

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings of the data analysis are presented. The chapter presents an overall and multi-faceted picture of the problems of the international students with regard to the use of English for academic purposes by means of quantitative and qualitative data analyses and findings. According to the research questions presented in chapter one, first, I will present the various tasks that the international students are involved in which requires the use of English for academic purposes (EAP). Then, the most problematic areas will be discussed followed by other findings that seek to explain what makes these areas problematic for the students. Later in the chapter, the perceptions of the lecturers regarding the problems of the international students with the use of EAP will be presented. Finally, an account of the students' and lecturers' perceptions regarding the possible solutions to the problems will be given.

4.1 Response rate

A total of 210 questionnaires were completed and returned to be included in the data analysis. (68 questionnaires from the Faculty of Education (FE) and 142 questionnaires from the Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology (FCSIT), were obtained, i.e. 45.3% of the population of international students of the FE and 52% of the population of

international students of the FCSIT participated in the study by returning questionnaires). The details with regard to the respondents from the two faculties are given in the table below:

Table 4.1: The Percentage of Respondents from the Faculties of Education and Computer Science

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Education	68	32.4	32.4	32.4
	Computer S	142	67.6	67.6	100.0
	Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Most of the respondents were Iranian and Middle East Arab students followed by the African Arab, Chinese, and others (see table 4.2 below). This is quite understandable when one considers the number of Iranian and Middle East Arab students, who form the bulk of the population of the international students in the two faculties. 55.8% of all international students in the two faculties come from Iran and Middle East Arab countries while the other 44.2% come from 30 different countries. Iranian students themselves comprise 31.44% of the whole population in the two faculties.

Table 4.2: The Percentage of the Respondents from the Faculties of Ed and CS based on their countries of origin

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Iranian	100	47.6	47.6	47.6
	Middle East Arab	52	24.8	24.8	72.4
	African Arab	26	12.4	12.4	84.8
	Chinese	20	9.5	9.5	94.3
	Others	12	5.7	5.7	100.0
	Total	210	100.0	100.0	

4.2 Areas of Language Use for Academic Purposes

There are mainly seven areas in which the students use English for academic purposes:

- 1- Note taking during lectures,
- 2- Writing reviews and other project papers,
- 3- Oral presentations,
- 4- Answering exam questions,
- 5- Reading comprehension of text books and journals,
- 6- Understanding lectures, and
- 7- Participating in group discussions and tutorials.

The areas of language use stated above can be generally categorized into three groups. The first group is one which requires producing the language, in other words it is the productive mode of language use, and includes taking notes, writing reviews and project papers, oral presentations, and answering exam questions. The second group reflects the receptive mode of language use in which the users have to receive and comprehend messages; as far as the above mentioned areas of language use for the participants in this study are concerned, reading texts and understanding lectures belong to this group of receptive skills. And finally, the third category of language use pertains to situations in which the language should be negotiated. Put in another way, it is interactional: 'Group discussions' is an example of such an area of language use where people interact and negotiate using language. It could, however, be argued that oral presentations and answering exam questions are at times interactional, the former being oral and the latter written in which the students interact with lecturers and other classmates in oral and written discourse. However, in these areas,

production is more dominant than negotiation; the students who are, for example, giving oral presentations must first start the discourse by producing the language and then proceed to discussions and negotiations, if there are any.

4.3 The Most Problematic Areas

As it was mentioned earlier in chapter three, the questionnaire had five options for each area of language use: ‘Always’, ‘Usually’, ‘Sometimes’, ‘Never’, and ‘Not Applicable’. Based on the frequency of the difficulties that the students faced in using English in each area they were asked to select one option.

However, we should bear in mind that the option ‘*sometimes*’ in the questionnaire got a relatively high percentage in the responses. And that is quite explainable, because no matter how good the students’ language might be, there are still chances that they *sometimes* face problems with the use of language in certain areas. So we may first need to look at the order and the frequency of the problems that *always* or *usually* challenge the students and then see in that case what some of the most challenging areas of language use are. Table 4.3, on the following page, shows the most problematic areas of language use that always or usually challenge the international students with regard to the use of EAP:

Table 4.3: The Most Problematic Areas of Language Use that Occur 'Always' or 'Usually'

<i>Areas of the Use of EAP</i>	Writing Reviews and Papers	Oral Presentations	Note Taking	Group Discussions	Exam Questions	Reading Comprehension	Understanding Lectures
<i>Percentage of Problems</i>							
<i>Always</i>	13.3%	8.6%	4.8%	7.6%	1.9%	4.8%	2.9%
<i>Usually</i>	30.5%	24.8%	17.1%	13.3%	15.2%	9.5%	10.5%
<i>Total</i>	43.8%	33.4%	21.9%	20.9%	17.1%	14.3%	13.4%

Predictably, the productive modes of language use are those areas that quite a lot of students *always* or *usually* have problems with. In fact, more than 40% of them always or usually had problems with writing reviews and papers, and more than a third with oral presentations. The interactional mode of language use follows the productive area of language use where one fifth of the international students reported they always or usually had problems with group discussions. The receptive mode lies the last in the list; comparatively, fewer students had always or usually problems with reading comprehension or understanding lecturers. In other words the students have fewer problems with understanding rather than producing or interacting in the language.

This is one way of looking at the problems. The other alternative is to consider the largest numbers of frequencies with regard to the students' problems with the use of English by including the option of 'sometimes'; the following table (4:4) shows the areas and the

1941 percentage of the students who ‘always’, ‘usually’, or ‘sometimes’ had problems with the use
1942 of English in these areas.

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1944
1945
1946

Table 4.4: The Most Problematic Areas of Language Use

<i>Areas of the Use of EAP</i>	Understanding Lectures	Writing Reviews and Papers	Oral Presentations	Note Taking	Group Discussions	Reading Comprehension	Exam Questions
<i>Percentage of Problems</i>							
<i>Always</i>	2.9%	13.3%	8.6%	4.8%	7.6%	4.8%	1.9%
<i>Usually</i>	10.5%	30.5%	24.8%	17.1%	13.3%	9.5%	15.2%
<i>Sometimes</i>	80%	48.6%	49.5%	59%	55.2%	61%	41.9%
<i>Total</i>	93.4%	92.4%	82.9%	80.9%	76.1%	75.3%	59%

1947

1948 As can be seen, *understanding lectures* and *writing reviews and other project papers* were
1949 the areas where more than 90% of the students had problems. The numbers have really
1950 swelled for all the areas, including the receptive ones.

1951 All the international students, none of whom uses English as a first language, admitted (in the
1952 interviews) that they have at least sometimes encountered problems with the use of EAP (25
1953 international students participated in the interviews). But, they mentioned that producing the
1954 language is more difficult for them than comprehending it. “*We usually understand things we*
1955 *read or listen*”, one student said, “*but when it comes to saying or writing we can not do that*”.
1956 They also stated that the mode of communication was important, i.e., whether it is written
1957 discourse or oral discourse is very important. Written discourse is much more difficult to
1958 produce than oral discourse; one of the students said: “*when you write, you have to think a lot*

1959 *and worry about grammar and vocabulary. Also you are alone. But when you talk, you don't*
1960 *need to care about formal language. Also people help you when you speak and you can*
1961 *continue*". When they write, they monitor themselves much more in terms of grammar and
1962 accuracy than when they talk. They also said when they talk and the other person does not
1963 understand what they say, they get a chance to rephrase and explain the issue again in another
1964 way. They, however, do not get a chance to clarify what they have written and submitted,
1965 simply because they do not get immediate feedback from the audience they are addressing.
1966 This is most troublesome for them in writing the reviews and papers where not only do they
1967 have problems with writing but also with the general structure of the genres involved. In
1968 other words, general writing proficiency, including grammar, vocabulary, and others, on one
1969 hand, and not knowing how to structure the overall text, how to start, how to continue, how to
1970 end and what to include in each section, on the other hand, pose the greatest problems to
1971 them in this area of language use.

1972

1973 Although written discourse is more difficult to produce compared to spoken discourse, it was
1974 easier for the students in this study to comprehend it in comparison with spoken discourse
1975 (according to the interview findings). In other words, it was easier for them to understand
1976 what they read than what they listened to. The main reasons for this were the pace and time
1977 limit. When they read, they said, they could control the pace; they could read slowly when
1978 the content and the language is hard and read faster when they have less difficulty with the
1979 content or language. They also mentioned they had the chance to go back if they did not
1980 understand a part or re read whatever they had read before. The students also said that when
1981 they read and did not understand, they were able to translate whatever they did not
1982 understand, but in listening, the time is too short for them to translate and follow the lecture

1983 simultaneously. Note taking was also much easier while reading than listening according to
1984 students because of the same reasons: time constraint, and pace.

1985 Generally the students agreed that lack of vocabulary, general or technical, could pose more
1986 problems than insufficient knowledge of structure or grammar in all the skills. They believed,
1987 especially for understanding, lack of sufficient vocabulary knowledge was the greatest barrier
1988 to their proper understanding. They said they had far fewer problems understanding sentence
1989 structures compared to the unknown vocabulary used in the sentences. Also for language
1990 production, writing or speaking, they said they needed much more vocabulary items than they
1991 needed sentence structure knowledge. They said that they could edit the grammar of the text
1992 but they could not do so for vocabulary.

1993 Interviews with the students also revealed that getting involved in interactions such as group
1994 discussions, asking questions in class or the like could be as much dependant on personality
1995 as on language proficiency, that means besides having good language skills they needed to be
1996 brave and sociable enough in order to be able to participate actively in such events;
1997 furthermore, better language proficiency would result in a stronger confidence in different
1998 areas of language use. Some students said they like to participate in discussions, but they
1999 were afraid of making mistakes. *“I do not say any thing and continue checking the grammar*
2000 *by myself... suddenly another student gives the answer”* a student commented, *“their English*
2001 *is not a lot better than me, but they are more confident”*. And as I noticed in the interview
2002 sessions some were introverts and shy and would never talk unless they were invited to do so.
2003 We might conclude that better language proficiency would build a better confidence in the
2004 students to enable them to participate more confidently in the interactions.

2005

2006 The students from the two faculties, one from the sciences (FCSIT) and one from the
2007 humanities (FE), were selected to represent the whole population of the students in the
2008 university; however, the results of the data analyses did not identify any major differences
2009 between the two as far as problems with the use of EAP in different areas of language use
2010 were concerned.

2011 In the following, each area of language use and the problems faced by the students in each of
2012 these are discussed in further detail:

2013

2014 **4.3.1 Understanding Lectures**

2015 As can be seen in the table below, only 6.7% of the students never had problems with this
2016 area of language use. At the other extreme there were about 3% of the students who always or
2017 usually struggle to understand the lectures. But the large majority (4/5 of the students) stated
2018 that they sometimes had problems with this task.

2019 Table 4.5: Problems with Understanding Lectures

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	6	2.9	2.9	2.9
	Usually	22	10.5	10.5	13.3
	Sometimes	168	80.0	80.0	93.3
	Never	14	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	210	100.0	100.0	

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There are different factors which could make understanding the lectures in English difficult for the international students; Table 4.6 gives the different subcategories which make this task difficult:

Table 4.6: Reasons for Problems with Understanding Lectures

<i>Understanding Lectures/what makes it difficult for the students</i>	<i>Percentage of students who have problems</i>
1) Different Accents and Pronunciation	88.6%
2) The Content of the Lectures	80%
3) Not understanding Malaysian-context Examples	70.5%
4) Speed of the Speech	70.5%
5) Not being able to ask questions to check understanding	65.7%
6) Lack of ESP knowledge (e.g. technical vocabulary etc.)	58.1%
7) Lack of general English proficiency	51.4%

As can be seen, both the way the lecture is delivered by the lecturers and the content of the lectures affect the understanding of lectures. Most of the students mentioned they were not very familiar with the Malaysian English accent and this was their first exposure to this variety of English; so, it was difficult for them to understand at least parts of the lecture. The other thing that they mentioned was that the lecturers were also from different races (Malay, Indian, Chinese, and those from countries other than Malaysia) which would make a difference in their accents and this would also affect the way the students understood what

2038 they (the lecturers) said in English. This would account for why almost 90% stated that they
2039 had a problem with different accents or pronunciations.

2040 The other point that the students mentioned was related to the content. They said if they read
2041 on the lecture which was going to be delivered the day after, they would have fewer problems
2042 in understanding it; that would help them in two ways: the first was to familiarize them with
2043 the topic and the related issues which would be discussed in the class, and the second was to
2044 understand the meaning of the technical words which were going to be used in the lecture the
2045 day after, so they would have less difficulty with understanding new words or expressions.
2046 The second point about content was the use of examples from the Malaysian context. Using
2047 Malaysian context examples to clarify the lecture points was also difficult for students to
2048 digest; they mentioned they did not understand the rationale behind the example.

2049 The speed of the speech also refers to the delivery; however the problem was two sided. One
2050 was that some lecturers speak fast and deliver the lecture fast without giving enough time for
2051 the students to grasp ideas, and the other was the students' lack of listening proficiency. This
2052 means the students were not competent enough to follow the lecture as far as the listening
2053 comprehension skill was concerned. Interviews revealed that both problems exist in our
2054 university; however, the interviewees mentioned that there were not many professors who
2055 spoke fast and were not patient enough to linger, answer questions or check understanding;
2056 the problem mostly originated from a lack of listening comprehension competency.

2057

2058 Also, related to the above mentioned problem, the students could not ask questions to check
2059 their understanding. As a result, some points remained vague to them and that would lead to
2060 not understanding or misunderstanding the lecture points. Students mentioned not being able

to ask questions, both because of poor language proficiency and also a fear of being wrong or embarrassed, contributes to this problem.

Almost half of the students thought they did not have enough general language proficiency to help them understand the whole lecture: this is a relatively high number for the students who were not proficient enough in the language to comprehend the lectures. During interview sessions, however, they commented that this was not a very frequent problem and barrier; it only sometimes happened to them when lack of language proficiency impeded understanding. In other words, although lack of perfect English proficiency would challenge a lot of the students, it did not block comprehension altogether at all times; it appears to be an intermittent problem.

4.3.2 Note Taking During Lectures

Note taking was one of the areas that seems to be occasionally causing problems for the students and as it can be seen '*sometimes*' here gets a very high percentage (almost 60%). It was, however, not applicable to some students who did not have any courses to attend.

Table 4.7: Problems with Note-taking

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	NA	2	1.0	1.0	1.0
	Always	10	4.8	4.8	5.7
	Usually	36	17.1	17.1	22.9
	Sometimes	124	59.0	59.0	81.9
	Never	38	18.1	18.1	100.0
	Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Also, 20% of the students *always* or *usually* have problems with note taking during lectures, a percentage which cannot be neglected.

Note taking in English appears to be difficult due to different reasons (see table 4.8 below). Almost 90% of the students stated that they could not write fast enough and “fell behind” as they were taking notes, 80% did not know the principles of taking notes and summary writing, and more than half of them could not listen and take notes at the same time. Some said they took notes in their mother tongue, and some others said they recorded the sessions if the lecturers permitted them to do so. The last resort for the students was to borrow the PowerPoint slides from the lecturers or notes from friends in the class who were better note takers.

Table 4.8: Reasons for Problems with Note-taking

<i>Note Taking/what makes it difficult for the students</i>	<i>Percentage of students who have problems</i>
1) Not being able to write fast in English	88.6%
2) Not being good at summarizing	80%
3) Not being able to listen and take notes simultaneously	70.5%

From what was presented and discussed above we can conclude that in order to be an efficient note-taker, the students need to be listening and writing simultaneously. That itself requires them to write fast. They also need to be able to do summarizing. Learning the skills and strategies of not only summary writing, but summarizing while listening could help the students to take notes more successfully and efficiently.

4.3.3 Reading Comprehension of the Books and Journal Texts

As it was mentioned earlier, reading comprehension is a receptive mode of language use and the results of the data analysis showed that it was not a frequent problem facing the international students in the University. Taking a look at the table below, depicting the problems with reading texts, we observe it was never a problem for almost 25% of the students; for most of them (65%) it was only an intermittent problem.

Table 4.9: Problems with Reading Texts

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	10	4.8	4.8	4.8
	Usually	20	9.5	9.5	14.3
	Sometimes	128	61.0	61.0	75.2
	Never	52	24.8	24.8	100.0
	Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Generally, reading texts in their majors was the least frequent problem of the international students. However, about 15% reported that they *always* or *usually* had problems with reading texts and understanding them. For others the problem was not as frequent. Since most of the concepts were relatively familiar to the students, and the students had background knowledge about them (these concepts), and also they had been lectured in the classes on the concepts, reading the texts was not as big a problem. However, according to the students comprehension could be more difficult if the contents were difficult. The table below shows the problems and the frequency of their occurrence with regard to reading the texts:

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Table 4.10: Reasons for Problems with Reading Texts

<i>Reading texts/what makes it difficult for the students</i>	<i>Percentage of students who have problems</i>
1) The content of the texts	66.7%
2) Lack of general English proficiency to read	65.7%
3) Lack of technical English knowledge used in the major	51.4%

2123

2124 The students mentioned that they had enough time to ponder while reading and if they did not
 2125 understand they could reread until they would get the message. Being able to use their
 2126 dictionaries while reading was another advantage that the students mentioned about reading.
 2127 The last point about reading was that the students could ask a friend with better English
 2128 proficiency or the lecturers, if they had the time, to help them understand the points that were
 2129 not clear.

2130

2131 4.3.4 Writing Reviews and other Project Papers

2132 Writing was one of the highly ranked areas in which the students faced problems. Not
 2133 surprisingly, almost 44% of the international post graduate students most often have
 2134 problems with writing their project papers or other academic genres. 92% of the students
 2135 faced problems while writing academic genres, which was the most frequently reported
 2136 problem of the international students with the use of EAP in the university compared to the
 2137 other problems that they faced in the other areas of language use.

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2139

2140

Table 4.11: Problems with Writing Reviews and Project Papers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	28	13.3	13.3	13.3
	Usually	64	30.5	30.5	43.8
	Sometimes	102	48.6	48.6	92.4
	Never	16	7.6	7.6	100.0
	Total	210	100.0	100.0	

2141

2142 As we see, there were only few students who claimed they did not have problems with
 2143 writing their papers or other projects. Table 4.7 below shows the different factors which lead
 2144 to this problem and the percentage of the students reporting those problems:

2145

Table 4.12: Reasons for Problems with Writing Reviews and Papers

<i>Writing reviews & papers /what makes it difficult for the students</i>	<i>Percentage of students who have problems</i>
1) Not being familiar with the format and structure of the genre	82%
2) Not being aware of the relevant genres	80%
3) Insufficient vocabulary knowledge	80%
4) Translating from L1 to L2	77%
5) Lack of knowledge of correct sentence structure in English	72.4%

2146

2147

2148 The two most important factors, which *always* or *usually* posed problems to the students
 2149 while writing projects and papers, were unfamiliarity with the genres and lack of knowledge
 2150 of the correct format and structure of a project paper or a critical review on an article. In other
 2151 words, although they may have ideas, they did not know how to write. Some of the students

2152 mentioned in the interviews that they did not know what they were expected to write and how
2153 they were supposed to write it. They said peers would not be able to help either since every
2154 one had their own ideas and thoughts about the projects; they did not know whose
2155 perceptions about the structure or format were correct let alone the contents and how they
2156 were written. The other thing they pointed out was that they did not, most of the time, get
2157 feedback on their work due to the fact that they submitted them as part of the requirements
2158 for the courses they took, and hardly any of them were returned to the students by the
2159 lecturers at the end of the academic semesters with the feedback and comments on them.

2160 The other problem that the students pointed out was lack of vocabulary knowledge. Most of
2161 them commented they did not know enough vocabulary to help them write well. They said
2162 they needed more vocabulary to be able to write more fluently and elaborately. One said: "*my*
2163 *writing is full of simple and usual words, I think at post graduate level writing, we must use*
2164 *more formal words ... more academic*". One other said that when they did not know the exact
2165 vocabulary for each specific situation, the message they were trying to convey was not as
2166 efficient as it had to be.

2167

2168 The other problem they have was that they needed to translate from their mother tongue to
2169 the target language which is English; this is both time consuming and may cause inaccuracies
2170 or vagueness, as they commented; they said most of the translated parts were unclear for their
2171 readers; in addition, it took them very long to translate.

2172

2173 Grammar was their least concern among the five factors, although the students in the
2174 interview sessions commented that a good knowledge of the structure would be a great help

for them in writing. A student said if they could write grammatically correct sentences, it would be easy to improve the vocabulary level of the text later. Some others said they could always use the editors' help to polish the language.

4.3.5 Participating in Group Discussions and Tutorials

Participation in such activities as group discussions and tutorials is an interactional mode of using the language. Not only does it need language proficiency, but it also requires other communication strategies and competencies. It was shown to be a highly frequent problem for about a fifth of the population of the international post graduate students in this study. The table below (table 4.13) shows the frequency of the students who have problems in this area of the use of EAP:

Table 4.13: Problems with Participating in Group Discussions & Tutorials

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	16	7.6	7.6	7.6
	Usually	28	13.3	13.3	21.0
	Sometimes	116	55.2	55.2	76.2
	Never	50	23.8	23.8	100.0
	Total	210	100.0	100.0	

As can be seen, however, about the same number of people (slightly more than one fifth) reported they never had problems with participating in such group activities. As a problem that may *sometimes* occur to an international student, it gets a relatively high percentage. The figures for the different elements which cause this problem are presented in the table below:

Table 4.14: Reasons for Problems with Participating in Group Discussions and Tutorials

<i>Participating in group discussions & tutorials /what makes it difficult for the students</i>	<i>Percentage of students who have problems</i>
1) Translating the thoughts from L1 to English	78%
2) Not being able to speak English fluently	73%
3) Not being able to understand what is discussed in the group	70%

2195

2196 As can be observed, for a second time (the first time being for writing reviews and articles),
2197 translation from the mother tongue to English presents the international students with
2198 problems. For more than three fourths of the students, translating from L1 to English appears
2199 to be a very challenging part of participating in group discussions; the reason was, according
2200 to them, shifting from mother tongue to English takes time, and this may make the student
2201 give up making a comment, not to mention that it may hinder self confidence by causing long
2202 pauses and embarrassment. They also mentioned that in group discussions, if they wanted to
2203 translate, they did not have the time to look up the unknown vocabulary items. So they said
2204 they may just prefer not to take the risk, and be a listener who mostly agrees with what others
2205 say, rather than taking a long time to think and making a comment which may still be
2206 challenged and need more support on the part of the person who proposed it.

2207

2208 Some said that they missed some of the parts of the discussions due to a lack of
2209 comprehension; as a result, they preferred to stay quiet and listen instead of talking; they
2210 feared they might have misunderstood something and they did not want to "lose face".
2211 However, most of the students who were interviewed mentioned that they did actually like
2212 the group discussions since they learned a lot from the issues which were discussed, had more

chances of participation despite their lacks in the English language, and understanding was not too difficult for them.

4.3.6 Oral Presentations

The following table (table 4.15) shows the frequency of the students who have problems with giving oral presentations:

Table 4.15: Problems with Oral Presentations

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	18	8.6	8.6	8.6
	Usually	52	24.8	24.8	33.3
	Sometimes	104	49.5	49.5	82.9
	Never	36	17.1	17.1	100.0
	Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Being a productive and interactive mode of language use, giving oral presentations also seems to be one of the serious problems that the students in this study face. Table 4.16 illustrates the factors that contribute to this difficulty and the percentage of the students who have these problems:

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Table 4.16: Reasons for Problems with Giving Oral Presentations

<i>Giving oral presentations /what makes it difficult for the students</i>	<i>Percentage of students who have problems</i>
1) Worrying if they speak well enough for others to understand	78%
2) Worrying if they are asked questions they do not understand or can not answer	77%

2234

2235 As it was discussed earlier in the previous section, giving oral presentations is an example of
2236 the *productive* and *interactional* mode of language use. The students thought being
2237 interactional, giving oral presentations could be both beneficial and disadvantageous. The
2238 advantage is that in interactions the interlocutors get chances to repair the language and
2239 clarify obscurities. However, it gets difficult when the students need to produce the language
2240 and monitor what they say in terms of content and the correct language use in a short period
2241 of time and in the presence of others who might not necessarily be their friends. So they
2242 always worried if what they were talking about was comprehensible for the audience.

2243 However, the students said they could practice what they wanted to say beforehand, or
2244 practice a few times before the real presentation. Some of them mentioned that the power
2245 point slides were of great help to them since they could guide the presenter through the
2246 presentations; the slides also helped them to remember the key points.

2247 The other thing which worried the students was the questions they might be asked. They
2248 thought this was quite unpredictable and they might not get a chance to practice until they
2249 face them on the day of presentation. On the one hand, international students worried if they

were asked questions that they might not understand; on the other hand, they worried that they might give their answers in ways that they might not be understood.

Most of the students said that the audience (the lecturer and the other peers) and their feedback and support during the presentations were very important and vital to them.

4.3.7 Answering Exam Questions

The last area of language use and the problems associated with that was answering exam questions. As one of the very common ways to evaluate the students' mastery of the subject matter they have studied, examinations play crucial roles in the students' academic lives. The table below shows the frequency of the problems that the students have with answering examination questions.

Table 4.17: Problems with Answering Exam Questions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	NA	2	1.0	1.0	1.0
	Always	4	1.9	1.9	2.9
	Usually	32	15.2	15.2	18.1
	Sometimes	88	41.9	41.9	60.0
	Never	84	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total		210	100.0	100.0	

It may be concluded that answering exam questions was not as serious as the other areas of language use such as writing papers as more than 80% *never* or only *sometimes* had problems. The reason according to one student was the students' familiarity with the genre over a very long period of time during their academic years of study. This means they have

been taking examinations since they first got into school, and all through the years they have been dealing with questions which need to be properly answered and discussed.

Table 4.18: Reasons for Problems with Answering Exam Questions

<i>Answering exam questions /what makes it difficult for the students</i>	<i>Percentage of students who have problems</i>
1) Not being able to write well in English	62%
2) Not understanding the exam question	51%

However, this area did not seem to be a great problem for the students as far as the percentages of the frequency of the problems were concerned. But it is interesting to note that more than half of the students experience difficulties with understanding what the questions really meant and what they were required to do. They said they could ask the lecturers for clarification during the examination session and check if the way they were addressing the question was appropriate and acceptable. But the issue remains that they have problems understanding the question and if the lecturer is not available, it would be a really serious problem.

And 60% of the students at times felt they knew the answers but they did not have the sufficient language proficiency to make themselves completely and clearly understood. One said it bothered him when he had a lot to say and elaborate but he could not use the language freely to expand the issues and describe fine details. This is a problem because it might lead

2287 to a low mark at the end of the semester which means poor mastery of the subject matter
2288 knowledge, although the main cause is poor language performance in answering the exam
2289 questions. In other words, not being able to use the language well to answer the questions
2290 effectively may suggest that the student has not grasped the subject matter very well, while
2291 the actual fact is that the student has understood the concepts but cannot demonstrate it
2292 properly by means of the language.

2293 However, according to the students' responses, these problems were not that frequent and did
2294 not challenge them very often (only less than 20% have frequent problems). Nevertheless, it
2295 must be noted that they do have a problem in this area although it is not as severe as in the
2296 other areas.

2297

2298 **4.4 Lecturers' Perspectives about the Students' Problems with EAP**

2299 The third research question of the study was framed to inquire the lecturers' perspectives
2300 regarding the international students' problems with the use of English for academic purposes,
2301 the results of which are presented in this section.

2302 The lecturers(5 from the FCSIT and 4 from the FE) who participated in the survey and
2303 agreed to have interviews with the researcher all taught courses at the post graduate level and
2304 also supervised post graduate theses. All of them agreed that the students, to varying degrees,
2305 had problems with the use of English. *"To me, I cannot generalize the international students'*
2306 *problems with English"*, one commented *"some are really good, some cannot even*
2307 *communicate in simple English, and some are OK, with solvable problems"*. Being solvable,
2308 according to this lecturer, means the students have the sufficient basic proficiencies of the
2309 different skills to be developed and improved.

2310 The lecturers mostly agreed that the comprehension of the students, except for a few of them
2311 whose English were really poor, was good. And the students did not have problems
2312 understanding lectures, or the assigned texts and articles. Of course, comprehension could not
2313 be directly observed by the lecturers, but it could be indirectly shown in interactions. They
2314 also said almost all of the students understood the exam questions, *“this can be understood by
2315 looking at the answer, the answer may not be that great, but at least it tells me that the
2316 student has understood the question”*. However, according to the lecturers the students must
2317 still strive to have better critical reading skills of the academic texts (e.g. journal articles) in
2318 their subject matters.

2319 For presentations, the lecturers were generally satisfied with the majority of the students. One
2320 said the PowerPoint slides and the fact that they (the presentations) are presented orally and
2321 involve interaction helps them (for example in case of vagueness, the students can clarify
2322 themselves or repeat and restate what was unclear or not understood), and the presentations
2323 usually go well. One lecturer said the presentations might sometimes be colloquial, but it is
2324 fine, *“we do not mean to be that serious in our classes!”* One lecturer, however, believed we
2325 must help and encourage our students to be good presenters both in language and presentation
2326 skills. *“We should not unnecessarily simplify and informalize the presentations”*. According
2327 to the lecturers presentation skills are crucial for the post graduate level students and they
2328 expected a post graduate student to be fluent enough in English to have successful delivery.

2329 However, the most frequently mentioned problem was with writing, especially writing
2330 reports and critical reviews. The problem was in fact mentioned by all of the lecturers about
2331 writing any kind of genre, specially the ones which contained extended texts. According to
2332 them, firstly the students did not know the correct structure of the genre; in other words they
2333 did not know how, for example, a critical review must be written as far as the different
2334 sections or ‘moves’ in the genre are concerned. They believed the students were not

2335 sufficiently aware of the expected product. The other problems they mentioned was the
2336 students were not familiar with the conventions for writing, quoting, or referencing, for
2337 example, in APA style or others.

2338 One lecturer interestingly commented, “*Students have problems producing extended texts*”,
2339 even in answering exam questions. Some believed the students did not elaborate enough on
2340 the issue and did not write and discuss as much as they expected them to do. The same
2341 problem occurs, according to the lecturers, when they want to write article reviews. They
2342 simply write a summary but do not know how to discuss and critically review the article to
2343 get the positive and negative points. Grammar and vocabulary were not of great concern to
2344 the lecturers; they thought works could be edited and proofread by others as far as the
2345 language was concerned, but the organization of the text and the content are more difficult to
2346 edit specially by the editors who are outside the field. Some lecturers thought the problem
2347 was due to the fact that the students did not read critically, or were not trained to do so, and
2348 they seem to be unaware of the special features of each genre and the way it should be written
2349 and discussed. “*A student at the post graduate level is expected to write critically and be able*
2350 *to elaborate on the issues thoroughly and in depth*”, one lecturer commented. According to
2351 the lecturers, writing is an essential task for the post graduate students and they must really
2352 try to improve themselves in order to be more efficient in their writings and guarantee their
2353 academic progress. According to one professor from the faculty of computer science, “*for a*
2354 *post graduate student to be outstanding he or she must publish in refereed journals, and this*
2355 *is impossible without having a good skill of academic writing*”. In order for students to be
2356 good writers they need to improve their general English on one hand and writing for
2357 academic purposes on the other.

2358

4.5 Perspectives regarding the Solutions

The last research question of this study investigated the perspectives of the students and the lecturers with regard to the possible solutions to the above mentioned problems. The following two sections include the students' and lecturers' perceptions regarding what could be done to help the international students to be more efficient as far as the use of English for academic purposes is concerned:

4.5.1 Students' Perspectives about Solutions to their EAP Problems

The interviewees were asked to comment on the ways they could be helped with their problems. More than half of the students believed they still need English classes to improve their general proficiency on the one hand and help them not forget what they already know on the other hand. They had all learned English at different levels as a foreign language either in their own country or in Malaysia and they all believed one or two years were not enough to master a language, and learning a language should happen throughout years of interaction and language use. Also being mostly foreign language speakers of the language, the international students believed that if they did not use the language consistently, they would forget what they had learnt thus far. And since some lived with families and some lived with their fellow countrymen, they did not have a lot of opportunities to use the language outside of the campus, not to forget that even on the campus they usually spend time with friends from their own country! They mentioned they needed to have formal English language training for them to be able to increase, improve, and also maintain their proficiency.

2381 A few commented they have to study on their own to improve their English. *"I think I do not*
2382 *need to go to English class any more, I learnt the basics already. Now I must study myself*
2383 *and be more better"*. The majority agreed they needed to learn more vocabulary to help them
2384 in both comprehension and production, and also they needed to practice structure more.

2385 However, most of them mentioned that they need academic writing courses which would
2386 guide them to write papers, articles, and theses. The students who had attended some
2387 workshops on academic writing agreed that such courses were really illuminating for them
2388 and they had learned a lot and they said they still think they needed lengthier ones. Although
2389 they could get their works edited by some people who do editing work, they still feel they
2390 need to be better educated in academic writing so that the initial work they produced would
2391 be stronger.

2392 Specifically, those who were doing their theses or final project papers said they really needed
2393 to be told what they were supposed to do and how to do it properly. In other words, they
2394 wanted clarifications with regard to the lecturers' expectations. Some said because they were
2395 not familiar and aware of how to write different parts of the papers, they had to do things at
2396 least two times which might be two totally different versions about the same section; that is to
2397 say, they write up a section once and submit to the supervisor but when the professor reads,
2398 they know that they have been misunderstood or need to do fundamental changes. They all
2399 agreed that in order to save time and energy they must be briefed before they do the job;
2400 otherwise it will be difficult both for themselves and the supervisor. The students demanded
2401 workshops on academic writing special by the faculty to which they belonged; the reason was
2402 such workshops were more specific regarding the expectations and the internal
2403 institutionalized conventions of each faculty.

2404 The students urged the faculty to have occasional workshops and short training courses which
2405 would teach them the basics and elements of powerful academic writing. They also said that
2406 good examples of the genre and analyses of these would really benefit them while writing on
2407 their own; however, they said, that was the way through which some of their supervisors help
2408 them to move through different stages of writing; they give them or introduce to them
2409 successful texts which have already been written in their fields and recommend them to
2410 analyze them and follow their patterns before or when they want to write their own projects.
2411 The students said they would write better and more efficiently with coaching and clear
2412 guidelines.

2413

2414 **4.5.2 Lecturers' Perspectives about Solutions to the Students' EAP Problems**

2415

2416 The solutions that the lecturers recommended would urge the university, students, and the
2417 faculties to set determined and cooperate in order to alleviate the EAP problems. In other
2418 words, they believed that in order to solve the language problems fundamentally all the three
2419 parties must accomplish their roles; otherwise the problems would still exist despite all the
2420 efforts, energy, and expenses. However, the students should be most responsible to undertake
2421 learning and dedicating themselves to solve their EAP problems. The university and the
2422 faculties can help them to find their ways more easily and smoothly.

2423

2424 Firstly, all of them agreed that there should be a prerequisite for the language proficiency of
2425 the international students who apply to study in the university. Students need to have
2426 acceptable IELTS or TOEFL scores upon registering in the courses. This filtering, according

2427 to them, would prevent serious problems that the students and their professors might face in
2428 the academic adventure. An acceptable level of proficiency would pave the path for the
2429 improvement of English for academic purposes. And this is a phase which must be strongly
2430 enforced by the university upon processing the applications of the prospective postgraduate
2431 students.

2432 However, the university should also have English classes for those who still want to or need
2433 to improve their English. Similar to the students' perspectives, the lecturers believed that the
2434 language training center on the campus can always help the students to improve their
2435 language proficiency. Such a center would provide the students with a chance to not only use
2436 the language but also correct the mistakes they have in English language use.

2437 On the other hand, the students must feel dedicated to study hard and by reading extensively
2438 and intensively increase their in-depth knowledge of the concepts; according to them it can
2439 help them in two ways: if one understands the concepts deeply language could be a less
2440 troublesome burden, and secondly, the more one reads the better writer one will be. So if
2441 students read more this can *"indirectly help with their writing and presentations"* because
2442 they unconsciously learn the *"language they use and the structure"*. According to one
2443 lecturer, students at a post graduate level have to read a lot in the field, and on top of all, they
2444 should realize the fact that they have to be independent learners and researchers at this point
2445 of their academic journey. *"That is how we all learned and that is the best and only way the*
2446 *students should follow"*, an associate professor commented. The students themselves need to
2447 be aware of the importance of the English language in academic studies and they should set
2448 out to practice hard and discover their drawbacks so that they can best help themselves and be
2449 helped.

2450

2451 And finally, the faculties should also arrange 'academic writing courses' specific to the
2452 discipline. Most of them believed that the academic writing courses should be offered jointly
2453 by language experts and the lecturers in the field; this would help them with the language on
2454 one hand, and the conventions of the major and discipline on the other hand. “*We must first*
2455 *realize and make it clear where and for whom we are writing*” a professor mentioned.
2456 According to him language is important to form the base of the genre but only experts in the
2457 field can help with the specific characteristics of the related genre. This was the main reason
2458 they believed the academic writing courses should be planned and implemented by both
2459 language and subject matter experts.

2460

2461 **4.6 Conclusion**

2462 This chapter has discussed the findings of the research in terms of the four research questions.
2463 First, the areas in which the students used English for academic purposes were identified.
2464 Then, the data regarding the problems and the frequency rate at which the students faced
2465 problems in each of these areas were presented and the different factors which caused each
2466 problem were investigated and discussed by means of the results obtained from
2467 questionnaires and interviews. The next section included interview results with the lecturers,
2468 who dealt with the students in academic domains, regarding the students’ EAP problems and
2469 how they could be helped to improve their academic achievements with regards to EAP in
2470 particular. The last section stated the perceptions of the students and lecturers regarding
2471 solutions to the related problems. In the next chapter a conclusion on the study and related
2472 issues will be presented, and recommendations will be given.

2473