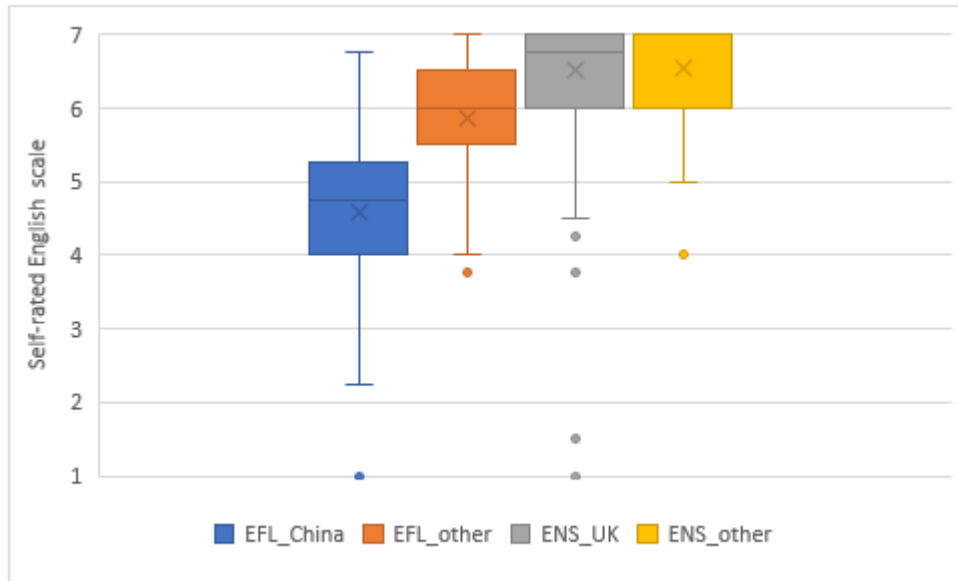
Table 4.6

Descriptive Statistics for the Self-rated English Levels

Group	N	M (SD)	Mdn	Range
EFL_China	153	4.59 (1.01)	4.75	5.75
EFL_other	270	5.85 (0.76)	6.00	3.25
ENS_UK	623	6.50 (0.65)	6.75	6.00
ENS_other	117	6.55 (0.60)	7.00	3.00

Figure 4.5

Boxplot of Self-rated English Levels Organised by Group



As shown in Figure 4.5, EFL students rated their English proficiency lower than ENS students. Notably, Chinese EFL students had the lowest self-ratings, followed by non-Chinese EFL students. The self-ratings of the UK ENS students and the international ENS students were virtually indistinguishable.

To examine the differences in self-rated English proficiency between EFL and ENS students, a Mann-Whitney test was conducted. The results confirmed that ENS students rated themselves significantly higher than EFL students, $U = 53054.50$, $z = 19.10$, $p < .001$, $r = .56$.

In addition, a Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a significant difference in self-rated English proficiency among the four student groups, $H(3) = 440.05$, $p < .001$. A post hoc test with pairwise comparisons further revealed that within the EFL group, Chinese students rated their English proficiency significantly lower than non-Chinese EFL students ($p < .001$, $r = -.42$). However, within the ENS group, no significant differences were found between UK students and international ENS students ($p = 1.000$, $r = .03$).

Similar to the results of vocabulary knowledge, there were also individual differences in how students rated their English proficiency within each group, as shown by the ranges and Figure 4.5. This highlights the fact that not all students in each group perceive their language similarly.

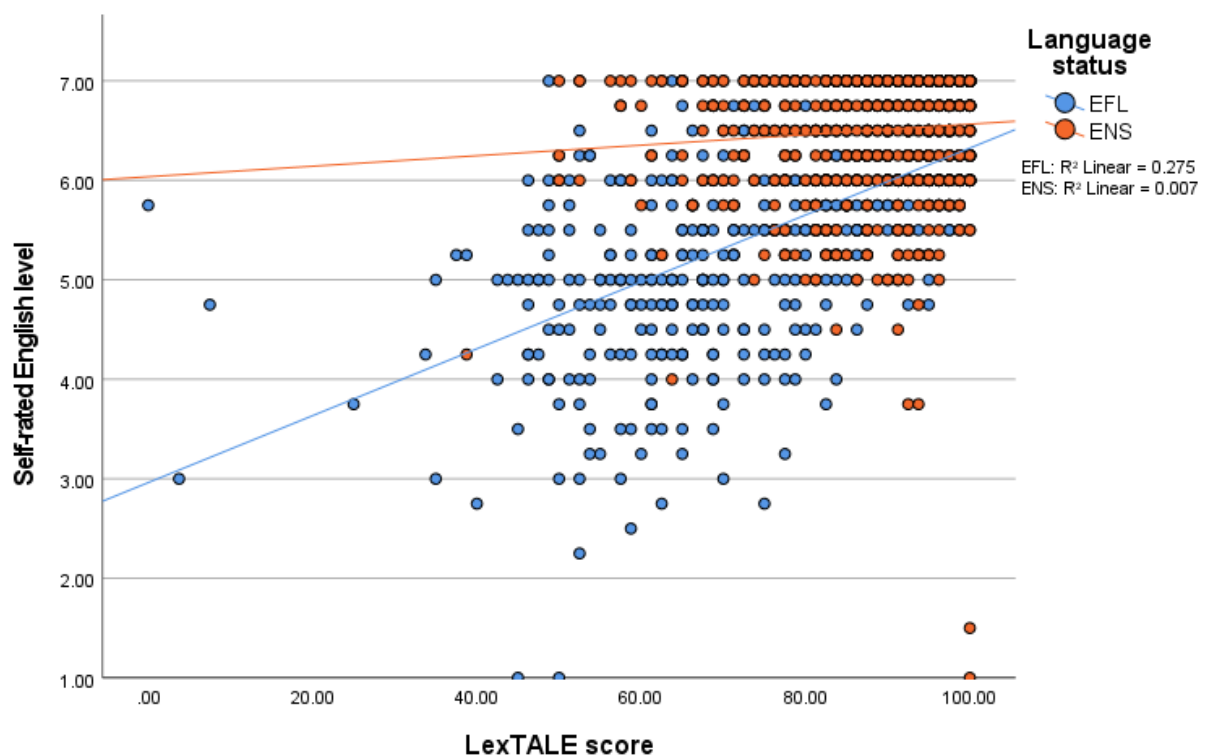
A Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the potential relationships between students' vocabulary scores (serving as an indicator of English language proficiency) and their self-rated English proficiency. The results indicated a significant positive correlation between

these variables ($r_s = .47, p < .001$). It suggests that students with higher English proficiency tended to rate their English proficiency higher, indicating a sense of self-awareness regarding their own language skills.

When examining the correlations within the EFL and the ENS groups separately, a stronger and more statistically significant correlation was observed among EFL students ($r_s = .55, p < .001$) compared with ENS students ($r_s = .09, p = .015$). Figure 4.6 provides a visual comparison of the correlations between the two groups.

Figure 4.6

Scatterplot of LexTALE Vocabulary Score and Self-rated English Proficiency Split by Language Status



As shown in Figure 4.6, the correlation among EFL students was notably stronger compared to ENS students. It should be noted that the weaker correlation for ENS students could be due to their data points being clustered together, leading to lower variance in scores. In other words, many ENS students rated their English proficiency at the highest possible level, resulting in a lower strength of association. However, the fact that there was still significant correlation within ENS students suggested that these variations in language proficiency, even within native English speakers, were genuine and meaningful.

4.7.2.3 Perceived academic language difficulty

4.7.2.3.1 Overall academic language difficulty

During the survey, participants were asked questions about the challenges they faced related to the English language in their studies. They responded to a total of 12 questions, grouped into three sets of questions, each focused on a specific English ability: reading, listening, writing and speaking. Using a 7-point scale, participants rated how much they agreed with each statement describing various language-related academic challenges (e.g., “I find giving presentations difficult.”), with 1 indicating “not at all true of me” and 7 indicating “very true of me”. If a participant had no experience with a particular statement, they could choose “not applicable”. To determine the overall academic language difficulty score for each participant, the average score of the 12 questions was calculated and used in Table 4.7, Figure 4.7 and statistical analysis in this section. Descriptive data for the difficulty of each language skill (reading difficulty, listening difficulty, writing difficulty, and speaking difficulty) were calculated and are also presented in Table 4.7. Boxplots and statistical analyses of each language skill are presented in Appendix N.

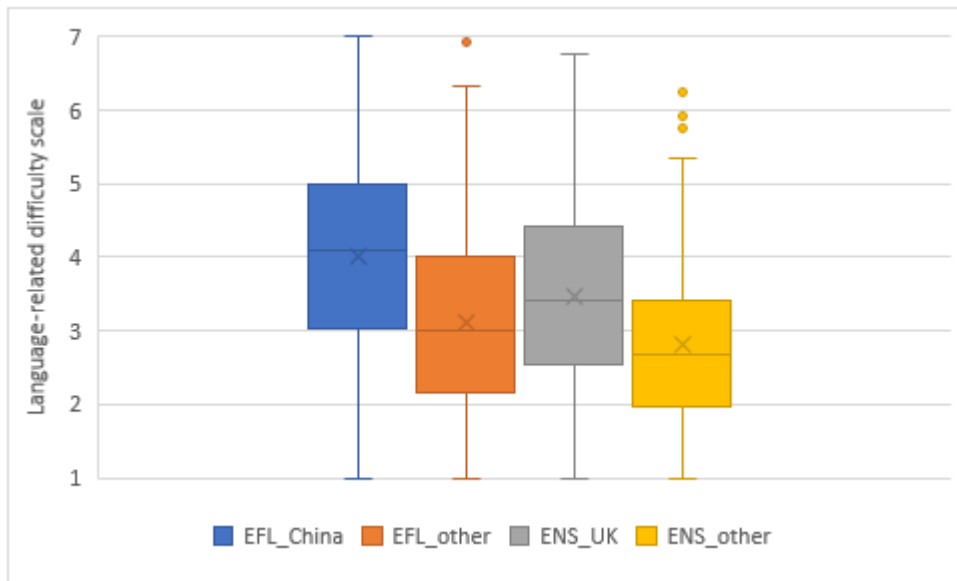
Detailed descriptive results are presented in Table 4.7 and Figure 4.7 below.

Table 4.7*Descriptive Statistics for the Academic Language Difficulty Levels*

Group	Overall academic language difficulty				Reading difficulty			Listening difficulty			Writing difficulty			Speaking difficulty		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Mdn</i>
EFL_China	153	4.01 (1.35)	4.08	6.00	153	4.20 (1.62)	4.33	153	3.54 (1.57)	3.67	153	4.36 (1.56)	4.67	151	3.91 (1.55)	4.00
EFL_other	270	3.11 (1.26)	3.00	6.00	261	2.93 (1.61)	2.67	269	2.49 (1.33)	2.00	265	3.39 (1.60)	3.33	266	3.62 (1.75)	3.33
ENS_UK	622	3.47 (1.23)	3.42	5.75	600	3.39 (1.52)	3.33	619	3.09 (1.41)	3.00	618	3.42 (1.50)	3.00	618	3.95 (1.75)	3.67
ENS_other	117	2.81 (1.06)	2.67	5.25	116	2.81 (1.31)	2.67	117	2.51 (1.25)	2.33	116	2.73 (1.37)	2.33	117	3.21 (1.64)	3.00

Figure 4.7

Boxplot of Overall Academic Language Difficulty Levels Organised by Group



As can be seen from Figure 4.7, the levels of overall academic language difficulties varied across the four student groups. Chinese EFL students reported the highest difficulty level, followed by UK ENS students. Non-Chinese EFL students, despite English not being their first language, reported a lower difficulty level compared to UK ENS students. International ENS students reported the lowest difficulty level.

A Mann-Whitney test was performed to determine the differences in academic language difficulty between EFL and ENS students. The results revealed no significant difference between EFL and ENS students, $U = 151899.50$, $z = 0.80$, $p = .424$, $r = .02$.

However, a Kruskal-Wallis test showed a significant difference in academic language difficulty among the four student groups, $H(3) = 76.22$, $p < .001$. A post hoc test with pairwise comparisons indicated significant differences between all student groups, except for international ENS students and non-Chinese EFL students, where no significant difference was observed. Specifically, within the EFL group, Chinese students reported significantly higher difficulty levels than non-Chinese EFL students ($p < .001$, $r = .33$). Moreover, within the ENS group, UK students reported significantly higher difficulty levels than international ENS students ($p < .001$, $r = .20$). Surprisingly, UK students also reported significantly higher difficulty levels compared to non-Chinese EFL students ($p < .001$, $r = .13$).

Similar to the findings of vocabulary knowledge and self-rated English proficiency, individual responses within each group reveal a broad distribution of perceptions regarding academic English difficulty. The range data and Figure 4.7 particularly showed that EFL students had a particularly diverse range of perceptions, highlighting their distinct individual differences within the groups.

Therefore, the main points from the results were:

- 1) Chinese EFL students reported the highest levels of difficulty, significantly more than the other groups.
- 2) UK ENS students rated their difficulty levels significantly higher than both international ENS and non-Chinese EFL groups.
- 3) There was no significant difference in the perceived difficulty levels between international ENS and non-Chinese EFL groups.

Sections 4.7.2.1 and 4.7.2.2 revealed that the English language proficiency (from both validated tests and self-ratings) of both ENS groups was indistinguishably and significantly higher than that of either EFL group, with the proficiency of Chinese EFL students being significantly lower than that of non-Chinese EFL students. Surprisingly, despite having high English language proficiency through both subjective and objective measures, UK ENS students perceived relatively high difficulty levels in academic language. Additionally, the similar difficulty levels in academic language perceived by international ENS students, despite having higher English language proficiency compared to non-Chinese EFL students, was also unexpected. To find out the deeper reasons and explore which specific aspects of academic language were found to be difficult, I looked closer at the pattern of the results by question item (Details are discussed in the next section).

4.7.2.3.2 Item-specific academic language difficulty

As mentioned at the end of the last section, the unexpected findings of overall academic language difficulties have prompted further exploration into these difficulties. Specifically, the aim was to answer the question “What types of academic language difficulties do different student groups find challenging?”. To achieve this, specific question items within each language skill were compared, and the results are presented in this section.

There were three questions related to each language domain (reading, listening, writing and speaking). This section compares the difficulty levels of specific difficulty aspect, as shown by the

individual question items, across groups within each language domain (i.e., group by item interaction). To illustrate the results, boxplots are presented, followed by Friedman tests and their post-hoc pairwise comparisons (Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests).

4.7.2.3.2.1 Academic reading difficulty

The three question items related to students' academic reading difficulty were:

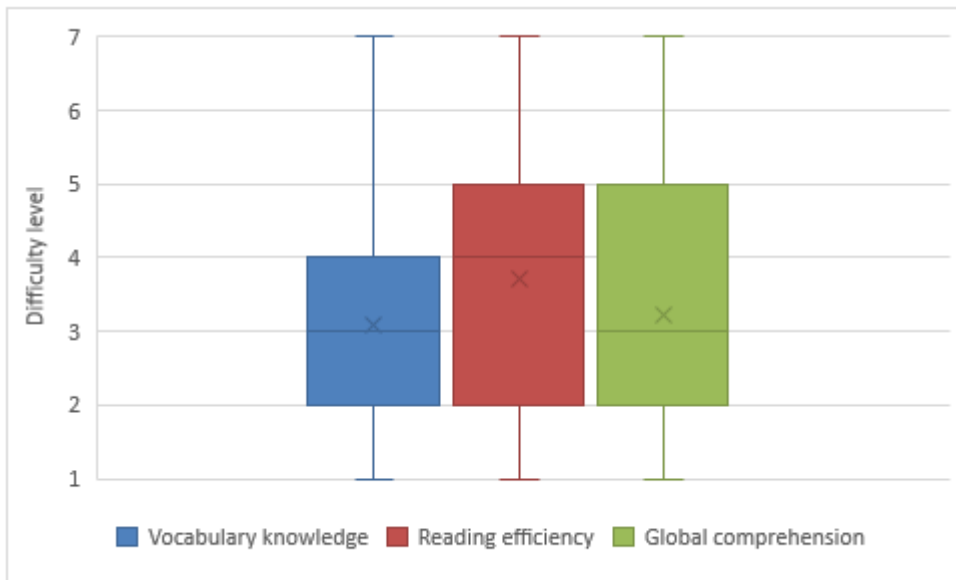
1. There are many words that I do not understand in my required reading materials.
2. When reading assigned academic texts, I often run out of time as they are too long.
3. After completing a required reading, I often find that I do not know what it was all about.

These questions measured students' reading difficulties with 1) *vocabulary knowledge*, 2) *reading efficiency* and 3) *global comprehension* respectively.

Figure 4.8 shows the boxplots of these specific aspects of academic reading difficulties across the entire sample (for all students).

Figure 4.8

Boxplots of All Students' Reading Difficulty Levels by Subcategory



Additionally, Figure 4.9 shows boxplots of these aspects for each student group.

Figure 4.9

Boxplots of Each Group's Reading Difficulty Levels by Subcategory

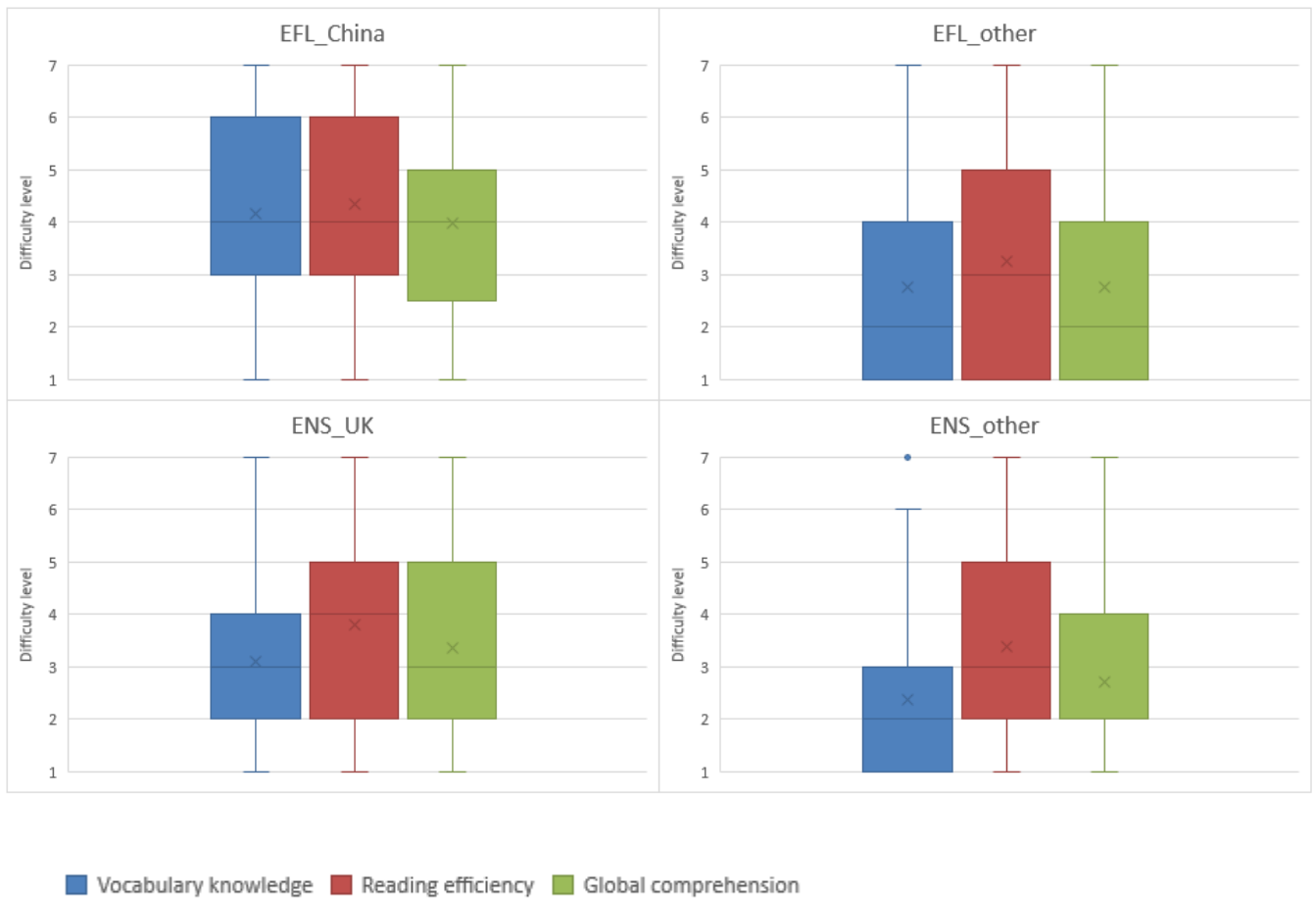


Figure 4.8 shows that reading efficiency was reported to be the most difficult aspect of reading, followed by global comprehension and vocabulary knowledge. However, differences were observed between groups. Figure 4.9 indicates that the two ENS groups perceived vocabulary knowledge to be less challenging compared to reading efficiency and global comprehension. Similarly, non-Chinese EFL students rated vocabulary less difficult than reading efficiency. Conversely, for Chinese EFL students, vocabulary knowledge was as challenging as reading efficiency and even more challenging than global comprehension.

The results of Friedman tests are as follows:

Friedman tests:

EFL_China: $\chi^2(2) = 14.22, p < .001$

EFL_other: $\chi^2(2) = 13.10, p = .001$

ENS_UK: $\chi^2(2) = 72.14, p < .001$

ENS_other: $\chi^2(2) = 34.87, p < .001$

The tests showed significant differences in academic reading difficulties across all groups for the three question items. Therefore, pairwise comparisons were conducted.

Post-hoc pairwise comparisons:

Group China_EFL:

Vocabulary knowledge vs. reading efficiency: $p = 1.00$, $r = -.03$

Vocabulary knowledge vs. global comprehension: $p = .074$, $r = .13$

Reading efficiency vs. global comprehension: $p = .014$, $r = .16$

Group EFL_other:

Vocabulary knowledge vs. reading efficiency: $p = .068$, $r = -.10$

Vocabulary knowledge vs. global comprehension: $p = 1.00$, $r = .02$

Reading efficiency vs. global comprehension: $p = .021$, $r = .12$

Group ENS_UK:

Vocabulary knowledge vs. reading efficiency: $p < .001$, $r = -.21$

Vocabulary knowledge vs. global comprehension: $p = .017$, $r = -.08$

Reading efficiency vs. global comprehension: $p < .001$, $r = .13$

Group ENS_other:

Vocabulary knowledge vs. reading efficiency: $p = .001$, $r = -.32$

Vocabulary knowledge vs. global comprehension: $p = .809$, $r = -.07$

Reading efficiency vs. global comprehension: $p < .001$, $r = .24$

The results indicate that ENS students tend to perceive vocabulary knowledge significantly less challenging compared to reading efficiency, while EFL students, especially those from China, tend to view vocabulary similarly challenging. Since vocabulary knowledge serves as a strong indicator of various linguistic abilities (Anderson & Freebody, 1981) and processing information more quickly and effectively is associated with higher-skilled readers, vocabulary knowledge is likely to be a more direct measure of linguistic knowledge while reading efficiency is a more direct indicator of academic skills. Therefore, the results suggest that EFL students, especially those from China, may face difficulties related to both linguistic knowledge and academic skills, whereas ENS students may struggle more with academic skills than linguistic knowledge.

4.7.2.3.2.2 Academic listening difficulty

The three question items related to students' academic listening difficulty were:

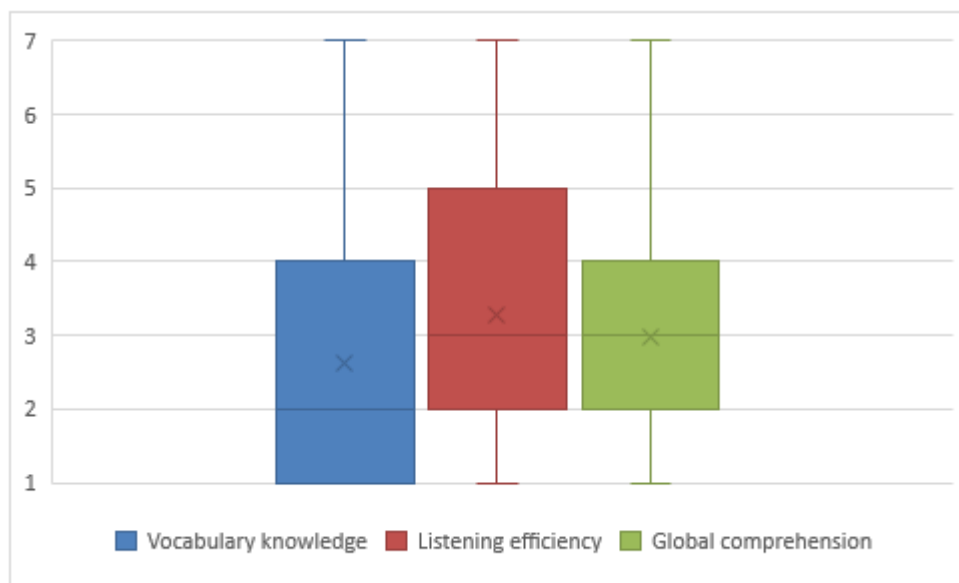
1. My lecturers use many words that I do not understand.
2. During class time, I often miss important points because lecturers are speaking too fast.
3. In lectures, I often feel lost.

These questions measured students' listening difficulties with 1) *vocabulary knowledge*, 2) *listening efficiency* and 3) *global comprehension* respectively.

Figure 4.10 shows the boxplots of these specific aspects of academic listening difficulties across the entire sample (for all students).

Figure 4.10

Boxplots of All Students' Listening Difficulty Levels by Subcategory



Additionally, Figure 4.11 shows boxplots of these aspects for each student group.

Figure 4.11

Boxplots of Each Group's Listening Difficulty Levels by Subcategory

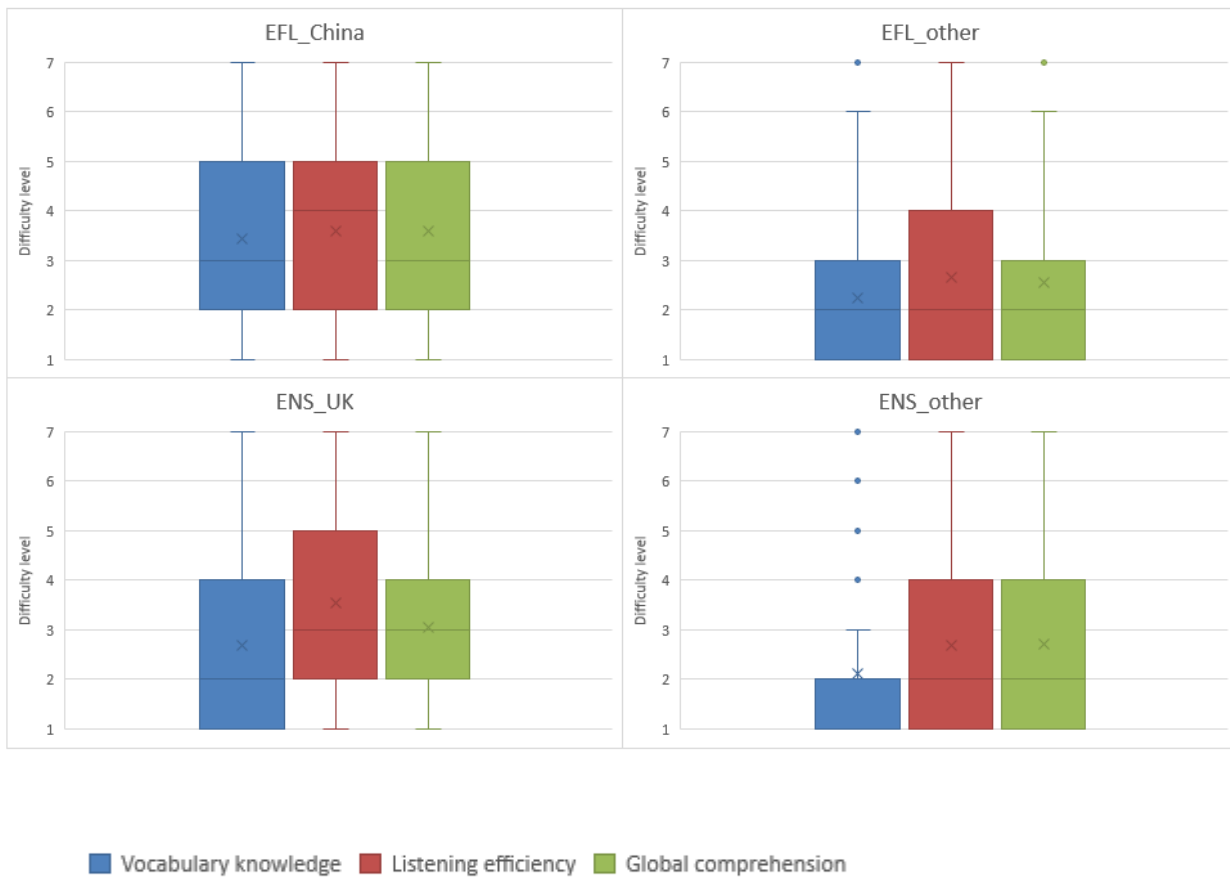


Figure 4.10 shows that listening efficiency was reported to be the most difficult aspect in listening, followed by global comprehension and vocabulary knowledge. However, there were differences between groups again. Figure 4.11 shows that the two ENS groups viewed vocabulary knowledge to be notably less difficult than the other two aspects. However, EFL students (especially Chinese EFL students) considered vocabulary knowledge to be similarly difficult to global comprehension and listening efficiency.

The results of Friedman tests are as follows:

Friedman tests:

EFL_China: $\chi^2(2) = 4.73, p = .094$

EFL_other: $\chi^2(2) = 25.67, p < .001$

ENS_UK: $\chi^2(2) = 151.19, p < .001$

ENS_other: $\chi^2(2) = 21.46, p < .001$

The tests showed significant differences in academic listening difficulties across the three question items for the groups of EFL_other, ENS_UK and ENS_other. Hence, pairwise comparisons were conducted for these three groups.

Post-hoc pairwise comparisons:

Group EFL_other:

Vocabulary knowledge vs. listening efficiency: $p < .001$, $r = -.17$

Vocabulary knowledge vs. global comprehension: $p = .034$, $r = -.11$

Listening efficiency vs. global comprehension: $p = .467$, $r = .06$

Group ENS_UK:

Vocabulary knowledge vs. listening efficiency: $p < .001$, $r = -.30$

Vocabulary knowledge vs. global comprehension: $p < .001$, $r = -.12$

Listening efficiency vs. global comprehension: $p < .001$, $r = .18$

Group ENS_other:

Vocabulary knowledge vs. listening efficiency: $p = .011$, $r = -.19$

Vocabulary knowledge vs. global comprehension: $p = .002$, $r = -.23$

Listening efficiency vs. global comprehension: $p = 1.00$, $r = -.04$

The results suggest that all student groups except the Chinese EFL students found vocabulary less challenging than listening efficiency and global comprehension. However, Chinese EFL students seemed to find vocabulary just as difficult as the other two aspects. Vocabulary knowledge, as mentioned in the last section, is a strong indicator for various aspects of linguistic ability (Anderson & Freebody, 1981). However, speed of processing, which can exist independently of vocabulary knowledge without significant correlations (Andringa et al., 2012), can be affected by factors such as working memory capacity (Cerbin, 2018). Global comprehension, which is the understanding of language in a general sense (British Council, 2023), can be related to both linguistic knowledge and listening efficiency. It can also be influenced by other factors such as culturally-based knowledge (Littlemore, 2001) and nonverbal cognitive abilities (Woumans et al., 2019). Hence, vocabulary knowledge is more related to lower-level linguistic skills, while listening efficiency and global comprehension are more related to higher-level academic skills. Thus, in terms of listening difficulties, Chinese EFL students may face more challenges with lower-level linguistic skills, while other students may struggle more with higher-level academic skills.

4.7.2.3.2.3 Academic writing difficulty

The three question items related to students' academic writing difficulty were:

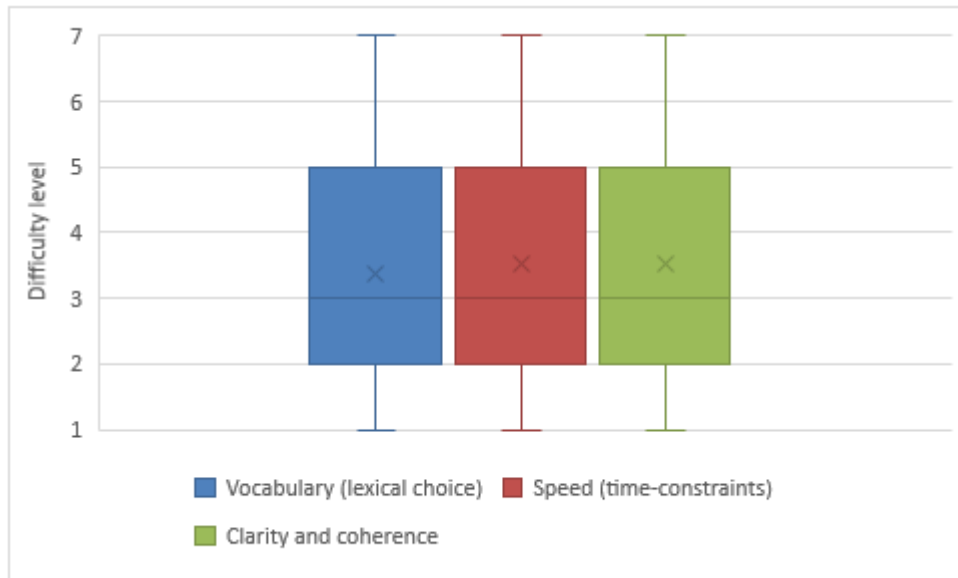
1. When writing assignments or sitting exams, I often struggle to find the right words.
2. When writing assignments or sitting exams, I often run out of time to complete the work to my satisfaction.
3. I often find it hard to express and organise my ideas clearly in academic writing.

These questions measured students' writing difficulties with 1) *vocabulary (lexical choice)*, 2) *speed (time-constraints)* and 3) *clarity and coherence* respectively.

Figure 4.12 shows the boxplots of these specific aspects of academic writing difficulties across the entire sample (for all students).

Figure 4.12

Boxplots of All Students' Writing Difficulty Levels by Subcategory



Additionally, Figure 4.13 shows boxplots of these aspects for each student group.

Figure 4.13

Boxplots of Each Group's Writing Difficulty Levels by Subcategory

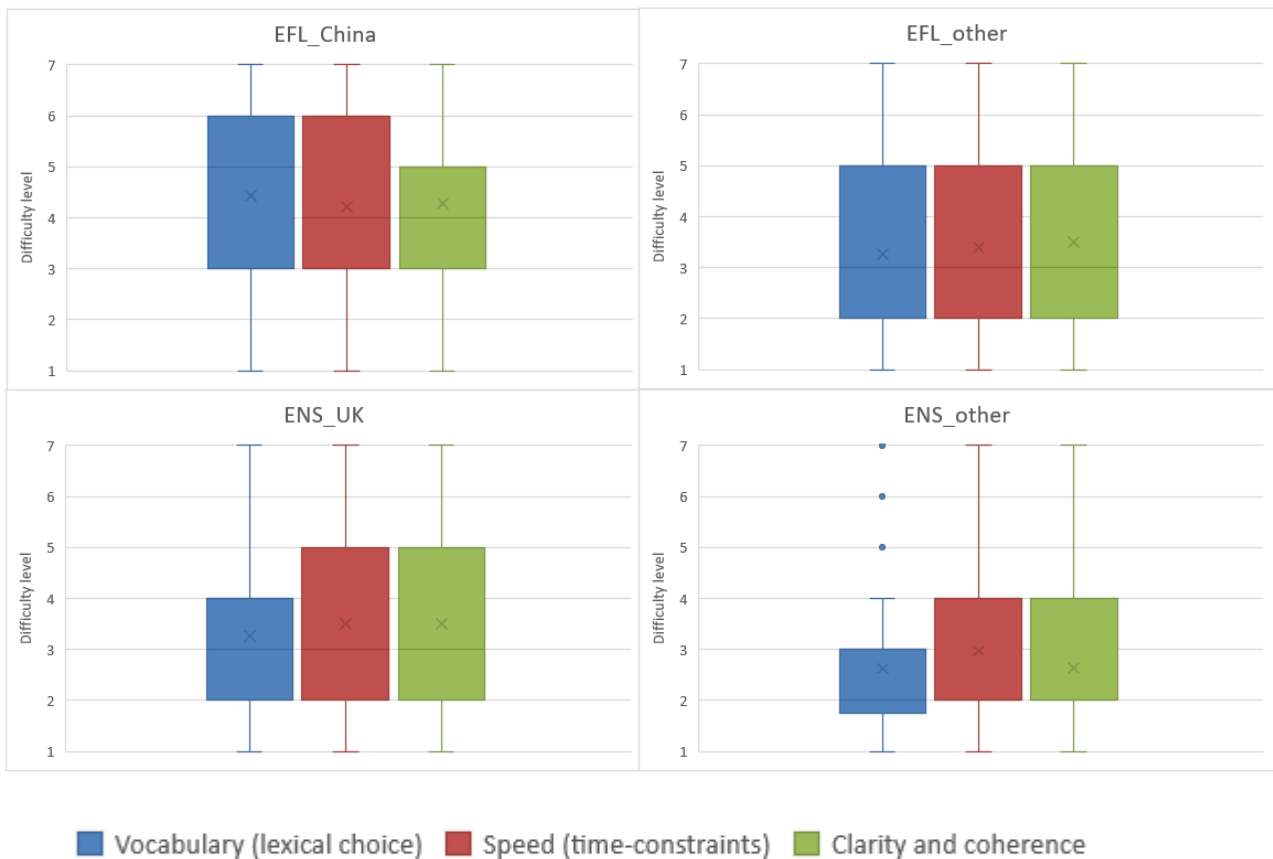


Figure 4.12 shows that the difficulty levels of all the writing aspects were similar. However, there were still differences between groups. According to Figure 4.13, the two ENS groups found vocabulary notably less challenging than speed, clarity and coherence. The non-Chinese EFL group also rated vocabulary slightly less challenging than the other aspects. In contrast, Chinese EFL students perceived vocabulary to be the most challenging aspect of writing.

The results of Friedman tests are as follows:

Friedman tests:

EFL_China: $\chi^2(2) = 3.65, p = .161$

EFL_other: $\chi^2(2) = 2.70, p = .259$

ENS_UK: $\chi^2(2) = 10.64, p = .005$

ENS_other: $\chi^2(2) = 5.28, p = .071$

The tests showed significant differences in academic writing difficulties across the three question items for the group ENS_UK. Hence, pairwise comparisons were conducted for this group.

Post-hoc pairwise comparisons of group ENS_UK:

Vocabulary (lexical choice) vs. speed (time-constraints): $p = .113$, $r = -.06$

Vocabulary (lexical choice) vs. clarity and coherence: $p = .033$, $r = -.07$

Speed (time-constraints) vs. clarity and coherence: $p = 1.00$, $r = -.01$

The results suggest that UK students find vocabulary to be less of a problem than speed, clarity, and coherence in writing, while other students find all aspects comparably challenging. Similar to the implication from reading difficulty, EFL students tend to perceive linguistic knowledge to be as challenging as academic skills in writing.

4.7.2.3.2.4 Academic speaking difficulty

The three question items related to students' academic speaking difficulty were:

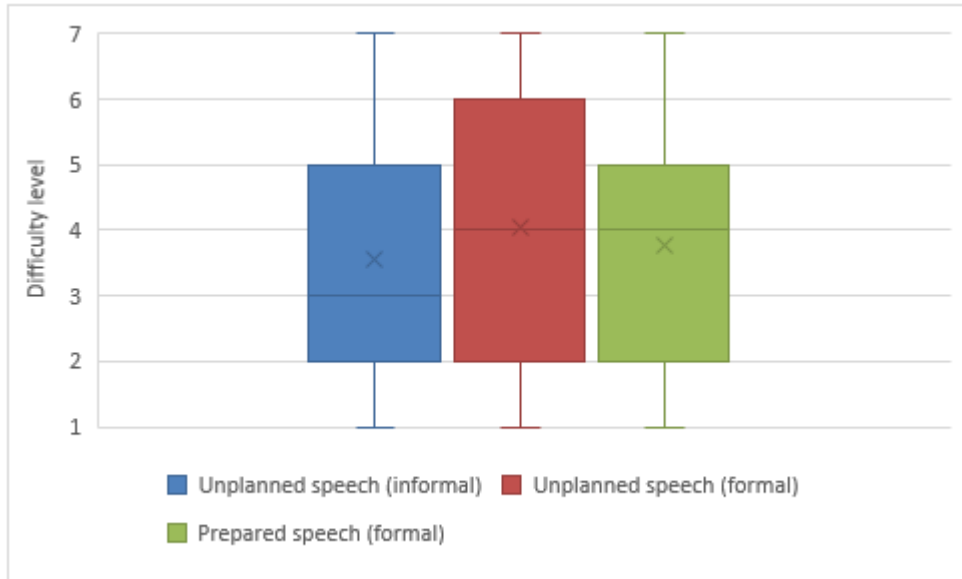
1. I often find it hard to express myself successfully in class discussions.
2. I rarely ask questions or volunteer answers in my classes.
3. I find giving presentations hard.

These questions measured students' speaking difficulties with 1) *unplanned speech within a peer group (informal context)*, 2) *unplanned speech in front of the whole class and the tutor (formal context)*, and 3) *prepared speech in front of the whole class and the tutor (formal context)* respectively.

Figure 4.14 shows the boxplots of these specific aspects of academic speaking difficulties across the entire sample (for all students).

Figure 4.14

Boxplots of All Students' Speaking Difficulty Levels by Subcategory



Additionally, Figure 4.15 shows boxplots of these aspects for each student group.

Figure 4.15

Boxplots of Each Group's Speaking Difficulty Levels by Subcategory

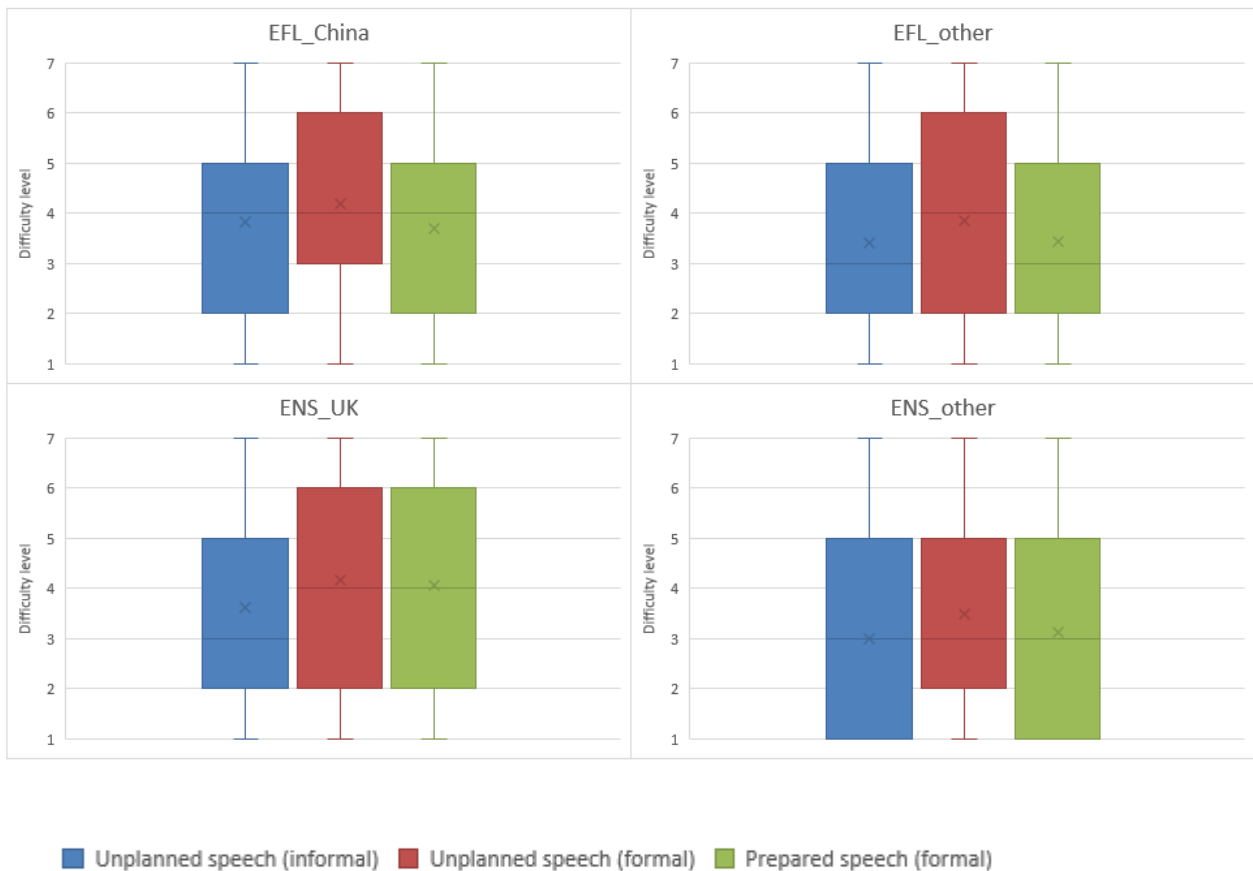


Figure 4.14 shows that formal unplanned speech was reported to be the most difficult aspect in speaking, followed by formal prepared speech and informal unplanned speech. However, there were differences between groups. Figure 4.15 reveals that for almost every group except for the Chinese EFL group, informal unplanned speech was considered less difficult than formal prepared speech. Conversely, for Chinese students, informal unplanned speech was slightly more challenging than formal prepared speech.

The results of Friedman tests are as follows:

Friedman tests:

EFL_China: $\chi^2(2) = 4.89, p = .087$

EFL_other: $\chi^2(2) = 25.67, p = .035$

ENS_UK: $\chi^2(2) = 151.19, p < .001$

ENS_other: $\chi^2(2) = 21.46, p = .095$

The tests showed significant differences in academic speaking difficulties across the three question items for the groups of EFL_other and ENS_UK. Hence, pairwise comparisons were conducted for these two groups.

Post-hoc pairwise comparisons:

Group EFL_other:

Unplanned speech (informal) vs. unplanned speech (formal): $p = .185, r = -.08$

Unplanned speech (informal) vs. prepared speech (formal): $p = 1.00, r = 0$

Unplanned speech (formal) vs. prepared speech (formal): $p = .185, r = .08$

Group ENS_UK:

Unplanned speech (informal) vs. unplanned speech (formal): $p < .001, r = -.14$

Unplanned speech (informal) vs. prepared speech (formal): $p < .001, r = -.12$

Unplanned speech (formal) vs. prepared speech (formal): $p = 1.00, r = .02$

The results suggest that UK students perceive speaking in informal contexts less challenging compared to formal contexts. For other student groups, all three speaking aspects are similarly difficult. The three groups of international students reported a higher difficulty level with formal unplanned speech (i.e., "I rarely ask questions or volunteer answers in my classes.") than informal

unplanned speech and formal prepared speech, although this difference was not statistically significant. This might reflect cultural differences where some international students might feel hesitant to ask questions (Lee, 2009) or challenge lecturers (Cheng, 2000) in classes. However, the lack of statistical significance suggests that while cultural differences might play a role, they may not be the dominant factor in the academic speaking context.

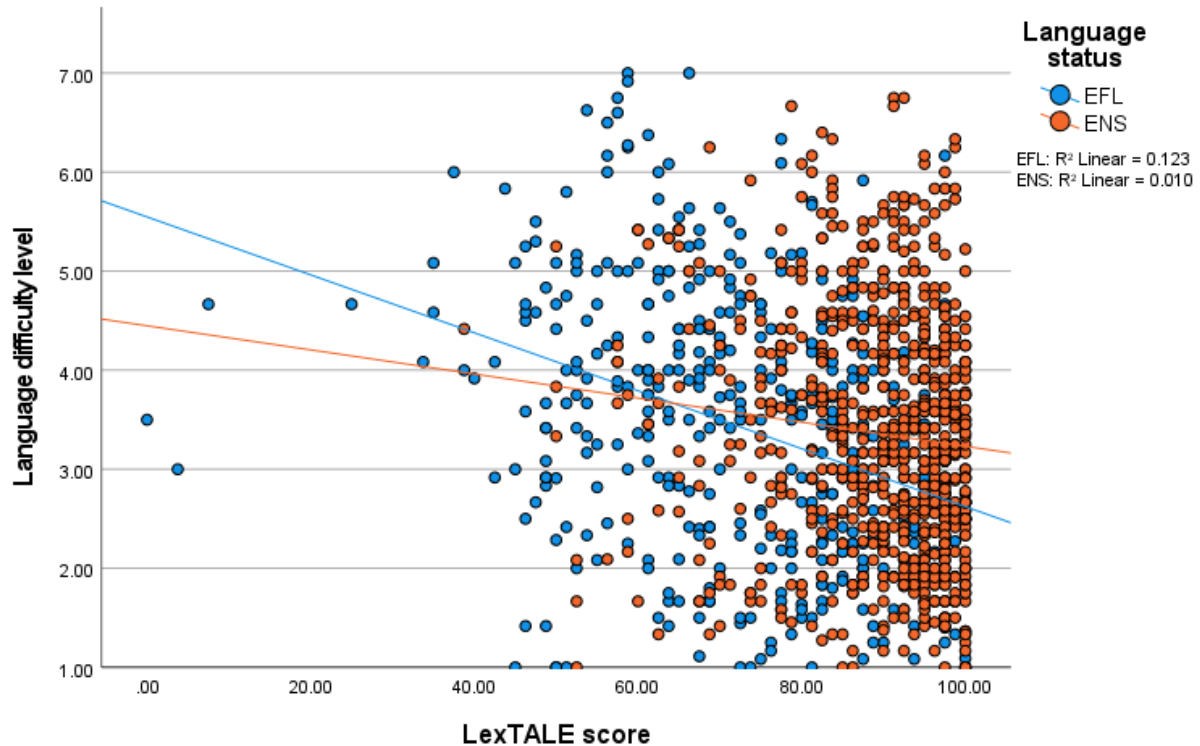
4.7.2.3.3 Correlations

In order to explore the relationships between students' vocabulary scores, self-ratings of English proficiency and academic language difficulty levels, a Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis was conducted. The results revealed that both objective (vocabulary scores) and subjective (self-ratings) measures of English language proficiency significantly and negatively correlated with academic language difficulty (vocabulary scores vs. academic language difficulty: $r_s = -.21, p < .001$; self-rated English proficiency vs. academic language difficulty: $r_s = -.30, p < .001$). These results suggest that students with higher English proficiency are more likely to rate their English proficiency higher and experience fewer academic language difficulties.

When examining the correlations within the EFL and the ENS groups separately, a stronger correlation was observed among EFL students (vocabulary scores vs. academic language difficulty: $r_s = -.38, p < .001$; self-rated English proficiency vs. academic language difficulty: $r_s = -.56, p < .001$) compared with ENS students (vocabulary scores vs. academic language difficulty: $r_s = -.15, p < .001$; self-rated English proficiency vs. academic language difficulty: $r_s = -.22, p < .001$). Figure 4.16 provides a visual comparison of the correlations between vocabulary scores and academic language difficulty for the two groups.

Figure 4.16

Scatterplot of LexTALE Vocabulary Score and Academic Language Difficulty Split by Language Status



As shown in Figure 4.16, EFL students demonstrated a stronger correlation than ENS students. Similar to the observation in Figure 4.6, the weaker correlation might be due to a narrow range of vocabulary scores in the ENS group. This means that many ENS students achieved maximum scores, leading to a lower correlation strength. Despite this, the fact that there was still significant correlation within ENS students suggested that the variations in academic language difficulty were genuine and meaningful.

4.7.2.4 Self-efficacy

The survey also asked participants questions about their self-efficacy, which measured their expectations and confidence in their studies. Specifically, all participants were requested to report their confidence in academic studies (i.e., academic self-efficacy). Moreover, EFL participants were exclusively asked additional questions about their confidence in studying in the English language (i.e., English self-efficacy).

There were eight questions evaluating all students' academic self-efficacy and two questions evaluating EFL students' English self-efficacy. They rated whether each statement (e.g., "I expect to do well in my studies.") was true of them or not on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 indicated "not at all

true of me” and 7 indicated “very true for me”. The average score of each participant was calculated for the analysis of both academic self-efficacy and English self-efficacy measures.

4.7.2.4.1 Academic self-efficacy

Table 4.8 and Figure 4.17 below present descriptive results for academic self-efficacy.

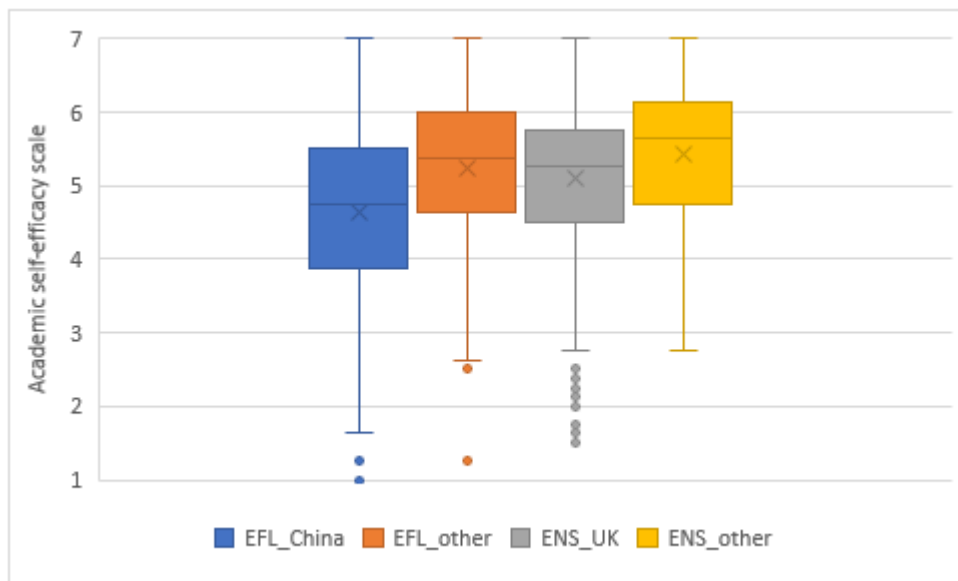
Table 4.8

Descriptive Statistics for the Academic Self-efficacy Levels

Group	N	M (SD)	Mdn	Range
EFL_China	153	4.63 (1.19)	4.75	6.00
EFL_other	270	5.24 (1.01)	5.38	5.75
ENS_UK	623	5.09 (1.01)	5.25	5.50
ENS_other	117	5.43 (0.99)	5.63	4.25

Figure 4.17

Boxplot of Academic Self-efficacy Levels Organised by Group



In Figure 4.17, it can be seen that Chinese EFL students had notably the lowest academic self-efficacy among the four groups. Interestingly, both non-Chinese EFL students and international ENS students, despite their international status, reported higher academic self-efficacy compared to UK ENS students.

A Mann-Whitney test was run to investigate the potential differences in academic self-efficacy between EFL and ENS students. The results indicated that ENS students had significantly higher levels of academic self-efficacy compared to EFL students, $U = 145511.50$, $z = 1.20$, $p = .046$, $r = .04$.

Furthermore, a Kruskal-Wallis test showed a significant difference in academic self-efficacy among the four student groups, $H(3) = 43.14$, $p < .001$. A post hoc test with pairwise comparisons further revealed that within the EFL group, Chinese students had significantly lower levels of academic self-efficacy compared to non-Chinese EFL students ($p < .001$, $r = -.25$). Moreover, within the ENS group, UK students had significantly lower levels of academic self-efficacy compared to international ENS students ($p = .003$, $r = -.13$). Additionally, Chinese EFL students had significantly lower levels of academic self-efficacy than UK ENS students ($p < .001$, $r = -.16$), indicating the lowest confidence among all the groups.

A Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis revealed a strong negative correlation between academic language difficulty levels and academic self-efficacy ($r_s = -.50$, $p < .001$), suggesting that students who experience more academic language difficulties tend to have lower confidence in their academic abilities.

When analysing the EFL and ENS groups separately, both groups displayed strong correlations between academic language difficulty and academic self-efficacy (EFL: $r_s = -.51$, $p < .001$; ENS: $r_s = -.50$, $p < .001$). The results indicated that academic language difficulties significantly and strongly associated with academic studies for all groups of students regardless of whether English was their first language or not.

4.7.2.4.2 English self-efficacy

As English self-efficacy questions were exclusively administered to EFL students, this section only includes analysis and comparison of two EFL groups. The descriptive results for English self-efficacy are presented in Table 4.9 and Figure 4.18 below.

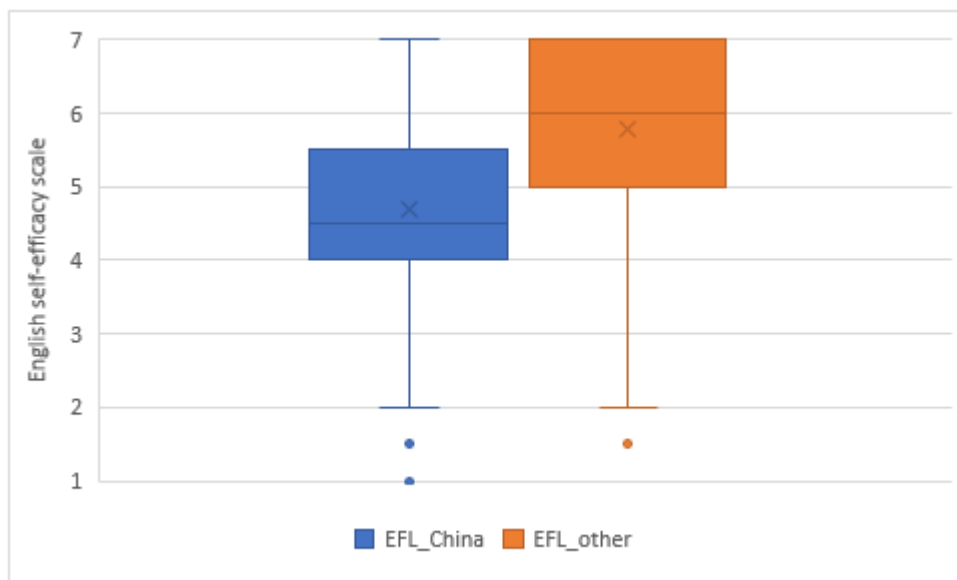
Table 4.9
Descriptive Statistics for the English Self-efficacy Levels

Group	N	M (SD)	Mdn	Range
EFL_China	153	4.70 (1.30)	4.50	6.00

EFL_other	269	5.78 (1.26)	6.00	5.50
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Figure 4.18

Boxplot of English Self-efficacy Levels Organised by Group



According to Figure 4.18, Chinese EFL students had noticeably lower levels of English self-efficacy than non-Chinese EFL students.

As there were only two groups in the English self-efficacy measure, a Mann-Whitney test was used to compare the means within the EFL group. The results confirmed that Chinese EFL students reported significantly lower levels of English self-efficacy than non-Chinese EFL students, $U = 10577.00$, $z = -8.39$, $p < .001$, $r = -.41$.

While the group averages provide an overview of the differences between groups, the individual ranges in self-efficacy, as shown by the range data and Figures 4.17 and 4.18, reveal a more complex picture. For example, the broad range observed among Chinese EFL students in both academic and English self-efficacy highlighted a distinct diversity within this group. This suggests that even within the same group, some students may find their studies difficult while others may find them easy.

4.7.2.5 Summary of the results

The cross-sectional survey mainly evaluated students' English language proficiency and their self-perceptions related to language and learning, including self-rated English proficiency, perceived academic language difficulty and self-efficacy. The effects of domicile status (home vs. international) and language status (native vs. non-native English speakers) on these variables were also analysed across four student groups.

English language proficiency was measured by LexTALE vocabulary test. EFL students demonstrated significantly lower proficiency than ENS students. Within the EFL groups, Chinese EFL students had significantly lower proficiency compared with non-Chinese EFL students. However, there was no significant difference in proficiency among the two ENS student groups. The pattern of students' self-rated English proficiency closely mirrored the objective measure of their proficiency, indicating students' self-awareness regarding their English abilities. A correlation test confirmed this, revealing a significant and positive relationship between objective and subjective English proficiency, particularly among EFL students.

When it came to perceived academic language difficulty, measured by language-related difficulty in studies, Chinese students reported the highest difficulty levels across all groups. Surprisingly, UK students, despite being native English speakers and home students, reported significantly higher levels of academic language difficulties than both non-Chinese EFL students and international ENS students. EFL students, particularly those from China, generally found lower-level linguistic skills as challenging or even more challenging than higher-level academic skills. In contrast, ENS students usually found lower-level linguistic skills less difficult than higher-level academic skills. A correlation test suggested that students with higher English proficiency or those who had greater confidence in their English skills tended to experience lower levels of academic language difficulties.

In terms of confidence in studies, measured by academic self-efficacy, Chinese students showed the lowest levels among all groups. UK students continued to show unexpected uncertainties, with lower academic self-efficacy compared to international ENS students. Interestingly, the pattern of academic language difficulty seemed to mirror academic self-efficacy more closely than objective or subjective English language proficiency. A correlation test confirmed that students experiencing higher academic language difficulties were more likely to have lower academic self-efficacy.

In terms of confidence in studying in English, measured by English self-efficacy exclusively for EFL students, Chinese EFL students reported significantly lower confidence than non-Chinese EFL

students. This suggested that, among all student groups, Chinese EFL students exhibited the lowest English proficiency, the lowest confidence in their English skills and capabilities in studying in English language, and the highest levels of academic English difficulty.

4.8 Open questions

As mentioned in the end of Section 4.3.3, two open-ended questions were part of the on-line survey which was designed and implemented through Qualtrics. Participants were asked about both challenging and positive experiences in their studies. The first question sought to understand what they found difficult, while the second focused on what they found enjoyable. Specifically, the questions were: 1. Please tell us about some experiences (academic and/or social) that you have found challenging in your current studies; 2. Please tell us about some experiences (academic and/or social) that you have found positive in your current studies. These two questions did not require forced responses, making it possible for participants to skip them (or either of them) if they had no relevant experience or did not wish to share.

4.8.1 Participants of open questions

A total of 691 participants provided valid responses to the question about challenges, while 667 participants provided valid responses to the question about positive experiences. Table 4.10 below displays the distribution of participants among different groups for both open questions.

Table 4.10

Participant Group Distribution for Two Open Questions

	Challenges <i>N (%)</i>	Positive Experiences <i>N (%)</i>
EFL_China	68 (44.44%)	64 (41.83%)
EFL_other	153 (56.67%)	150 (55.56%)
ENS_UK	397 (63.72%)	381 (61.16%)
ENS_other	73 (62.39%)	72 (61.54%)
	691 (59.42%)	667 (57.35%)

Total

Table 4.10 also displays the percentage of participants who provided valid responses compared to the total valid survey participants. Most non-participants either skipped one or both questions or provided invalid answers, such as “No”, “N/A”, random meaningless words, or irrelevant responses. To be considered valid, responses for one question needed to be related to academic and/or social challenges, and responses for the other one had to be associated with positive academic and/or social experiences.

EFL students, particularly those from China, appeared less likely to respond to open questions. Since participants had to express their experiences in English, the lower English proficiency of EFL students may have contributed to their reluctance.

4.8.2 Analysis approach of open questions

The data were entered into an Excel document and subsequently imported into NVivo, an on-line programme that facilitates coding and organising data from various sources into themes (Thomas, 2017). A qualitative analytic method called content analysis was employed, following the guidelines by Bengtsson (2016). Content analysis classifies textual material, condensing it into more relevant and manageable pieces, and can be used for various purposes, such as analysing open-ended survey questions (Weber, 1990). To minimise the influence of preconceptions on the results, an inductive approach was employed for the content analysis. This approach was chosen because although previous studies have explored similar topics, the participants in this study experienced a unique learning environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which created a distinct context with insufficient prior knowledge.

Given the data’s nature (diverse responses, many of which were brief and surface-level), the analysis focused on manifest content, describing what the participants explicitly stated rather than interpreting the text on a deeper level. Four stages outlined by Bengtsson (2016) were followed:

4.8.2.1 Decontextualisation

In this stage, meaning units (i.e., the smallest units containing some of the insights the researcher needs) are identified, and an open coding process is used to label them with codes.

After importing the data into NVivo, I familiarised myself with the content through repeated re-readings. I identified meaning units related to participants' academic and social experiences and labelled them with codes in relation to challenges and positive experiences across the data. A complete response was usually considered as one single meaning unit, unless a participant shared multiple experiences from distinctly different perspectives. For instance, the meaning units of both "my lecturers speak very quickly" and "very sharp accents from foreign lecturer" were coded as "listening difficulties" at this stage. As the analysis progressed, initial codes were generated. Adopting an inductive approach, I developed the initial coding list during the process rather than creating it beforehand. Codes were repeatedly revised and rephrased, resulting in the formation of an initial coding list in preparation for the subsequent phase. In the end, 20 codes were identified within the domain of challenges, and 16 codes in the domain of positive experiences.

4.8.2.2 Recontextualisation

This stage requires researchers to re-read and double-check what has been included as meaning units. All content related to the research question should be included, while unrelated content should be excluded.

NVivo's automatic highlighting feature marks all coded data, allowing me to easily distinguish between included content and excluded portions. I reviewed the entire original text to ensure that all relevant data were included. Responses pertaining to students' positive and challenging experiences were considered relevant. I then re-evaluated all unmarked data to determine if they should be included. Several responses unrelated to the predefined categories of challenges or positive experiences were excluded from further analysis. For instance, a response like "Attending" was omitted.

4.8.2.3 Categorisation

This stage involves the identification of homogeneous groups and generation of categories.

As there were two open-ended questions exploring two distinct aspects of participants' experiences, the dataset was naturally divided into two primary domains: challenges and positive experiences. I further explored the data, searching for similarities, grouping them into subcategories, and

eventually generating potential categories. For example, the previously mentioned listening difficulties were classified as “language-related difficulties” within the “academic obstacles” category for the domain of challenges. I then reviewed the entire categorisation process. In the end, there were three categories for each open-ended question (six final categories in total). Whenever I encountered uncertainties, I consulted with a colleague with relevant educational research background. Finally, I reviewed and refined the categories.

4.8.2.4 Compilation

This stage involves presenting a comprehensive overview of the results.

With the help of NVivo and some manual calculations, I created tables to display numeric information about the experiences of various participant groups. When presenting the results, I made efforts to stay as close to the participants’ words as possible in order to accurately convey this manifest analysis. Relevant quotations from the original data were selected to support each sub-category, without any modifications made to grammar or lexical choices. I also created additional tables to show my coding and categorisation process, wrote up a detailed analysis for each category and drew conclusions based on the evidence.

4.8.3 Results of open questions

Table 4.11 and Table 4.12 present the codes for the domains of *challenges* and *positive experiences* respectively, along with the frequencies for each code. The word *frequencies* refers to the number of times participants mentioned specific references.

Table 4.11

Codes and Frequencies in the Domain of Challenges

Codes	Frequencies
Difficulties in subject-related knowledge	64
Difficulties in assignment and assessment	37
Difficulties in group work and discussion	32
Lack of support and guidance in courses	21
Teaching methods	25
Other course-related difficulties	14

Reading difficulties	85
Speaking difficulties	72
Listening difficulties	36
Writing difficulties	59
Overall language-related difficulties	36
Learning methods and learning skills	20
Distraction and boredom	25
Mental health issues and learning disabilities	18
Other self-related difficulties	13
Inexperience and differences	49
Work overload; difficulties with work-life balance	104
On-line education difficulties	78
Social isolation and social difficulties	90
General and other difficulties due to the COVID-19 restrictions	14

Table 4.12

Codes and Frequencies in the Domain of Positive Experiences

Codes	Frequencies
Learning enjoyment	167
Support from lecturers and tutors	120
Ease of study and improvement	82
Friendship and social interaction	81
Sense of accomplishment	71
Benefits from recorded lectures	56
Other support from universities	48
Help from peers	44
Seminars and group discussion	30
Convenient on-line study and events	26
Available learning resources	23
Other enjoyment	18
Time flexibility	16
General support and other support	13
Self-support	11
Other flexibility	7

These codes were then organised into sub-categories and further grouped into categories. For example, the first six codes in Table 4.11 were arranged into the sub-category *course-related difficulties*. Table 4.13 and Table 4.14 show the analysis process with example meaning units (i.e., participant quotations).

Table 4.13

Categories, Sub-categories, and Examples in the Domain of Challenges

Categories	Sub-categories	Example meaning units
Academic obstacles	Course-related difficulties	A lot of the content in my course is very difficult and sometimes I struggle to understand it all.
	Language-related difficulties	I speak fairly eloquently in my mother tongue, it is hard to maintain the same level of “elegance” in English. In an academic setting, I sometimes struggle to find a certain keyword that would express my thoughts.
	Self-related difficulties	Due to mental illness, I have found it hard to attend on-line classes, therefore I am worried I will not be doing well.
Isolation and distance	On-line education difficulties	I have found speaking in on-line lectures challenging and more intimidating, especially within breakout rooms.
	Social isolation and social difficulties	Having a social life is also a struggle because of lockdown restrictions and on-line lectures making it difficult to make friends.
	General and other difficulties due to the COVID-19 restrictions	General COVID-19 uncertainty and restrictions.
Adjustment difficulties	Inexperience and differences	As an international student I’ve found it challenging so far to adapt to the academic differences between the UK and my home country.
		The workload is quite high this year and I feel

Work overload; difficulties with work-life balance like tasks take me longer than expected.

Table 4.14

Categories, Sub-categories, and Examples in the Domain of Positive Experiences

Categories	Sub-categories	Example meaning units
Enjoyment and improvement	Sense of accomplishment	It makes me confident that I can keep up with the lectures on 2x speed.
	Friendship and social interaction	I have met some like-minded people that I'll enjoy staying in touch with.
	Learning enjoyment	Some of the topics we have learned about have been very interesting.
	Ease and improvement	I feel I am improving, although slowly.
	Other enjoyment	The city is really nice and the university has nice buildings.
Support and accessibility	Support from lecturers and tutors	Lecturers are incredibly understanding and very helpful in the case of me not understanding a topic.
	Available learning resources	There are plenty of resources available and I know where to look for them.
	Help from peers	I find it helpful to have a discussion with students about the paper I read as a homework because it gives me a chance to clarify some parts of the paper I found confusing.
	Seminars and group discussion	I've found that discussions during seminars are very useful and informative, especially when I make an effort to contribute my own thoughts.
	Self-support	I found that looking at the notes beforehand really helps.
	Other support from universities	The university – academics and administrators alike – has responded very well to the crisis, and has maintained transparency throughout the process.
	General support and other support	I cannot stress how much I love the NHS

		- it's been a real help to me for my experience in the UK.
Flexibility and freedom	Time flexibility	Being able to fit work around my own schedule.
	Benefits from recorded lectures	Having all the lectures recorded means I can rewatch areas that I have found challenging or confusing.
	Convenient on-line study and events	I have enjoyed the flexibility of the on-line course structures.
	Other flexibility	Freedom of choosing the material for studying.

As illustrated earlier, three categories were established to outline participants' challenges and three to highlight their positive experiences. The figure below shows the screenshot of the nodes on NVivo.

Figure 4.19

A screenshot of the nodes on NVivo

Nodes

Name
<input type="checkbox"/> Challenges
<input type="checkbox"/> Academic obstacles
<input type="checkbox"/> Course-related difficulties
<input type="checkbox"/> Language-related difficulties
<input type="checkbox"/> Self-related difficulties
<input type="checkbox"/> Adjustment difficulties
<input type="checkbox"/> Inexperience and differences
<input type="checkbox"/> Work overload; difficulties with work-life balance
<input type="checkbox"/> Isolation and distance
<input type="checkbox"/> General and other difficulties due to the COVID-19 restriction
<input type="checkbox"/> On-line education difficulties
<input type="checkbox"/> Social isolation and social difficulties
<input type="checkbox"/> Positive experience
<input type="checkbox"/> Enjoyment and improvement
<input type="checkbox"/> Ease and improvement
<input type="checkbox"/> Friendship and social interaction
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning enjoyment
<input type="checkbox"/> Other enjoyment
<input type="checkbox"/> Sense of accomplishment
<input type="checkbox"/> Flexibility and freedom
<input type="checkbox"/> Benefits from recorded lectures
<input type="checkbox"/> Convenient on-line study and events
<input type="checkbox"/> Other flexibility
<input type="checkbox"/> Time flexibility
<input type="checkbox"/> Support and accessibility
<input type="checkbox"/> Available learning resources
<input type="checkbox"/> General support and other support
<input type="checkbox"/> Help from peers
<input type="checkbox"/> Other support from universities
<input type="checkbox"/> Self-support
<input type="checkbox"/> Seminars and group discussion
<input type="checkbox"/> Support from lecturers and tutors

In following sections, I will discuss the six categories in detail.

4.8.3.1 Challenges

Academic obstacles, isolation and distance as well as *adjustment difficulties* were three main issues for participants' reported challenges.

Challenge 1: Academic obstacles

Academic obstacles emerged as a key element of participants' challenging experiences and were reported more frequently than any other category. These obstacles were mainly associated with language, although some were related to courses or personal factors. However, those course-related and self-related challenges also had language elements.

When compared with course-related and self-related difficulties, language-related difficulties were the most frequently reported academic obstacles across all four student groups. These difficulties were mainly concerning reading, speaking, listening and writing. Detailed analysis and comparisons of these language-related difficulties across groups are provided in Section 4.8.3.3).

In terms of course-related difficulties, understanding subject-related knowledge stood out to be a primary concern. Many participants reported challenges in relation to the subject content and subject concepts (e.g., "A lot of the content in my course is very difficult and sometimes I struggle to understand it all."). Besides this, issues relating to assignments and assessments, group work, teaching methods, and lack of support or guidance in their courses were also reported. It is noteworthy that course-related challenges might be in some ways comparable to language-related ones, as students' language problems were also likely to occur in their subject studies. For example, understanding technical terminology and concepts with unfamiliar vocabulary can pose a challenge, leading to difficulties in group work and assignments. Nevertheless, there was a fair amount of dissatisfaction concerning teaching and insufficient support. Therefore, Students' desired support was further explored in interviews (see Section 6.8.5).

A few participants described their difficulties to be self-related. Instead of attributing their difficulties to external factors (such as lecturers talking too fast or reading being too difficult), these self-related

difficulties revealed how participants sometimes placed the blame solely on themselves. Some participants reported being easily distracted and feeling bored (e.g., “It is difficult for me to focus during lectures so I often miss what the lecturer is saying.”); some expressed dissatisfaction with their learning methods or skills (e.g., “Finding the most effective methods of independent study”); others mentioned concerns about mental health issues and learning disabilities (e.g., “I am dyslexic so it takes me much longer to read and process the material.”). Despite focusing on personal factors rather than language-related difficulties, some of the issues mentioned by participants were indirectly related to language, such as difficulty focusing in lectures leading to missed content while *listening*, or dyslexia affecting *reading*. Although the reporting rate of self-related difficulties was minimal compared to the other academic challenges, it is still worth exploring the possible reasons for distractions, ineffective methods, and the support they may need. Given that most answers in the open-ended questions were brief and superficial, the interviews addressed those questions in detail.

Challenge 2: Isolation and distance

Isolation and distance reflected participants’ dissatisfaction about their inability to connect with others, difficulties in on-line learning, and other difficulties they encountered due to the lockdown restrictions.

Socially, participants reported feeling isolated and lacking opportunities to make friends and establish connections. The COVID-19 restrictions limited their chances of meeting people, and the transition to on-line classes made it even more challenging to connect with their own classmates. Although some participants did not explicitly attribute their social difficulties to the restrictions (e.g., “it’s been hard to meet people”), it is reasonable to speculate that COVID-19 still played an important role since most participants mentioned it when expressing their social disconnections (e.g., “Connecting with people in my class is hard due to the course being on-line.”).

Academically, there were complaints about the effectiveness and convenience of mandatory on-line teaching. Many students seemed to be unaccustomed to learning on-line (e.g., “It’s hard with everything being on-line, especially when you have to have discussions with other people and it’s awkward.”). Some mentioned slow internet speeds, which might hinder their coursework; some found it hard to maintain focus in front of a computer; others simply disliked studying on-line.

Furthermore, there was a general sense of frustration when participants mentioned the restrictions (e.g., “This year, lockdown and restrictions have been particularly detrimental.”). As the data collection took place during a period when UK universities had to follow specific rules due to the restrictions, it is not surprising to see the distinct impact of these issues.

Challenge 3: Adjustment difficulties

Participants faced difficulties adjusting, which involved feelings of overload, imbalanced, inexperienced, and encountering differences.

Many of them complained that their workload was overwhelming. Some also reported struggling to maintain a balance between their studies and personal life or effectively manage their time. One participant stated “Keeping up with the workload at master’s level is hard, especially when you want to do anything else with your life”.

For students who had little or no prior experience in the UK academic environment, adjustment was challenging due to numerous differences (e.g., “Teaching pattern is different here, something which I am not used to.”). Notably, this type of challenge was not limited to EFL students alone, as international ENS students reported similar issues (e.g., “The British curriculum where sometimes only one assessment is given for a term-long course is new and challenging to me.”; “I’ve found it challenging so far to adapt to the academic differences between the UK and my home country.”). In addition, despite being based in the UK and having familiarity with the local environment, some UK ENS students also experienced difficulties due to the differences between universities and schools (e.g., “Learning from lectures is quite a big change from school, so it’s taking some time to get used to it.”).

4.8.3.2 Positive experiences

Positive experiences reported by participants can be categorised into three main areas: *enjoyment and improvement*, *support and accessibility*, as well as *flexibility and freedom*.

Positive experience 1: Enjoyment and improvement

Participants expressed a sense of *enjoyment and improvement* in their learning journey, which

involved their positive feelings for learning what they were interested in, feeling a sense of achievement concerning their accomplishments or improvements, and having friendship or pleasant interactions with people (although limited).

Many participants found their course content interesting and the learning process pleasant. Given that academic obstacles was the most frequently mentioned challenge while *enjoyment and improvement* had the highest frequency in positive experiences, it is possible that academic studies can be difficult and enjoyable at the same time. This assumption was confirmed by a few participants with one example's original text stating "Even though they are difficult, I enjoy writing essays and trying to present my knowledge".

Other than learning enjoyment and the experience of ease, improvement and accomplishment also brought positivities. Some were delighted that the learning was easy (e.g., "Lectures are easy enough to follow"), and some made improvement or obtained a sense of accomplishment (e.g., "Continuous progression in academics is motivating.").

Despite limited social interactions, participants found joy in connecting with people and building friendships (e.g., "Although I haven't been able to meet people on my course, I feel like I'm much closer with my flatmates than other years due to mainly staying in the flat."; "My course mates are all very conversational and we really enjoy comparing our cultural differences and experiences."). It is interesting that the reporting frequencies of social interactions in both positive and negative sub-categories (friendship and social interaction vs. social isolation and social difficulties) were almost the same. It is possible that the situation made it hard to meet new people and make friends, which highlighted their enjoyment in the restricted social connections and made those limited friendships specially valuable.

Positive experience 2: Support and accessibility

Participants appreciated the support provided by different people or through different methods. The help and assistance received from lecturers and tutors were reported most often (e.g., "Lecturers are incredibly understanding and very helpful in the case of me not understanding a topic."). There was a lot of satisfaction concerning their fast speed of email responses, understanding attitudes, approachable personalities, and helpful teaching methods.

Many participants also obtained learning help from friends, group members, university departments or other sources (e.g., “other students are really helpful when they understand something I don’t.”).

Positive experience 3: Flexibility and freedom

The category of *Flexibility and freedom* was also influenced by the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 period, similar to *isolation and distance*. On-line study and limited social interactions seemed to provide students with more flexible time and life/study styles. Interestingly, despite the potential dissatisfaction with on-line universities, there were also positive aspects that some students appreciated.

The availability of recorded lectures emerged as the most significant advantage of on-line education. By accessing recorded lectures on-line, many students gained the flexibility to watch them at their convenience. They could pause, rewind, take notes, adjust the speed, and rewatch repetitively until full comprehension was achieved (e.g., “Pre-recorded lectures have enabled me to understand the content better since I can pause the lecture, make more detailed notes, and research points I don't fully understand without missing important information.”). Some lectures even included captions, facilitating easier understanding, particularly for students who had trouble hearing or understanding the content (e.g., “I’ve found it great when there are captions in videos (lectures or otherwise) so that I can see the words that I wasn’t able to hear.”). Such benefits of recorded lectures highlight their potential usefulness beyond compulsory on-line learning, especially in addressing potential language barriers. For example, in future offline and in-person teaching scenarios, it could be beneficial to have lectures recorded and available on-line for students to conveniently review and reinforce their understanding.

Moreover, with almost everything being on-line combined with the fact that students did not have to go to campus, they gained more available and flexible time to spend as they wished or to attend on-line events (e.g., “Studying on-line part time gives me the flexibility to fit study around my work.”).

4.8.3.3 Open question findings across different groups

Group comparison 1: Language-related difficulties by group

As academic obstacles was the category most frequently reported as a challenge with the sub-category of language-related difficulties being the most reported one, language-related difficulties seemed to be a particularly important factor in students' challenging experiences. Since this research also aimed to compare students' language-related experiences among different groups, a matrix was created to show the frequency and reporting rate of self-reported language-related difficulties within these four groups (see Table 4.15 below).

Table 4.15

Frequency and Reporting Rate of Language-related Difficulties by Group

	Reading difficulty	Listening difficulty	Writing difficulty	Speaking difficulty	Other language difficulty	Overall language difficulty
EFL_China	11 (16.18%)	13 (19.12%)	7 (10.29%)	6 (8.82%)	8 (11.76%)	45 (66.18%)
EFL_other	11 (7.19%)	14 (9.15%)	16 (10.46%)	21 (13.73%)	11 (7.19%)	73 (47.71%)
ENS_UK	56 (14.11%)	8 (2.02%)	33 (8.31%)	38 (9.57%)	14 (3.53%)	149 (37.53%)
ENS_other	7 (9.59%)	1 (1.37%)	3 (4.11%)	7 (9.59%)	3 (4.11%)	21 (28.77%)

Note. Numbers in the table: the number of references mentioned related to the difficulty.

Percentages in the table: the proportion of the number of students reported the difficulty in relation to all the students in the group who provided at least one valid answer related to challenges.

The frequency represents the number of references that participants mentioned. When participants reported language-related issues without indicating specific areas (e.g., “the level of my English is not high enough”), these data were classified as *other language difficulty*. The frequency of *overall language difficulty* has the cumulative sum of all the other categories, including reading, listening, writing and speaking and other language difficulties.

As illustrated in Table 4.15, EFL students, particularly those from China, reported language-related difficulties more frequently than ENS students. This high frequency of language-related difficulties among Chinese students was consistent with the results in other measurements from the survey, such as self-rated language-related scales and the objective English proficiency measure, further confirming that Chinese students found their language barriers particularly challenging compared to all other groups.

Nevertheless, ENS students also experienced language-related challenges in an academic context. Notably, UK ENS students reported an unexpectedly high numbers of reading issues (e.g., “I have found finding my own reading difficult and often I find the academic language in readings difficult to understand.”). Surprisingly, the reporting rate for reading-related difficulties among UK students (14.11%) was even higher than that of the non-Chinese EFL group (7.19%) and almost equal to that of Chinese EFL students (16.18%).

Interestingly, international ENS students reported the lowest rate of language-related difficulties, despite the fact that UK ENS students were expected to be most at ease and familiar with the UK’s culture and educational setting. The observed lack of confidence among UK students was in line with the results of the academic self-efficacy and academic language difficulty scales in the survey. Further insights into UK students’ language-related difficulties were gathered through the interview research.

Group comparison 2: General presentation by group

Table 4.16

Frequency and Reporting Rate in each Category by Group

	Challenges			Positive experiences		
	Academic obstacles	Isolation and distance	Adjustment difficulties	Enjoyment and improvement	Support and accessibility	Flexibility and freedom
EFL_China	65 (82.28%)	7 (8.86%)	7 (8.86%)	36 (50.00%)	31 (43.06%)	5 (6.94%)
EFL_other	123 (62.44%)	36 (18.27%)	38 (19.29%)	99 (53.51%)	72 (38.92%)	14 (7.57%)
ENS_UK	320 (61.54%)	112 (21.54%)	88 (16.92%)	242 (52.04%)	150 (32.26%)	73 (15.70%)
ENS_other	49 (51.04%)	27 (28.13%)	20 (20.83%)	42 (46.15%)	36 (39.56%)	13 (14.29%)

Note. Numbers in the table: the number of references mentioned related to the category.

Percentages in the table: the proportion of the number of references in the category in relation to the total number of references in the domain (challenges/positive experiences) for that group.

Table 4.16 shows that the issue of academic obstacles were a prominent concern among all groups of students. For example, academic obstacles made up 82.28% of the challenges reported by Chinese EFL students. This again emphasised the need for investigation into what additional support students require to address their academic challenges, especially those related to languages, which was

further explored in the interview study. Surprisingly, UK ENS students reported a higher rate of academic obstacles than international ENS students, nearly equal to the rate reported by non-Chinese EFL students, which further confirms their lack of confidence in academic studies.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the impacts of COVID-19 appeared to be more negative (*isolation and distance*) than positive (*flexibility and freedom*), which highlights the need for additional support, guidance or changes to mitigate the negative effects of the restrictions or a similar crisis in the future.

4.8.3.4 Summary of the results

The responses to open-ended questions offer some valuable insights into students' perceived challenges and positive experiences. The challenges students experienced were more academic than social with language-related difficulties being an important factor. EFL students, particularly those from China, found language-related issues more difficult than ENS students. Difficulties related to restrictions also influenced participants, leading to feelings of loneliness and isolation as well as academic challenges. Adjustment issues were also mentioned as a new environment can make everything hard.

Fortunately, despite these academic difficulties, many students expressed their enjoyment of the learning process, often shown by their interest in subject content or their delight in accomplishment and improvement. Support from a variety of sources, especially from lecturers and tutors, was also perceived to be useful. The flexibility and convenience provided by on-line courses emerged as a silver lining to the restrictions, even though the negative impacts were more prominent.

EFL students' perceived academic obstacles, especially those related to language, constituted the majority of the challenges they faced during their educational journey in the UK. Nevertheless, these problems were not exclusive to EFL students. Despite English being ENS students' first language, UK ENS students surprisingly showed a high degree of uncertainty concerning language-related issues and general academic studies. These results were consistent with the survey outcome measures.

4.9 Discussion

The cross-sectional survey study analysed different groups of students' English language proficiency and self-perceptions related to language-related and academic experiences, including self-rated

English proficiency, self-efficacy and perceived academic language difficulty. In the survey, participants self-assessed their English skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking), language-related difficulties experienced in studies and self-efficacy. They also completed the LexTALE vocabulary test to measure their objective English proficiency and answered open questions to express their challenges and positive experiences. Unlike previous research, this study separated the effects of domicile status (home vs. international) and language status (English as a native language, ENS vs. English as a foreign language, EFL) and compared four groups of students: Chinese EFL students (EFL_China), non-Chinese EFL students (EFL_other), UK ENS students (ENS_UK) and international ENS students (ENS_other).

4.9.1 English language proficiency

This section discusses different groups of students' English language proficiency levels, which were evaluated by LexTALE vocabulary performances.

The results revealed no significant difference in vocabulary knowledge between UK ENS students and international ENS students. Both groups outperformed the two EFL groups, with Chinese EFL students scoring significantly the lowest.

Li et al.'s (2010) research suggested that Chinese students tend to have lower English proficiency compared to other international students. This study not only supports Li et al.'s findings but also extends them by comparing within the EFL group itself, which did not include international ENS students. Eddey and Baumann (2011) suggested a correlation between English language proficiency and the country of origin, with students from countries like China typically having lower English proficiency compared to those from countries where English is the official or dominant language, widely spoken or well understood (e.g., USA, India, and Western Europe). This study corroborates these findings and highlights the fact that despite sharing the commonality of being international students and non-native English speakers, the English proficiency of Chinese EFL students tends to be considerably lower than EFL students from other countries. Given that the study found no difference in English language proficiency between UK home students and international ENS students, it is necessary to distinguish international ENS students (such as those from the USA) from other international students when it comes to English language proficiency.

4.9.2 Self-perceptions of English language proficiency

This section discusses different groups of students' self-perceptions of English language proficiency, which were evaluated by self-rated English proficiency levels.

Interestingly, the pattern of self-rated English proficiency closely mirrored the objective measurements of English proficiency (measured by LexTALE vocabulary performance). Both ENS student groups self-assessed their English skills indistinguishably and significantly higher than either EFL student group, with Chinese EFL students displaying the least language confidence. This pattern remained consistent when examining self-ratings across all language skills, including reading, listening, writing and speaking. The correlation test showed a positive and significant relationship between vocabulary knowledge and self-ratings of English skills. This suggests that students have a certain degree of intuitive understanding of their own English language competencies. The results align with Li and Zhang's (2021) meta-analysis, which reported a moderate overall correlation between students' self-assessment and language performance, as measured by language tests and teacher assessment.

Tomoschuk et al.'s study (2018) suggested that students from China might overestimate their English proficiency compared to other groups due to different frames of reference when comparing their language skills to those around them. However, this study does not corroborate this finding. In this research, Chinese students had both the lowest English language proficiency and the lowest self-ratings of their English proficiency, indicating that they were well aware of their limitations, and were unlikely to overestimate their English abilities compared to others. Since the research contexts were different, with Tomoschuk et al.'s study (2018) being set up in bilingualism and this study being set up in UK higher education, it is possible that students are more likely to be aware of their English abilities in the context of UK higher education.

4.9.3 Perceived academic language difficulty

This section discusses different groups of students' academic language difficulties experienced in their studies, which were evaluated by levels of language-related academic difficulty. Additionally, insights gathered from open questions are also discussed.

Chinese EFL students experienced the highest level of academic difficulty, followed by UK ENS students, non-Chinese EFL students and international ENS students. Interestingly, the difficulty level of UK students was significantly higher than that of non-Chinese EFL students. This was surprising considering their native language advantage and local domicile status, as well as their high English proficiency levels shown in both objective and subjective evaluations. This suggests that high confidence in general English proficiency does not necessarily translate into high confidence in using the language for academic purposes.

While the language difficulties faced by non-native English students and international students in English-speaking countries have been widely researched by scholars such as Bawa and Watson (2017), Phakiti and Li (2011), and Sawir (2005), there is limited understanding of the language-related difficulties experienced exclusively by native English-speaking and local students. According to previous research, some of the language-related problems encountered by EFL students go beyond linguistic knowledge and comprehension, extending to academic language skills that could also affect ENS students. For example, issues such as lack of attention during reading (Al-Jarrah & Ismail, 2018), inadequate skills in organising ideas in writing (Muamaroh et al., 2020) and nervousness during public speaking (Kheryadi & Hilmiyati, 2021) contain non-linguistic elements and could potentially affect native English speakers as well. In fact, both EFL and ENS participants in the open questions in this study reported similar issues, such as distraction while studying and challenges in understanding and speaking during on-line lectures. Other factors, like adjustment issues and learning disabilities, also influenced students of different language backgrounds. For example, many participants in open questions reported difficulties in adjusting to a new learning environment (such as overwhelming reading load and challenging academic transition). This further confirmed that academic language can be challenging for students regardless of their language background.

The assessment of academic language difficulty scale in this study emphasised English usage in academic contexts rather than purely linguistic knowledge. Therefore, the high difficulty level reported by UK ENS students suggested a lack of confidence in their academic language abilities. Moreover, both skill-specific comparisons and open-ended questions highlight the significance of *reading* in UK students' language uncertainty, a topic further explored in the interview study (see Section 6.8.2.2).

Despite English proficiency not being equivalent to academic English proficiency, they share a close connection. There were significant negative correlations between academic language difficulty levels and both English proficiency and self-rated English proficiency. This suggests that students with higher English proficiency and more confidence in their English proficiency were less likely to experience academic English difficulties, although English proficiency and academic English proficiency can be viewed differently.

The shift to on-line education during the COVID-19 period might have had a more pronounced negative impact on students with lower English proficiency compared to those with higher proficiency. In the open questions, EFL students attributed more challenges to be language-related compared with ENS students. Many of these responses were directly or indirectly related to COVID-19 restrictions, such as struggles to understand lecturers due to unsatisfying recording quality and difficulty engaging in on-line class discussions. Academically, the restriction may have exacerbated EFL students' language disadvantages and language difficulties. In Pham et al.'s (2022) study, on-line teaching was challenging for instructors to help EFL students fully understand the lesson content and most students struggled to improve their speaking skills via on-line education. Socially, obstacles in meeting and building relationships with others could have restricted the language progress of EFL students. Even prior to the COVID-19 period, interactions between international and native students were limited. Sherry et al.'s (2010) study at an American university found that most international students did not succeed in making friends with Americans. Similarly, Constantine et al. (2005) stated that international students tend to remain in same-ethnicity groups. The restrictions from the pandemic were likely to further impede EFL students' language improvement through reduced interactions with locals. According to Mahyob's (2020) study, EFL students identified a lack of real English language practice with classmates as one of their challenges during the COVID-19 period.

However, on-line education also revealed some benefits. For example, many students found recorded lectures and on-line study materials helpful. EFL students, in particular, appreciated the convenience to watch lectures at their own pace, rewatch whenever needed, and use captions to increase comprehension. This suggests that making study materials and recorded lectures available on-line could be beneficial, even in in-person teaching.

4.9.4 Self-efficacy

This section discusses different groups of students' confidence in studying their courses, which was measured by academic self-efficacy. It also discusses EFL students' confidence in studying in the English language, which was measured by English self-efficacy. Additionally, insights gathered from open questions are also discussed.

In terms of academic self-efficacy, Chinese EFL students displayed the lowest confidence among all groups. Interestingly, UK ENS students' levels of academic self-efficacy were lower than international ENS students and were similar to (albeit not significantly lower than) non-Chinese EFL students. A significant negative correlation was observed between academic language difficulty and academic self-efficacy, suggesting that students who found academic English more challenging tended to have lower confidence in their studies. Responses from open questions revealed that a large number of perceived academic obstacles to be language-related, with a higher percentage of UK ENS students (37.53%) attributing their challenges to language compared to international ENS students (28.77%). Since UK ENS students perceived unexpectedly high levels of academic language difficulties and unexpectedly low levels of academic self-efficacy, it is possible that some of their academic difficulties might be closely related to academic language.

Notably, higher academic self-efficacy stems from understanding how to achieve a goal rather than the actual attainment of that goal (Honicke et al., 2020). Responses from open-ended questions revealed that many challenges stemmed from a lack of understanding about *how* to address academic difficulties or adapt to new environments. It is likely that students with low academic self-efficacy might lack the understanding of how to deal with their academic English difficulties. The specific language-related difficulties these students experienced were further investigated in the interview study.

In terms of English self-efficacy, Chinese EFL students showed lower confidence levels compared to non-Chinese EFL students. This indicates that Chinese students' low confidence extends beyond English language proficiency (as measured by self-rated English proficiency) to include the use of English in academic contexts. Edey and Baumann's (2011) research found that students requiring remedial English programmes before starting their studies generally achieve lower academic grades compared to those meeting language requirements. Furthermore, students completing longer remedial programmes tend to have lower grades than those in shorter programmes. Considering the significantly larger percentage of Chinese EFL students (45.64%) attending pre-session courses compared to non-Chinese EFL students (6.49%), it is reasonable to assume that their lower English

language proficiency hindered their academic studies and influenced their confidence in both general studies and studies using English.

4.10 Conclusion

The cross-sectional study, based on initial survey data, explored UK university students' English language proficiency, academic language difficulties and self-efficacy. It compared different groups of international students and home students; it also investigated the relationships between their English language proficiency and perceptions regarding language and academic studies. Moreover, responses from open questions shed light on students' perceived challenges and positive experiences.

ENS students displayed significantly higher levels of English language proficiency and confidence in their proficiency compared to EFL students. However, there was no difference between home ENS students and international ENS students, suggesting that students' language status (whether English is their first language or not) plays a more important role in their language proficiency and confidence in this proficiency than their domicile status (whether students are home or international). However, in terms of academic language and academic studies, UK ENS students showed less confidence than non-Chinese EFL students, suggesting that academic language can be challenging for all groups of students regardless of their language background. Among all student groups, Chinese EFL students reported the lowest levels of English language proficiency, confidence, and self-efficacy, and the highest levels in academic language difficulties. Their lack of confidence and difficulties are likely to be related to their limited language proficiency.

Despite some positive experiences such as enjoyment of academic progress and appreciation of support, students encountered various challenges, predominantly related to academic studies and language. It raises the question of whether students' English language proficiency and related perceptions change over time after studying in UK universities. This is addressed in the subsequent longitudinal survey study presented in Chapter 5. Additionally, it is also worth exploring the specific language-related difficulties that students encounter and the additional support they desire. The interview study further explores these topics, which is presented in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 5 STUDY TWO: FOLLOW-UP SURVEY STUDY

5.1 Introduction

The survey, which was conducted at the beginning of the 2020 academic year and discussed in Chapter 4, investigated how home and different groups of international students differ in terms of their English language proficiency, academic language difficulty and self-efficacy. However, it only provided a snapshot of these differences at a single time point. To understand whether and how these factors change over the course of an academic year, a follow-up survey was conducted towards the end of the academic year with a subset of participants from a single university.

The purpose of this longitudinal study was to investigate the academic changes in students' experiences, with a specific focus on language-related experiences, among university students in the UK over the duration of an academic year. This study also aimed to conduct a comparative analysis of the changes across different student groups. Therefore, the research question of this study was: How do the English language proficiency and self-perceptions regarding language and learning of home students and different groups of international students change over the course of an academic year?

Specifically, it investigated the language-related academic perceptions and performances of master's students at one UK university by comparing data collected at the beginning and the end of an academic year. Initially, participants completed a survey that measured their English proficiency, self-rated English proficiency, perceived academic language difficulty and self-efficacy. One academic year later, those who agreed to continue their participation in the study were invited to complete a follow-up survey which consisted of similar questions to the initial survey. This two-point data collection enabled a deeper understanding of how university students' English language proficiency and language-related academic experiences change over the course of an academic year.

5.2 Participants

A total of 59 participants (with valid responses) took part in this longitudinal study, all of whom were enrolled in postgraduate taught programmes at a Russell Group University in the North-East of England. These individuals had participated in the initial survey at the beginning of the academic

year and provided valid contact information to voluntarily take part in a follow-up survey toward the end of the academic year.

In the initial survey, 100 potential participants expressed interest in participating in the follow-up survey, however, only 63 of them successfully completed it. Upon further examination, it was discovered that four participants provided conflicting demographic information in relation to whether English is their first language, making it impossible to classify them into one of the four student groups. They were therefore excluded from the analyses. Consequently, 59 valid survey responses were used for the analysis.

Of the 59 participants, 28 were home students, domiciled in the UK with English as their first language (ENS_UK). The remaining 31 were international students, who were from various regions outside the UK. Out of these international students, six were native English speakers (ENS_other), while 25 were non-native English speakers. Within the non-native English-speaking students, the largest group were 13 students from China (EFL_China), who reported Chinese as their first language. The remaining 12 EFL students reported domiciles other than China (EFL_other).

Out of all the participants, 12 identified as male, 45 as female, one chose “other” as their gender, and one preferred not to reveal their gender. The average age of the participants was 25.44 (*SD* = 5.37). The gender and age details of the different student groups are provided in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1
Demographic Information of Follow-up Survey Participants by Group

Group	EFL_China	EFL_other	ENS_UK	ENS_other
N	13	12	28	6
Gender	M = 2 (15.38%) F = 11 (84.62%) Other = 0 (0%) NI = 0 (0%)	M = 5 (41.67%) F = 7 (58.33%) Other = 0 (0%) NI = 0 (0%)	M = 5 (17.86%) F = 21 (75.00%) Other = 1 (3.57%) NI = 1 (3.57%)	M = 0 (0%) F = 6 (100.00%) Other = 0 (0%) NI = 0 (0%)
Age	23.00 (2.48)	27.75 (6.57)	25.96 (5.94)	23.67 (1.03)

Note. M: male, F: female, NI: No information

5.3 Survey design and data collection

The design of the initial survey is comprehensively described in Section 4.3 above.

During the follow-up survey, participants re-evaluated their English skills and retook the same vocabulary task (i.e., LexTALE). They also reported their self-efficacy and rated their academic language difficulties again. Since the follow-up survey was conducted at the end of the academic year, the questions relating to self-efficacy and academic language difficulties were rephrased in the past tense, allowing participants to reflect on their experiences (e.g., “In lectures, I often feel lost.” was changed to “In lectures, I often felt lost.”). The follow-up survey questions are included in Appendix B.

The initial survey was carried out from 2nd November 2020 to 2nd January 2021, while the follow-up survey was conducted from 12th July 2021 to 6th October 2021. Participants who had completed the initial survey, expressed interests and provided valid email addresses were sent an email invitation containing a link to the follow-up survey (see Appendix E for the information sheet, consent form and invitation email).

5.4 Analysis approach

5.4.1 Normality of distribution and outliers

Prior to conducting the analysis of the longitudinal data, the normality of distribution was examined to provide guidance on whether parametric or non-parametric tests would be used. The assumption of normality for Mixed ANOVA is that: there should be normally distributed dependent variables for each combination of the levels of the independent variables. Since the longitudinal study had two levels of within-subjects factor (Time 1 and Time 2) and four levels of between-subjects factor (four groups of students), there were eight combinations of the datasets (e.g., Vocab_T1Group 1, Vocab_T1Group2, Vocab_T1Group3, Vocab_T1Group4, Vocab_T2Group 1, Vocab_T2Group2, Vocab_T2Group3, Vocab_T2Group4) for five outcome measures (i.e., Vocabulary, Self-rated English, Academic language difficulties, Academic self-efficacy, English self-efficacy) which needed to be tested to find out if the distributions were approximately normal. The analysis of the normality was therefore conducted for all these datasets separately.

The Shapiro-Wilk test for normality indicated that some datasets (out of five outcome measures across four groups for two research periods) were normally distributed while others were not. Since significance tests of normality lack power to detect non-normality in small sample sizes (Field, 2018), histograms and Q-Q plots were also used, which suggested that almost all datasets were approximately non-normally distributed for all outcome measures.

In addition to the normality check, boxplots were used to detect outliers. Two participants exhibited unusual performance in the vocabulary tests, resulting in extreme scores on boxplots. Upon reviewing the raw data, it was confirmed that these two scores were indeed atypical. Specifically, one Chinese participant scored only 6 in T1 but 41 in T2. It was discovered that she skipped the majority of the vocabulary questions (53/63) in T1, resulting in the exceptionally low score. Another participant from the UK scored 53 in T1 but 31 in T2. Although she completed all the questions, it was unusual that her vocabulary score was substantially lower at Time 2. Further investigation revealed that she answered the questions at an extraordinarily fast pace (average item response time of 0.62 seconds, compared to the overall average of 1.34 seconds). Furthermore, the latter half of the vocabulary test was completed even faster, with an average item response time of only 0.23 seconds. Given her significant decrease in score and the atypically rapid completion time, it was possible that this participant answered the questions randomly to get through the test quickly at T2.

However, it was found that the results of the analysis remained consistent whether these two outliers were included or excluded. To maintain completeness of the data, this paper includes these two data points in the data analysis and the reported results.

5.4.2 Analysis process

Tables and graphs:

The data were presented visually using a combination of tables and line graphs. In addition to presenting descriptive data for both Time 1 and Time 2, the tables also included information on the T2-T1 difference, as well as the visual outcomes of the Wilcoxon signed-rank tests. Line graphs were used to demonstrate group differences across time, with only three groups represented. The group of international ENS students was omitted from line graphs due to its small sample size ($N = 6$) and to enhance clarity. However, additional line graphs that include all four groups can be found in Appendix R.

Statistical tests:

For this study, a Mixed ANOVA was initially proposed as it involved both a “within-subject” factor (time) and a “between-subject” factor (group). However, since the normality of all the data violated the assumption of parametric tests, non-parametric tests had to be used instead. As there is no Mixed ANOVA non-parametric alternative and group differences had already been investigated in a cross-sectional study with a significantly larger sample size, individual non-parametric tests were conducted to compare differences over time within each group and the magnitude of change over time between groups. Specifically, Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were used to compare changes over time within each group and Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to compare the magnitude of change between groups (using T2-T1 score differences). Since the number of participants in the group ENS_other ($N = 6$) was too small for meaningful statistical analysis between groups, this group was excluded from the Kruskal-Wallis tests. Whenever significant differences were detected, follow-up pairwise comparisons were conducted to determine which specific groups exhibited differences.

For the outcome measure of English self-efficacy, a Mann-Whitney test was used instead of a Kruskal-Wallis test as an exception, as there were only two groups (the two EFL groups) being compared.

Correlation:

To investigate the relationships between changes in English language proficiency and changes in students’ perceptions of language and learning, a non-parametric measure of correlation, the Spearman’s correlation coefficient, was employed. It examined the correlation between students’ improvement in the vocabulary knowledge (as an index of English language proficiency) and changes in various self-reported measures, including self-rated English proficiency, self-efficacy and perceived academic language difficulties.

Similar to the Kruskal-Wallis test, the correlation test was run on the T2-T1 score differences. The test was conducted on the overall sample first, followed by individual tests for each of the four groups.

5.5 Challenges

The follow-up survey study faced challenges that impacted the data analysis.

Since it was a longitudinal study, participant attrition was a significant issue. Initially, there were 100 potential participants who met the criteria and expressed a willingness to continue participation in the survey. However, many participants from the initial survey did not respond to the follow-up survey. I tried to minimise the attrition by sending three reminders, but in the end, 28 participants still did not respond to the invitation email or complete the follow-up survey. Worse still, an additional 13 participants could not be contacted or did not provide valid survey responses for various reasons such as invalid contact information, incomplete follow-up surveys, or inconsistent demographic information. In the end, only 59 surveys were included in the analysis, and the sample size of international ENS students was too small to conduct meaningful statistical analysis between groups. The reduced sample size lowered the statistical power and generalisability (see Section 7.6 for a detailed discussion of research limitations). This experience taught me to be prepared for participant attrition and special circumstances when estimating the number of participants in the future.

5.6 Results

The results for each outcome measure are presented in tables, line graphs and through the results of statistical tests. As mentioned in Section 5.4.2, due to the small sample size of group ENS_other ($N = 6$), only three groups (EFL_China, EFL_other, and ENS_UK) were used in the line graphs and Kruskal-Wallis tests. However, line graphs including all four groups are presented in Appendix R.

5.6.1 Vocabulary knowledge

The participants completed a timed version of the LexTALE vocabulary test, directly embedded in the survey and delivered by Qualtrics (see Section 3 of Appendix B for the test instructions and question examples) at both time points. The results are summarised in Table 5.2 and Figure 5.1 below.

Table 5.2

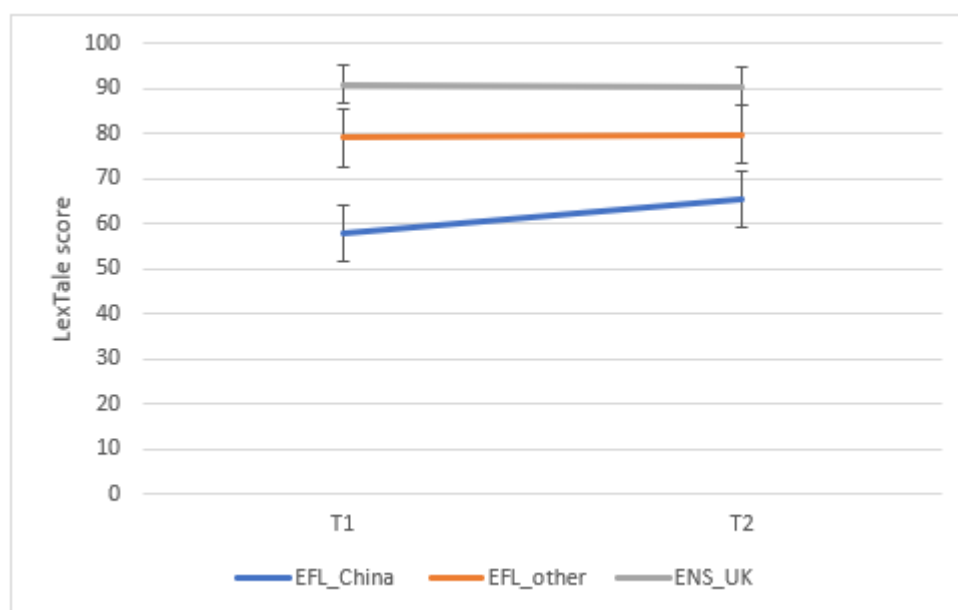
LexTALE Vocabulary Scores at Time 1 and Time 2, and the Change between Time 1 and Time 2, Reported by Group

Group	<i>N</i>	T1	T2	T2-T1 change	Wilcoxon signed-rank test
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		<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>	effect size <i>r</i>
EFL_China	13	57.79 (18.32)	61.25	65.19 (7.97)	63.75	7.40 (14.55)	0.00	1.69	.091	.33
EFL_other	12	78.96 (11.28)	81.88	79.69 (10.87)	81.25	.73 (7.38)	1.50	0.43	.666	.09
ENS_UK	28	90.94 (7.14)	90.63	90.40 (12.21)	95.00	-.54 (10.20)	.00	0.67	.506	.09
ENS_other	6	86.67 (6.41)	86.25	85.42 (9.31)	86.88	-1.25 (8.44)	-1.50	-0.27	.785	-.08

Figure 5.1

Line Graph Representing the Change in LexTALE Vocabulary Scores from Time 1 to Time 2, Reported by Group



As can be seen from Figure 5.1, there was no visual change in the performance of either non-Chinese EFL students or UK ENS students over time. However, there was an improvement in the proficiency of Chinese EFL students, narrowing the gaps between them and the other two groups. Additionally, it shows that the proficiency differences between groups observed at Time 1 persisted at Time 2. UK ENS students remained the most proficient, followed by non-Chinese EFL students, and Chinese EFL students maintained the least proficient group, despite their observed improvement.

The Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed no significant change between T1 and T2 within each group (Group EFL_China: $T = 60.50$, $z = 1.69$, $p = .091$, $r = .33$; Group EFL_other: $T = 44.50$, $z = 0.43$, $p = .666$, $r = .09$; Group ENS_UK: $T = 111.50$, $z = 0.67$, $p = .506$, $r = .09$; Group ENS_other: $T = 6.50$, $z = -0.27$, $p = .785$, $r = -.08$). It suggested that there was no significant improvement in English language proficiency for all student groups over time.

Similarly, the Kruskal-Wallis test confirmed that there were no statistically significant group differences in T1–T2 changes on the LexTALE test, $H(2) = 1.68$, $p = .433$.

5.6.2 Self-rated English proficiency

At both research times, participants were asked to rate their English proficiency using the same method (see Section 2 of Appendix B for the questions). They self-assessed their reading, listening, writing and speaking abilities using a 7-point scale, where 1 represents “almost none” and 7 represents “exceptionally good”. The self-rated English score was computed as the average score across the four skills for each participant. The results of the skill-specific comparisons (self-rated reading, self-rated listening, self-rated writing and self-rated speaking) are presented in Appendix S. Detailed descriptive results are presented in Table 5.3 and Figure 5.2 below.

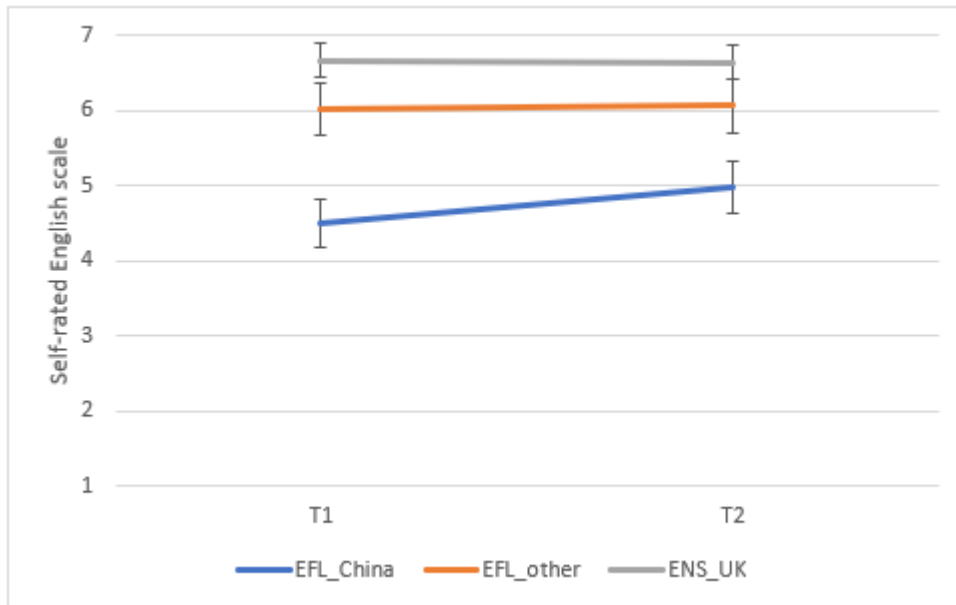
Table 5.3

Self-rated English Proficiency at Time 1 and Time 2, and the Change between Time 1 and Time 2, Reported by Group

Group	N	T1		T2		T2-T1 change		Wilcoxon signed-rank test		
		M (SD)	Mdn	M (SD)	Mdn	M (SD)	Mdn	z	p	effect size r
EFL_China	13	4.50 (0.70)	4.50	4.98 (0.62)	5.25	.48 (.53)	.50	2.62	.009	.51
EFL_other	12	6.02 (0.74)	6.25	6.06 (0.78)	6.00	.04 (.75)	.13	0.09	.928	.02
ENS_UK	28	6.67 (0.45)	6.88	6.65 (0.60)	7.00	-.02 (.42)	.00	-0.11	.916	-.01
ENS_other	6	6.71 (0.60)	7.00	7.00 (0.00)	7.00	.29 (.60)	.00	1.34	.180	.39

Figure 5.2

Line Graph Representing the Change in Self-rated English Proficiency from Time 1 to Time 2, Reported by Group



As can be seen from Figure 5.2, there was no visual change in the self-rating of both non-Chinese EFL students and UK ENS students over time. However, there was a positive change in the self-rating of the Chinese EFL students during Time 2 of their studies, narrowing the initial gap between the groups. The figure further shows that at both Time 1 and time 2, UK ENS students consistently rated their English language proficiency the highest, followed by non-Chinese EFL students. Despite the observed increase, Chinese students' self-ratings remained the lowest.

The Wilcoxon signed-rank tests confirmed Chinese EFL students' increase in confidence as they rated their English proficiency significantly higher after approximately one academic year compared to before, $T = 82.5$, $z = 2.62$, $p = .009$, with a large effect size, $r = .51$. However, there was no significant change in self-rated English for non-Chinese EFL students ($T = 34.00$, $z = 0.09$, $p = .928$, $r = .02$), the group ENS_UK ($T = 66.00$, $z = -0.11$, $p = .916$, $r = -.01$) and international ENS students ($T = 3.00$, $z = 1.34$, $p = .180$, $r = .39$).

The Kruskal-Wallis test further revealed a significant difference in the rating changes among the three groups, $H(2) = 7.53$, $p = .023$. Further analysis was conducted through pairwise comparisons with an adjusted p -value to control for Type I error rate at 5%. The results indicated that Chinese EFL

students perceived a significantly higher improvement in their English proficiency compared to UK ENS students, $p = .023$, with a medium to large effect size, $r = .42$. However, no significant difference was observed between the groups EFL_China and EFL_other, or between EFL_other and ENS_UK.

5.6.3 Academic language difficulty

During both research periods, participants were asked questions about the challenges they encountered with regard to language during their studies. In the initial survey, they were given a set of 12 questions, with each set of three questions focused on one English ability (reading, listening, writing and speaking). They were asked to rate each difficulty statement (e.g., “My lecturers use many words that I do not understand”) on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 indicating “not at all true of me”, and 7 indicating “very true of me”. In the follow-up survey, the questions were rephrased to be more reflective (e.g., “My lecturers *used* many words that I *did* not understand”) (see Section 5 of Appendix B for questions in T2). The average score of the 12 questions was calculated for each participant to indicate academic language difficulties in the analysis. The results of the skill-specific comparisons (reading difficulty, listening difficulty, writing difficulty and speaking difficulty) are presented in Appendix T. Detailed descriptive results are presented in Table 5.4 and Figure 5.3 below.

Table 5.4

Academic Language Difficulty at Time 1 and Time 2, and the Change between Time 1 and Time 2, Reported by Group

Group	N	T1		T2		T2-T1 change		Wilcoxon signed-rank test		
		M (SD)	Mdn	M (SD)	Mdn	M (SD)	Mdn	z	p	effect size r
EFL_China	13	3.81 (1.27)	4.33	3.48 (1.37)	3.25	-.33 (.67)	-.33	-1.51	.132	-.30
EFL_other	12	3.38 (1.73)	2.64	3.15 (1.72)	2.63	-.24 (1.56)	-.03	-0.08	.937	-.02
ENS_UK	28	3.03 (1.07)	2.87	3.20 (1.23)	3.38	.18 (1.33)	.17	0.74	.459	.10
ENS_other	6	2.80 (0.66)	2.88	2.78 (0.91)	2.88	-.03 (.68)	.08	-0.11	.917	-.03

Figure 5.3

Line Graph Representing the Change in Academic Language Difficulty Levels from Time 1 to Time 2, Reported by Group

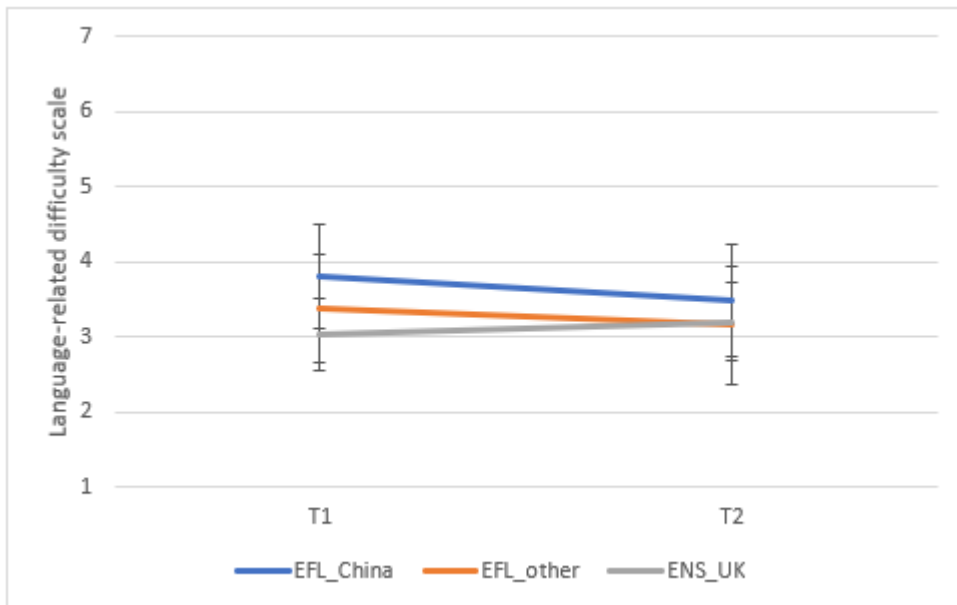


Figure 5.3 shows that all groups of students experienced only a minor change in their academic language difficulty as time progressed. It also reveals a slight increase in difficulty level for UK students and a slight decrease in difficulty level for both EFL groups.

The Wilcoxon signed-rank tests confirmed no significant differences between T1 and T2 for all four groups (Group EFL_China: $T = 24.00$, $z = -1.51$, $p = .132$, $r = -.30$; Group EFL_other: $T = 38.00$, $z = -0.08$, $p = .937$, $r = -.02$; Group ENS_UK: $T = 235.50$, $z = 0.74$, $p = .459$, $r = .10$; Group ENS_other: $T = 10.00$, $z = -.11$, $p = .917$, $r = -.03$).

Similarly, the Kruskal-Wallis test found no significant group differences in T1-T2 changes on academic language difficulty, $H(2) = 2.00$, $p = .368$.

5.6.4 Self-efficacy

During both research times, all participants were asked about their confidence in academic studies (i.e., academic self-efficacy). EFL participants, on the other hand, were exclusively asked additional questions about their confidence in studying in the English language (i.e., English self-efficacy).

5.6.4.1 Academic self-efficacy

During the initial survey when participants had just begun their academic year, they were presented with eight statements designed to gauge their confidence in studies (e.g., “I am certain I can master skills being taught.”). Similar to the academic language difficulty scale, they were asked to rate whether they were true or not using a 7-point scale, where 1 represented “not at all true of me” and 7 represented “very true of me”. During the follow-up survey when participants were nearing the end or had completed their academic year, they were asked similar questions, with minor adjustments, to assess their self-efficacy in a reflective way (e.g., “I am certain I *have mastered* the skills being taught”) (see questions 1-8 in Section 4 of Appendix B for academic self-efficacy questions in T2). For the analysis, the average score of the eight questions was calculated for each participant. Table 5.5 and Figure 5.4 below present descriptive analysis for academic self-efficacy.

Table 5.5

Academic Self-efficacy at Time 1 and Time 2, and the Change between Time 1 and Time 2, Reported by Group

Group	N	T1		T2		T2-T1 change		Wilcoxon signed-rank test		
		M (SD)	Mdn	M (SD)	Mdn	M (SD)	Mdn	z	p	effect size r
EFL_China	13	4.42 (1.19)	4.25	4.56 (0.85)	4.38	.13 (1.21)	.50	1.79	.073	.35
EFL_other	12	5.77 (0.84)	5.63	4.98 (1.36)	4.75	-.79 (1.04)	-.81	-2.12	.034	-.43
ENS_UK	28	5.28 (0.73)	5.31	5.09 (1.18)	5.25	-.18 (1.25)	.00	-0.35	.724	-.05
ENS_other	6	5.92 (0.44)	5.81	5.69 (0.79)	5.75	-.23 (.57)	-.13	-0.81	.416	-.23

Figure 5.4

Line Graph Representing the Change in Academic Self-efficacy Levels from Time 1 to Time 2, Reported by Group

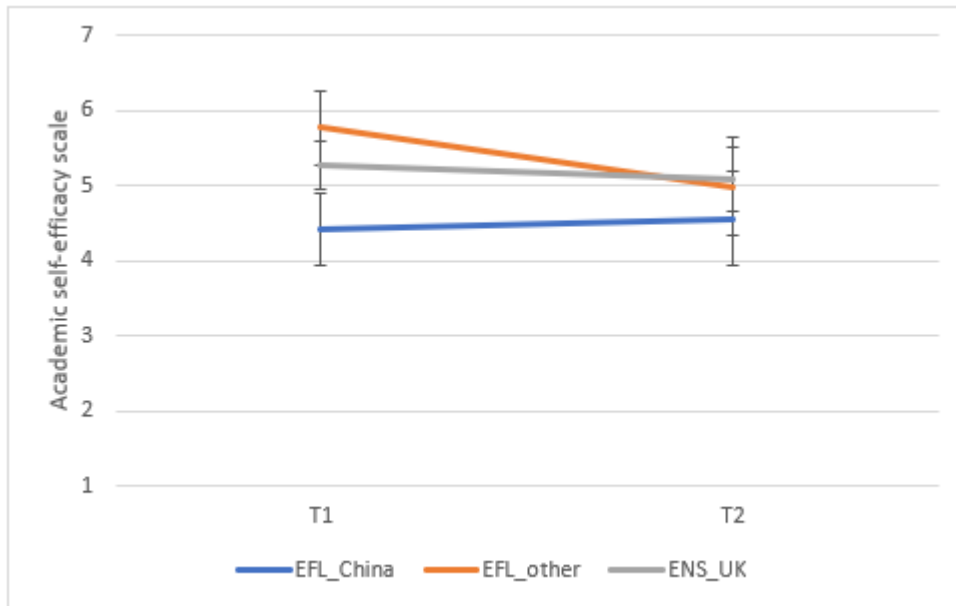


Figure 5.4 shows that, as time progressed, both non-Chinese EFL students and UK ENS students experienced a decline in academic self-efficacy, with the most substantial decrease observed among non-Chinese EFL students. It also reveals that despite initially having a higher level of academic self-efficacy than UK ENS students, non-Chinese EFL students experienced a distinct drop in their confidence, resulting in a slightly lower level than that of UK ENS students after one academic year. Chinese EFL students' confidence increased, while the other two groups' decreased, narrowing the gap between them, however, their academic self-efficacy in T2 remained lower than either group.

The Wilcoxon signed-rank tests confirmed non-Chinese EFL students' decrease in confidence as they rated their academic self-efficacy significantly lower at T2 compared with T1. $T=12.00$, $z = -2.12$, $p = .034$, with a medium to large effect size, $r = -.43$. In contrast, there was no significant change for the groups EFL_China ($T = 71.00$, $z = 1.79$, $p = .073$, $r = .35$), ENS_UK ($T = 187.50$, $z = -0.35$, $p = .724$, $r = -.05$) and ENS_other ($T = 4.50$, $z = -0.81$, $p = .416$, $r = -.23$).

Additionally, the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a significant difference between the confidence changes of the three groups, $H(2) = 8.17$, $p = .017$. Subsequent pairwise comparisons with adjusted p -values indicated that non-Chinese EFL students exhibited significantly different perceptions of changes in academic self-efficacy compared to Chinese EFL students, $p = .013$, with a large effect size, $r = .57$. No significant difference was found between the groups EFL_China and ENS_UK, or between EFL_other and ENS_UK.

5.6.4.2 English self-efficacy

As previously mentioned, EFL students answered additional questions to assess their confidence in studying in the English language. In the initial survey, they were presented with two statements about their English self-efficacy (e.g., “I am confident I can do as well studying in English as I was able to in my native language.”) and were asked to rate whether they were true or not using a 7-point scale, the same as that used for academic self-efficacy. In the follow-up survey, they were asked similar questions with adjustments made to reflectively evaluate their confidence (e.g., “I did as well studying in English as I had previously done in my native language.”) (see questions 9-10 in Section 4 of Appendix B for English self-efficacy questions in T2). To analyse the data, the average score of the two questions was calculated for each participant. Table 5.6 and Figure 5.5 below show descriptive analysis for English self-efficacy.

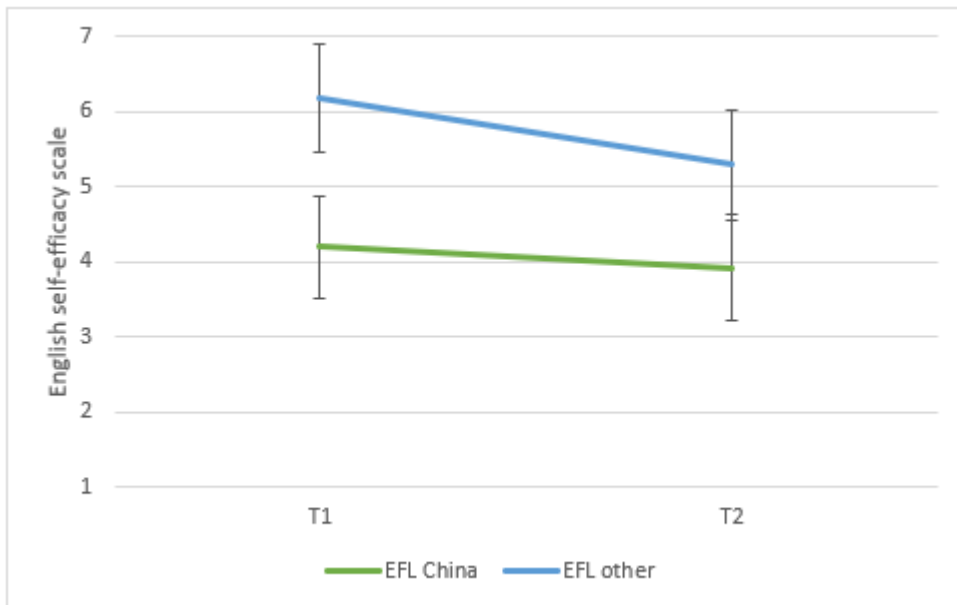
Table 5.6

English Self-efficacy at Time 1 and Time 2, and the Change between Time 1 and Time 2, Reported by Group

Group	N	T1		T2		T2-T1 change		Wilcoxon signed-rank test		
		M (SD)	Mdn	M (SD)	Mdn	M (SD)	Mdn	z	p	effect size r
EFL_China	13	4.19 (1.52)	4.50	3.92 (0.86)	4.00	-.27 (1.41)	.00	-0.66	.507	-.13
EFL_other	12	6.17 (0.98)	6.50	5.29 (1.51)	5.50	-.88 (1.38)	-.25	-1.97	.049	-.40

Figure 5.5

Line Graph Representing the Change in English Self-efficacy Levels from Time 1 to Time 2, Reported by Group



As depicted in Figure 5.5, there was a decrease in the confidence of both EFL groups over time, although the decline of the Chinese EFL students was minor while that of non-Chinese EFL students was evident. Moreover, the Chinese EFL students' confidence remained lower than those of non-Chinese EFL students after one academic year.

The Wilcoxon signed-rank tests confirmed a decline in the English self-efficacy of non-Chinese EFL students, as there was a significant loss of confidence ($T = 4.00$, $z = -1.97$, $p = .049$), with a medium to large effect size, $r = -.40$. In contrast, there was no significant change for Chinese EFL students ($T = 17.00$, $z = -.66$, $p = .507$, $r = -.13$).

In terms of group differences, however, no significant difference was found in changes between the two EFL groups (Mann-Whitney, $U = 60.50$, $z = -.97$, $p = .347$, $r = -.19$).

5.6.5 Correlation

According to Spearman's correlation coefficient, there was no significant correlation between changes in students' vocabulary scores and changes in self-rated English proficiency ($r_s = -.02$, $p = .886$), perceived academic language difficulties ($r_s = -.17$, $p = .212$), academic self-efficacy ($r_s = .22$, $p = .090$) or English self-efficacy ($r_s = .03$, $p = .802$).

When examining different student groups, the results stayed consistent: no significant correlations were observed among all four student groups. This suggested that attitudes towards language and learning were not related to the progress of students' English proficiency.

5.6.6 Summary of the results

The longitudinal study examined and compared the survey responses of 59 participants at two different research times. Similar to the cross-sectional survey, it evaluated students' English language proficiency and their self-perceptions related to language and learning, including self-rated English proficiency, academic language difficulty and self-efficacy. The changes over time for each group and group differences in changes were both analysed.

English language proficiency was measured by LexTALE vocabulary test. The Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed that all student groups did not show significant improvement in English language proficiency after an academic year. The Kruskal-Wallis test further showed that there were no significant differences among the groups regarding changes in proficiency over time.

In terms of students' self-rated English proficiency, the Wilcoxon signed-rank tests showed interesting results. Chinese EFL students rated their own English abilities significantly higher over time, unlike the other three groups where no changes in self-ratings were observed. Furthermore, the Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that the perceived English proficiency improvement of Chinese EFL students was significantly higher than that of UK ENS students.

When it came to perceived academic English difficulty, measured by language-related academic difficulty, the Wilcoxon signed-rank tests found no significant differences between the two times for all four groups. Similarly, the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed no significant group differences in changes over time.

Regarding students' confidence in their studies, measured by academic self-efficacy, the Wilcoxon signed-rank tests found a significant decline over time in non-Chinese EFL students, while no significant changes were observed in other groups. The Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that the change in confidence among non-Chinese EFL students significantly differed from that of Chinese EFL students.

In terms of students' confidence in studying in English, measured by English self-efficacy exclusively for EFL students, the Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed a significant drop over time in non-Chinese EFL students. In contrast, Chinese EFL students' confidence remained relatively stable. The Mann-Whitney test revealed no significant difference in changes between the two EFL groups.

According to Spearman's correlation coefficient, there was no significant correlation between changes in all groups of students' vocabulary scores and changes in self-rated English proficiency, academic language difficulty and self-efficacy, suggesting that students' attitudes towards language and learning were not related to their progress in English language proficiency.

5.7 Discussion

5.7.1 English language proficiency

Across all student groups, there was no significant improvement in English language proficiency after approximately one academic year. Although both EFL groups showed improvement over time, the proficiency gap between them and ENS students remained, with EFL students still considerably behind in closing this gap. This finding aligns with Trenkic and Warmington's (2019) study, which indicated that the proficiency gap between Chinese students and British students was hard to overcome over time (7-8 months).

However, Rogier's (2012) research revealed a significant improvement in students' English abilities after studying via EMI in a four-year undergraduate programme at a UAE university. Similarly, in a recent study where English language proficiency was observed over four years through EMI at a Turkish university, students' proficiency improved significantly (Yuksel et al., 2021). It may be possible that improvement in English proficiency can be achieved gradually through studying academic content in English, a trend that was not obvious in a one-year study period. This emphasises the need for providing language-related support to EFL students to accelerate their progress, rather than assuming that they would naturally and rapidly catch up with ENS students by being in an English-speaking environment.

5.7.2 Self-perceptions of English language proficiency

Although there was no significant improvement in all groups of students' English language proficiency, Chinese EFL students self-rated their English abilities significantly higher as time passed. This suggested that while there were no substantial gains in language proficiency, Chinese students' confidence in their English proficiency increased over time.

Furthermore, since no significant correlation was observed between changes in students' vocabulary scores and changes in their self-rated English proficiency across all groups, it appeared that students' self-perceptions about their English language proficiency were not related to their actual progress in English proficiency. Storch and Hill (2008) argued that a lack of score improvement does not necessarily mean a lack of progress since improvements might not be large enough to reflect in scores or could have occurred in areas not covered by tests. Among all groups, Chinese students showed the most improvement in English language proficiency, despite the improvement being statistically insignificant. Thus, it is possible that their minor improvements or progress in areas not tested, may have boosted their confidence. This perceived improvement was also in line with Wang's (2018) study about Chinese students' long-term studying experiences in UK higher education, where they reported to improve listening and reading skills and self-confidences in using English over time.

However, for the other three groups, the self-ratings of English language proficiency remained stable over time (no statistically significant change). This suggests not only a lack of improvement in their English language proficiency but also no growth in confidence over the course of the study.

5.7.3 Perceived academic language difficulty

There were no significant differences in perceived language-related academic difficulties between T1 and T2 for all four groups. This suggested that students did not find academic language difficulties easier after approximately one academic year.

Chinese students gained confidence in their English abilities (significant increase in self-rated English language proficiency) but showed no decrease in academic language difficulties (insignificant decrease in perceived academic language difficulty). In Liu's (2012) study about Chinese students' language adjustment in a UK university, difficulties in writing assignments and different academic requirements compared with China were highlighted to be their concerns, which were mainly associated with language usage in studies. Moreover, in Zhou's (2009) study, where ESL learners' perception about writing for academic purposes in a Canadian pre-university EAP programme was

examined, the students reported continuously experiencing difficulties and lacking the knowledge and resources for improvement. Therefore, it is possible that for Chinese students in this study, academic language was harder to perceive improvement than general English abilities.

For the other three groups, students did not gain confidence in self-ratings of English language proficiency, nor did they experience lower difficulty levels of academic language difficulties, suggesting that their self-perceptions of English language proficiency and experienced academic English difficulties remained stable.

5.7.4 Self-efficacy

There was a significant decrease in academic self-efficacy and English self-efficacy among non-Chinese EFL students over time. In contrast, the self-efficacy of other student groups showed no significant changes, indicating that the confidence of non-Chinese EFL students in their academic abilities and English usage in studies decreased, while the confidence of other groups remained stable.

Furthermore, the correlation analysis revealed a strong significant connection between changes in academic self-efficacy and changes in English self-efficacy among non-Chinese EFL students ($r_s = .721$, $p = .008$). This indicated that the observed decrease in academic confidence among non-Chinese EFL students was associated with their declining confidence in using English in an academic context. Despite this, their perceived difficulty levels in academic English remained stable. Therefore, it might be important to explore which specific aspects of language they found challenging in their studies. Since EFL students' self-efficacy can be enhanced through language support classes (Thompson et al., 2019), it might be also important to explore the specific types of language-related assistance they desire. These topics were further addressed in the interview study (see Chapter 6).

However, for other student groups, both academic and English self-efficacy remained stable over time, which implied a stable level of confidence throughout the study period.

5.8 Conclusion

The longitudinal study, using data from both initial and follow-up surveys, examined potential changes in English language proficiency, academic language difficulties and self-efficacy among different student groups after studying in UK universities for around one academic year.

The students did not show significant improvement in their English language proficiency over the year. Additionally, there was no relationship between their changes in English proficiency and changes in perceptions of language and learning. Despite this, Chinese students felt more confident in their overall English abilities by the end of the academic year. Yet, this increased confidence was not reflected in their academic studies or in their academic language use. It is possible that a single academic year might be too short to demonstrate notable language improvement, but even slight progress could enhance their confidence. However, *academic* language continued to pose challenges across all student groups. Interestingly, non-Chinese EFL students felt less confident in their academic performance and ability to study in English, suggesting that they possibly experienced more academic difficulties than expected at the beginning of their admission, and English might have been considered to have played a role in those challenges. Given these findings, it is worth exploring the specific language-related obstacles students face in their studies. Therefore, interviews were carried out, with details presented in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6 STUDY THREE: INTERVIEW STUDY

6.1 Introduction

The initial survey study, which was conducted at the beginning of the 2020 academic year and discussed in Chapter 4, investigated how different groups of students differ regarding English language proficiency, academic language difficulty and self-efficacy. The follow-up survey study, which was conducted at the end of the academic year and discussed in Chapter 5, examined how these groups of students changed over an academic year. However, these quantitative studies only offered a general overview of their English language proficiency and perceptions in relation to language and learning. To gain a more detailed understanding of the students' experiences and perceptions, follow-up interviews were conducted with a selection of participants from the initial survey study.

The purpose of these interviews was to gather in-depth information about students' academic experiences, especially those related to language. Specifically, the interview was designed to address the following questions:

- Q1. What do students perceive as their most prominent academic language difficulties and what impact do they believe these difficulties have on their academic performance?
- Q2. Do the difficulties differ based on students' language status and domicile?
- Q3. Which strategies do students use to compensate for their language-related difficulties and what support would help them?

6.2 Participants

To be eligible for an interview, participants had to complete the initial on-line survey and express their willingness to be contacted by providing valid contact information. The participant selection strategy involved stratified sampling, a purposive sampling method that involves selecting specific categories or groups of cases and then dividing the sample according to these categories (Robinson, 2013).

In the survey research (Chapters 4 and 5), participants were divided into the following four groups based on their language background and domicile:

Group 1: EFL_China

- Chinese EFL Students: International students from China with English as a foreign language.

Group 2: EFL_other

- Non-Chinese EFL Students: International students with English as a foreign language from the rest of the world.

Group 3: ENS_UK

- UK ENS Students: British domiciled students who are native English speakers.

Group 4: ENS_other

- International ENS Students: International students who are native English speakers.

Since the aim of the study was to investigate and compare these groups of students, stratified sampling was used to ensure the interview study also covered these aspects comprehensively while producing a balanced dataset. In addition to domicile and language group, the selection of interview participants was designed to be a stratified sample with two other variables: current degree (undergraduate/ postgraduate) and gender (male/ female). The plan was to recruit 16 interviewees, four from each group, with a balance of gender and degree (see Table 6.1 below for the planned profile of the recruited interviewees).

Table 6.1

Planned Profile of Recruited Interviewees

Group	Degree	Gender	N
EFL_China (N = 4)	UG	M	1
		F	1
	PGT	M	1
		F	1
EFL_other (N = 4)	UG	M	1
		F	1
	PGT	M	1
		F	1
ENS_UK (N = 4)	UG	M	1
		F	1
	PGT	M	1

		F	1
	UG	M	1
ENS_other		F	1
(N = 4)	PGT	M	1
		F	1
			Total: 16

Note. UG: undergraduate. PGT: postgraduate taught. M: male. F: female.

To investigate how different groups of students perceive their language-related difficulties and their impact on academic performance, additional selection criteria were implemented. The selection was designed to make sure interviewees all achieved English vocabulary scores that were the same or similar to the average scores in their respective groups, as measured by their LexTALE scores in the survey. This ensured that participants were more representative of their group's English proficiency, allowing for more appropriate comparisons when discussing language-related difficulties and their impact on academic experiences. Furthermore, to ensure comparability across the sample and increase the likelihood of language-related difficulties being evident in academic experiences, interviewees were selected from similarly ranked universities and enrolled in linguistically demanding programmes such as linguistics and law. This was because language difficulties were more likely to manifest in these programmes than in subjects with lower linguistic demands, such as mathematics and technology (Zhang, 2010).

A list of target participants was created to identify those who met both eligibility criteria (i.e., completed the initial survey, expressed willingness to participate in interviews, and provided valid contact details) and additional inclusion requirements (i.e., similar LexTALE scores compared to group average, enrolment in linguistically demanding subjects, and attendance at Russell Group universities). Despite a large number of volunteers, only some met the selection criteria and provided valid contact information (such as existing email addresses). Additionally, some eligible potential interviewees did not respond to interview invitations, possibly due to changing decisions after nearly one academic year. Table 6.2 shows the number of potential interviewees within each category and whether positive responses were gained. During the recruiting process, only one potential interviewee in each category was contacted at a time. If there was no response or appointment booking after one week, another student in the same category was contacted until a positive response was obtained or all potential participants in the category were contacted.

Table 6.2*Number of Potential Interviewees and Positive Responses by Category*

Group	Participant category	N	Positive response
EFL_China	UG_M	2	Y
	UG_F	1	N
	PGT_M	1	N
	PGT_F	16	Y
EFL_other	UG_M	3	Y
	UG_F	11	Y
	PGT_M	4	N
	PGT_F	5	N
ENS_UK	UG_M	13	Y
	UG_F	41	Y
	PGT_M	1	N
	PGT_F	9	N
ENS_other	UG_M	1	Y
	UG_F	4	N
	PGT_M	1	N
	PGT_F	7	Y

Note. UG: undergraduate. PGT: postgraduate taught. M: male. F: female. Y: yes, N: no.

As shown in Table 6.2, there were no positive responses in some participant categories, despite contacting all potential interviewees. To adapt to the situation and recruit further interviewees, adjustments were made to the original recruitment plan. Firstly, instead of recruiting an equal number of male and female participants, more female participants were recruited (M = 7, F = 11). There is no research to suggest that language proficiency or academic experiences are substantially different between male and female students in higher education, nor was that the interest of this study. Since the majority of participants in the initial survey were female (M = 337, F = 786, other = 7, unknown = 33), the higher number of female interviewees reflected the overall sample. Secondly, due to difficulties in consistently recruiting from linguistically demanding programmes in Russell Group universities, the range of target participants was expanded to include students from non-Russell Group universities or those in less linguistically demanding programmes. Some interviewees

were in programmes with less linguistic demand but still enrolled in Russell Group universities, while others were from other universities but still enrolled in linguistically demanding subjects.

Interestingly, one interviewee (EFL_Italy) studied two subjects (physics and philosophy) simultaneously with different linguistic demands and provided specific insights on how her language proficiency affected her experiences differently in each subject. Other interviewees in less linguistically demanding programmes also offered valuable perspectives. The inclusion of these participants allowed additional insight into how self-perceived language-related difficulties may manifest in different linguistically demanding subjects.

In the end, a total of 18 participants were interviewed, with 4 or 5 in each group (see Table 6.3 for interviewee profiles). The number of participants exceeded the original target of 16, as two additional EFL interviewees (one in each EFL group) responded to the invitation after data had already been collected from other volunteers. Since they both met the selection criteria and expressed interest in contributing to the research, their perspectives were included to provide additional insights into EFL students' language difficulties and academic experiences.

Table 6.3

Interviewee Profiles

Group	Domicile and first language	Interviewee ID	Degree studied	Gender	Subject studied by department	University	Vocabulary score/60	Self-efficacy score/7
EFL China (N = 5)	China (Chinese)	EFL_China_1	UG	M	Education	University of York	36	4.25
		EFL_China_2	UG	F	Psychology	University of Bath	36	5.75
		EFL_China_3	PGT	F	Philosophy	University of Birmingham	36	4.5
		EFL_China_4	PGT	F	Media	University of Warwick	37	4.88
		EFL_China_5	PGT	M	Urban Studies and Planning	University of Sheffield	36	3.88
	Italy	EFL_Italy	UG	F	Natural	King's	50	3.75

	(Italian)				Science, Philosophy	College London		
EFL other (N = 5)	France (French)	EFL_France	UG	M	Philosophy	University of Birmingham	47	4.88
	Hungary (Hungarian)	EFL_Hungary	UG	F	Media	University of York	51	5.13
	Cyprus (Greek)	EFL_Cyprus	PGT	M	Education	University of Portsmouth	53	6.5
	Mexico (Spanish)	EFL_Mexico	PGT	F	Natural Science	University of York	49	6.75
		ENS_UK_1	UG	M	Education	University of York	54	5.63
		ENS_UK_2	UG	F	English Literature, Linguistics	University of York	54	2.25
ENS UK (N = 4)	UK (English)	ENS_UK_3	PGT	M	Psychology	University of Bath	54	4.88
		ENS_UK_4	PGT	F	Education	University of Portsmouth	58	5.38
	Ireland (English)	ENS_Ireland	UG	M	Psychology	Durham University	55	5.25
	Singapore (English)	ENS_Singapore	UG	F	Natural Science	University of Cambridge	57	5.75
ENS other (N = 4)	USA (English)	ENS_USA_1	PGT	F	Archaeology	University of Aberdeen	55	6
	USA (English)	ENS_USA_2	PGT	F	Education	University of Leeds	56	6
Total N: 18								

6.3 Instrument development

6.3.1 Interview design and rationale

The data collection was conducted through one-to-one semi-structured on-line interviews. Semi-structured interviews combine the structure of a list of issues to be covered together with the flexibility to explore points further as needed (Thomas, 2017). Interviewees were mostly asked pre-prepared questions, followed by additional questions based on their responses if necessary to obtain further details. In the end of interviews, they were also given the opportunity to provide any additional comments they may have had. One-to-one interviews were chosen to enable participants to speak openly, as other methods like focus groups may be inappropriate when discussing sensitive issues (Bullock, 2016). In each interview, only the interviewee and I were present, creating a safe space to discuss potentially sensitive subjects related to participants' challenges and difficulties. All interviews were conducted on-line, using platforms like Zoom, which offers accessibility, flexibility, and effectiveness for qualitative research (Gray et al., 2020). On-line interviews enabled convenient data collection, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when face-to-face interviews were not feasible.

The interview questions were designed following the initial analysis of the initial survey results and based on emerging patterns. These questions aimed to explore in-depth phenomena concerning students' academic expectations and experiences, with a particular focus on the linguistic demands of their studies.

Survey results indicated that language poses a significant academic challenge for students in all groups. However, the specifics of how and why language limited their studies remained unclear, prompting further exploration through interviews. The survey also measured self-efficacy, reflecting students' confidence in their studies. Surprisingly, UK ENS students reported more difficulties with academic English than both international ENS and non-Chinese EFL groups, and lower academic self-efficacy compared to international ENS students, despite scoring high on both self-rated English proficiency scale and vocabulary test. Responses to open-ended survey questions revealed that *reading* was the most prominent challenge for UK ENS students, while other groups experienced relatively even difficulties across all four aspects of English. Notably, the reported rate of UK ENS students' reading-related difficulties (14.11%) was even higher than those of the non-Chinese EFL students (7.19%) and similar to Chinese EFL students (16.18%). Similarly, skill-specific analysis in

academic language difficulty revealed that UK students' academic *reading* difficulty level was particularly high. Given UK students' unexpected low self-confidence in studies and high levels in language-related academic difficulties (particularly in reading), it was necessary to investigate their specific struggles and why "reading" appeared to be the primary concern. Furthermore, the survey did not provide an in-depth understanding of the differences in language-related difficulties between various groups (e.g., to what extent the language difficulties experienced by ENS students are similar to those experienced by EFL students?), which was worth investigating. The interviews also explored the strategies students relied on to compensate for language difficulties, especially the factors that drove Chinese students' self-efficacy, as they particularly encountered academic challenges, but their average academic self-efficacy was not that low. Lastly, considering the prevalence of academic obstacles among all student groups, shown by open questions, it was also important to explore the additional support they desired to address their academic challenges, particularly those related to language.

The interview questions consisted of three parts: introduction, main interview questions and ending (see Appendix C for detailed interview questions).

The first part served to establish a rapport and reiterate ethical considerations.

In the second part, the main interview questions were posed, beginning with a few broad warm-up questions to help the interviewees feel comfortable while discussing their general university experiences. They were also encouraged to elaborate on the positive experiences they had mentioned in the survey. After putting them at ease, the conversations shifted to focus on academic challenges, especially possible language difficulties. To address the research question about students' most perceived prominent academic language difficulties, all interviewees were asked about their most significant challenges and the specific language-related difficulties they faced in their studies. As the interviews were semi-structured and interviewees' perceptions of language-related academic experiences were crucial, follow-up questions, such as "Can you please specify?" and "Why is that difficult?" were asked if necessary to encourage them to provide details. After that, the interviewees were asked whether their language skills limited their academic achievements (and how exactly), allowing for an understanding of the impact of language difficulties on their performance. EFL interviewees, who had unique experiences studying in both their first language and English, were asked additional questions about how they experienced studying in English compared to studying previously in their first language. These questions encouraged them to share

opinions on the differences between studying in English and their first language, as well as to reflect on their expectations and the experiences of studying in English. When interviewees finished talking about their experiences and perceptions, they were asked to share their strategies to deal with reported difficulties and the support they wished they could have obtained. Finally, since the survey highlighted the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, interviewees were asked about its effects on them, with a particular focus on language-related aspects.

In the last part of the interview, interviewees were asked to share any additional comments if they wish to. Then they were informed about the follow-up process, including the prize draw and possible future concerns before the interview was concluded.

6.3.2 Language choices in interviews

The majority of the interviews were conducted in English. However, Chinese interviewees were given the choice to be interviewed in either English or Chinese, and all of them chose Chinese. Conducting interviews in the participants' native language helps to achieve the greatest amount of mutual understanding that is possible. Chinese students' weakness in oral English has been noticed by some researchers such as Wang (2018), who found that speaking ability was their most prominent language-related issue, and the improvement of which was not satisfactory compared with that of their listening and reading skills, despite being in an English-speaking environment. In my survey study, Chinese students reported the lowest self-rated English proficiency, the highest academic language difficulty level, and scored the lowest on the vocabulary test compared to all other groups. This confirmed that in the present sample, their mastery of English was the weakest. Therefore, they were also likely to find it more difficult to conduct interviews in English compared with the other groups.

Additionally, in the optional open-ended questions of the survey, Chinese students were the least inclined group to provide answers, with less than half of those choosing to respond. This suggested that their level of English may have been a limiting factor in their expression, contributing to their reluctance to answer. Therefore, conducting interviews in a language in which participants are most comfortable ensures they understand the questions and can express their feelings easily and accurately.

However, allowing one EFL group (EFL_China) to be interviewed in their native language, while the other group (EFL_other) was not, might affect the data's validity. This decision was based on the pragmatic reason that I am proficient in both Chinese and English, but not in the other languages involved in the study. Moreover, translating interview data can be challenging and potentially problematic since meanings in one language usually lack an exact equivalent in another (Filep, 2009). As a result, I made a great effort to ensure the translation was accurate so that Chinese interviewees' experiences were as close to their original meaning as possible (see Section 6.5.2 for detailed transcription process).

6.4 Pilot study

Pilot studies offer valuable insights, such as identifying unexpected barriers in data collection (Ivey, 2014), and allowing researchers to practice and refine their techniques (Jordan et al., 2021). To evaluate and refine the interview design, prior to the data collection, I conducted two-stage pilot online interviews using Zoom with four participants (who did not participate in the actual study later).

The main purposes of this pilot were:

1. Estimate the time duration of the whole and each part of the interview;
2. Examine clarity of the interview questions;
3. Check the necessity of using Chinese language for Chinese participants;
4. Obtain participants' additional feedback and suggestions.

The basic profile of the pilot participants is as follows:

Stage 1 (Participants 1-3):

1. UK ENS student, postgraduate in Education, male
2. Chinese EFL student, undergraduate (2nd year) in Business, female
3. Malaysian EFL student, undergraduate (1st year) in Law, female

Stage 2 (Participant 4):

4. Chinese EFL student, undergraduate (3rd year) in Psychology, female

All participants voluntarily took part in the pilot study. They completed the survey before the interviews, which provided background information (e.g., vocabulary scores) and helped generate

tailored interview questions (i.e., interview questions based on their responses to open-ended survey questions). The pilot interview data were not analysed.

During Stage 1, the duration of the entire interview and each part was recorded. The entire interview process ranged from 17.1 to 31.5 minutes (21.0 minutes on average). Afterwards, participants were asked to provide feedback on any ambiguities, discomforts, or suggestions. The time durations appeared suitable. When given a choice between conducting the interview in the Chinese or English language, Participant 2 chose Chinese. After the interview, I specifically asked her thoughts on using Chinese for the interview, and she strongly endorsed its necessity. Based on the feedback, minor adjustments were made to some interview questions. For example, a question with a scale was rephrased and divided into smaller questions to avoid confusion: The original question for EFL students, which included a scale (i.e., “So how does studying in English compare - for you - to studying in your first language? For example, if we say that there is an imaginary scale from 1 to infinity, and 1 is not difficult at all while 5 is how difficult studying in your first language is, where on this scale is studying in English for you? Why is this the case?”), was replaced with several smaller questions that did not use scales and seemed less likely to cause misunderstandings (i.e., “So how does studying in English compare - for you - to studying in your first language? Was it more difficult than you had anticipated? (If yes) Were you surprised by it (that it was so difficult)? Do you think arriving with a better proficiency in English would have made your studies easier? (If yes) And had you known how difficult it was going to be, would you have still come? Or would you have first improved your English proficiency and then started your studies?”). These changes were discussed with my supervisor and confirmed by Participant 2 as clear and suitable. Participant 1’s interview was audio-recorded (with consent) to help me reflect on my interviewing style. Reviewing pilot interview recordings can enhance researchers’ skills by identifying mistakes and improving interview techniques (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Hence, I reflected on my performance and practiced speaking in a more relaxed and fluent way.

During Stage 2, Participant 4 also expressed her preference to be interviewed in Chinese. The interview was audio-recorded (with consent). I reviewed the recording multiple times to check if the interview flowed smoothly and if there were any areas for improvement. It seemed that Participant 4 understood every question clearly and showed strong engagement in sharing her experiences. I also found myself speaking more fluently and naturally compared to Stage 1. With satisfactory results from the pilot study, I was ready to proceed with the official interviews.

6.5. Procedure

6.5.1 Data collection

Potential interviewees who met the eligibility and selection criteria were sent an interview invitation via email. Due to an initially low response rate, the email was modified, with both versions included in the appendix. A Doodle poll link was included in the email, allowing participants to book appointments at their convenience by simply selecting available time and date slots. A booking confirmation email was sent one day before the interview, serving as a reminder and including the Zoom link (see Appendix U for interview invitation emails and booking confirmation email). An information sheet (see Appendix F) about the interview was provided at both points of invitation and booking confirmation. All interviews were conducted on-line and audio-recorded with participants' prior consent.

At the beginning of the interview, I reiterated important ethical issues. I briefly explained the purpose of the study, and informed interviewees about data anonymisation. They were made aware of their right to refuse to answer questions or express discomfort during or after the interview. After reconfirming oral consent, I provided a digital consent form (see Appendix G) for interviewees to complete before recording and starting the interview.

As mentioned in Section 6.3.2, Chinese interviewees were given the choice between Chinese or English, with all five choosing Chinese. The interviews were transcribed verbatim in Chinese and then translated into English using the method of back translation, with the help of my colleagues to ensure accuracy (see Section 6.5.2 for the detailed transcription process).

Individual interviews were conducted at the end of the academic year when participants had experienced most or all of their learning (from 15th July 2021 to 3rd September 2021). The interviews lasted between 12.0 to 36.9 minutes (24.2 minutes on average).

6.5.2 Transcription process

All data were transcribed manually with the help of a free web app oTranscribe (<https://otranscribe.com/>). Sample interview transcripts can be found in Appendix V, while the complete transcripts are available upon request.

Interviews conducted in Chinese were first transcribed verbatim in Chinese and then translated into English. To ensure translation accuracy and quality, the back-translation method was adopted with the help of a Chinese PhD student and a British master's graduate student, both with social science research backgrounds. Back-translation, a widely-used method for quality assurance in translation, is the process of re-translating content into the source language without access to the original text (Tyupa, 2011). The PhD student, acting as an independent Chinese translator, back-translated 10% of randomly chosen English transcripts from all five Chinese interviewees. We then discussed any differences together. We both agreed that despite some superficial differences, the overall translation quality was high, with most differences relating to language formalities, synonyms, and sentence structures that did not affect meaning. For the few parts that led to differences in meanings, we consulted a monolingual British student to ensure the final translation accurately conveyed the original meaning using appropriate English expressions. Following Brislin's (1970) recommendation that translated materials be reviewed by native speakers of the target language, the British student also reviewed all translated transcripts to ensure the language was natural and suitable in English.

The transcripts were then imported to a qualitative data analysis computer software NVivo, facilitating efficient storage, organisation, and management of the qualitative data (Wong, 2008). To ensure anonymity, all interviewees' names were replaced and labelled with codes such as EFL_China_1 and ENS_UK_4. However, basic information profiles were kept to identify their backgrounds.

6.6 Analysis approach

I conducted the analysis using reflective thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2022). This is a six-step method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data, which has been widely used in qualitative research (Clarke & Braun, 2014). It was used in this study because it is flexible and appropriate for exploring participants' experiences, and can highlight similarities and differences across datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An inductive approach was adopted for this exploratory research to direct the coding and theme development in order to focus on the content of the data, which is the ideas and perceptions of the interviewees.

6.6.1 Familiarisation with the data

This phase requires researchers to become fully familiar with the data. I listened to the original audio data repeatedly and read the transcribed interview data several times in order to become familiar with it. I also took notes whenever there was something interesting or possibly noteworthy. For example, when I read that Chinese interviewees all seemed to recognise their language limitations but still would have chosen to start their studies rather than improving their English proficiency first, I took notes about these types of interesting points as reminders for future analysis.

6.6.2 Coding of the data

This phase involves creating concise labels (codes) to tag relevant features of the data in relation to the research questions, and reviewing all data extracts related to each code. While reading the interview transcripts, I paid extra attention to aspects potentially relevant to my research questions, and labelled them with words, phrases or sentences conveying insights of interest to me. The function of “Code” in NVivo facilitated this process conveniently when changes needed to be made. I used an inductive approach rather than a deductive approach due to the need for exploratory research on students’ academic experiences and language difficulties. Hence, the coding process was data-driven (instead of using any coding frames from any theoretical foundation) and I focused on interviewees’ own perceptions in relation to research questions. For example, the data extract of “I guess the biggest challenges is that my professors are actually Swedish so it took me some time to kind of get used to their accent.” was coded for “Accents (listening difficulties)”. The majority of coding was semantic, capturing explicit meaning of interviewees’ own perceptions. I mainly focused on the surface level meaning portrayed by interviewees, especially during the initial coding process and developed semantic codes such as “Large amount of reading and slow reading speed”. When I re-visited the data and became more experienced, some latent codes were generated. For example, the code of “Self-confidence” was developed for the data extract where interviewee ENS_Singapore explained that she conquered her shyness to speak by constantly reminding herself not to be embarrassed about her own distinct accent. After that, I collated the coding processes: I re-read all interview transcripts to ensure all the interviewees’ accounts in relation to the research questions were identified and coded; all the codes and coded data extracts were reviewed; some similar codes were merged into single codes in the meantime; irrelevant codes were eliminated. An initial list of 67 codes was generated in preparation for the next stage of analysis.

6.6.3 Theme development

This phase involves identifying similar or overlapping codes, grouping patterns, and developing clusters of codes with a shared central organising concept (themes). I looked for patterns across the codes and coded data, sorting the codes into significant broader patterns of meaning that I identified. During this process, I particularly paid attention to the research questions my study intended to address and ensured the names of the patterns were directly relevant to them. In the “Nodes” interface on NVivo I tried different clusters by grouping codes into different categories to help me develop theme ideas. Finally, I collated the codes and coded data extracts within the patterns. For example, codes with commonalities such as self-support, self-reflection, adjustment, or confidence when compensating for language difficulties were grouped into a wider category of “self-motivation and self-sufficiency”. In this way, a set of potential themes developed.

6.6.4 Reviewing themes

This phase requires two levels of theme review: reviewing the themes against the coded data to check if they fit; ensuring the themes tell a convincing and coherent story of the coded data. As I refined the themes, I combined similar ones to form main themes as they contained similar accounts or demands of interviewees (e.g., “Grammar, vocabulary, and fluency of language use”, “Academic reading and writing skills” and “cultural nuances when using English” combined together to form a single theme). I also created and used a thematic map to clearly display themes and sub-themes and identify areas of potential contradiction and overlap. Initially, “COVID-19 influence on languages” was created as a main theme, however, upon further reflection, it was merged into another theme as a sub-theme since only 11 data extracts directly supported this theme about its direct influence on languages. Moreover, some overlap was shown between this COVID-19 theme and another, further confirming the reconsideration to eliminate and merge it into another main theme. In the end, four main themes were defined.

6.6.5 Defining and naming themes

This phase involves developing a detailed analysis of each theme, determining the “story” and “essence” of each theme. It also involves determining theme names. I decided on the theme names after considering the content of the individual themes and their relationships to the research questions.

6.6.6 Writing up

This phase requires a combination of (further) analysis and writing up. For each theme that was formed, I wrote a detailed analysis in relation to the survey results and existing literature. I also used interviewees' quotes when necessary to illustrate the theme report. These quotes were used as they were originally produced, without any corrections for grammar or lexical choices. By contextualising the findings in relation to previous literature and closely sticking to my research questions, I managed to broaden my understanding of the interviewees' experiences and fulfil the purpose of my research. Therefore, detailed information of the interview analysis was presented.

6.7 Challenges

I faced some challenges during the participant recruitment and data analysis phases of my interview study.

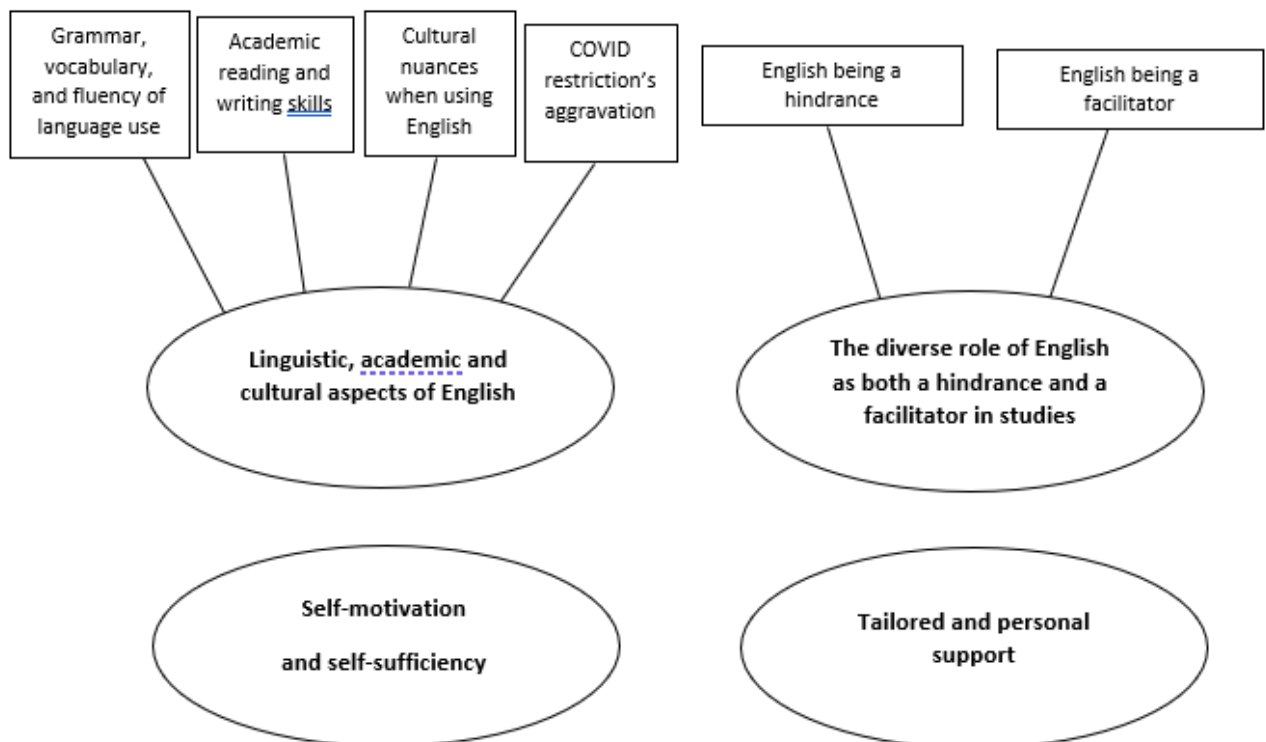
Firstly, recruiting sufficient participants was more difficult than anticipated. One potential interviewee did not show up for an arranged appointment without offering any reason, which deeply frustrated me. Therefore, I modified my invitation email to be less formal (see Appendix U) and broadened the range of target participants (as mentioned in Section 6.2). In turn, the recruitment increased. Secondly, when transcribing the interview data, I sometimes struggled to understand what exactly some of the interviewees said due to my limited English proficiency, especially if they used (what I considered) complicated words and strong accents. Sometimes occasional background noise made my understanding worse. Therefore, I noted all the parts that I could not understand or was not sure about and asked a UK friend for help, who clarified all the content for me. Lastly, due to my lack of experience as a researcher, I had not cultivated a habit of frequently backing up my transcribed data. During the transcription phase, my laptop's hard disk completely broke, resulting in the loss of nearly all my transcriptions. I had to redo a large amount of the work. From this experience, I learned to back up my work daily to prevent any technical issues.

6.8 Results and discussion

6.8.1 Thematic map

A thematic map below (Figure 6.1) shows the four main themes that were identified in the data, and their sub-themes. Sub-themes can be helpful to provide structures to themes and present hierarchies of meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The four main themes are “Theme 1: Linguistic, academic and cultural aspects of English”, “Theme 2: The diverse role of English as both a hindrance and a facilitator in studies”, “Theme 3: Self-motivation and self-sufficiency” and “Theme 4: Tailored and personal support”. Each theme is independent, representing a separate and specific aspect of the data. Collectively, these four themes provide answers to the research questions. Specifically, Theme 1 answers the question of what students perceive as their most prominent academic language difficulties and how these perceived difficulties differ based on students’ language status and domicile (Q1, Q2); Theme 2 addresses the impact students believe these difficulties have on their academic performance (Q1); Theme 3 illustrates strategies that students use to compensate for their language-related difficulties (Q3); Theme 4 shows external support that students receive and identifies the types of support students would find helpful (Q3). Within the rectangular blocks are sub-themes, each being connected to their relevant parent theme (main theme).

Figure 6.1
Thematic Map with Four Main Themes and Their Sub-themes



The following sections describe each theme and examine how they relate to the survey results and background literature.

6.8.2 Theme 1: Linguistic, academic and cultural aspects of English

This theme is about the language challenges that students experienced when engaging in higher education in the UK, and how these differed for native and non-native English speakers. The responses from the survey showed that language presents itself as a significant academic difficulty for students in all groups. During the interviews, I picked up on this point and asked about academic challenges, especially those related to language. It seems that interviewees attributed their language-related difficulties to the following three challenges:

1. Grammar, vocabulary, and fluency of language use;
2. Academic reading and writing skills;
3. Cultural nuances when culture and English use differ between countries.

Participants also described how COVID-19 restrictions exacerbated their difficulties by reducing their opportunities to practice, adjust and improve.

When talking about language difficulties, while EFL interviewees (especially Chinese EFL interviewees) were more likely to report their challenges related to all the above three aspects, ENS interviewees tended to report only academic learning skills (ENS_UK and ENS_other) and cultural nuances (ENS_other).

6.8.2.1 Grammar, vocabulary, and fluency of language use

EFL interviewees, particularly those from China, exclusively brought up the linguistic challenges related to grammar and vocabulary in English. This sub-theme is about language challenges that are related to grammar, vocabulary, and fluency of language use that EFL students faced, which were shown mainly in the aspects of grammar and vocabulary.

When it came to spoken expressions that one Chinese interviewee considered to be “basic”, she reported difficulties in expressing them quickly and clearly. Interviewee EFL_China_3 said, “甚至是

一些比较基本的，可能人家觉得很日常的语言，我都可能无法很快速清晰的表达出来” [“Even for language that is basic and that other people probably consider to be used daily, I might not be able to express myself clearly and quickly”]. When I further asked her why speaking was difficult for her, she reported that she could barely express herself using some key words, but she was aware that her grammatical tense and sentence structures might not be correct:

时态已经不太管了，我其实表达我的意思就好...就会忽略整个句子的结构，然后就没有办法用一个正确的语句把它表达出来。但是可以勉强用那些关键词来表达出意思，让旁人听懂，这个是可以的。但是我也知道，表达的那个句子不是特别正确。 [I didn't care about tense as long as I could express what I mean... I ended up neglecting the whole structure of the sentence, then I couldn't express my meaning using a correct statement. But I still barely managed to express my meanings by using the key words which ended up making sense to people. But I was still aware that the sentence wasn't very correct.]

Interviewee EFL_China_2 expressed some struggles in her writing. She found the vocabulary selection challenging and she was even concerned about whether her writing was understandable or not to others:

(写作中)对我最困难的就是对词语的选择...我没有办法像我在用中文写作的时候那么流畅...我在申请不管是研究生还是申请实习的过程中，我在写我的个人陈述的过程中，就会有这方面的压力吧，觉得可能我表达的别人到底能不能看懂，我到底能不能完全的展现出我在这方面的能力。 [(In writing,) the most difficult thing for me was my selection of words... My writing couldn't be as fluent as when I write in Chinese... Whenever I applied for a master's degree or internship, I felt pressure when I was writing my personal statement. I wondered if they could understand what I expressed, and if I could fully present my competence in this field.]

Other non-Chinese EFL students shared similar experiences, although the magnitude or nature of difficulty might differ from their Chinese counterparts. For example, both interviewees EFL_France and EFL_Hungary found it hard to express themselves with precision. In spite of this, EFL_France interviewee believed this to be more prevalent in everyday life than in his studies, and it was never a major issue for him.

Given that EFL students' self-perceived and tested English proficiency scores were significantly lower than ENS students, with Chinese students having considerably lower scores than any other groups, it was understandable that only EFL students (especially Chinese students) perceived themselves to encounter linguistic difficulties concerning vocabulary, grammar as well as the fluency and precision of language use.

6.8.2.2 Academic reading and writing skills

Unlike grammar, vocabulary, and fluency of language use, in terms of academic learning skills, both EFL and ENS interviewees saw themselves as having difficulties, especially in academic reading and writing. This sub-theme presents challenges related to students' academic reading skills and academic writing skills.

The quantity of academic reading material was seen as a notable difficulty of reading, which seemed to be related to academic reading approaches. Several interviewees reported a large amount of assigned reading, which they tended to find overwhelming, causing problems like having trouble in keeping track of main points during their reading. Since my survey results showed an unexpectedly large amount of reported difficulty in reading among UK students, their detailed explanation about "why" was worth noting. In the interviews, three out of four UK students reported a similar perception about reading overload, and all UK interviewees perceived themselves as having difficulties related to reading. Besides the unfamiliar vocabulary encountered in academic reading, which they found complex or technical, their approach to academic reading was also reported to cause problems. Interviewee ENS_UK_4 talked about how she could not keep track of what she had read:

But it's **just** the massive quantity. That's all. That's the big problem...You get this general idea in your head like, "Yeah, these are great ideas, these are great concepts." But then you write about them, and you're like, "Wait, who said that though?" It feels like you can't remember whether you're plagiarising - whether you have this idea, or whether somebody else had it and you just forgot about it. You know, that kind of thing. Yeah, **keeping track** was a pain.

Her emphasis on "just" and "keeping track" showed her perceived struggle to make connection between the ideas and their authors after undertaking a substantial amount of reading, which did

not indicate any problem related to understanding. Indeed, UK interviewees' so called "difficulties in reading" were more like a lack of academic skills rather than linguistic knowledge. In Gorzycki et al.'s (2019) research in undergraduate students in an American university where students' comments about academic reading were analysed, a large majority of the impressions (29/30) about the amount of academic reading stated that it was too much and an inappropriate amount, implying that this might be a common problem students may encounter. Many international ENS interviewees and EFL interviewees also reported similar challenges. For example, the interviewee EFL_China_1 found it hard to "find main points" when reading long articles. In many cases, however, EFL interviewees' problem of perceived quantity of numerous reading materials was also related to linguistic knowledge of vocabulary (as illustrated in Theme 1). Since efficient reading and comprehension require learners' mastery of high-frequency words along with substantial additional vocabulary (Rashidi & Khosravi, 2010), their perception of overwhelming reading amount might be related to their limited vocabulary knowledge.

In addition to the perceived large amount of reading, interviewees also reported difficulties with reading fluency. They perceived their reading speed as slow, attributing this to unfamiliar or complex vocabulary and the limited time available for completion. For example, Interviewee ENS_UK_2 said, "so in seven days, reading 30 pages in seven days when it is a lot of complicated language was quite difficult".

Lack of academic writing skills, such as the skill of being succinct and adopting academic writing style, was also reported by both ENS and EFL interviewees. Interviewee EFL_Cyprus talked about how he struggled to express ideas succinctly in academic writing. He said, "I had trouble narrowing down my thoughts... That was at least **my** challenge, I have to cut my ideas short, very often". Mastering the skills of citing and referencing was another problem. Interviewee EFL_China_4 perceived the academic writing requirements in the UK to be "stricter when it comes to citing" than China, which was unanticipated and difficult for her. However, those difficulties were not exclusive to EFL students and English native speaking interviewees experienced challenges, too. Interviewee ENS_UK_1 shared a similar struggle: "I don't know how to properly reference something in an essay... I just don't really get referencing personally". Some EFL interviewees also reported difficulties with writing fluency, as they felt they had insufficient time to complete their writing assignments or exams. They attributed this to the difficulty in writing in the English language and perceived limited time. For example, EFL_Italy expressed her experience of having less assigned time than in her home country:

I was used to taking my time, doing drafts and stuff. And then **here** for writing, they just used to it to do so much quicker than us. And I didn't know that. And then of course, it's in English. So it's an added difficulty. So I **wasn't** expecting this at all.

Despite the assumption that ENS students have advantages over EFL students when it comes to language, Zhao's (2017) study found that writer experience (i.e., experience in writing with enhanced understanding of genre and disciplinary knowledge) outweighs the native-speaker status in the academic writing context. This might explain why both English native and non-native students reported challenges (sometimes even similar challenges) in academic writing.

According to Berman and Cheng (2010), similar to students whose first language is not English, English native-speaking students were also likely to face academic language difficulties. This sub-theme was consistent with their study and showed that both ENS and EFL students may encounter difficulties related to academic reading and writing skills.

6.8.2.3 Cultural nuances when culture and English use differ between countries

This sub-theme is about the problem of cultural nuances within the English language, which was mentioned by all groups of international students (i.e., Groups EFL_China, EFL_other and ENS_other). Their concerns related to the impact of different accents and English spelling rules as well as cultural differences in learning.

Several interviewees (from the group of EFL_other and ENS_other) talked about the diverse English accents they needed to adjust to when listening, and their own distinct accents which they were conscious of when speaking. Unfamiliar accents can lead to difficulties in understanding while listening (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Fortunately, the issue of accent in both listening and speaking, together with spelling differences seemed to be mostly only transitory problems which were mitigated or completely overcome later on. As an American student whose first language is English, ENS_USA_1 attributed her biggest language-related challenge to be adjusting to the accents used by professors in classes. She said, "It took me some time to kind of get used to their (my professors') accent...Another thing is that a lot of British words are spelled differently here than in America". When asked about the strategies employed to tackle those issues, she admitted that there were not any strategies and she just needed to "go with it" and "pay extra attention". As time went by, she reported getting used to unfamiliar accents and spelling differences.

Compared to problems with accent and spelling, the impact of cultural differences on studies seemed to be more difficult to tackle. When doing assessments which needed to reference TV shows and films, interviewee EFL_Hungary shared her experiences of how a different cultural background influenced her studies in film and television production:

In assessments, for example, studio shows, so live TV shows, they [UK students] can use references that I wouldn't know of, and my lecturers wouldn't understand my references if I'm talking about a Hungarian show that doesn't exist in the UK, but I don't know, those shows that they refer to. So I might come up with an idea and they just go, well, this is the same as this other thing that I didn't even know existed. So that's another barrier, basically, what culture we grew up in, and what we are aware, exist in all media in different countries.

Cultural differences in studied were also experienced by interviewee EFL_China_5 when he reported differences in laws surrounding the purchase and sale of land in China and the UK.

然后其他的可能是就是因为地区国家的一些标准不一样吧，比如说像国内吧，房屋买卖，因为咱们是不能买土地嘛，土地是归国家的。然后，所以咱们都是买了它的使用权。但是像这边的话，就相当于土地是能私有的，所以他一些买卖和一些定义可能不太一样。当时学的时候。就感觉很迷惑，rent，租赁嘛，然后可能在国内的话就想的是比如说‘租赁’，租赁一年或者是五年这种，然后在在这边居然能租 99 年。 [Another difference might be that standards [laws] are different in different countries. For example, in China, we can't buy land because land belongs to the country, so we can only buy the right to use it. However, here, lands are private, so the definitions of buying and selling can be different. When I learned about it, I was very confused, like, "rent" (English word) is "rent" (Chinese translation of "rent"). "renting" in China might mean "renting for 1 or 5 years", while here, unexpectedly, you can rent for even 99 years.]

Interestingly, when he talked about what he considered to be exclusively cultural differences in studies, he mistakenly used the English word "rent" when he presumably meant "lease". This is most likely because "rent" and "lease" have the same translation in Chinese, "租赁", which caused confusion. This revealed not only another cultural nuance of which he seemed unaware – the

difference between renting and leasing, but also his lack of linguistic knowledge pertaining to English vocabulary. The confusion between “rent” and “lease” reflected that the struggles of Chinese students lie in both cultural differences and linguistic limitations.

The difficulty of cultural nuance within the English language was reported by almost all international interviewees, highlighting the challenges they faced due to differences of culture and English use when studying in a foreign country.

6.8.2.4 COVID-19 restriction’s aggravation

According to the EFL interviewees, COVID-19 restrictions had exacerbated their language difficulties.

Due to the limited opportunities for face-to-face communication during the pandemic, a large number of EFL interviewees mentioned the impact that on-line classes and the inability to meet people had on their language ability. Interviewee EFL_China_2 said, “大家可能不能面对面，所以一些锻炼口语的机会会比较少吧” [“People couldn’t be face to face, so I had limited chances to practice spoken English”]. Interviewee EFL_France shared some similar thoughts:

Because of COVID-19, I couldn’t manage to do all the things I wanted to...like meeting English people...because I mean, that’s why I came to the UK to study, you know, to improve my English as well as to meet new people. And now I was not able to do as I planned, including meeting these people.

Although the direct impact of COVID-19 on language was not widely reported by interviewees, almost every interviewee stressed that it had an influence on several other aspects of their life such as general study or their social life, which tended to indirectly cause barriers to EFL students’ language improvement. According to Stevanović et al.’s (2021) research about students’ experiences during COVID-19 in higher education, students reported the lack of interaction and live communication to be one of the biggest disadvantages of distance learning. This limitation might have caused a non-negligible barrier to their language practice. In Mahyoob’s (2020) study about EFL students’ on-line learning perceptions during COVID-19 period, for students, a lack of real English language practice with their teachers and classmates was one of the challenges that was mentioned, which was not eliminated as time went by like other difficulties (such as inexperience in using on-line tools). The negative impact of COVID-19 on language improvement mentioned by the EFL

interviewees was in line with the aforementioned studies, making it harder for EFL students to practice their English when social connections were limited.

6.8.3 Theme 2: The diverse role of English as both a hindrance and a facilitator in studies

When analysing how interviewees perceived the effect of language difficulties on their academic performance, it was interesting to note that they reported both positive and negative aspects of studying in English. On the one hand, some interviewees' English proficiency was perceived to limit what they could have achieved in their academic studies. On the other hand, some EFL students considered academic English preferable to their first language for certain aspects, such as subject knowledge and technical terms, as they felt accustomed to studying them in English.

When asked whether they perceived their language skills to have limited their achievement, most EFL students (especially Chinese students) considered English as a hindrance. This was predominantly shown in their comments about their writing, which they believed negatively influenced their achievement. In comparison, the vast majority of ENS students (7 out of 8) did not perceive language skills to limit their academic achievement in any way, despite reporting language-related issues.

Interviewee EFL_China_2 admitted, “我觉得就算在写作上面吧, 我觉得很大程度上束缚了我的学业成就...我写一篇论文的时间就会比别人长很多” [“I think my writing has limited my academic achievement to a great extent... It took me much more time to write an essay compared to other people”]. Interviewee EFL_Hungary also considered writing to be her main limitation. She said, “It's harder to find the right words in something that's not your native language compared to your own language. So it's harder to write a script in the same amount of time -- it might take me longer”.

Previous research has shown that English proficiency influences EFL students' academic achievement (Fakeye & Ogunsiji, 2009; Li et al., 2010; Maleki & Zangani, 2007), and that English proficiency on entry predicts academic success (Eddey & Baumann, 2011; Ghenghesh, 2015; Trenkic & Warmington's, 2019). This means that many EFL students arrive with a level of English proficiency that can be a barrier to their learning, potentially limiting them from fulfilling their academic potential. When EFL interviewees were asked if they thought that having a higher proficiency in English on arrival would have made their studies easier, all nine offered a positive response, which showed that the students themselves appear to be aware of the hindrance of English on achievements.

Despite the perceived negative impact of English among EFL interviewees, some positive aspects were also highlighted. Over half of the EFL interviewees perceived academic English to be easier than their first language when it came to their subject knowledge. For example, some interviewees were more comfortable with the technical terms of their subject in English. Interviewee EFL_China_3 shared,

我现在习惯了用英语来读这些哲学的 paper 的时候，我发现其实换成中文反而有点点的不习惯。因为很多这些专业的词汇都是英语里面有的，但是到了中文，就很难找出一个很确切的翻译，或者意思会因为不同语系会有区别。 [I'm not really used to reading those philosophical papers if I change the language to Chinese, since I have gotten used to reading them in English. It's because some terminologies only exist in English, and they are hard to translate accurately in Chinese, otherwise the meanings would be different due to the difference in languages.]

Moreover, when asked the question “And had you known how difficult it was going to be, would you have still come? Or would you have first improved your English proficiency and then started your studies?” All the interviewees who were asked agreed that they would only have if it had not delayed their study. That is to say, if the situation had been perfect (e.g., time allowed it, no delay in their enrolments), they would have improved before enrolment. However, due to the practicality of the situation (e.g., time being more important than the improvement of English), they would have still made the same decision. This implied that although the interviewees desired to improve their English beforehand, this wish was not so strong that they would have delayed their plan to study abroad. Interviewee EFL_China_2 stated,

可能我会在来之前那个暑假好好学习，但我觉得我不会因为英语推迟我学习的这个计划吧。比如说推迟一年这种，我觉得不会。因为不想耽误时间，而且我觉得语言能力虽然对我有限制，有影响，但是好像没有那么严重到我会想晚毕业一年。 [I would probably have studied hard in the summer holiday before I came here. But I think I wouldn't have delayed my plan to study (in the UK) just because of my English. I wouldn't have delayed for, for instance, a year, because I didn't want to lose time. Also, although I felt my language abilities limited me and affected me, the seriousness wasn't so much for me to delay my graduation for one year.]

The fact that interviewees like interviewee EFL_China_2 recognised their English limitations but still would have chosen to be enrolled as planned suggested that they had confidence that the limited English proficiency would not have affected their graduation or caused them to fail academically. Since there are multiple factors influencing satisfaction for international students (Arambewela et al., 2006) and language proficiency might not necessarily be a significant one (Sam, 2001), it is likely that they still perceived their academic performance to be satisfactory and their overall overseas experience to be pleasant. Given that students would still have enrolled despite their limited English proficiency and its hindrance on their studies, the support available within universities seems to be crucial in making their academic experiences better.

Although not being the focus of this study, it seemed that linguistically less demanding courses caused fewer language issues than other courses, which is expected since fewer presentations and writing assessments were required (Zhang & Mi, 2010). For example, interviewee EFL_China_5 shared that his course contained largely calculations and analyses, which made him feel language was not a major difficulty; interviewee EFL_Italy who studied both physics and philosophy reported her language difficulties mainly lay within philosophy (rather than physics) which required essay writing.

This theme presents the diverse role of English in EFL interviewees' perceptions, reflecting the fact that English served as both a hindrance and a facilitator in their studies. While English, as a foreign language, was acknowledged to be a limiting factor concerning EFL interviewees' academic achievement, it had some advantages over their first language for EFL interviewees when it came to subject knowledge. In addition, despite the conscious knowledge of the English language's limitation on achievement, they still would have studied in the UK, rather than taking time to improve their language prior to studying, highlighting the necessity for universities to support the students and mitigate language barriers so that students can fulfil their academic potential.

6.8.4 Theme 3: Self-motivation and self-sufficiency

When encountering language-related difficulties in interviewees' academic journey, self-motivation and self-sufficiency were reported to be the main strategies to compensate for a lack of language skill. Some interviewees intentionally sought a variety of learning strategies to ease the difficulties; some of them actively encouraged themselves to overcome psychological barriers and gained

confidence in using language, some of them attributed their language progress to simply their stay in an English-speaking environment.

All the groups of students seemed to seek out various learning strategies by themselves and a large variety of self-supported strategies were used, including on-line tools and software, dictionaries, preview and preparation, review and self-reflection. What is noteworthy is that “reading” itself was the most reported coping strategy for both reading (8 interviewees) and writing difficulties (5 interviewees) – in other words, reading academic articles and books in English was the way in which they sought to improve both reading and writing skills. According to interviewees, reading academic texts not only helped them to understand the vocabulary and content naturally, but also allowed them to use what they read to benefit their writing. For example, Interviewee ENS_Ireland said,

I think when you see a word used a lot in different academic contexts, even if after I’ve looked it up and haven’t understood it, when it’s used a lot in a variety of different academic things, you eventually understand it better. It’s just reading a lot I guess, that helps the most when it comes to understanding.

Similarly, Interviewee EFL_China_1 said,

可能就是看的那个文献多了的话，自然而然就会有一点认知吧，就是怎么写算是一个好的文章，也不是照搬，就是从文献当中去学习吧。 [I guess reading more literature helped me gain some knowledge about how to write a good article naturally and gradually – not by copying, but by learning from literature.]

Reading frequently and extensively can build reading speed, develop vocabulary and improve the ability to comprehend information in academic texts quickly (Lei et al., 2010). Given that the most reported reading difficulty was slow reading speed and/or a large amount of reading, it is likely that reading academic literature enabled quicker comprehension, which also increased reading speed and therefore alleviated their concerned reading difficulties. Some researchers stressed the reading-writing connection and the importance of reading for developing the writing skills of EFL students (AlOmrani, 2014; Park, 2016). In Itua et al.’s (2014) qualitative research, higher education staff identified “academic reading” to be essential to developing students’ academic writing skills. Reading’s significant role as a remedy to compensate for a lack of reading and writing skills might explain the perceived large (or even excessive) amount of assigned reading by professionals.

Interviewee ENS_UK_4 expressed her “double-edged sword” perception with regards to reading. Despite her perceived overwhelming reading requirements, she said, “The amount of reading **was** a strategy, like forcing myself to do that was a strategy...It was a strategy in itself, with drawbacks. Yeah. That's how I describe it”.

Other than interviewees’ active motivation, self-sufficiency also constituted the perceived support in language. Several interviewees reported themselves to have made progress due to a large exposure to the English language and they attributed their (academic) language improvement to their stay in an English-speaking environment. Instead of being a “strategy”, this type of method was more like “adaptation”. The exposure can be either from their past experiences prior to UK university or during their learning in the UK. Interviewee EFL_Italy said,

I lived one year in the US, and then I went to UK before starting University for one whole year, I went to university, I did like a foundation year, and I also worked full time. So when I went to university, I was already kind of used to it... But I can imagine for other people what it must be, like, I would have **never** been able to do this. If I didn’t have my previous experiences, I would have not been able to write essays or participate in seminars.

Here, she attributed the perceived language ease to her past experience in English-speaking countries, which resonated with EFL_Mexico, EFL_Cyprus, ENS_Singapore and ENS_USA_1 who had similar (academic) English experiences. From Krashen’s (1982) second language acquisition theory, acquiring languages is a subconscious process and it plays an important role in language development. According to his theory, language acquirers are only aware that they use the language for communication without being aware of the fact that they are acquiring language. Interviewee EFL_Italy’s subconscious acquisition of the language was likely to be a factor for her perceived language ease in an English environment over time when she had to use English to communicate.

Although two Chinese interviewees also recognised the importance and potential benefit of having access to an English environment, which drove their decision to come to the UK or watch English videos, they did not express having achieved the benefit like other groups of students. This could be possibly explained by their lower exposure to the English language. For example, in Europe, the impact of English on society is generally high with it being commonly present in sources such as the Internet, commercials, movies and music (Lindgren & Muñoz, 2013), whereas Chinese language is still predominant concerning the media associated with China (Bi, 2011). It seems that Chinese

students may have less English exposure compared with other groups of students, yet some of them acknowledge its significance and take actions to actively create an English environment. For example, when talking about language difficulties and strategies, interviewee EFL_China_3 constantly mentioned the word “语境 language environment”, which she highly valued when she attempted to improve her English:

我有看 YouTube, 我是想尝试看一些本地人生活啊, 就是说很日常的娱乐的这些东西, 让自己更熟悉这个语境。 [I watch YouTube. I wanted to try to watch stuff about local people's life, which was about very daily and recreational activities, in order to make myself familiar with the language environment.]

According to the initial survey result, non-Chinese EFL students' average vocabulary score was significantly higher than Chinese EFL students. Since a large majority of this group consists of European students, their higher English proficiency hints at the important role of exposure to language input for incidental and implicit language development.

This theme illustrated interviewees' main strategies employed to deal with their perceived language-related difficulties by themselves. “Reading academic articles and books” stood out to be their most reported coping strategy to compensate for difficulties related to reading and writing. Exposure to an English environment was another factor that they believed to improve their language. However, while Chinese students also recognised the importance of being exposed to English language, they did not report themselves to benefit from it like other groups of students, possibly due to their limited opportunities to get sufficient English exposure and immersion, which was a contributing factor to Chinese students' lower English proficiency when compared with others.

6.8.5 Theme 4: Tailored and personal support

This theme serves to present some other strategies that interviewees have used as well as expand upon the desired support they would find helpful. It seemed that personal support from university staff members was desired and tailored support catering to students' diverse demands is required.

In addition to the self-support mentioned in the last theme, this theme focused on the external support students obtained from various sources, including university departments, professionals and

peers, to help with language-related difficulties. One feature commonly present in these support channels that they found to be useful was that they were appropriate to suit their personal needs (e.g., specific language demands) or were able to adapt to the special circumstances (e.g., on-line courses due to COVID-19).

The most frequently reported external support channels were those from professionals, such as lecturers, supervisors, language tutors and seminar leaders. A total of 9 interviewees all mentioned the positive influence of these support channels on their language, especially for their reading and writing ability. This is consistent with the survey results observed in the open-ended questions where “help from lecturers and tutors” was reported as the most common type of accessible support amongst participants in the category of perceived positive experience. This showed students’ appreciation of receiving support from professional staff members, and the interview research further found that support which was tailored and personal was largely valued. Multiple interviewees shared their experience with lecturers in the form of one-to-one support in relation to their specific demands. For example, when talking about support received during their studies, interviewee ENS_USA_2 said,

They had emailed hours for when they were available to talk over Zoom, which was very helpful. I think I spoke with two of my lecturers a few times...I could get my misunderstandings of terminology and meanings of articles answered. So it was good.

Interviewee EFL_China_1 also shared some support that he experienced and considered to be useful,

在交 paper 以前，可能我会问老师 “你可不可以帮我看一下，这篇 essay 这样写的 structure 是不是对的？” 或者 “有些措辞上面，你帮我看一下吧。” 老师就会给 feedback 说 “这边可能需要改进一下会好一些”。就是说老师会给很多帮助。 [Before submitting my papers, I sometimes asked my lecturers “Could you read it for me and see if the essay structure is correct?” or “Please help me check my wording.” My lecturers would give me feedback, saying “improving this part would make it better”. In other words, my lecturers gave me lots of help.]

This is in line with Poulos and Mahony’s (2008) study about students’ perceptions of feedback, suggesting that students prefer specific feedback instead of general feedback that is provided for the

whole class. In Ganobcsik-Williams's (2004) report on teaching academic writing in the UK, among various academic writing support, offering one-to-one writing tutoring was perceived to be useful by most higher education staff. This type of tutoring required appointments with writing tutors and served to meet students' individual writing needs. Indeed, students' difficulties can be diverse, meaning that tailored and personal language support might be needed. It is reassuring that this seemed to be valued by both students and universities.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the support from universities was completely satisfying. When it came to the desired support of interviewees, the responses often showed diversity, calling for more student-centred support methods to accommodate for the various situations that students request and require.

To expand on this point, what students need can vary significantly depending on the individual. For example, interviewee ENS_USA_2 wished more handouts could have been made to help her understand the terminology in her course; interviewee EFL_Hungary wished assigned readings could have been talked through in lectures to enhance comprehension; interviewee EFL_Italy wished that exam time would have been extended to allow for sufficient writing preparation etc. Moreover, even for widely used support that students favoured, not every course in every university implements them. For example, although a large number of survey participants and multiple interviewees specifically expressed the benefit of having access to lecture video recordings during COVID-19, interviewee EFL_China_3's course was an exception, and she strongly wished her classes would also have been recorded.

In academic institutions, most English language services provide help for both students whose first language is English and those whose is not (Huang, 2013). All groups of interviewees used and approved of tailored language support but still had language demands placed upon them, confirming the necessity of supporting the language demands for all student groups. However, Similar to the other themes, Chinese interviewees displayed a distinctive characteristic. Chinese interviewees were the only group who specifically appreciated the fact that lecturers and peers sometimes slow down or use simple words while speaking. This was deemed by interviewee EFL_China_1 as “*被照顾到 to be taken care of*” due to his lower English proficiency compared to his peers. When it came to support for Chinese students, language may even cause barriers and hinder the intention to ask for help. When Interviewee EFL_China_3 talked about the feeling of loneliness due to the lockdown,

despite feeling that it was necessary to address it, she found it too hard to talk to the university's psychological health consultancy in English:

这种感受用中文也很难表达, 转换成英语的话, 就更难以和当地人进行交流和试图寻求帮助。 [The feelings would be hard to be expressed even in Chinese, and if transferred into English, it would be even **harder** to communicate with local people and seek for help.]

When further asked "If the university had support in Chinese, would you seek for help?" She offered a positive response. With the Chinese group's English proficiency being the lowest of all groups, it is possible that they require different support than other groups of students.

The wide range of different opinions suggests that students do not hold a homogeneous view of what support they need. Therefore, tailored support is needed since it has the potential to address diverse issues that affect students' learning experience and enhance their academic achievement (Boughton et al., 2010; Sayer et al., 2002), although it should be noted that just because students desire a certain type of support does not mean that it is necessarily beneficial. Since support services can be expensive to set up and do not always attract the expected number of students (Zepke & Leach, 2010), some services may need to be adjusted, modified, or changed to avoid financial inefficiency. The interview research showed that different groups of students have different needs and thus require a different level of support. For example, Chinese students might need specific language support which targets students with a lower language proficiency than other groups. It is preferable for support to be adapted to suit the various demands of students' rather than being generalised towards all.

6.9 Conclusion

The interview data provided in-depth information about students' language-related difficulties, the perceived impact of these difficulties on academic performance, coping strategies and desired support. Most of the reported language difficulties were considered to be related to a lack of linguistic knowledge, a lack of academic skills and different cultural nuances. While the first issue was more likely to be reported by EFL students (especially Chinese students), the second was expressed by and shown in all groups and the last one was reported almost exclusively by international students. COVID-19 restrictions reduced their opportunity to make improvements and aggravated their difficulties. On the one hand, those language difficulties caused barriers to students' learning

and limited EFL students' academic achievement; on the other hand, in terms of subject knowledge, studying in English was sometimes deemed to be easier than studying in EFL students' first language due to acclimatisation to academic language. Interestingly, despite recognising language difficulties and their negative impact, EFL students would not have delayed their enrolment, highlighting the crucial need to provide support while at university.

When facing the reported difficulties, a variety of coping strategies were used. Some of the approaches were self-driven through motivation and adjustment; some others came externally and were tailored to the students' needs. Students' desired support was varied on an individual basis because of the distinctly different language demands between students. The various desires require that future support pays concern to individual groups and even the individual. Chinese students, for example, might require support which caters to students with a lower English proficiency compared to other groups; whereas British students, for example, might require academic support, especially in areas related to reading and writing.

CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

This chapter combines the key findings from the three studies presented in Chapters 4-6, discussing university students' experiences and expectations in terms of their English language proficiency, academic language difficulties and self-efficacy in UK higher education. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the research conducted through these three studies aimed to address the following research questions:

Q1. How does **English language proficiency** differ between home and different groups of international students in UK higher education? How does this change over the course of one academic year?

Q2. What are students' **self-perceptions** regarding their English language proficiency, academic language difficulties and confidence in academic studies? How do these self-perceptions differ between home and different groups of international students, and how do they change over time?

Q3. What are the **relationships** between students' English language proficiency, self-perceptions of English language proficiency, academic language difficulties and confidence in studies?

In order to address the above research questions, three studies were conducted: an initial survey study (see Chapter 4), a follow-up survey study (see Chapter 5) and an interview study (see Chapter 6). This chapter will combine the key findings from these studies and discuss them in relation to previous research. Discussions will be organised around the research questions.

7.2 Research question 1

This section discusses students' **English language proficiency**, as measured by a validated and widely used vocabulary test called LexTALE. It addresses the first research question, which consists of two sub-questions: 1) How does English language proficiency differ between home and different groups of international students in UK higher education? 2) How does this change over the course of one academic year? The following two subsections will address these questions respectively.

7.2.1 English language proficiency differences between home and different groups of international students

The findings of this study corroborate the results from previous research conducted in higher education settings in English-speaking countries, suggesting a large difference in the levels of language and literacy skills between international EFL students and home ENS students (Eddey & Baumann, 2011; MacKiewicz, 2022; Trenkic & Warmington, 2019). Nevertheless, this study fills some gaps in the previous research and contributes to the existing knowledge.

Firstly, many previous empirical studies that measured, compared and tracked international students' English language proficiency in higher education were based on samples that comprised only Chinese students (Trenkic & Warmington, 2019), or had an overrepresentation of Chinese students in their samples (Knoch et al., 2015). While European students were occasionally included (MacKiewicz, 2022), those from neither China nor Europe were often overlooked. In this study, Chinese students were compared not only with ENS students, but also with other EFL students from the rest of the world. This reveals that Chinese students generally lag behind both groups in English language proficiency. In addition, previous research typically conflated the domicile (home students vs. international students) with language status (native English speaker vs. non-native English speakers) by comparing international EFL students with home ENS students (MacKiewicz, 2022; Trenkic & Warmington, 2019). In this study, the domicile and language status were teased apart by distinguishing between international students who speak English as their first language and those who do not. Both groups were compared with home students speaking English as their first and dominant language. The findings show no significant difference in English language proficiency between home ENS and international ENS students, suggesting that differences in English language proficiency between home students and international EFL students are related to language status rather than domicile. This insight, despite being small, contributes to the existing knowledge as it has not been empirically demonstrated before. Finally, some studies compared Chinese EFL students with all international students, irrespective of their linguistic background (Eddey & Baumann, 2011; Li et al., 2010). Building on past findings that showed Chinese students tend to fall behind other international students (Eddey & Baumann, 2011; Li et al., 2010), this study compared within the EFL group itself (excluding international ENS students), revealing that Chinese students' language proficiency is also low compared with other non-native English-speaking international students.

A question emerging from the results that the current data does not directly address is: why do Chinese EFL students arrive with lower English proficiency than other international EFL students? In the interview study of this research, some Chinese EFL students acknowledged their limited English exposure and one even reported making deliberate efforts to create an English environment at home. However, current research still cannot offer a comprehensive explanation. Previous literature suggests some potential reasons, such as the less English exposure of Chinese students in comparison to European students (Bi, 2011; Björkman, 2016; Lindgren & Muñoz, 2013; Long, 2023; Yang, 2006) and the more distinct linguistic differences between Chinese and English, compared with between most European languages and English (Levin et al., 2013; Li et al., 2015; Martínez-Adrián & Del Puerto, 2017; Wang, 1973). Another contributing factor could be China's prevalent language test-preparation industry, which often focuses on test-taking strategies, potentially producing students who come to English-speaking higher education with inflated English proficiency scores (Hu & Trenkic, 2021; Trenkic & Hu, 2021). Yet, further research is needed to comprehensively understand why Chinese students' average English language proficiency on arrival is lower than other international EFL students worldwide.

7.2.2 Changes in English language proficiency over one academic year

The longitudinal survey results revealed no significant improvement in English language proficiency across all student groups over approximately one academic year, maintaining the proficiency gap between EFL and ENS students. This is in line with the previous research, suggesting that studying in English-speaking countries does not necessarily guarantee noticeable proficiency gains in English (Birrell, 2006; MacKiewicz, 2022; Trenkic & Warmington, 2019).

While past empirical longitudinal studies on students' language progress within a year mainly targeted home ENS students and specific EFL student groups, such as Chinese and European (MacKiewicz, 2022; Trenkic & Warmington, 2019), this study expanded upon them by including international ENS students and EFL students from the rest of the world other than China.

It is commonly believed that studying in English, particularly in an English-speaking country, results in an automatic improvement in English language skills, especially for international students (Storch & Hill, 2008). However, this is not always the case and language improvement seems to be a slow progress which may not be obvious over one single academic year. The limited improvement might be related to their lack of opportunities for English practice in non-academic environments, as

international students in higher education are more likely to interact with their compatriots or other international students over local students (Gomes, 2014; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Sherry et al., 2010; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Therefore, despite living in an English-speaking country, their real-world English communication opportunities remain limited. Given that this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the restrictions could have further limited students' opportunities for in-person communication since almost all interviewees expressed their disappointment over the reduced face-to-face interactions. Nevertheless, it does not mean that EFL students' English language proficiency does not improve at all. Several studies indicated significant improvement in EFL students' English skills after three to four years of studying in English environment (Knoch et al., 2015; Rogier, 2012; Yuksel et al., 2021). Even this study observed some proficiency growth for both EFL groups, although it was not statistically significant. This highlights that language development is a slow process.

The above finding is particularly important since many universities across the world (including those in the UK) often accept students whose English language proficiency is below the level recommended by language testing experts, especially when offers are made conditional on attending pre-session courses, at the end of which students do not have to sit a secure English test (Birrell, 2006; Pearson, 2020). These institutions typically overestimate how much progress can be made within such programmes, resulting in students who enrol through pre-session pathways typically achieve lower grades and fail more credits than students who met the language entry requirements on a secure English test (Eddey & Baumann, 2011; Oliver et al., 2012). Given this study's findings on slow language development during their study period, it is important to provide support to international EFL students to accelerate their language development and help them narrow the language gap between them and ENS students.

7.3 Research question 2

This section discusses students' **self-perceptions**. It addresses the second research question, which consists of two main parts: 1) The self-perceptions of different student groups regarding their English language proficiency, academic language difficulties and confidence in academic studies; 2) The changes in these perceptions over one academic year. The discussions in this section draw from students' levels of self-reported English language proficiency, levels of language-related difficulties experienced in studies, and self-efficacy levels respectively. Additionally, findings from interviews and

open-ended questions are also combined and discussed. The following two subsections will discuss the two parts respectively in detail.

7.3.1 Self-perceptions of different groups of students' English language proficiency, academic language difficulties and confidence in academic studies

Perceived English language proficiency

The previous research predominantly focused on either self-perceptions of language-related experiences (Gu & Maley, 2008; Lin & Scherz, 2014; Rabia, 2016; Taylor & Ali, 2017) or direct measures of linguistic knowledge and skills (Eddey & Baumann, 2011; Education First, 2022; MacKiewicz, 2022; Trenkic & Warmington, 2019). In contrast, this study assessed both objective and perceived English skills simultaneously, exploring directly whether students have self-awareness of their linguistic abilities.

In this study, Chinese EFL students scored and self-rated their proficiency the lowest, followed by non-Chinese EFL students, while the two ENS groups scored and self-rated the highest. The close alignment between students' proficiency self-ratings and objective English language proficiency suggests that students are well aware of their linguistic abilities. This was further confirmed by the results from open-ended questions and interviews. In the open-ended responses, EFL students' challenges were more likely to be language-related than those of ENS students. During the interviews, all EFL interviewees acknowledged and recognised their language limitation in their studies. However, such awareness of their English proficiency is in contrast with Tomoschuk et al.'s study (2018) which suggested that students tend to misestimate their language proficiency due to different frames of reference. Since Tomoschuk et al.'s research was conducted with bilingual students in the US, while this study focused on home and international students in UK higher education, the different contexts may be related to the differences in results. This study, therefore, provides new insights into the self-awareness of language proficiency among students in UK higher education.

Perceived academic language difficulties

As highlighted in Section 2.4, there has been an academic debate focusing on whether the language-related difficulties in academic writing differ between non-native and native English speakers. Some argue that both native and non-native English speakers face similar academic writing difficulties

(Hyland, 2016a; Hyland, 2016b), while others argue that non-native speakers may face additional challenges due to linguistic barriers (Flowerdew, 2019). This study explores academic language difficulties within the UK higher education context, specifically analysing the similarities and differences in the challenges experienced by students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

This study revealed that Chinese EFL students experienced the highest level of language-related difficulty in their studies, followed by UK ENS students, non-Chinese EFL students and international ENS students. Interestingly, the difficulty level of UK ENS students was significantly higher than that of non-Chinese EFL students. Given the potential advantage of their native language background, their long experience with the UK education system, and their high English proficiency level reflected in both objective and subjective measures, this high difficulty level is unexpected. The relatively high level of perceived English language proficiency and the high level of perceived academic language difficulty among UK ENS students suggest that high confidence in overall English proficiency does not automatically transfer to high confidence in using English for academic purposes. The results from open-ended questions and interviews in this study further confirmed ENS students' challenges: both EFL and ENS students reported difficulties related to language, such as loss of concentration while reading and listening, an overwhelming amount of assigned reading and struggles with efficient writing. This aligns with the view that academic language is nobody's mother tongue regardless of one's native language (MacFarlane et al., 2020) and some challenges associated with academic language can affect both EFL and ENS students (Berman & Cheng, 2010; Hyland, 2016a; Hyland, 2016b). In fact, the challenges faced by students may extend beyond pure linguistic comprehension to encompass academic language skills, such as maintaining focus in reading (Al-Jarrah & Ismail, 2018), organising ideas effectively in writing (Muamaroh et al., 2020) and managing nervousness during public speaking (Kheryadi & Hilmiyati, 2021).

Despite UK ENS students reporting a significantly higher level of language-related difficulty than non-Chinese EFL students, a higher percentage of non-Chinese EFL students reported challenges that were language-related compared with UK ENS students in open questions. This may suggest that the range of language-related difficulties experienced by non-Chinese EFL students may be broader, while those of UK ENS students may be more focused. This was further confirmed in the interview study, where the language-related difficulties of EFL students were related to linguistic knowledge, academic skills and cultural differences whereas UK ENS students' difficulties were mainly related to only academic skills. Similarly, the analysis of item-specific language-related academic difficulties within each group revealed that EFL students (especially those from China) found lower-level

linguistic skills to be as challenging or even more challenging than higher-level *academic* skills, whereas ENS students usually found lower-level *linguistic* skills less difficult than higher-level *academic* skills. These findings support Flowerdew (2019) who highlighted the linguistic challenges and disadvantages of non-native English speakers in academic success.

In conclusion, both EFL and ENS students may encounter academic language difficulties. EFL students typically face a wider range of difficulties, including both linguistic and academic skills, while ENS students mainly face difficulties related to academic skills. Therefore, tailored support should be provided to address the different needs of these different student groups. However, while it is understood that UK ENS students struggle with academic skills, the specific reasons they perceive these challenges to be more difficult than those faced by non-Chinese EFL students remain unclear, highlighting the need for future research.

Self-efficacy

In terms of confidence in studies (measured by academic self-efficacy) in this study, Chinese EFL students displayed significantly lower confidence than all other student groups. Interestingly, despite their language advantage and local student status, UK ENS students' confidence was not only lower than international ENS students but also was comparable to (albeit not significantly lower than) non-Chinese EFL students. Responses to open questions mirrored these findings: Chinese EFL students attributed the highest percentage of challenges to academic obstacles, followed by non-Chinese EFL students and UK ENS students. In terms of confidence in studying in the English language (measured by English self-efficacy), Chinese EFL students reported significantly lower confidence than non-Chinese EFL students.

The findings of this study indicate that Chinese students' lack of confidence is not limited to just overall English language proficiency but extends to using English in academic settings as well as their general academic studies (see Section 7.4 for details about the relationships between students' language skills and confidence). Since academic self-efficacy is a significant predictor of students' academic achievements (Doğan, 2015; Elias & MacDonald, 2007; Galyon et al., 2011; Gore, 2006; Schunk & Pajares, 2002) and having high self-efficacy is particularly important for positive impacts on academic performance (Galyon et al., 2011), it seems necessary to improve students' self-efficacy. Given that students themselves value supportive learning environment (Ramsay et al., 1999) and that academic self-efficacy can be increased through means such as feedback and encouragement

(Bulfone et al., 2021), offering students the support they need is crucial. Responses to open questions and interviews in this study confirmed students' appreciation for support: they valued the support they received and enjoyed the improvements they made in their studies, emphasising the importance of supporting students' studies.

In addition to the above points, this study offers further insights by distinguishing between domicile and language status. Firstly, the differences in academic language difficulties and academic self-efficacy between international ENS and home ENS students, despite similar levels of English language proficiency measures, suggest that the challenges faced by home students are mainly academic rather than linguistic. As mentioned in Section 4.2.2, home ENS students had significantly lower socio-economic status than international ENS students, possibly due to various reasons such as the high cost of international tuition fees. Therefore, home students typically come from broader socio-economic backgrounds with a wider range of academic abilities whereas international students are more likely to either come from more well-off backgrounds or receive scholarships due to high academic skills. Secondly, the differences in academic language difficulties and academic self-efficacy between international ENS and EFL students, who share the same domicile status (i.e., international) but differ in English language proficiency, could be more confidently attributed to their language status/ English language proficiency. Finally, these findings suggest that previous research, which only compared international EFL students with home ENS students, may not have fully recognised the extent to which English language proficiency influences the academic difficulties experienced by international EFL students, especially those from China. This highlights the unique but noteworthy linguistic challenges faced by EFL students.

7.3.2 Changes in self-perceptions over one academic year

Changes in perceived English language proficiency

Although Chinese EFL students began with the lowest self-rated proficiency levels, their confidence in their English language skills increased significantly over time. This trend was not observed among other student groups, whose confidence levels did not show a similar growth. This confidence gain aligns with Liu's (2009) findings, which indicated that low-performing students demonstrated a significant increase in confidence, while students with high English proficiency remained relatively stable. In the open-ended questions about their positive experiences, many students expressed their enjoyment of their academic and language improvement. Interviews further revealed that Chinese

students found using English in an academic context somewhat easier than their native language due to their familiarity with learning content in English. Therefore, Chinese students' increased confidence may be related to their perceived improvement and adjustment. It might be the case that since Chinese EFL students' original self-rating was particularly low, even minor improvements encouraged them, which led to an increase in their self-ratings.

The fact that Chinese EFL students showed an increased confidence in their language skills despite no significant improvement in their objective language proficiency is consistent with previous literature which suggests that perceived language improvement can differ from actual improvement (DeKeyser, 2007; Liu, 2009).

Furthermore, this study extends beyond previous research by examining perceptions of proficiency changes among ENS students. The findings suggest that ENS students generally do not perceive any changes in their English language proficiency over time.

Despite their significant perceived improvement, the perceived English proficiency level of Chinese EFL students remained the lowest and far behind the levels of other groups. Additionally, the perceived English proficiency of non-Chinese EFL students did not improve over time, and they also remained far behind the ENS groups. This suggests continuing lack of confidence among EFL students compared to ENS students and highlights the need for targeted linguistic support, particularly for Chinese students, to improve their English language proficiency and gain confidence in their language skills.

Changes in perceived academic language difficulties

The longitudinal survey study found no significant changes in language-related difficulties between the beginning and the end of the academic year for all four student groups, suggesting that students did not find academic language easier after approximately one academic year.

However, based on the interview results, students either naturally improved their language skills through long-term immersion in English-speaking environments or actively sought different methods to mitigate language-related difficulties. For example, some non-Chinese interviewees highlighted the benefit of being immersed in an English-speaking environment before starting their studies. Although Chinese EFL interviewees did not personally experience this advantage, they recognised its

importance, prompting some of them to study in the UK in the first place. This further confirms the limited English exposure of Chinese EFL students compared with other students, highlighting the importance of language immersion in language development. It also aligns with Krashen's (1982) second language acquisition theory, which highlighted the role of natural and subconscious acquisition in improving language abilities. Interestingly, this perceived improvement through immersion contrasts with the lack of significant change found in the quantitative results of the longitudinal study. It suggests that, although students recognise and even experience the benefits of natural immersion, the degree of perceived improvement is still limited and gradual over one academic year.

Other than immersion, students also reported seeking methods to compensate for their language-related difficulties. Interestingly, the most frequently mentioned strategy to overcome reading and writing difficulties was "reading academic articles and books". On the one hand, students found reading difficult due to their linguistic knowledge, language fluency and academic reading skills; on the other hand, they perceived reading as a way to enhance their reading and writing abilities. A lot of previous research has highlighted the significant role of academic reading in improving students' reading and writing skills (AlOmrani, 2014; Itua et al., 2014; Lei et al., 2010; Park, 2016; Therova, 2021). This study further indicates that students are aware of the importance and potential benefits of reading. Unfortunately, the effort might be insufficient in addressing their language-related difficulties as all student groups did not find academic language easier over time. However, despite their awareness of language limitations and how the limitations negatively impact their academic achievement, all the EFL students interviewed would still have pursued their studies in the UK, highlighting the importance of language-related support within universities to enhance their academic experiences.

Both open questions and interviews highlighted students' appreciation for personal support from university professionals, especially from lecturers and tutors. Interviews further revealed that the additional support desired varied widely from one individual to another. Tailored support plays an important role in improving students' language-related skills and confidence (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2004; Mahony, 2008; Thompson et al., 2019c) and it has the potential to address diverse issues that affect students' learning experience and enhance their academic achievement (Boughton et al., 2010; Sayer et al., 2002). The varied support preferences reported in this study highlight the need for tailored university support based on students' diverse demands, especially from academic professionals. Considering the varied English language proficiency levels among student groups,

different levels of language support may be necessary. For example, Chinese EFL students may require different language support compared to others. Thus, support should be tailored to meet the specific needs of different students, rather than adopting an approach that generalised towards all.

Although it was not the focus of this study, COVID-19 appears to have influenced students' experiences with language, especially impacting those with lower English proficiency more than those with higher proficiency. Responses from open questions and interviews indicated that the pandemic's restrictions significantly affected students' academic and social lives, which may have potentially influenced their language-related experiences. Many students expressed feelings of isolation due to challenges in connecting with others and struggles with on-line learning. In interviews, EFL students particularly expressed specific concerns about limited opportunities to practice English due to reduced interactions. With previous research suggesting that on-line learning during COVID-19 hindered students' communication and language practice (Kohnke & Jarvis, 2021; Mahyoob, 2020), it is likely that COVID-19 exacerbated students' language-related difficulties, especially among EFL students, further confirming the importance of paying attention to their needs.

Changes in self-efficacy

Although non-Chinese EFL students' initial academic self-efficacy and English self-efficacy were not low compared to other groups, their confidence dropped significantly over time. Previous studies suggest a distinction between using English in social and communicative settings and using English to learn and perform in academic contexts (Wang et al., 2018). Students may perceive linguistic progress while still finding academic language difficult (Wang, 2018). Given that confidence in using English to learn predicts students' academic self-efficacy (Wang et al., 2018), it is likely that non-Chinese EFL students in this study maintained their overall English confidence (measured by perceived English language proficiency) but decreased confidence in using English academically (measured by English self-efficacy). This could be due to their increased challenges in academic English usage as their studies progressed, influencing their confidence in studies (as measured by academic self-efficacy) over time (further discussed and confirmed in Section 7.4).

Apart from language factors, external support also plays an important role in shaping academic self-efficacy (Edwards-Joseph & Baker, 2014), highlighting the need for academic language support. Nonetheless, the specific reasons for the decline in non-Chinese EFL students' self-efficacy remain unclear. The interviews were conducted only once, before the longitudinal analysis, and did not

include questions about changes in perceptions. Therefore, future research is needed to explore the specific factors contributing to the decrease in non-Chinese EFL students' self-efficacy.

7.4 Research question 3

This section discusses the **relationships** between students' English language proficiency, their perceptions of this proficiency, perceived academic language difficulties and confidence in studies.

The correlation results indicate that students with higher English language proficiency tend to perceive their own proficiency as higher, experience fewer academic language difficulties, and have more confidence in their studies, particularly in the case of EFL students.

The significant correlation between students' English language proficiency and their perceived proficiency further confirmed that students were aware of their language abilities. However, no significant correlation was found between students' actual and perceived progress in English proficiency, indicating a disconnection between self-perceived and actual language improvements. This suggests that students tend to have self-awareness of their English skills relative to others, but not in terms of their own degree of English progress.

Among EFL students, a significant moderate negative correlation was observed between English language proficiency and academic language difficulty, suggesting that students with higher proficiency tend to perceive less academic language difficulty. While the literature frequently highlights cultural shock and barriers as significant factors affecting the adjustment of international students (Andrade, 2006; Anjalin et al., 2017; Wang & Hannes, 2014; Xia, 2020), this study reveals that, despite the shared experience of cultural shock among international students, those with higher English proficiency might navigate and adjust to new environments more quickly. This finding further highlights the important role of language skills in the academic success of international students, which potentially outweighs the impact of cultural differences in the academic context.

As discussed in Section 7.3.2, non-Chinese EFL students experienced a decrease in both academic self-efficacy and English self-efficacy over time. Since the correlation analysis suggested that the observed decrease in academic confidence among non-Chinese EFL students correlated with their declining confidence in using English academically, and given that confidence in using English to learn predicts students' academic self-efficacy (Wang et al., 2018), it is likely that they experienced

increased challenges in academic English usage, which led to their decreased confidence in studies over time.

7.5 Implications

This research found that a student's native language status (i.e., whether English is their first language or not) plays a more decisive role in determining their English language proficiency, and confidence in their English language proficiency than their domicile status (i.e., whether they are home or international students). However, overall English language proficiency does not necessarily translate to academic language mastery. Although ENS students have high levels of overall English language proficiency and confidence in this proficiency, they are also likely to experience academic language difficulties. Yet, the nature of these language-related difficulties varies: ENS students mainly face challenges with academic language skills whereas EFL students mainly struggle with linguistic skills as well as academic language skills.

Despite an observed increase in Chinese students' confidence in their English language proficiency, the actual development of language skills is slow across all student groups. Moreover, the perceived academic language difficulties of all student groups did not improve over time, nor did their self-efficacy. However, the diverse levels of English proficiency and varied perceptions among students highlight the individual differences within each group, suggesting that every student, regardless of their background, has the potential to excel and build confidence in their studies and language proficiency. This emphasises the need for language-related support. Some academic support introduced during COVID-19 restrictions demonstrated value that extends beyond the pandemic and may be worth implementing continually in the future. For example, uploading lectures on-line allows students, particularly those with limited English proficiency, to rewatch the content and enhance their understanding.

Due to students' different language levels and various reported preferences, it is important for the support to be tailored rather than being generalised to all. EFL students, especially those from China, may benefit from support designed for students with relatively lower English proficiency levels, focusing on developing both linguistic knowledge and academic language skills. ENS students, on the other hand, may require more support related to academic language skills, especially in areas of academic reading and writing. Therefore, higher education institutions in the UK should recognise

the diverse language needs of different student groups and provide tailored support to enhance their academic performance and overall educational experiences.

7.6 Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into English language proficiency, academic language difficulties, and self-efficacy among different groups of students in UK higher education, some limitations should be noted when interpreting the results.

Firstly, the sample size of the follow-up survey was limited, with only 59 eligible participants. The relatively small sample size may limit the generalisability of the results. Specifically, the number of international ENS students was only six, making it impossible to have meaningful longitudinal statistical analysis between groups. Therefore, the findings may not capture the full picture of students' changes and they should be interpreted with caution. Secondly, the research was conducted during the atypical time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although all student groups in this study experienced the same circumstance, it is still unclear whether the exact results could be replicated under typical conditions. In addition, as discussed in Section 6.3.2, one EFL group (Chinese EFL students) was allowed to be interviewed in their native language, while the other EFL group (non-Chinese EFL students) was not, potentially affecting the validity of the data. This decision was based on the pragmatic reason of my proficiency in Chinese and English but not in the other languages. Moreover, given that the interview study was conducted only once before the longitudinal analysis, the study did not capture the explicit reasons behind specific observed changes. For example, the exact reasons behind the decrease in self-efficacy over time among non-Chinese EFL students remain unclear. The in-depth reasons why Chinese students arrive with lower English proficiency than other international EFL students and why UK ENS students perceive academic language difficulty levels to be particularly high are also unclear. Future research could address these questions and explore deeper into these areas. Finally, making comparisons within the group of non-Chinese EFL students based on their domiciles and first languages was not feasible in this research, due to the extensive diversity within the sample, which included 68 different domiciles and 63 first languages among 270 students. Future research could focus on comparisons between different groups of international EFL students, excluding those from China.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study remain valid and offer valuable insights. Firstly, the cross-sectional study had a large sample ($N = 1163$) which increased the representativeness and

reliability of the findings when comparing student groups. Although the sample size of the longitudinal study was limited, the inclusion of diverse groups of students in both research times still provided some insights into this under-researched area. Secondly, Chinese students' English language proficiency (as evidenced in both past literature and the current study's sample) is particularly low even compared with other international students, which could have hindered their ability to express their experiences accurately in English. Conducting interviews in their native language ensured their responses were as reflective and accurate as possible. The findings remain valid due to the careful translation approach taken to ensure the original meaning is maintained (detailed in Section 6.5.2). Lastly, the variety of data sources, ranging from surveys to interviews, enhanced the reliability of the findings. For example, both the 7-point scale survey data and the interviews suggest that ENS students' language challenges mainly lie in academic skills rather than linguistic skills; both the open-ended survey questions and the interviews suggest that students highly value support from universities.

7.7 Conclusion

The research highlights the important role of students' native language status in shaping their English language proficiency and confidence in that proficiency. However, when it comes to academic English proficiency, ENS students sometimes show even less confidence than EFL students. While the main source of language-related uncertainty for ENS students is academic language skills, EFL students' lack of confidence extends to linguistic skills as well. In fact, the academic difficulties faced by EFL students, particularly those from China, are mainly related to their proficiency in the English language rather than to their academic skills. Unfortunately, for most students, improvement in English language proficiency, as well as academic and language-related confidence, is a slow process. This emphasises the need for tailored language-related support from educational institutions in order to improve their English language proficiency, academic performance and overall educational experience.

Understanding university students' English language proficiency, academic language difficulties and self-efficacy can offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and educational institutions. It is hoped that this study can help educational decision-makers to better understand students' language-related needs and offer more effective language support for university students in the future.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

This study investigated the academic experiences and expectations of home students and various groups of international students within UK higher education, focusing on their English language proficiency, academic language difficulties and self-efficacy. In order to examine the effects of language and domicile status, this research divided international students into three groups: native English-speaking students from countries other than the UK (ENS_other), non-native English-speaking students from China (EFL_China) and non-native English-speaking students from other countries (EFL_other). These groups were compared with each other and with native English-speaking home students (ENS_UK).

The study found that the two ENS groups had indistinguishably and significantly higher English language proficiency than EFL groups, with Chinese EFL students having the lowest proficiency. This highlights that students' language status (i.e., whether their first and dominant language is English or not), rather than their domicile status (i.e., home or international), determines their English language proficiency, suggesting that the proficiency differences between home and international EFL students are related to students' native language status rather than their domiciles. Building upon previous research that showed Chinese EFL students' lower proficiency compared to European students and other international students (regardless of their language status), this study further demonstrated that Chinese EFL students also had lower proficiency than other international *EFL* students. Interestingly, all student groups, regardless of their background, were generally aware of their English language abilities compared to others.

However, English language proficiency is not directly equal to academic language mastery. Home students, despite their high proficiency and confidence in English, showed an unexpected lack of confidence in academic language and academic self-efficacy. Their concerns were mainly related to *academic* factors, especially academic reading and writing skills, rather than *linguistic* issues. In contrast, EFL students' academic language difficulties and academic concerns were more related to their *linguistic* skills than *academic* skills, especially for Chinese EFL students who had the highest difficulty levels in academic language and lowest self-efficacy among all student groups.

Unfortunately, during the course of an academic year, most students did not show significant improvement in either English language proficiency or academic and language-related confidence. This slow progression highlights the need for continued support to accelerate their language-related

progress, especially since students reported that they appreciated the support they had received but wished additional support would have been implemented.

However, it does not mean that all student groups' support should be homogeneous. Instead, the different nature of students' language-related difficulties requires the support to be tailored. For EFL students, their language-related difficulties seem to be broader, including linguistic, academic and cultural aspects, with a primary focus on linguistic skills. Despite being aware of their language limitations, they reported that they would still have chosen to come to the UK to study, thus highlighting the importance of providing comprehensive but linguistic-focused support for them to improve their English language proficiency, close the gap between ENS students, and make their whole learning experience better. For ENS students, despite their high proficiency in English, they sometimes even find academic language skills harder than some EFL students. Therefore, support should focus on improving their academic skills, particularly in areas of academic reading and writing. This tailored approach is necessary to address the specific language-related difficulties faced by different student groups, ensuring their academic success.

Appendix A Initial survey questions

Section 1: Pre-survey questions

Q 1.1 **Title of the study:** Expectations and experiences of international and home students at UK universities

Researcher: Xiaqian Shi, University of York (email: xs962@york.ac.uk)

Supervisor: Dr Danijela Trenkic, University of York

You are invited to participate in a survey on expectations and experiences of international and home students at UK universities. We are looking for both undergraduate and master's students, British as well as international, either at the beginning or further on in their studies. To help us direct you to the right information and consent form, please answer the following questions.

(This research has been approved by the Department of Education, University of York Ethics Committee. If you have any questions or complaints about this research please contact Xiaqian Shi at xs962@york.ac.uk, or the Ethics Committee via education-research-admin@york.ac.uk. If your concerns are not resolved, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@york.ac.uk. For information about General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) please see https://www.york.ac.uk/education/research/gdpr_information/)

Q1.2 Which statement describes you best?

- I am a student at a university in the United Kingdom (UK).
- I am a student at a university outside of the UK. *Skip To: Q1.6*
- I am not a university student. *Skip To: Q1.6*

Q1.3 Which statement describes your situation?

- I am an undergraduate student.
- I am a master's student (taught programme). *Skip To: Q1.5*
- I am a master's student (by research). *Skip To: Q1.6*
- I am a doctoral student. *Skip To: Q1.6*

Q1.4 Which statement describes your situation?

- I am in the first year of my studies.
- I am in the 2nd, 3rd or 4th year of my studies.

Display Q1.5 if "Which statement describes your situation?" = I am a master's student (taught programme).

Q1.5 Which statement describes your situation?

- I am a student at the University of York.
- I am a student at another UK university.

Display Q1.6:

If “Which statement describes you best?” ≠ I am a student at a university in the United Kingdom (UK).

Or “Which statement describes your situation?” = I am a doctoral student.

Or “Which statement describes your situation?” = I am a master’s student (by research).

Q1.6 Thanks for your interest! Unfortunately, you do not meet all the requirements for this study.

The survey will be concluded here. [Skip To: End of Survey](#)

Q1.7 Is English your first language (that is, one of the languages you learnt from birth)?

Yes [ENS participants](#)

No [EFL participants](#)

Section 2: Self-rated English proficiency

Q2.1

Your English skills

On a scale from 1 to 7, how would you rate your English skills?

1 - Almost none

7 - Exceptionally good

For example, if you think your English speaking skill is **exceptionally good**, please choose ‘7’ for the item ‘Speaking’.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Speaking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Listening	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 3: LexTALE vocabulary knowledge

Q3.1 This section is a vocabulary quiz. Please read the instruction below before you proceed.

You will see a string of letters (for example “flower” or “glemp”) and your task is to decide whether this is an existing English word or not. **If you think it is an existing English word, you click on "yes", and if you think it is not an existing English word, you click on "no".**

If you are sure that the word exists, even though you don't know its exact meaning, you may still respond "yes". But if you are not sure if it is an existing word, you should respond "no". Don't spend too long thinking about it: just go with your intuition. You will only have **7 seconds** to answer each question.

In this experiment we use British English rather than American English. For example: "realise" instead of "realize"; "colour" instead of "color", and so on. Please do not let this confuse you. This quiz is NOT about detecting such subtle spelling differences anyway.

The quiz has **63 questions** and will take about **5 minutes** to complete.

If everything is clear, you can now start the quiz.

platory (1/63)

Yes No

denial (2/63)

Yes No

generic (3/63)

Yes No

... (Omitted here 58 similar questions)

listless (62/63)

Yes No

wrought (63/63)

Yes No

Section 4: Self-efficacy

Q4.1

Your expectations and confidence in your studies

Please select the number that best describes you.

1= Not at all true of me

7= Very true of me

For example, if you **do not** expect to do well in your studies at all, please choose '1' for the statement 'I expect to do well in my studies'.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. I expect to do well in my studies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Considering the difficulty of the course, the lecturers, my academic abilities and my English skills, I think I will do well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. I am confident I can do an excellent job on the assignments and exams.

4. I believe I will receive excellent grades.

5. I am certain I can understand the most difficult material presented in the readings for this course.

6. I am confident I can understand the most complex material presented in lectures for this course.

7. I am certain I can master skills being taught.

8. I am confident I can understand the concepts being taught.

Display Statements 9 and 10 for EFL participants

9. I am confident I can do as well studying in English as I was able to in my native language.

10. I expect my proficiency in English will allow me to fulfil my academic potential.

Section 5: Language-related academic difficulty and open-ended questions

Q.5.1

What do you find easy or difficult in your current studies?

Please select the number that best describes how you feel.

1 – Not at all true of me

7 – Very true of me

For example, if you expect that it is **very true of you** to often feel lost in lectures, please choose '**7**' for the statement 'In lectures, I often feel lost'.

Note that **N/A** (Not applicable) should be chosen when you **do not** have a particular experience. For example, if you **have not** given any presentation yet, please choose '**N/A**' for the statement 'I find giving presentations hard'.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
1. During class time, I often miss important points because lecturers are speaking too fast.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. My lecturers use many words that I do not understand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. In lectures, I often feel lost.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I rarely ask questions or volunteer answers in my classes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I often find it hard to express myself successfully in class discussions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. I find giving presentations hard.

7. When reading assigned academic texts, I often run out of time as they are too long.

8. There are many words that I do not understand in my required reading materials.

9. After completing a required reading, I often find that I do not know what it was all about.

10. When writing assignments or sitting exams, I often struggle to find the right words.

11. When writing assignments or sitting exams, I often run out of time to complete the work to my satisfaction.

12. I often find it hard to express and organise my ideas clearly in academic writing.

Q5.2 Please tell us about some experiences (academic and/or social) that you have found challenging in your current studies.

Q5.3 Please tell us about some experiences (academic and/or social) that you have found positive in your current studies.

Section 6: Demographic and background information

Q6.1 In which country have you spent most of your life ?

UK

Display the Choice of "China" for EFL participants

China

Other (please specify) _____

Q6.2 How long have you lived in the UK? (State clearly the number of months or years. e.g., 1 year and 2 months)

Number of years: _____

Number of months: _____

ENS participants: Skip to Q6.19

(Q6.3-Q6.18: EFL participants exclusively)

Q6.3 Have you lived in another English-speaking country (countries) prior to starting university (e.g., the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand)?

Yes

No **Skip To: Q6.5**

Q6.4 How long did you live there? (state clearly the number of months or years. e.g., 1 year and 2 months)

Number of years: _____

Number of months: _____

Q6.5 What is your first language(s)? _____

Q6.6 How old were you when you first began to study English at school? _____

Q6.7 Have you taken any English language proficiency tests (e.g., TOEFL, IELTS)?

Yes

No **Skip To: Q6.17**

Q6.8 Which proficiency test did you take last before arriving at the university?

TOEFL

IELTS

Other (please specify) _____

Q6.9 When did you take this proficiency test? (which year?) _____

Q6.10 What was your overall score on this proficiency test? _____

Q6.11 What was your score on the speaking part? _____

Q6.12 What was your score on the reading part? _____

Q6.13 What was your score on the writing part? _____

Q6.14 What was your score on the listening part? _____

Q6.15 Before your current studies, did you attend any school or university where **every subject** was taught in English?

Yes

No **Skip To: Q6.17**

Q6.16 What is the level of qualification you obtained in that English-speaking institution (e.g., GCSE, A-levels, Bachelor, Masters)? _____

Q6.17 Have you attended a pre-sessional English language programme before starting university? (a course offered by universities to international students to help them improve their English language skills before the start of their degree programmes)

Yes

No **Skip To: Q6.19**

Q6.18 How long was your pre-sessional course? (e.g., 8 weeks, 6 months, 1 year) _____

Q6.19 What are you studying at university? (What is your major?) _____

Q6.20 Given the COVID-19 situation, some UK universities have changed their teaching style. How have you been attending your classes this term?

Everything on-line

Mostly on-line with some on campus

Half on-line, half on campus

Mostly on campus with some on-line

Everything on campus

Other (please specify) _____

Q6.21 Thinking about your **previous** studies, how do you see your academic success relative to your classmates? (We are interested in how you see it, not necessarily the actual ratings produced by your school.)

Top 5% Top 10% Top 25% Top 50% Top 75% Other

Q6.22 What is your age? (e.g., 21) _____

Q6.23 What is your gender?

Male Female Other Prefer not to say

Q6.24 What is the highest level of education for your **mother**?

- Some or no secondary education
- Secondary school education
- Post-secondary education with vocational training
- University degree
- Post-graduate degree or professional education
- Don't know/ not applicable

Display Q6.25 for master's (taught programme) students in the University of York:

Q6.25 In June 2021, we will contact you again to see how your experiences have changed. Please leave your valid student email address here.

What is your student email address? (e.g., xs962@york.ac.uk) _____

Display Q6.26 If Q6.25 Is Not Displayed

Q6.26 Would you like to be entered in a prize-draw for a £30 Amazon voucher? (If so, please leave your preferred contact details, e.g., email address, phone number, WeChat ID, etc.)

- Yes (please leave your contact details) _____
- No

Q6.27 This brings us to the end of the survey.

Before you finish, please indicate if you would be happy to participate in a follow-up on-line interview. The interview would give you a chance to talk about your academic expectations and

experiences in more depth. If you participate, you will be entered in another prize-draw for a £20 Amazon voucher.

Would you like to participate in a follow-up on-line interview?

Yes

No *Skip To: End of Survey*

Q6.28 Please leave your preferred contact details for the interview (leave it blank if you prefer to be contacted by the above email address). _____

Appendix B Follow-up survey questions

Section 1: Pre-survey question

Title of the study: Expectations and experiences of international and home students at UK universities (Follow-up survey)

Researcher: Xiaqian Shi, University of York (email: xs962@york.ac.uk)

Supervisor: Dr Danijela Trenkic, University of York

Thank you again for participating in the first part of this study a few months ago. We would now like to invite you to take part in the follow-up survey.

Is English your first language (that is, one of the languages you learnt from birth)?

- Yes **ENS participants**
- No **EFL participants**

Section 2: Self-rated English proficiency

Your English skills

On a scale from 1 to 7, how would you rate your English skills?

1 - Almost none

7 - Exceptionally good

For example, if you think your English speaking skill is **exceptionally good**, please choose '7' for the item 'Speaking'.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Speaking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Listening	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 3: LexTALE vocabulary knowledge

This section is a vocabulary quiz. Please read the instruction below before you proceed.

You will see a string of letters (for example “flower” or “glemp”) and your task is to decide whether this is an existing English word or not. **If you think it is an existing English word, you click on "yes", and if you think it is not an existing English word, you click on "no".**

If you are sure that the word exists, even though you don't know its exact meaning, you may still respond "yes". But if you are not sure if it is an existing word, you should respond "no". Don't spend too long thinking about it: just go with your intuition. You will only have **7 seconds** to answer each question.

In this experiment, we use British English rather than American English. For example: "realise" instead of "realize"; "colour" instead of "color", and so on. Please do not let this confuse you. This quiz is NOT about detecting such subtle spelling differences anyway.

The quiz has **63 questions** and will take about **5 minutes** to complete.

If everything is clear, you can now start the quiz.

platory (1/63)

Yes No

denial (2/63)

Yes No

generic (3/63)

Yes No

. . . (Omitted here 58 similar questions)

listless (62/63)

Yes No

wrought (63/63)

Yes No

Section 4: Self-efficacy

Your experiences in your studies

Please select the number that best describes you.

1= Not at all true of me

7= Very true of me

For example, if you **do not** think you did well in your studies at all, please choose '1' for the statement 'I think I did well in my studies'.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. I think I did well in my studies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Considering the difficulty of the course, the lecturers, my academic abilities and my English skills, I think I did well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I believe I did an excellent job on the assignments and exams.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. I received excellent grades.

5. I am certain I understood the most difficult material presented in the readings for this course.

6. I believe I understood the most complex material presented in lectures for this course.

7. I am certain I mastered skills being taught.

8. I believe I understood the concepts being taught.

Display Statements 9 and 10 for EFL participants

9. I did as well studying in English as I had previously done in my native language.

10. I think my proficiency in English allowed me to fulfil my academic potential.

Section 5: Language-related academic difficulty

What did you find easy or difficult in your studies this year?

Please select the number that best describes how you felt.

1 – Not at all true of me

7 – Very true of me

For example, if you think that it is **very true of you** to have often felt lost in lectures, please choose '7' for the statement 'In lectures, I often felt lost'.

Note that **N/A** (Not applicable) should be chosen when you **did not** have a particular experience. For example, if you **did not** give any presentation, please choose 'N/A' for the statement 'I found giving presentations hard'.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
1. During class time, I often missed important points because lecturers were speaking too fast.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. My lecturers used many words that I did not understand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. In lectures, I often felt lost.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I rarely asked questions or volunteered answers in my classes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I often found it hard to express myself successfully in class discussions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I found giving presentations hard.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. When reading assigned academic texts, I often ran out of time as they were too long.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. There were many words that I did not understand in my required reading materials.

9. After completing a required reading, I often found that I did not know what it was all about.

10. When writing assignments or sitting exams, I often struggled to find the right words.

11. When writing assignments or sitting exams, I often ran out of time to complete the work to my satisfaction.

12. I often found it hard to express and organise my ideas clearly in academic writing.

Section 6: Additional information

Thinking about your studies over the last academic year, how do you see your academic success relative to your classmates? (We are interested in how you see it, not necessarily the actual ratings produced by your university.)

Top 5% Top 10% Top 25% Top 50% Top 75% Other

Please confirm your email address again so we can contact you to arrange the payment of your £5 Amazon voucher and to enter you into the prize draw for a £30 Amazon voucher.

What is your student email address? (e.g., xs962@york.ac.uk) _____

Appendix C Interview questions

The following flow of questions was implemented during the interview process:

Introduction:

(Initiate a friendly but professional conversation, establish a rapport while reiterating important ethical issues)

Hello. I'm Xiaqian Shi. Thank you for attending today's interview. It's so lovely to see (hear) you. How are you?

你好。我是石夏千。谢谢你参加我们今天的采访。非常高兴见到（听到）你。你最近好吗？

I hope you've had time to read the information I sent you about this interview, and I've received your consent form but do you have any questions? I'll just explain it again briefly if it's ok. The reason I conduct this interview is to understand academic expectations and experiences of university students from different language backgrounds. That is why I'm very glad and grateful that you have agreed to contribute to my study. This interview is audio recorded but the data will be anonymised, I hope you are still ok with that?

我相信你已经阅读了我发给你关于此次采访的介绍，我也收到了你发回给我的同意书。但是我还想确认一下，你有什么问题吗？请允许我简单地再做一下说明。我这次采访的目的是为了解不同语言背景的大学生们的 academic expectations and experiences。所以说我非常感谢你愿意为我的研究做出贡献。这次采访是录音的，但是数据会被匿名处理，我希望你仍然对此表示同意？

I won't ask you any difficult questions, and there are no right or wrong answers. Just be yourself and tell me about your academic experience, in as much or as little detail as you wish. If you don't feel like answering any questions, that's also fine. Ok? And if anything I say makes you concerned or uncomfortable, either now or later, or even after today, please let me know. Ok? So if it's all ok, we can start now.

我不会问任何困难的问题，答案也都没有所谓的正确或错误。只需要做你自己，在自愿的基础上细节化的讲述你的学习体验就可以了。如果你不想回答任何问题，也是完全可以的。好吗？

如果我说的任何东西让你感到担忧或者不自在，无论是现在还是稍后，甚至是今天以后，也请告诉我，好吗？如果都没有问题的话，我们就可以开始了。

Main interview questions:

(Start the main part of the interview with a broad question and let participants talk in order to see what's important to them)

So how have you found your studies at the University of X so far? How is it going?

你觉得在 XX 大学的学习生活如何？过得怎么样？

(If they are not talking much, then try to open them up with their own 'positive experience' in the survey)

In your survey, you said that [positive experience]. Can you tell me more about it? Do you still feel the same?

在你的问卷中，你提到[positive experience]。关于这点，可以再详细的说明一下吗？你现在也有同样的感受吗？

(After talking about positive experiences, orient them to challenges)

So there were many good things for you, which is great, but like all students you must have also experienced some challenges. What has been the most difficult for you so far?

这样看来有很多积极的一面，但是像所有学生一样，你一定也经历了一些挑战。请问你觉得目前为止最困难的地方在哪？

(If their talk does not cover language problems yet, I'll move the discussion in that direction. Put them at ease then start to direct them to talk about language-related challenges)

As you are studying in the UK, I know your English proficiency must be good (or: I know English is your first language), but academic English uses a more specific type of language and can be difficult for even native speakers. So can you tell me what have you found most challenging language-wise in your studies? Like any difficulties related to your reading, writing, speaking or listening?

既然你在英国读书，我知道你的英语一定不错，但是学术英语是更专业的一种语言，即使母语者也会觉得有难度。请问你在学习过程中，在语言上最困难的地方在哪里？比方说有没有和听，说，读，写有关的困难？

(If I'm interested in some particular language-related challenges that the participants answered in the survey for the open-ended questions but that are not mentioned here, I'll direct them to that specific area. For example, as native UK students reported distinct reading challenges in the survey, I'll ask them to talk more about this)

I'm particularly interested in X (e.g., reading). In the survey, you said [negative experience about it]. Can you tell me more about it please? What's difficult about X (e.g., reading)?

我对 X (e.g., 阅读) 特别感兴趣。在问卷中，你提到[negative experience about it]。能不能具体讲讲这方面呢？X (e.g., 阅读) 具体哪里让你觉得困难呢？

Would you say that your language skills have limited in any way what you could have achieved in your studies? How exactly? Can you tell me more about it?

你认为你的语言能力有没有在任何地方束缚了你的学业成就？为什么？能不能深入讲讲？

(Additional questions exclusively for EFL students:)

So how does studying in English compare - for you - to studying in your first language?

用英语学习，和用中文学习相比，对你有什么不同呢？

Was it more difficult than you had anticipated?

你觉得比你之前预计的要更难一些吗？

(If yes) Were you surprised by it? (that it was so difficult)

(如果是) 你觉得对此惊讶吗？(这种困难)

Do you think arriving with a better proficiency in English would have made your studies easier?

你觉得你如果在入学时拥有更好的英语水平，可以使你的学习更容易吗？

(If yes) And had you known how difficult it was going to be, would you have still come? Or would you have first improved your English proficiency and then started your studies?

(如果是) 如果你入学前知道用英语学习的难度，你还仍然会来读书吗？或者说你会不会先提高英语水平，再开始入学学习？

So like everyone else, you also have problems with academic languages. What strategies do you use to compensate for any language-related difficulties?

和其他所有人一样，你也有和学术语言相关的困难。你有没有用什么方法来弥补语言上的困难呢？

Other than the methods you just mentioned, was there any support available to you during your studies? Did you find it helpful? What else might have been helpful to you?

除了你刚刚提到的方法，在你的学习期间有没有外界的任何支持和帮助呢？有用吗？还有没有任何你认为可能会有用的？

(If they don't mention anything related to the pandemic and there seems to be enough time – the interview has only taken place for less than 15 minutes, I'll further explore pandemic-related experiences and the possible support students may wish to have)

This academic year is so different from every other year, with the pandemic, lockdowns and restrictions. Can you tell me about how much the pandemic has affected you? Is there anything else you wish you could have obtained during the lockdown to help?

这个学年与往年都不同，有疫情，有封锁，有各种限制。请问疫情对你有多大的影响呢？有没有其他的你希望和认为应该被提供的支持呢？

Ending:

(End the interview friendly, make sure participants understand the possible follow-up process)

Is there something else you would like to add about the things we talked about today? Do you have any questions or concerns about anything?

有没有任何对于今天我们聊的你想要补充的观点？有没有其他的任何问题或疑虑？

Now we are finishing the interview. Thanks a lot for participating in this interview! Your help is much appreciated. I will let you know if you are the winner of the prize-draw, hopefully you have good luck! If you want to contact me about anything in the future, you can always email me or send me messages on WhatsApp.

我们现在接近到采访的尾声了。非常感谢你今天的参与！如果你是最后中奖的参与者的话，我也会联系告知，祝你好运！如果接下来有任何想问我的，你可以随时给我发邮件或者发信息。

Appendix D Initial survey information sheets and consent forms

1. Information sheet and consent form 1:

(For participants excluded from follow-up survey contact)

(Page 1)

Researcher: Xiaqian Shi, University of York

Supervisor: Dr Danijela Trenkic, University of York

Department of Education

Expectations and experiences of international and home students at UK universities

(Survey)

Please read the information about the study before proceeding

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to understand academic expectations and experiences of university students from different language backgrounds in the UK.

What would this mean for you?

You will be asked questions about your academic expectations and experiences, about your language background and proficiency in English, and about yourself (e.g., age, the country you normally live in). You will also do a fun quiz about English words. The survey should take about 15 minutes to complete. You will be entered in a prize-draw for a £30 Amazon voucher. In addition, if you agree to participate in a follow-up on-line interview, you will be entered in a further prize-draw for a £20 Amazon voucher. We will only be able to contact you if you choose to leave your contact details.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in this study is entirely optional. You can stop completing the questionnaires at any point. If you change your mind at any point before or while submitting your data, or later, up to the moment the data is fully anonymised, you will be able to withdraw your participation by writing to xs962@york.ac.uk. You will not have to provide a reason. Note, however, that if you choose to

submit your responses anonymously (without providing your contact details) it won't be possible to withdraw your participation as there would be no way to identify your data.

Storing and using your data

The data will be stored by code number on a password-protected computer. It will only be accessible to the researchers involved in the project. Any information that identifies you (e.g., email address) will be stored separately from your questionnaire responses and will be destroyed within 12 months.

The anonymised data may be used in presentations, in research reports, in project summaries or similar. It may be stored indefinitely with the University's Research Data York service or in other open research data repositories, and may be shared with other researchers or used in future research.

Processing of your data

Information that you provide will be treated confidentially and shared on a need-to-know basis only. The University of York is committed to the principle of data protection by design and default and will collect the minimum amount of data necessary for the project. In line with our charter which states that we advance learning and knowledge by teaching and research, we process personal data for research purposes under Article 6(1) (e) of the GDPR: *Processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest*. Special category data is processed under Article 9 (2) (j): *Processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, or scientific and historical research purposes or statistical purposes*

Questions or concerns

This research has been approved by the Department of Education, University of York Ethics Committee. If you have any questions or complaints about this research please contact Xiaqian Shi at xs962@york.ac.uk, or the Ethics Committee via education-research-admin@york.ac.uk. If your concerns are not resolved, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@york.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information, and for your help with this research.

(Page 2)

Title of the study: Expectations and experiences of international and home students at UK universities

I confirm that I was given information about this study and I understand what my participations will involve.

I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and I am happy to take part.

I understand that any information about me will be held confidentially in accordance with the University regulations and GDPR.

Please tick 'YES' below only if you agree with all of the above statements and wish to proceed with the study.

YES

2. Information sheet and consent form 2:

(For participants targeted for follow-up survey contact)

(Page 1)

Researcher: Xiaqian Shi, University of York

Supervisor: Dr Danijela Trenkic, University of York

Department of Education

Expectations and experiences of international and home students at UK universities

(Survey)

Please read the information about the study before proceeding.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to understand academic expectations and experiences of university students from different language backgrounds in the UK.

What would this mean for you?

The data collection will be held at two points in time: at the beginning and at the end of this academic year. This means that in order to take part in the study you need to be willing to take part at both times.

At both times, we'll ask you to complete an on-line survey which includes questions about your academic expectations and experiences, and a short fun quiz about English words. In the first survey only, we'll also ask you some questions about yourself such as age, language background and the country you normally live in.

The survey should take about 15 minutes to complete. You will be entered in a prize-draw for a £30 Amazon voucher for each survey completed. When you complete the second survey, you will also receive £5 cash as an individual thank-you for participating. Finally, if you agree to participate in a follow-up on-line interview, you will be entered in a further prize-draw for a £20 Amazon voucher.

Due to the design of the study, we will also need to know your course marks. You need to be happy to allow the university to share your marks with us. As the information on your course marks is essential for the study, you cannot take part if you do not wish to give us this consent. Please note that a code will be used to store your data and no one apart from the researchers will be able to link your marks to you.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in this study is entirely optional. You can stop your participation at any point. If you change your mind at any point before or while submitting your data, or later, up to the moment the data is fully anonymised, you will be able to withdraw your participation by writing to xs962@york.ac.uk. You will not have to provide a reason.

Storing and using your data

The data will be stored by code number on a password-protected computer. Any information that identifies you will be stored separately from your questionnaire responses and your course marks. It

will only be accessible to the researchers involved in the project and will be destroyed after data collection for the full study is completed (by the end of 2021).

The anonymised data may be used in presentations, in research reports, in project summaries or similar. It may be stored indefinitely with the University's Research Data York service or in other open research data repositories, and may be shared with other researchers or used in future research.

Processing of your data

Information that you provide will be treated confidentially and shared on a need-to-know basis only. The University of York is committed to the principle of data protection by design and default and will collect the minimum amount of data necessary for the project. In line with our charter which states that we advance learning and knowledge by teaching and research, we process personal data for research purposes under Article 6(1) (e) of the GDPR: *Processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest*. Special category data is processed under Article 9 (2) (j): *Processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, or scientific and historical research purposes or statistical purposes*.

Questions or concerns

This research has been approved by the Department of Education, University of York Ethics Committee. If you have any questions or complaints about this research please contact Xiaqian Shi at xs962@york.ac.uk, or the Ethics Committee via education-research-admin@york.ac.uk. If your concerns are not resolved, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@york.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information, and for your help with this research.

(Page 2)

Title of the study: Expectations and experiences of international and home students at UK universities

I confirm that I was given information about this study and I understand what my participations will involve.

I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and I am happy to take part.

I grant the permission to the researchers to access my marks from the University of York student records solely for research purposes.

I understand that any information about me will be held confidentially in accordance with the University regulations and GDPR.

Please tick 'YES' below only if you agree with all of the above statements and wish to proceed with the study.

YES

Appendix E Follow-up survey information sheet, consent form and invitation email

1. Information sheet and consent form:

(Page 1)

Researcher: Xiaqian Shi, University of York

Supervisor: Dr Danijela Trenkic, University of York

Department of Education

Expectations and experiences of international and home students at UK universities

(Follow-up survey)

Please read the information about the study before proceeding.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to understand academic expectations and experiences of university students from different language backgrounds in the UK.

What would this mean for you?

The data collection is held at two points in time: at the beginning and at the end of this academic year. You have already completed the initial survey; this is the follow-up survey.

In this survey, we will also ask you very similar questions to last time.

The survey should take about 10 minutes to complete. You will be entered in a prize-draw for a £30 Amazon voucher when the survey is completed. You will also receive a £5 Amazon voucher as an individual thank-you for participating in both surveys.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in this study is entirely optional. You can stop your participation at any point. If you change your mind at any point before or while submitting your data, or later, up to the moment the

data is fully anonymised, you will be able to withdraw your participation by writing to xs962@york.ac.uk. You will not have to provide a reason.

Storing and using your data

The data will be stored by code number on a password-protected computer. Any information that identifies you will be stored separately from your questionnaire responses. It will only be accessible to the researchers involved in the project and will be destroyed after data collection for the full study is completed (by the end of 2022).

The anonymised data may be used in presentations, in research reports, in project summaries or similar. It may be stored indefinitely with the University's Research Data York service or in other open research data repositories, and may be shared with other researchers or used in future research.

Processing of your data

Information that you provide will be treated confidentially and shared on a need-to-know basis only. The University of York is committed to the principle of data protection by design and default and will collect the minimum amount of data necessary for the project. In line with our charter which states that we advance learning and knowledge by teaching and research, we process personal data for research purposes under Article 6(1) (e) of the GDPR: *Processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest*. Special category data is processed under Article 9 (2) (j): *Processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, or scientific and historical research purposes or statistical purposes*.

Questions or concerns

This research has been approved by the Department of Education, University of York Ethics Committee. If you have any questions or complaints about this research please contact Xiaqian Shi at xs962@york.ac.uk, or the Ethics Committee via education-research-admin@york.ac.uk. If your concerns are not resolved, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@york.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information, and for your help with this research.

(Page 2)

Title of the study: Expectations and experiences of international and home students at UK universities

I confirm that I was given information about this study and I understand what my participations will involve.

I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and I am happy to take part.

I understand that any information about me will be held confidentially in accordance with the University regulations and GDPR.

Please tick 'YES' below only if you agree with all of the above statements and wish to proceed with the study.

YES

2. Invitation email:

Dear participant,

Thank you so much for completing the first survey on the expectations and experience of international and home students at UK universities that I ran last autumn. I am now writing to invite you to complete the follow-up survey.

This survey is very similar to the previous one and will take about **10 minutes** to complete. To start the on-line survey, you just need to click on the link below (or copy and paste it to the address bar of a browser):

(Survey link)

As a thank-you for taking part, you will receive a **£5 Amazon voucher** by email (it will be sent to you by a Department of Education's administrator). In addition, you will be entered in a prize-draw for **£30 in Amazon vouchers**.

For any further information or concerns, please contact me at: **xs962@york.ac.uk**

You can also contact me via WhatsApp or phone number: **07579921886**

WeChat or Skype: **evana714**

Many thanks and I look forward to your participation!

Xiaqian Shi (Evana)

University of York

Appendix F Interview information sheet



Researcher: Xiaqian Shi, University of York

Supervisor: Danijela Trenkic, University of York

Department of Education

Expectations and experiences of international and home students at UK universities (Interview)

Please read the information about the study before proceeding

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to understand the academic expectations and experiences of university students from different language backgrounds in UK higher education.

What would this mean for you?

You will participate in an on-line interview with the researcher, Xiaqian Shi. The interview will focus on your academic expectations and experiences, and you will be asked to reflect on the linguistic demands of your studies. The interview will take place on-line, using a digital platform such as Zoom or Google Meet, at a time convenient to you. A record of the interview (recording and transcript) will be collected, but your identifiable information will not be attached. You may see and comment on this record if you wish.

The interview will last between 15 and 30 minutes. You will be entered in a prize-draw for a £20 Amazon voucher.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in this interview is entirely optional. If you do decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet for your record and will be asked to sign a consent form (both of these will be in a digital format). If you change your mind, you will be able to withdraw your participation without having to provide a reason. You can stop the interview at any point, and even if you change your mind later, up to the moment the data is fully anonymised, you will be able to withdraw your participation by writing to xs962@york.ac.uk. You will be given the opportunity to comment on a written record of your interview if you wish. After the interview, and following your comments on your interview transcript, data will be anonymised so it will not be possible to withdraw your data after this point.

Storing and using your data

The data will be stored by code number on a password-protected computer. Any information that identifies you will be stored separately from your interview data. It will only be accessible to the researchers involved in the project and will be destroyed after data collection for the full study is completed.

The anonymised data may be used in presentations, on-line, in research reports, in project summaries or similar. It may be stored indefinitely with the University's Research Data York service or in other open research data repositories, and may be shared with other researchers or used in future research.

Processing of your data

Information that you provide will be treated confidentially and shared on a need-to-know basis only. The University of York is committed to the principle of data protection by design and default and will collect the minimum amount of data necessary for the project. In line with our charter which states that we advance learning and knowledge by teaching and research, we process personal data for research purposes under Article 6(1) (e) of the GDPR: *Processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest*. Special category data is processed under Article 9 (2) (j): *Processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, or scientific and historical research purposes or statistical purposes*

Questions or concerns

This research has been approved by the Department of Education, University of York Ethics Committee. If you have any questions or complaints about this research please contact Xiaqian Shi

at xs962@york.ac.uk, or the Ethics Committee via education-research-admin@york.ac.uk. If your concerns are not resolved, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@york.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information, and for your help with this research.

Appendix G Interview consent form

(Page 1)

Interview Consent Form

Expectations and experiences of international and home students at UK universities

I confirm that I have read and understood the information given to me about this research and I understand what taking part will involve.

I understand that participation in this study is voluntary.

I understand that my data will be anonymised and the data may be used in presentations, on-line, in research reports, in project summaries or similar.

I consent to audio recordings being taken during my interview. I agree to take part in the interview.

Please tick 'YES' below only if you agree with all of the above statements and wish to proceed with the interview.

YES

(Page 2)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix H List of UK universities for survey circulation request

1. University College London
2. The University of Manchester
3. The University of Edinburgh
4. King's College London
5. Coventry University
6. The University of Sheffield
7. Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine
8. University of the Arts, London
9. The University of Glasgow
10. The University of Warwick
11. The University of Leeds
12. The University of Birmingham
13. The University of Liverpool
14. Cardiff University
15. The University of Oxford
16. University of Nottingham

17. London School of Economics and Political Science

18. The University of Cambridge

19. City, University of London

20. Queen Mary University of London

21. Newcastle University

22. The University of Southampton

23. The University of Bristol

24. The University of Westminster

25. The University of Exeter

26. The University of Sussex

27. University of Durham

28. The University of Bath

29. De Montfort University

30. The University of Aberdeen

Appendix I Students' detailed domiciles and first languages in the initial survey study

Table I1

Reported First Languages of Chinese EFL Students (EFL_China) in the Initial Survey Study

First languages	N
Chinese	133
Mandarin Chinese	13
Cantonese Chinese	7
Total N	153

Table I2

Reported Domiciles and First Languages of Non-Chinese EFL students (EFL_other) in the Initial Survey Study

Domiciles	N	First languages
Poland	21	Polish
Italy	16	15 Italian 1 Twi
Germany	14	10 German 1 German and Russian 1 Arabic and Persian 1 German and Dutch 1 German and French
India	14	4 Malayalam 4 Hindi 3 Telugu 1 Kannada 1 Marathi 1 Urdu
Romania	14	13 Romanian 1 Romanian and Hungarian

France	13	12 French 1 French and German
Hong Kong	13	Chinese
Bulgaria	10	Bulgarian
Spain	10	8 Spanish 1 Spanish and Catalan 1 Spanish, Basque and English
Hungary	8	7 Hungarian 1 Hungarian and Italian
Lithuania	8	6 Lithuanian 1 Lithuanian and Russian 1 Russian
Malaysia	8	5 Malay 3 Chinese
Cyprus	7	Greek
Saudi Arabia	6	Arabic
Greece	5	Greek
Kuwait	5	4 Arabic 1 Polish
Slovakia	5	4 Slovak 1 Slovak and Hungarian
South Korea	5	Korean
UAE	5	3 Malayalam 1 Tamil 1 Arabic
Czech Republic	4	Czech
Russia	4	3 Russian (1 No information)
Brazil	3	Portuguese
Japan	3	Japanese
Singapore	3	1 Hindi 1 Chinese 1 Urdu and Japanese
Switzerland	3	1 French

		1 German
		1 Hungarian
Turkey	3	Turkish
Brunei	2	1 Chinese 1 Malay
Denmark	2	Danish
Estonia	2	Estonian
Finland	2	Finnish
Indonesia	2	Indonesian
Jordan	2	Arabic
Kenya	2	Swahili
Latvia	2	Latvian
Mexico	2	Spanish
Pakistan	2	Urdu
Portugal	2	Portuguese
Qatar	2	Arabic
Taiwan	2	Chinese
Thailand	2	Thai
Vietnam	2	Vietnamese
Austria	1	German
Bahrain	1	Arabic
Bangladesh	1	Bangla
Belarus	1	Russian
Belgium	1	French
Botswana	1	Setswana
Congo	1	Lingala
Croatia	1	Croatian
Dominican Republic	1	Spanish
Ethiopia	1	Harari
Georgia	1	Georgian
Iceland	1	Icelandic
Iran	1	Persian
Kazakhstan	1	Kazakh

Luxembourg	1	German
Morocco	1	French
Netherlands	1	Spanish and Dutch
Nigeria	1	Hausa
Norway	1	Norwegian and Swedish
Oman	1	Arabic
Sri Lanka	1	Malayalam
Sweden	1	Swedish
Tanzania	1	Swahili
Uganda	1	Ateso
Venezuela	1	Spanish
Argentina and UK	1	Spanish
France and Netherlands	1	Dutch
Hong Kong and Nepal	1	Nepali
(No information)	2	1 Arabic (1 No information)
Total N	270	

Note. There were two participants who did not provide valid information about their domiciles, and two participants who did not provide valid information about their first languages. The table presents this information as “No information”.

Table I3

Reported Domiciles of International ENS Students (EFL_other) in the Initial Survey Study

Domiciles	N
USA	29
Hong Kong	10
Singapore	8
France	7
India	7
UAE	5
Malaysia	4
Spain	4
Australia	3

Italy	3
Canada	2
Ireland	2
Kenya	2
Nigeria	2
Poland	2
Switzerland	2
Azerbaijan	1
Belgium	1
Botswana	1
British Virgin Islands	1
Canada and Ireland	1
Egypt	1
Germany	1
Germany and UK	1
Greece	1
Bahamas, India and UK	1
India and Kuwait	1
Jamaica	1
Japan	1
Jordan	1
Kuwait	1
Liberia	1
Netherlands	1
New Zealand	1
Portugal	1
Portugal and UK	1
Rwanda	1
South Africa	1
Spain and USA	1
Taiwan	1
Thailand	1
Total N	117

Appendix J Description of newly arrived and continuing students among undergraduate participants in the initial survey study

Table J1

Distribution of Undergraduate Survey Participants by Group

Group	UG students <i>N</i>	New and continuing students
		<i>N</i> (%)
EFL_China	58	UG new: 26 (44.83%)
		UG continuing: 32 (55.17%)
EFL_other	188	UG new: 80 (42.55%)
		UG continuing: 108 (57.45%)
ENS_UK	530	UG new: 264 (49.81%)
		UG continuing: 266 (50.19%)
ENS_other	73	UG new: 33 (45.21%)
		UG continuing: 40 (54.79%)

Note. UG: undergraduate, UG new: newly arrived first-year undergraduate students, UG continuing: undergraduate students who were in their second, third or fourth year of study.

Among the total 849 undergraduates who participated in the initial survey study, 403 were newly arrived students, while 446 were continuing students. Table J1 provides a detailed distribution in each group. It shows that continuing students slightly outnumbered newly arrived students across all groups. To further assess whether the distribution between newly arrived students and continuing students was equal, chi-square goodness of fit tests were conducted. The results revealed that the distribution did not differ overall, $X^2(1, N = 849) = 2.18, p = .140$. Similar results were found within nearly all groups (EFL_China: $X^2(1, N = 58) = 0.62, p = .431$; ENS_UK: $X^2(1, N = 530) = 0.01, p = .931$; ENS_other: $X^2(1, N = 73) = 0.67, p = .413$), with the exception of ENS_other where continuing students significantly outnumbered new students ($X^2(1, N = 188) = 4.17, p = .041$). The results suggested that the number of newly arrived students compared to continuing students showed almost no difference in most groups.

Appendix K Detailed classification of participants' majors in the initial survey study

Major	<i>N</i>	Category
Natural Sciences	81	SE
Physics	62	SE
Computer Science	51	SE
Psychology	49	SS
Medicine	41	SE
Pharmacy	30	SE
Education	28	SS
English language and Linguistics	23	HA
Psychology in Education	23	SS
Biology	20	SE
Social Sciences	19	SS
English	18	HA
Architecture	17	SE
Biomedical Sciences	15	SE
Electronic Engineering	15	SE
Linguistics	15	HA
Philosophy	13	HA
Veterinary Medicine	11	SE
International Relations	10	SS
Music	10	HA
Theoretical Physics	10	SE
Applied Linguistics and TESOL	9	SS
Behavioural Science	9	SS
Biochemistry	9	SE
Engineering	9	SE
Law	9	SS
TESOL	9	SS
English Language and Creative Writing	8	HA
Geography	8	SS

Urban Studies and Planning	8	SE
Arts and Cultural Management	7	HA
Urban Design and Planning	7	SE
Finance	6	BU
History of Art	6	HA
Italian and Spanish	6	HA
Language Studies and Linguistics	6	HA
Public Health	6	SE
Spanish	6	HA
Theatre and Performance Studies	6	HA
Advanced Computer Science	5	SE
Applied Clinical Psychology	5	SS
Economics	5	BU
Electronic and Computer Engineering	5	SE
French and Italian	5	HA
Global Media and Communication	5	HA
Global Media Industries	5	OT (HA, SS)
Immunology	5	SE
International Political Economy	5	BU
Journalism	5	HA
Mathematics and Computer Science	5	SE
Social Policy	5	SS
Structural Engineering and Architecture	5	SE
Anthropology	4	SS
Applied Human Rights	4	SS
Architectural Design	4	SE
Bioinformatics	4	SE
Biotechnology	4	SE
Clinical Trials	4	SE
Data Science	4	SE
Environmental Geography	4	SS
French	4	HA
French and Philosophy	4	HA
French and Spanish	4	HA

History and Spanish	4	HA
Management	4	BU
Physics and Philosophy	4	OT (HA, SE)
Public Administration and Public Policy	4	SS
Social Policy, Crime and Criminal Justice	4	SS
Accounting, Business Finance and Management	3	BU
Applied Psychology and Economic Behaviour	3	SS
Business management	3	BU
Chemical Engineering	3	SE
Chemistry	3	SE
Cultural Heritage	3	SS
Culture, Media and Creative Industries	3	OT (HA, SS)
Developmental Psychopathology	3	SS
Education Studies with Psychology	3	SS
English and Philosophy	3	HA
Environmental Science	3	SE
Film and Television Production	3	HA
German and Linguistics	3	HA
German and Spanish	3	HA
Health Psychology	3	SS
History	3	HA
Human Geography and Environment	3	SS
MBA	3	BU
Mechanical Engineering	3	SE
Nuclear Engineering	3	SE
Pharmaceutical Sciences	3	SE
Philosophy and Psychology	3	OT (HA, SS)
Philosophy, Religion and Ethics	3	HA
Politics and French	3	OT (HA, SS)
Psycholinguistics	3	HA
Psychology and Linguistics	3	OT (HA, SS)
Real Estate	3	SE
Social Justice and Education	3	SS
Social Work	3	SS

Spanish and Linguistics	3	HA
Spanish and Portuguese	3	HA
Spanish and Russian	3	HA
Applied Social Science	2	SS
Business	2	BU
Civil Engineering	2	SE
Computing	2	SE
Conservation Biology	2	SE
Conservation of Archaeological and Museum Objects	2	HA
Cultural and Creative Industries	2	HA
Electronic and Communication Engineering	2	SE
English and History of art	2	HA
Forensic Speech Science	2	HA
French and Linguistics	2	HA
French and Russian	2	HA
Genetics	2	SE
Global and International Citizenship Education	2	SS
Global Journalism	2	HA
Human Geography	2	SS
Human Rights	2	SS
Interactive Media	2	HA
International Business Management and French	2	OT (BU, HA)
International Trade and Business Communication	2	BU
Law and Spanish	2	OT (HA, SS)
Linguistics and English Language Teaching	2	SS
Marketing	2	BU
Media and Public Relations	2	OT (HA, SS)
Mental Health and Wellbeing in Education	2	SS
Modern Languages, Translation and Interpreting Studies	2	HA
Molecular Cell Biology	2	SE
Museum and Artefact Studies	2	HA
Music and French	2	HA

Philosophy and Spanish	2	HA
Physics and Technology of Nuclear Reactors	2	SE
Political Economy	2	BU
Politics	2	SS
Robotic Engineering	2	SE
Sciences of the Historic World	2	SS
Social Media	2	OT (HA, SS)
Sociology and Education	2	SS
Theoretical Physics and Applied Mathematics	2	SE
Translation	2	HA
Trauma Sciences	2	SS
Women's Studies	2	SS
Accounting and Finance	1	BU
Advanced Pharmaceutical Manufacturing	1	SE
Ancient Civilisations	1	SS
Ancient History and Social Sciences	1	OT (HA, SS)
Applied Linguistics for Language Teaching	1	SS
Applied Psychology	1	SS
Archaeology	1	SS
Artificial Intelligence and Computer Science	1	SE
Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning	1	SE
Audio and Music Technology	1	SE
Automation and Control	1	SE
Business of the Creative Industries	1	BU
Child Nursing	1	SS
Civil and Environmental Engineering	1	SE
Classics (Literae Humaniores)	1	HA
Clinical Psychology	1	SS
Cognitive Neuroscience	1	SE
Community Music	1	HA
Computer Game Engineering	1	SE
Conservation Studies	1	SS
Cyber Security	1	SE
Development, Disorders and Clinical Practice	1	SS

Digital Education	1	SS
Digital Media and Communications	1	HA
Digital Science	1	SE
Digital Systems Engineering	1	SE
Earth Sciences	1	SE
Economic Studies and Global Sustainable Development	1	BU
Economics and Econometrics	1	BU
Economics and Finance	1	BU
Education and Sociology	1	SS
Education in Childhood Studies	1	SS
Eighteenth Century Studies	1	HA
Electrical and Electronic Engineering	1	SE
Embedded Systems and Internet of Things	1	SE
Embedded Wireless Systems	1	SE
English and Creative Writing; Computer Science	1	OT (HA, SE)
English and Film and Visual Culture	1	OT (HA, SS)
English in Education	1	SS
English with Music Studies	1	HA
Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Enterprise Development	1	BU
Environment, Economics and Ecology	1	SE
Environmental Geoscience	1	SE
Financial Risk management	1	BU
French and German	1	HA
French and Theatre	1	HA
Fusion Energy	1	SE
Gaelic Studies and Politics	1	OT (HA, SS)
Gender Studies	1	OT (HA, SS)
Genomics	1	SE
Geology and Petroleum Geology	1	SE
Geophysics	1	SE
Geoscience	1	SE
Geotechnical Engineering	1	SE

German and Italian	1	HA
German and Sociology	1	OT (HA, SS)
German with Music Studies	1	HA
Global Crime and Justice	1	SS
Global Marketing	1	BU
Global Sustainable Development	1	SE
Global Sustainable Development and Theatre	1	OT (HA, SE)
History and Economics	1	OT (HA, SS)
History and French	1	HA
History and German	1	HA
History and History of Art	1	HA
History and International Relations	1	OT (HA, SS)
History and Philosophy of Science	1	HA
History of Art and Film and Visual Culture	1	HA
History of Art and Italian	1	HA
History with Music studies	1	HA
History; Politics	1	OT (HA, SS)
Hydrology and Water Management	1	SE
Intelligent Robotics	1	SE
International Business Communication	1	BU
International Business Management and German	1	OT (BU, HA)
International Business Management and Spanish	1	OT (BU, HA)
International Education Leadership and Policy	1	SS
International Fashion Marketing	1	SE
International Human Rights Law and Practice	1	SS
International Law	1	SS
Land Economy	1	BU
Landscape	1	SE
Language Education	1	SS
Law and French	1	OT (HA, SS)
Law and German	1	OT (HA, SS)
Liberal Arts	1	HA
Liberal Arts and Natural Sciences	1	OT (HA, SE)
Life Sciences and Global Sustainable	1	SE

Development		
Materials Science and Engineering	1	SE
Mathematics	1	SE
Mathematics and Philosophy	1	OT (HA, SE)
Media	1	OT (HA, SS)
Media and Creative Industries	1	HA
Medical Engineering	1	SE
Medicine; English	1	OT (HA, SE)
Modern Languages (French, German and Italian)	1	HA
Modern Languages (French, Spanish and Italian)	1	HA
Modern Languages (Spanish, Chinese)	1	HA
Modern Languages and English Language	1	HA
Music Production	1	HA
Neuroscience	1	SE
Philosophy and Italian	1	HA
Philosophy and Sociology	1	OT (HA, SS)
Phonetics and Phonology	1	HA
Physical Geography	1	SS
Physician Associate Studies	1	SE
Plant Sciences	1	SE
Politics and Spanish	1	OT (HA, SS)
Politics, Religion and Philosophy	1	OT (HA, SS)
Printing Engineering	1	SE
Renaissance and Early Modern Studies	1	HA
Russian	1	HA
Sciences (Biology and Psychology)	1	SE
Social Media and Interactive Technologies	1	SE
Social Media and Management	1	BU
Social Media and Social Research	1	SS
Social Sciences and History of Art	1	OT (HA, SS)
Social Sciences; History	1	OT (HA, SS)
Sociology	1	SS
Sociology and Geography	1	SS
Spanish, French and Italian	1	HA

Special Educational Needs	1	SS
Sustainability Science	1	SE
Sustainable Architecture Studies	1	SE
Sustainable Chemical Engineering	1	SE
Sustainable Futures	1	SS
TEFL	1	SS
Theatre	1	HA
Theology and Religion	1	HA
Transport Engineering, Planning and Management	1	SE
Women, Violence and Conflict	1	SS
Zoo Studies	1	SS

Note. BU: business, HA: humanities and arts, SE: sciences and engineering, SS: social sciences, OT: other.

Appendix L Conversion tables for CEFR levels

IELTS scores in CEFR scale:

IELTS scores	CEFR Equivalent
8.5, 9	C2
8	C1/C2
7, 7.5	C1
6.5	B2/C1
6	B2
5.5	B1/B2
4.5, 5	B1

IELTS in CEFR scale. (n.d.). Retrieved May 30, 2023, from <https://www.ielts.org/about-ielts/ielts-in-cefr-scale>

TOEFL scores in CEFR scale:

CEFR level	Reading (0-30)	Listening (0-30)	Speaking (0-30)	Writing (0-30)	Total (0-120)
C2	29	28	28	29	114
C1	24	22	25	24	95
B2	18	17	20	17	72
B1	4	9	16	13	42
A2	n/a	n/a	10	7	n/a

Comparing TOEFL iBT Scores to the CEFR. (n.d.). Retrieved May 30, 2023, from <https://www.ets.org/toefl/score-users/ibt/compare-scores.html#accordion-1e9bee5a64-item-26098d20a4>

Duolingo scores in CEFR scale:

Duolingo English Test Score	CEFR
10-55	A1-A2
60-95	B1
100-125	B2
130-150	C1
155-160	C2

cefr. (n.d.). Retrieved May 30, 2023, from <https://duoplanet.com/duolingo-english-test/>

C1 Advanced (CAE) scores in CEFR scale:

Cambridge English Scale Score	Grade/CEFR	CEFR level
200-210	Grade A	C2
193-199	Grade B	C1
180-192	Grade C	C1
160-179	Level B2	B2

C1 Advanced Scale Scores. (n.d.). Retrieved May 30, 2023, from <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/advanced/results/>

PTE scores in CEFR scale:

PTE Academic Score	CEFR Equivalent
85-90	C2
76-84	C1
59-75	B2
43-58	B1
30-42	A2

10–29	A1
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Understanding your PTE score. (n.d.). Retrieved May 30, 2023, from <https://www.pearsonpte.com/scoring/understand-your-pte-score>

B2 First (FCE) scores in CEFR scale:

Cambridge English Scale Score	Grade/CEFR	CEFR level
180–190	Grade A	C1
173–179	Grade B	B2
160–172	Grade C	B2
140–159	Level B1	B1

B2 First Scale Scores. (n.d.). Retrieved May 30, 2023, from <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/first/results/>

C2 Proficiency (CPE) scores in CEFR scale:

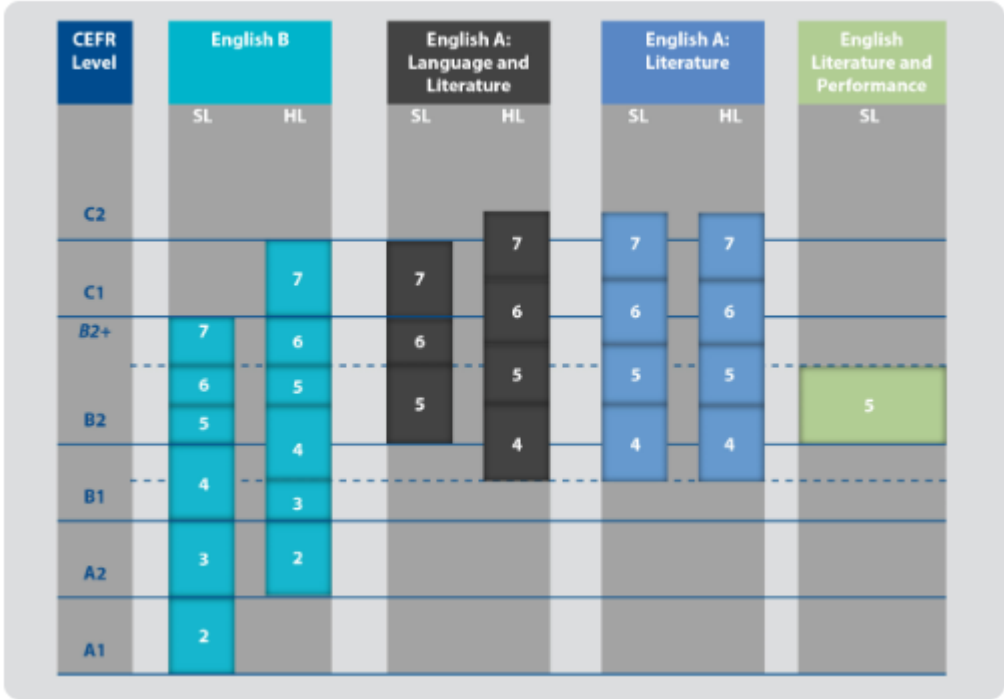
Cambridge English Scale Score	Grade	CEFR level
220–230	Grade A	C2
213–219	Grade B	C2
200–212	Grade C	C2
180–199	Level C1	C1

GCSE English scores in CEFR scale:

RQF Level	GCSE/A-Level	Cambridge English Qualification
Level 3	A-Level	C2 Proficiency
Level 2	GCSE grades 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4 or grades A*, A, B, C	C1 Advanced
Level 1	GCSE grades 3, 2, 1 or grades D, E, F, G	B2 First

Comparing Cambridge English exams to GCSE/A-Level English. (n.d.). Retrieved May 30, 2023, from <https://support.cambridgeenglish.org/hc/en-gb/articles/202838386-Comparing-Cambridge-English-Qualifications-to-other-exams>

IB Diploma English scores in CEFR scale:



Benchmarking Diploma Programme language courses to the CEFR. Retrieved May 30, 2023, from <https://www.ibo.org/news/news-about-the-ib/benchmarking-diploma-programme-language-courses-to-the-cefr/>

Appendix M Skill-specific analysis in self-rated English proficiency in the initial survey study

Table M1 and Figures M1-M4 below provide detailed descriptive results of the four self-rated English skills, including reading, listening, writing and speaking among the four student groups.

Table M1

Descriptive Statistics for the Self-rated Reading, Listening, Writing and Speaking Levels

Group	N	Reading		Listening		Writing		Speaking	
		M (SD)	Mdn	M (SD)	Mdn	M (SD)	Mdn	M (SD)	Mdn
EFL_China	153	4.94 (1.13)	5.00	4.84 (1.33)	5.00	4.25 (1.09)	4.00	4.33 (1.19)	4.00
EFL_other	270	6.13 (0.90)	6.00	6.07 (0.93)	6.00	5.53 (0.99)	6.00	5.67 (0.96)	6.00
ENS_UK	623	6.58 (0.73)	7.00	6.61 (0.74)	7.00	6.32 (0.86)	7.00	6.50 (0.75)	7.00
ENS_other	117	6.62 (0.65)	7.00	6.61 (0.62)	7.00	6.43 (0.78)	7.00	6.52 (0.73)	7.00

Figure M1

Boxplot of Self-rated Reading Levels Organised by Group

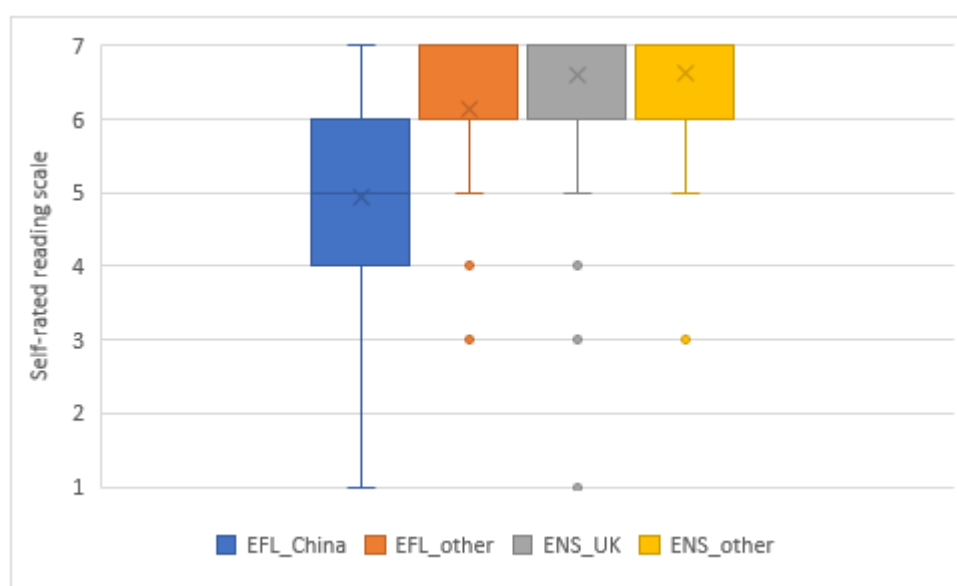


Figure M2

Boxplot of Self-rated Listening Levels Organised by Group

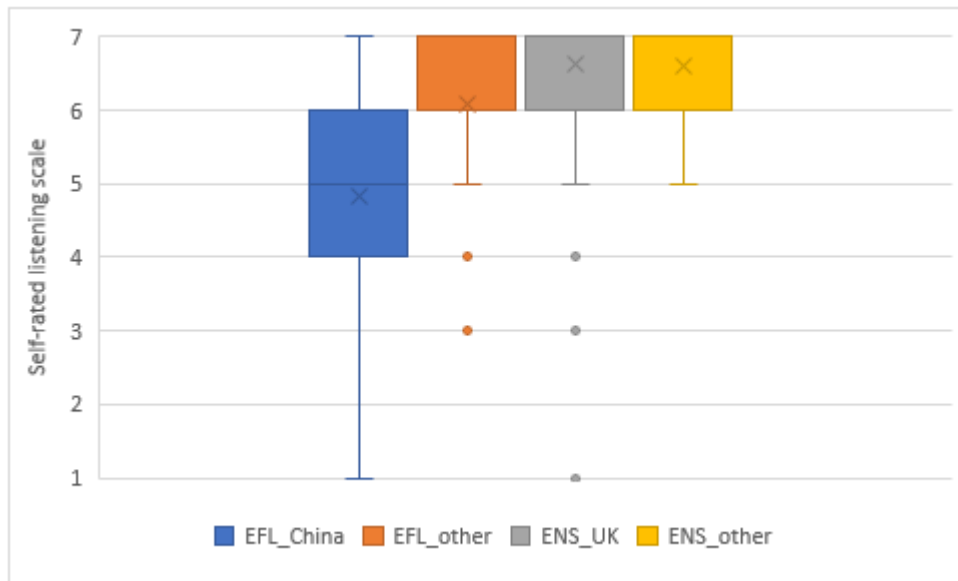


Figure M3

Boxplot of Self-rated Writing Levels Organised by Group

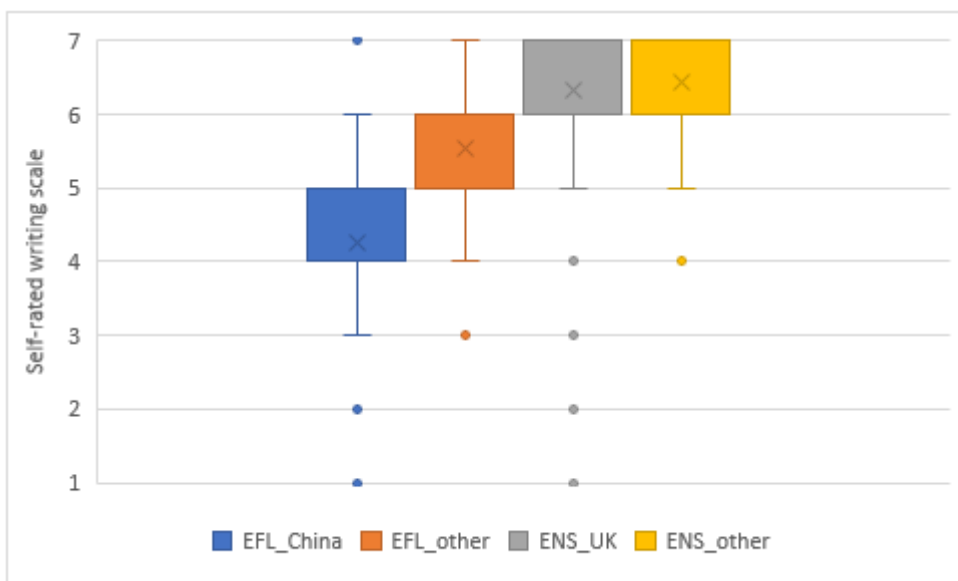


Figure M4

Boxplot of Self-rated Speaking Levels Organised by Group

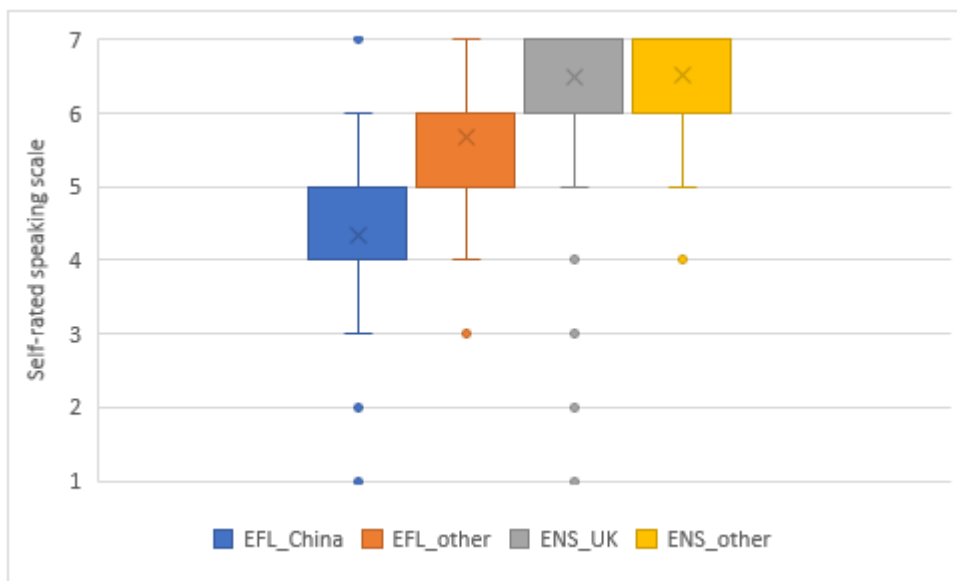


Table M1 and Figures M1-M4 show that Chinese EFL students consistently rated their English skills the lowest compared to other student groups. While it may not be surprising that non-Chinese EFL students reported the second lowest average self-ratings across all language skills, their self-ratings for listening and reading skills were similar to those of ENS students. The self-ratings of UK ENS students and international ENS students were visually comparable.

Mann-Whitney tests and Kruskal-Wallis tests (together with post hoc tests) conducted on the four self-rated language skills displayed a similar pattern as the overall average self-rated English (see Section 4.6.2.2). The tests confirmed that EFL students rated themselves significantly lower than ENS students across all language skills, with Chinese EFL students having the lowest ratings, followed by non-Chinese EFL students. The two ENS groups rated their English similarly to each other across all language skills. The results of the tests are presented in detail below.

Mann-Whitney tests:

Comparison of EFL group and ENS group:

Reading: $U = 81279.50$, $z = -15.04$, $p < .001$, $r = -.44$

Listening: $U = 78362.50$, $z = -15.73$, $p < .001$, $r = -.46$

Writing: $U = 61966.50$, $z = -17.98$, $p < .001$, $r = -.53$

Speaking: $U = 57904.00$, $z = -19.04$, $p < .001$, $r = -.56$

Kruskal-Wallis tests:

Comparison of the four student groups:

Reading: $H(3) = 322.81, p < .001$

Listening: $H(3) = 322.77, p < .001$

Writing: $H(3) = 392.80, p < .001$

Speaking: $H(3) = 431.79, p < .001$

Post hoc tests with pairwise comparisons of Kruskal-Wallis tests:

(Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests)

Comparison of the two EFL groups: EFL_China and EFL_other:

Reading: $p < .001, r = -.48$

Listening: $p < .001, r = -.42$

Writing: $p < .001, r = -.40$

Speaking: $p < .001, r = -.40$

Comparison of the two ENS groups: ENS_UK and ENS_other:

Reading: $p = 1.000, r = -.01$

Listening: $p = 1.000, r = .02$

Writing: $p = 1.000, r = .01$

Speaking: $p = 1.000, r = -.01$

Appendix N Skill-specific analysis in academic language difficulty in the initial survey study

The academic language difficulty levels were measured through a total of 12 survey questions, with each set of three questions focusing on difficulty in one of the four language skills: reading, listening, writing and speaking. The respective average score for the difficulty of each language skill for each participant was calculated for analysis. Figures N1-N4 below present a visual description of the perceived skill-specific academic language difficulties among the four student groups.

Figure N1

Boxplot of Reading Difficulty Levels Organised by Group

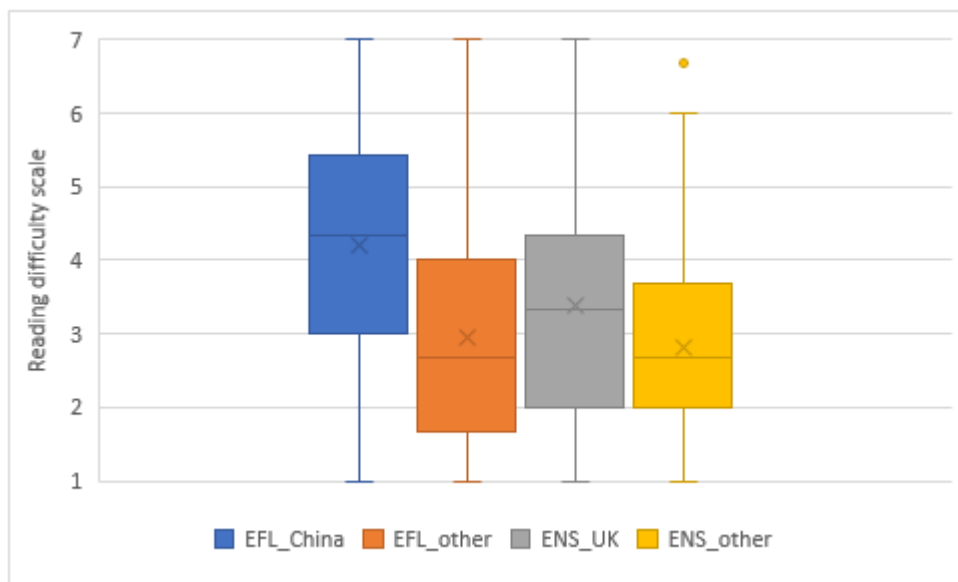


Figure N2

Boxplot of Listening Difficulty Levels Organised by Group

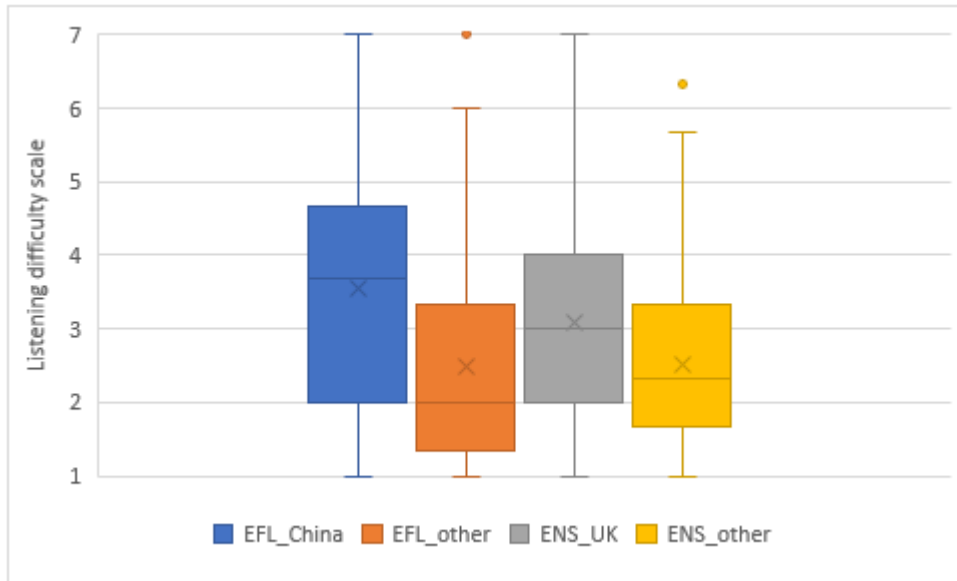


Figure N3

Boxplot of Writing Difficulty Levels Organised by Group

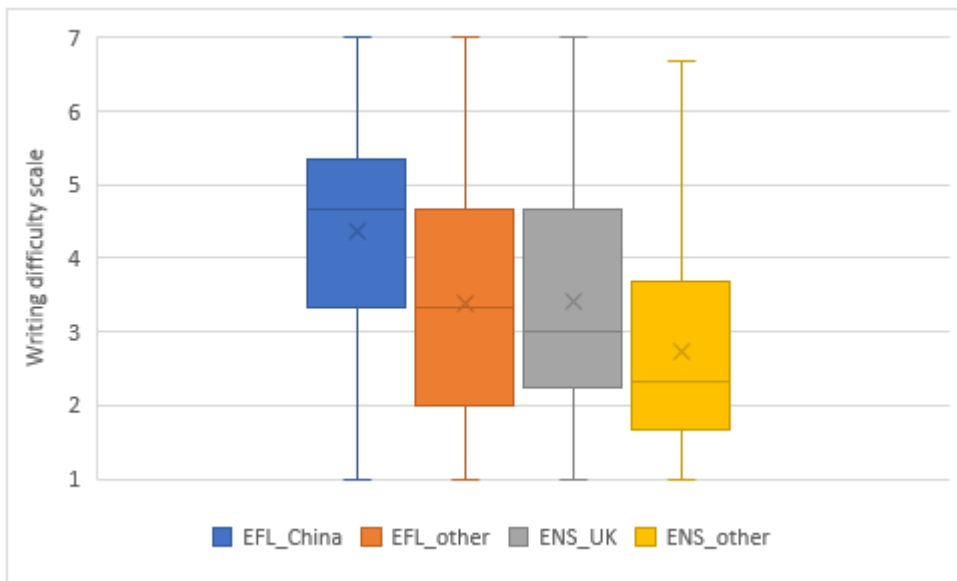
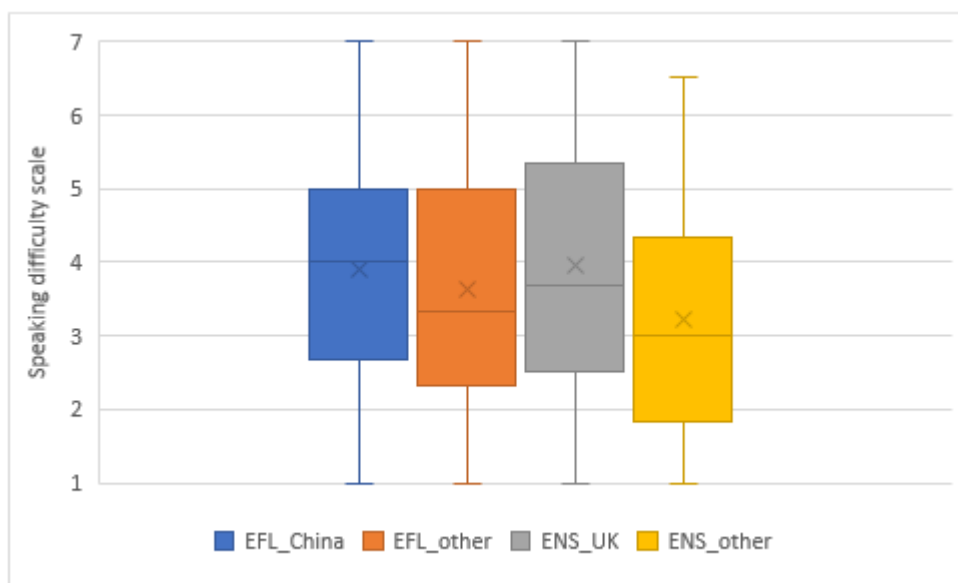


Figure N4

Boxplot of Speaking Difficulty Levels Organised by Group



Figures N1-N4 show that Chinese EFL students rated their difficulty levels evidently the highest in almost all language skills, except for speaking, where UK ENS students reported slightly higher difficulty levels. Surprisingly, UK students' difficulty levels consistently surpassed both non-Chinese EFL students and international ENS students, despite their native status in both language and domicile. Non-Chinese EFL students rated their difficulty levels in almost all language skills lower than UK ENS and Chinese EFL students but higher than international ENS students. International ENS students reported the lowest difficulty levels in almost all language skills compared to other groups.

Mann-Whitney tests and Kruskal-Wallis tests (together with post hoc tests) were conducted to analyse the difficulty levels of four language skills. The results revealed that Chinese EFL students perceived almost all language skills as the most difficult except for speaking. Surprisingly, UK students' levels of listening difficulty and reading difficulty were significantly higher than those of non-Chinese EFL students and international ENS students. Some detailed results of the tests are presented below.

Mann-Whitney tests:

Comparison of EFL group and ENS group:

Reading: $U = 144679.500$, $z = -0.67$, $p = .503$, $r = -.02$

Listening: $U = 144522.50$, $z = -1.97$, $p = .049$, $r = -.06$

Writing: $U = 129783.00$, $z = -4.36$, $p < .001$, $r = -.13$

Speaking: $U = 148667.00$, $z = -0.85$, $p = .398$, $r = -.03$

Kruskal-Wallis tests:

Comparison of the four student groups:

Reading: $H(3) = 74.03, p < .001$

Listening: $H(3) = 70.93, p < .001$

Writing: $H(3) = 74.71, p < .001$

Speaking: $H(3) = 21.65, p < .001$

Post hoc tests with pairwise comparisons of Kruskal-Wallis tests:

(Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests)

Comparison of the two EFL groups: EFL_China and EFL_other:

Reading: $p < .001, r = .38$

Listening: $p < .001, r = .34$

Writing: $p < .001, r = .29$

Speaking: $p = .369, r = .09$

Comparison of the two ENS groups: ENS_UK and ENS_other:

Reading: $p = .002, r = .14$

Listening: $p < .001, r = .15$

Writing: $p < .001, r = .17$

Speaking: $p < .001, r = .15$

Appendix O Initial survey invitation emails and posters

1. Invitation email to University of York departments:

Dear (Name of department),

I am writing to ask if you could help me with the survey I am conducting. My name is Xiaqian Shi and I am a PhD student in Education at the University of York. My research is about expectations and experiences of university students in the UK and I am looking for participants who are **undergraduate and master's (taught) students at UK universities.**

My aim is to recruit a nationally representative sample, from as many UK universities as possible. I would be very grateful if you could help me circulate this on-line survey by forwarding it to the students in your department.

This research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Education (University of York). If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me via xs962@york.ac.uk or my supervisor: Dr Danijela Trenkic (danijela.trenkic@york.ac.uk). If your concerns are not resolved, please contact the Education Ethics Committee (education-research-admin@york.ac.uk) or the University's Data Protection Officer (dataprotection@york.ac.uk).

Many thanks and I look forward to your support!

Yours,

Xiaqian Shi (Evana)

Dear students,

My name is Xiaqian Shi (Evana) and I am a PhD student in Education at the University of York. I am looking for research participants in a study on international and home students' academic expectations and experiences. If you are an **undergraduate or a master's (taught) student**, you can take part.

The study involves an on-line survey and takes about **15 minutes** to complete. To start the on-line survey, you just need to click on the link below (or copy and paste it to the address bar of a browser):

(Survey link here)

To thank you for participating, you will be entered in a prize-draw for a **£30 Amazon voucher**. In addition, if you agree to participate in a follow-up on-line interview, you will be entered in a further prize-draw for a **£20 Amazon voucher**.

Finally, if you are a master's student at the University of York AND you complete the survey again at the end of the year, you will get **£5 cash** after the second survey.

I would also appreciate it if you could share this link with other students in your circle (either in York or another UK university). For any further information or concerns, please contact me at:

xs962@york.ac.uk

You can also contact me via WhatsApp or phone number: **07579921886**

WeChat or Skype: **evana714**

Many thanks and I look forward to your support!

Xiaqian Shi (Evana)

2. Invitation email to other university departments:

Dear (Name of department),

I am writing to ask if you could help me with the survey I am conducting. My name is Xiaqian Shi and I am a PhD student in Education at the University of York. My research is about expectations and experiences of university students in the UK and I am looking for participants who are **undergraduate and master's (taught) students at UK universities**.

My aim is to recruit a nationally representative sample, from as many UK universities as possible. I would be very grateful if you could help me circulate this on-line survey by forwarding it to the students in your department.

This research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Education (University of York). If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me via xs962@york.ac.uk or my supervisor: Dr Danijela Trenkic (danijela.trenkic@york.ac.uk). If your concerns are not resolved, please contact the Education Ethics Committee in the University of York (education-research-admin@york.ac.uk) or the University's Data Protection Officer (dataprotection@york.ac.uk).

Many thanks and I look forward to your support!

Yours,

Xiaqian Shi (Evana)

Dear students,

My name is Xiaqian Shi (Evana) and I am a PhD student in Education at the University of York. I am looking for research participants in a study on international and home students' academic expectations and experiences. If you are an **undergraduate or a master's (taught) student**, you can take part.

The study involves an on-line survey and takes about **15 minutes** to complete. To start the on-line survey, you just need to click on the link below (or copy and paste it to the address bar of a browser):

(Survey link here)

To thank you for participating, you will be entered in a prize-draw for a **£30 Amazon voucher**. In addition, if you agree to participate in a follow-up on-line interview, you will be entered in a further prize-draw for a **£20 Amazon voucher**.

I would also appreciate it if you could share this link with other students in your circle (at the same or another UK university). For any further information or concerns, please contact me at:

xs962@york.ac.uk

You can also contact me via WhatsApp or phone number: [07579921886](tel:07579921886)

WeChat or Skype: [evana714](https://www.skype.com/people/evana714)

Many thanks and I look forward to your support!

Xiaqian Shi (Evana)

3. Leaflets posted at the University of York:

Participants wanted!

Are you an undergraduate student?

Can you spare 15 minutes to complete a survey about your academic expectations and experiences?

- **You will be entered in a prize-draw for a £30 Amazon voucher.**
- **If you participate in a follow-up interview, you could also win a £20 voucher.**

Students from every language background are welcome!

Simply scan the QR code to start the survey:

(Contact me for more info: xs962@york.ac.uk)



Participants wanted!

Are you a master's student at the University of York?

Would you like to take part in a study about your academic experiences and expectations?

- You will get £5 in cash,
- PLUS a chance to win £30 and £20 Amazon vouchers.

Students from every language background are welcome!

Simply scan the QR code to start the survey:

(Contact me for more info: xs962@york.ac.uk)



4. Leaflet posted at other universities:

Participants wanted!

Are you an undergraduate or master's student?

Can you spare 15 minutes to complete a survey about your academic expectations and experiences?

- You will be entered in a prize-draw for a £30 Amazon voucher.
- If you participate in a follow-up interview, you could also win a £20 voucher.

Students from every language background are welcome!

Simply scan the QR code to start the survey:

(Contact me for more info: xs962@york.ac.uk)



Appendix P Results of the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality in the initial survey study

Outcome measures	Group	W	df	<i>p</i>
Vocabulary	EFL_China	0.966	153	<.001**
	EFL_other	0.934	270	<.001**
	ENS_UK	0.853	623	<.001**
	ENS_other	0.874	117	<.001**
Self-rated English	EFL_China	0.970	153	.002**
	EFL_other	0.962	270	<.001**
	ENS_UK	0.743	623	<.001**
	ENS_other	0.762	117	<.001**
Language-related academic difficulty	EFL_China	0.986	153	.132
	EFL_other	0.974	270	<.001**
	ENS_UK	0.985	622	<.001**
	ENS_other	0.953	117	<.001**
Academic self-efficacy	EFL_China	0.978	153	.016*
	EFL_other	0.979	270	<.001**
	ENS_UK	0.970	623	<.001**
	ENS_other	0.952	117	<.001**
English self-efficacy	EFL_China	0.968	153	.001**
	EFL_other	0.854	269	<.001**

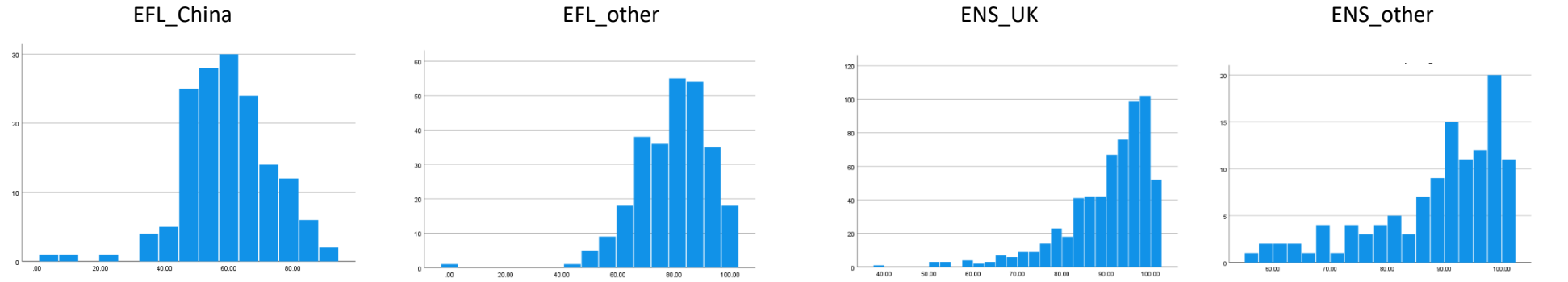
*significant at the 0.05 level

**significant at the 0.01 level

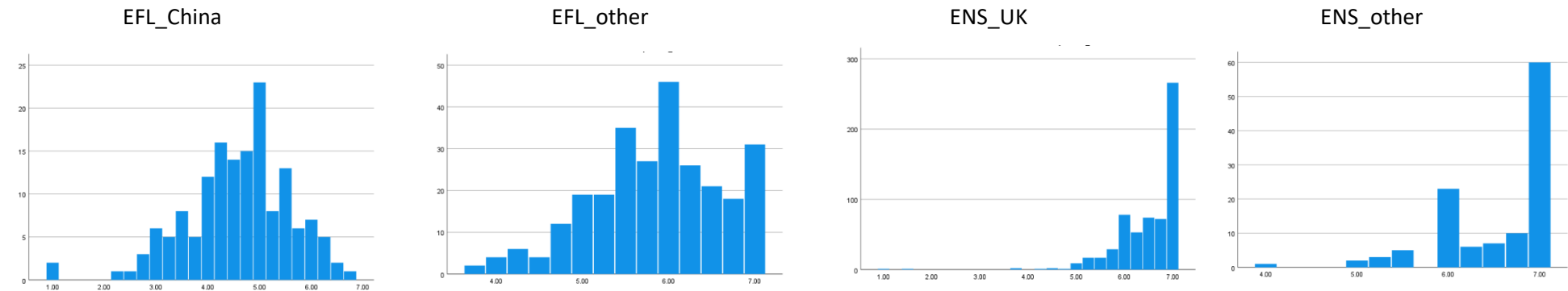
Appendix Q Histograms and normal Q-Q plots: distribution of scores for the initial survey study

Histograms:

Vocabulary:



Self-rated English proficiency:

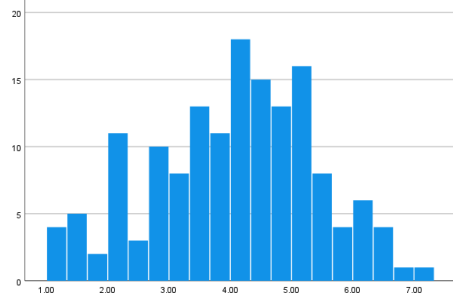


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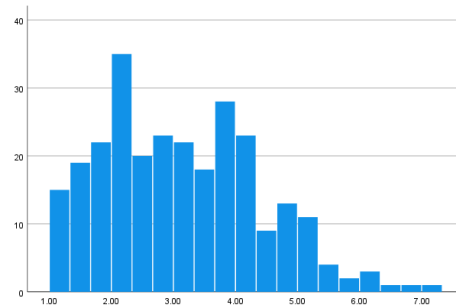
Frequency

Language-related academic difficulty:

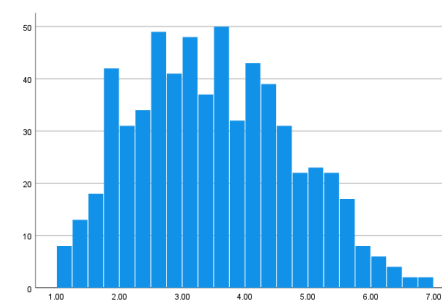
EFL_China



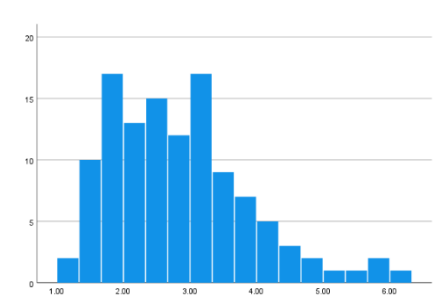
EFL_other



ENS_UK



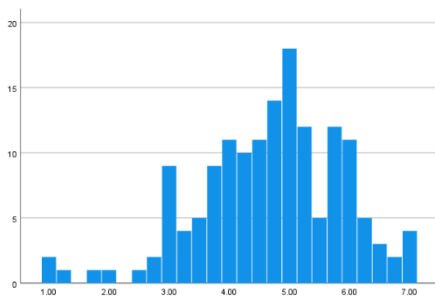
ENS_other



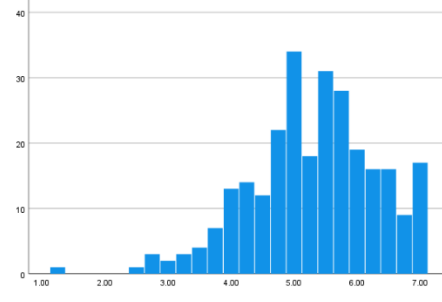
Frequency

Academic self-efficacy:

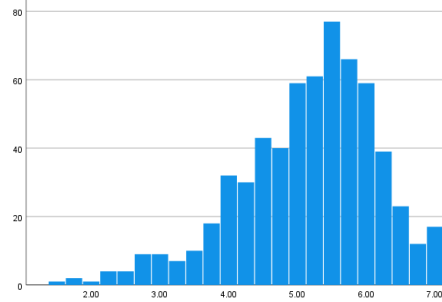
EFL_China



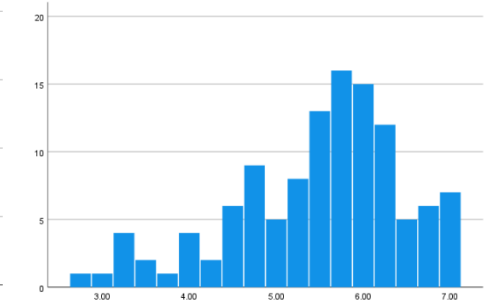
EFL_other



ENS_UK

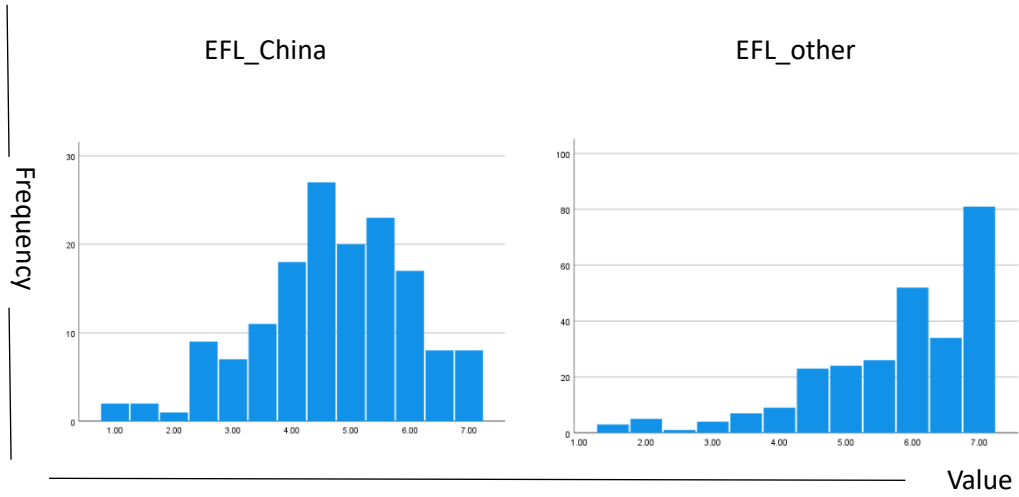


ENS_other



Value

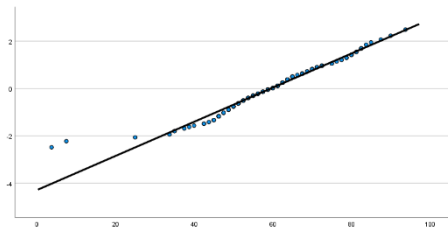
English self-efficacy:



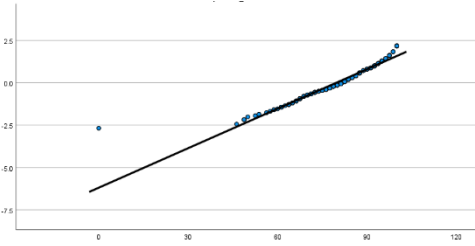
Normal Q-Q plots:

Vocabulary:

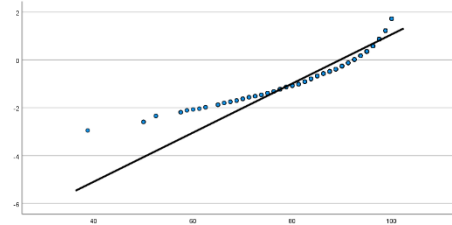
EFL_China



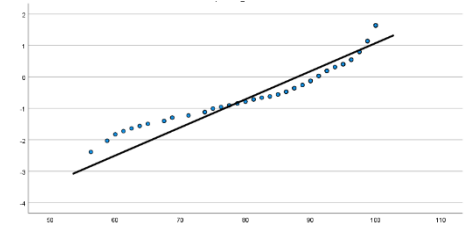
EFL_other



ENS_UK

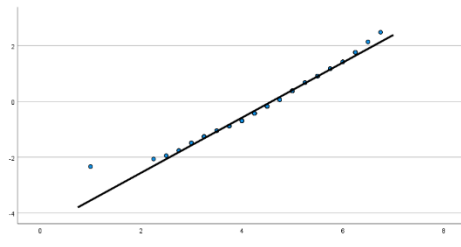


ENS_other

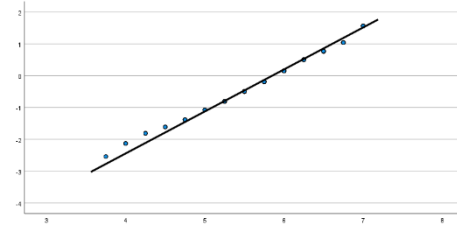


Self-rated English proficiency:

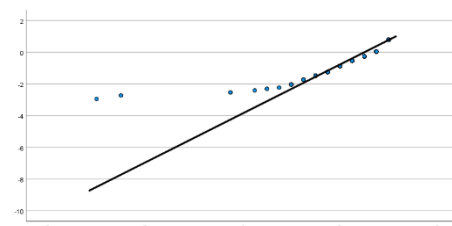
EFL_China



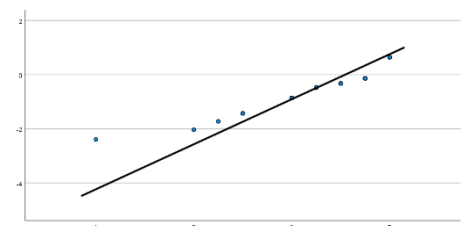
EFL_other



ENS_UK



ENS_other

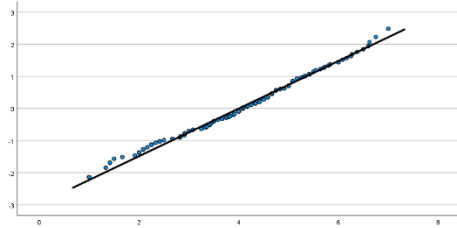


Expected normal

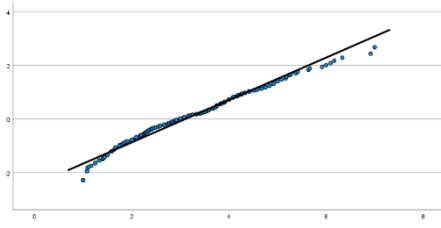
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Language-related academic difficulty:

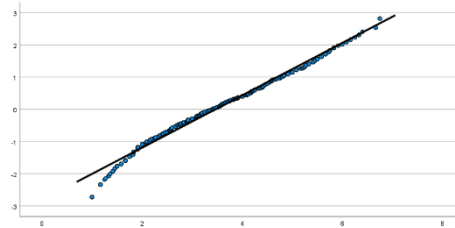
EFL_China



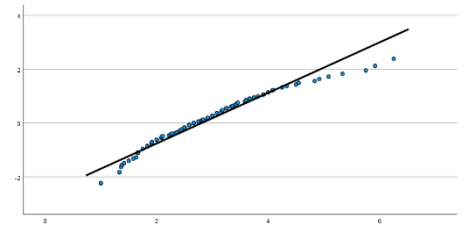
EFL_other



ENS_UK

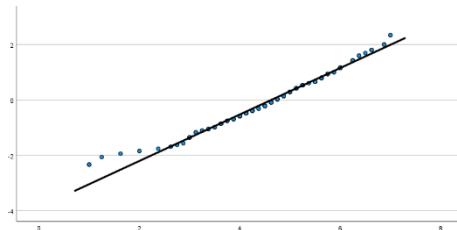


ENS_other

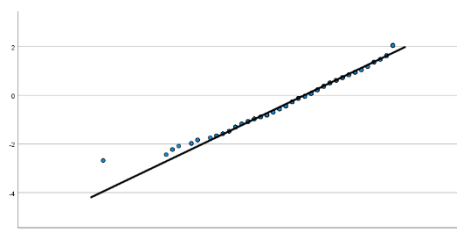


Academic self-efficacy:

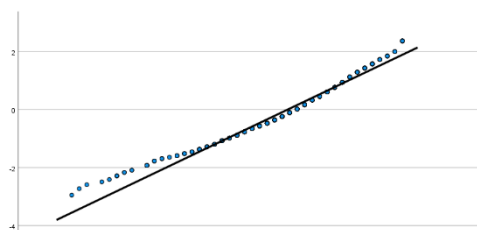
EFL_China



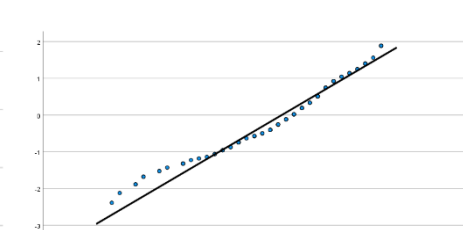
EFL_other



ENS_UK

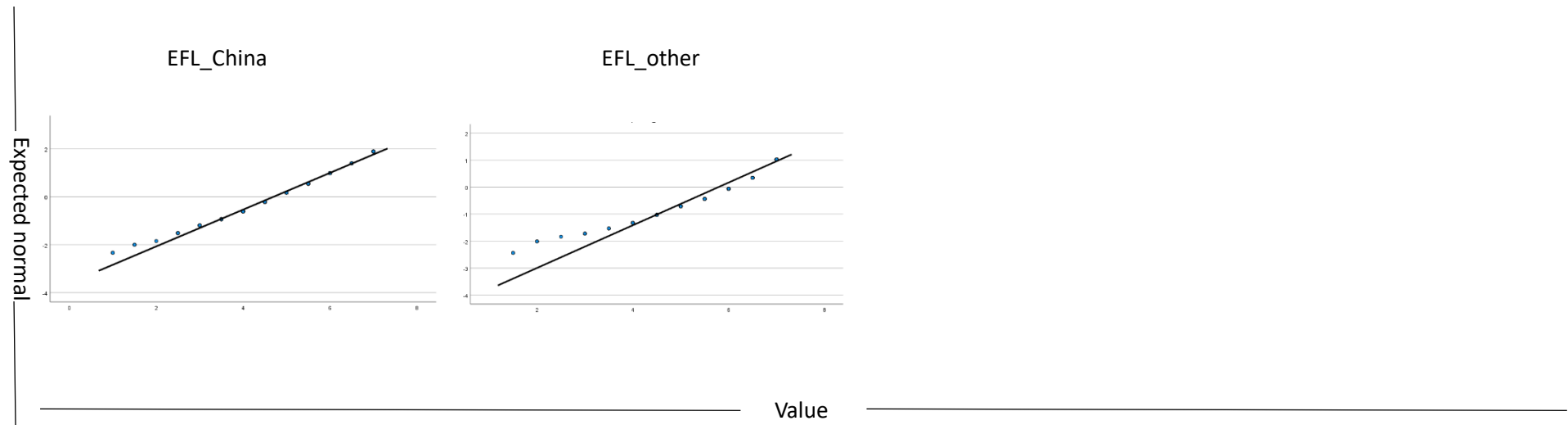


ENS_other

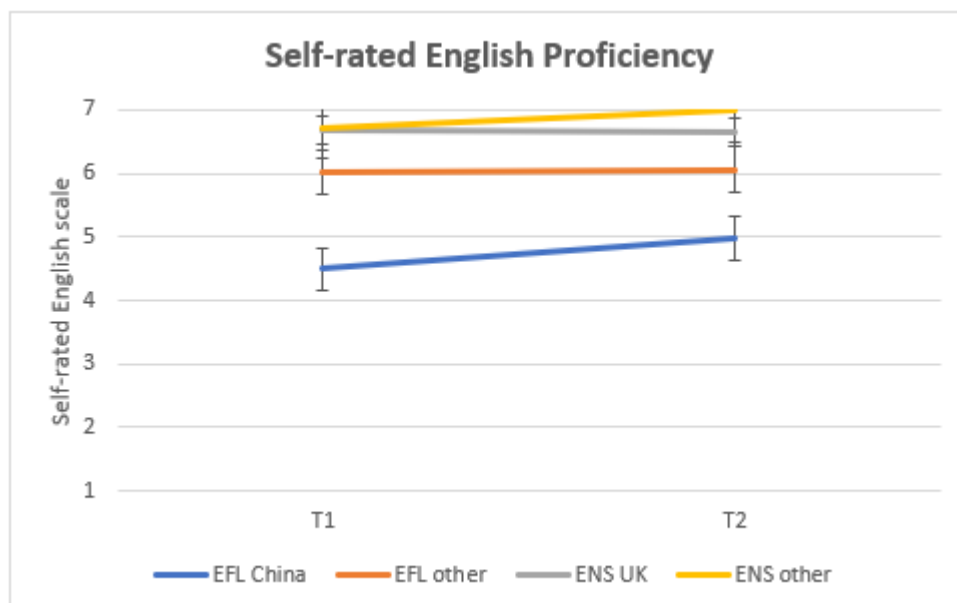
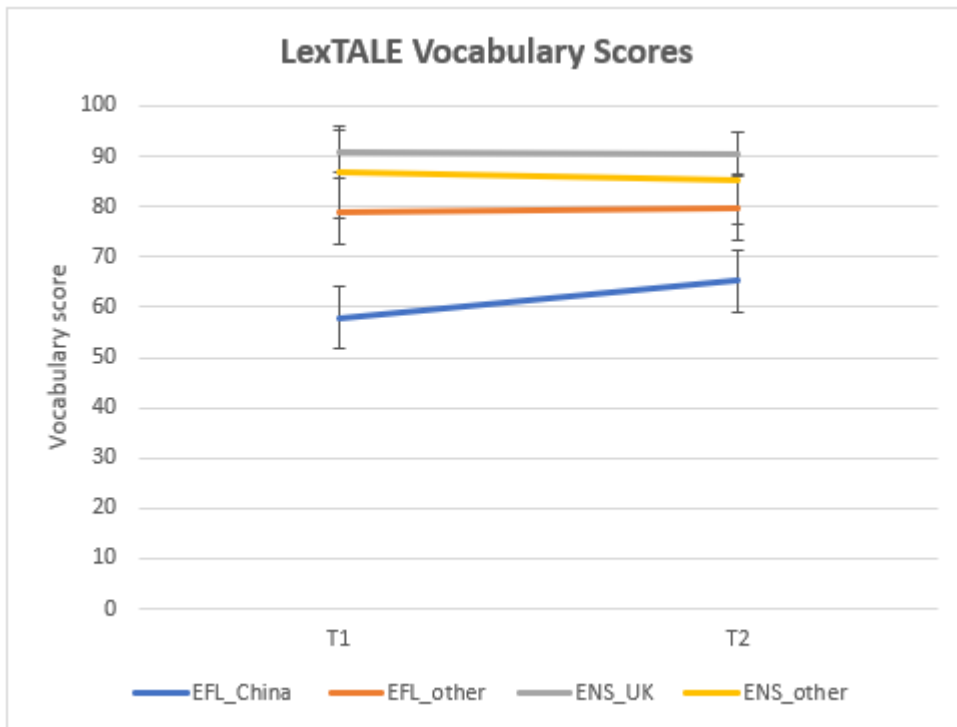


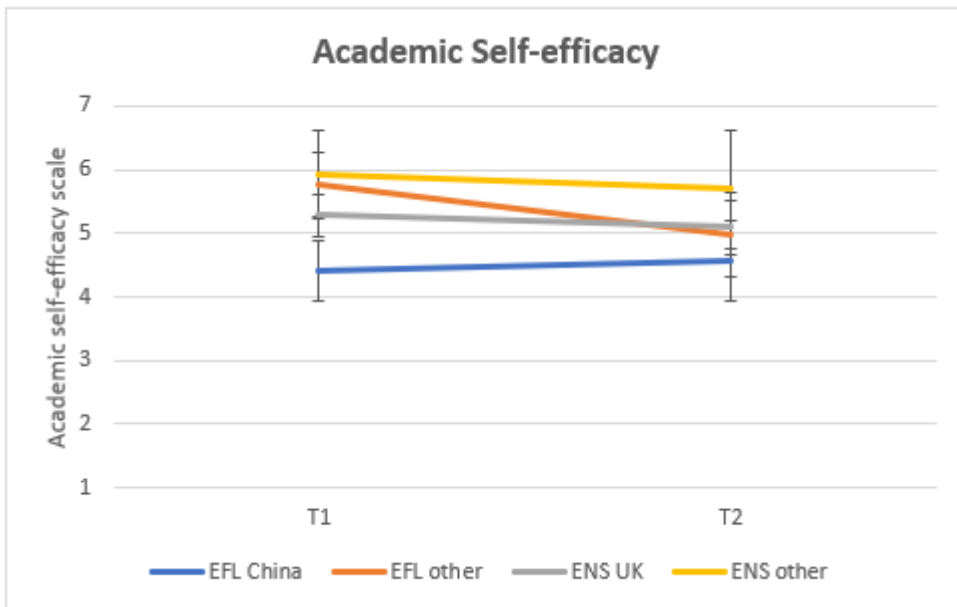
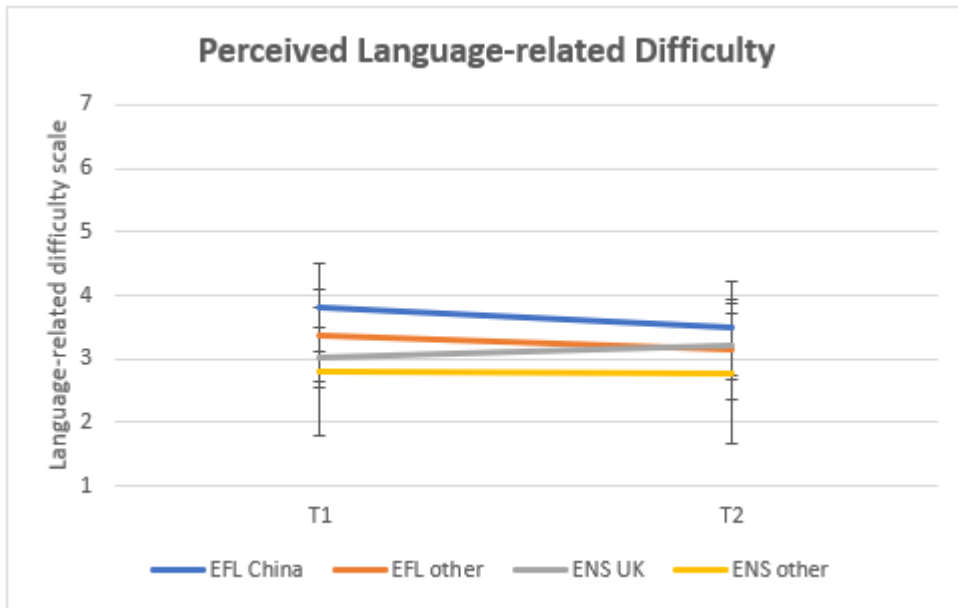
Value

English self-efficacy:



Appendix R Line graphs including international ENS group in the follow-up survey study





Appendix S Skill-specific comparisons in self-rated English proficiency in the follow-up survey study

T1 – T2 Change in Self-rated Reading Skill by Group: Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests

EFL_China: $T = 28.00$, $z = 1.51$, $p = .132$, $r = .30$

EFL_other: $T = 2.50$, $z = -1.00$, $p = .317$, $r = -.20$

ENS_UK: $T = 20.00$, $z = -0.83$, $p = .405$, $r = -.11$

ENS_other: $T = 1.00$, $z = 1.00$, $p = .317$, $r = .29$

T1 – T2 Change in Self-rated Listening Skill by Group: Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests

EFL_China: $T = 21.00$, $z = 1.27$, $p = .206$, $r = .25$

EFL_other: $T = 6.00$, $z = -0.45$, $p = .655$, $r = -.09$

ENS_UK: $T = 1.50$, $z = 0.00$, $p = 1.000$, $r = 0$

ENS_other: $T = 3.00$, $z = 1.41$, $p = .157$, $r = .41$

T1 – T2 Change in Self-rated Writing Skill by Group: Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests

EFL_China: $T = 45.00$, $z = 2.81$, $p = .005$, $r = .55$

EFL_other: $T = 22.00$, $z = 1.40$, $p = .161$, $r = .29$

ENS_UK: $T = 33.00$, $z = 0.00$, $p = 1.000$, $r = 0$

ENS_other: $T = 1.00$, $z = 1.00$, $p = .317$, $r = .29$

T1 – T2 Change in Self-rated Speaking Skill by Group: Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests

EFL_China: $T = 24.00$, $z = 1.89$, $p = .059$, $r = .37$

EFL_other: $T = 9.00$, $z = -0.33$, $p = .739$, $r = -.07$

ENS_UK: $T = 9.00$, $z = 0.45$, $p = .655$, $r = .06$

ENS_other: $T = 1.00$, $z = 1.00$, $p = .317$, $r = .29$

Differences in Group Change (among three groups): Results of the Kruskal-Wallis Test

Self-rated reading: $H(2) = 7.10$, $p = .029$ (a further comparison is reported below)

Self-rated listening: $H(2) = 2.85$, $p = .240$

Self-rated writing: $H(2) = 10.41$, $p = .005$ (a further comparison is reported below)

Self-rated speaking: $H(2) = 5.39$, $p = .067$

The findings indicated a significant improvement in the Chinese students' confidence in writing skills over one academic year ($T = 45.00$, $z = 2.81$, $p = .005$) with a large effect size ($r = .55$). Furthermore, pairwise comparisons of the Kruskal-Wallis test with an adjusted p -value indicated that Chinese students perceived a significantly higher improvement in their English proficiency compared to UK students in reading ($p = .050$, $r = .37$) and writing ($p = .005$, $r = .40$).

Appendix T Skill-specific comparisons in academic language difficulty in the follow-up survey study

T1 – T2 Change in Perceived Reading Difficulty by Group: Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests

EFL_China: $T = 17.50, z = -1.69, p = .090, r = -.34$

EFL_other: $T = 21.50, z = -0.12, p = .905, r = -.03$

ENS_UK: $T = 215.00, z = 0.63, p = .531, r = .08$

ENS_other: $T = 8.50, z = -0.42, p = .674, r = -.12$

T1 – T2 Change in Perceived Listening Difficulty by Group: Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests

EFL_China: $T = 15.50, z = -1.63, p = .104, r = -.32$

EFL_other: $T = 25.00, z = 0.99, p = .321, r = .21$

ENS_UK: $T = 75.50, z = -1.40, p = .163, r = -.19$

ENS_other: $T = 11.00, z = 0.11, p = .914, r = .03$

T1 – T2 Change in Perceived Writing Difficulty by Group: Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests

EFL_China: $T = 27.50, z = -0.91, p = .363, r = -.18$

EFL_other: $T = 23.50, z = -0.41, p = .683, r = -.09$

ENS_UK: $T = 239.50, z = 0.83, p = .405, r = .11$

ENS_other: $T = 12.50, z = 0.42, p = .673, r = .12$

T1 – T2 Change in Perceived Speaking Difficulty by Group: Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests

EFL_China: $T = 33.00, z = 0.00, p = 1.000, r = 0$

EFL_other: $T = 15.00, z = -1.28, p = .201, r = -.27$

ENS_UK: $T = 223.50, z = 1.22, p = .222, r = .16$

ENS_other: $T = 5.00, z = -0.67, p = .500, r = -.19$

Differences in Group Change (among three groups): Results of the Kruskal-Wallis Test

Reading Difficulty: $H(2) = 2.51, p = .285$

Listening Difficulty: $H(2) = 3.79, p = .150$

Writing Difficulty: $H(2) = 1.32, p = .518$

Speaking Difficulty: $H(2) = 2.92, p = .232$

The results indicated that students across all groups did not perceive significant change in challenges related to reading, listening, writing and speaking over time. Additionally, there was no significant differences between groups in terms of perceived difficulty changes across all four language skills.

Appendix U Interview invitation emails and booking confirmation email

The initial invitation email:

Dear Participant,

Thank you so much for completing my survey on the expectations and experience of international and home students at UK universities that I ran last autumn. I am grateful that you have also shown your interest in participating in the follow-up interview. I am writing now to invite you to the follow-up interview.

The interview is part of my research study which seeks to increase our understanding of university students' academic expectations and experiences, and how the language demands of their courses shape them. The interview will be held on-line and based on a day and time that suits you. It will take around 15-30 minutes. To thank you for participating, you will be entered in a prize-draw for a **£20 Amazon voucher**. (To Chinese interviewees exclusively:)The interview can be conducted in **Chinese** if you wish, with English being an alternative choice.

You can book a slot directly with the Doodle poll linked below:

(Doodle poll link with information sheet included)

Please let me know if you have no availability in the above link and we can arrange another date and time.

For any further information or concerns, please contact me at: **xs962@york.ac.uk**

You can also contact me via WhatsApp or phone number: **07579921886**

WeChat: **evana714**

Many thanks and I look forward to your response!

Xiaqian Shi (Evana)

University of York

The edited invitation email:

Hello,

You took part in my study on students' experiences at UK universities last autumn. Thank you so much for completing that survey! I am now running follow-up interviews and hope you are still happy to do it.

What's involved? We'd meet digitally (Zoom or another platform) to talk about your university experiences and language demands of your studies for **15-30 minutes**. In return, you will be entered in a prize-draw for a **£20 Amazon voucher**.

You can book a slot directly on this Doodle poll:

(Doodle poll link with information sheet included)

If none of the suggested dates in the Doodle poll work for you, please email me back and we'll arrange an alternative time. I hope you'll be able to help me with my research by taking part in this interview.

Many thanks!

Xiaqian (Evana)

Booking confirmation email:

Dear (name of the participant),

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the Interview for my study on students' expectations and experiences. I can confirm that your interview is booked for (date and time).

Please use the Zoom link below for our on-line interview:

(Zoom link)

Although I will have my video camera on, it is up to you whether you wish to turn on the camera or not. Please make sure that the device you will be using has a microphone. I have also attached an information sheet with detailed information. I will send you the consent form for you to sign during our interview.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to meeting you tomorrow!

Many thanks!

Evana

Appendix V Sample interview transcripts

The transcripts below were from an interview conducted with interviewee EFL_China_1. Transcripts for the other 17 interviewees are available upon request.

Interviewer: Xiaqian Shi (XS)

Interviewee: EFL_China_1 (EFL_C1)

Date and time: 24th July 2021 2:00pm

Location: On-line Zoom

XS: 那我们现在就开始正式的采访。你觉得在约克大学的学习生活如何？过得怎么样？

XS: Now we can begin our official interview. So how have you found your studies at the University of York so far? How is it going?

EFL_C1: 因为今年，大多是网课嘛，然后线下的生活其实没有很多，所以大部分还是偏向于在中国的那一方面，不是在英国的。线上学习的话，我觉得，相比于之前线下的话会有更多的一些阅读上的内容吧。好像在 Zoom 课程好像时间也会比较少一点，老师讲的比较笼统概括一点，会给你布置一些相应会比去年多一点的 reading list，然后会去看很多很多书。然后比大一要(有)更多的阅读材料吧。

EFL_C1: This year, because the majority of my study was on-line, there wasn't actually much of a life off-line. Most of my off-line life was more China instead of the UK. Speaking of on-line studies, I feel there were more readings than in the past when I was studying in person. The lectures seemed to be shorter on Zoom, and the lectures were taught in a more general and abstract way. They assigned more reading lists than last year, so I had a lot of readings to do. There were more reading materials than the first year.

XS: 请问你说线下更偏向中国是什么意思呢？是因为你人在国内吗？

XS: When you said off-line life was more China, what did you mean? Are you talking about the fact that you physically have been in China?

EFL_C1: 对，是因为人在国内，然后一整年网课嘛，然后不太有机会接触到英国的 home 学生，不像大一的时候有一个本地的英国学生跟我住在一个房间，所以会经常会有一些交流也好，出去玩也好，就英语会学得更多。在中国的话，就不会。

EFL_C1: Yes, I have been physically in China. I've had to study on-line for a whole year and I haven't had much chance to connect with British home students. This was different than the first year, when I had a British home student living with me, which gave me the chance to communicate and hang out together, so I ended up learning a lot more English. In China, I can't really do this.

XS: 嗯，我理解了。请问在你的问卷中，你提到了一些积极的方面，比方说英国本地的同学和老师都很爱帮忙，有耐心，人很好什么的，可以再详细的说明一下吗？你现在也有同样的感受吗？

XS: Ok, I understand. In your survey, you mentioned some positive experiences. For example, you said that British local students and lecturers are helpful, patient and friendly, can you tell me more about it? Do you still feel the same?

EFL_C1: 对啊，在大一的时候，因为我比较幸运分配到了一个本地学生一起住。刚开始大家都不是很熟，我英语也没有很好，刚刚进去的时候就很多时候挺尴尬的，（因为）会有一些语言上的障碍。我会发现在 common room 的时候，一整个 floor 的人都会去，他们就会很多时候帮我，对我说话的时候会比较慢一点，相对来说不会用复杂的词句。如果对他们英国本地的人的话，就会更快的去交流，有很多俚语什么的，就感觉还蛮被照顾到的。他们也会带着我出去玩，去逛街什么的。在学业上，老师会给很多意见，在交 paper 以前，可能我会问老师‘你可不可以帮我看一下，这篇 essay 这样写的 structure 是不是对的？’或者‘有些措辞上面，你帮我看一下吧。’老师就会给 feedback 说‘这边可能需要改进一下会好一些’。就是说老师会给很多帮助。我印象还蛮深的，我们班有一个女生相处还蛮不错的，是英国本地的同班同学，会给我很多日常学习上的一些帮助，教我怎么整理笔记和阅读，然后说‘有些 paper，不用看所有东西，只需要看前面后面，就可以得出一个 general 的东西。’

EFL_C1: Yes, that was in the first year. Because I was lucky enough to be assigned to live with a local student. In the beginning, I wasn't very close to him, and my English wasn't very good, so it was sometimes awkward at first (due to) the language barrier. I noticed that everyone on the whole floor

would go to the common room. (When I was there) they would help me, talk to me slowly and use relatively uncomplicated words and sentences. If they talked to local British people, they talked faster and used slang, this made me feel like I was taken care of. They would also take me out, we'd go window-shopping and so on. Academically, lecturers gave me a lot of advice. Before submitting my papers, I sometimes asked my lecturers 'Could you read it for me and see if the essay structure is correct?' or 'Please help me check my wording.' My lecturers would give me feedback, saying 'improving this part would make it better'. In other words, my lecturers gave me lots of help. Also, I have a deep impression that I got along well with a girl who was a local British classmate. She gave me a lot of general academic help, specifically, teaching me how to organise notes and how to read (effectively). She said 'For some papers, you don't need to read everything. You only need to read the beginning and the end so as to obtain a general idea.'

XS: 请问你刚刚说的那些是大一的时候，那这一年都在国内，就没有这样的体验了，是不是？

XS: You said that this was just in your first year. Does that mean that this year, since you have been in China, you haven't had such experience?

EFL_C1: 对，就是接触会比较少，很多都是 email，跟老师都是 email 往来。感觉这一年跟老师接触会比大一少很多，可能因为不是面对面的话，email 感觉会有点生硬。同学的交流就很少了，大家可能就是在 social media 上点个赞，然后偶尔会问候一下，不会很亲密的去聊一些事情。

EFL_C1: Yeah, you're right. I had little contact with people. The majority of communication happened by email and that's how I always contacted my lecturers. I felt that this year the contact with lecturers was less compared to first year. It's probably because we weren't face to face and emails felt a little bit stiff. The communication between classmates was even less. People tended to hit 'like' on each other's social media posts and greet each other occasionally – we didn't chat intimately.

XS: 你觉得主要是因为人没有在英国吗？

XS: Do you think the main reason for that is that you haven't been in the UK?

EFL_C1: 我觉得可能会有个时差问题吧，然后大家都不在身边，就没有一个 common 的东西去 share，慢慢就会有隔阂吧。

EFL_C1: I felt that the problem might be the time difference, and also people weren't in person. We didn't have things in common to share with each other, so we grew distant.

XS: 我理解。这样看来有很多积极的一面，特别是你大一的时候，但是像所有学生一样，你一定也经历了一些挑战。请问你觉得目前为止最困难的地方在哪？

XS: I understand. So there were many good things for you, especially when you were in your first year, but like all students you must have also experienced some challenges. What has been the most difficult for you so far?

EFL_C1: 你是指学习上吗？

EFL_C1: You mean academically?

XS: 都可以，学习上或生活上也可以。

XS: All aspects, including studying and daily life.

EFL_C1: 我以前有一点被 bother 到，就是有一点不是很舒服的感觉。因为我说了，我之前跟英国的本地学生住在一间房间嘛，因为自己会想，大家既然都住一间房间嘛，就会想大家都做朋友，在各个方面都表现的比较积极，有点迎合他的意思。比方说很多时候，他说‘你要不要出去一起喝酒’，可能有时候不是很想去，但是还会觉得‘就当做一个积极的娱乐，或者积极的出行吧’，就跟他一起去，跟好多人一起喝酒。可能在过程中，没有这么愉悦，他们会有很多 topic 是我不能讲，很难去表达的那种 topic。当时是因为很想和他，还有和很多的英国人，也就是一个 floor 的人，保持很好的关系。但是好像后来发现，就会在一个很尴尬的位置，没有跟他们走的很近，没有办法坐下来掏心掏肺的说些事情，但是又不是很浅，他们出去玩还是会叫我。那时候就感觉有些不舒服，他们没有很真诚的待我，真的把我当朋友，说一些掏心的话的那种感觉。后来就会慢慢好一点，就觉得也不是跟每个人都能交朋友的，能交的话就交，不能交，那就这样吧。这个就是生活上的一些，我觉得还蛮不舒服的一个东西。后来在学习上，我很多时候在读很长的 paper 的时候，或者很长的书的时候，就有有一种读完这个篇章，可能理解每个字的意思，但是读完这一个章节，可能对很零散的概念要再去一个一个找，要关键地方要划出来，才能够拼凑出一些关键的东西。如果匆匆的看，可能就很空的，可能看了一遍像没有看一样。这个还蛮难的。

EFL_C1: I used to find some things a bother, I mean, I felt uncomfortable. As I said, I lived in the same flat as a local British student. I thought that since we lived together, we could be friends. I acted positively in every aspect, and I deliberately tried to please him a bit. For example, there were many times when he asked me 'Do you want to come drinking with us?', I probably didn't want to, but I still thought 'I will just consider it as a good night out', then I'd go out with him and drink with many people. During that time, it wasn't really that enjoyable. There were many topics that I couldn't talk about or express clearly. At that time, I really wanted to maintain a good relationship with him and with other British people who were on the same floor as me. But later on, I realised that I was in an awkward situation -- I couldn't have a very close relationship with them, and I couldn't share my true feelings with them, but the relationship wasn't very shallow either because they still invited me to come if they were going out. At that time, I felt a bit uncomfortable, because they didn't treat me genuinely as a real friend and share their honest thoughts with me. Then, slowly, I began to feel better, because I realised that you can't make friends with everyone. If it will be, it will be; if not, it's fine. This is what I felt uncomfortable about in my life. Then academically, there were many times that when I read a very long paper or a long book, I had a feeling that I probably understood every word when finishing a chapter, but I still had to find main points by looking for the scattered concepts and marking the important points. If I read it in a rush, I just felt clueless -- it's as if I didn't read it at all. This was very difficult for me.

XS: 也就是读文章找重点?

XS: So, it was finding main points while reading articles that you found difficult?

EFL_C1: 对。一定要自己去找。通看就没有什么用我感觉。这个是一点。第二点就是，老师一节课上完，可能抛出一个问题，可能给我说，可能从这几个方面去考虑这个问题。但是不会告诉你这个结果是什么，就是这个结果要自己看。最后我还是会回到这个问题，会去想，比方说教育是什么，教育的公平是什么，就这个问题，是这节课的内容。要自己去看很多书，有一个自己的理解，这个理解并不是老师直接给你的，而是自己看书自己看材料得出来的。这个和我之前一个学习模式差距会比较大，会有不习惯的时候。那时候觉得还蛮不习惯。相比较之前在国内的一个模式，就是灌输，老师把结果告诉你，比方说你该怎么怎么做，得出这个结果是什么。但是在国外的学习就是，老师不会告诉结果是什么，结论是什么，这个结论是要你自己去找，要自己通过读文献，读各种资料，得出你一个你自己的理解，这个理解不是老师给你的，是要有这样一个过程，是要自己去找。这个和我之前的模式就有差别，会有不习惯的地方。

EFL_C1: Yes. It's important to be able find (the main points) on my own. I feel that it's a bit useless to read a paper from the top to bottom (without finding the key information). This is one point (I'd like to make clear). The second point is that during lectures, the lecturers might raise a question and tell us to think about it from several perspectives, but they wouldn't tell us the answer. The answers have to be found by ourselves. At the end of the day, I still had to think about this question. For example, what is education? What is equity in education? These questions might be the content of this lesson. We needed to read many books and form our own understandings which were not given by the lecturers, but were formed by ourselves after reading books and materials. This learning style was very different than what I had in the past and sometimes I wasn't used to it. I really felt I wasn't used to it. In comparison, the learning style in my home country was cramming the answers that the teachers told us. For example, (they told us) what we should do and how to do it, then what the answers are. Instead, in foreign countries, teachers (or lecturers) don't tell us the answers, and we have to find them by ourselves. We have to read literature and materials, then obtain our **own** understanding which isn't given by lecturers. This process has to happen – figuring it out on our own. This learning style was different from what I had in the past and sometimes I wasn't used to it.

XS: 更需要学习上的独立， 是吧？

XS: So you needed to study more independently, right?

EFL_C1: 对， 更需要一些自主性的东西。

EFL_C1: Yes, we needed to be more independent.

XS: 请问你之前说的跟朋友的关系可能不能很深入的交往， 让你觉得不能很舒服什么的， 请问你觉得原因是什么？

XS: You mentioned that it was hard to connect with your friend and you felt uncomfortable, could you please tell me why you think it was like that?

EFL_C1: 我觉得文化背景会超过语言障碍。因为很多时候， 就是观念不太一样。并不是语言的问题， 尽管语言上可能没有像 **native speakers** 这么好， 但是我还是有这个自信， 就是说我可以把我要说的东西表达清楚， 不会让他们有误解。所以就觉得并不是语言的问题， 更多的是文化背景上， 话题上面有一些冲突， 他们有些并不是很有兴趣去知道。有些地方可能就是不一样， 想法不一样。就会导致偏差， 然后就， 挺难的反正 (laugh with embarrassment)。

EFL_C1: I think cultural difference surpassed language barriers. There were many times that we had different opinions. It wasn't a language problem, although my language wasn't **that** good compared to native speakers, I still had the confidence that I could express what I wanted clearly without causing a misunderstanding for them. So I think it wasn't a problem with language, but with cultural background and a conflict of topics. They had no interest in knowing (what I was interested in). There was just something different between us, and there were different thoughts, hence, it was hard (laugh with embarrassment).

XS: 我理解。学习上，请问除了你刚才说的阅读方面，还有就是学习模式不一样。你在问卷里面也提到了，在写作方面也有困难。

XS: I understand. Academically, aside from what you just mentioned about reading and learning styles, you also shared in the survey that you had difficulties with writing.

EFL_C1: 有。

EFL_C1: I did have (difficulties in writing).

XS: 写作方面请问困难在哪里呢？

XS: What's difficult about writing?

EFL_C1: 写作的话是因为之前并没有很系统的训练过，去怎么逻辑地写论文。很多时候，写的东西，我自己都知道它很零散，它在逻辑上不是很统一。但是我们学校有一个专门负责留学生写作的，算是一个团体吧，他们会有人给看。就是你写一篇文章，然后你发给他们，然后他们给你提一些很专业的问题，就说‘你这样这样会比较好，怎么怎么改会比较好’。有发过一次，然后就觉得‘噢！差距还是好大’的感觉。很多时候我表达的东西并没有办法很精简，很多时间没有办法把观点清晰的表达出来。到现在我也没有克服它很多。可能就是看的那个文献多了的话，自然而然就会有一点认知吧，就是怎么写算是一个好的文章，也不是照搬，就是从文献当中去学习吧。也是会问教授，比如说这样写会不会好，这样写会不会好。教授给 feedback，然后就是这样一点点，一点点去往上提升。

EFL_C1: Concerning writing, I wasn't trained systematically before about how to write papers logically. There were many times during writing that I was aware that what I wrote was scattered and inconsistent logically. However, there is kind of a group in my university which is in charge of helping overseas students with writing. People there read our writings for us. If we wrote an article and send it to them, they would provide us with some professional advice, like 'If you did this, it would be better, and changing it like this would be better.' I sent (my writing) once, and I felt 'Oh, the gap is still very big (between me and them).' There were many times that what I expressed couldn't be succinct and my ideas couldn't be expressed clearly. I still haven't overcome it much even now. I guess

reading more literature helped me gain some knowledge about how to write a good article naturally and gradually – not by copying, but by learning from literature. I also asked my lecturers, for example, if writing like this would be good, and writing like that would be bad. My lecturers gave some feedback and I just improved like this gradually bit by bit.

XS: 请问你的语言能力有没有在任何地方束缚了你的学业成就呢？

XS: Would you say that your language skills have limited in any way what you could have achieved in your studies?

EFL_C1: 我觉得可能写作上会有一点吧，因为毕竟我们大部分的形式，并不是口头的什么，大部分的形式是以论文的形式为主。它也不是考试。论文就是更需要有一定的英语基础，把逻辑，把语言整理成一个系统的文章体现出来。它不像数学，可能有一个答案，对了就是对了，错了就是错了，只要理解题目的意思就好了。我们更多的是（写）综合性的阐述性的文章，需要一定的英语基础。在某些程度上是有一定的影响的。

EFL_C1: I think writing might have a little bit. After all our form (of assessment) wasn't spoken, but mainly writing papers. It wasn't exams either. Writing academic papers needs some English foundation, to be able to organise language and logic into a systematic article. It's not like maths where correct answers exist – correct answers mean correct while wrong answers mean wrong – you only need to understand the instructions. What was needed was mostly (to write) comprehensive and expository papers, which required some English foundation. (The English foundation) had some impact (on my study).

XS: 请问用英语学习，和用中文学习相比，对你有什么不同呢？

XS: How does studying in English compare - for you - to studying in your first language?

EFL_C1: 我个人觉得可能语言本身的不同并没有什么很多，更多的是模式上的不同。

EFL_C1: I **personally** think the differences between languages themselves aren't that many, the differences are more in the styles (of teaching and learning).

XS: 就是中国的大学和英国的大学的不同？

XS: Between universities in China and those in the UK?

EFL_C1: 我也不知道中国的大学是什么样，但是就是和高中相比，模式不太一样。但是就语言来本身说，除了自己要写的时候可能有一些问题，但是日常的时候，听教授讲话，包括他们做的ppt，都是ok的。可能有一些专有名词不认识，但是课前有preview，会看，会查些单词，就还好其实。

EFL_C1: I don't know what universities are like in China. But comparing with my secondary school, the styles are different. In terms of language itself, except for some difficulties with writing, my everyday life where I generally listen to lecturers and watch their presentations was all ok. I might

not have recognised some technical terms, but I prepared before the class by previewing the materials. I looked them up, so I felt alright.

XS: 就是写稍微难一点？其他都还好？

XS: So you felt writing was a bit hard, everything else was alright?

EFL_C1: 对，其他都还好。

EFL_C1: Yes, everything else was alright.

XS: 那你觉得这些稍有的困难比你之前预计的，来英国之前的预计要难一些吗？

XS: Was this problem more difficult than you had anticipated?

EFL_C1: 还好。我之前想，生活上可能会有一些困难的东西，因为大一刚来的时候，可能要办 visa, 住宿的合同要签，可能要有 bank letter 什么的，可能觉得自己会有一些问题。但是，实际上还好，生活上也没有预计想象的这么困难。然后学习上，是有预计过，在写的方面预计有一定的困难，在现实中也遇到了一些困难，但是在教授说话的速度啊，包括理解程度上，我觉得还 ok 吧，我觉得预计和现实还差不多。

EFL_C1: It was alright. I had thought I might encounter more problems in daily life. When I came here in my first year, I had to deal with my visa, sign the contract with my accommodation and get my bank letter, things like this. I had probably felt that I would face some difficulties, but actually, I was alright. My life wasn't as hard as I had anticipated. Academically, I had also anticipated that I might have writing difficulties, and I did encounter them. But in terms of lecturers' speed of speaking and my level of understanding, I felt kind of ok – the reality was kind of the same as I had anticipated.

XS: 那就是没有说比预计的要难很多是吧？

XS: So it wasn't much harder than you had anticipated?

EFL_C1: 对，没有难很多。

EFL_C1: No, it wasn't.

XS: 嗯行。你觉得你如果在入学时拥有更好的英语水平，可以使你的学习更容易吗？

XS: Ok. Do you think arriving with a better proficiency in English would have made your studies easier?

EFL_C1: 会，那肯定会。因为我知道我们班大概 2 个 3 个香港或者新加坡的学生，他们雅思成绩或者总体上比我们要高。因为我大概只有 7 分这样子，他们都是 7.5, 8 分，会比我们高 1 到 1.5 分这样子。感觉很多时候，比方说我们有心理课，就会有很多很长的单词，一时间一两个还好，可能一篇 ppt 拉出来很多很长的词的时候，读的速度会慢，理解的程度也会慢。那时候去问他们，他们就会告诉我，这个是这样。英语水平更好的话肯定是对学业有帮助。然后我觉得他们能够更轻松，比我们更快的去理解这些东西。他们表达的时候也会更流畅，比方说我们

在做 presentation 的时候，或者说回答某些事情的时候，会卡住。我可能讲了半天就只讲了一个点，别人就可以很顺畅的，2,3 个点就讲完了。还是会有影响。

EFL_C1: Yes, it definitely would have. I have 2 or 3 classmates from Hong Kong or Singapore. Their IELTS scores were overall higher than ours [Chinese students']. Mine was only 7, theirs was 7.5 or 8, which was 1 or 1.5 higher than ours. I felt that, for example, in my psychology classes, there were many times that my reading speed and understanding became slow when watching PowerPoints which contained a wide variety of long words. When I asked them for help, they answered and helped me out. Having better English abilities surely helps with study. I felt that they could understand (academic) things more easily and quickly. They also expressed themselves more fluently. For example, when doing presentations or answering questions, we [Chinese students] might get stuck or I might talk about only 1 point while spending a lot of time on it, while they could talk about 2 or 3 points fluently. (That's why) this has impact.

XS: 好的。如果你入学前知道用英语学习的难度，你还仍然会来读书吗？或者说你会不会先提高英语水平，再开始入学学习？

XS: Ok. Had you known how difficult it was going to be, would you have still come? Or would you have first improved your English proficiency and then started your studies?

EFL_C1: 我觉得如果是按我自身情况的话，如果是知道现在这个难度的话，我应该会先去提升自己的英语水平，然后再来。但是很多时候需要考虑现实的因素，可能是不是有这个时间。比方说，学英语不是很短期就可以提升的嘛，还是要半年到一年的时间去提升。很多现实的情况是，没有这个时间去提升。只能到这边来上课了。现实因素会阻碍到这个东西所以我还是觉得我还是会来上课，不是觉得‘啊，现在很难，就不读书了’。我觉得还是会来读书。因为本身语言要学要进步，本身就不是一个很容易的事情，本身就是要遇到很多困难才能提升。其实我觉得在一个英语国家和说英语为母语的人相处，在他们的大学里面读书，我觉得是对英语有考验也是提升最快的一个途径。比起可能用力的去学很多东西，我觉得可能在这边读书反而是比较容易提升英语的一个途径吧。

EFL_C1: I feel that based on my own situation, if I had known the difficulties, I would have improved my English abilities before I came. But considering the practicality of the situation at hand, I might not have had the time for it. For example, improving English is time-consuming -- it requires half a year to a year to improve. The practical issue was that there would not have been time for me to improve (without delaying my study) so I still would have come here to study. The reality of the situation would have been a problem, so I would still have come to study. I wouldn't have been stopped simply by the fact I thought it would be very hard. I think I still would have come. Learning and improving a language isn't an easy thing and improvement requires challenges. I actually think getting along with people whose native language is English in an English-speaking country while

studying in their university is challenging but also the best way to improve English. Compared with studying it hard (at home), I think coming here to study is an easy way to improve English.

XS: 就是说边读书边提高?

XS: So you're talking about studying while improving at the same time?

EFL_C1: 对, 边提高。

EFL_C1: Yes, improving at the same time.

XS: 如果是理想状态的话, 如果也不耽误时间啥的, 可能还是会先提高再来?

XS: So if the situation had been ideal, and it hadn't taken time, you would have probably improved first then come here?

EFL_C1: 对, 那我可能还是会先提高再来。对对。

EFL_C1: Yes, then I would have improved then come here. Yes.

XS: 但是现实情况, 就不是很...

XS: But the reality is not...

EFL_C1: 现实情况就不是很理想, 不允许有这个时间去学。

EFL_C1: The reality of the situation isn't that ideal. I wouldn't have had time to study (English).

XS: 嗯, 我理解。和其他所有人一样, 你也有和学术语言相关的困难。你有没有用什么方法来弥补语言上的困难呢? 包括你之前说的找学校的一个组织来帮助...

XS: Ok I understand. So like everyone else, you also have problems with academic language. What strategies do you use to compensate for any language-related difficulties? Including the organisation in the university you found to help...

EFL_C1: 是 academic writing 什么的组织。我觉得对学术写作还是有一定的帮助的。因为我不是从国际学校出来的, 我是高考出来的, 我之前完全没有接触过学术写作这个概念。所以到这边来, 读了一个预科, 相比较他们国际高中的学生, (我的) 写作的基础没有这么扎实。很多时候, 尤其是写一遍很长的论文的时候, 就会觉得力不从心。不知道怎么写, 不知道组织框架是什么, 也不知道应该怎么起句, 怎么结尾, 当中应该写些什么, 都不知道。

EFL_C1: Yeah, there was the organisation about academic writing. I think it was in some ways helpful for my academic writing. I didn't attend an international school beforehand, I attended the National College Entrance Examination (in China) and I didn't know any concepts about academic writing. So I had a foundation year when I came here. Compared with those who attended international secondary schools, (my) writing foundation wasn't that solid. I often felt powerless when writing a very long paper. I didn't know how to write it, I didn't know the frame of an essay, I also didn't know how to write the beginning, middle or end -- I didn't know any of it.

XS: 有没有用呢, 这些帮助?

XS: Were these types of assistance useful?

EFL_C1: 有。在一定程度上是有用的。他们给我一个 overall 的框架，然后告诉我哪些字是不能用的，哪些格式是不能用的。比方说，不能简写，不能用祈使句，不能用问句什么的。这些会真实的反映在你的成绩上面，写了会扣分，会降低你的分数，如果不写这些就会好。然后包括 reference 的格式，那些术语上面，我觉得这没有什么办法，这就是课前去查这些字，把他们都标注上，不断的去看他们。比方说，我可能第一次不认识，把它标注下来后，第二次还是不认识，到**后来**就会变成，教授讲的时候对这些字格外的敏感，就会觉得‘诶，我听到这个字了，但我还是不知道它是什么意思’。然后又去看，这样就可以把这个词记住，之后就好了。这个没有捷径可以走，还是这个办法会比较好。就我本身写作上的问题，我会找专门的学校的地方去问，我也会去问我的 tutor 或 supervisor，问他们怎么写会比较好一点。另一方面就是多看 articles 和书，他们都是优秀的作品，他们都是经过层层筛选才会被发布。不管他们的研究成果，或方法，包括他们的写作，都是可以学习的有价值的，所以多看也可以对写作有帮助。这就是**我**是怎么学的。

EFL_C1: Yes, to some extent. They gave me an overall frame (to follow), and told me what words can't be used, what structures can't be used. For example, abbreviations, imperative sentences and interrogative sentences can't be used. This reflects on grades directly – if you use them, you will get lower grades; if you don't use them, it's good. In terms of reference formats and technical terms, there is no easy solution in my opinion. Looking the words up before the classes, making notes and reviewing them often is needed. For example, I probably didn't recognise (the words) at first. After taking notes, I probably still didn't recognise them the second time. But **later** I was really sensitive about those words when my lecturers used them, and tended to feel 'oh, I heard this word, but I still don't know the meaning of it'. Then I looked it up again. In this way, I finally was able to remember that word. There's no shortcut for this, but I found this to be a good method to use. Regarding my own writing problems, I looked for help from a relevant department. I also asked my tutor or supervisor about how to write to make it better. On the other hand, I read some articles and books. They were all excellent works and had been published through layers of selection. Their research results, research methods and writing are all worth learning from. So reading more was helpful to my writing. This is how I studied.

XS: 好的，看来还是有很多自己对自己的帮助和外界的帮助。还有没有任何你认为可能会有用的，但是你没有得到的帮助呢？还是说，你觉得帮助已经足够了？

XS: Ok. It seems that you had a lot of support from both yourself and external resources. What else might have been helpful to you? Or do you think this amount of support was enough?

EFL_C1: 足够肯定是没有。我觉得可能，我没有了解过，我们是不是有辩论社。有的话可以有更好的帮助，不管是语言上还是写作上。我之前读预科的时候是有辩论社的，虽然是中国人自

已举办的辩论社，在语言上不是英文。但是我觉得这种东西对我们有**很大**的帮助，因为辩论一个话题的时候，你不知道这个话题是什么嘛，然后有两天的时间去看所有的文献。然后到辩论的时候，比方说正方要想办法去反驳反方嘛，对逻辑思维有很强的要求，比方说有 1,2,3,4,5 个点，要看过文献，精炼出这 5 个点，要反驳对方。我觉得可能这个东西会对不管是写作还是语言上都有帮助。但是，是不是会有人去，是不是会吸引中国学生去，我觉得是个问题。因为就我本身来说，如果有这个社，我也会犹豫要不要去。因为如果是我们非母语使用者，如果英语不是很好的话，肯定不会想去啊，会觉得‘我连话都说不清，怎么能反驳对方的观点呢？’所以我觉得可能会先从中国自己小的社团，那种辩论赛（开始），先把逻辑锻炼起来。同时可能会有一些，比方说 tour 吧，以非学习为主的，不是一个学习性的东西，可能是去出去玩，社交性的活动，可能会比较好。因为很多时候，可能因为学习的东西就会变得很繁重，有压力。如果是一个社交的话，是一个以放松为主的，就去交朋友。对英语非母语的学生来说，会有很多话题可以去聊，对英语没有要求很高的话题就对我们来说会比较轻松一点，会潜移默化的也会帮助英语，口头交流的水平，包括听力也会有提高吧我觉得。

EFL_C1: It was surely not enough. I don't really know if there was a debate society or something like that. It'd be helpful if we had one, either for our language or writing. When I was in my foundation course, there was a debate society. Although it was held by Chinese students and the language wasn't in English, I think it was of **great** help to us. When we debated on a topic, we weren't familiar with it, so we'd spend 2 days reading literature about it. During the debate, in order to refute others, we needed to refine 1,2,3,4,5 points from the literature and it required strong logical thinking. I think it's beneficial for both writing and general language ability. But it would be a question of whether it can attract people and Chinese students. For myself, I would also hesitate about whether or not to go to this society. Because non-native speakers like us don't have very good English so surely we wouldn't want to go. We would think 'I even can't speak clearly, how can I refute other people's arguments?' So I think I would begin with a Chinese small debate society and improve my logic first. At the same time, trips unrelated to academic study would be good, like going outside to have fun and socialise. Because academic stuff often makes people feel onerous and pressured, while socialising events aim to relax people and allow them to make friends. For students whose native language isn't English, there are many topics to talk about. The topics that don't require a high level of English skills can be relaxing for us, and help with improving our English subconsciously. This includes speaking skills as well as listening skills in my opinion.

XS: 就是说如果有这两个社团或者组织的话，你是肯定会愿意去的是吧？

XS: So if there were those two societies or organisations, you would definitely want to go?

EFL_C1: 对，我肯定是会愿意去的。

EFL_C1: Yes, I would want to go for sure.

XS: 好的。这个学年与往年都不同，有疫情，有封锁，有各种限制。请问疫情对你有多大的影响呢？

XS: Ok. This academic year is so different from every other year, with the pandemic, lockdowns and restrictions. Can you tell me about how much the pandemic has affected you?

EFL_C1: 对学业上吗？

EFL_C1: You mean academically?

XS: 生活也可以的，都可以。

XS: Daily life can also be included, anything is fine.

EFL_C1: 我觉得影响还是挺大的吧。生活上肯定是因为隔离了嘛，也不能回去（英国），导致和一些朋友还聊的蛮好的，刚开始可能会慢慢淡掉，最后可能就失联了。到最后就变成，你发一个‘你好’，他发一个‘你好’，就会比较淡一点。然后学习上的话，就变得很需要自主性了。因为在家是有很多可以分心的事情的，不像之前这么 forceful，没有这么有压力的感觉。

EFL_C1: I think the impact was huge. Due to the isolation (between the UK and China), I couldn't go back (to the UK). This resulted in a faded relationship between me and some of my friends. We were talkative in the beginning, then we drifted apart slowly, then we even kind of lost contact. Finally, there was a situation that I sent a 'hello' to my friend, and he sent a 'hello' back – the relationship had worn away a bit. Academically, it required a lot of independence. There were many distractions at home without the pressure (of a learning environment), it wasn't as forceful as before.

XS: 也是因为疫情所以你才回国内的，是不是？

XS: You went back to China because of the pandemic, right?

EFL_C1: 对，就是疫情。如果不是疫情，我不会回国。因为疫情回来的话，变成线上之后，家里的人觉得我是大学了也不会管我。我也不像以前一样每天都会面对面的上课，有时候可能早上刚起床九点钟，还没睡醒，可能 Zoom 就挂在那边，可能有时候听一点，有时候就不听。这个东西，对**自主性的**考验就比较大。很多时候需要自己去看书，不像以前在宿舍，这个氛围会一直提醒我‘在大学，应该去做一些跟学习相关的事情’，会有这种感觉，就是‘我是一个学生，我应该去看书，我应该去图书馆’。比方说我下课了，可能同学 5,6 个人说‘我们要准备去图书馆’，那时候我就会想‘我是不是也应该去图书馆，因为我还有没看完的书，还有没有做完的东西，那我也应该去图书馆。’潜移默化在英国就会有这样一个氛围，去鞭策你，就是说‘你应该学习’。但是在家就没有这个动力了，就觉得‘我在家，我在休息’，很多时候也没有 quiz，也没有上课老师问问题，因为只是一篇 essay 的事情，很多时候就会偷懒，会觉得‘这个 article 是不是看不看也没有什么区别，可能就看看个大概就好了’。所以我觉得这个还蛮有影响的。

EFL_C1: Yes, due to the pandemic. If it wasn't for the pandemic, I wouldn't have gone home. Ever since I came home because of the pandemic, things were always on-line. My family didn't discipline me since I'm already a university student. I couldn't have classes face-to-face like before. Sometimes I just got up at 9am and didn't feel awake. Although my Zoom was turned on, sometimes I listened a bit, sometimes I didn't. This challenged my **independence**. I also had to actively read books **on my own**, unlike before when I was in the university accommodation where the atmosphere always reminded me that 'I am in the university and I need to do things for my studies'. During that time, I had the feeling that 'I'm a student. I should read books. I should go to the library'. For example, when classes finished, 5 or 6 classmates would say 'we are going to the library', then I also thought 'I probably should go to the library too because I have books that I haven't finished reading, and things that I haven't completed.' Subconsciously the atmosphere in the UK pushed me to tell myself 'you should study.' But I didn't have such motivation at home. I just felt 'I'm at home. I'm taking a rest.' We didn't really have any quizzes in class or questions from the lecturers. There was only the matter of completing an essay, so I often became lazy, thinking 'It probably doesn't matter if I read this article or not. Reading in a general way will probably be just fine.' So I think this (pandemic) had a big impact.

XS: 请问对这些和疫情相关的困难，你认为有没有其他的你希望和认为应该被提供的支持呢？

XS: Regarding those difficulties relative to the pandemic, is there anything else you wish you could have obtained to help?

EFL_C1: 我觉得学校在疫情相关的事情上，已经做了很多，大家都能看到。我也看到了很多困难，确实是挺难解决的事情。我觉得在疫情这个方面，学校已经做得足够好了，很多课程安排考虑到了时差的原因，比方说线上的课，可能最晚的课到中国时间晚上十点钟，就是不会晚上凌晨有课。这肯定是学校照顾到我们，才会这样设置课程。但还有些其他的東西，比方说类似于牵扯到金钱的东西，比方说住宿的退款啊。还有明年，也就是今年开学后如果我们去了，到底是线上还是线下，这个东西还是很模糊的。学习上我觉得很多东西已经做的很好了...嗯...我暂时还想不到可以提升的。

EFL_C1: I think the university has done a lot in terms of the pandemic which we were all able to see. I noticed many difficulties that weren't easy to resolve. I think regarding the pandemic, the universities have been doing good enough. They considered the time difference when scheduling the courses. For example, the courses on-line finished at 10pm at the latest in Chinese time, that is to say, there weren't classes at midnight. This was surely because the university cared for us and planned the courses to be like that. But other stuff, like financial stuff, such as accommodation refunds, as well as the question whether we will be on-line or off-line in the next academic year, was pretty

vague. Academically, I think the university has done a good job...hmm..I can't really think of any improvements that they could have made.

XS: 模糊请问是什么意思啊?

XS: What do you mean by 'vague'?

EFL_C1: 模糊就是, 今年到底是线上还是线下, 我们到底该不该回去, 回去以后到底有一些什么措施, 比方说需不需要隔离? 这个前景还是很模糊, 就是这个意思。

EFL_C1: Vague is like specifically, whether classes will be on-line or off-line this year, whether or not we should go back (to the UK), and if we are back, what measures will be taken, for example, is quarantine needed or not? I meant this kind of prospect is still very vague.

XS: 哦哦, 所以这个就不是很好, 是吧?

XS: I see. So this isn't very good, right?

EFL_C1: 对对。非学习上我觉得, 如果有什么可以提升的话, 我觉得可以提升一些公告的频率吧, 更新信息的频率。

EFL_C1: That's right. Non-academically, I also think the frequency of the announcements to update us with new information could have been more often.

XS: 你指的是和疫情相关的吗?

XS: Do you mean announcements about the pandemic?

EFL_C1: 对, 和疫情相关的各种政策, 包括宿舍, 健身房, 校区使用, 图书馆使用, 和疫情相关的信息。我觉得更新需要快一点, 很多时候我都不知道, 比方我的宿舍欠费了, 还是没有欠费, 是他们有退款还是没有退款, 我都不知道有这样一个东西出来。我还得自己发一个 email 去问然后他们才会告诉我。就是很多时候没有被告知, 这个上面需要提升吧。其他的我觉得已经做得足够好了。

EFL_C1: Yes, various policies about the pandemic, like regulations on using apartments, gyms, the campus and libraries. I think they needed to be updated more quickly. I didn't even know if my accommodation fee was overdue or not, and if the refund was issued or not. I didn't know any of this information and I had to email them to ask in order to know. I wasn't informed at times, and this needs to be improved. Everything else was all good enough in my opinion.

XS: 好的。有没有任何对于今天我们聊的你想要补充的观点? 有没有其他的任何问题或疑虑?

XS: Ok. Is there something else you would like to add about the things we talked about today? Do you have any questions or concerns about anything?

EFL_C1: 没有了。

EFL_C1: No.

XS: 好的。谢谢你。我们现在接近到采访的尾声了。非常感谢你今天的参与！如果你是最后中奖的参与者的话，我也会联系告知，祝你好运！如果接下来有任何想问我的，你可以随时给我发邮件或者发信息。

XS: Ok. Thank you. Now we are finishing the interview. Thanks a lot for participating in this interview! I will let you know if you are the winner of the prize-draw, hopefully you have good luck! If you want to contact me about anything in the future, you can always email me or send me messages.

EFL_C1: Ok, 谢谢。

EFL_C1: Ok. Thanks.

XS: 谢谢你，拜拜。

XS: Thank you and goodbye.

EFL_C1: 拜拜。

EFL_C1: Bye.

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