CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

Since language is an essential component of tertiary education and also great numbers of international students in Malaysia are mostly non native speakers of English, the need for a study that surveys the problems of the international students with regard to the use of English for Academic Purposes in the universities is undeniable. This study was proposed and conducted as a response to such a need because no other studies had investigated the problems, that is, the use of Academic English among international students in Malaysia. In the previous chapters the detailed rationale, literature, methodology, and results of the study were presented, and in this chapter a conclusion, including a summary of the study and its findings, will be provided together with some recommendations both for EAP implementation and further research.

5.1 Summary of the Study

This study was conducted by adopting a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the problems of the post graduate international students with the use of English for academic purposes. A total number of 210 students completed questionnaires from Faculties of Education (68) and Computer Science and Information Technology (142). 25 of these students (15 from the Computer Science and Information

2497 Technology Faculty and 10 from the Faculty of Education) agreed to participate in the

2498 interview sessions. Also, 9 lecturers (5 from Computer Science and 4 from Education)

2499 teaching and supervising post graduate students contributed to this work by participating in

2500 the interview sessions.

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2502 The study was mainly trying to find out the areas in which the international students use

2503 English in an academic setting, that is the university, and the problems they face in the course

2504 of fulfilling different tasks in these areas. It also sought students' and lecturers' perspectives

2505 regarding the solutions to these problems. In other words, this study was designed to answer

2506 the following research questions:

2507   1-   What are the various academic activities that the international students engage in
2508   where they need to use the English language?

2509   2- Which of these pose problems to the international students in terms of the use of
2510   English language?

2511   3- What are the perceptions of the lecturers about the problems that the international
2512   students have with the use of English for academic purposes?

2513   4- What are the students' and the lectures' solutions to these problems?

2514 In the following a summary of the findings for each research question will be presented.

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2516 **5.1.1 RQ 1: Various Areas of Language Use for Academic Purposes**

2517 The students use English for academic purposes mainly in seven areas: note taking during

2518 lectures, writing reviews and other project papers, oral presentations, answering exam

2519   questions, reading comprehension of text books and journals, understanding lectures, and

2520   participating in group discussions and tutorials.

2521   Some of the above mentioned areas require students to produce the language (writing reviews

2522   and project papers) some require them to receive and comprehend the language

2523   (understanding lectures) and some require them to both produce and comprehend the

2524   language (giving oral presentations) where they need to speak and listen for questions or

2525   comments.

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2527   **5.1.2 RQ 2: The Most Problematic Areas**

2528   This research question was approached in two ways. The first way looked at the frequency

2529   and percentages of the problems that '*always*' or '*usually*' challenged the students, while the

2530   second approach considered the percentages of the frequencies of the problems that

2531   '*sometimes*', '*usually*', or '*always*' occurred to the students. In both cases 'writing reviews and

2532   papers' and 'giving oral presentations' got comparably high percentages where most students

2533   felt they had problems with.

2534   Considering the problems that 'always' or 'usually' challenged the students, 'writing reviews

2535   and papers' (43.8%) and 'giving oral presentations' (33.4%) got the higher percentages

2536   followed by 'note taking' (21.9%), 'participating in group discussions' (20.9%), ' answering

2537   exam questions' (17.1%), 'reading the academic texts' (14.3%), and ' understanding lectures'

2538   (13.4%), respectively.

2539   If we include 'sometimes' in the frequency of the occurrence of the problems, ' understanding

2540   lectures' (93.4%), 'writing reviews and papers' (92.4%), and 'giving oral presentations'

2541   (82.9%) got the highest percentages followed by 'note taking' (80.9%), 'participating in group

discussions' (76.1%), 'reading academic texts' (75.3%), and ' answering exam questions' (59%), respectively.

As we would have observed, in 'understanding lectures', including the 'sometimes' option can make a great difference which would lead us to assume that it is an intermittent problem which could happen at times but not very often; an unfamiliar accent, for example, can make it difficult for the students to understand the lecture perfectly.

However, it is worth mentioning that both quantitative and qualitative date show that the areas where the students are supposed to produce the language are more troublesome for them compared to those which require comprehending the language. Having problems with producing the language itself may stem from lack of knowledge about the expected structure of the genre, where the students do not know how to write certain genres like a critical review, lack of vocabulary and/or sentence structure, or translation from the first language to the second, which makes the process slow and at times vague and inaccurate.

5.1.3 RQ 2: Lecturers' perceptions regarding international students' problems with EAP

According to the lecturers, problems of the international students with the use of English for academic purposes cannot be easily generalized; the problems can range from lack of basic proficiency, where they even have problems with survival communication, to inadequate academic English skills, where their general English proficiency is good but they are not well equipped with sufficient knowledge of academic writing. However, the findings from the data obtained by lecturers' interviews confirm the above mentioned results: the lecturers also

believed that students' comprehension was better than their production. They were mainly concerned with academic writing skills where the students were supposed to write academic genres such as critical reviews or theses. The lecturers believed that a student at post graduate level has to be more proficient in academic writing because academic writing is one of the most crucial and critical parts of the post graduate education and in order for the students to be successful academics they need to be really capable in academic writing.

5.1.4 RQ 2: Students' and lecturers' perceptions regarding the solutions to international students' problems with EAP

Lecturers and students both recommended some solutions with regard to the problems that the students face with the use of English for academic purposes.

5.1.4.1 Students' Perspectives

Students generally suggested having general English courses on the campus, self study, and academic writing workshops. As foreign speakers and users of English, they thought they needed to learn English more than they already knew and also they wanted to have more exposure to the language, since living with their families or friends from the same country limited their exposure to English. Some of the students thought they needed to self study and acquire more proficiency rather than attending classes, since the classes had taught them what they were supposed to do, and encouraged them to do the rest on their own. And finally all agreed that occasional academic writing workshops were of great help to them whereby they

2587   could both learn the conventions of academic writing and also be clear about the expectations

2588   as far as writing different genres, like an article review in the university, was concerned.

2589   **5.1.4.2 Lecturers' Perspectives**

2590   Lecturers also mentioned some practical solutions. First, they believed that the university

2591   must apply the language proficiency requirement policy in admitting the prospective students.

2592   Non native international students must have a proof of language proficiency (like IELTS or

2593   TOEFL) upon applying to the university for post graduate studies to indicate that the students

2594   have the required fundamental skills of language, sufficient to start and pursue a post

2595   graduate course. International students also needed to improve their academic English with

2596   regard to their major by reading critically and extensively in their field of study. And finally,

2597   linguists and ESP specialists together with subject specialists, computer science lecturers, for

2598   example, in each faculty should design academic writing courses that align with the academic

2599   writing conventions which are observed in that specific faculty and subject area.

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2601   **5.2 Overview of the Problems and Implications**

2602   Generally speaking, the problems that the international students face with EAP can be

2603   divided into two categories: problems with general English and problems with the use of

2604   English for academic purposes.

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5.2.1 Lack of General English Proficiency

The first set of problems are problems with general English. During the course of the research it was discovered that some students had basic proficiency problems with the language. As a result, it is completely natural and predictable that they will face problems when they start their studies in the university. This kind of lack of proficiency could not only lead to academic failure but it may also result in embarrassment or loss of motivation altogether. Not to mention that lack of language proficiency for those who cannot speak the Malaysian language either, would undoubtedly make it difficult for the students to survive in Malaysia. The students who set off to continue their education in a foreign country must at least have a basic proficiency in the foreign language to make it easier for them to challenge other problems that might arise, academic or non academic.

5.2.2 Problems with Academic English

The second set of problems, which were more common among the international students (and is of specific interest in this study), was the problems with the use of language for academic purposes. As it could be seen and inferred from the results in the data analysis chapter, problems could happen in different areas of language use within the university and there is not single area which proved to be easy or problem-free for the international students. However the frequencies could vary from 'all the time' problems to 'occasional' problems.

Writing extended texts by observing the conventions, which were mostly unknown to the majority of the students, was the most common and challenging problem. This is actually a two fold problem. Firstly, the students have to produce the language, which is comparatively

2632   more difficult than comprehending the language; they find it easier to read something rather

2633   than writing it. The second thing is that what they write should definitely follow certain

2634   conventions. This latter aspect could be even more challenging and troublesome for the

2635   students than the former. The main reason for this is the unfamiliarity with the structure of

2636   the academic genres. This gap between the expectations of the academics and students'

2637   products simply originates from the fact that the students have never been aware of such

2638   generic conventions; and the problem only manifests itself once the text has been poorly

2639   constructed on the students' part and meticulously reviewed on the professors' part. The

2640   students could have faced far fewer problems if they had been more aware of the conventions

2641   and generic characteristics of academic genres.

2642   Communication problems could also cause barriers to successful language use for the

2643   international students. They could happen in classroom lectures where different problems

2644   could exist. For example, at times the students may not be tuned to the lecturer's accent and

2645   find it difficult to perceive the language. Or sometimes the locally specific examples would

2646   leave the students in suspense and confusion. Some problems could appear in interactions

2647   with lecturers or other classmates. For example they may find it difficult to ask questions or

2648   participate in discussions; this could have language related reasons and also personality and

2649   character trait explanations. Although these problems are not as serious and frequent as

2650   writing problems, they could make it difficult for the students to survive in their academic

2651   life.

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2653   All in all, the international students in the University of Malaya face problems as far as the

2654   use of English for academic purposes are concerned. These problems could be attributed to

2655   different reasons and sources, and the frequency at which they occur is also different from

2656 one area of language use to another and also from one student to another. Attending to these

2657 problems and proposing practical and possible solutions could certainly increase the quality

2658 of education in the university on the one hand, and enhance the students' academic

2659 performance on the other. In the following section some recommendations are presented.

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5.3 Recommendations

2662 There are a certain number of considerations which can be taken in order to improve the level

2663 of EAP in the university and help the international students as far as the use English for

2664 academic purposes is concerned.

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5.3.1 Language Requirement Policy

2667 The first thing which needs to be done is to make it compulsory for the new applicants of the

2668 post graduate degrees in the university to have a minimum language proficiency qualification

2669 on an internationally recognized assessment tool such as like IELTS or TOEFL. This would

2670 guarantee that the newly arrived students at least have a general knowledge of English and

2671 would be able to adjust and improve in the course of their studies with the use of language in

2672 academic areas such as writing reports or reviews.

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5.3.2 Language Center

2678 The second recommendation would be to have a language center on the campus. This center

2679 would help the international students with their general English and English for Academic

2680 and Specific Purposes. Those who still feel they need English classes and practice could

2681 benefit from the classes. The center should also provide specific courses to help the students

2682 deal with different aspects of the use of English for Academic purposes. For the center to be

2683 successful, it needs to have instructors with language expertise and also discipline specific

2684 knowledge. The former would undertake the linguistic part and language related issues while

2685 the latter would guide the students with the conventions and the generic knowledge of the

2686 texts that are specific to the major and field where they come from. The center could also

2687 have tutors of academic writing who can help individuals and groups with their academic

2688 writing difficulties. The other service that the center can provide is the editing service

2689 whereby skillful editors can help to edit the students' work; this kind of editing can both help

2690 refine the written text and indirectly teach the students the skills and secrets of successful

2691 academic writing; the editing job should preferably be done in the presence of the students as

2692 they can benefit from direct observation of correction procedures. All in all, the center would

2693 work as a support center for students' language issues where they could get consultation on

2694 their problems and also get occasional help with emerging needs.

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5.3.3 Technical Writing Course in the Faculties

Sometimes it might be helpful to teach the students explicitly the generic features of different written and spoken genres. Such a conscious knowledge may work in two ways for the students. First, it helps them better understand the genre and what it entails; second, it would guide the students to produce acceptable work on their own. Once the students are familiar with the sample products and existing genres, they could better conform to the conventions. They would also know that genres in different settings may vary according to the internal conventions of each institution. Familiarity with the institutions and their disciplinary conventions are vital to successful academic survival. This can be done under a course which we may call 'technical writing'. The faculties can, with the help of linguists and ESP practitioners, define such a course and present it to the post graduate students using lecturers from their own faculties who are familiar with the conventions of writing within that major or field of study.

5.3.4 Electronic Groups Sharing Network

The students should be advised that learning and mastering the language is a painstaking and challenging path and it requires a lot of effort and dedication on their part. After all, each individual is responsible for his/her learning and s/he should be well equipped and prepared to face and challenge the problems. However, this endeavor can be facilitated by modern technology; by having internet based groups (like the various Yahoo groups or Google groups or Blogs), the students can share their problems and get feedback and help from the others. It can lead to a fruitful group work sharing network for the students to share ideas and inquiries.

5.4 Recommendations for further Research

This study tried to pioneer the investigation of the problems of international students with the use of English for Academic Purposes in Malaysia. Identifying the problems is the first step towards finding possible and workable solutions to those problems. In the five chapters of this work, the researcher tried to present a thorough account of the problem and its background, relevant literature, methodology, results, and implications of the study.

 However, this study is an initial step in a multitude of possibilities of inquiries in the English language problems of the international students. Other studies could be proposed to investigate the problems of the international students using a larger sample from various other areas of study. Some studies can also investigate the specific problems of the students studying in a certain area or major. Thesis writing and problems associated with that is also an extremely important area for EAP researchers to explore in Malaysian University contexts.