CHAPTER TWO

REVIEWE OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

Malaysian universities have recently admitted a large number of international students who are planning to do their higher education studies in different fields and at different levels (Ministry of Tourism Official website, updated September, 2008). In order to be able to provide quality education for these students, the managers and planners need to be familiar with their academic needs, on one hand, and the problems they may face during the course of their studies, on the other. In spite of the above-mentioned fact that there are many international students who study in Malaysian universities, there is a lack of research in investigating their academic problems in general, and English language and issues related to the use of it for academic purposes in particular.

There have been a lot of studies regarding the problems of international students in American and Australian universities and these studies have taken into consideration many factors that might pose problems for the international students, including social, cultural, and academic ones (Ballard, 1982, 1987; Burns, 1991; Samuelowicz, 1987). There are also a lot more studies in the form of unpublished doctoral dissertations in American universities on these issues (Han, 1977; Ellis, 1978; Antanaitis, 1990; Koyu-Fogel, 1994). There is however a need for research to be done in the Malaysian context to study the problems that the international students face with the use of English for academic purposes.
This review of literature includes different sections on the various aspects related to the current study. The following sections will be covered in this chapter:

- Needs Analysis and related issues.
- General problems faced by international students.
- Academic problems faced by international students.
- The Michigan International Students Problem Inventory (MISPI)
- Adjustment problems of international students.

### 2.1.1 Needs Analysis

In this part of the literature review, needs analysis will be defined and some issues related to it will be discussed and elaborated.

### 2.1.2 A Definition of Needs Analysis

Needs analysis in second or foreign language teaching is referred to as the process of understanding what to teach to the L2 learners and how to teach it. This is one of the ‘enduring conceptions’ in English for Specific Purposes and it has been part of the English language pedagogy for some 20 to 30 years (Long, 2005). Needs analysis in general involves activities and actions undertaken in order to collect information about the language learners and many other things to design and implement curriculum and syllabuses that respond to the particular needs of a specific group of L2 learners (Iwai et al., 1999).
2.1.3 The Importance of Needs Analysis

Needs analysis has an essential role in English Language Teaching (ELT); this analysis is usually made in order to recognize the specific aim(s) that a group of learners share; it plays a crucial role in the processes of designing and implementing any kind of language course, specially when it is English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and essential role has been acknowledged by several ELT researchers and practitioners throughout years (Munby, 1978; Richterich and Chancerel, 1987; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Berwick, 1989; Brindley, 1989; Tarone and Yule, 1989; Robinson, 1991; Johns, 1991; West, 1994; Allison et al. (1994); Seedhouse, 1995; Jordan, 1997; Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998; Iwai et al. 1999; Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Finney, 2002).

Many teachers assume that learners of ESP have a particular goal for which they will be following a course of study (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). In fact, the learners and users of the language use the language in any area of study to achieve a specific goal, and the purpose of language use in that specific field of study is the most crucial part of the ESP curricula and is the major concern of most ESP needs analysis. In other words, ESP needs analysis intends to identify the needs that users have and the purposes for which they use the language so that they can prepare the language course that is most suitable for them. According to Hutchinson and Waters:

… if we had to state in practical terms the irreducible minimum of ESP approach to course design, it would be needs analysis, since it is the awareness of a target situation—a definable need to communicate in English that distinguishes the ESP learner from the learner of General English.

(Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: p. 54)
2.1.4 The Development of Needs Analysis

A review of literature reveals that needs analysis has gone through several stages of evolution. In the beginning stages, i.e. during the 60s and early 70s, ESP was influenced by language-centered approaches, especially register analysis. It was the discrete language items (grammar, lexis) which were used to define needs. In the late 70s, however, the emphasis shifted to functions. However with the introduction of Munby's Communicative Syllabus Design (1978) to the field of ELT, ‘situations’ and ‘functions’ were given the central focus in the realm of needs analysis. He introduced the 'communication needs processor' (CNP) in his book which was the basis of his approach to needs analysis. Following Munby's model, Chambers (1980) introduced Target Situation Analysis (TSA) to the field, and since then, several other scholars have introduced several new terms to the field, such as, Present Situation Analysis (PSA), Pedagogic Needs Analysis (PNA), Deficiency Analysis (DA), Strategy Analysis (SA) or Learning Needs Analysis (LNA) (Haseli Songhori, 2008).

2.1.4.1 Munby’s Target Situation Analysis (TSA)

As stated earlier, needs analysis as a functional approach was practically established in the middle 1970s (West, 1998). Prior to that time, needs analysis mainly involved linguistic and/or register analyses; needs were viewed as discrete grammar and vocabulary language items (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998). However, research showed that functions and situations were equally fundamental (Hutchinson and Waters 1987). In fact with the introduction of Munby’s Communicative Syllabus Design in 1978, needs analysis changed its directions towards regarding the learners’ aims as central within needs analysis and consequently the concept of target needs became of great importance and interest.
Munby first introduced the Communicative Needs Processor (CNP) in his 1978 Communicative Syllabus Design which was greatly appreciated by other ESP scholars:

> With the development of the CNP it seemed as if ESP had come of age. The machinery for identifying the needs of any group of learners had been provided: all the course designers had to do was to operate it.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 54)

In earlier models of needs analysis, lists of vocabulary and grammatical structures were used as the predictor of the learners’ future language needs. However, according to West (1998), in Munby’s CNP model, by studying the target situation, the target needs and target level performance of the L2 users are identified; in fact, his model generally places needs analysis as central to ESP materials or course design.

In CNP, Munby (1978: 32) takes into consideration “the variables that affect communication needs by organizing them as parameters in a dynamic relationship to each other”. His model generally consists of the following parameters (see Fig. 2.1):

Figure 2.1: Munby’s CNP Model (1978)
I. **Participants**: information about learners’ personal and linguistic backgrounds such as gender, age, country of origin, current proficiency of the target language, and information about the other languages they know and their proficiency levels in those languages;

II. **Communication Needs Processor**: information about the specific communication needs of the second or foreign language learners based on socio-cultural and stylistic variables, what the prospective users really need in order to be able to use language that is socio-culturally sound and appropriate, which together with a profile of such needs of the user of the language will help the learners to be able to function efficiently in the target situation;

III. **Profile of Needs**: information obtained through the processing of data in the CNP in order to give a picture of the needs;

IV. **Meaning Processor**: attempts to assign semantic values with relevant pragmatic dimension to the communication needs in the socio-cultural profile of the communication needs;

V. **The Language Skills Selector**: “the specific language skills that are required to realize the events or activities that have been identified in the CNP” (Munby, 1978: 40);

VI. **The Linguistic Encoder**: “the dimension of contextual appropriacy” (Munby, 1978: 49) that is, whether the linguistic choices which have been allocated to various events and activities are appropriate with regard to the context;

VII. **The Communicative Competence Specification**: a description of the expected communicative competence of the ESP language user which is in fact the ultimate goal of the needs profile.
From the seven mentioned components of Munby’s model, the most important one or at least the one which has mostly been based on or referred to in the literature of needs analysis is the Communication Needs Processor (CNP) (Haseli Songhori, 2008). CNP is in fact the basis of needs analysis in Munby’s framework which, through processing of eight elements, provides a rather thorough profile of the specific communication needs for an ESP language learner. Those eight parameters introduced by Munby (1987) are given in figure 2.2:

![Figure 2.2: Munby’s Parameters for CNP Model (1978)](image-url)
I. **Purposive domain**: in this area the goals for which the second language would be used by the learner at the end of the ESP training will be considered and investigated.

II. **Setting**: in this area certain physical and psychological aspects of target situations where the learners would use the language would be considered. Physical aspect involves the spatial and temporal features of the situation and the psychological aspect investigates the environment in which the language might be used.

III. **Interaction**: this area investigates the learners’ prospectus interlocutors and their relations.

IV. **Instrumentality**: this area investigates the medium of the language to be used- whether written or spoken-, the mode of the language to be used- whether in monologue, dialogue or any other form-, and the channel of communication in the language to be used- whether face to face, on the phone, or any other.

V. **Dialect**: this area investigates the dialects of the target language that learners need to be familiar with in order to both understand and produce the language properly in terms of the spatial, temporal, and social aspects.

VI. **Communicative event**: this area studies the L2 users’ needs in order to be able to produce and comprehend the target language efficiently.

VII. **Communicative key**: this area involves the socio linguistic aspect of the use of the target language and focuses on appropriate language use, like being polite in different events.

VIII. **Target level**: this area predicts the language proficiency level of the L2 users by the end of ESP training, which might not necessarily be the same for all skills.
Munby’s main objective in CNP was actually finding a comprehensive account of the target language forms that L2 learners would most probably use in their prospective L2 situations; in fact, for learners to be able to function efficiently in the target language situations, they need to be taught according to the data which has been produced by the means of Munby’s communication needs processor (CNP). And according to Robinson (1991), for the reason of being so thorough and comprehensive in terms of the data regarding the learners and their target language situations, Munby’s framework was applied by a lot of ESP researchers thereafter.

Very closely related to CNP was TSA, Target Situation Analysis, which was first introduced by Chambers (1980). For him, target situation analysis referred to communication in the target situation. However, most researchers followed the CNP framework rather than TSA; for example Hutchinson and Waters came up with a list of questions by answering which the needs analysts were able to define a thorough target situation description leading to target situation analysis (Hutchinson and Waters 1987).

Despite the great benefits and potentials that Munby’s framework had to offer, there were, however, some problems associated with that. For example, as Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) mention, although the model included micro functions in the CNP, they had not been prioritized, nor had been any affective factors included in the model. Or as Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state, using CNP would be too time consuming to be applied for each learner, it also takes into consideration the analyst’s points of view and not of the learners’ and others’, and finally learning needs, wants and necessities have not been considered and included either.
One of the other critics of Munby’s Model was West (1994) according to whom the drawbacks of CNP would be summarized in the four following categories:

I. Complication: Since the model tries to be as thorough as possible, it would obviously be time-consuming and complicated.

II. Learner: Although the model claims to be learner-centered, data collected is most of the time about the learner. In a learner-centered approach, the data should have been gathered from the learner.

III. Limitations: According to Munby, limitations should be dealt with once the needs analysis has been carried out, while to many others, constraints of practicality have to be taken into consideration at the onset of needs analysis or any other course planning or designing.

IV. Language Syllabus: Munby does not practically provide guidelines and the processes of translating language learners’ needs profile into a practical language syllable.

2.1.4.2 Present Situation Analysis (PSA)

As the name indicates, present situation analysis (PSA) is the counterpart of target situation analysis (TSA). Whereas in TSA the analysts consider the learners’ expected target situation linguistic features and expected language proficiency level, in PSA they take into considerations learners’ present proficiency level and their other characteristics at the start of or prior to the course. Once it is established where the learners are at the onset, it would be more possible to practically take them where we expect at the end. "A PSA estimates strengths and weaknesses in language, skills, and learning experiences" Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998).
Richterich and Chencrel first introduced Present Situation Analysis to the field of needs analysis and ESP. In their approach, information regarding the learners was obtained from the learners themselves and the situations they were at the time of need analysis. In order to obtain a profile of the learners and their current proficiency levels, they used questionnaires and placement tests. The questionnaires would collect data on the learners’ current situation like the languages they knew, their special abilities, their level of education and others, and the placement test would determine their language proficiency level at the beginning of the course.

However as can be seen, although PSA complemented TSA by providing data on the learners’ situation at the beginning of the course, it did not necessarily address and resolve the problems, one of the most serious ones being the issue of practicality and limitations, that were ascribed to TSA. As a result, there was still a need for the new frameworks and models to be introduced to the field.

2.1.4.3 Pedagogic Needs Analysis

As mentioned earlier, West (1998) mentioned four main problems with TSA developed by Munby (1978). In order to compensate for the shortcomings of Munby’s models, West introduced the general term ‘Pedagogic Needs Analysis’ (PNA); PNA itself consisted of three subcategories namely: Deficiency Analysis (DA), Strategy Analysis (SA) or Learning Needs Analysis (LNA), and Means Analysis (MA) West (1998).

Deficiency Analysis

Deficiency analysis which is mainly understood from the learners’ present situation analysis is actually an analysis of what it takes to take the learners from their present situation to the target situation. In other words, it needs to draw on the data on both sides. Firstly, it needs to understand the learners’ current situation and their present proficiency level in the target
language and secondly, it needs to predict the learners’ expected proficiency level in the target situations. It would address the gap that needs to be filled between the current situation and the target situation.

The following figure is a graphic realization of deficiency analysis:

![Figure 2.3: Deficiency Analysis](image)

**Learning Needs Analysis or Strategy Analysis**

So far and as far as the different approaches to needs analysis such as present situation or target situation analyses are concerned, the models have been entirely focusing on the language or the learners themselves but not on the strategies applied by the learners in the process of learning. However, in Learning Needs Analysis (LNA) or Strategy Analysis (SA) the focus is on the learners’ strategies in second language learning.

According to Jordan (1997), the first ESP scholar who used SA was Allwright who in his research and practices got the learners to state in their own words their viewpoints regarding language learning and their perceived language needs.
He also introduced and differentiated needs, wants and lacks. By ‘needs’ he meant the skills that the learners regarded as relevant to themselves, by ‘wants’ he meant the needs which were prior to the learners based on their situations, and finally by ‘lacks’ he meant what the learners perceived would be the gap between what they knew about the language at their present situation and what they expected to acquire in the end. This model was later applied in Hutchinson and Waters’ (1987) approach because to them the learners’ learning needs were of great importance and their model of language teaching generally favored a learning-centered teaching approach and they believed that LNA would provide the educators with what needs to be done for the learners to learn the language. To them ESP was not an end by itself but a means to the end. In other words, they advocated a process oriented approach to language teaching rather than a product oriented one.

This approach was welcomed by others such as Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) who believed that we need to teach learners skills that make them capable of reaching their second language learning goals and central to this is consideration of certain learners’ factors such as their motivation, learning strategies and processes, and learning styles. The other advocate is Jordan (1997: 26) who quotes Bower (1980) on the significance of learning needs:

If we accept...that a student will learn best what he **wants** to learn, less well what he only **needs** to learn, less well still what he either wants or needs to learn, it is clearly important to leave room in a learning programme for the learner’s own wishes regarding both goals and processes.

Hutchinson and Waters’ (1987) model of SA or LNA consists of four groups of questions which are themselves divided into more in depth ones. Their framework is given in the following by quoting from Haseli Songhori (2008):

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1. **Why** are the learners taking the course?
   - Compulsory or optional;
   - known needs or unknown reasons for learning;
   - Are status, money, and promotion involved?
   - What do learners think they will achieve?
   - What is their attitude towards the ESP course? Do they want to improve their English or do they resent the time they have to spend on it?

2. **How** do the learners learn?
   - What is their learning background?
   - What is their concept of teaching and learning?
   - What methodology will appeal to them?
   - What sort of techniques bore/alienate them?

3. **What** sources are available?
   - number and professional competence of teachers;
   - attitude of teachers to ESP;
   - teachers' knowledge of and attitude to subject content;
   - materials;
   - aids;
   - opportunities for out-of-class activities.
4. Who are the learners?

- age/ sex/ nationality;
- What do they already know about English?
- What subject knowledge do they have?
- What are their interests?
- What is their socio-cultural background?
- What teaching styles are they used to?
- What is their attitude to English or to the cultures of the English speaking world?

(Hutchinson and Waters (1987) quoted from Haseli Songhori (2008))

Means Analysis

As stated earlier, a major drawback of Munby’s model was the fact that it had not taken the issue of practicality into consideration. In other words, the framework would not be able to predict and react to the probable constraint and limitations in the process of implementing the courses. However, in mean analysis the focus is on the viability of the designs and plans in the course of teaching and learning. And the question is “Would what we have planned be possible to be practiced based on the circumstances of the situation and the environment?”

There are two other relevant issues in this regard. One is the culture; that means if culture has been considered in the course of planning and teaching and whether the course is culturally sensitive enough not to cause any misunderstandings or cultural conflicts. The second issue is that as Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) mentioned there might be cases where a plan or course that produces great results in one situation might fail in another situation.
2.1.4.4 A Current Concept of Needs Analysis

One recent and rather thorough concept of needs analysis is probably the one proposed by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998: 125). This approach contains all and even more than what was mentioned above regarding various approaches to needs analysis. Their model of needs analysis is summarized in figure 2.4 below:

![Figure 2.4 A Current Concept of Needs Analysis](image)

1. **Environmental situation** - information about the situation in which the course will be run (means analysis), such as the environment where the course will be run and the costs;
2. **Personal information about learners** - factors which may affect the way they learn (wants, means, and subjective needs), such as age, gender, learning strategies, motivation;

3. **Language information about learners** - what their current skills and language use are (present situation analysis), such as their proficiency level and years of language instruction they have had;

4. **Learner’s lacks** - the gap between the present situation and professional information about learners), such what they lack in language as shown by diagnostic tests;

5. **Learner's needs from course** - what is wanted from the course (short-term needs), such as the course objectives and the learners’ expectations;

6. **Language learning needs** - effective ways of learning the skills and language determined by lacks, such as new strategies that could help the learners improve their skills;

7. **Professional information about learners** - the tasks and activities English learners are/will be using English for (Target Situation Analysis and objective needs), such as their future positions;

8. **Communication in the target situation** – knowledge of how language and skills are used in the target situation (obtained through means such as register analysis, discourse analysis, genre analysis).

(Adapted from Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) and Haseli Songhori (2008))

It is, however, worth mentioning at this end that the various kinds of needs analyses that we reviewed here or exist elsewhere in the literature are not necessarily exclusive but rather complementary; each of them play their own role in completing the overall task.
2.1.4.5 Inclusion of Tasks and Emerging Problems in Needs Analysis

All the works done in ESP have sought to promote the communicative nature of language teaching, because starting with register analysis and formal structural analyses of the language, ESP teachers have been very concerned with the needs of students as they used the language, rather than language per se. In this regard and according to what has so far been discussed, there are still two issues which seem to be necessary and related to the current study; one is the concept of task and the other is the issue of emerging problems which is the central focus of this work.

The Inclusion of Tasks

As mentioned earlier, there are analyses of needs which focus on the structural and detailed linguistic properties of the language (e.g. Cameron, 1998) in order to design and develop language programmes for the people who are going to use the language as their second language. However, these detailed analyses have been shown to be not comprehensive and sufficient enough to predict future competency of the second language user unless they are complemented by functional analyses (Cathcart, 1989).

Furthermore, research has shown that it is not often the lack of linguistic competence per se that makes learners unable to perform adequately at work or a foreign university course (Marriot and Yamada, 1991; Marriot, 1991). The second language users in these studies were relatively competent in the use of grammar and also of the vocabulary of the second language. However, they were not very well aware of the cross cultural pragmatic differences which was the reason for their failure in the successful fulfillment of the task. So the user’s inability to perform the task successfully could depend as much on socio cultural factors as it could on the second language linguistic knowledge (Marriot, 1991; Jacoby and McNamara, 1999; Medway and Andrew, 1992); that is why for these researchers the unit of analysis is task, and they usually collect samples of discourse which are involved in the fulfillment of
the tasks relevant to the communicative needs of the particular groups of learners (Long 2005).

**Emerging Problems**

The other issue which needs to be discussed in this literature review with regard to needs analysis is the emerging problems of the users of language, here English, for specific purposes. So far, we have considered the needs of the learners and users at various points and levels. However, there might still be some problems that emerge as the users are involved in the course of the actual performance of the tasks involved or associated with the use of English for specific purposes. What this study is mainly trying to achieve, after identifying the various tasks that the international students have to perform as part of their academic venture in the university, is to identify the problems that the users face in the course of performing those tasks. Attending to these problems would lead to more successful task fulfillment and as a result the students would have better academic achievements. There is lack of research in this area, which is identifying the problems that arise while performing the tasks as far as using English for specific purposes is concerned, and this research attempts to contribute to the literature and methodology of needs analysis by investigating it.

**2.1.4.6 Summary**

In this section, a review of the developments in needs analysis was presented. First, there was an introduction of the early accounts of needs analysis. Then, further developments and reforms in the approach were discussed and later, the section provided a more recent and multi faceted needs analysis process. The section ended with two remaining issues which were the role of task in needs analysis and the emerging problems in the course of task fulfillment that this study tries to investigate.
2.2 The General Problems Faced by International Students

As mentioned in the introduction, there is not much research available considering only the English language problems of the international students. Most researchers have concentrated on the general problems confronting international students, one of which has often proven to be English language problems.

To begin with, there are studies in the literature which have investigated different problems of international students who have chosen to study in an English speaking country. These students reported various problems that they had to challenge including English language problems. Han (1997) when studying Eastern universities in Pittsburg concluded that for Korean students, “English language” along with “health service” was the most serious problem area.

Moon (1991) carried out another survey among the Korean students which had the same result. The study showed that among different factors considered in the study, English language proficiency was the most problematic area in educational issues. Parr, Bradley, & Bingi (1992) mentioned that international students face major hurdles with essay examinations and taking notes while the lecturer is speaking due to the lack of English proficiency. On the other hand, their performance as teaching assistants led them to be confronted with problems; because of their different accents, expressions and teaching methods, their American students could not understand the lesson (Pedersen, 1991).
Joseph Kee-Kuok Wong (2003) in another research, tried to find out the problems of the Asian International Students. The survey was conducted among 78 first year to fourth year Asian international students in a university in South Australia. In order to get further information on the actual problems faced by these international students, the researcher carried out some interviews with nine of these students. According to this research, the Asian international students’ problems were categorized into three groups: different learning styles, cultural barriers and language problems. The students, due to their previous system of education, faced a lot of barriers in studying in Australia. Most of them had been used to be spoon-fed by their instructors in their home countries: this was not the case in their host country. The participants reported several problems which were based on their lack of knowledge of English. They found it a big hurdle to take notes while the lecturer was speaking. First of all, they had to understand the lecture. The Australian accent of the lecturers made this an even more difficult task. Thus it affected the note-taking process also. The other areas of difficulty were doing the assignments, and participating in group discussions.

And finally, Yeh and Yang (2003) investigated the experience of Asian graduate students in the United States. The research was conducted to discover the students’ reasons for choosing some specific universities and to clarify the ways they had used to improve their situation at their arrival at U.S colleges, and also their problems. According to the results of interviews conducted with 12 graduate students, “English language” knowledge was the most serious barrier for the students. The students confronted a lot of difficulties while they were trying to discuss a matter or show their feeling or opinion toward an issue. All the students had scored well in the TOEFL test, however. Among the English language competency problems, problems in reading fast, writing and speaking were the most crucial ones.
There are also studies which have considered the psychological and stressor factors in students’ academic lives; here too, English language problems were prominent among those problems which made their academic lives difficult. For example, Lin, Jun-Chih Gizela and Yi, Jenny K (1997), provided an overview of socio-demographic characteristics of international students and common stressors Asian international students experienced in the United States. According to this study, one of the main problems the international students had was adjusting to the English language and even the educational system. The research shows that the international students had various problems such as understanding the accent of the lecturers, comprehending the tests, reading relevant texts and limited vocabulary knowledge. In addition, some of these Asian International students were assigned as teaching assistants, causing other problems. The students who participated in their classes sometimes had complaints about their foreign accents. As a result, chances of miscommunication in these classes increased and the affected students had less comprehension than the others.

In another study, Cheng, Ding, and Perez (1998) evaluated the East Asian student Stressor Inventory. They examined different areas of difficulty like English efficiency, family pressure, social support, academic performance, culture shock, and financial difficulties. The study showed that “English language” proficiency had a very important effect on students’ stress.

Lin & Yi (1997) believed low level of English language proficiency could be related to academic performance; furthermore, it could affect international students’ psychological health. Sandhu (1994) in a study on the psychological needs of the international students mentioned that those international students who came from non-English speaking countries were more likely to have problems than the others. According to the researcher, these students were at a high risk of developing psychological problems, especially as these students could not express their concerns because of lack of language and social skills.
Another group of studies revealed how lack of language proficiency hinders the students from using the service and facilities provided by the university optimally. Deirdre Coghlan et al (2005) conducted a survey among the international students and professionals in Ireland. The research aimed to analyze access to higher education and recognition of professional qualifications. In this research different areas were analyzed, among which there was once again problems with performing in English Language. As was obvious, a lot of students faced problems with English. The most significant problem was the inability to integrate and communicate with the professionals who provided services for the foreign students. A large number of students in their study could not be successful in the required English proficiency examinations required for studying at the universities (like TOEFL or IELTS exams). Those students who entered the university still had problems with English language proficiency and had to pay a lot to attend extra English classes. One of participants in the study said,

“I think the language barrier is still the big problem, no matter what you want to do, even if you just want to buy something. The first thing is to solve this. I studied hard, because the culture is different and the communication skill is very different. Even though I’d been learning English since grade 4 in elementary school- maybe 9 years old. That’s a standard course in China, you must do it. They even start from 6 now. But we are very good at grammar or words but most Chinese people are very poor at Spoken English and listening. Mostly even if they understand the words, they can’t speak very well.”
As English language is the main means of communication for the international students, lack of knowledge of the English language might prevent them from enjoying the facilities of the foreign universities, since they cannot understand English very well. Hajar Safahieh & Diljit Singh (2006) in a study at the University of Malaya surveyed the information needs of international students at this Malaysian university. Among the 54 participants, the main information needs were related to the faculty, university and their programmes of study. The researchers found that many students could not use the facilities provided at university, like the library, because of the English language barrier. As a result, English language competency was assumed to be the main hurdle for the information needs. The participants were asked to rate their English language knowledge along with some other skills like computer and internet proficiency. According to the results, almost half of the respondents in their study were not able to get sufficient information about their majors or the facilities available in the university due to their low proficiency level in the English language.

2.2.1 Summary

This section presented a number of different studies in American and Australian universities which had investigated the problems of the international students in general. In all of the studies the students mentioned problems with English language as being one of the major difficulties that confronted them along with other challenges of studying and living in an English speaking country.
2.3 The Academic Problems Faced by International Students

As several researchers have looked into the general problems among international students, others have focused their attention specifically on academic problems in relation to students’ English language proficiency. Gradman and Hanania (1991), for example, found a strong correlation between TOEFL scores and the amount of reading in which the students had engaged in out of the classroom. Also the effect of contact with native speakers on their general language proficiency and how all these would help them overcome their language barriers. Xu (1991), on the other hand, did not find any correlation between their TOEFL scores and perceived academic difficulties in an American graduate school. Xu’s findings showed that their self-rated language proficiency was the biggest predictor of the magnitude of academic difficulty. And he concluded that attending language preparatory programmes is important for international students before they pursue advanced degrees in the United States. By academic difficulty he does not only mean and include language use problems but others such as understanding the content itself and dealing with exams and assignments. This means perfect performance in the university as far as use of the language is concerned involves successful fulfillment of a variety of tasks that one has to accomplish in his or her academic life such as understanding lectures, text books and exam questions, on the one hand, and producing language in giving presentations, writing projects, and answering exam questions on the other.

In various surveys, a lot of students were reported to have problems with the use of English for academic purposes; English language proficiency was chosen to be the most serious barrier for most of the international students. For example, Spaulding & Flack (1976) cited from Sharma’s study on foreign students attending North Carolina; among the problems with English for academic purposes, “giving oral reports”, “participating in class discussions”,
“preparing written reports”, “taking notes in class”, and “understanding lectures” were the
most significant (p.47).

Ali (1991), using questionnaires and interviews with Malaysian and Indonesian students in an
American university, also found that “participation in whole class activities”, “writing
academic English for term papers and examinations”, and “reading large quantities of reading
assignments” were among the most serious problems of the students in their academic life
along with the other problems that the students faced abroad.

In general, foreign students had a severe problem in using English for academic purposes. As
claimed by a research, such a problem was more apparent among the arts and humanities
students due to a lack of EAP instruction. Angelova (1998) stated that the international
students studying in humanities had the most serious problem in academic writing compared
to the students of science and business communications. Angelova found out that for the
students of science and business communication faculties, the conventional disciplinary
discourses were relatively well defined because these students had been forced to attend
remedial classes to improve their writing skills because of their lack of proficiency in
academic writing. Unlike these students, students in the faculties of arts and humanities faced
more problems with writing complicated genres because of the lack of intensive writing
courses and as a result less preparation.

Some researches took a further step into understanding the academic problem of students
with English and tried to identify the language skills which were lacking. Hull (1978) stated
that Asian students compared to the other international students, had lower performance in
the following areas: “writing papers, reading speed, reading comprehension, speaking in
class, understanding discussion, and understanding lectures.” (p. 60) According to this
research, among the four components of English language, reading, writing, speaking and listening, writing was reported to be the most challenging component.

Angelova (1998) concluded that the difficulties faced by international students in academic writing were due to various pitfalls. According to this study, academic writing was a very difficult process in which various skills were required to be successful: grammar and formatting, knowledge of technical vocabulary, critical thinking ability, mastery of the American rhetorical style, understanding of text structure and organization, and mastery of the conventions of a discipline. These areas were great hurdles for foreign students.

Dolan (1997) also reported that many international students do not have the courage to participate in classroom discussions. According to him, the low language proficiency of the students leads to their fear of participating in the class discussions when speaking in English. On the other hand, because of limited listening skills, their understanding of the classroom discussion is affected. As a result, they might not demonstrate a good performance in the classroom.

Phongsuwan (1997), trying to figure out the problems of Thai students in an Eastern American university, also found that besides difficulties with the new social life, customs, cultures, and learning methodology, the students reported English language problems with pronunciation, inadequate vocabulary, low reading and writing speed, and native speaker speaking rate.

Also, Isvet Amri Novera (2004) conducted a research on Indonesian postgraduate students studying in Australia. In this research the students’ academic, social and cultural experiences were examined. The study confirmed the results of many others (for example, Robertson, et al., 2000: Li, et al., 2002: Bayley, et al., 2002) in finding that language difficulties were a significant hurdle for learning by Indonesian students, and a major factor in their cultural and
educational adjustments. In Isevat’s research 23 out of 25 of the participants were reported to have faced at least some English language problems in an academic setting. Among the problems, writing essays and making oral presentations were the most frequently mentioned ones. As the researcher mentioned, it was almost impossible for Indonesians students not to make grammatical mistakes. Such a problem leads to difficulties with English in academic settings.

Cummins (1984, in Borland and Pearce, 2002: p.109), on the other hand, noted that it took longer for language learners to become competent in the academic context. The research showed that some of the students had speaking problems, too. The problem was due to insufficient practice in conducting class presentations and their unfamiliarity with the topics of discussions. The above problems caused the Indonesian students of his study to be inactive and the local students to dominate the classroom. In addition, some of the participants complained about their reading comprehension and writing abilities. They were not very competent writers and readers, since they did not have sufficient practice in their pre-university setting in their own country.

2.3.1 Summary

In this part of the literature review, the researcher presents some studies that investigated the academic problems of international students and difficulties they had with using English in various areas. Some studies had also discussed the skills that were lacking in the international students’ English language proficiency which contributed to their problems.
2.4 The Michigan International Students Problem Inventory (MISPI)

A large number of dissertations have used the Michigan International Students Problem Inventory (MISPI) as their measuring instrument. The MISPI consists of several problem areas which include 132 items: The problem areas include:

- admission-selection,
- orientation service,
- social-personal,
- living-dining,
- health service,
- religious service,
- student activity,
- academic record,
- English language,
- financial aid,
- and placement service.

Porter, as cited in Breuder (1972), mentions that this questionnaire has been developed to help international students highlight their problems, and this study shows the differences in answers, which might be related to different sub-groups of International students. Along with the mentioned instrument, researchers have considered some other factors such as age, gender, nationality, academic status (that is being an undergraduate or a graduate student), marital status, length of study/stay in America, and field of study.
A number of Asian researchers from South East Asia and the Middle East have used this questionnaire to study the Asian students’ problems in American universities. Poorshaghaghi (1993) conducted a survey in a college to come up with the various demographic variables which could influence the students-perceived problems. According to Poorshaghaghi’s study, “English language” was the most frequently mentioned problem by students.

Shabeeb (1997) also used the MISPI instrument and conducted the survey among Saudi and Arabian Gulf students from six colleges and universities in the East of the United States. The aim of the survey was to identify and study adjustment problems and concerns of these students while studying at colleges in eastern Washington. Shabeeb, like many other researchers used the MISPI (Porter, 1966). The questionnaire was mailed to 150 Arab students in the fall of 1995. In total, 103 of the questionnaires were investigated, and different factors such as gender, marital status, age, scholarship status, level of study, and major fields were evaluated. Like the other studies, the results showed that “English language” was the most problematic area for these students. Female students reported more problems in the area of academic records, which means results they got from different examinations in the subjects of their areas of study. Male students, on the other hand, faced more problems with English language than female students did. There were some other problems that the students faced as well, like social-personal, living-dining, academic services, and financial aid. The most noticeable fact is that “English language” was ranked as problem number one!

Like Shabeeb, Xia (1992) chose students from eight different Asian countries to find out the problematic areas of difficulty among this group. Like the other studies, he realized that the “English language” was the biggest problem area. It is worth mentioning that Xia’s research showed that there were differences among the participants from different countries. For example, Korean and Taiwanese students had the biggest problems with English language compared to the other students. On the other hand, Indian students had the fewest difficulties.
in the area of “English language” use in the academic setting probably because of the language use background (English was the language of instruction in their schools).

In another study, Payind (1979) surveyed the problems of Iranian and Afghan students at nine universities in the United States. The researcher conducted the survey with the use of questionnaires and individual interviews. The questionnaires were mailed to the students and later some students were interviewed. The students answered to the Likert-scale questionnaires to evaluate and analyze the degree of the eight areas of difficulty. They English language was reported to be the most serious problem. The students complained about the lack of English language proficiency. The areas of concern were: the use of English for academic work, answering exam questions, and expressing thoughts in English.

And finally, Mahdavi-Harsini (1981) conducted a research among Iranians, Malaysians, Nigerians, Saudi Arabians and Taiwanese. The research was done with the help of the MISPI questionnaire. Conducting the research showed that among the above international students, “living-dining”, “English language” and “financial aid” were the most highlighted problem areas. Unlike many other researches, the “English language” problem was the second area of difficulty for students: “Social-Personal” problems were ranked the first. Saudi Arabian and Taiwanese students stated that “English language” problem was the most serious problem for them, though.

One study, however, included international students from a variety of countries; Galloway & Jenkins (2005) sent questionnaires to 417 foreign students in California and Texas 215 of which were completed and returned. The research aimed to do a comparison between the international students and administrative perceptions at two private, religiously affiliated universities. The MISPI was used as the instrument for conducting the research. As a result, three of the areas were reported as the major problematic ones: financial aid, placement
services and the English language. Despite the fact that problems with English language along with two other areas were the obstacles, English was reported to be the most serious area of difficulty. Students had difficulties in different areas mostly because of their deficiency in the English language.

Some researchers used the MISPI and included other factors; for example, Breuder (1972) surveyed some special areas causing problems for international students. He used the MISPI to do a comparison between the international students attending public junior colleges in Florida with the foreign students at a university. In his research, he considered the following factors:

a) Students’ use of English out of the classroom,

b) Gender,

c) The amount of time spent on campus,

d) School environment (rural or urban),

e) Size of international student body (fewer or more than fifty students in one college).

The study showed that having problems with financial aid along with the difficulty with English language as being the most serious problem areas.
There were researches that included interviews as well. Moshfegh (1989) did a study on Iranian students’ problems in the U.S. universities; Individual interviews were conducted among the Iranian students with the aim of finding their social, academic and personal problems. The questionnaire covered all the eleven problem areas of MISPI. Along with the expressed social and personal problems, some language problems were expressed, too. As far as academic problems were concerned, none of the students reported a serious problem, though. Some of the students mentioned that they had difficulties with “speaking in the class”, “competing with American students”, “insufficient time to do school projects”, “taking notes in the class”, “writing reports”, and “typing papers”. According to Moshfegh, interviewing the students was much more beneficial than mailing them the questionnaire. According to her, there were four advantages in conducting the interview which were the following:

a) Mailing the questionnaire mostly results in ignoring it and not getting the response;

b) while the students answer the questionnaire in the interview session, the interviewer can process and proceed conveniently because the respondents are available for clarifications and the researcher does not have to wait to see if he or she would get responses or not;

c) the interviewer can ask follow-up questions during the interview to make sure of his/her understanding of the responses;

d) it is much cheaper because they do not have to pay the mailing costs.

Ellis (1978) accomplished a research like what Moshfegh did. Like her, Ellis used constructed interviews among some randomly selected international students from different countries except Canada and European countries. The researcher did not mail the questionnaires to the students but organized individual interviews to get detailed answers.
The survey covered the problem areas as mentioned in the MISPI along with some other academic issues such as teaching methods, applicability of the education to the home country, quality of academic programmes, availability of desired courses, department advisors, and students’ experience in classrooms. In order to categorize the English language problem area into detailed ones, the researcher developed detailed questions and got the following results. Almost most of the students had problems with:

a) reading rate: they had to spend more time studying than the others,
b) conducting oral presentations in the classroom,
c) translating the English texts to their mother tongue language for better understanding, and
d) understanding colloquial English.

The survey proved that among all the above problematic areas, “Speaking English” was the most problematic one compared to “writing problems”. As a matter of fact, speaking problems could lead to their failures in the academic and social aspects of their student lives. According to Ellis, there was a “vicious cycle” where students could not integrate with the others; the students were afraid of being humiliated because of their insufficient command of the English language. The mentioned problem could lead to their frustration and they could not improve their speaking ability.

2.4.1 Summary

This section reviewed the studies which had used the MISPI as the main means of data collection to identify the problems of the international students. In most of the researches
conducted by the use of MISPI, “English language” was often present among the academic problems of the international students as a relatively serious problem.

2.5 The Adjustment Problems Faced by International Students

A lot of studies have been carried out to discover the adjustment problems of the students. In these kinds of studies, a lot of factors have been surveyed among which there were language issues. These researches have shown language barrier along with other barriers that the international students from different parts of the world face and have to adjust to.

Some studies used questionnaires to investigate the adjustment problems of the international students from different parts of the world in American universities. Yeung (1980) in a study explored the adjustment problems of international students at the North Texas University in America. This study was conducted to clarify the special adjustment problems the international students faced upon arrival at a foreign university. The students had anticipated some specific adjustment problems, but there turned out to be different upon arrival. 67 participants took part in the survey and the problems were categorized into seven categories:

a) Communication and language,

b) international student advising,

c) academic,

d) psychological-personal,

e) financial,

f) health, and
g) food.

The most serious problems were understanding American idioms and slang, class participation, adjusting to different accents, expressing ideas and emotions in English, writing project papers, developing English vocabulary, getting scholarship from the university, making friends in America, and adjustment with food. As far as language problems were concerned, the researcher suggested remedial English classes as a solution to their problems.

In another study, Junius (1987) surveyed international students’ adjustment problems at the Northern Arizona University. A sample of 121 international students were studied to identify the different areas of difficulty like: personal services, admission, orientation, academic process, social, living-dining, English Language, students’ activities, health services, financial aid, religious services, placement and international student services. The study showed that the students’ greatest problems were living-dining, English language and health services.

In the meantime, some others incorporated interviews in their studies to further validate their findings. Kono (1999) in a qualitative research surveyed adjustment experiences of students and the strategies the students used to cope with those barriers in America. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 foreign students from 13 countries. Each participant had to answer six open-ended questions. Audio-recording was used to record their speech. Using Spradley’s (1979 and 1980) ethnographic analysis procedure, Kono realized that language, academic and social factors were the most serious barriers. The major suggestions of this study were remedial English language classes and counseling facilities.

The other study which used a qualitative approach was Nezahat Guluca’s (1993). Nezahat Guclu in a study examined the adjustment problems of international graduate students attending the University of Pittsburgh and coping strategies and sources of help utilized by
these students in their efforts to deal with the problems they faced. The survey was conducted among five hundred international students from 90 different countries. The researcher used a questionnaire plus three additional open ended questions to accomplish the research. Among the researcher’s findings, having problem with English language along with financial problems were the first problems reported by international students. The research showed that those students who had obtained high English proficiency scores had fewer problems than those who had low English proficiency scores.

The issue of the relationship between English language proficiency and the adjustment problems was studied in further detail in a number of other studies. Lin, Jun-Chih Gisela and Yi, Jenny K (1997) did a research on the Asian international students’ adjustment issues. As they reported in their findings, international students face different problems like racial discrimination, language problems, accommodation difficulties, dietary restrictions, financial stress, misunderstanding, and loneliness. The study showed that most of these problems were due to their low level of English language proficiency. These students had academic problems because of the language barrier. As a result, these academic problems were correlated with adjustment. Students reported various problems which had a great effect on their adjustment issues. They had difficulty with understanding the accent of the lecturers, which resulted in not understanding the lecture and not being able to participate in the class discussions. In addition, students were not able to comprehend the test constructions. Students had to allocate more time to reading the text books because of their low level of English language proficiency. Moreover, they could not answer the exam questions successfully due to the lack of vocabulary. Many Asian international students confronted this major problem which led to experiencing a great deal of stress in the United States (ibid).
Poyrazli et al. (2004) also reported that low level of English language proficiency along with lack of social support led to a lower level of adjustment among the international students. And finally, a study investigated the relationship between the language competency and the students’ GPAs. Poyrazli et al (2001) surveyed the adjustment issues of Turkish college students studying in the United States using ISAS (Instrument of Student Adjustment Strain). The survey was conducted among 79 Turkish college students in the age range of 19 to 34 years. The results showed that those who were competent English language users had better Grade Point Averages. Moreover, those young students who had better reading and writing English language skills could adjust better than the others. Generally, the research showed a strong relationship between the age factor and proficiency in reading and writing English language with adjustment level in studying at an overseas university.

However, a high proficiency test score did not necessarily guarantee students’ perfect adjustment and performance in the foreign country. Helen Huntley, (1993) investigated Adult International Students Problems of Adjustment in American Universities. According to this study, the first barrier the students encountered was the English language problem. Although the students had passed TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) they were not yet competent users of English language. They needed English language competency for formal and conversational situations. One third of the participants in this survey had rated their English language competency inadequate for carrying out their studies when entering the university. Therefore, many of these students had to register for specific English classes to enhance the necessary knowledge of English language. Consequently, they had to spend more time and money on English learning instead of starting their academic studies at the university.
Huntley, quoted from her participants stating that understanding lectures, taking notes, answering questions, and writing project reports were the most serious problems the Asian students faced:

“Teachers say, “Why are Chinese quiet?” Understanding problems causes silence and vocabulary causes difficulties. My skill of writing is quite poor. Sometimes I do poorly in exams because my English isn’t enough. I express things in my own way and the Profs don’t get it”

Moreover, the students due to the study backgrounds in their own countries were not used to giving oral presentations in the class which led to them having a serious problem in giving oral presentations in the class and participating in group discussions:

“Usually, I don’t participate. It is cultural that I don’t do it. I’m not used to it. Other Chinese students are active when the Prof asks the class to list facts, but when there should be discussion and defending points, Canadians take over. We are not taught to be argumentative. We are taught to listen”.

There were also some students who might have been good at reading and writing, but due to their poor knowledge of listening and speaking they could not communicate with their peers at university. They usually did not understand the native speakers’ accents, idioms and jokes:

“We learn Standard English in China, but we know little idiom. People hare speak with southern accent, talk in idioms, so that we hardly understand. I have trouble understanding American jokes. When they laugh, I don’t know what they are laughing about, which makes me feel bad”.
2.5.1 Summary

In this section, the researcher reviewed the studies which had investigated the adjustment problems of the international students in English speaking countries. As shown above, English language problems here too are among the serious problems that the students have to face in order to be able to adjust themselves to the new academic setting.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter surveyed the related literature concerning needs analysis and the studies which have so far investigated various problems of the international students with regard to different aspects of education in an English speaking academic setting. Although, as we observe, a lot has been done in this area of research, this study still would add to the current literature due to two major reasons. First, in the literature of needs analysis no studies have focused on the ESP problems of the users of the second or foreign language. Secondly, there are no other studies which have investigated the ESP problems of the international students in Malaysia. Having these two deficiencies in mind, the researcher conducted this study. The methodology and data analysis results will be presented in the following chapters.