CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

English language is the main language of communication in politics, business, science and academia, and administration (Crystal, 2003). English is also the medium of instruction, therefore international students enrolled at the educational institutions in Europe and the USA, and in countries which use English as the medium of instruction, have to be proficient in English in order to maximise their learning experience.

Baskaran (1983, as quoted in AL-Khasawneh, 2010:2) mentioned that *'English language plays a vital role in helping to initiate students into the academic community in acquiring not only language proficiency necessary but the specific genre pertaining to these communities'.* Adam and Keene (2000, as quoted in AL-Khasawneh, 2010:1) stated that *'teaching and learning of English can help the students to deal successfully with their academic demands and to perform successfully in their disciplines and professional context'.* There are ample evidence to indicate the need for international students to have sufficient competence in the use of English language for academic purposes.

English speaking countries such as the U.S.A., U.K, Canada, and Australia are actively attracting international students to pursue their studies overseas. For instance, the United States, as a native English speaking country, is the most popular study destination for international students. In the academic year 2008/2009, there were 671,616 international students enrolled in American universities and colleges (*The Chronicle,* 2011). In hosting international students, the United Kingdom also stands as a preferred destination. In the academic year (2009/10) there were 160,210 international students enrolled in the United Kingdom, from the non-UK countries (HESA, 2011).

In the same manner, in the aftermath of September 11, Malaysia has attracted international students although it is not a native English speaking country. Students' enrolment in Malaysian public and private institutions of higher learning increased dramatically until it reached 80,000 in the academic year 2010 (Mohammed, 2011). There are different aspects of Malaysian policies which made it an attractive destination for international students to pursue their studies. First, English language is the medium of instruction in Malaysian higher education institutes. Second, the cost of quality tertiary education is more affordable in comparison to the UK and other countries. Third, there are many institutes spread all around the Malaysian peninsula, where international students may enrol to study English language. Fourth, there are many people speaking English which makes living and studying easy for students who do not speak Bahasa Melayu. Fifth, there is a wide range of study options in a good number of universities and colleges to opt for.

However, in this country the international students get less exposure to English language environment unlike in the native English speaking countries. They get exposure to English only in the university. Therefore, international students must invest more time and energy to show competence in English. It becomes even more challenging for students who come from countries where English language is not the medium of instruction such as Omani students. A good number of Omanis get enrolled in Malaysian universities. Hence the researcher has taken up to identify the academic difficulties faced by Omani students pursuing higher degree studies through the medium of English and in an environment where their exposure to English language usage or opportunities to practice English is limited to the classroom contexts.

Most of the international students registered in Malaysian universities hail from non-English speaking countries such as Oman, Iran, Africa, and China. Although many of

these students managed to complete their studies successfully, they have to work extra hard to overcome the various English academic difficulties they face during their studies. For many of them, these difficulties may negatively affect their motivation and slow down the progress of their studies.

In Oman, Arabic language is the national and official language. Therefore, most of the Omani citizens speak Arabic fluently and use Arabic in most of their daily communication. English language does not have any crucial role in the Omanis' daily lives like most of the Arab countries and it is treated as a foreign language. With English language being a lingua franca, and the language of science and commerce, the Omani government has adopted English as its only official foreign language (Al-Issa, 2006). As such, English has become a core language subject in the education system in the Sultanate. It is also used in various commercial settings such as tourism, banks, chemists, medical clinics, showrooms, restaurants, factories, and insurance agencies (Al-Issa, 2006).

Arabic language is also the medium of instruction in government schools in Oman, and English is taught in school as a subject and it is mostly taught by Arabic-speaking teachers. Omani students usually start learning English from the first standard until the twelfth standard. Although they have been exposed to English for 12 years, these students are still facing difficulties functioning in the language at tertiary level. At universities, English is the medium of instruction in most of the faculties. This shift from Arabic to English causes difficulties for many students especially in dealing with the faculty courses taught in English as *'most high school students graduate with very low language proficiency'* (AL-Busaidi, 2003:9). As a result, most of those students have to sit for English language intensive courses to improve their English proficiency.

Omani students in public universities in Malaysia also face academic English difficulties and they suffer and struggle in their studies (Abdurrahman, personal communication, February21, 2010). They constantly need support to overcome these difficulties. Therefore, investigating Omani students' difficulties and academic needs is essential as it would help in identifying areas that would guide them improving their level of English quickly. Knowing the areas to focus on will help them overcome their academic English problems and succeed in their studies.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

As a postgraduate student at a public university in Malaysia, the researcher observed that Omani students face difficulties in the use of English in the context of academic purposes. They are constantly struggling and looking for solutions to overcome their problems in order to successfully complete their studies. Before submitting their assignments, PowerPoint slides for presentations, dissertations and theses they have to look for English language editors, to review and edit their work. Some of the difficulties they face are using the correct grammar and vocabulary, understanding the content of a book, article or texts, and translating their ideas from Arabic to English. Based on the common complaints from Omani students and their lecturers, the researcher decided to carry out this study in order to identify the difficulties they face in using English for academic purposes and to suggest solutions to overcome these problems.

Investigating Omani international students' academic English difficulties is necessary because if these difficulties are not addressed they may eventually lead to academic failure. Initially, students may not see English proficiency as an important issue because their concern is more on the content of their specialization. However, since English is the medium of instruction they will soon realize that they are not able to among other things, understand lectures conducted in English, references and resources in English,

and to complete assignments and answer examination questions effectively. More importantly they are not able to express the content they know in their mother tongue (Arabic) in English language. As such, it is crucial and justified to conduct an investigation into the English for academic purposes difficulties faced by the Omani students and to find solutions to overcome these difficulties.

English for academic purposes is different from general English which is used in the everyday context. Students whose proficiency and exposure to English usage is limited may not be aware of this difference and may therefore use non-academic English in the academic context. Consequently, students need to be aware of the various English usages according to their specialisation at university in order to function effectively in their specific academic language use.

There are various studies which have sought to identify the problems faced by international students in Malaysia (AL-Zubaidi, 2010), Australia (Siti Salina and Hamidah, 2010) and America (Gilbert, 2000). Among the factors identified in these studies as the causes for these difficulties are culture, social, finance and academic issues. According to Esfahani (2009), Al-Khasawneh (2010), and Yusliza (2011) few studies focused on academic language difficulties of Arab international students in Malaysia. For instance, AL-Khasawneh (2010), studied the academic writing difficulties faced by Arab speaking postgraduate students in Malaysia regardless of their nationality. He found that students' attributed their writing problems to their weak foundation, environment, and methods of teaching and learning English in their home countries.

So far, there have not been any studies carried out on the difficulties in academic English among Omani students attaining their degrees in Malaysia. Currently there are more than 650 Omani students at both graduate and postgraduate levels in various

Malaysian educational institutes (Oman Embassy Malaysia, personal communication, February 21, 2011). The number of students is also increasing as more students opt to come to Malaysia for their tertiary education. According to the Omani embassy records, the rate of failure is 5% each year. Although the percentage is small, many of these students are government sponsored. The amount of money and time spent to send even one student overseas is something that the government would want to avoid wasting. This alone is a reason enough to justify carrying out this study.

1.2 Research Objectives

The goals of this study are to identify the difficulties Omani postgraduates face in using English for academic purposes and to suggest solutions to overcome these problems. This study will focus on the following objectives:

1. To identify the difficulties Omani postgraduate students at a public university in Malaysia face in using English for academic purposes

2. To determine the possible causes of the difficulties faced by these students.

3. To find out how best Omani students can overcome these difficulties they face during their study.

1.3 Research Questions

The study designed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the difficulties faced by Omani postgraduate students at a public university in Malaysia in using English for academic purposes?

2. What are the perceived causes of these difficulties?

3. How best can Omani postgraduates overcome these difficulties?

1.4 Significance of the Study

Due to the absence of any study looking at the English for Academic Purposes difficulties faced by Omani students, there is an urgent need to address the said issue. Such a study is especially significant as there are a large number of Omani students currently pursuing their postgraduate studies in Malaysian universities. A needs analysis is therefore essential to be carried out at the beginning of the investigation as this would help identify the problems faced by the Omani students in using English in different academic contexts.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

Although, there may be other factors that contribute to the difficulties, this study focuses only on difficulties related to using English in the academic context. And although there are Omani students at other institutes of higher learning in Malaysia, this study will be carried out among Omani postgraduates in one public university in Malaysia. Moreover, the study will focus on only the academic English skills where students face difficulties as identified by Esfahani (2009) and also from the preliminary discussion with several lecturers at this university: writing critical reviews, understanding lecturers, answering exam questions, note-taking, oral presentations, understanding academic books / journals, and participating in group discussion and tutorials. In particular, this study seeks to determine if Omani students face the same difficulties.

There are a number of limitations which could be observed in this study. They are related to the following:

The research method has been limited to 13 postgraduates out of 650 Omani of both graduates and postgraduates in Malaysia higher education institutes which represent 3% of the number of the Omani students in Malaysia. As the researcher aims to study only

one of the Malaysian public universities, the 13 students who participated in this study represented 65% of the Omani postgraduate students in this university (based on 20 students being the total number of Omani postgraduate students registered at the selected Malaysian public university).

Moreover, the research applied a triangulation approach (a questionnaire and 2 interviews (students and lecturers) to meet the objectives of the study and answer the research questions. However, only 2 students of the 13 who completed the questionnaire agreed to be interviewed, which does not allow the findings of the study to be generalised across all Oman students in Malaysian universities.

1.6 Summary

In this chapter, the background of the topic and the problems faced by the Omani international students and how such problems can be dealt with has been duly discussed. Preliminary conversations with Omani students and lecturers were carried out and the problem areas were noted and presented as the statement of the problem.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

There are more than 80,000 international students pursuing tertiary studies in Malaysian universities (Mohammed, 2011). These international students come from different linguistic backgrounds, cultures and have different academic needs. Therefore, Malaysian universities policy makers should bear in mind these different needs, in order to help students to study successfully. At the same time the home country must prepare their students accordingly before sending them to the host countries. Identifying these academic needs through systematic research is important to all parties involved –the home country, the host country and the students themselves. Since there are more than 650 Omani students in Malaysian universities (Oman Embassy Malaysia, personal communication, February21, 2011), it is therefore important to identify the difficulties faced by Omani students in Malaysian universities and to suggest possible ways to alleviate these difficulties.

This chapter is organized into several sections within which the different aspects related to the use of English in the academic contexts, needs analysis approaches and academic difficulties faced by students will be discussed. The sections are:

- English for Specific Purposes

- English for Academic Purposes

- Needs analysis

- General problems faced by international students

- Academic problems faced by international students

2.1 English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

In order to conduct a successful ESP course, information on learners' needs, wants and necessities, drawbacks, learning needs, course needs, and language needs should be obtained. As the current research is studying academic English difficulties faced by Omani international students in Malaysia, all these issues should be discussed as a way of understanding the background to this study. Therefore this chapter begins with a discussion on ESP.

According to Waters & Hutchinson (1987) the English we write and speak differ considerably from one context to another. These differences have a lot to do with distinctions in learners' needs and interests. Some students learn English to get a certificate in general English through which the learner might apply for citizenship in English speaking countries, while others might be studying English for professional purposes to secure a job or to get a promotion. The context or the discipline of the educational institute has a role in the choice of the type of English which must be used in order to achieve their goals. Hutchinson and Waters (1987:19) explained that ESP is *'an approach to language teaching in which all decision as to content and method are based on the learners' reason for learning'*. Thus, one of the aims of ESP is the approach in teaching and learning English language skills and to ensure that the method used and the curriculum will enable learners to perform effectively in the target context the course was designed for. Figure 2.1 summarizes the factors Hutchinson and Waters (1987) see as important considerations when designing an ESP course.
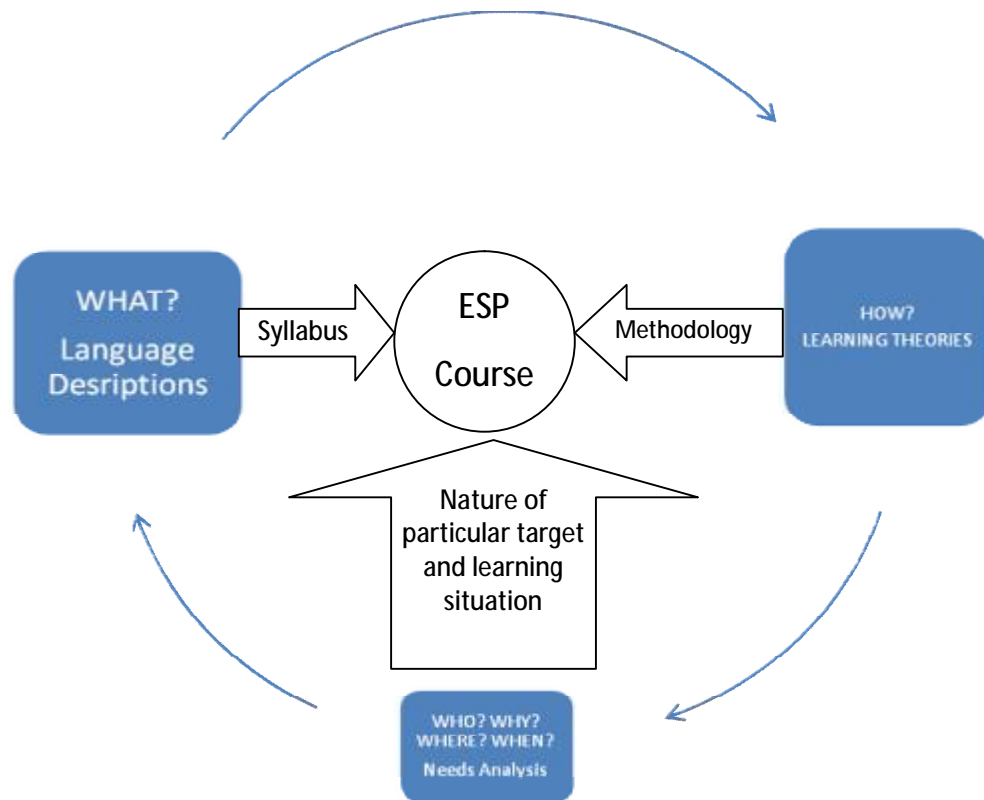
Figure 2.1: Factors Affecting ESP Course Design
(Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 22)

Similarly, Orr (2002:1) defined ESP as an *'... English education for highly specialized purposes, which require training beyond that normally received...'* and that ESP possesses three specific referents in the world of English language education:

1. As the specific subject of the English language that is required to carry out specific tasks for specific purposes.

2. As a branch of language education that studies and teaches subsets of English to assist learners successfully carrying out specific tasks for specific purposes and

3. As a movement that has popularized the ESP profession and its work with ESP discourse.

In much the same lines, Basturkmen (2006: 17) explained that ESP consists of three elements: learners, English and environment (discipline) and is *'understood to be about preparing learners to use English within academic, professional, or workplace environments'*. Basturkmen (2006:21) went on to justify the importance of selecting what to teach based on the purpose of learning:

> *'As it is not possible to teach all of a language, teachers and course designer must be selective. Nowhere, is this more SO than in ESP teaching, with its emphasis on specific purposes and the limited duration of most ESP courses. It is often by selecting what to teach that language teachers show their notions of what language and their beliefs as to what are important in the language learning.'*

However, it is important to note that ESP does not mean to gain the knowledge of the specific part of the language that would be used in the field only, but the competence to use the language sufficiently in a specific context. Therefore, ESP can be seen as a *'spoken and written discourse in academic and workplace settings, which in unfamiliar to most native and non-native speakers and thus required special training'* (Orr, 2002:1). In this sense, there can be many types of ESP -- English for Science, English for Engineering, for example, all of which would come under English for Academic Purpose or EAP.

2.2 English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

Tompkins (2009:13) pointed out a distinction between academic and social languages when he stated that *'The type of English used for instruction is called academic language. It is different than the social or conversational language we speak at home and with friends.'* Therefore, for Tompkins (2009), the distinction between the two lies in the context English is used, Academic English refers to its use in the academic environment, and social English in the social environment.

Oshima & Hogue (2007) on the other hand differentiated between academic writing and other writings such as creative and personal writing. They defined creative writing as a kind of writing you do when you write stories and personal writing as a kind of writing you do when you write letters or e-mails to your friends and family. They added that creative and personal writings are informal writing where people feel free to use slang, short sentences and connotations when they write. Moreover, they stated that academic writing in English is probably different from academic writing in other languages in terms of the grammar, word choice, and the way ideas are organized. As such, they added that the way academic writing is written might look clumsy, repetitive and even impolite to people of other languages.

Therefore, students need to be taught and given sufficient practice in academic language even if they are proficient users of social language because without access to academic language, students are likely to have difficulties to understand and use academic language in the classroom (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Tompkins (2009:13) added that *"through instruction and frequent opportunities to use talk and other language arts in meaningful ways, children learn the knowledge, vocabulary, and language patterns associated with academic English. Although, learning academic language is essential for all children, the challenge is greater for English learners."* Therefore, familiarising

students with Academic English features and style is essential for students of all levels. This can be achieved through needs analysis which is going to be discussed below.

2.3   Needs Analysis

Needs in education, according to Richards (2001:54), is *'often described in terms of linguistics deficiency, that is, as describing the differences between what a learner can presently do in a language and what he or she should be able to do.....These needs have objectives reality and are simply there waiting to be identified and analysed.'*

Needs analysis emerged in the 1970s as a necessary stage in the planning of educational programmes and it was introduced into language teaching through the ESP movement (Richards, 2001). As the demand for specialized language programmes increased, applied linguists started to employ needs analysis procedures in language teaching (Richards, 2001). Then by the 1980s, the 'needs-based philosophy' emerged in language teaching in most parts of the world and it was used in relation to ESP and vocationally oriented programmes (Bindley, 1984). As a result, the teachers were able to decide what materials to provide to their students based on their needs. As such, Gupta (2007:15) defines needs analysis as *'a diagnostic process that relies on data collection, collaboration, and negotiation to identify and understand gaps in learning and performance and to determine future actions.'* Richards (2001:51) on the other hand, defines needs analysis as *'procedures used to collect information about learners needs.'*

Richards, Platt and Platt (1992: 242 -243) define needs analysis as *'the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities'*. Thus, Richards, Platt and Platt (1992), Richards (2001) and Gupta (2007) looked at needs analysis as the procedures of collecting data about learners' needs and to identify and understand the gaps in learning

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and performance and to decide future plans. These definitions are in line with the objectives of this study in which it looks at the students' needs and identifies the difficulties they face and to suggest future actions.

Needs analysis has an essential role in the designing and carrying out of language courses (Songhori, 2008). In other words, needs analysis is *'a process for figuring out how to close a learning or performance gap"* as it helps to determine the important needs of the learners and the way to address these needs (Gupta, 2007:14). Gupta (2007) states that needs analysis is typically used in the following situations:

- Solving a current problem

- Avoiding a past or current problem

- Creating or taking advantages of a future opportunity

- Providing learning, development, or growth

Needs analysis is fundamental in any English language teaching (ELT) programme because it clarifies learners' objectives and needs to learn that programme. It also helps to avoid repeating what students have already learnt and avoid lacking what they are still in need of. In addition, it helps planners, policy makers and syllabus designers to propose the syllabus and implement the type of language content.

Needs analysis becomes essential in the field of ESP because English nowadays is used in many different fields and each field has its specific needs and interests. For instance, General English focuses on teaching daily life English so it teaches general vocabulary which is related to general usage. English for medicine is another type of English which focuses on the specific registers and sentence structures medical staff use. Therefore, the need to analyse the learners' specific wants and objectives becomes very demanding. As a result, many ESL researchers and practitioners have given their concern to carry out needs analyses of ESL learners which are likely to be (Munby, 1978; Hutchinson and

Waters, 1987; Tarone and Yule, 1989; West, 1994; Jordan, 1997; Finney, 2002 and Songhori, 2008).

Needs analysis is crucial in language teaching because it provides information about learners and identifies and understands gaps in learning and performance. Hutchinson and Waters (1987:53) stated that *"any course should be based on an analysis of learners' need."* Therefore, conducting needs analysis is essential before designing any course. Richards (2001:52) listed *"a number of different purposes of needs analysis:*

- *to find out what language skills a learner needs in order to perform a particular role, such as sales manager, tour guide, or university student*

- *to help determine if an existing course adequately addresses the needs of potential students*

- *to determine which students from a group are most in need of training in particular language skills*

- *to identify a change of direction that people in a reference group feel is important*

- *to identify a gap between what students are able to do and what they need to be able to do and*

- *to collect information about a particular problem learners are experiencing."*

These purposes are important in order to conduct a needs analysis. Richards (2001) assured that the first step in conducting needs analysis is to determine its purpose or purposes.

Needs analysis could also be conducted for different users. Richards (2001:56) states that *"in any situation where needs analysis is being undertaken, there are thus different stakeholders, that is, those who have a particular interest or involvement in the issue or programmes that are being examined, and it is important to try to get a sense of what*

their different agendas are.” In addition to that Richards (2001:55) points out that the end users of the secondary school English curriculum in a country may include:

- *“curriculum officers, who may wish to use the information to evaluate the adequacy of existing syllabus, curriculum and materials*

- *teachers who will teach the curriculum*

- *learners, who will be taught from the curriculum*

- *writers, who are preparing new text*

- *testing personnel, who are involved in developing end-of-school assessments*

- *staff of tertiary institution, who are interested in knowing what the expected level will be students exiting the school and what problems they face.”*

Therefore, the users of a needs analysis differ as well as depend on the purposes of conducting the needs analysis.

According to Richards (2001:57), *“The target population in needs analysis refers to the people about whom information will be collected.”* Richards (2001) suggested that the target population for an English programme in an EFL context for public secondary schools may consist of:

- policy makers

- ministry of education

- teachers

- learners

- academics

- employers

- parents

- academic specialist

Therefore, it is important to be clear on the purpose(s) of the needs analysis so that it would help to specify the targeted population in advance (Richards, 2001).

Behavioral theories attempted to explain the reasons behind alterations in individuals' behavioral and learning patterns. In recent years, there has been increased interest in the application of these theories in education. In the traditional teaching, language learning typically involved repetition of words, patterns and grammar rules. Accuracy was given more importance than fluency. Eventually, that method of teaching was considered not as successful for some learners as it did not develop learners' communicative skills. Resulting from that, several approaches were introduced by among others, Chomsky (1965), Halliday (1971), Hymes (1972), Widdowson (1978), Munby (1978), and Bachman (1990). Chomsky's notion of language competence and performance was heavily criticised by Hymes. Chomsky's competence or performance model did not provide an explicit place for socio-cultural features in human communication. Subsequently, Chomsky's approach was criticized by Munby (1978) who argued that knowing grammar rules is not sufficient; learners must know the contextual constraints for using those rules in any particular situation (AL-Busaidi, 2003).

Munby(1978) highlighted the importance of socio-cultural and socio-semantic orientation in communication. Munby (1978) also stated that the syllabus designer must first start from the learners' communicative needs and then combine language items and learners needs. His Communicative Needs Processor (CNP) model consists of a range of questions about key communication variables (topics, participants, medium, sponsors, teachers,) which can be used to recognize the target language needs of any set of learners (Richards,1987). Long (2005:307) states that *'needs analysis is essential to identify the tasks that learners will engage in, and the language needed to realize those tasks;* .Thus, Munby's (1978) approach is workable in ESP area because it gives a new vision on individual learners needs.

According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998:125) the current concept of needs analysis in ESP includes the following aspects:

a) *"Professional information about the learners*: the tasks and activities learners are/will be using English for- *target situation analysis* and *objective needs*" as it gives detailed ideas about the learners which helps to design the appropriate curriculum.

b) *"Personal information about the learners:* factors which may affect the way they learn such as previous learning experiences, cultural information, reasons for attending the course and expectations of it, attitude towards English- *wants, means, subjective needs*". It is essential to understand learners' background, what they need to learn and what their course demands.

c) *English language information about the learners*: what their current skills and language use are- *Present Situation Analysis*- which allows us to assess (d).

d) *Learners' lacks*: the gap between (a) and (c). It is fundamental to fill in this gap as there are some curriculum which do not contain related topics students are supposed to have studied in the previous course,

e) *Language learning information*: effective ways of learning the skills and language in

(d) - learning needs.

f) *Professional communication information* about (a): knowledge of how language and skills are used in the target situation- linguistic analysis, discourse analysis, genre analysis.

g) What is wanted from the course? It illuminates the output of the course and how they could achieve their plans.

h) Information about the environment in which the course will be run. For instance, if the students are aware of their learning environment and conditions, they are psychologically prepared to put additional effort in mastering second language. The knowledge of the course environment paves way for mental and material preparation in learning language accurately.

Therefore this study will discuss second language needs analysis in order to give a clearer understanding of the academic needs of students and suggest ways to overcome their difficulties.

2.3.1 Target Needs

Hutchinson and Waters (1987:53) believe that there are differences between General English taught in schools and English taught in colleges but the difference is on ESP in practice but not in theory: *'what distinguished ESP from general English is not the existence of a need as such but rather the awareness of the need. If learners, sponsors and teachers know why the learners need English, that awareness will have an influence on what will be acceptable as reasonable content in the language course and, on the positive side, what potential can be exploited.'* Thus, the awareness of the needs will influence the content (Science, Geography, Medicine, etc) of the language course and in using the ESP approach to design a programmes, it would be the awareness of the needs analysis of target situation *'(i.e. what the learner needs to do in the target situation)'* which will differentiate contents of the ESP learners of general English. Therefore, needs analysis is the awareness of learners' needs of the target situation.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argued that Target Needs is an umbrella term which covers a number of essential distinctions; however it is better to look at Target Needs in terms of necessities, lacks and wants.

a. **Necessities**: are the needs determined by the demands of the target situation: *"what the learners has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation"* (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 55). They gave an example of a businessman who might need to understand business letters to communicate effectively at sales conference etc. He/she will also need to know the linguistic features, vocabulary, structure, etc.

b. **Lacks**: the necessities that learners lack. Lacks can be decided on after recognizing what the learners already know. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) defined lacks as the gap between the target proficiency and the existing proficiency.

c. **Wants**: are learners' views about the reasons they want language and these should not be ignored, as students possibly have a clear idea about the necessities of the target situation and will certainly have a view as to their lacks (Kandil, 2002).

These concepts are illustrated with relevant examples in Table 2.1.

Table 1.1: The Differences between Necessities, Lacks and Wants (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 58)

	OBJECTIVES (i.e. as perceived by course designers)	**SUBJECTIVE** (i.e. as perceived by learners)
NECESSITIES	The English needs for success in Agricultural or Veterinary studies	To reluctantly cope with a 'second-best' situation
LACKS	(presumably) areas of English needed for Agricultural or Veterinary studies	Means of doing Medical studies
WANTS	To succeed in Agricultural or Veterinary studies	To undertake Medical studies

Hutchinson and Waters (1987:56) argued that awareness of the needs characterises the ESP situations and *'awareness is a matter of perception, and perception may vary according to one's standpoint.'* In fact, learners' wants may cause a conflict in the target situation with other interested parties, course designers, sponsors, and teachers. For instance, 'Li Yu Zhen is a Chinese graduate in Chemistry, who is going to study in the United States. She needs to be able to survive socially and professionally in an English-speaking community. Fluency is, therefore, her greatest need. Li Yu Zhen, however, prefers to spend her time improving her knowledge of English grammar. Why? Her answer lies in her own estimation of priorities. In order to be accepted for her course of study she must first pass a test. The most important criterion in the test is grammatical accuracy. Li Yu Zhen, therefore, sees her priority needs as being to pass the test ' (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987:56). Thus, it is essential to understand learners' wants before starting any course to be combined later with learners' needs and course objectives.

Chen (2005, as citied in Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2010) also highlights the importance of including necessities, lacks, and wants in the analysis process of learners' target needs, stating that *'by looking at learners' background situation, lacks, necessities and wants, we recognized that the individual participants have their own general and specific needs both objectively and subjectively…This significant identification of needs became the basis of the course design'* (p.2).

There are different approaches in needs analysis such as: Learning-Centred Approach, Target-Situation Analysis Approach, Present-Situation Analysis, and Means Analysis Approach. These approaches are crucial to needs analysis and will be used in this study as a guide to the information which needs to be obtained. The following section is going to discuss the different approaches to needs analysis.

2.3.2 Approaches to Needs Analysis

Hutchinson and Waters (1987:19) argued that ESP is neither a specific language nor a methodology, 'ESP *must be seen an approach not as a product.'* Based on Munby's approach, Chambers (1980) introduced the Target Situation Analysis. Then, from that time other approaches have been introduced such as Learning- Centred Approach, the Strategy Analysis Approach, Present-Situation Analysis, the Means Analysis Approach, Pedagogic Needs Analysis, Deficiency Analysis, Register Analysis, Discourse Analysis and Genre Analysis (Songhori, 2008). However, Jordan (1994) stated that in reality there are only two main approaches in needs analysis: Target Situation Analysis (TSA) and Present- Situation Analysis while the other approaches are seen as permutations of these two main approaches.

Munby (1978) on the other hand, designed the most widely and methodical work on needs analysis which is called the Communicative Syllabus Design and it presents in a detailed manner the procedures of determining the target situation needs (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). Munby (1978) called these set of procedures, the Communicative Needs Processor (CNP). Munby (1978:32) stated that *'in the Communication Needs Processor (CNP) we take account of the variable that affects communication needs by organizing them as parameters in a dynamic relationship to each other.'* Munby's model (1978) is the most important model and was the base or often referred to in the literature of needs analysis (Songhori, 2008). Munby's Communication Needs Processor (CNP) model consists of eight parameters as illustrated in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Munby's CNP Model (1978)

The eight parameters as shown in Figure 2.2 are:

1. **Purposive domain**: this parameter established the ESP, and then *'he specifies the occupational or educational purpose for which the target language is required'* (Munby, 1978:1978). It is essential to specify the objectives of any course.

2. **Setting:** deals with the physical and psychosocial setting where the learner will use the target language. The physical setting consists of spatial and temporal aspect where learners would use the language, and the psychosocial setting which are the different environments in which the target language will be used.

3. **Interaction**: identifies the learner's interlocutors and predicts their relationships.

4. **Instrumentality**: analyses the *medium* of the language that will be used (written or spoken or both), the *mode* of the language to be used (i.e. dialogue,

monologue, etc.) and the *channel* of communication (i.e. face to face, television, etc.).

5. **Dialect**: identifies the dialect learner have to be familiar with in order to understand and produce the language suitably in terms of the spatial, temporal, or social aspect.

6. **Communicative event**: to express what the learner has to do with the target language effectively (receptively or productively).

7. **Target level:** the targeted level of language proficiency at the end of ESP course which may not be the same for all skills.

8. **Communicative key**: to specify the manner learner has to do with the target language (i.e. being polite) in different events (i.e. request).

(Munby, 1978)

Munby's CNP model aims to find as systematically as possible the language form as prospective in the learning situation. Therefore, the component of these eight parameters will ask questions about the use of the target language in order to identify learners' real world communicative requirements. The results of these questions will be used as a base to prepare the proposed group of learners for the intended use of the language by using the communicative key which will in turn help in designing the syllabus (Jordan, 1997, as cited in Alharby, 2005).

Jordan (1994) states that the Target Situation Analysis (TSA), and the Present- Situation Analysis (PSA) are also used in needs analysis. Therefore, the following discussion will focus mainly on these two approaches.

2.3.2.1 Target Situation Analysis (TSA)

Hutchinson and Waters, (1987:54) stated that *'the communicative syllabus design was a highly detailed set of procedures for discovering target situation need''* and they

defined target situation needs as *'what the learners need to do in the target situation.'* In addition, Esfahani (2009:11) stated that *'by the introduction of CNP , needs analysis changed its directions towards the learners'* aims as central within needs analysis and consequently, the concept of target needs became of great importance and interest.

Chambers (1980:29) defined Target Situation Analysis as *'an approach to needs analysis devoted to establishing the learners' language requirement in the occupational or academic situation they are being prepared for.'* Thus, target situation analysis is an approach to learners' needs analysis to require learners' language needs in the ESP situation. According to West (1998, as cited in Songhori, 2008) target situation analysis starts out by establishing the learners' target needs and target level performance as in Munby's CNP. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987:59) *'the analysis of target situation needs is in essence a matter of asking questions about the target situation and the attitude towards that situation of the various participants in the learning process'*. Thus, through target situation analysis, teachers and syllabus designers would be able to determine learners' needs, lacks and necessities.

Although target situation analysis is the starting point in ESP course design, some linguists have criticised this approach such as Dudley-Evan and St. John (1998), Jordan (1997), Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Mead (1982). Jordan (1997:23), for instance, stated that Munby's (1978) approach was a *'landmark in the development of needs analysis, and probably the best known framework for target-situation analysis.'*

However, they also criticised Munby's (1978:24 as quoted in Ha, 2005) approach by stating that *'the language items chosen for practice in ESP/EAP should reflect those used in the real world,'* not the language derived from social English as classified by Munby's model.

On the other hand, West (1994:9&10 as cited in Songhori 2008:9) stated that Munby's model has the following shortcomings:

1. **Complexity:** Munby's attempt to be systematic and comprehensive inevitably made his instrument inflexible, complex, and time-consuming.

2. **Learner-centeredness**: Munby claims that his CNP is learner-centred. The starting point may be the learner but the model collects data *about* the learner rather than *from* the learner.

3. **Constraints**: Munby's idea is that constraints should be considered after the needs analysis procedure, while many researchers feel that these practical constraints should be considered at the start of the needs analysis process.

4. **Language**: Munby fails to provide a procedure for converting the learner profile into a language syllabus.

To sum up, although Munby's (1978) model was criticized by many writers, it is still used by many ESL researchers and it is believed that Munby's approach should be drawn on as reference or a partly socio-linguistic base for designing a syllabus (Ha, 2005). Thus, Munby's approach is still a valid reference for designing a syllabus because it focuses on students' needs as the first stage in the targeted situation.

2.3.2.2 Present Situation Analysis (PSA)

The Present Situation Analysis (**PSA**) and the Target Situation Analysis (TSA) go hand-in-hand as both address considerations in needs analysis and curriculum design. While TSA focuses on analysing the learners' language needs in the occupational or academic situation they are being prepared for, the PSA focuses on learners' present proficiency level at the start point of the course (Esfahani, 2009). When both TSA and PSA are combined, the course designer may know the learners' needs and their present language

proficiency level, and can therefore plan for the expected language proficiency level for that course.

One of the shortcomings of Munby's model is that it collects data about the learners not from the learners. On contrary, the PSA collects data *from* the learners rather than *about* the learners. In order to obtain information for a comprehensive needs analysis, it is necessary to use both PSA and TSA approaches to design a language course. Richards (2001:146) mentioned that *'in order to plan a language course, it is necessary to know the level at which the programme will start and the level learners may be expected to reach at the end of the course'*. Therefore, gathering information on learners' present situation (i.e. placement test, questionnaires, interviews) will assist in determining the content of the target situation programme. However, Songhori (2008:10) cautions the combination of TSA and PSA *'within the realm of ESP, one cannot rely either on TSA and PSA as reliable indicators of what is needed to enhance learning and reaching the desired goals'*. For that reason, linguists and syllabus designers proposed other approaches to needs analysis such as the Pedagogic Needs Analysis (PNA).

2.3.2.3   Pedagogic Needs Analysis (PNA)

Pedagogic Needs Analysis (PNA) was introduced by West (1998) in order to compensate the four shortcomings (Complexity, Learner-centeredness, Language, and Constraints) of the Munby (1978, as cited in Songhori, 2008) model. The PNA consisted of three subcategories Deficiency *Analysis* (DA), Strategies Analysis (SN) and Means Analysis (MA).

Deficiency Analysis (DA)

According to Esfahani (2009:18) Deficiency Analysis (DA) is *'an analysis of what it takes to take the learners from their present situation to the target situation.'* Consequently, deficiency analysis is the source of language syllabus (Jordan, 1997),

because it fills the gap between the present situation and target extra linguistic knowledge, mastery of general English, language skills, and learning strategies (Songhori, 2008). Figure 2.4 presents a graphic realization of Deficiency Analysis. It illustrates Present Situation Analysis and Target Situation and fills the gap between the two approaches (Esfahani, 2009).

Figure 2.3: Deficiency Analysis (Esfahani, 2009)

Strategies Analysis (SN) or Learning Needs Analysis (LNA)

As we have noticed that Target Situation and Present Situation Analysis focused on language and the learners but not on the strategies used by the learners in the process of learning. Therefore, the Learning Needs Analysis (LNA) or Strategies Analysis (SA) fills in that gap as its focus is on learner's strategies in second language learning (Esfahani, 2009). Jordan (1997) stated that Allwright (1982) was the pioneer in the field of Strategy Analysis. Jordan (1997:27) stated that *'Allwright's (1982) concerns were to help students to identify skills areas and their preferred strategies of achieving the skills'.*

Hutchinson and Waters (1987:61) stated that *'the needs, potential and constrains of the route (i.e. the learning situation) must also be taken into account, if we are going to have any useful analysis of learner needs.'* They considered LNA as a source of data which *'provide educators with what to be done for learners to learn the language'* (Esfahani, 2009:20). Thus, it is crucial to identify students used strategies in the process of learning which may help lecturers to improve learners, learning abilities.

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Means Analysis (MA)

Means analysis (MA), on the other hand, answers the question: would what we have planned be possible to be practiced based on the circumstances of the situation and the environment? This has been raised by some researchers as another of the shortcomings of the Munby model.

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998:125) stated that Means Analysis provides '*information about the environment in which the course will be run.*' It implies that what works in a specific situation might not work in other, therefore, according to Songhori (2008:15), the '*ESP syllabi should be sensitive to the particular cultural environment in which the course will be imposed.*' Swales (1989 quoted by West, 1994 as in Songhori, 2008:15) stated that in order to have an effective course or program, curriculum specialists should be aware of five factors related to the learning environment:

1. classroom culture

2. EAP staff

3. Pilot target situation analysis

4. Status of service operations

5. Study of change agents

To sum up, for the Means Analysis model, it is obvious that for any course planning and teaching, it is essential to consider the situation and culture of the learners because it may cause a misunderstanding or cultural conflict (Esfahani, 2009).

The above paragraphs were a summary of the approaches to Needs Analysis. The following section will highlight the current concept of Needs Analysis and the approaches which are going to be employed in this study.

2.3.3 Current Concepts in Needs Analysis

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998:125) proposed a comprehensive model of Needs Analysis which contains all the approaches to needs analysis mentioned earlier and even more. Their mode consists of eight approaches which are elaborated as such:

1. **Environment 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 run (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 showed by diagnostic test;

5. **Learners needs from course:** what is wanted from the course (short-term needs), such as the course objectives and the learner's 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 analysis), 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).

As mentioned above, this is the most comprehensive model of Needs Analysis which contains all the approaches to needs analysis which are stated earlier and even more. As Jordan (1994) states that the Target Situation Analysis (TSA) and Present- Situation Analysis are actually more in use in needs analysis. Therefore, this study is going to employ Present- Situation Analysis (PSA) approach as the study is investigating the academic language difficulties, their causes and the possible ways to solve them.

2.3.4 Procedures for Collecting Data for Needs Analysis

The type of procedures in conducting needs analysis depend on the type of information required. There are several varieties of data collection instruments, for example, questionnaires, interviews, meetings, and observation. As in any investigation, it must not be just one tool as the triangulation approach -- collecting data from two or more resources (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987& Richards, 2000).   Moreover, the choice of the instruments and method also depend on the time and availability of resources (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

The following section will present a brief discussion of two of the most frequently used tools (questionnaire, interview) in needs analysis approaches (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). These two methods are the same two used in this current study.

2.3.4.1 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire is the most widely used method for gathering survey information, providing structured, often numerical data (Wilson and McLean, 1994 as in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). It is frequently used to collect information in needs

analysis because it is easy to prepare, can be used with a large number of participants and can be prepared in such a way that makes analysis of data relatively easy. Questionnaires can also be used to collect different information at the same time, such as participant's biography, academic background, learning strategies, attitudes, beliefs, academic difficulties and communication difficulties (Richards, 2001).

A questionnaire may consist of a set of different types of questions such as dichotomous questions, multiple choice questions, and closed ended as well as open ended questions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). Structured items in which participants choose from a close-ended and limited choice which 'are quick to complete and straight forward to code (e.g. for computer analysis), and do not discriminate unduly on the basis of how articulate the respondents are' (Wilson and McLean, 1994, in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:248).

However, questionnaires have some disadvantages. They depend on subjects' motivation, honesty, memory, and ability to respond. For instance some participants may not give the right information, sometimes intentionally or they may misunderstand the question. Structures surveys, particularly those with closed ended questions, may have low validity when responding to affective variables. Therefore, researchers sometimes need to administer the questionnaires themselves in order to clarify ambiguous items to respondents. Researchers have to also be familiar with the characteristics of a good questionnaire and ensure that the information acquired is reliable. They also need to sample the questionnaire to identify the ambiguous questions. Nevertheless, the questionnaire is the preferred method used to obtain information in needs analyses (Richards, 2001).

2.3.4.2 The Interview

The interview is one of the most important techniques used in data collection. The participant gives the needed information verbally in a face-to-face relationship. In some ways the interview can be taken to be an oral questionnaire. An interview gives more space for participants to speak freely, and for the interviewer to comment and ask in-depth follow up questions. Information obtained from the interview can be used to guide the design of the questionnaire. It also can be used after the administration of questionnaires in order to get more in-depth explanation from participants or to verify responses obtained from the questionnaire (Richards, 2001). In-depth interviews permit the participant to express ideas and opinions in their own words (Webber, 2010).

On the other hand, interviews are more time consuming than questionnaires. Researches can administer a written questionnaire to a large group of participants at the same time, the interview can be carried out with only one participant at a time because one participant's response may affect another participant's response (Mitchell and Jolley, 2010).   Therefore, the current study has selected both the questionnaire and the interview as its data gathering tools (to be discussed in detail in Chapter 3).

2.4   General Difficulties Faced by International Students

There are studies in the literature which have identified different problems of international students studying in an English speaking country. For instance, a study by Cheng, Ding and Perez (1998) looked at the difficulties faced by East Asian international students enrolled in American universities. They found that these students had high stress level. The study also found that this high stress level is caused by *"high test anxiety, financial difficulties, and culture shock, which are compounded by the students' lack of English proficiency and perceived family pressure to excel academically"* (Cheng, Ding and Perez, 1998:5).

Berman and Cheng (2001) stated that in a survey of international students at the University of Alberta in Canada, Chacon (1998) found that 37.7% and 36.7% of international students found speaking and writing, correspondingly, to some extent problems or serious problems for them. Moreover, Chacon found a similar percentage of the students found 'understanding instructors' difficult, and over two thirds of the group had high academic stress.

Sawir (2005) on the other hand, studied language difficulties of international Asian students in Australian universities. The study found that the learning difficulties were grounded in weaknesses in students' prior learning experiences. The researcher found that students' prior learning was focusing on grammar and reading skills in teacher-centred classrooms and no focus was given to the development of conversational skills. Sawir (2005:14) findings included:

1. 'Students' prior English language learning experience has an impact on how well they can cope with the academic requirement of the Australian university.
2. The data indicate that students did not have sufficient exposure to English language conversation.
3. Classroom practice was not only largely didactic (one-way) rather than conversational in form, but was also largely confined to the teaching of grammatical rules.
4. This classroom practice appeared to have shaped some learner's beliefs that grammar was the most important part of English language learning.
5. It appeared that this belief had then become manifested in their communication behaviour, so that they were not able to communicate effectively, socially and academically, and the learning of conversational skills was retarded.'

AL-Zubaidi (2010) studied the cultural and language barriers of international Arab students in Malaysia. He found that 27% of his Arab participants at the Malaysian universities are not suffering from cultural difference. On the other hand, he found that 54% of his participants face academic barriers, and these barriers were their biggest problem.

AL-Khasawneh (2010), studied academic writing problems faced by Arab postgraduate students in Malaysia. He found that his subjects had difficulties in academic writing and his study revealed that the students faced problems in relation to vocabulary register, spelling, grammar, referencing and organization of ideas.

Siti Salina and Hamidah (2010) conducted a study on the difficulties Malaysian students face in Australian universities. They found that Malaysian students have difficulties in terms of adjusting to the new learning culture. Specifically, academic difficulties were Malaysian students' major problem. Students were unfamiliar with the Australian academic system, had language difficulties, problems with academic writing and unstructured supervision (Siti Salina and Hamidah, 2010). They suggested that students need to be familiarized with the new learning culture. They also suggested that the international student office and university counselling centres could support those at risk students by creating support groups to help them survive in the new academic environment.

Tar, Tanczos and Wiwczaroski (2010) studied the academic difficulties of L2 medical students in Hungary pursuing their undergraduate diploma course in English. They study focused on students' reading, writing and oral skills. The study found through the Skills Checklist and interviews that comprehension difficulties was a problem to more than 70% of the first year medical students. In addition, the interview findings showed

that students encounter several problems in intercultural communication, culture shock and have difficulties in their interaction with their peers and lectures.

Terraschke and Wahid (2011) studied whether the academic experience of international students are influenced by attending an EAP course. They found that the English for Academic Purposes course did not only improve their English proficiency but also helped them build up useful academic skills and introduced them to the common genres of their respective fields. They found that former EAP students were better in using learning strategies, more confident in dealing with written assessments and have better understanding of the demands of their course. On the other hand, students who did not attend an EAP course *'expressed a greater sense of dissatisfaction and disappointment when their high academic expectations were not fulfilled'* (Terraschke and Wahid, 2011:173).

A counselling services department in the University of Glamorgan in United Kingdom found that international students face different challenges once they go abroad and generally they are academic and culture difficulties. The department mentioned that international students face difficulties such as; academic difficulties, culture shock, language difficulties, homesickness, anxiety, depression and difficulties in getting used to a new climate. Counselling services were provided for these students to help solve their problems and to offer techniques to help the students solve their difficulties on their own.

2.5   Academic English Proficiency

Stephen, Welman and Jordaan (2004) discussed whether English language proficiency is an indicator of academic performance at a tertiary institution or not. They found that "*the hypothesis that English language proficiency has a significant impact on black student success rates appears to be substantially correct*" (2004:10). As result, for

international students whose mother tongue is not English, they need to be proficient in English to be successful in an academic setting.

Robertson et al. (2000, as cited in Sawir, 2005) stated that students and staff emphasize that language is the key source of difficulties in teaching and learning. They observed that international students have different difficulties in the use of English language for example they do not understand the lecturers' spoken English, feel unhappy with their oral performance, face writing difficulties, and problems of interpretation.

Bayley et al. (2002 as cited in Sawir, 2005) also found that according to academic staff, of the international students who come from a Non-English speaking background, many were not able to contribute effectively in tutorial discussions. They also stated that due to poor grammar, students' written work was regularly hard to be read and assessed. Therefore, students will not be able to communicate effectively because in addition to having poor writing skills, the students find it hard to understand the lecturers.

AL-Zubaidi (2010) studied Arab international students' language barriers in Malaysian universities. He found most Arab students were struggling to obtain sufficient level of English language proficiency particularly in terms of accent, pronunciation, and slang. In addition, he found students were struggling with lecturers' instructions because they were fast-paced and it was new to international students.

AL-Khasawneh (2010) also studied problems faced by Arab international students in the college of business in Malaysia and he focused his attention on writing for academic purposes. He found that business students face problems while carrying out the assigned writing tasks. Students' difficulties were in vocabulary, grammar, organization of ideas, spelling and referencing, and vocabulary. He stated that the major problem students faced was vocabulary and this problem occurred because as to function effectively in

their programmes, they need a reasonable size of vocabulary. He argued that there is an amount of vocabulary which is required to be acquired as they appear frequently in academic texts. In conclusion, AL-Khasawneh stated that to overcome these academic writing problems, it is the responsibility of the lecturers to help students improve their writing and reading of discipline-specific English materials. Similarly, Davies & Maldoni (2004) mentioned that most international students in Australia who come from non-English speaking backgrounds have academic reading difficulties.

Wilson (2003, as cited in Davies & Maldoni, 2004) stated that international students face serious difficulties in academic readings. She argued that students who have little experience of academic text find it difficult to read large volumes of academic reading lists. Reid, Kirkpatrick and Mulligan (1998, as cited in Davies & Maldoni, 2004) also found that international students who come from non-English speaking backgrounds spent two to three times longer to read a text compared to students who come from English-speaking background. Davies & Maldoni, (2004:3) found that *"there can be no effective analysis, comprehension and application without reading as a basis'.* They also stated that good reading skills is important for students, as it helps them to understand the concepts and in turn convey their competency in written and oral communication tasks, and is also important in understanding exam questions. Therefore, international students need to acquire academic reading skills in order to successfully complete their programme of study.

A study by DeZure, Kaplan and Deerman (2001:1) researched the importance of note taking to students and they stated that it has a *"positive impact on students learning."* Kiewra et al (1991, as cited in DeZure, Kaplan and Deerman, 2001) mentioned that students who take notes during lectures score higher marks on the tests of recall and synthesis compared to the students who do not take notes. Moreover, Johnstone & Su

(1994, as cited in DeZure, Kaplan and Deerman, 2001) built a relationship between note taking, remembering, and better performance on exams. They found that the more students record (note taking), the more they remember and the better they perform on exams. Although it is obvious that note taking is an essential skill for students, note taking as a task can be difficult for international students. Note taking involves listening and writing simultaneously and students say they experience the most difficulty with lecturers who speak fast or inaudibly, lecturers who do not present a clear outline at the beginning of the lecture, or do not signal important information (Johnstone & Su, 1994 as quoted by DeZure, Kaplan and Deerman, 2001). DeZure, Kaplan and Deerman concluded with some practical suggestions of how faculties can support students' note taking difficulties. DeZure, Kaplan and Deerman (2001:2) stated that the *'faculty can improve their students'* note taking ability by focusing on three areas: lecture strategies, the use of handouts, and strategies for engaging students.

Berman and Cheng (2001) studied the international graduate and undergraduate students' perception on the difficulties the English language in terms of the four skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. They found that the productive skills' (writing and speaking) difficulty rating was higher than the receptive skills (listening and reading) difficulty, and for productive skills, speaking skill difficulties were higher than writing skill for both graduate and undergraduate students. They also stated that regarding speaking skills, students found *'carrying out oral presentation', 'taking part in class discussion', 'answering questions in class discussion', 'asking questions in class discussion'* most difficult. It was also found that students found *'Writing essay examinations'* a difficult task.

Li and Gasser (2005) found that, in general, students in tertiary level face difficulties in the academic setting, however, international students, in addition to these difficulties, face other difficulties related to adjusting to the new culture environment. They also

found international students were surprised and anxious about their low level of language proficiency and academic performance (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Kagan & Cohen, 1990; Ying & Liese, 1994, as quoted in Li and Gasser, 2005). Li and Gasser (2005) concluded that well prepared international students may handle the challenges in their cross-cultural experiences better and have a better possibility to attain the goals of their study.

Mostafa (2006) carried out a study to explore the experience of international Arab graduate students in the University of Alberta, Canada, regarding cultural differences and adjustment, supervision, language difficulties, differences of study system, and funding. He used semi-structured, personal, face to face tape-recorded interviews with five Arab graduate students at the university. The study found that there are differences between the academic system at the university and that of the universities where the international students have been taught in their home countries. All respondents showed that English language proficiency is one of the critical issues that affect them either on- or off- campus. They found the English language difficult to understand as there is a range of accents, or dialectical variations and also difficulties in getting people to understand them. As a result, the University of Alberta employed different programmes and strategies to support international students to adjust to the Canadian setting (Mostafa, 2006).

Siti Salina and Hamidah (2010) also found that Malaysian postgraduate students who have difficulties in English language reported having problems in their academic performance in Australian universities. Therefore, Malaysian students were advised to attend English language courses, and they were encouraged to interact with local students to build confidence and to improve their speaking abilities. Regarding

academic writing difficulties, the study suggested that international students need to attend English academic workshops organised by the university or ask for help from the international student's office regarding their difficulties in academic writing.

2.6 Summary

The sections in this chapter have highlighted some studies which had considered the adjustment problems of the international students in countries where English is the medium of English. As discussed, there were different difficulties that international students faced, and generally, academic English skills were the most frequently raised problems.

This chapter also discussed the literature regarding ESP and related issues, needs analysis and its importance to the ESP and the types of needs to be addressed in any course design or course evaluation. This chapter also reviewed previous studies which were concerned with international students' difficulties. As no study has been conducted on the academic English difficulties of Omani international students in the Malaysian educational context, this current study would help fill that gap in the literature. The methods which were used to conduct this study will be explained in the following chapter.

3.0 Introduction

This chapter explains in detail the methods used in this study including the data collection and data analysis procedures. First, the design of the study will be presented followed by the description of the respondents, instruments, and the procedures for the administration of the questionnaire and interviews. This chapter concludes with an elaboration of the approaches used for data analysis. Figure 3.1 summarizes the framework for the current study by presenting the theoretical framework, research questions, study instruments, and information resources, of the study.
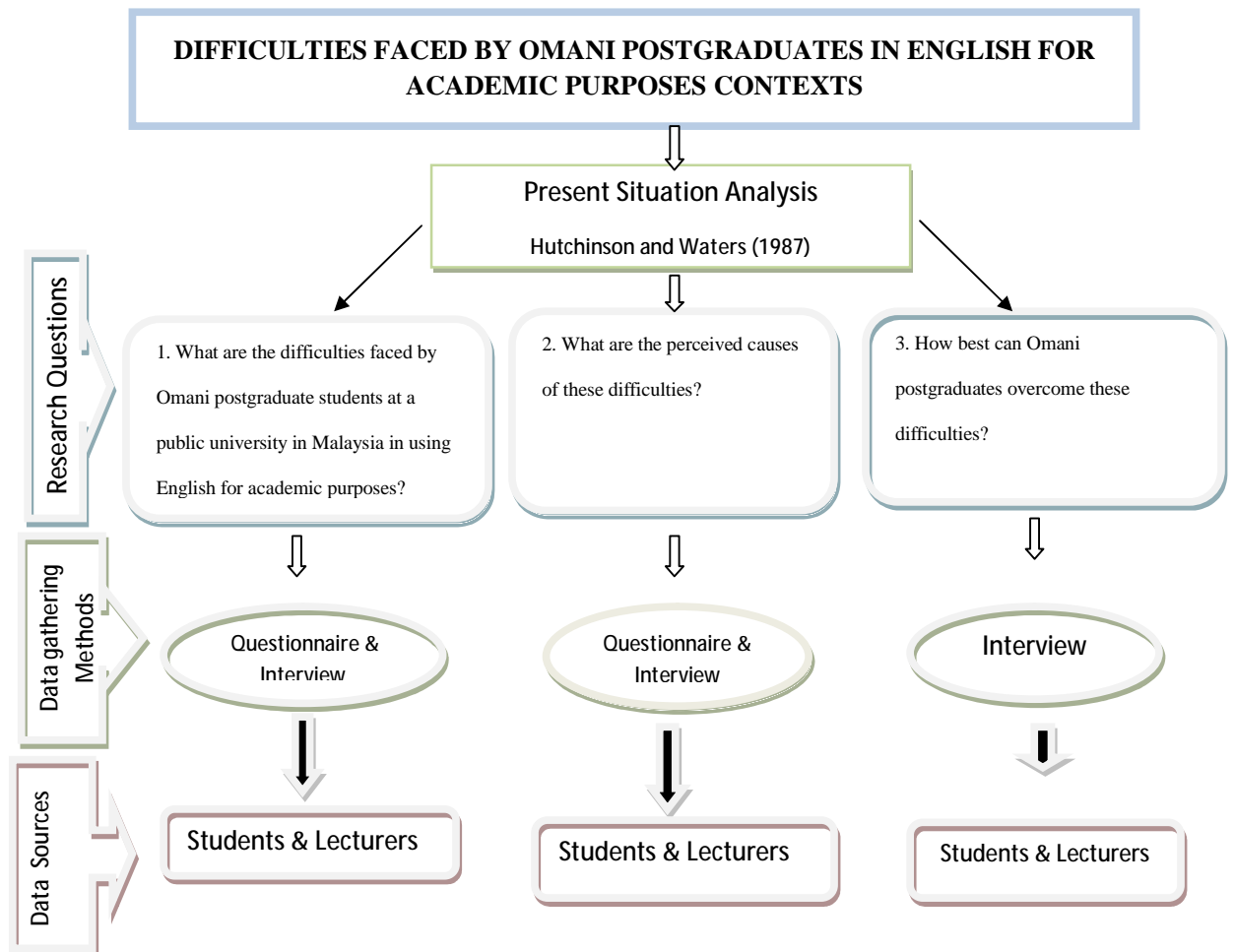
Figure 3.1: Study Framework

3.1 Research Design

This study aimed to identify the academic language difficulties of Omani postgraduate students attaining their studies in a public university in Malaysia. It seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the difficulties faced by Omani postgraduate students at a public university in Malaysia in using English for academic purposes?

2. What are the perceived causes of these difficulties?

3. How best can Omani postgraduates overcome these difficulties?

In order to gather the information required to answer these questions, the study has employed mixed methods approach (quantitative and qualitative approach). The use of mixed methods meant to *'gain better understanding of the results'* (Dunning, 2004: 8). Sydenstricker, (2011) also mentioned that the use of mixed methods *'increase the quality of final results and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of analysed phenomena'*. Thus, the employment of the triangulation approach (quantitative and qualitative method) helped to verify the results through each of the data gathering instruments and strengthen the findings of the study (Creswell, 2003; Dunning, 2004).

The research aimed to identify the most frequently cited of the academic language difficulties among Omani postgraduates. For this the study utilized a questionnaire and an interview protocol as the data gathering tools. Two sets of interviews (students' interview and lecturers' interview) were carried out with two Omani students and two lecturers from a public university in Malaysia. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed orthographically and then analysed qualitatively to verify and confirm the responses from the questionnaire and to give a better understanding of the results.

3.2 The Respondents

The respondents were two lecturers and thirteen Omani postgraduates. These two groups are described in the following section.

3.2.1 Lecturers

The lecturers were from two faculties: one from the Faculty of Education and one from Faculty of Languages and Linguistics. These lecturers were chosen as they have had the experience of teaching and supervising Omani students. Both of them have been lecturers and supervisors for more than 15 years and ranked as an associate professor and a senior lecturer respectively in the academic year 2010/2011. The lecturers are proficient in English and have obtained their degrees from the UK and other English speaking countries. Their participation is on a voluntary basis and they are also aware of the objectives of the research and the sort of questions they will be asked. After getting permission from the lecturers, an appointment was made, and a suitable place was identified for the interview. All the lecturers were informed well in advance. The lecturers' profile is summarized in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Interview Participants of a Public University in Malaysia: Lecturers (Academic year 2010-2011)

No	Faculty	No. of lecturers	Gender	Age	Educational Rank	Educational background	
						Lecturing	Supervising
1	Education	1	Male	40-45	Assoc Professor	12yrs	12yrs
2	Languages and Linguistics	1	Female	50-55	Senior Lecturer	17yrs	17yrs

3.2.2 Omani Students

There are altogether 20 Omani postgraduate students currently registered at the selected Malaysian university. Of this number 2 participated as the pilot respondents and 13

students participated as the actual respondents. The 13 respondents represented 65% of the Omani postgraduates (20 students) studying in the Malaysian public university. The 13 students were from 7 faculties: 4 from the Faculty of Education, 3 the Faculty of Medicine, 2 from the Faculty of Information Technology and Computer Science and 1 each from the Faculties of Science, Economics and Administration, Languages and Linguistics, and Engineering, in the academic year 2010/2011.

These Omani students were pursuing masters or doctorate degrees and were in different stages of their studies. Their English proficiency levels were not similar, because they obtained their previous degree through different media of instruction. Some of them studied in Arabic and others in English. Table 3.2 summarizes their profile.

Table 3.2: Student Participants Profile

No	Age	Gender	Faculty	English Course Yes/No	English test Yes/No	English test Test & Grade	English Proficiency	Academic course Yes/No	Previous Language of instruction
1	26-35	MALE	SCIENCE	Y	Y	Placement Test = Grade B	*GOOD	N	ARABIC
2	36-45	MALE	EDUCATION	Y	Y	Placement Test = Grade B	*SATISFACTORY	Y	ARABIC
3	36-45	MALE	EDUCATION	Y	Y	ACADEMIC WRITING=B	SATISFACTORY	Y	ARABIC
4	26-35	MALE	EDUCATION	N	N		GOOD	N	ENGLISH
5	36-45	MALE	EDUCATION						
6	26-35	MALE	COMPUTER SCIENCE	N	Y	ENG.COURSE V.GOOD	GOOD	Y	ENGLISH
7	36-45	MALE	ECONOMICS	N	N		GOOD	N	ENGLISH
8	26-35	MALE	COMPUTER SCIENCE	N	N		GOOD	N	ARABIC
9	26-35	MALE	MEDICINE	N	N		GOOD	N	ENGLISH
10	26-35	FEMALE	LANGUAGES & LINGUISTICS	N	Y	IELTS=GOOD	GOOD	Y	ENGLISH
11	26-35	FEMALE	MEDICINE	N	N		GOOD	N	ENGLISH
12	26-35	FEMALE	MEDICINE	N	N		GOOD	N	ENGLISH
13	46-above	MALE	ENGINEERING	N	Y	IELTS= 6	GOOD	Y	ENGLISH

*'Good' or 'satisfactory' is according to students perspectives

3.3 Data Collection

The triangulation approach (a questionnaire and two sets of interviews) was used to meet the objectives of the study and answer the research questions. The following section is going to discuss the instruments used in this study.

3.3.1 The questionnaire

 A questionnaire was used to identify the difficulties in the use of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) of Omani postgraduate students at a public university in Malaysia. The questionnaire (see Appendix1) covered two sections: Part One encompassed questions about participants' demography. Part Two consisted of seven skills representing the difficulties Omani students might face in the use of academic English which were replicated from Esfahani (2009).

The questionnaire was distributed to 13 Omani postgraduate students at the different faculties in a public university in Malaysia. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire by choosing the appropriate option from a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'never', to 'always'. The questionnaire was constructed based on Esfahani's (2009) questionnaire, which she developed from the academic English activities (Note taking, Writing critical reviews, Answering exam questions, Understanding lecturers during lectures, Understanding academic books/journals, Participating in group discussion and tutorials and Oral presentation). Her respondents were students in various public universities in Malaysia.

In developing the current questionnaire, the main academic activities of students in the university were listed particularly the activities that involved using English. This is done through information gathered from informal discussions with some of the Omani students regarding their academic English difficulties. The exercise revealed similar activities and difficulties as listed in Esfahani (2009). As such, information from the

preliminary discussions, the students' edited writing and other studies on international students' academic English difficulties were consulted in determining the items in the questionnaire.

Some of these activities are writing projects, critical reviews, answering exam papers, oral presentations, group discussions, class participation, reading comprehension, and discussions, and the difficulties they might have faced in performing these activities. The academic activities were the same as those listed in Esfahani (2009) -- note taking, writing critical reviews, answering exam questions, understanding lectures, reading/ understanding academic book and journals, participating in group discussion and tutorials and oral presentation.

The following seven sub-skills of the four language learning domains, (reading, writing, listening and speaking) were thus identified to be included in the questionnaire:

Note taking

Writing critical reviews

Answering exam questions

Understanding lecturers during lectures

Reading/ Understanding academic books/journals

Participating in the group discussion and tutorials

Oral presentation

Writing skills: the first three sub-skills (note taking, writing critical reviews, and answering exam questions) come under writing as in Esfahani (2009) (see Appendix1). The following descriptions of the skills were based on the preliminary discussions with the Omani students and review of past related studies.

1. **Note taking**: Note taking is an important skill at university level because students need to take notes during lectures and it involves performing 4 tasks all at once – listening to the lecture and understanding its contents, summarizing

the main points and taking down coherent notes that can later be used for revision.

2. **Writing critical reviews**: At the university where the Omani Postgraduate students are studying, they are usually required to do a critique on articles and to write a report. This is a difficult activity for three reasons. Students lack the relevant vocabulary to write an advanced level critique, they do not know the style of critical review report, and because of limited proficiency in English, they tend to translate from their mother tongue to English.

3. **Answering exam questions**: This difficulty is mainly due to students' poor English proficiency which impedes their understanding of the exam questions, and the difficulty to compose critical answers.

4. **Listening skills:** Many studies such as AL-Zubaidi (2010) found that listening skills play an important role in understanding lecturers and students who were struggling with lecturers' instructions. AL-Zubaidi found different reasons which may make listening a problematic area for students: lecturers speaking fast, the use of local dialect and accents, the use of local examples, difficulty to understand the content (i.e. vocabulary, topics) of the lecture, and the difficulty to understand the field-specific English language used.

5. **Reading skills**: The difficulties included are those involving comprehension of books and articles which are common among second language international learners (Esfahani, 2009). Esfahani (2009) noted that this difficulty might be due to slow reading (e.g. a lot of time spent checking meaning of words in the dictionary), difficulty to understand the content of the academic books and journals (e.g. interpretation of data) and the specialised nature of the reading materials used (e.g. field specific registers).

6. **Speaking skills:** Sawir (2005) indicated that the speaking skills problems many international students face are mainly related to oral presentation and participation in group discussions and tutorials.

7. **Participation in group discussions and tutorials**: These activities require a good command of the English language because participants have to express their ideas to be understood by others and also to understand what others are saying. Some of the obstacles identified by Sawir (2005) were: low proficiency or fluency in English and students tend to translate from their mother tongue to the target language and in doing so, much of the meaning will be lost or distorted. They also find it difficult to understand other group members which may lead to misunderstandings.

8. **Oral presentation:** It is one of the academic activities students at tertiary level have to be confident doing. Many of them may find it difficult for the following reasons. Some face difficulty in speaking well during the presentation so they are afraid that they would be misunderstood, and they are also afraid that they would be asked questions which they might not be able to understand and therefore cannot answer effectively.

3.3.2 The interviews

The second data gathering method used in this study is the interview. Two sets of interviews were designed to be administered to two Omani students who agreed to participate and showed serious academic difficulties in their questionnaire. In addition, two lecturers were also interviewed: one from the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics and the other from the Faculty of Education. Both these lecturers are involved in the language aspect of the masters and PhD programmes and have experienced teaching and supervising Omani students.

The interviews were used to triangulate with the questionnaire in order to increase the reliability and validity of the data obtained from the questionnaire and to obtain clear elaborations as to why they face the difficulties they indicated in the questionnaire.

1. **Students' interview**: The student interview protocol consists of 10 questions. Students were asked about the difficulties they faced in the use of English for academic purposes and specifically in the seven skills identified and included in the questionnaire. They are asked to give further explanation as to why it is difficult for them to engage in each of the academic English skill. This information will provide a detailed view of what the students perceived to be the causes of the problems. Besides that, the students are encouraged to suggest solutions they feel might help solve their problems in the seven language sub-skills.

2. **Lecturers' interview:** Similarly the two lecturers were asked to share their experiences in teaching and supervising Omani students, focusing particularly on what they perceived to be the most challenging and problematic areas for the Omani students in the use of academic English. They are also asked what they have done to help the students and whether these actions have or have not been successful and why.

Both interviews are in-depth semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are used so as to get in-depth information of Omani postgraduate students' problems in the use of Academic English. Through these semi-structured interviews, the respondents would provide more specific information on their perception of the causes of the difficulties students face. The two interview protocols can be seen as Appendices II and III.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Before the two instruments of this study were administered to the respondents, they were first piloted on 2 Omani postgraduate students, other than the 13 who participated as the respondents for the actual study. The results of the pilot exercise were used to improve on the instruments. The pilot participants were encouraged to comment on parts of the questionnaire that they found unclear or irrelevant and suggest ways to improve it. According to Creswell (2003) a pilot study is essential as it establishes content validity and comments on the research instruments can be used to improve on the instrument. Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) recommended piloting research instruments as it will assess whether the research protocol is realistic and workable, to check whether the sampling frame and method are relevant. It might also be used to accumulate preliminary data which can be analysed to guide the analysis of the actual data and research instruments can be developed and tested. After piloting the questionnaire and getting the comments from the two arbitrators, minor changes (vocabulary and sentences structure) were made to the questionnaire and the final version can be seen as Appendix I. The questionnaires were administered prior to the interviews.

3.4.1 Administration of the Questionnaires

Once the questionnaire has been revised based on the comments made by the pilot participants, they were administered to the actual respondents. Short Messaging System (SMS) and e-mails were used to contact postgraduate Omani students and to invite them to participate in the survey. Through this process, thirteen positive replies were confirmed. After explaining the objective of the research and getting their signed consent, the questionnaire was then administered to the participants, 6 completed it face to face and 7 completed it via email.

3.4.2   Administration of the Interviews

Although it would have made the findings more robust if all 13 respondents could be interviewed, this study had to be content with only two respondents as the other 11 did not want to be interviewed. Two students, who indicated more difficulties in the questionnaire than the others, were identified to participate in the interview. After a lot of convincing, the two students agreed to be the interview respondents.

Both the student and lecturer interviews were carried out face to face individually and all the interview sessions were recorded with the participants' permission. Each student interview lasted 25 minutes and the lecturers were interviewed for about 15 minutes. The lecturers were asked 4 questions about writing critical review, answering exam questions, note taking during lectures, reading/understanding books and journal, understanding lecturers, oral presentations, and participating in group discussion and tutorials. All four interviews were transcribed on the same day the interviews were conducted and analysed qualitatively.

3.5   Data Analysis

As illustrated in Figure 3.1, the Present Situation Analysis (PSA) approach is applied in this study by getting learners to comment on their academic English difficulties. As discussed in Chapter Two, Present Situation Analysis aims to analyse the present situation needs, therefore, applying this approach in the research design would help to identify Omani postgraduates' academic English difficulties and to recommend to policy makers, lecturers, some techniques and strategies to overcome Omani students' academic English difficulties**.**

The questionnaire allows the students to choose from a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from '*never'* to 'always' for each area of the academic English purposes and the problems associated with them. The main objective in the analysis of the data from the

questionnaire is to determine the most *frequently* occurring difficulties. 'Sometimes' is added to 'usually' and 'always' as it indicates the occurrence of the difficulty. The secondary objective in the analysis is to determine the *least frequency* of occurrence of the difficulties ('never' and 'rarely').

The second source of data comes from the students' and lecturers' interviews. Students and lecturers were asked to comment on the academic English usage difficulties and their causes. They were also asked for their perceptions on how to overcome the problems. Each domain and sub-skills of the students' difficulties were analysed individually in order to get the frequency of the causes of each difficulty. In addition, information obtained from the interviews was triangulated with the information obtained from the questionnaire. The information was also used to validate and confirm the results of the questionnaire. They would help in explaining in-depth the causes of the students' academic English difficulties.

3.6   Summary

This chapter provided detailed information of the methodology used in this study and how the Esfahani (2009) questionnaire was used to construct the questionnaire for the current study. It also showed how the data was analyzed. In the following chapter, the data gathered was analysed and the results discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the overall and multi-faceted aspects of the difficulties faced by the Omani postgraduate students in using English for academic purposes. The data obtained from each of the research instruments employed is presented, analysed and discussed. The data from the interviews were analysed qualitatively and the difficulties the respondents indicate through the questionnaire were reported using frequency counts. In line with the objectives of this study, the different tasks used by Omani postgraduate students in which academic English is required are identified and the causes of these difficulties as well as the most difficult tasks are analysed. Then, the students' and lecturers' perception of the solutions to alleviate the difficulties are obtained are discussed in detail.

4.1   Findings from the questionnaires

This section presents the questionnaire findings which provided information on the 'areas of English used for academic purposes' and 'The Most Problematic Areas'

4.1.1   Areas of English used for Academic Purposes

Analysis of the questionnaire yielded similar results as the exploratory interviews carried out on a few of the Omani students prior to carrying out this study. The seven skills/areas identified were 'understanding lecturers during lectures', 'participating in group discussion and tutorials', 'writing critical reviews', 'answering exam questions', 'note taking during lectures', 'reading/ understanding academic books and journals' and 'oral presentation'. These skills were the areas they are expected to perform well in as postgraduate students in the use of English in the academic context. The respondents

agreed all 7 skills adopted from Esfahani (2009) were also the areas they are expected to perform well in as postgraduate students.

4.1.2 Students' most difficult academic language skills

Table 4.1 summarizes the academic language difficulties faced by Omani postgraduates. It also shows the most frequent problems (as indicated by the frequency of 'always' and 'usually' responses) found challenging to the Omani students in the use of academic English. It shows that 15% of the students face problems in the use of perceptive modes of language use: **'understanding lecturers during lectures',** and the productive modes of language use: **'participating in group discussion and tutorials'** and **'writing critical reviews'**. However, the data also shows that none of the Omani students found **'answering exam questions'** difficult. It is interesting to observe in the data that 'always' was only chosen when rating the difficulty of 'participating in group discussion and tutorial' (7.69%). On one level it indicates that only a small number of students encounter difficulties in the use of this skill. However, since 'always' was not selected for any of the other skills, it can be concluded that the students face more difficulties in "participating in group discussions and tutorials".

Table 4.1: Students' self-rating of difficulties in skills in the use of academic English (based on frequency of 'Always', 'Usually' and 'Sometimes' responses)

Areas of the Use of EAP Percentage of Problems	Writing Critical Reviews	Note taking	Reading Academic Books and Journals	Participating in Group Discussion and Tutorials	Oral Presentation	Answering Exam Questions	Understanding Lecturers during lectures
Always	0	0	0	7.69%	0	0	0
Usually	15.38%	7.69%	15.38%	7.69%	7.69%	0	15.38%
Sometimes	53.84%	53.84%	30.76%	23.07%	23.07%	30.76%	0
Total	**69.22%**	**61.53%**	**46.14%**	**38.45%**	**30.76%**	**30.76%**	**15.38%**

On the other hand, it was observed that 53% of the students chose '*sometimes*' for both the 'writing critical reviews' and 'note taking' skills which is a high percentage in frequency in comparison to the other skills. By choosing the '*sometimes*' option students are reporting that they do face difficulty in the use of the language skills concern even if it is not *usually* or *always*. Therefore, in this study, the option '*sometimes*' were counted together with '*usually*' or '*always*' as it indicated that the difficulty do occur '*sometimes*' in some skills such as writing critical reviews and note taking. In addition, the percentage of difficulties occurrence changed and increased when '*sometimes*' is added to the '*usually*' and '*always*' potions. Table 4.1 shows that writing critical review, note taking and reading/ understanding academic books and journals' sequentially were the most problematic skills to Omani postgraduates. The sequence of difficulty for the seen skills are presented below.

a) Writing Critical Review

Table 4.1 shows that 69.22% of Omani students who have chosen '*sometimes*', '*usually*' and '*always*' were facing difficulty in writing critical review. There are different causes that may make *'writing critical reviews'* difficult and challenging to the students. Analysis of the data shows that the causes of writing critical review are: 1. their lack of vocabulary forces them to think in Arabic and write in English or they translate from Arabic to English, 2. they do not know the style of writing (see Appendix IV for details).

b) Note Taking Difficulties

Note taking was the second most difficult academic language skill. As it is known that one of the skills tertiary level students are required to practice during lectures in order to note down lecturers' explanations and clarifications and some students face problems in the use of note taking. Omani students stated that they have problems in note taking

during lectures and Table 4.1 shows that 61.53% of them face difficulty in the use of note taking.

Note taking would be difficult to students because of different causes. Analysis of the data shows that 61.53% of Omani students mentioned that they are slow in writing in English and they also stated that summarizing the lecturers' points was also difficult as they did know how to summarize the lecturers' points. It also shows that 69.53% of students are lacking summarizing techniques which is another cause of note taking problems. In addition, listening and taking notes at the same time is difficult for students and 61.53% of them referred to this cause (see Appendix IV for details).

c) Reading/ Understanding Academic Books and Tutorials

Reading/ Understanding academic books and journals was the third most frequent difficulty among Omani postgraduates in the university. Table 4.1 shows that 53.86% of Omani students rarely or never have difficulties in reading/ understanding academic books and journals while 46.14% of them do find this task difficult.

Analysis of the data shows that 46.15% of Omani students stated that they are slow in reading academic books and journals and 46.15% of them face difficulty in understanding the content of academic books and journals. Reading and understanding the materials used in their specific field of study are a problematic area for 38.46% of the Omani students (see Appendix IV for details).

d) Participating in Group Discussion and Tutorials

Table 4.1 shows that 46.14% of the international Omani students face problems in participating in group discussions and tutorials. They stated that it is hard to present in front of their lecturers and students. However, 38.46% of the students rarely face difficulties in the use of this skill.

Students found participation in group discussion difficult generally because of their poor proficiency in English (53.84% of the Omani students could not speak English very well). Also, 38.46% of them stated that they do not understand what their group members say and they need time to think in Arabic and then respond in English. In addition, 23.07% of the students indicated that their English is not that good therefore they cannot participate.

e)   Answering Exams' Questions

Exams are the most frequently used instrument to evaluate students' knowledge. Table 4.1 shows that difficulty in answering exam questions occurred frequently among (30.76%) Omani students, while 46.15% of the students rarely face problems in Answering Exam Questions and 23.07% of them stated that they never face this problem.

Omani students indicated different causes for the problem of Answering Exam Questions. Analysis of the data shows that 46.15% of the students could not give critical answers to exam questions, and 38.46% of them cannot write well because of their low English proficiency, and 23.07% of them stated that they have difficulty to understand exam questions (see Appendix IV).

f) Oral Presentations

Table 4.1 shows that Oral Presentation is also a problematic skill for Omani students. It scored 30.76% as students indicated that they face difficulties in this productive use of the language. It means that one third of the Omani students face difficulties in the use of oral presentation skills.

There are two main reasons for the difficulties in use of Oral Presentation to Omani students. First, Omani students are afraid to stand before other students because they

cannot speak English very well and are afraid to be misunderstood once they spoke, and 30.76% of the students selected these reasons. Second, they are afraid to be asked questions during presentations for fear they could not understand the questions asked and therefore would not be able to answer the questions (see Appendix IV for the causes of oral presentation difficulty).

g) Understanding Lectures

Understanding lecturers was the least difficult for International Omani students. Table 4.1 shows that only 15.38% of the students face a problem understanding lectures, while 38.46% and 46.15% of students rarely and never face difficulty, correspondingly. The data also indicates that 76.92% of Omani students face difficulties understanding lecturers' pronunciations and accents. Lecturers' accents were different from the standard pronunciations of the words in English language as students were taught by lecturers from different nationalities.

At the same time, 61.53% of the students stated that some lecturers use Malaysian examples which Omani students are not familiar with and find difficult to relate to and understand. Lecturers' speaking fast was the third reason for this difficulty whereby 38.46% of the students stated that they found that the lecturers speak too fast and therefore they found it difficult to understand the lecturers and this makes it difficult for them to take notes while trying to make out what the lecturers are saying.

The fourth cause is drawn from their difficulty to understand the English vocabulary used in the field of study. The data showed that 38.46% of students face the problem because they have not acquired the English registers used in their field of study and they are more familiar to the Arabic registers.

4.2 Findings from the Interviews

The following section highlights the findings based on the lecturers' perspectives regarding students' problems in using English for Academic Purposes and students' perspectives regarding their problems in using English for Academic Purposes. It is also going to show the lecturers and students' suggested solutions for the academic English difficulties.

4.2.1 Lecturers' Perception of the Causes of the Students' Problems in the Use of Academic English

Both lecturers interviewed agreed that international postgraduate Omani students have difficulties in the use of English for academic purposes. One of the lecturers stated that *'some Omani students have academic difficulties in the use of English for academic purposes' because they registered at the University with low English language proficiency'.* They stated that the students' poor proficiency in English has the strongest effects on their academic performance.

Both lecturers also agreed that *writing critical review* is the most challenging area for Omani students. They claimed that some Omani students are not proficient in or familiar with academic writing style as they were not well prepared for the different types of academic writings from the education they received in their home country.

They also stated that the students' English proficiency is very low as indicated by the make many errors they make in grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, as well as word choice in their assignments. At the postgraduate level, universities expect their students to have a certain level of English proficiency and without it the challenges will be high for the students to handle and they will inevitably be left behind in their studies. Finally, they added that there is not enough learning support provided where the students can make up for the gaps in their knowledge.

4.2.2 Students' Perceptions of the Causes of their Academic English Problems

Most of the Omani postgraduate students who completed the questionnaire and the students who participated in the interview agreed that they face difficulties and challenges in performing academic tasks at the postgraduate level. They also agreed that these difficulties are basically due to low English language proficiency, and students with a good command of English language and equipped with sufficient training of the academic skills would not have these difficulties.

Participants also agreed that '*writing critical reviews*' is the most challenging and difficult task for them. As critical review is a higher level productive mode of language use, it needs different strategies to achieve it as one of the students mentioned '*in order to write a critical review paper you not only need to have good command of English language but must also be able to think critically in English*'.

They added that they use internet translation engine heavily to translate the academic task from English to their mother tongue language (Arabic) to understand the task or the academic books. Therefore, translation engines might not be accurate as academic registers. Al-Khasawneh (2010) also studied the causes of academic writings difficulties. He found that the use of the mother tongue, the limited opportunities to practice English, lack of writing practice in educational institutions and low proficiency in English were some of the causes of academic writing difficulties.

The second participant interviewed added that '*students need to be trained to the style of writing critical review paper because some students have not written any critical review paper before*'. Students realised that they need to be well trained for the university various task such as critical review writing, presentations, group discussion and tutorial etc. before starting the academic course. They mentioned that there are few

workshops held during the semester and most of them are for the faculties' students only and other students from different faculties could not attend.

The following section will highlight the lecturers and students' perceptions regarding the possible solutions to overcome the academic language difficulties faced.

4.2.3 Lecturers' Perceptions Concerning Solutions to Students' Academic English Difficulties

Lecturer A suggested that *'potential students should be well prepared to handle university level tasks before coming into the programme'*. Students should be given workshops or a course in academic skills in their countries before travelling abroad or after they begin their studies at the university in the host country. In addition, *'the university should provide learning support; writing workshops, consultations, thesis writing workshops'*.

Lecturer B suggested that the university should conduct workshops on academic writing and writing critical review as many students have difficulties in these areas. The lecturer also suggested that the students should request for workshops on the area of difficulties they face. Students should not wait for the university to conduct the workshops but they should arrange with lecturers to hold workshops because they are aware of their needs and difficulties.

4.2.4   Students' Perceptions Concerning Solutions to their Academic English Difficulties

The interviewees agreed that postgraduate students should be given General English language courses as many students, not only Omanis, have language difficulties. They stated that language difficulty becomes worse when they use English for academic purposes. Therefore, they suggested that the University should conduct workshops on

English for academic purposes and it should be compulsory for all postgraduate students.

One of the interviewees stated that *'University lecturers should vary their lecturing techniques and strategies in order to suit different students'* because some lecturers use presentations only which is lecturer centred, and there is no interaction with students. In addition, students with mixed abilities should not be mixed together in group discussions and tutorial because students with a good command of English tend to dominate the discussion and they do not give a chance to students with lower proficiency in English to participate.

They also mentioned that home countries should prepare their students before sending them abroad. Some countries do not give English language priority therefore their students suffer from poor English proficiency and they have to sit for and pass an intensive English programme organized by the university. They also should give their students a course in English for academic purposes in order to acquire academic skills such as academic writing, presentations, and critical thinking strategies before sending them overseas.

Interviewees mentioned that they struggle with the writing of their theses or assignments because they were not well prepared for this type of writing. They stated that they have to search for a proof-reader to edit their work before they can submit their work for examination. An interviewee mentioned that he has attended a course in academic writing and he feels he is much better than before and he suggested that students must attend such courses to be able to write more proficiently.

4.3 Discussion

The results of the analysis revealed different findings for the different issues raised. Analysis of the data revealed that 'writing critical review', 'note taking' and 'reading/

understanding academic books and journals' were the most difficult academic tasks for Omani postgraduates in one of the local universities in Malaysia. On the other hand, postgraduates stated that 'oral presentation' and 'understanding lecturers' were their least problematic tasks. These results are not in support of the results obtained in Esfahani (2009). She found 'understanding lecturers' as the most difficult academic activity and 'answering exams questions' as the least difficult academic language task for international postgraduates at the local universities in her study.

The following section will discuss the three most difficult academic language tasks and the least difficult academic language task in detail.

4.3.1 The Most Difficult Academic Language Tasks

1. Writing Critical Reviews

As mentioned earlier, 69.23% of Omani postgraduates face difficulties in 'writing critical reviews' which is a productive mode of language use. In other words it is the production of the language such as writing, note taking and speaking which are most problematic for them. Analysis of the data revealed that there were different causes for these difficulties (as illustrated in Appendix IV) This finding is similar to that found in Berman and Cheng (2001) that academic writing is the most problematic skill for international graduates.

The data obtained by this current study indicated that 61.35% of students did not know the style of writing critical reviews because they have not been exposed to this type of writing when they were in Oman where they acquired their bachelors degree in Arabic (as they indicated in the questionnaire). It was also revealed that in most cases, the students were expected to perform these tasks as soon as they begun their studies in Malaysia without having given the necessary preparation. With this knowledge, lecturers have to make sure their students know how to do the task before assigning it to their students. In addition, for international postgraduates, their governments should

train them with the different academic skills in their previous degree or at least their government need to teach them these skills before sending them abroad for study.

The second cause of the difficulty in 'writing critical review' was students were writing their critical reviews in their first language (which was Arabic) then they translate their work into English. The data shows that 46.15% of the students translate from their first language to English when doing their 'critical reviews'. Students resort to translating when their English is poor and they do not have sufficient vocabulary as it was the third cause of difficulty in writing critical reviews. It also shows that 53.84% of students do not have sufficient English vocabulary which makes them dependent on translation to do their critical review task.

2. Note Taking

Note taking is an essential skill at the tertiary level and students need to have good note taking techniques as a basic academic survival skill. The data shows that many of the Omani postgraduates' identified this task as their second most difficult academic language skill. Johnstone & Su (1994, as quoted in DeZure, Kaplan and Deerman, 2001) found that the more students' record (note taking), the more they remember and the better they perform on exams. Therefore, acquiring effective note taking skill can significantly help students to perform better in their studies.

Table 4.1 shows that 61.53% of Omani postgraduates experience this difficulty. Analysis of the data (see Appendix IV) also shows that 61.53% of Omani students indicated they are slow in taking notes. They stated that they need to write fast in order to capture the lecturers' explanations and details. For postgraduate students note taking is essential as most courses at the postgraduate levels are delivered through lectures and most of the time there are no handouts provided apart from the power point slides used

alongside the lectures. Therefore, students need to be able to take down good notes while listening to the lecturers.

Students also stated that summarizing lecturers' points was difficult as they did know how to summarize. For this, 69.53% of students indicated that lacking summarizing techniques is another cause of note taking problems. Therefore, students need to be taught summarizing techniques in order to help them identify the main ideas and details they should take down while the lecturers are speaking. Lecturers too could help by providing handouts and lecture summaries.

Finally, listening and taking notes at the same time cause difficulties for 61.53% students. Johnstone & Su (1994, as quoted in DeZure, Kaplan and Deerman, 2001) also studied the importance and difficulties of note taking. They found that the main difficulty for students is when the lecturers speak too fast during lectures, and students cannot write and listen at the same time. Some students do not have the abilities or techniques of writing notes while listening to the lectures and they might write some of the details and could not catch the rest. They also assume lecturers are too fast while they are slow note takers. Thus, students should learn how to take note quickly while listening to the lecturers. On the other hands, lecturer should slow down if he/she noticed students could not listen to him.

To sum up, there are different note taking techniques and tips which postgraduate students are suppose to acquire in order to be able to note down important information from lectures. Students have to acquire these techniques and universities should make sure through their lecturers that their students have note taking skills. If not they should hold a workshop on note taking tips. Finally, lecturers also should be more sensitive to their students' capabilities and slow down if they notice their students were not able to

take notes. They should facilitate them with handouts and summaries, and guide them to read the sources of their lectures.

3. Reading/Understanding Academic Books and Journals

Reading/Understanding academic books and journals is a receptive mode of language use where the users have to receive and understand messages such as while reading texts and understanding lectures. This was identified as the third most frequent difficulty among postgraduate Omani students. Davies & Maldoni (2004) stated that international students in Australia who come from non-English speaking backgrounds have academic reading difficulties. Table 4.1 shows that 46.14% of the students have difficulties in understanding the reading materials and the content of academic books and journals due to their inability to read fast and critically.

Omani students stated that they cannot read the academic books and journals at a faster rate because they need to use translation engines or check in the dictionary for meanings of new words. Without the help of dictionaries or translation engines, Omani students would face problems understanding the academic texts. The implication here is that students do not have sufficient amount of vocabulary to read and understand academic books and journal.

They also mentioned that they could not understand the content of academic books (data) and the field specific terms found in the reading materials. Thus, Omani students need to acquire reading techniques such as skimming and scanning to help them process reading materials faster and more effectively. Davies & Maldoni (2004) also found that the difficulties regarding reading academic books were due to different causes such as students having little experience of academic text (content-based) and found it difficult to read large volumes.

Generally, Omani students' difficulties in reading and understanding academic books and journals are due to their poor English proficiency and lack of knowledge in reading techniques. Therefore, they need to improve their English proficiency and learn reading strategies such as speed reading. Lecturers also need to be aware of the problems the students face and provide solutions to overcome them.

4.3.2   The Least Difficult Academic Task

The analysis revealed that few Omani postgraduates have difficulties in the use of English for Academic Purposes when it comes to 'understanding lectures'. Table 4.1 shows that only 15.38% of the students encountered difficulties when it comes to understanding lectures. Students were able to understand lectures in English, understand the content of the lecture and understand the lecturers even when they speak fast. It may also be because some lecturers use simple language when lecturing. Therefore, simple language simplifies the content language and helps students to understand the lectures easier. It is also important for lecturers to familiarize students with the academic content terms as they introduce the specific topics.

The following section will highlight the findings of the lecturers' perspectives regarding students' problems in using English for Academic Purposes and link the results to the questionnaire findings.

4.3.3   Lecturers' Perceptions of the Causes of these Academic Language Difficulties

Lecturers interviewed agreed that Omani postgraduates encounter difficulties in the contexts of English for academic purposes because they have been accepted into the university with low English language proficiency. According to the university requirements, students are accepted at the university without IELTS or TOEFL certificates if they can prove that they had studied their previous degree through the English medium. This requirement is very logical if the students have gone through

more than four years of study and they speak English most of the time but in the case of Omani students, English is spoken in a very limited occasions. As a result, Omani students may forget the language after graduation and would not be able to use the language proficiently. Therefore, they need a refresher course in English or they should be made to produce the IELTS or TOEFL certificate. The lecturers also stated that because the students' English proficiency is very low, they would make many grammar, spelling, and sentence structure errors, as well as wrong word choice in their assignments. At postgraduate level, universities expect their students to have a certain level of English proficiency and without it the challenges will be too much for the students to handle and they will inevitably be left behind in their studies.

The lecturers interviewed agreed that some Omani students are unfamiliar with academic writing style for instance writing critical reviews and most of their students encounter difficulties with this task. They stated that students were not well prepared for the different types of academic writings at expected at this university as the skills were not taught to them prior to their arrival into Malaysia.

Finally, they added that there is not enough learning support for international students provided by the university and they are left to address their difficulties on their own. Student learning support services can be of a significant help in monitoring and strengthening the students' academic progress and in by providing counselling services and workshops on academic skills development.

4.3.4 Students' Perceptions of the Causes of their Academic Language Difficulties

Most of the Omani postgraduate students who completed the questionnaire and the students who participated in the interview agreed that they face difficulties and challenges in performing academic tasks at the postgraduate level. They also agreed that

these difficulties are basically due to low English language proficiency, and students with a good command of English language and equipped with sufficient training of the academic skills would not have these difficulties. Thus, students᾿ poor English is the main cause of students᾿ failure in performing academic tasks according to students᾿ point of view.

Participants also agreed that ‘*writing critical reviews*’ is the most challenging and difficult task for them. As critical review is a higher level productive mode of language use, it requires competencies in strategies in addition to a higher level of proficiency in English. As one of the students mentioned ‘*in order to write a critical review paper you not only need to have good command of English language but must also be able to think critically in English*’. Students lack the ability and strategies to perform critical reviews and they linked this to their low English proficiency and unfamiliarity with the academic tasks required of them.

They added that they use internet translation engine heavily to translate the academic task from English to their mother tongue language (Arabic) in order to understand the tasks or the academic materials necessary in performing the tasks. However they are also aware that the translation engines might not provide them with accurate translations of, for example, the academic registers. Students depend on translation engine because do not have enough vocabulary due to their poor English lack of exposure to the English academic terms. As such they turn to the help of proofreaders to correct their work before submission. This can be time consuming and sometimes costly as well. This finding is supported by Al-Khasawneh (2010) who also studied the causes of academic writings difficulties among international students in Malaysia. He found that the use of the mother tongue, the limited opportunities to practice English, lack of writing practice

in educational institutions and low proficiency in English were some of the causes of academic writing difficulties.

The second participant interviewed added that *'students need to be trained to the style of writing critical review paper because some students have not written any critical review paper before'.* Students realised that they need to be well trained for the various academic tasks such as critical review writing, presentations, group discussion and tutorial before starting the academic programme. They mentioned that there are few workshops held during the semester and most of them are for the faculties' students only and other students from different faculties could not attend. This shows that there is no common understanding among university faculties regarding students' learning support needs.

To sum up, the students' perceptions of the causes of their academic English difficulties, they feel that the challenges and difficulties they face in performing the academic tasks required of them are mainly related to their poor English proficiency, difficult academic tasks, and no support services and workshops to help them overcome some of these difficulties.

The following section will highlight the lecturers and students' perceptions regarding the possible solutions to overcome the academic language difficulties faced.

4.3.5   Lecturers' Perception of the Solutions to Students' Academic Language Difficulties

Lecturer A suggested that potential students should be prepared to handle the academic tasks before enrolling at the new academic setting. They should be given English language course to acquire the general language skills and workshops on academic language skills before they embark on their specific study programs.

The lecturers also recommended that local universities should provide learning support such as workshops in academic writing. They feel that students at the local university are not getting support and they were left without any follow up services. Therefore, any university that plan to enroll more international students should establish student support centres to address the various problems students face in relation to their study programs and academic needs .

Lecturer B suggested that the university should conduct workshops on academic writing and writing critical review as many students have difficulties in these areas. This can happen if there is a close follow up from university staff with students. Lecturers too could help their students because they meet them regularly, therefore they may recommend workshops to their faculty.

Lecturer B also suggested that the students should request for workshops on the area of difficulties they face. Students should not wait for the university to conduct the workshops but they should arrange with lecturers to hold workshops because they are aware of their needs and difficulties. Students are too dependent as they expect the university or faculty to organize the workshops. On the other hand, sometimes faculty officers are not aware of students' problems if there are not informed of the students' problems, but at the same time, the officers should find out from the students what their needs are. Thus, they should be effective communication between students, lecturers and administrators.

To sum up, the lecturers' perception of the solutions to students' academic language difficulties, point towards better communication between the education ministry of the students home country and that in Malaysia. The home country can find out the kind of difficulties the students faced and they can incorporate within their education system, English for Academic purposes preparatory courses for students before going abroad.

Universities should also provide learning support services to develop the areas where the international students are found to be weak in. Lecturers should monitor their students and guide them to overcome their academic difficulties. Finally, students should take charge of their own learning and make reasonable requests for their faculties to conduct workshops on the areas of their weaknesses.

4.3.6 Students' Perceptions of the Solutions to their Academic Language Difficulties

The students' interviewed suggested that the university should conduct General English language courses as many students, not only Omanis, have language difficulties, including local students. Universities should ask all students to sit for English language entry test (placement test) and not just asking students to provide a letter that they have acquired their previous degree through the English medium of instruction. They stated that the language difficulties become worse when they have to use English for academic purposes. Students also suggested, as did the lecturers interviewed, that Universities should conduct workshops on English for academic purposes and these workshops should be made compulsory for all postgraduate students even if they have taken them before. Students face difficulties when it comes to academic language skills because some of them have not taken the academic language course and others have acquired their previous degree in other language than English such as Arabic.

Students also suggested that lecturers should vary their lecturing techniques and strategies. They should use different teaching methods such as presentations, discussions, using slides and giving handouts, and lectures should be more student centred. There should be more active interactions with students in order to make the learning environment more conducive and interesting.

In addition, students with mixed abilities should not be mixed together in group discussions and tutorials because students with a good command of English tend to

dominate the discussion and would not provide enough opportunities for students with lower proficiency in English to participate. Their suggestion is logical but if the students' English proficiency is good, they may not be facing these problems in the first place. Therefore, universities should make sure their students have a good command of the English language prior to university entrance and if they are not that proficient, they should be given the training to upgrade their proficiency before or while pursuing their specific programme of study.

The students interviewed also agreed with the lecturers, that the students' home countries should prepare them before sending them abroad. For instance, some countries do not give English language any priorities or it is not taught in their countries, as a result students may suffer from their poor English proficiency and they have to sit for intensive English programmes, which can take a long time before they can actually begin their programme of study. Therefore, home countries should make sure their students have sufficient English language proficiency to handle academic language tasks such as academic writing, presentations, and critical thinking strategies before sending them overseas.

Finally, the students interviewed mentioned that they struggle with the writing of their assignments, dissertations and theses and they have to employ the services of proof-readers to edit their work before they can submit it for examination. In addition to that, although postgraduates (master and PhD) have to attend research methodology course in their local university, which is a good practice, they may need more support from their supervisors, as the knowledge gained from the methodology course may not be sufficient to see them through the entire research exercise. Sometimes, their supervisors are too busy with their teaching and administrative tasks as well as their own research

projects. As such they are not able to meet their students regularly, which can aggravate the problems the students face.

4.4   Summary

This section has showed and discussed the findings of the questionnaire and the interviews. The findings will be summarized in the following chapter together with the recommendations for further investigation into this area of EAP.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Overview of the Study

As mentioned in the previous chapters, there are thousands of international students studying all over the world whose mother tongue is not English (*The Chronicle*, 2011). As a result, quite a number of the students have been lagging behind in their studies due to their poor or limited proficiency in English and academic skills. Some students even fail or discontinue their studies. English language proficiency is obviously crucial when pursuing higher degrees at the universities which employ English as a medium of instruction. In this study, the students who seek admission into the university understudy are 99% hail from non-English speaking countries and whose first language is not English. Under such circumstances, students with low English proficiency have difficulties to perform effectively in the academic courses. Omani postgraduate students are no exception in this regard. They are also facing serious academic language difficulties and are struggling to perform the academic tasks required of them. Therefore, it is timely that an investigation into this matter is carried out in order to identify the academic English usage problems, explore the causes of such problems and find the possible solutions to overcome them.

To answer the three research questions, this study employed a triangulation approach through a qualitative method together with some descriptive statistics involving frequency counts of the academic difficulties faced by the respondents. The three research questions are:

1. What are the difficulties faced by Omani postgraduate students at a public university in Malaysia in using English for academic purposes?

2. What are the perceived causes of these difficulties?

3. How best can Omani postgraduates overcome these difficulties?

A questionnaire and an interview schedule were used to gather the information required to answer these questions. A total of 13 students from 7 faculties in the academic year 2010/2011 completed the questionnaire. In addition, 2 students from the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Science respectively were interviewed together with 2 lecturers; one from the Faculty of Education and one from the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics.

The following section will give an overview of the findings for each research question.

5.1 Research Question 1: What are the difficulties faced by Omani postgraduate students at a public university in Malaysia in using English for academic purposes?

Postgraduate students use English for Academic Purposes generally in seven areas: writing critical reviews, note taking, answering exam questions, oral presentations, reading/understanding academic books and journals, participating in group discussions and tutorials, and understanding lecturers. These seven skills from Esfahani (2009) were piloted on two Omani postgraduates and they too showed problems in the use of these same skills. After the identification of the academic difficulties, the data was also analysed to determine the most problematic academic difficulty among the Omani postgraduate students. This was done by looking at the frequency the problems were indicated with *'always'*, *'usually'* and *'sometimes'*. The 'sometimes' option also included 'always' and 'usually' options as some participants tended to tick 'sometimes' to indicate that they do face the problem from time to time. For instance, 'participating in group discussions and tutorials', 23.07% of the participants selected the option 'sometimes' which means that students do face this difficulty from time to time.

The analysis revealed that taking into consideration the options 'sometimes', 'always' and 'usually', the questionnaire showed that 'writing critical reviews' is the most problematic at (69.22%), . 'Note taking' (61.53%), 'reading/understanding the academic books and journals' (46.14%), 'participating in group discussions and tutorials' (38.45%), 'answering exam questions' (30.76%), and 'oral presentations' (30.76%). 'Understanding lecturers' (15.38%) was the least frequently occurring problem.

5.2 Research Question 2: What are the perceived causes of these difficulties?

Lecturers and students have some similar perceptions regarding the causes of Omani postgraduates' problem with regard to academic language difficulties. The lecturers agreed that the most challenging difficulty for Omani postgraduates was 'writing academic critical review paper'. They stated that students' problems were because of their poor proficiency in English language, limited exposure to academic language and style and insufficient preparation for the new academic culture. Therefore, lecturers stated that English language proficiency and academic skills are crucial for academic success. The lack of student learning support and hands-on workshops on research add on to the problem.

The student interviewees also indicated that their low English proficiency is the main reason for their academic difficulties. As students have limited vocabulary, they tend to translate from Arabic to English which in turn can cause a lot of misinterpretation of the tasks. They also mentioned that they did not attend academic language workshops or courses before travelling abroad because their countries do not offer such courses. The university does not provide very many academic writing workshops, there are academic writing workshops provided by the university and if there are any they are more specific for certain faculty with limited attendance.

5.3 Research Question 3: How best can Omani postgraduates overcome these difficulties?

The lecturers suggested convenient solutions to the academic language difficulties. First, they suggested that students need to attend general English language course to improve their language proficiency on campus and not just produce TOEFL or IELTS certificates or a letter stating that they were taught in English in their previous degree. Second, the university could conduct academic language courses and workshops to improve students' abilities in academic language writing and to support their learning. Third, the university could also conduct 'hands on workshops' to help students with their writing skills and research methods. Finally, one of the lecturers suggested that students should play a role in improving their abilities by asking the university to conduct workshops on the areas of difficulties they face.

Students also suggested practical suggestions to overcome their academic difficulties. First, they suggested that the university could help improve students' language abilities through English language courses from time to time to upgrade their language proficiency. Second, the university could conduct more workshops on academic writing where students can practice the different types of academic writing such as writing critical reviews. Third, they suggested that lecturers could try to speak clearly as some lecturers have different accents and speak too fast. Fourth, lecturers could vary their teaching strategies and not use one method only which does not suit all students. Fifth, they also suggested that students themselves have to improve their language abilities as they need to read more academic books and journals and improve their writing skills. Finally, students suggested that the home country should prepare the students in advance before sending them abroad and there should be some awareness to the host country academic culture so it would not be such a shock when they begin their studies.

5.4   Overview of the Problems and Implications

Overall, Omani postgraduates face difficulties in Academic language mainly because they are deficient in General English, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and have difficulty to adjust to the new academic culture. This study is based on the perceptions of a small number of Omani students, which makes the findings, in conclusive, neither does it claim to predict the future trends of language development of future Omani or international students at Malaysian institutes of higher learning. However, the findings do show the reality of how things are in the present situation as expressed by 13 of the total 20 Omani students and 2 lecturers who are directly involved with their education at one Malaysian institute of higher learning. The facts of the situation point to the need for Malaysian institutes of higher learning as the provider of the educational needs of international students to have a better understanding of the purpose of language learning and development for these students when they seek education outside of their country. Student learning support is important and should be based on the specific needs of the students. Analysis of the data obtained from this study has highlighted some key areas to be considered when planning study programmes for international students. These areas are discussed in detailed in the ensuing sections. Nevertheless, to have a more concrete understanding of the difficulties international students face studying in Malaysian institutes of higher learning, further research involving a larger sample and a more comprehensive survey should be carried out.

5.4.1 Deficiency in General Proficiency

First, deficiency in General English was the main cause of academic language difficulties as general English is the path to English for Academic purposes. Students who are insufficiently proficient in general English will not be able to perform an academic task. This may result in the students being behind in their studies or may cause failure and dropping out from the programme. Students mentioned that they have

limited general English vocabulary and field specific registers. They also lack presentation skills and are anxious and afraid to present in front of other students and lecturers, also due to their limited proficiency in English. First language interference was also cited as a reason where students resort to translating from Arabic to English and vice versa.

5.4.2 Difficulties with Academic English

Omani postgraduates were not well-prepared with the English for Academic Purposes (EAP). This leads to difficulties in performing academic tasks. As postgraduate students, they have to complete academic tasks which required specific skills and higher level language competence. The participants stated that they lack some of these academic language skills which cause academic language problems and challenges. For instance, they acknowledged that they do not have the skills of writing critical reviews. They found it difficult to perform the writing task whereas these are essential tasks at university level and they may affect their academic performance.

They also mentioned that there was not enough preparation to do the academic tasks. For instance, the students stated that they were sent abroad without being prepared with the necessary academic skills and research methods which made studying at the postgraduate level challenging. As such it becomes the responsibility of the host university to bring their skills and knowledge up to standard through relevant workshops and other learning support courses to help the students cope with the demands of their programmes.

5.4.3 The Difficulty in Adjusting to the New Academic Culture

Lecturers and students stated that writing critical reviews as the most difficult and challenging tasks and students have to search for help to complete these tasks. Omani students have never been taught how to write critical reviews and most of the writing

tasks and presentation activities are also part of a new academic culture for them. Interviewees mentioned that they face difficulties adjusting to this new academic culture. Not only do they have to improve their English language skills they have to from the start learn how to write critical reviews, do presentations and participate in seminar style groups discussions effectively.

Therefore, it is important to implement strategies and tactics to overcome these difficulties. The following section will make suggestions and recommendations to address the problem of academic language.

5.5   Possible Recommendations to EAP Difficulties

To solve the problem of academic language difficulties, the study would suggest the following strategies and policies.

1.   English Language Proficiency Requirements

The university may ask students to sit for English language placement test so as to get an overview of students' language skills which may help the university to give workshops on the students' required skills such as language structure and practice the language usage.

2.   Academic Language Course

As mentioned in Chapter two, there are differences between general English and academic language skills where students are required to use different skills in academic language which are not used in general English. Therefore, faculties at universities should make sure that their students have the academic language skills to perform successfully in the academic courses by making academic language course compulsory, and students must pass the course and should have it at the beginning of their studies. In academic language course, students learn how to write in an academic style such as

writing critical reviews and answering exam questions. They should also study how to prepare a presentation and how to participate in group discussions and tutorials. These skills will be useful in helping students to perform successfully in their courses and for lifelong learning.

'Writing critical review' for example is a skill. It cannot be learned in a day or two. Such a course should be incorporated in their curriculum as a learning support course. Once the students have improved their skills in academic writing, note-taking skills can be easily mastered through a series of workshops. 'Reading academic books and journals' can also be improved through short courses. Once the students have acquired some of these skills they can further develop the skills by practicing them on their own. Lecturers can direct this improvement by providing a reading list for the students' independent reading. 'Participating in group discussion and tutorials' can help boost the confidence level of the students if done effectively. Such discussions and tutorials should be organised as research support groups and the students should make it a point to attend them. Students have to attend the seminars organised by the department in order to develop the skill in oral presentations. Students should develop the needed vocabulary in the concerned academics to overcome the problem in answering the question papers and understanding the lectures. In general, both the university and the students are equally responsible for developing the relevant skills necessary in ensuring academic success.

5.6 Adjustment to the New Learning Culture

Home countries should make sure that their students have the abilities to adjust to the new academic setting by preparing students for the new academic language culture prior to sending them abroad. It can be done through preparing students for the new academic

setting and the required tasks and the new society culture. In addition, the sponsors should follow up their students and make sure they have adapted to the new culture.

5.7 University Students' Support Department

Students have different challenges when they travel abroad to study for example, culture shock, academic difficulties, anxiety, and financial shortage, home sickness, etc. These problems may affect students' motivation and may cause failure. Therefore, universities have to establish **University Students' Support Department** which helps to make sure their students study successfully and facilitate them with the required academic skills, render psychological support, and give financial support such as getting them an opportunity to work, etc. Universities worldwide have established **Students' Support Department** such as the University of Alberta which has employed different programmes and strategies to support international students to adjust to the Canadian society and academic difficulties (Mostafa, 2006).

5.8   Faculties Students' Societies

University may establish *Faculties Students Societies* where students gather and discuss their different difficulties and challenges such as academic difficulties and specific faculty's required skills. These societies are useful because they could give practical suggestions to improve students' performance and ideas to improve teaching methods.

5.9 Recommendations for Further Research

This study has identified difficulties faced by Omani postgraduates in using English for Academic Purposes, their causes and the possible ways to solve the problems. The study used *Present Situation Analysis* to highlight students' present problems. However, in order to develop the study furthermore, a *Target Situation Analysis* in which the

researcher analyses students' and the targeted needs of universities should be carried out.

5.8 Summary

This chapter has analysed and discussed the findings of the research in terms of the three research questions. The study identified seven major difficulties faced by Omani students and that 'writing *the critical review'* was the most frequently cited academic language difficulty. The study found that there are different causes for the academic language difficulties such as low English proficiency, limited vocabulary and students were not well-prepared. Finally, the survey found that students need to be well-prepared before registering to the university. These findings were validated and confirmed through interview questions. It can also be concluded that although the number of students and lecturers referred to in this study is small and confined to Omani postgraduate students only, the findings cannot be generalised to the larger population of postgraduate students, the findings are similar to Isfahani (2009) and should be considered by the authorities of this university as well as other Malaysian institutes of higher learning. At the same time, the international students' home country authorities and the students themselves (not just Omani students) should seriously consider the recommendations made here.