

Becoming independent learners: International student transition from an English for Academic Purposes course to postgraduate studies

by Laurel Naomi Acton

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the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Education)

Under the supervision of: Associate Professor Susan Oguro
Dr Neil England
Professor Lesley Harbon

University of Technology Sydney
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Laurel Naomi Acton, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (Education), in the School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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I dedicate this thesis to the participants in my study and other students in their learning situation.

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List of Acronyms

ASQA: Australian Skills Quality Authority. National regulator for Australia's VET sector.

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis

CHC: Confucian Heritage Culture. 'CHC' is often used to refer to educational systems thought to be influenced by Confucianist ideals. This is a contested term, as discussed in section 2.4 and throughout Chapter 9 (Discussion). In recognition of its problematic aspects, speech marks are included in its use in this thesis, thus 'CHC'.

CILO: Course Intended Learning Outcome. Relevant to subject documentation at targeted Australian university. See Table 6, section 4.3.4.ii.

EAP: English for Academic Purposes

EGAP: English for General Academic Purposes

ELICOS: English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students. English-teaching programs for international students studying in Australia on a student visa.

ESAP: English for Specific Academic Purposes

ESL: English as a Second Language

GMP: Good Manufacturing Practice. Title of postgraduate course at targeted university.

ICC: Intercultural communication competence

IEC: Intensive English Centre. Public educational institutions in Australia providing intensive English teaching to newly-arrived, high school aged students whose first language is not English.

IELTS: International English Language Testing System

L1: The first language of the student

L2: The language (here English) which is not the student's first language and is used as the medium of instruction

PTE: Pearson Test of English

SILL: Strategy Inventory of Language Learning. Strategy scale for assessing use of language learner strategies, devised by Oxford (1986).

SLO: Subject Learning Objective. Relevant to subject documentation at targeted Australian university. See Table 6, section 4.3.4.ii.

TEQSA: Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Agency. Australia's independent national quality assurance and regulatory agency for higher education.

TESOL: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language

VET: Vocational Education and Training. Courses in Australia which provide training and certification in workplace skills and associated technical knowledge.

Abstract

This study examined the experiences of international students as they transitioned to their first postgraduate semester at an Australian university from an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course at an English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) college. Independent learning, expressed through critical thinking and active involvement in academic tasks, is a vital component of success in many postgraduate courses. However, this way of learning can be unfamiliar to students from traditional, teacher-directed educational backgrounds. The purpose of the study was to explore the nature of the process by which participants developed as independent learners, by engaging with first-semester challenges in their postgraduate course.

This qualitative case study was conducted at a university in Sydney, Australia. The eighteen participants, representing five nationalities, were enrolled in twelve different postgraduate degrees across the university. Three in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant, spanning the period from the completion of their EAP course to late in their first postgraduate semester. Data collection and analysis focused on two particularly difficult aspects of participants' first-semester experiences: understanding lecture content and completing a linguistically challenging assignment task. The theoretical framework for the study underpins its purpose of investigating varied participant experience in changing educational contexts. Within a social constructivist paradigm, complexity theory (Larsen-Freeman, 1997) acts as a metatheory, supported by two aligned theories: the strategic self-regulation model (Oxford, 2017) and usage-based theory (Bybee, 2003, 2006).

Findings revealed that the participants' resourceful strategy use was at the core of their growing independence as learners. The three main types of strategic response employed by the participants were their efforts to fulfil academic requirements despite skill gaps, engagement with tasks involving critical thinking, and study management in a less-structured educational setting. The participants' strategy use in the postgraduate context was intensified by pedagogical differences between their L1 undergraduate degree, EAP course and postgraduate studies. The major original contribution of the study arising from the findings is the Strategic Self-learning Model, which frames participant

development as an iterative, holistic process based on pragmatic decision-making.

This study's findings contribute knowledge to the under-researched area of the EAP pathway to postgraduate studies, benefiting both universities and English colleges by enhancing understanding of international student transitions. The findings also provide fresh perspectives on the application of language learning strategy research. Recommendations to optimise the transition experiences of students by supporting their developing independence are provided.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A brief vignette is provided here to introduce the context, participant profile and purpose of the study.

Nancy is a 25-year-old woman from a major Chinese city. Following her Bachelor of Marketing degree in China, she worked in the Marketing field for two years. Nancy then decided to undertake a Master of Marketing degree by coursework in a major city in Australia to boost her career prospects in China. As she did not achieve the required English test score for university entrance, Nancy first completed a 10-week course at an English college. In this course, Nancy learnt valuable academic skills for her postgraduate course, but when she started at university, Nancy was shocked at the difficulty of the tasks and the degree of critical thinking required. Highly motivated to achieve her career goal and to pass all her subjects, Nancy used a number of strategies to meet these challenges. Despite failing one Marketing assignment, by the end of her first semester, Nancy felt that she had progressed in her critical thinking skills and become more independent, both academically and personally.

1.1. The research problem and the study's objectives

The vignette above illustrates the research problem explored in this thesis. At issue is the process of development of an independent learning approach by first-semester postgraduate coursework students who have entered an Australian university via an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. Independent learning is considered an essential attribute for academic success at a Western university (Hammersley-Fletcher & Hanley, 2016; Kember, 2001; Kettle, 2017; Ryan, 2013c; Tran, 2013a) and is more prevalent in postgraduate courses (Evans et al., 2018; Fenton-Smith & Humphreys, 2017). Western universities are defined here as institutions based on the European tradition of critical thought, in countries such as the United States of America (US), the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, New Zealand and Australia. However, the unfamiliarity of this independent study approach for many international students can cause academic difficulties (Evans et al., 2018; Gram et al., 2013; Heng, 2018; Lu & Singh, 2017; Ryan, 2013c). There is a lack of research into the

development of an independent learning approach for students entering postgraduate coursework studies at an Australian university, specifically via the EAP pathway. This research is vital to increase understanding of the educational processes of these students and to optimise their adjustment to university studies.

Independent learning has been variously interpreted in the literature to mean student responsibility for learning, self-sourcing of knowledge, and management of time pressures (Busher et al., 2016; Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Heng, 2018; Spiro et al., 2012). It has also been closely associated with active learning, critical thinking and evidence-based argumentation (Gram et al., 2013; Kettle, 2017; Ryan, 2013c; Saravanamutu & Yap, 2014). Researchers have made strong links between the independent approach to learning required at Western universities and core values of these institutions, such as the advancement of critical thought and knowledge through rigorous academic debate (Hammersley-Fletcher & Hanley, 2016; Owens, 2011; Ryan, 2013c). These links point to sociocultural influences on independent learning and consequent difficulties for international students in changing their habituated ways of accessing knowledge.

This thesis addresses five major gaps in the literature regarding the EAP route to postgraduate coursework studies at Western universities.

1. Within the under-researched area of EAP preparatory courses for Australian universities, the focus of studies has largely been confined to academic skill preparation for university studies, rather than the broader goal of developing students into independent learners (Benzie, 2011; Dooley, 2010; Dyson, 2014; Floyd, 2015; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011).
2. Insufficient research has been conducted into the postgraduate process by which EAP graduates develop into independent learners to the extent required within their university discipline (Benzie, 2015; Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Kell & Vogl, 2006).
3. Research into the academic adjustment of international students to Western universities has tended to examine the students' difficulties, rather than their agentic response to these difficulties (Heng, 2018,

2020; Kettle, 2011, 2017; Olave-Encina et al., 2020; Ryan, 2013c; Tran, 2011).

4. Studies in the language learning strategies field have mostly focused on the completion of specific tasks for learning a foreign language, rather than on the longer-term development of students' ways of learning through strategy use in an L2 setting (Afshar & Movassagh, 2017; Oxford, 2017; Oxford et al., 2018). In this case, the students' changing ways of learning relate to their development as independent learners.
5. There has been limited research into connections between the development of independent learning by international students at Western universities and the goal of internationalisation widely expressed by these institutions. The need for many international students to shift from their information-focused, teacher-directed L1 educational background to the independent learning approach of a Western university may impact on their sense of inclusion in the new environment and the potential for intercultural understanding (Hammersley-Fletcher & Hanley, 2016; Kettle, 2017; Ryan, 2013c).

In light of these gaps in the literature, this study has the following objectives:

1. To explore factors contributing to the development of an independent learning approach of former EAP students in the first semester of their postgraduate coursework studies
2. To determine the students' academic and personal changes during their development into independent learners.

1.2. Personal orientation to the research

My personal engagement with this research project stems from my considerable experience of teaching international students in Australia, in both EAP courses at English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) colleges and postgraduate courses. More broadly, in my 35 years as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher across a number of sectors, age groups and educational contexts, I have frequently found myself in the role of preparing

students for the transition to a larger-scale educational setting. These transitions have included the following:

- Refugee, migrant and international students moving to mainstream high school from a preparation course at a public Intensive English Centre (IEC), or a High School Preparation Program at a private ELICOS college
- International students entering university from a high school setting or ELICOS college.

In these new study environments, the students were unlikely to have the close monitoring and care that ESL teachers were able to offer in the preparatory phase, with smaller, relatively homogeneous classes and a rigorous language- and skill-based curriculum. From a personal perspective, I was struck by the vulnerability and courage of these students. They faced many challenges due to their drive to succeed, while navigating an unfamiliar sociocultural and educational environment in their L2 (English). I noted the contrast between the rich individuality I saw in my students and stereotypical depictions of Asian students as diligent, compliant learners seeking to advance their family's interests through an overseas qualification. While the ESL teaching experience itself was satisfying and enjoyable, I often wondered how my students would manage in the next stage of their education. Despite inevitable skill deficiencies relative to their L1 English-speaking peers, these students would need to cope far more independently than was the case in the heavily scaffolded preparation course.

The other question which lingered in my mind concerned the relevance of my teaching to the students' subsequent educational needs. Having taught only on 'one side of the fence', it was difficult to know what lay beyond. Later, when I began lecturing on a Master of TESOL course in early 2017, I began to see the kinds of difficulties faced by many of the international students. From these observations, I developed a deep interest in understanding more about the specific experiences of postgraduate students who had entered via an EAP course at an ELICOS college. This study, then, provides an opportunity for me to hear directly from these students about their experiences, to inform

understanding of the EAP-to-postgraduate transition, and ideally to contribute to improved experiences of future students taking this pathway to university.

I also feel motivated to honour the open and often quite personal contributions of the participants in this study, by relating their perspectives with respect and veracity. In the spirit of agency demonstrated by the participants, I have chosen to use the first person form and active voice where appropriate, as these linguistic choices can help researchers 'situate themselves as influential actors in their own writing' (Pearson-Casanave, 2017, p. 41). Finally, I hope to support the elusive but worthwhile goal of internationalisation of the Western university through greater focus on inclusiveness and mutual understanding.

1.3. Context of study

This study was conducted at a university in Sydney, Australia. All 18 participants were international students in their first semester of postgraduate studies. They came from five different countries: China (12), Thailand (3), Vietnam (1), Japan (1) and Colombia (1).

1.3.1. Background information on international students in Australia

The participants in this study form part of the huge numbers of international students in Australia. From January to July 2019, the period of data collection, there were 684,754 international students studying in Australia (Australian Education International, 2019). This figure represented an annual rise of 9% p.a. in total numbers, and in the higher education sector of 10% p.a. since July 2018 (Australian Education International, 2019). Increases also occurred in non-research postgraduate commencements in Australia, with a rise of 8.7% in 2019 following 17.5% growth the previous year (Australian Education International, 2020a). These international student figures placed Australia third globally behind the US and the UK. The substantial growth in numbers over a number of years has been attributed to Australia's reputation for quality tertiary education, the proximity to rapidly growing, educationally mobile middle classes in East Asia, and financial pressures on Australian universities due to restricted federal

funding (Arkoudis et al., 2018; Arrowsmith & Mandla, 2017; Kettle, 2017; Tran, 2011).

However, since 2019, international student numbers in Australia have decreased due to COVID-19 related disruption. For example, September 2020 figures, with 670,636 international students engaged in studies across all educational sectors, represent a 7% annual decline in student numbers (Australian Education International, 2020b). This decrease, however, does not affect the significance of this study about student experience in a given context. Moreover, the resilience of this educational sector over a number of years suggests that student numbers may return to their former levels.

The financial pressures on Australian universities associated with Government funding restrictions have fuelled economic-based discourses about international students in Australia, in contrast to the educational focus of this study. In part, the economic perspective is due to the position of international education as one of the largest export industries in Australia, worth AU\$37.6b in 2018-19 (Australian Education International, 2019). In addition to its contribution to Government coffers, the stimulus has also had a practical impact, shown by the 240,000 jobs estimated to result from the presence of international students in 2019 (Australian Education International, 2019). Public discourses have tended to frame the students as an 'export industry and commodity' (Tran, 2011, p. 92), while tertiary institutions have been criticised in the media for prioritising financial concerns over educational needs of these students (Burton-Bradley, 2018; Hunter, 2019b; Worthington et al., 2019b). This qualitative study of students' lived experiences provides an important alternative discourse to the economic model by highlighting students' perspective towards their educational processes, with a view to increasing understanding of their experience.

While the highest proportion of international students (51%) was enrolled in higher education in July 2019, this figure did not include pathway institutions for international students, including schools, Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions and ELICOS colleges (Australian Education International, 2019). With 106,811 students enrolled in July 2019, ELICOS colleges comprised 13% of total international student enrolments (Australian Education

International, 2019). This study, then, is based on two important educational sectors in Australia: universities and ELICOS colleges.

A significant feature of the Australian international student landscape for many years has been the high proportion of students from one country, the People's Republic of China (henceforth referred to as 'China' and its students as 'Chinese'). As in most other Anglophone contexts, this national group has comprised the largest cohort, with 38.3% of enrolments in higher education and 30.5% in the ELICOS sector in July 2019 (Australian Education International, 2019). Similarly, amongst this study's participants, Chinese students constitute the largest national group. The large numbers of Chinese students have generated debate about the financial dependence of both the Australian Government and Australian universities on this cohort.

Given the vast field of international education in Australia and the prominent economic discourses, this study's detailed examination of the lived experiences of postgraduate students is vital for presenting educational processes from an individual perspective.

1.3.2. The university and its pathway college

As stated in section 1.3., this study was carried out at an Australian university. All of the participants had completed a preparatory course at an ELICOS college linked to the university by a direct entry arrangement. Direct Entry Programs are defined by English Australia, the peak body guiding the development of ELICOS colleges, as follows: 'English language programs that provide students who successfully complete the programs with "direct entry" to further study in ... higher education without having to further demonstrate proficiency in English' (Brandon & O'Keefe, 2017a, p. 3). Therefore, ELICOS colleges, through their EAP courses, provide an alternative to university entrance based on language test requirements. Within this under-researched pathway route to university, this study will help to inform understanding of the EAP-to-postgraduate transition. As there are similar direct entry arrangements in most other Western countries, such as the US, UK, Canada and New

Zealand, it is likely that this study's findings will have relevance beyond the Australian context.

In order to preserve anonymity, the university will be referred to throughout this thesis as 'the University', while the linked ELICOS college will be referred to as 'the College'. Note that for the same reason, citations and references which would identify the University and the College have been omitted. If required, however, application can be made to me as the thesis author for release of the relevant citations and references.

The University, together with its linked College, was chosen for pragmatic reasons. As I have taught in both settings, the professional and personal links established through my teaching roles made it easier for me to understand their organisational structures, communicate with relevant senior staff, and invite students to join the study. Secondly, the two institutions are well-established educators of large numbers of international students taking this pathway route, so the study's findings will likely be relevant for similar institutions.

1.3.2.i. The College

The College website describes it as a registered private higher education provider of pathway courses to the University, of which it is a controlled entity (2020). The direct entry route to postgraduate studies is in the form of an EAP preparation course. The final, compulsory stage for postgraduate entry is 10 weeks long, but students arriving at the College without the requisite language skills for the direct entry course must complete additional levels beforehand.

The purpose of the College is framed in instrumental terms: 'to provide the best available opportunity for students to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to attain their goals' (2020). These goals are elsewhere linked to success in students' subsequent University studies. Beyond teaching international students, the College appears to have a strong international reach, providing diploma and English programs in six other countries, as well as supporting and participating in a range of global youth and humanitarian programs.

1.3.2.ii. The University

The University is a major tertiary institution located in Sydney, the largest city in Australia, with a total of 46,159 students in November 2019, including 15,450 international students (2019). The University's approach to international students is expressed in two sections of the website. Firstly, an overview of initiatives states that the University is 'committed to internationalisation' and claims that it 'integrates inter-cultural and global perspectives into every facet of university life' (2019). On a practical level, the focus is said to be on three areas: internationalisation of the curriculum, development of the staff's intercultural capabilities, and enhancement of international students' experiences. Secondly, the University's extensive 2027 Strategy outlines planned initiatives in the areas of language and academic writing support for international students. Within the classroom, the University undertakes to train teaching staff to optimally meet international students' academic needs. The wording of the goal of 'helping staff to better understand the benefits of multicultural class teachings' implies a need for a degree of attitudinal change by staff. These specific strategies are located within a broader framework of international education, aiming for 'all students to engage in international activities, both at home and overseas' (2019).

Based on these policy statements, it appears that the University has a strong commitment to optimising the experiences of international students through the provision of additional academic support, as well as enhancing the outlook and teaching skills of staff through professional development programs. However, these statements need to be viewed with some caution, in light of claims that internationalisation rhetoric may not match reality (Arrowsmith & Mandla, 2017; Fischer & Green, 2017; Green & Whitsed, 2015; Liyanage & Nima, 2016; Ryan, 2013b; Watson & Widin, 2015). Given potential dissonance between stated policy and actual practice, the study will inform understanding of this issue through the lens of international students' experiences across several subject areas.

1.3.3. Overview of ELICOS sector

The ELICOS pathway provides an alternative route to higher education for students who have not achieved the language test entry score for their course, as determined by the university. The most common of these international academic language tests are IELTS, PTE Academic and TOEFL. Monitored by the Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA), ELICOS direct entry courses can be offered by a registered provider which has a formalised entry arrangement with a registered higher education provider (TEQSA, 2020). Federal legislation, in the form of ELICOS Standards 2018, specifies that ‘formal measures must be in place to ensure that assessment outcomes are comparable to other criteria used for admission to the tertiary education course of study’ (Australian Government, 2019). Students’ language and skill competence, then, is internally assessed by each ELICOS college.

The legal status of this assessment requirement reflects the increasing regulation of the ELICOS sector over the past twelve years, seeking to ‘enhance Australia’s reputation as a provider of quality education to international education markets and assist in attracting quality international students to Australia’ (TEQSA, 2020). A more pragmatic formulation of this requirement, according to the Higher Education Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015, is that ‘admitted students have the necessary proficiency in English to participate in their intended study’ (Brandon & O’Keefe, 2017a, p.31). Ultimately, though, the Framework reaffirms that it is up to the individual university to determine its entry levels. These decisions as to acceptable language levels are subject to competitive pressures between universities for international student fees, in a landscape where more university options for students within Asian countries are emerging (Kettle, 2017; O’Loughlin, 2015; Tran, 2011).

1.3.3.i. Language issues: ELICOS and university sectors

The increasingly stringent regulation of ELICOS colleges arose from concerns expressed fifteen years ago in media and academic publications regarding international students’ language skills. It was argued that the reputation for quality in Australian higher education institutions was being threatened by the

rush to enrol students despite inadequate language proficiency (Birrell, 2006; Bretag, 2007). The combination of public and academic concern prompted the 2008 Bradley Review, an examination of options for higher education reform. This process culminated in the establishment of TEQSA, as a national regulatory body to oversee higher education in Australia and its providers (TEQSA, 2020). This has provided a stable regulatory framework for higher education, although questions have remained as to TEQSA's degree of oversight of university practices relative to other institutions (Burton-Bradley, 2018), as well as to the language competence of students admitted to Australian universities (Baik & Greig, 2009; Mickan, 2013; Sherry et al., 2010).

There is general agreement in the literature that university entrance scores are set too low (Baik & Greig, 2009; Bretag, 2007; Dyson, 2014; Zhang & Mi, 2010). This position is supported by evidence of a gap of 0.5 of an IELTS band between the recommended level for tertiary entrance (IELTS, 2020) and the commonly accepted entry levels by Australian universities. As these entry scores form the framework within which ELICOS colleges plan to achieve equivalence to an external assessment process, downward pressure is placed on the language levels of beginning exit-level EAP students. Taking a critical stance on 30 years of research linking international students' relatively poor academic skills with inadequate language levels, Zhang and Mi (2010, p. 372) question 'whether the problem is not partly the making of host institutions'. However, Kettle (2017, p. 27) regards the dominant focus on language levels as 'highly seductive', arguing that it downplays the more important interplay of language, culture and pedagogy. A similar position to that of Kettle (2017) is taken in this study, which does not minimise the importance of language competence, but locates it within a network of factors.

1.3.3.ii. Functions of EAP courses in the ELICOS sector

According to English Australia, the value of EAP courses at ELICOS colleges goes well beyond language teaching, as these courses can prepare students 'more comprehensively and holistically' than language tests can (Brandon & O'Keefe, 2017b, p. 3). The purpose of EAP courses includes instruction in academic skills, but the generic nature of the skills usually taught in these

courses is important to note in light of the demand for disciplinary skills at university (Benzie, 2011, 2015; Counsell, 2011; Floyd, 2015). Apart from specific skill instruction, EAP courses are required to include instruction in “academic literacy” and the culture of study in Australia’ (Brandon & O’Keefe, 2017b, p. 3). Acculturation to the critical approach to learning in Australian universities is therefore presented as a core purpose of EAP courses.

This overview of the EAP direct entry pathway to Australian universities reveals that it operates within a complex and increasingly regulated framework. The competition between universities for international student fees impacts on the English competence of students in the EAP direct entry program, as well as on the length of the EAP course. These pressures arguably compromise the ability of ELICOS colleges to adequately equip students with the requisite skills and learning approach for postgraduate studies in Australia. Further EAP issues arising in the literature will be explored in sections 2.5.3. and 2.6., then discussed further in Chapters 9 and 10 in relation to the participants’ experiences of their transition to postgraduate studies.

1.4. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the development of an independent approach to learning in the first semester of postgraduate coursework studies at an Australian university, for students who have completed an EAP course at an ELICOS college.

1.5. Research question

Based on the research problem, objectives and purpose of the study, the following research question guides its implementation:

How do former EAP students develop an independent approach to learning in their first semester of postgraduate coursework studies in Australia?

1.6. Theoretical and methodological approaches of the study

The study's theoretical and methodological approaches are aligned with each other and with the study's purpose, as stated in section 1.4. Together, they seek to reveal how the participants' responses to the unfamiliar educational context of the postgraduate course developed greater independence in their study outlook. To this end, a social constructivist paradigm is adopted, highlighting the generation of meaning through individual experience of a given situation (Hua, 2016; Schwandt, 2000), in this case of the independent academic culture of the postgraduate course (Evans et al., 2018; Fenton-Smith & Humphreys, 2017). This approach foregrounds the participants' emic perspective (Creswell, 2007), a subjectivist viewpoint which is captured through the use of in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method. A secondary data source is provided by subject documentation, in order to reveal the degree of participant understanding of disciplinary requirements.

Within the social constructivist paradigm, complexity theory (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, 2017) operates as a metatheory guiding the application of two theories: the strategic self-regulation model (Oxford, 2017) and usage-based theory (Bybee, 2003, 2006). All three contribute to understanding of participant experience in different but complementary ways. Complexity theory highlights the role of instability, contextual interaction and nonlinearity, key factors in the situated yet diverse experiences of the participants as they faced first-semester challenges. Oxford's (2017) strategic self-regulation model acknowledges the fluidity and holistic nature of strategy use, reflecting the need for participants to respond to unfamiliar and difficult postgraduate demands with flexibility and a combination of affective and cognitive elements. Finally, usage-based theory helps to explain language-related issues experienced by the participants in their L2 studies. It is noted that, consistent with APA guidelines, lower case is used in this thesis to refer to existing theories and models. However, the Strategic Self-learning Model, as a new theoretical construct, appears in capitalised form, a feature which will also support clear explanation of its features.

In order to reveal the participants' development over time and in different educational contexts (Feryok & Mercer, 2017), this theoretical framework is supported by the semi-longitudinal nature of the study. Three interviews were

conducted from January to July 2019, spanning the period from completion of the EAP course to completion of the first postgraduate semester. The combined effect of the theoretical and methodological approaches is to facilitate understanding of the participants' developmental processes in terms of their core elements and contributing factors, viewed from the participants' own perspective.

As stated above, the participants had all completed an undergraduate degree in their own country, followed by an EAP course at an ELICOS college in preparation for their university studies. There were 18 participants in the study, all postgraduate coursework students apart from one Bachelor of Nursing student. This participant was included in the study as he had already completed an undergraduate degree in China and worked for a year in South America. The participants were enrolled in 12 different courses across the university, providing a broad range of experience through their interview data.

In closing, the choice of theoretical and methodological frameworks and the participant profile for this study work together to achieve the purpose of the study and respond to the research question.

1.7. Significance of the study

By revealing the experiences of former EAP students in their first postgraduate semester through the lens of independent learning, this study will provide important insights for the benefit of future students taking this academic route. There are three types of institutions which could usefully apply this study's findings to review existing programs and practices:

1. **ELICOS colleges providing direct entry courses:** These colleges will find the detailed examination of students' experiences in their transition to postgraduate studies of great value. Comparison of the participants' experiences to those of their own students can inform evaluation of existing direct entry courses. While English Australia recommends that colleges track students' progress once at university, the organisation also acknowledges the difficulty of doing so (Brandon & O'Keefe, 2017a). For ELICOS colleges, this study provides useful information about factors

affecting students' first-semester adjustment to postgraduate coursework studies, including the impact of EAP practices on both the skills and the independent way of learning required at university.

2. **English Australia:** Through this study's findings, English Australia will have access to in-depth accounts of students' experiences in the direct entry course of a well-established ELICOS college, together with these students' first-semester postgraduate experiences. This knowledge can inform the preparation of English Australia's regularly published 'Guide to best practice in direct entry programs', which includes positive examples of effective educational approaches to support recommendations regarding pedagogy, curriculum and assessment (Brandon & O'Keefe, 2017a, 2017b).

In its current document on Direct Entry Programs, which received input and endorsement from TEQSA and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), English Australia highlights the importance of including 'learning approaches that students may encounter in their further educational experience'. Problem-based learning and self-directed tasks are provided as examples of these learning approaches which should accompany more traditional teacher-directed methods (Brandon & O'Keefe, 2017a, p. 9). Together with recommendations regarding tertiary visits and inductions and 'cross-cultural awareness seminars targeted at the education context' (p. 10), this represents an acknowledgement of the vital and sensitive functions of EAP courses beyond mere skill preparation. Given this level of awareness in English Australia, the results of this study will be of benefit in its efforts towards continuous improvement of member colleges' operations.

3. **Universities in Australia and other Western countries:** Universities will gain insights from the study's exploration of links between the development of an independent approach to learning by international students and internationalisation policies. By revealing factors contributing to independent learning in international students' first

postgraduate semester, the findings will help to inform policy and practice in support of inclusivity goals.

More broadly, this study joins the growing body of research which highlights the active, resourceful nature of international students' approach to their studies, countering depictions of their passivity and academic weakness (Heng, 2018; Kettle, 2010, 2017; Tran, 2011; Tran, 2013a). It also serves to strengthen the emerging calls for internationalisation of the university through inclusivity (Benzie, 2015; Healey, 2017; Ryan, 2013c), within the context of students' formative first semester.

1.8. Limitations of the study

There are two key limitations to this study. Firstly, it is based on participant experiences based on an EAP curriculum and textbook dating from 2012. It is noted that the College curriculum is currently being reviewed.

Secondly, while subject documentation was utilised as a data source, the lecturers' written feedback comments were not included (see section 4.3.4.iii.b). Instead, feedback data used in the study are based on participant reports of lecturers' written comments. The participant accounts may not always correspond to the lecturers' intent, although they do reflect the lived experience of the participants, the key perspective in the study.

1.9. Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organised into ten chapters.

Chapter 1 has introduced the research project as an investigation of the development of an independent learning approach by first-semester postgraduate students who have transitioned to an Australian university from an EAP course at an ELICOS college. The research question was defined, based on gaps in the literature in this area. Background information about the ELICOS sector in the broader context of higher education in Australia was provided. Finally, the significance of the study for a range of institutions was explained.

Chapter 2 examines the literature on topics pertinent to this study. It reveals various representations of international students within the media and in relation to two prominent discourses: internationalisation of the university and the influence of a 'Confucian Heritage Culture' background. There is a detailed examination of the literature on independent learning at Western universities, as the core topic of this study. The last two sections of this chapter explore research highlighting the agentive nature of international students through their access to, and utilisation of, a range of resources.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework for the study, in terms of its paradigm (social constructivism) and theoretical models. Complexity theory (Larsen-Freeman, 1997) is introduced as a metatheory explaining fundamental mechanics of human existence, and is supported by two aligned theories: the strategic self-regulation model (Oxford, 2017) and usage-based theory (Bybee, 2003, 2006).

Chapter 4 explains the methodology adopted in this study. Within a case study design, the data collection methods and data analysis tools are outlined, together with their purpose of revealing the participants' experiences over a period of intense change. Participant recruitment procedures are explained and the demographic profile of the participant group examined. Ethical considerations related to the study's procedures are also discussed, including data validation.

Chapter 5, the first of four findings chapters, reports on the participants' overall transition across three educational settings: their L1 undergraduate, EAP and postgraduate studies. The participants' reasons for undertaking overseas study and pedagogical differences in the three contexts are shown to influence their perception of the University course. There is a brief introduction to the study's emergent Strategic Self-learning Model.

Chapter 6 explores participant challenges in two core academic tasks: understanding lecture content and completing assignment tasks. The chapter examines how the participants' need for independent learning arises from challenges related to skill difficulties, the requirement for critical thinking, and

the need for self-organisation in a less structured educational environment than experienced previously.

Chapter 7 outlines participant responses to the two core academic tasks in Chapter 6 and frames them in terms of strategy use. While differences in response across the cohort are explored, the consistently agentive, resourceful and flexible nature of the participants' strategy use is foregrounded and viewed as an exercise in independent learning.

Chapter 8 reports on the role of self-reflection in the participants' transition to the independent, critical role expected in Australian postgraduate contexts. This analysis covers three related aspects: ways in which postgraduate tasks fostered independent thought; the hybridised influences of the participants' L1, EAP and postgraduate experiences on their changing ways of learning; and broader personal changes in the participants associated with their developing independence.

Chapter 9 draws together the study's findings and review of the literature to respond to the research question. It analyses the participants' experiences within the framework of the Strategic Self-learning Model, the major contribution of this study. This model, which builds on Oxford's (2017) strategic self-regulation model, represents the process by which the participants developed as independent learners in the first postgraduate semester.

Chapter 10 summarises the theoretical and methodological approaches of the study, before outlining its key contributions to the literature. It proceeds to make recommendations for EAP courses at ELICOS colleges, as well as for Australian universities seeking to promote the inclusivity and growing independence of international students. Areas for further research based on the important findings of this study are also proposed.

1.10. Summary of Chapter 1

An independent learning approach at Western universities poses challenges for international students who are used to traditional, teacher-directed pedagogical approaches. This study goes beyond the widespread research focus on

international students' skill deficits to explore factors promoting the development of EAP students into independent learners in the postgraduate context. Chapter 1 has explained the objectives, purpose and significance of the study, as well as contextualising the study within the broader field of the EAP-to-postgraduate transition in Australia.

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature related to the portrayal of international students. It also examines research into independent learning in relation to both EAP and university settings, together with resourceful forms of adaptation to university requirements by international students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Chapter 2 analyses the literature on issues related to the transition experiences of former EAP students in their first semester of postgraduate studies at an Australian university. The purpose of this literature review is 'to develop sharper and more insightful questions about the topic' (Yin, 2017, p. 13). In this case, the lens for viewing research is international student experience of the requirement for independent learning in postgraduate courses.

To create a broad understanding of issues which may impact on the participants, sections 2.2. to 2.4. explore ways in which international students are frequently positioned in the media and literature. These different portrayals emerge through public discourses in the media, through the interrelated prisms of internationalisation and intercultural communication competence (ICC), and through categorisation as 'Confucian Heritage Culture' ('CHC') students. The varying perspectives on international students are further explored in Chapters 9 and 10, which juxtapose these portrayals with the study's findings about the participants' lived experiences. The major part of this chapter, section 2.5., provides an overview of studies related to the core topic of independent learning, addressing both the preparatory function of EAP courses and student experience at Western universities. Finally, sections 2.6. and 2.7. examine literature relating to sources of support for ex-EAP university students: skills learnt in their EAP course and resources available in the university setting. These two sections reveal the complexity of the educational environment navigated by international students.

Chapter 9 returns to these issues, contextualising them within the study's response to the research question about the nature of participant development.

2.2. Public discourses on international students in Australia

There has been a significant amount of media attention in recent years on the presence of international students in Australia, particularly in higher education

contexts. The largely negative tone of this discourse is important to note because of the media's ability to influence the attitudes of key stakeholders: the international students themselves, domestic student peers, academic staff and the general Australian public. A brief examination of media discourse around the time of the study's data collection is therefore important for locating this study's purpose and findings within broader conversations about international students.

Section 1.3.1. has alluded to the crucial role of international education in the Australian economy and university sector, contributing to a public image of international students as providing prosperity but also vulnerability to changing fortunes. Similarly, media discourse has acknowledged international students as vital contributors to university funding, sometimes referred to as 'a cash cow' (Burton-Bradley, 2018, para. 8). Universities are said to enrol large numbers of students with inadequate language competence, due to their hunger for international student fees in an environment of declining public funding (Baker, 2019; Baker et al., 2019; Burton-Bradley, 2018; Hunter, 2019a, 2019b; Worthington et al., 2019a, 2019b). These discourses have portrayed international students as victims of the drive for student fees because of their inadequate skills for university studies, impacting in turn the quality of Australian universities. For example, media reports have evidenced reports from Australian academics about the limited communication skills of international students, as well as declining language entry standards at some universities (Baker, 2019; Baker et al., 2019; Burton-Bradley, 2018; Hunter, 2019b; Worthington et al., 2019a, 2019b). The financial dependence of Australian universities on international student fees has therefore been presented in the media as a serious issue which jeopardises Australia's reputation for quality education (Baker, 2019). ELICOS colleges, too, have been criticised for providing expensive yet inadequate preparation courses which virtually guarantee tertiary entrance (Baker, 2019).

Noticeable in these reports is the absence of international student voices, apart from the occasional simplistic, deficit portrayal of an unnamed student to begin an article. These portrayals tend to position international students as passive learners, linguistically weak, unable to cope with the academic demands of the

Australian university, and in some cases, prone to unethical behaviour (Baker et al., 2019; Worthington et al., 2019a; Zhao & Liu, 2019). Stereotypes of this nature, which lack a nuanced context or sense of agency, can be contrasted with the focus of this study, to represent the lived experiences of international students and highlight their strategic, agentive responses to challenging, unfamiliar circumstances. Section 10.3.2.iii. summarises this distinction in its contextualisation of the study's findings within different discourses on international students.

2.3. Interculturality and internationalisation of the university

Issues associated with the rise in international student numbers and growing diversity of student populations worldwide have been discussed in the literature in relation to two interrelated topics: interculturality (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2012; Hua, 2016; Jackson, 2012) and the internationalisation of the university (Gao, 2015; Healey, 2017; Qiang, 2003; Teichler, 2004). The relationship between these two fields of research, but also the indeterminate and contested nature of key concepts, is apparent in the most widely cited definition of the internationalisation of the university: 'the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education' (Knight, 2015, p. 3). In this definition, interculturality is depicted as an attitudinal, skill-based concept which can help to facilitate internationalisation of higher education, provided it is embedded into the relevant institutional frameworks.

There is broad agreement amongst researchers that internationalisation means more than the presence of international students (Gao, 2015; Healey, 2017; Kettle, 2017) or the inclusion of international content (Arrowsmith & Mandla, 2017; Green & Whitsed, 2015; Sawir, 2011). However, there is much complexity and disagreement in relation to the terms and concepts associated with internationalisation. As one example, the term 'global' in this context has been regarded either as a worthy goal of mutual understanding (Deardorff, 2006; Healey, 2017) or as a damaging concept which subverts heterogeneity (Jackson, 2012; MacDonald & O'Regan, 2012). Furthermore, Ryan (2011) has

argued that Knight's reference to internationalisation as a process should specify mutual understanding amongst different cultural groups as its goal. Ryan also advocates, as an alternative to the 'intercultural' element, a more dynamic and inclusive 'transcultural approach', which 'positions academic cultures as partners in the creation of new knowledge and practices' (p. 633). Similarly, Heng (2020) and L. T. Tran (2011) criticise the normalisation of Western university practices, advocating 'reciprocal adaptation' of international students and other university personnel (Tran, 2011, p. 92).

Nevertheless, the term 'intercultural' has tended to dominate in the literature across a wide range of applications, with the core concept of 'intercultural communication' commonly used to refer to interactions across cultural and educational interfaces and their impact on the interactants and broader society (Hua, 2011, p. 1). Indeed, several studies have investigated a means to measure ICC within the university environment (Arasaratnam, 2009; Deardorff, 2006; Koester & Lustig, 2015). For this study, interculturality is a useful notion, as international students are potentially treated as outsiders unless a respect for difference is actuated through awareness and accommodation of their needs. A transcultural approach offers further opportunities through development of productive cultural engagement.

Researchers advocating the internationalisation of the university curriculum have argued for inclusivity in the subtler pedagogical choices which delineate power relationships (Campbell & Li, 2008; Leask & Bridge, 2013; Leask & Carroll, 2011; Ryan, 2005). A common goal of these researchers is to encourage staff to be 'open to new ways of thinking' (Sawir, 2011, p. 54). Tentative progress in internationalisation of the curriculum has been associated with initiatives by disciplinary teaching staff (De Wit & Leask, 2015; Green & Whitsed, 2015; Leask & Bridge, 2013), with those in the Humanities found to adapt their pedagogical approach most readily (Sawir, 2011). More broadly, awareness by academic staff of preferred learning styles of international students is considered important (Cheng et al., 2016), but was found to be challenging for lecturers in one study (Sawir, 2011). The adoption of inclusive approaches to teaching and learning is clearly of relevance to this study, which

investigates participants' strategic efforts to adjust to academic norms at an Australian university by becoming independent learners.

In contrast to several large-scale studies which have investigated the internationalisation of the curriculum without including student voices (Gao, 2015; Healey, 2017; Leask & Bridge, 2013; Ryan, 2011), Kettle (2017) has framed the issue in terms of localised 'social practice' (p. 45). This useful approach, which investigates students' ability to engage academically within institutional settings, is utilised for the purposes of this study. Broad concepts like internationalisation and interculturality can thereby be examined in terms of individual experiences in specific academic contexts, enhancing the opportunity for detailed understanding. The value of a social practice approach to internationalisation is illustrated in a qualitative Australian study of postgraduate international students of Business, revealing a mismatch between the views of teaching staff and their students (Cheng et al., 2016). While lecturers assumed the inclusion of international case studies in course materials to be sufficient, the students complained about the preponderance of Western case studies and pedagogical approaches, as well as the number of Chinese international students in the course.

The inclusion of close qualitative studies is also vital because the literature contains evidence of dissonance between the stated institutional policy of universities and the reality, pithily described as 'a hollow shell behind the rhetoric' (Green & Whitsed, 2015, p. 3). Such inconsistencies have been identified at a university-wide level, across faculties and even between staff members (Arrowsmith & Mandla, 2017; Fischer & Green, 2017; Ryan, 2013b; Sawir, 2011; Watson & Widin, 2015). Despite the somewhat euphemistic description by the Australian Government of 'our ... highly internationalised institutions and international outlook' (Australian Government, 2016, p. 25), the initiative to implement this strategy rests with the universities themselves (Liyanage & Nima, 2016).

2.4. Adaptability of 'CHC' students

The term 'CHC' ('Confucian Heritage Culture') in the educational context is used to refer to Confucianist influences on ways of teaching and learning of students from China, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, Singapore and Vietnam. Core Confucianist ideals are generally thought to be diligence, deference to teachers as authority figures, and maintenance of social harmony (Gutierrez & Dyson, 2009; Tran, 2013a). According to the traditional 'CHC' discourse, these students have resistance to Western learning styles (Nielsen, 2002), revert to a collectivist mentality which prevents them from expressing independent views (Phuong-Mai et al., 2005), and adopt passive learning approaches which disengage students from the active study mode encouraged at Western universities (Lum, 2006).

However, there has been a significant shift in the literature, with the deficit model of entrapment in a so-called 'Confucian Heritage Culture' being increasingly contested. The restrictive view outlined above has been problematized in a range of ways which reflect the diversity of perspectives in this area. On the one hand, some researchers see these students as a homogeneous but misunderstood group. For example, the widespread argument that social harmony is a core value in 'CHC' societies has been rebutted with research finding that 'CHC' students were actually more competitive than collectivist (Campbell & Li, 2008). This competitive disposition was said to facilitate a reluctance to share ideas in groupwork or whole class settings. An alternative explanation for the reticence of 'CHC' students in class is that their apparently passive learning style actually involves student engagement in a Confucianist 'silent inner dialogue' (Li & Wegerif, 2014, p. 22). Memorisation of content, often thought by Western academics to be antithetical to understanding, has been presented as 'an adjunct to deeper learning' (Gutierrez & Dyson, 2009, p. 375). Finally, traditional approaches to study used by 'CHC' students have not been found to adversely affect their academic performance (Li et al., 2010; Ma, 2014).

Another approach is to see 'CHC' students as quite individualistic and pragmatic (Heng, 2018, 2020; O'Dwyer, 2017; Tran, 2008, 2011; Tran & Vu,

2018; Tran, 2013a), a core position which, however, also features a range of researcher perspectives. For instance, 'CHC' students are variously depicted as products of their mass education system rather than of their culture (O'Dwyer, 2017; Tran, 2013a), highly adaptive and self-reflective (Heng, 2018, 2020; Quan et al., 2016; Tran, 2013a), or resourceful in managing high-stakes assessment tasks (Shi, 2006; Wang & Brown, 2014). A similar rejection of 'a reified culturalism' (O'Dwyer, 2017, p. 198) is built on the claim that there are significant aspects of Confucianist teaching which encourage independent thought. To add to the complexity of the landscape, diversity and social change are having an increasing impact on 'CHC' students. Gutierrez and Dyson (2009) point to variations in student behaviour across 'CHC' countries, while other studies locate Chinese students within the context of significant social and educational reforms in China (Ryan, 2011, 2013b; Ryan & Viète, 2010).

Accompanying this productive problematisation of 'CHC' students have been calls for close qualitative studies such as this one, which can investigate the complexity of situations in detail (Heng, 2018; Hua, 2011; Rose, 2015; Tran, 2008, 2011; Tran, 2013a). This 'small culture' approach (Holliday, 2011, p. 204) can express the voice of students and complement several studies based on analysis of Confucianist texts (L. Li and Wegerif, 2014; O'Dwyer, 2017; Phuong-Mai, Terlouw & Pilot, 2005). Such small-scale studies represent an attempt to de-essentialise stereotypical conceptions of students from 'CHC' countries which may cloud perception of individual complexity.

Within this hotly contested field, this study examines the degree to which the participants from 'CHC' countries appear to be influenced by Confucianist ideals, in terms of their views of L1 educational experiences and their continued use of L1 study practices.

2.5. Independent learning

An examination of the literature on independent learning provides a reference point for understanding participant experiences of this key area of the study. The importance of participant adjustment to an independent approach to learning is based on the broad acknowledgement by researchers of its

challenges for international students at Western universities (Hammersley-Fletcher & Hanley, 2016; Kember, 2001; Kettle, 2017; McGrath-Champ et al., 2013; Quan et al., 2016; Ryan, 2013c; Tran, 2013a).

While the term 'independent learning' occurs frequently in the literature, it has been used to refer to varied aspects of academic experience. One frequently mentioned aspect relates to the respective roles of teachers and students in the learning process. In this regard, independent learning for international students is often referred to in terms of a general 'shift in the responsibility for learning from teacher to learner' (Spiro et al., 2012, p. 608), or the sourcing of information by the student with the tutor's guidance (Busher et al., 2016). This overall pedagogical perspective often finds expression in the literature in more specific issues for international students, such as critical thinking (Kettle, 2017; Ryan, 2013a; Sawir, 2011) and skill gaps necessitating additional learning on their part (Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Heng, 2018; Quan et al., 2016). These challenges interrelate with time management issues arising from the unfamiliar course structure at Western universities (Busher et al., 2016; Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Heng, 2018). Unlike the long contact hours with minimal reading demands at many Asian universities, courses in Western countries tend to have limited lecture time, but a heavy reading load and more assignments. Other prominent notions associated with independent learning in the literature include active learning, research-based knowledge, argumentation, problem-based learning and, more generally, student-centred learning (Gram et al., 2013; Hughes & Bruce, 2016; Kettle, 2011, 2017; Ryan, 2013c; Saravanamutu & Yap, 2014; Tran, 2013a).

There is a tendency for studies on international students' experiences of independent learning to adopt an essentialist and deficit discourse (Benzie, 2015; Heng, 2020; Ryan, 2013a). For example, Yan and Berliner (2011) explain Chinese students' difficulties in adjusting to studies at a US university through lecturer accounts of the students' passive learning style. However, as a qualification to this negative perspective, the less active study approach of Chinese students has not been found to affect their academic achievements (Li et al., 2010; Ma, 2014). A related danger is the use of 'inaccurate and unhelpful binary terms' to differentiate Western from 'CHC' educational approaches

(Ryan, 2011, p. 940). Challenging these essentialist dichotomies, Ryan (2011) points to features of China's higher education system which are arguably consistent with notions of independent learning and could potentially improve Western university practices. These include the widespread student use of self-reflection to evaluate their learning methods and study attitudes based on effort and perseverance. Adding to the complexity of this field, an independent learning approach has been depicted as holistic in nature, incorporating habits of mind and affective factors as well as cognitive factors (Saravanamutu & Yap, 2014). A holistic perspective usefully points to the multi-faceted challenge of the transition to a Western university for international students used to a different way of learning.

This study seeks to avoid essentialist discourses by investigating the participants' diversity within broad patterns of experience.

2.5.1. Framing of research into development of an independent learning approach by international students

There is increasing attention by researchers to international student adjustment in terms of the students' development as independent learners at a Western university. This approach, addressing issues faced by students from a range of cultural backgrounds, represents a departure from the primary research focus on skill deficiencies (Nam & Beckett, 2011; Ryan, 2011; Wette & Furneaux, 2018; Wu & Hammond, 2011). Research into the growth of an independent approach to study in international students is located in three areas: ironically, one based on skill deficiencies, another exploring the nature of student response to challenge, and the third highlighting the need for awareness of value-driven learning approaches.

2.5.1.i. *Student response to skill deficiencies*

International student responses to their skill limitations at Western universities have been identified as a pathway to developing new, more independent ways of learning (Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Heng, 2018; Quan et al., 2016). This framing is attributed to the additional autonomous effort required on the

students' part to compensate for skill deficiencies. A similar view is expressed from the perspective of strategy researchers, with widespread agreement that learners' use of developing skills which lack automaticity involves strategy use (Cohen, 2018; Gunning & Turner, 2018; Macaro, 2006; Oxford, 2017; Rose, 2015). Conversely, the unfamiliarity of an independent learning approach for many international students has often been associated with skill-based academic difficulties, particularly those associated with critical thinking (Evans et al., 2018; Heng, 2018; Ryan, 2013c). Paradoxically, then, while some skill deficiencies may impact on international students' ability to function as independent learners, student responses to skill gaps have generally been found to promote an independent approach to study. Indeed, Afshar and Movassagh (2017) argue that strategy use and critical thinking are based on similarly agentic thought processes.

This conundrum is relevant to the study's participants as, despite intensive EAP instruction, graduates from these courses have tended to demonstrate skill deficiencies once at university, especially in critical thinking (Birrell, 2006; Bretag, 2007; Dyson, 2014; Floyd, 2015).

The participants' responses to skill-based challenges in their first semester will therefore be analysed in terms of the role of these responses in fostering an independent learning approach amongst the participants.

2.5.1.ii. Nature of student response to challenge

Researchers have used a variety of related framings to explain the concept of student independence and its development. A focus on the growth of learner autonomy as a result of strategy use was an early contribution of Wenden (1991) in the foreign language learning context. However, Wenden's argument that students are incapable of devising their own strategies without teacher instruction has since been discounted by most researchers. Indeed, research into self-regulated learning has pointed to the important role of student agency in the process of developing independence in their studies (Winne, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman, 2008). Consistent with this position, Winne (1995) refers to self-regulation as a student ability to access and utilise

resources, metaphorically ‘calling on a library of information and applying a suite of varied skills during studying activities’ (p. 173). Similarly, a self-regulated approach to learning has been found to enhance academic goal achievement by stimulating agency and a sense of self in an iterative process (Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman, 2008).

However, there has been insufficient application of these notions to international students’ L2 experiences. One exception is Ding’s (2017) examination of the ways in which mainland Chinese undergraduate students strategically adjusted to the greater autonomy required at a Hong Kong university. Another is Gao (2006), who found that when Chinese students encountered the UK’s less structured, more autonomous language learning environment, their use of language learning strategies decreased as they sought more informal ways of learning. However, the focus of Gao (2006) was largely on changes in strategy use as a result of increased autonomy, rather than as a cause of it.

While these studies highlight the importance of developing student independence, the lack of a staged, systematic understanding of this process for international students constitutes a gap in the literature which this study seeks to address.

2.5.1.iii. Awareness of values behind learning approaches

A number of researchers advocate the identification of values underlying different learning approaches, as a means of understanding student adjustment to a Western university (Hammersley-Fletcher & Hanley, 2016; Owens, 2011; Ryan, 2013c; Tran, 2011; Zhang & Mi, 2010). This approach foregrounds the learner’s habituated perspective on life and learning: “Criticality” does not imply a self-contained analytical process but is sensitive to the outlook, values and cultural mores of the learner’ (Hammersley-Fletcher & Hanley, 2016, p. 992). Therefore, the shift by international students from traditional, teacher-centred educational backgrounds towards an independent learning mindset is thought to require an understanding of its ‘underpinning principles’ (Hammersley-Fletcher & Hanley, 2016, p. 979) and the establishment of ‘parameters for students’ thinking’ (p. 982).

Some researchers adopting this perspective propose dialogic learning activities in order to clarify the concept of independent learning and foreground inclusiveness, as dialogue involves the exploration by *all* students of diverse value-driven principles for learning (Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Heng, 2018; Higson & Liu, 2013; Ryan, 2013b, 2013c; Shannon-Little, 2013). This dialogic approach is seen as an educational resource – ‘the asset that [cultural] diversity offers’ – with the purpose of ‘enhanc[ing] learning opportunities and outcomes’ (McGrath-Champ et al., 2013, p. 28). However, when juxtaposed with warnings of essentialism and other findings of international student pragmatism (Heng, 2018, 2020; Tran, 2011; Tran, 2013a), this approach may inhibit, rather than support, international student development.

In the context of this research, this study considers participants’ perception of how they learn critical thinking skills - as purely technical requirements or as value-based educational differences.

2.5.2. Critical thinking

Critical thinking, a key component of independent learning, is considered a vital aspect of higher education in Western countries (Albusaidi, 2019; Hammersley-Fletcher & Hanley, 2016; Kettle, 2017; Lu & Singh, 2019; Ryan, 2013; Sawir, 2011). It has also been highlighted as a major area of difficulty for international students as they transition to a Western university, due to the unfamiliarity of academic practices based on critical thinking (Evans et al., 2018; Gram et al., 2013; Heng, 2018; Lu & Singh, 2017; Ryan, 2013c). The fact that postgraduate courses have an even greater need for critical thinking (Evans et al., 2018; Fenton-Smith & Humphreys, 2017) points to the considerable challenge for this study’s participants, who may have ingrained study habits from L1 undergraduate studies based primarily on mastery of disciplinary content. However, some researchers warn against positioning international students as academic outsiders based on difficulties with critical thinking, arguing for more nuanced understandings. For example, Ryan (2011) and Lu and Singh (2017) state that critical thinking has existed in different forms in traditional Chinese education systems, albeit expressed in less direct, argumentative representations.

2.5.2.i. Definitions of critical thinking

Throughout the last few decades, the definition of 'critical thinking' has been a topic of debate. Although it has generally been viewed from either a cognitive or a personal-cultural perspective, the extreme positions have gradually given way to awareness of the dual aspects of critical thinking. Cognitive approaches have tended to focus on the intellectual functions required to perform critical thinking, exemplified by Angelo's (1995, p. 6) definition: 'the intentional application of rational, higher order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, problem recognition and problem solving, inference and evaluation'. In academic tasks, critical thinking skills have been seen as relevant to a problem-based learning approach, reflective writing and research tasks, as well as to effective argumentation (Afshar & Movassagh, 2017; Evans et al., 2018; McGrath-Champ et al., 2013).

As critical thinking encompasses a variety of task types, it can be difficult for international students from educational backgrounds which place less priority on critical thinking to conceptualise exactly what it means. This is particularly the case if they do not grasp the core notion of logical and evaluative thought based on evidence (Hammersley-Fletcher & Hanley, 2016). This difficulty is evident in the description of critical thinking in a widely-used international student resource: 'Perhaps the easiest way to understand what critical thinking is, is to consider what a critical thinker does' (Brick et al., 2016, p. 24). The examples provided by the authors broaden even further the abovementioned range of academic activities through the inclusion of source evaluation, assessment of relevance, as well as comparison and connection of ideas across contexts (Brick et al., 2016). Some cognitive-based perspectives of critical thinking include a purpose in their definition, generally that of improving an existing situation after detailed analysis. The purpose may be seen in the form of specific conceptual development: 'analysing and evaluating a thought with a view of improving it' (Paul & Elder, 2008, p. 4), as movement towards 'a more generally applicable critical attitude' (Hammersley-Fletcher & Hanley, 2016, p. 981), or as a means to societal improvement (Barnett, 1997).

In contrast, the personal-cultural position, as originally enunciated by Samuelowicz (1987) and Atkinson (1997), views critical thinking primarily as a social practice rather than as a set of thinking skills. This perspective was thought to preclude the teaching of critical thinking to people from traditional, teacher-directed educational backgrounds. However, along with the emergence of synthesised understandings of critical thinking, this position received powerful critique, such as Davidson (1998), due to its failure to acknowledge the teachable cognitive component of critical thinking.

In place of this restrictive position, many researchers favouring a personal-cultural perspective towards critical thinking have increasingly acknowledged the cognitive element and referred to the influence of motivation, open-mindedness and, more generally, dispositions which may make critical thinking easier to learn (Afshar & Movassagh, 2017; Albusaidi, 2019; Hammersley-Fletcher & Hanley, 2016). Rather than entrenched, culturally based perspectives, student responses to critical thinking tasks are viewed as learnt and modifiable responses. Moreover, the notion of 'dispositions' acknowledges individual differences which exist within and across cultures, rather than rigid categorisation of students according to their cultural background (Ryan, 2013c). Finally, the notion of student agency recognises the capability of international students to transcend formative educational practices in order to create their own hybridised role as students in a Western educational institution. Relevant to this study, the new student role may incorporate a developing sense of independence as learners, highlighting the central role of agency in international student adjustment (Benzie, 2015; Heng, 2018; Ryan, 2011; Tran, 2011; Tran, 2013a).

Just as with the issue of 'CHC' influences examined in section 2.4., more nuanced and fluid depictions of broader international student experience are emerging in relation to their adaptation to tasks requiring critical thinking. This study investigates the degree to which the participants learn critical thinking skills in their first semester, as well as the process by which this learning occurs.

2.5.2.ii. Critical thinking: negative positioning of international students

As in the analysis of media discourses on international students (section 2.2.), this overview of definitions of critical thinking has revealed how varying perspectives can position international students in discourses of inclusiveness or of otherness. If the foregrounding of cultural aspects of learning is coupled with a deficit mentality as to students' agency and adaptability, the conclusion may be drawn that international students from more traditional, teacher-directed educational backgrounds are unable to integrate into Western universities (Heng, 2018; Ryan, 2010, 2011, 2013c; Ryan & Viète, 2010). For example, Kember (2001) argues that student adjustment to a facilitative/transformative pedagogical style from a didactic/instructive one can be 'difficult and even traumatic' (p. 217). A negative perspective on international students' prospects of developing critical thinking skills has been attributed to a methodological failure to incorporate data on personal and cultural histories to explain international students' behaviour (Heng, 2018, 2020). An alternative explanation is that researchers have not sufficiently considered students' 'generative process of knowledge building' as they synthesise L1 learnings with the demands of the Western university (Ryan & Viète, 2010, p. 151).

Negative outlooks on international students' ability to learn critical thinking skills have also been seen as evidencing an attitude which Kettle (2017, p. x) refers to as 'academic imperialism'. Indeed, both Ryan (2013c) and Hammersley-Fletcher and Hanley (2016) note the irony that amongst many Western academics, there appears to be a lack of critical thinking about their pedagogical role in catering for the learning of diverse student groups.

2.5.2.iii. International student challenges with critical thinking

Most studies about international students tend to focus on their difficulties at Western universities, rather than on their strategies for adjustment (Gram et al., 2013; Heng, 2018; Kettle, 2017; Ryan, 2013c; Tran, 2011). These difficulties have been magnified in the literature by the tendency of researchers to situate studies in students' first, most challenging year of their university course (Ryan, 2013c). While this study, too, investigates participant challenges in their first semester, the focus of the study is on the participants' responses to these

difficulties as a driver for their subsequent development as independent learners.

There is widespread agreement amongst academics that critical writing tasks pose the greatest problems for international students at Western universities (Graves & White, 2016; Kettle, 2017; Wahyudi, 2016; Zhang & Mi, 2010). For example, these students often struggle to develop a cohesive, logical argument due to a lack of familiarity with the notion of an evidence-based position (Heng, 2018; Kettle, 2017; Ryan, 2010; Zhang & Mi, 2010). An absence of sufficient evidence may, in turn, produce an overly general treatment of a topic without detailed examination of sources (Ryan, 2010). These difficulties can be summarised as uncertainty about the persuasive role of writers in discursive texts and their positioning relative to source material. This argumentative function has been found demanding for students from China, where eloquent narrative prose tends to be more highly valued than discursive text (Heng, 2020; Tran, 2011). Evaluating and synthesising sources and their concepts over a lengthy response are also demanding aspects of postgraduate writing tasks for international students from a variety of cultural and educational backgrounds (Kettle, 2017; Ryan, 2010). It is the unfamiliarity of expected academic forms, rather than a lack of student ability, which is seen to cause these difficulties (Heng, 2018; Lu & Singh, 2017).

2.5.2.iv. Support for the development of critical thinking skills

Increasing acknowledgement that international students can learn critical thinking skills has prompted research into effective pedagogical approaches for this purpose. Within the Australian context, the National Strategy for International Education 2025 states that student-centred pedagogy in Australia 'encourages students to be self-directed, critical thinkers', while at the same time, 'highly internationalised institutions', an 'international outlook' and 'programs that encourage intercultural awareness' enhance cultural competencies (Australian Government, 2016, p. 15). The dual goals of teaching independent learning and intercultural competence hint at the ambitious goals and delicate balance increasingly required of Australian, and indeed Western, universities.

From a pedagogical standpoint, most researchers see it as the lecturer's responsibility to promote student learning of critical thinking skills, particularly methods of analysis (Afshar & Movassagh, 2017; Albusaidi, 2019; Baik & Greig, 2009; Kettle, 2017). Researchers have also suggested that lecturers' knowledge of international students' previous educational practices facilitates the teaching of a critical approach to learning. This knowledge includes an understanding of students' previous L1 writing practices to inform pedagogical practices (Evans et al., 2018; Tran, 2011). Together with the previously mentioned proposals of dialogic techniques, whether between lecturers and students (Tran, 2011) or in mixed-nationality groupwork tasks (Gram et al., 2013), these suggestions seek a respectful acknowledgement of difference through thoughtful scaffolding of critical thinking tasks.

In this study, participant processes of learning to use critical thinking skills are examined through a targeted assignment task, with attention to factors supporting the development of their skills and broader development into independent learners.

2.5.3. Development of independent learning in EAP courses

Most of the research into EAP courses has focused on skill development, without explicit reference to the relative responsibility of teachers and students for learning, or to related aspects of the teaching and learning approach (Benzie, 2011; Dooey, 2010; Dyson, 2014; Floyd, 2015; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). Clearly, the preparation of students' academic skills for university is a crucial function of EAP courses, and will be examined in section 2.6.1. However, the focus here is on emerging research into another key function of EAP courses, as outlined in section 1.3.3.ii, namely that of preparing students for an independent approach to learning at a Western university (Benzie, 2015; Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Kell & Vogl, 2006).

English Australia guidelines for direct entry EAP programs reveal the interconnectedness of learning approaches with skill acquisition. Indeed, many of the academic skills specified for EAP courses which cater for future postgraduate students require the application of critical thinking. For example,

included in the English Australia 'Writing skills and strategies' postgraduate outcomes is the requirement for 'evaluating, hypothesising, synthesising and applying critical analysis to written texts' before writing a response (Brandon & O'Keefe, 2017a, p. 27). It appears, then, that students can be introduced to an independent study approach by instruction in critical thinking skills, although the relative complexity of the requirements in EAP and postgraduate settings is also clearly a factor in students' ability to transfer these skills to postgraduate tasks.

There is an increasing awareness amongst researchers of the need for EAP students to 'shift from dependence on the teacher to an independent mode of learning' (Kell & Vogl, 2006, p. 132). Benzie (2015, p. 6) utilises the notion of a hybridised 'process of cultural becoming' in her analysis of students' EAP experiences, thereby foregrounding their agency and suggesting a cultural component of changes in study approaches. EAP staff in Kell and Vogl's (2006) study went further, by expressing concerns about 'imposing on students ethnocentric Western constructions of what it is to be an "ideal" learner' (p. 123). Regardless how the EAP-to-university pedagogical transition is viewed, a common view is that EAP courses should form a conceptual bridge for students, with teachers accorded a guiding role and student agency supported.

Despite Floyd's (2015) assertion that EAP courses at ELICOS colleges prepare students for acculturation into university practices, such a pedagogical approach is subject to pressure from two key factors in the ELICOS context. Firstly, due in part to commercial pressures, generic, packaged programs and materials tend to be used, rather than flexible delivery and resources based on the disciplinary needs of particular cohorts (Benzie, 2011; Kaktins, 2018; Kell & Vogl, 2006). Secondly, the strong motivation of students to progress to university within a limited time may restrict EAP instruction to core academic skills required for university study (Kell & Vogl, 2006).

Given these pressures on ELICOS colleges, participant accounts of their EAP-to-postgraduate transition will inform understanding of the degree of pedagogical alignment between the EAP and university institutions targeted for this study.

2.5.3.i. Impact of L1 degree and EAP course delivery on development of independent learning

There is a limited knowledge base about the impact of L1 undergraduate and EAP pedagogies on student adjustment to university. Shifting from the content- and text-based direct instruction in many students' L1 backgrounds to the greater critical literacy and communication-based pedagogy in the Australian university system is thought to cause problems for students (Benzie, 2011, 2015; Kell & Vogl, 2006). The EAP-to-postgraduate transition brings additional challenges for new postgraduate students, including a reticence to participate in class discussion (Benzie, 2015) and limited availability of learning support relative to EAP provision (Dooey, 2010).

With regard to course organisation, the contrast between the short face-to-face scheduling of most postgraduate courses and the long contact hours of both their L1 degree (Busher et al., 2016) and EAP course (Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015) has been found to cause adjustment problems at university. In the latter study, the combined expectations of an independent approach to study at a Western university, in the form of 'self-directed reading and study, accentuated by the challenges of time management', prompted ex-EAP students to comment that they felt insufficiently prepared for their tertiary course (Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015, p. 6).

2.5.3.ii. Ways to teach independent learning in EAP courses

Insufficient research has been conducted into ways that EAP courses can foster an independent learning approach in their students through pedagogy and curriculum. English Australia recommends 'learning approaches that students may encounter in their further educational experience', such as problem-based learning and self-directed tasks, to accompany more traditional teacher-directed methods (Brandon & O'Keefe, 2017a, p. 9). However, as yet there are no evaluated programs of this nature in the literature. In one study, interventions were planned as a result of findings on student adjustment difficulties, but they remain unreported (Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015). The initiative was to include a joint college-university induction to university, ongoing informal support from the college, and a student mentoring system at university. The

absence of reported evaluation of this or other programs points to the need for further research into effective ways of developing EAP students' ability to learn independently.

In light of the limited research in this area, this study seeks to examine participant perception of pedagogical shifts from their L1 undergraduate to EAP to postgraduate courses, together with the impact on their adjustment to postgraduate ways of learning.

2.6. EAP courses: Skill focus

While independent learning is the focus of this study, an examination of skill teaching in EAP courses is relevant for two reasons. Firstly, as stated in section 2.5.3, critical thinking exemplifies the interrelationship of skills and independent learning. Secondly, section 2.5.1.ii explained that skill deficiencies necessitate additional, independent learning on the students' part (Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Heng, 2018; Quan et al., 2016), so the range and effectiveness of EAP skill teaching may impact on students' growing independence. Skill-related research has been prominent in the EAP literature (Benzie, 2015; Bretag, 2007; Dooey, 2010; Dyson, 2014; Floyd, 2015). This section outlines research into academic skill teaching in EAP courses, followed by studies examining two specific areas where former EAP students have undergone difficulties at university: writing skills and understanding spoken lectures.

2.6.1. Academic skill teaching

Despite the regulatory focus on language standards underpinning the purpose of ELICOS colleges, several studies have found that the teaching of academic skills, rather than language skills, is the most useful aspect of EAP preparation courses in terms of students' university experience (Dooey, 2010; Dyson, 2014; Floyd, 2015; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). In research by Terraschke and Wahid (2011) and Floyd (2015), a comparison between EAP students' views of their preparedness for tertiary study with students entering via a language test score pointed to the academic skill teaching provided in EAP courses as the key difference between the two groups. This view received tentative confirmation in

Floyd's (2015) study, where EAP instruction in researching online, planning a writing task, avoiding plagiarism, referencing and use of citations appeared to bridge the gap to test-entry students entering with stronger language skills. Significantly for this study, students' positive assessment of EAP academic skill teaching does not extend to critical thinking skills, which are reported to be inadequately taught (Dyson, 2014; Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015). Perhaps because the major EAP teaching focus is on academic skills, students' language skills are also rated poorly, impacting on students' ability to communicate effectively at university (Bretag, 2007; Dyson, 2014; Floyd, 2015). It appears, then, that in the limited length of EAP courses, priority tends to be placed on instruction in unfamiliar academic skills which will be relevant at university, rather than on critical thinking or language skills.

2.6.2. Writing skills

Bridging the domains of academic and language skills, writing skills have emerged in the literature as the weakest area for ex-EAP students at university (Dyson, 2014; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). Ironically, writing is also reported as the area of greatest learning for EAP students, particularly in planning writing tasks, writing in a formal academic style, producing core academic genres, and utilising academic sources through paraphrasing, citations and referencing (Dooey, 2010; Dyson, 2014; Floyd, 2015). Writing issues will be explored below in terms of the use of generic or disciplinary-specific forms in the EAP-to-university transition.

2.6.2.i. Generic versus disciplinary writing skills

Researchers have expressed concern about the dominant teaching of generic writing skills in the EAP setting, in light of the disciplinary requirements of students' future university courses (Benzie, 2011, 2015; Counsell, 2011; Floyd, 2015). The mastery of subject-specific genres and associated lexis is considered an important means of accessing disciplinary practices and epistemology (Dressen-Hammouda, 2008; Graves & White, 2016; Hyland, 2008, 2016; Mickan, 2013; Woodward-Kron, 2008). EAP researchers tend to

advocate a disciplinary focus in EAP instruction, while acknowledging commercial pressures about its viability (Benzie, 2011; Kaktins, 2018; Kell & Vogl, 2006). Criticism of generic EAP writing instruction has been couched in several ways: as an incorrect assumption of the universality and transferability of language and writing skills (Benzie, 2011, 2015; Counsell, 2011), as a perceived lack of student preparedness for their tertiary course (Benzie, 2015), as an ineffective pedagogical approach (Counsell, 2011; Dyson, 2016), or as exacerbating unfamiliarity in a new subject area (Benzie, 2015). However, the literature provides few examples of disciplinary elements within EAP source materials and tasks, and there is insufficient evaluation of their effectiveness, thereby limiting the knowledge base (Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011).

2.6.2.ii. Genre transfer to disciplinary requirements

Despite the dominance of generic written forms in EAP instruction, there is a lack of research into students' ability to transfer generic forms to disciplinary tasks at university. In one of the few studies in this area, Counsell (2011) attributes the uneven transfer of EAP writing skills to postgraduate tasks largely to confusion associated with the movement from a generic to disciplinary focus. Another under-researched challenge for ex-EAP students is transfer of a learnt genre to a university task which bears only partial similarity to it. Due to the paucity of EAP research, two studies from beyond the EAP area are examined here, specifically focused on the ability of US college students to transfer a learnt generic genre to a future disciplinary one (Clark & Hernandez, 2011; Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011). The critical factor in these studies on genre transfer appears to be students' genre awareness, or ability to understand when and why to use or adapt genres, rather than rote application of learnt genre features. Students termed 'boundary crossers' in a study of genre transfer (Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011, p. 325) showed awareness of the uncertainty of their task and spoke flexibly in terms of strategies to achieve the purpose of a genre, rather than seeing genres as discrete entities.

This study will examine the degree of challenge faced by the participants associated with the generic-disciplinary shift from an EAP course to

postgraduate studies, and the ways in which the participants address this challenge.

2.6.3. Understanding lectures

There has been less research into ex-EAP students' ability to understand postgraduate lectures than into their academic writing skills (Benzie, 2011; Bretag, 2007; Counsell, 2011; Dyson, 2014, 2016; Floyd, 2015), perhaps because of the impactful grading function of assessment tasks. The term 'lecture' is used here to mean a mode of academic teaching where the lecturer delivers key subject content and, unlike interactive tutorials and seminars, the students mostly listen, process, and possibly record the information in note form.

The available evidence suggests that former EAP students struggle to understand university lectures, primarily due to poor listening skills (Dooey, 2010; Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Kell & Vogl, 2006). Consistent with the traditional role of lectures, of providing 'efficient information transfer' about subject content (Turner, 2015, p. 164), listening skills for lecture purposes involve students understanding the gist of the lecturer's delivery. Other challenging factors mentioned in the literature include students' difficulty in adjusting to lecturers' accents (Dooey, 2010), habituation to a text-based learning style in L1 English instruction (Kell & Vogl, 2006), and unfamiliarity with local knowledge and idioms (Dooey, 2010). Finally, Kell and Vogl (2006) argue that EAP courses are too short to develop students' listening comprehension skills sufficiently for university lectures. Although Zhang and Mi (2010) found that international students' listening issues resolved in only 1-2 years, well before their writing issues, this time frame corresponds to the participants' entire course, highlighting the serious nature of their issues with understanding lectures.

Missing from the EAP studies in this area is knowledge of how these students address the challenges posed by lecture comprehension at university. Drawing more broadly on the international student literature, one major pedagogical form explored by researchers is the use of asynchronous lecture materials to

complement student attendance at face-to-face lectures. This avenue of research parallels an increasing acknowledgement of the limitations of lengthy, monologic face-to-face lectures (Johnson & Mighten, 2005; Luna & Cullen, 2011; Turner, 2015). The inadequacy of traditional lectures for teaching disciplinary content applies particularly to international students (Croese, 2011; Turner, 2015), due to comprehension difficulties and language fatigue. While studies into alternative forms of delivery for the general student population tend to focus on active processing through problem-based learning and jigsaw activities (Sanaie et al., 2019; Wijnen et al., 2017), for international students, the provision of asynchronous lecture materials has proved to be of particular benefit (Croese, 2011; Turner, 2015). Podcasts, typically used as an adjunct to face-to-face lectures rather than a replacement, are valued by students for the opportunity to listen repeatedly, in their own time, until they have fully understood the content (Turner, 2015). They have also been found useful for the broader student population, with their chief benefits reported to be convenience, access and reduction of anxiety (Luna & Cullen, 2011; Phillips & Laws, 2019).

This study proceeds from an examination of reasons for the participants' lecture-based issues to a detailed investigation of their response to these difficulties. These findings transcend a purely skill-based perspective to inform understanding of the participants' development into independent learners.

2.7. Student use of resources

A central focus of this study relates to ways in which the participants find and utilise resources to fulfil unfamiliar and challenging task requirements in their postgraduate studies. Section 2.6. examined student strategies to address university tasks linked to EAP issues raised in the literature, specifically genre-based writing and lecture comprehension. Section 2.7. explores research investigating other forms of strategy use implemented by international students in general. These include use of translation, accessing institutional support, communication with lecturers and peers, and the use of written models or exemplars. Based on this knowledge base, a key question to be explored in this

study is whether the utilisation of such resources promotes or inhibits participants' development as independent learners.

2.7.1. Translation strategies

Students' use of translation to access meaning operates through the cognitive strategy of transferring content from the L2 to the more familiar L1 form (Liao, 2006). Researchers have noted a sharp divide between the negative views of teaching staff towards L2 student use of translation and the positive perception of the students (Ducar & Schocket, 2018; Karnal & Pereira, 2015; Liao, 2006). Lecturers tend to believe that translation is unnecessary for students at university level and associate translation with outdated learning methods (Liao, 2006). On the other hand, university students appear to value the perceived advantages of translation, including improved access to content, learning of L2 lexis, and a consequent reduction in anxiety (Howze & Moore, 2003; Iwai, 2008; Liao, 2006). At the same time, students have acknowledged disadvantages of translation, including the danger of overreliance on translation tools, comprehension issues from the slower translation process, and difficulty in determining the appropriate meaning of homonyms (Chien & Hsu, 2014; Liao, 2006).

The growing use of machine translation has sharpened the abovementioned divisions between staff and student views (Ducar & Schocket, 2018; Eun-Young & LaBianca, 2017; Karnal & Pereira, 2015). Researchers attribute the popularity of machine translation among students to the forces of globalisation, digital nativisation and technological advances, which have greatly improved the accuracy of machine translation in recent years (Ducar & Schocket, 2018; Karnal & Pereira, 2015). Lecturers, in contrast, tend to be opposed to student use of machine translation, to the point where its use is hardly acknowledged or discussed (Karnal & Pereira, 2015). Apart from the accuracy and dependence issues associated with translation strategies in general, key concerns voiced about machine translation are its unethical use for writing tasks (Ducar & Schocket, 2018; Eun-Young & LaBianca, 2017), potential avoidance of active learning by students (Rushwan, 2017), and the perceived threat to the foreign language teaching, interpreting and translating industries (Crossley, 2018).

Limited research has been conducted into how students use translation tools, including machine translation (Karnal & Pereira, 2015; Liao, 2006). One key finding is that translation encourages wide-ranging use of reading and listening strategies, in contrast to the common view that it encourages a passive student role (Chien & Hsu, 2014; Karnal & Pereira, 2015; Liao, 2006). For example, participants using machine translation in the study by Karnal and Pereira (2015) monitored comprehension, paraphrased, and moved from bottom-up to top-down processing of the text in hybridised strategy combinations. Liao's (2006) description of the range of strategies refers instead to their category types, including cognitive, memory, affective and compensatory strategies. Finally, Chien and Hsu (2014)'s study found that participants adopted an active, flexible learning approach in their use of translation strategies, with declining use of translation as their L2 competence grew. It is clear, then, that in all three cases, the students managed their use of translation strategies according to their perceived needs. This agentive role highlights the relevance of this area to the study's exploration of how participants develop an independent approach to their studies.

Given the limited knowledge base on translation strategies, this study examines participants' use of machine translation and bilingual dictionaries with the purpose of determining patterns of hybridity and sequencing, as well as changes in strategy use as the semester progresses.

2.7.2. Institutional academic support

Academic student support for international students at university has been investigated in the literature in relation to the merits of generic or discipline-specific support structures. Two Australian studies (Baik & Greig, 2009; Tran, 2013) found that the subject-specific version was rated more highly by students than the generic, university-wide approach, because it was able to provide informed disciplinary guidance. Faculty-based academic support services, then, were framed by the researchers as a form of disciplinary enculturation, or 'legitimate peripheral participation' in the disciplinary community (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 14). The continued provision of generic support services across universities has been criticised for failing to acknowledge disciplinary

differences (Baik & Greig, 2009; Storch et al., 2016; Tran, 2013). Interestingly, generic support services echo the widespread EAP focus on general academic skills, and it appears that many of the issues involved in the debate on academic support services mirror those examined in section 2.6.2 in relation to the teaching of written textual forms in EAP courses.

In this study, the efficacy of different sources of academic support is investigated through the participants' experiences during their first postgraduate semester, when the need for external support mechanisms is greatest.

2.7.3. Communication with lecturers

Research into one-to-one dialogue between lecturers and international students has mostly focused on assessment tasks, particularly assignments, suggesting that students tend to seek lecturer help for this area of their studies. Clearly, assignment tasks are high-stakes ventures for all students (Negretti, 2017), but especially so for international students, due to language issues, inexperience with assignment-based assessments and extreme pressure to succeed in their studies (Huang, 2014; Li et al., 2010). Although most research investigates lecturer feedback on summative assignment tasks, there has also been some attention to student communication with lecturers during work on an assignment.

2.7.3.i. During assignment work

It appears that international students initiate dialogue with their lecturers if they are unsure of task requirements and their progress in fulfilling them (Croese, 2011; Graves & White, 2016; Tran, 2008). Studies focusing on East Asian students suggest that their willingness to approach a lecturer for assignment help relies on a pre-existing good relationship with the lecturer (Gutierrez & Dyson, 2009; Ling & Tran, 2015). In the case of Chinese students, this close lecturer-student relationship is thought to mirror the important mentoring role of teachers at high school (Ling & Tran, 2015). The productive role of lecturer-student dialogue about written assignment tasks was highlighted in an Australian study of postgraduate international students from East Asian

countries (Tran, 2008, 2011). Dialogue with lecturers helped to clarify assignment task requirements and, in doing so, the disciplinary principles on which the tasks were based.

However, the provision of written lecturer feedback before official feedback on a completed task is a less settled area. Crose (2011) argues that feedback on formative tasks introduces students to a new discipline. Moreover, feedback on assignment drafts has been found to provide valuable information on student progress in fulfilling task requirements, including unfamiliar genres (Graves & White, 2016; Tran, 2008, 2011). However, these findings need to be juxtaposed with those of a large Australian study, in which ex-EAP students expected drafting opportunities similar to their EAP course, but lecturers were unwilling to read assignment drafts due to time pressures (Crisp et al., 2009). It appears, then, that there is a gap between, on the one hand, 'best practice' as determined by researchers and student expectations (Graves & White, 2016, p. 305), and on the other hand, the pressured realities of lecturer roles.

2.7.3.ii. Assignment feedback

Feedback on completed assignments is an important issue as it has been shown to have a powerful impact on teaching and learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Olave-Encina et al., 2020; Ramsden, 1998). The impact on student learning applies not only to specific academic skills, but also to students' development into independent, responsible learners (Ferguson, 2011; Orsmond et al., 2013). The broader literature on feedback has tended to address both the content of feedback – 'the input side of the equation' (Poulos & Mahony, 2008, p. 144) – and student response to the feedback. The encouragement of student agency through the stimulus of feedback is highlighted by Carless and Boud (2018, p. 1315), who define feedback as 'a process through which students make sense of information from various sources and use it to enhance their work or learning strategies'.

Research on assignment feedback suggests that specific advice which has relevance to future assignments is most effective in generating active student response and learning (Blair & McGinty, 2013; Kettle, 2017; Zhang & Zheng,

2018). Feedback should go beyond linguistic correction to give students guidance on ways of constructing knowledge, as a means to disciplinary enculturation (Kettle, 2017). On the other hand, studies examining student processing of feedback highlight the importance of students having a conducive disposition (Carless & Boud, 2018; Dixon et al., 2019; Poulos & Mahony, 2008) and the ability to respond reflectively. Examples are an appreciation of the value of feedback, the ability to evaluate their work, affective coping strategies, and action in response to feedback (Carless & Boud, 2018). In the case of international students, obstacles to learning from negative affective responses may be exacerbated due to stressful associations with past assessment experiences in their country of origin (Olave-Encina et al., 2020).

It is evident from the above discussion that the two directions of feedback research, feedback content and student response, are interrelated, with a need for 'fostering both lecturers' and students' literacy competences or feedback competences' (Zhang & Zheng, 2018, p. 1130). As an example of mismatched expectations by lecturers and international students, Zhang and Zheng (2018) found that lecturers focused on students' use of analysis rather than description, prioritising use of originality and cohesive argumentation in their comments over linguistic accuracy. However, students favoured feedback related to unfamiliar writing conventions, as well as more specific error correction.

Given the importance of the bidirectional feedback process for student learning, this study examines the mutual impacts of lecturer feedback and student response on skill acquisition and disciplinary enculturation.

2.7.4. Communication with peers

There is widespread recognition in the literature that students from diverse cultural backgrounds at Western universities tend to segregate into smaller groups rather than interacting across sociocultural boundaries (Belford, 2017; Cheng et al., 2016; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). One Australian study found that this tendency applied to all students, regardless of lecturer efforts to generate mixed nationality groupings (Cheng et al., 2016). The reluctance of international students to mix freely has been portrayed in the

literature both negatively, in terms of missed opportunities to enhance international competence (Cheng et al., 2016), and more positively, as individual choices to maximise social capital (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). In three studies, organised social activities at university were found useful for initiating communication across cultural groups (Belford, 2017; Healey, 2017; Ma, 2017).

Students from China have received particular attention in the literature, due to their strong preference for working with conational peers at Western universities (Ling & Tran, 2015; Ma, 2017; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). The close networking of Chinese students was found to meet their social and emotional needs at a Western university (Yan & Berliner, 2013) and to provide mutual support with academic issues (Ling & Tran, 2015). Interestingly, conational support has been linked to successful academic outcomes of Chinese students, both in terms of its perceived value as a strategy (Quan et al., 2016) and as a factor predicting success (Li et al., 2010).

Participant experiences of peer relationships and support are examined in this study, with regard to both their sensitive role as L2 newcomers in the first semester of their postgraduate course and implications for their independence as learners.

2.7.5. Use of models and exemplars

There has been increasing research into the value of models and exemplars as tools to assist students with written assignments. This form of scaffolding for novice students has been seen as part of the disciplinary enculturation role of lecturers (Hyland, 2008, 2016; Leung & Street, 2017). The exact meaning of 'model' and 'exemplar' is a matter of debate, but the main points of distinction are apparent from the following definitions. Handley and Williams (2011, p. 98) define models as 'targets which students should aim for', while Carless and Chan (2016, p. 930) see exemplars as 'carefully chosen samples of student work which are used to illustrate dimensions of quality and clarify assessment expectations'. Models, then, are typically teacher-prepared, and as such, have been found useful as explicit representations of the required form, especially in

EAP courses (Chong, 2018). On the other hand, the teaching and use of exemplars has dominated discussion in the university context (Carless & Boud, 2018; Carless & Chan, 2016; Dixon et al., 2019; Hendry & Anderson, 2013; Wimshurst & Manning, 2013).

Several benefits of using exemplars have been cited in the literature. Firstly, their visibility is thought to clarify task requirements more effectively than explanations or marking criteria (Carless & Boud, 2018; Dixon et al., 2019; Handley & Williams, 2011). Seeing the required form makes unfamiliar types of tasks accessible to students (Dixon et al., 2019; Handley & Williams, 2011). The main focus of researchers' attention, however, has been the potential for exemplar-based instruction to develop 'tacit knowledge' (knowledge which is better conveyed through experience than explanation) and 'feedback literacy' (the ability to use feedback to enhance performance) (Carless & Boud, 2018; Carless & Chan, 2016; Chong, 2018; Handley & Williams, 2011; Wimshurst & Manning, 2013). The overlap between exemplar-based teaching and assignment feedback is noted here. Guided analysis of student exemplars becomes a way to prepare students for their own assignment response, as well as to practise feedback literacy without the affective challenges associated with their own response. In terms of pedagogical methods, researchers generally agree that classroom dialogue about the performance levels of a range of exemplars offers the greatest benefits, and that viewing exemplars without teacher guidance achieves little (Carless & Chan, 2016; Chong, 2018; Dixon et al., 2019; Handley & Williams, 2011).

Given the widespread use of teacher-written models in EAP instruction (Chong, 2018), this study examines the assignment experiences of the participants in their first postgraduate semester, in terms of the degree of scaffolding provided by models and/or exemplars throughout the EAP-to-postgraduate transition and impacts on the participants' growing independence as learners.

2.8. Summary of Chapter 2

Chapter 2 began by outlining the key discourses framing the academic experiences of international students in the media and literature. First, Australian media discourses were explored, revealing a dual perspective of international students as 'cash cows', yet also as threats to educational standards and academic integrity. These mostly negative portrayals were juxtaposed with research into the internationalisation of the university as a stated goal of many institutions - one which is, however, rarely achieved. The internationalisation objective of inclusiveness was juxtaposed with the challenge of international students becoming independent learners, as is expected at Western universities. Factors contributing to students' development of independent learning at university were examined, including skill gaps and the requirement for critical thinking in many postgraduate tasks. Research into these two factors was then related to EAP courses, in terms of their useful teaching of academic skills, but insufficient preparation for students' disciplinary requirements and ways of learning at university. Resourceful responses by students to their postgraduate challenges were outlined, including the use of translation, access of institutional academic support, peer and lecturer communication, and utilisation of written models or exemplars. Issues arising from the research in these areas will be explored in the light of participant experiences, within the framing of their development into independent learners.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework used in this study, detailing the underlying premises which guide its methodological and analytical approaches.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.1. Introduction

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework which underpins the study. This framework has been used to guide methodological decisions and interpret the data. The alignment of a theoretical paradigm with theoretical models and methodology is essential in research to achieve consistent application of core principles and integrity of process (Englander, 2012; Hua, 2016; Talmy, 2010). Therefore, this chapter goes beyond a description of each component of the study's framework to explain the consistency of approach and appropriacy of the framework for the needs of this research.

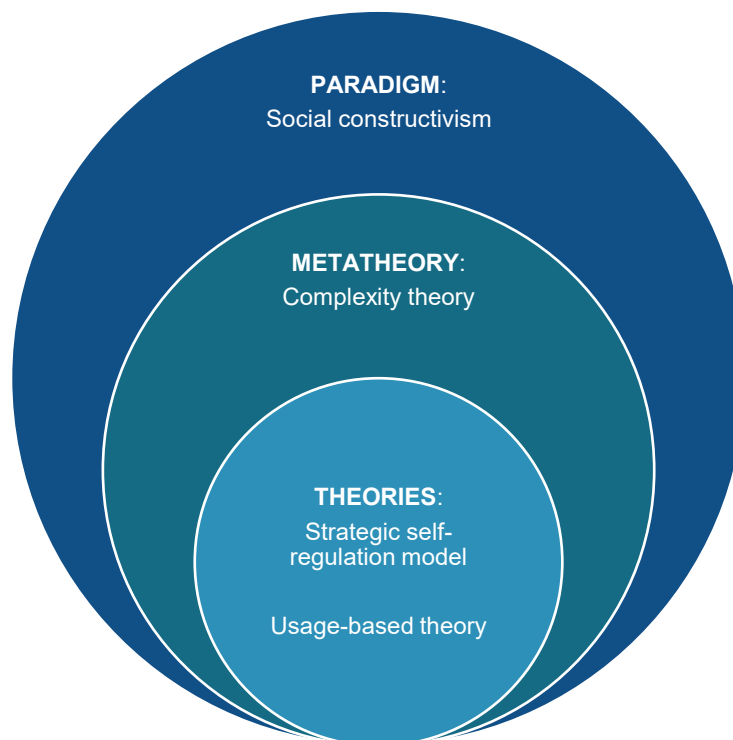
3.2. Outline and justification of theoretical framework

This study requires a theoretical framework which can facilitate exploration of areas of human experience involving considerable challenge, relatively rapid changes of environment, multiple influences on perception and behaviour, and an ongoing but irregular adjustment process which includes learning. For these purposes:

- Social constructivism is the theoretical paradigm, providing a way of viewing reality in terms of knowledge construction
- Complexity theory (Larsen-Freeman, 1997), as a metatheory, guides analysis of concept development through the interrelationship of contextual factors over time
- The strategic self-regulation model (Oxford, 2017), the primary theory used here, facilitates analysis of academic strategies used by the participants
- Usage-based theory (Bybee, 2003, 2006) is utilised to cast light on the linguistic development of participants and its impact on their academic experience.

Figure 1 diagrammatically represents the above information about the study's theoretical framework.

Figure 1: Theoretical framework of the study



3.3. Theoretical paradigm

It is vital to specify the theoretical paradigm of a study because it functions as 'the overarching constructive framework and meta-thinking behind a piece of research' (Hua, 2016, p. 4). According to the social constructivist paradigm to be used in this study, meaning emerges through an individual's subjective perception of an experience, influenced by sociohistorical factors (Creswell, 2007; Hua, 2016). Social constructivism is the overarching theoretical paradigm for this study for two reasons:

1. The premises of social constructivism accord with my own experience as a teacher. I have seen over many years how the 'magic' of learning emerges from the interaction of teacher and student perspectives on the topic of study. These perspectives go beyond factual information about the topic of study to incorporate ways of seeing and thinking about it. Through the productive interaction of teacher and student, based on the teacher's skills in engaging with the student's perceptual framework and

the student's openness to learning, understanding can develop.

Learning, from this perspective, is more than an absorption of facts. It is a holistic, integrative process of constructing reality through social exchange.

2. The ontological and epistemological premises of social constructivism make it suitable for investigating the experiences of the student participants in this study. Writing from a social constructivist viewpoint, Gergen (1995, p. 17) states that 'beliefs about knowledge inform, justify and sustain our practices of education'. In other words, each educational system and its practices is a product of a given worldview with no inherent basis for knowledge. The mind actively constructs knowledge through new experiences meeting existing perceptions (Hua, 2016; Schwandt, 2000). With regard to this study, the participants have engaged in three different educational contexts - their L1 undergraduate degree, the EAP course and the postgraduate setting - each of which embodies a different approach to teaching and learning. A social constructivist paradigm, therefore, enables the researcher to examine the interaction between students' outlook on study and the premises of each educational setting, forming their experience at that time.

More broadly, the recognition of the value of a social constructivist approach for studies of individual experience is part of a broader trend away from a positivistic approach, which can lead to the imposition of generalised, linear theories of behaviour and concordance-driven resource data (Larsen-Freeman, 2017; Mercer, 2011a, 2012a; Ushioda, 2009). Such a theoretical and methodological outlook may capture only a distorted view of human experience, without considering key factors like belief systems, personal factors and situated complexity. Instead, a study based on social constructivism necessitates a primary reliance on data which expresses the emic perspective of the participant, and analysis which reveals the complexity behind individual meaning construction (Creswell, 2007). In terms of this study, a social constructivist paradigm is an appropriate starting point for exploring diverse experiences of international students as they engage in an ongoing adjustment

process through the unfamiliar academic environments of their EAP and postgraduate courses in Australia.

3.4. Theoretical models

Complexity theory (Larsen-Freeman, 1997), the strategic self-regulation model (Oxford, 2017) and usage-based theory (Bybee, 2003, 2006) have been selected for this study as an epistemologically aligned set of theories because they facilitate a comprehensive explanation of the participants' complex challenges, strategy use in response to them, and resultant learnings in varied contexts. These models also incorporate the continuing role of language development in the participants' academic learning processes. Common to these three models is a core principle of social constructivism: the central role of interaction between individuals and their context. These three theories explain in different ways how this interaction helps to form experience, modify perception and expand knowledge.

3.4.1. Complexity Theory

Complexity theory functions here to provide a more specific way of viewing phenomena than a paradigm, thereby helping to explain data and guiding the application of the strategic self-regulation model and usage-based theory. Indeed, complexity theory has recently been categorised as a 'metatheory' by Larsen-Freeman (2017, p. 22), the key researcher driving its broadened application from the natural sciences to the social sciences. She explains the significance of its labelling as a 'metatheory' in terms of the 'power [of] major metatheories ... to shift paradigms'. Consistent with this role as a metatheory, complexity theory has impacted on the development of ideas in wide-ranging fields such as first and second language acquisition, sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics, demonstrating its cross-disciplinary nature (Beckner et al., 2009). Despite the diverse application of complexity theory, at its core is the dynamic, productive relationship between individuals and their context, referred to by Larsen-Freeman as 'dialogue allowing for creative emergence' (Larsen-Freeman, 2017, p. 30). This principle aligns complexity theory with a social

constructivist paradigm and optimises its function as a conceptual framing for more specific theoretical models addressing changes in human experience.

A number of different areas of research have been proposed as examples of complex adaptive systems, including language, a language, the language learner, language learning and use, agency, motivation, emotion and learning strategies, each nested within larger complex systems (Amerstorfer & Oxford, 2018; Beckner et al., 2009; Blythe & Croft, 2009; Dörnyei, 2009; Ellis, 2009; Larsen-Freeman, 1997; Mercer, 2012a; Sampson & Pinner, 2020). The specific object of study for this research is outlined in section 3.4.1.vi.

3.4.1.i. Instability

The key qualities in complexity theory are instability and change, reflected in the most common alternative names for this theory of 'chaos theory' (Larsen-Freeman, 1997) and 'dynamic systems theory' (De Bot, 2017). These qualities are clearly relevant to the fluid and shifting experiences of international students as they move from their L1 academic environment to an EAP course at an ELICOS college, and then to the first semester of a postgraduate course at an Australian university. Given these core concepts, it is unsurprising that the theory's increasing use in recent times in studies of human experience has been attributed to changing societal attitudes, because sociohistorical and sociocultural factors are at the core of complexity theory itself through its foregrounding of contextual influences, as well as its embrace of indeterminacy and impermanence (Beckner et al., 2009; Oxford, 2017).

Closely linked to the concept of instability is that of nonlinearity, whereby disproportionate outcomes can occur relative to given causal conditions, and as a result, 'predictability is compromised' (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, p. 17). Nonlinearity has been discussed in terms of the concept of emergence due to multiple interactive influences producing unpredictable outcomes (Dörnyei, 2009; Larsen-Freeman, 2017). In this way, it has been contrasted with a topdown application of theory using reductionist principles, which, according to complexity theory researchers, seeks to control the data rather than let it reveal itself (Beckner et al., 2009; Mercer, 2011a, 2012a; Ushioda, 2009) and to ignore

interactionality through its focus on isolated factors (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). Instead, from a complexity theory perspective, ongoing contextual interaction means that 'initial state dependence is always being recalibrated' (Larsen-Freeman, 2017, p. 18). Nonlinearity is, therefore, a more useful tool for revealing complex changes in human experience than positivistic, reductionist approaches to research. For the purposes of this study, a complexity theory approach addresses the likely uneven development of student skills and unpredictable adjustment process as the participants transition across educational contexts with variations in levels of language skills, commitment to their studies, and ability to access help from their peers and lecturers.

3.4.1.ii. Pattern formation

The suitability of complexity theory for this study is also based on another key feature: its acknowledgement of, and ability to capture, patterns: 'Everything is connected. Yet despite this complexity, despite its lack of overt government, instead of anarchy and chaos, there are patterns everywhere' (Beckner et al., 2009, p. 18). Correspondingly, this study seeks findings which go beyond mere description of individual experience to identification of patterns in individual and collective experience. The choice of complexity theory for this study thereby renders analysis of multi-faceted situations conducive to coherent explanation. The tendency to form patterns has been discussed in terms of 'stasis' or 'the attractor state', whereby a set of factors may settle into a period of stability which can, however, shift unpredictably in its timing and form in response to feedback (Oxford, 2017; Oxford et al., 2018). This coupling of order and disorder has also been described in temporal terms, with irony noted in the co-existence of opposites: '... there is persistent instability in complex dynamic systems' (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, p. 156). Rapid, unexpected student development has been well-known in educational circles in terms of phase transitions. Amongst complexity theory proponents, phase transitions have been attributed not only to the general dynamism of a system but also to diverse student agency (Beckner et al., 2009; Oxford et al., 2018). Both of these

factors are examined in this study, in order to develop a rich understanding of the participants' academic experiences.

3.4.1.iii. System as a whole with interacting parts

Researchers utilising complexity theory attempt to understand a system as a whole in terms of the interaction among its components, as opposed to investigating the contribution of each factor in isolation (Beckner et al., 2009; Dörnyei, 2017; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Oxford, 2017). In this study, such an approach enables an integrated examination of multiple factors affecting student experience in the postgraduate setting, such as the influence of past educational experiences, shifting levels of motivation, language competence and individual strategy preferences. This synthesised approach facilitates the generation of a comprehensive conceptual framework representing the dynamics of a complex system, here represented by the Strategic Self-learning Model (see Chapter 9).

The interactional aspect provides another ground for applicability to this study in that it presupposes adaptability, which in human experience is the basis for learning (Larsen-Freeman, 1997). The selection of complexity theory, then, helps to reveal the central focus of this study: the academic and personal learning, or development, of the participants in engagement with unfamiliar educational circumstances. Interaction can also occur between complex systems and the more specific sub-systems which underly them in an infinite hierarchy, termed nestedness (Amerstorfer & Oxford, 2018; Oxford et al., 2018; Yashima, 2020). This hierarchy allows for a productive analysis of ways in which, for example, the participants' understanding of assignment task requirements (viewed here as a sub-system) feeds into their overall experience of the task (a complex system). Complexity theory can, therefore, help to explain all the stages of the participant process, in terms of past and present factors contributing to their current educational experience, the participants' response to these factors, and academic and personal learnings that may result from the process.

3.4.1.iv. Unity of person and environment

One concept which arises from the focus on interrelated processes, as opposed to a reductionist analysis of individual factors, is that of the person and environment as an interactional whole (Dörnyei, 2009; Larsen-Freeman, 2017; Mercer, 2012a; Oxford, 2017; Ushioda, 2009, 2015). Ushioda (2009, p. 220) describes this notion as a 'person-in-context relational view', which, by avoiding the Cartesian dualism of the mind and materiality, allows for a more realistic, contextualised examination of individual experience. The person and context are seen as mutually constitutive: 'learners shape and are shaped by context' (Ushioda, 2015, p. 48). 'Context' in this regard has increasingly been defined as including the inner world of the person's thinking (Mercer, 2012a; Oxford et al., 2018; Ushioda, 2015).

What follows from the notion of contextualised interaction is a rejection of individual difference as a stable feature, in favour of viewing it in symbiosis with a particular context as an 'ecosystem' (Oxford et al., 2018, p. 6), and more broadly 'a systemic approach' (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 235). This is seen to subvert the traditional view of stable learner attributes because of the interactional nature of the context and inevitable changes over time (Dörnyei, 2017). Instead of preoccupation with 'theoretical abstractions', this approach thereby represents more authentically the shifting goals, thoughts and feelings of individuals in real situations (Ushioda, 2009, p. 220).

3.4.1.v. Contextual factors: Objective or subjective?

One contested area linked to the person-context concept and relevant to this study is whether contextual factors have objective or subjective saliency; in other words, whether all environmental factors should be included in analysis, or only those apparent to the student participants. Dörnyei (2009, p. 236) explains this as a cline representing, at one extreme, a societal perspective which focuses on social processes and norms affecting participants irrespective of their awareness, and on the other, an individualistic perspective which limits relevancy to contextual factors which are 'reflected in the individual's mental processes and the resulting attitudes, beliefs and values'.

This is a difficult and unresolved area for complexity theory researchers, which is relevant to this study and has implications for methodological choices. As one example, Ushioda (2015) proposes that for an ethnographic study of class dynamics in a learning activity, the researcher could analyse the classroom physical and social setting, observe teacher-student dynamics and elicit student perceptions as well. Her posited methodological design clearly embraces a combination of objective and subjective elements, in this case to reveal a comprehensive view of the complex system of classroom dynamics.

However, Ushioda's (2015) general conclusion, that complexity theory researchers need to 'describe interactions among internal contextual processes as well as contextual processes in the external environment' (Ushioda, 2015, p. 53), is more questionable. Firstly, her statement needs to be read alongside Dörnyei's (2009) warning against combining the objective and subjective extremes of the proposed cline, presumably because they represent different epistemologies. More importantly, however, it is suggested that Ushioda's general point may not be universally applicable, as different research studies may have quite different goals. Indeed, it is the responsibility of each researcher to determine a pragmatic solution to fit the needs of the study (Dörnyei, 2009, 2017; Larsen-Freeman, 2007). For example, Mercer's (2012a) study on agency limited data to the sole participant's perspectives as expressed in interviews. In this case, too, I seek to reveal the lived experiences of participants, and for this purpose, it is the participants' subjective perspectives that are relevant for analysis. Key to this approach is analysis of a person-context interactional unity as a complex system, thereby avoiding the danger expressed by several complexity theory researchers of reducing context to the status of an independent variable (Dörnyei, 2009; Larsen-Freeman, 1997, 2017; Mercer, 2012a; Ushioda, 2015). However, it can be challenging to analyse participant experience through the integrated notion of the person-in-context relational view, due to the complex interactions involved (Mercer, 2011b).

3.4.1.vi. Unit of analysis within network of complex systems

While complexity theory researchers highlight the interrelatedness of factors within and between complex systems, they also acknowledge the importance of

selecting one unit of analysis for research. This issue, termed ‘the boundary problem’ by Larsen-Freeman (2017, p. 32), reflects a tension between the need to understand the whole system and to ‘strategically simplify the complexity in order to research the system’ (Mercer, 2012a, p. 45). Therefore, most researchers advocate a narrowed research focus to one part of a complex system which fulfils the particular study’s aims, without losing sight of the system’s interacting parts (Dörnyei, 2009; Larsen-Freeman, 1997, 2017; Mercer, 2012a; Ushioda, 2015). The aim of this study is clearly to explore the participants’ experiences as they develop into independent learners in an unfamiliar educational setting. In terms of the narrowed focus, I will rely primarily on the recommendation of Larsen-Freeman (2017, p. 33), of ‘beginning with a particular point of entry into a complex system and continuing to watch as it evolves, as it modifies itself functionally through use by agents’. The points of entry in this case are two key academic experiences of challenge and change for the participant group which emerged from the data: understanding lecture content and completing an assignment task.

From this overview of the contextual focus of complexity theory, what becomes apparent is the sheer difficulty of implementing its conceptualisation through data analysis (Dörnyei, 2009; Oxford, 2017), yet the utility of doing so for researching the experiences of participants like those in this study.

3.4.1.vii. Key complexity theory features relevant to study

Below is a summary of the most relevant features of complexity theory for this study.

1. **Instability:** This is particularly relevant to the relatively rapid transitions of international students from their L1 educational setting to the Australian EAP course, and then to the postgraduate course at the linked university. These two transitions involve major changes of context with associated educational cultures and norms, as well as likely changes in the participants’ outlooks throughout this period.

2. **Nonlinearity:** This relates to the unpredictability of outcomes for the students due to the shifting interactional patterns of multiple factors. A participant's academic process may involve phase transitions, through sudden, unexpected progress or a disappointing outcome.
3. **Order and disorder:** The occurrence of patterns within the apparent disorder of human experience is examined in terms of repeated attitudes or strategic responses of individuals and across the participant group. Moments of turbulence between stasis and stasis similarly demonstrate aspects of the participants' process.
4. **Interactivity:** A focus on the interaction of factors impacting on a situation facilitates a more realistic understanding of participant experience than a linear, reductionist analysis of single factors. Understanding the participants' perceptions and choices necessarily addresses interrelated factors, such as a decision to undergo postgraduate studies in Australia potentially involving career ambitions, a desire for an intercultural adventure, and a wish to improve their English skills.
5. **Contextuality:** Like interactivity, this aspect of complexity theory facilitates a more authentic account of student experiences. Contextuality is particularly important for this participant group because of their shifting educational settings, which may lead to changes in ways of teaching and learning, including learning activities and assessment tasks. It also includes changes in the participants' internal context due to affective factors which impact on their experience. A primarily subjectivist approach is adopted here, limited to contextual factors reported by the participants.
6. **Nestedness:** This concept relates to the need for a deep understanding of the participants' adjustment process. The two units of analysis – understanding lecture content and completing an assignment task - reflect the cohort's experiences of challenging academic situations,

nested into their broader academic experience.

These six key features of complexity theory facilitate an integrated understanding of the participants' development in changing contexts.

3.4.2. The strategic self-regulation model

3.4.2.i. Introduction

The strategic self-regulation model (Oxford, 2017), a vast and comprehensive theoretical undertaking, will be used as the major tool to analyse the participants' strategy use in response to academic challenges. This model has been chosen due to its capacity to encompass broad aspects of the learner's experience through its ambitious integration of disparate theoretical approaches in the strategy field, cognitivism (mental processing) and socioculturalism (interactional influences), together with its infusion of holistic elements (Griffiths, 2020; Oxford, 2017). Oxford firmly locates her most recent model within a complexity theory framework, after an earlier form of the model with only brief reference to it (Oxford, 2011b). Oxford's shift to complexity theory occurred in the context of debate about its value for understanding agency, beliefs and strategy use (Dörnyei, 2009, 2017; Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Mercer, 2011a, 2012a; Oxford, 2011b; Ushioda, 2009, 2015), and she has continued this theoretical alignment in subsequent publications (Gkonou & Oxford, 2020; Oxford & Amerstorfer, 2018). Indeed, I intend this study as a response to Oxford's call for 'research approaches that accept and explore complexity, rather than deny this reality for convenience' (2017, p. 50).

3.4.2.ii. Relevance of strategic self-regulation model for this study

The choice of a model located within the field of language learning strategies, rather than broader academic strategies, is based on two assumptions:

- That the participants' language development occurs in conjunction with their usage of English in their disciplinary studies; and

- That both language learning and use impact on their experience in the content-based postgraduate course.

Within the language learning strategies field, the question of whether language learning and use should be treated as discrete or unified elements has generated considerable debate. However, for the purposes of this study, the researcher supports the position of Oxford, along with the majority of academics surveyed by her, that a rigid contrast between language learning and use is ‘a dangerous duality’ as the two are mutually formative (2017, p. 155).

3.4.2.iii. Strategy definition

Oxford’s strategic self-regulation model (2017) is the product of over forty years of research into language learning strategies, amidst hotly contested debate and continuing division. This is most evident in the area of strategy definitions, an area which will be discussed next, before explanation of the strategy definition used in Oxford’s (2017) model.

3.4.2.iii.a. Historical context

Ongoing debate as to definitions of language learning strategies has been expressed in vivid metaphoric terms, as variations of ‘fuzziness’ (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Ellis, 1994; Rose, 2015) or ‘the definitional tangle in the garden of L2 learning strategies’ (Oxford, 2017, p. 10). Points of disagreement relate to aspects like the language learning/use issue, the requirement of mental and/or physical action for a strategy, and the degree of specificity required to constitute a learning strategy (Cohen, 2010, 2011, 2018; Griffiths, 2018b; Macaro, 2006; Rose, 2015).

In response to these issues, Macaro (2006) proposed abandoning a definition of strategies in favour of a list of their features, and Dörnyei (2005) made the even more radical suggestion to replace learning strategies with self-regulation as the cognitive process driving individual response. Following this period of fierce debate, strategy research has continued, indeed thrived (Griffiths, 2018b, 2020), and self-regulation has in many cases been accorded a greater role

within the field in terms of strategy management (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Oxford, 2011b, 2017; Rose, 2011, 2012, 2015). Indicative of this trend is the inclusion of 'self-regulation' in the titles of Oxford's (2011b) and (2017) versions of the strategic self-regulation model.

3.4.2.iii.b. Oxford's strategy definition

Within the historical debate discussed above, Oxford's (2017) version needs to be understood primarily as a consensus position resulting from content analysis of 33 strategy definitions, although some key aspects like strategy flexibility, contextuality and sociocultural types of self-regulation were largely inserted to accord with her own perspective. The major focus here is to determine a strategy concept which serves the purposes of this study. Oxford's lengthy definition achieves this purpose, as it highlights aspects relevant to the participants' transitional experiences across educational contexts, while its specificity supports detailed data analysis:

'L2 learning strategies are complex, dynamic thoughts and actions, selected and used by learners with some degree of consciousness in specific contexts in order to regulate multiple aspects of themselves (such as cognitive, emotional, and social) for the purpose of:

- a) accomplishing language tasks;
- b) improving language performance or use; and/or
- c) enhancing long-term proficiency.

Strategies are mentally guided but may also have physical and therefore observable manifestations. Learners often use strategies flexibly and creatively; combine them in various ways, such as strategy clusters or strategy chains; and orchestrate them to meet learning needs. Strategies are teachable. Learners in their contexts decide which strategies to use. Appropriateness of strategies depends on multiple personal and contextual factors' (Oxford, 2017, p. 48).

Table 1 outlines how key aspects of Oxford's strategy definition relate to the context of the study.

Table 1: Relevance of Oxford's (2017) strategy definition to the study

PART OF DEFINITION	RELEVANCE TO STUDY
'with some degree of consciousness'	Views strategies as developing skills (which become automated as developed skills through extensive practice) (Cohen, 2011; Macaro, 2006; Rose, 2015). Relevant to participants drawing on limited EAP experience of e.g. academic reading skills or deductive argumentation to meet postgraduate requirements.
'specific contexts', where students need to 'regulate multiple aspects of themselves (such as cognitive, emotional, and social)'	Reflects participants' need to respond to unfamiliar learning situations holistically, beyond mere academic adjustment.
Strategy use occurring 'flexibly and creatively'	Promotes a realistic, nuanced representation of participants' strategic response and highlights their agency.
'appropriateness' of strategy use	Places focus on understanding 'multiple personal and contextual factors' which lead to strategy choices, rather than applying external criteria for success of strategy use. Aligns with objective of understanding participants' lived experiences.

Oxford's definition, then, offers not only a realistic approach to analysing participants' experiences in this study, but also a respectful one with the goal of understanding.

3.4.2.iv. Flexibility and complexity of strategies

Oxford's insertion of the term 'flexibly' into her definition of strategy use reflects a move by many researchers away from the perceived rigidity of strategy categories towards approaches that acknowledge the interrelationship between them (Cohen, 2010, 2011; Oxford, 1990, 2011b, 2017; Oxford & Amerstorfer, 2018; Rose, 2012). In a further metaphoric reference, Cohen (2010, p. 167) states: 'A learner's use of what is ostensibly a single strategy may actually represent a continual shifting or "dance": from one of these categories to another'. In Oxford's strategic self-regulation model, strategy types are classified as cognitive, social, affective or motivational (the latter introduced in her 2017 version), but with a blurring of boundaries and for a range of purposes. Like Cohen (2010), she frames this approach as a pragmatic representation of human behaviour:

'Far from being a despicable or shameful fact, the near-impossibility of neatly, permanently classifying strategies might be a sign of an intelligent understanding of a complex reality (Oxford, 2017, p. 141).

Oxford's inclusion of a strategy's purpose(s) into her framework creates a complex typology which can thereby reveal a range of experiences. As an example extrapolated from her framework, a student's cognitive strategy of activating prior knowledge to understand a lecture might have, in addition to its cognitive purpose, an affective purpose of pacifying anxiety, or even a social purpose of assisting another student. This localised approach to understanding strategy implementation reflects Oxford's alignment with complexity theory researchers. Moreover, strategies may occur in 'clusters', defined by Oxford (2017, p. 41) as 'task-oriented strategies that occur at the same time', and/or in 'sequences', with the aim of fulfilling difficult tasks in a staged fashion.

Another element of Oxford's (2017) model relevant to this study is her expansion of the widely used concept of 'metacognition' into a more holistic and diverse range of 'metastrategies'. This concept facilitates identification of the participants' strategy choices at the decision-making stage. Table 2 outlines the function of the four metastrategies, according to Oxford's (2017) model.

Table 2: Metastrategies in Oxford's (2017) model

METASTRATEGY	FUNCTION
Metacognitive strategy	Governing use of cognitive strategies (thought processes)
Metasocial strategy	Governing use of social strategies (human interaction)
Meta-affective strategy	Governing use of affective strategies (emotions)
Metamotivational strategy	Governing use of motivational strategies (motivational drivers)

To give a brief example, a student feeling anxious about not understanding lecture content could initiate strategy use by deciding and organising to do the following:

- Translate lecture slides (metacognitive)
- Ask a student peer (metasocial)
- Listen to music (meta-affective), and/or
- Remind themselves of their core reason for doing the course (metamotivational).

Therefore, Oxford's flexible and complex conceptualisation of strategy use enhances detailed analysis and holistic understanding of participant responses to challenging tasks.

3.4.2.v. Value of qualitative research into strategy use

Methodologically, the search for in-depth understanding of strategy use has prompted Oxford (1990, 2011b, 2017) to be a leading advocate of more qualitative research in this area, despite her quantitative-based Strategy

Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) providing the most commonly used research tool for many years (Oxford, 1986). Proponents of a qualitative approach seek insights into the contexts, motivations, specific forms and learner's experience of strategy use by means of interviews, think-aloud protocols and/or narrative approaches, instead of sole recourse to strategy inventories (Cohen, 2011; Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Gu, 2014; Oxford et al., 2014; Rose, 2012, 2015). Similarly, this study aims at a detailed understanding of participant perspectives over time through three in-depth interviews across a significant period of change. Triangulation with document analysis helps to reveal participant perception of disciplinary requirements.

3.4.2.vi. Learner attributes

In the attempt to reveal a more holistic conceptualisation of learner experience, Oxford's (2017) strategic self-regulation model reflects the abovementioned trend of researchers to include self-regulation in strategy analysis (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Gao, 2006; Rose, 2011, 2015), but locates this within a highly innovative, comprehensive formulation which encompasses agency, autonomy, growth mindset, self-efficacy, resilience, hope and internal attributions. She names these 'the soul of L2 learning strategies' and 'the learner's strength factors' (Oxford, 2017, p. 65). While a detailed account of each of these factors is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to highlight Oxford's basic premise, that a mere technical description of strategy use will not capture the very human experience of utilising inner resources for strategy implementation in the face of challenge. Table 3 provides a summary of the meaning of self-regulation, agency, autonomy and resilience to be adopted in this study, as these are the key learner attributes considered most relevant to the participants' experiences.

Table 3: Key learner attributes supporting strategy use

LEARNER ATTRIBUTE	SOURCE OF DEFINITION	MEANING FOR THIS STUDY	IMPORTANCE
Self-regulation	Oxford's (2017, p. 48) strategy definition	Directing aspects of oneself to implement a strategy	Highlights holistic and agentive aspects of strategy use
Agency	Core factors named by Oxford (2017, p. 77) as initiating behavioural choices	Capacity and will to initiate strategy use	Positions participants as initiators of strategic responses
Autonomy	Explicit definition by Oxford (2017, p. 80)	'Ability and willingness to take responsibility for one's learning, along with the action necessary to make this happen as relevant to the cultural context' (Oxford, 2017, p. 80)	Key to strategy implementation developing participants into independent learners (focus of this study)
Resilience	One of the definitions discussed by Oxford (Masten, Cutuli, Herbers & Reed, 2011, cited in Oxford, 2017, p. 87)	A form of adaptation in the face of challenge	Definition which best supports analysis of participant adjustment to daunting tasks and perhaps disappointing outcomes

These four learner attributes are relevant for the participants in this study, as they are engaged in an unfamiliar educational context with both affective and academic challenges. It is noted that Oxford's definition of autonomy adds the notions of responsibility and action to her concept of agency. Her acknowledgement that 'action' may be culturally appropriate is relevant to the different educational backgrounds of this study's participants.

3.4.2.vii. Synthesised theoretical approach with holistic elements

Oxford's strategic self-regulation model is an attempt to synthesise apparently disparate positions, in this case approaches from educational psychology and sociocultural theory. While a study of leading thinkers in the field revealed a common view that dichotomous positions are mutually exclusive (Cohen & Griffiths, 2015), some researchers advocate a fusion of approaches (Gao, 2006; Griffiths & Oxford, 2014), and this is the direction taken in Oxford's (2017) model.

From a cognitive psychology perspective based on self-regulated learning, Oxford utilises a three-phase task sequence (forethought, performance and self-reflection) adapted from Zimmerman (2008). In this study, the three-phase framework is used to analyse participants' strategy use in response to assignment challenges, largely due to the staged, finite nature of assignment work. A three-phase framework also constitutes the underlying framework for this study's Strategic Self-learning Model, which builds on Oxford's (2017) model for the purpose of highlighting the developmental aspects of strategy use in an unfamiliar L2 setting.

From the aspect of sociocultural theory within Oxford's (2017) model, the roles of context and mediation are prominent in data analysis. Relevant to this research, a study of students moving from China to Britain to study English found that the new educational context impacted on students' strategy choices (Gao, 2006). As outlined in section 3.4.2.vi., the inclusion in Oxford's (2017) model of learner attributes conducive to effective strategy use adds an important holistic dimension to these two major directions of strategy research. To summarise, the fluid, synthesised and comprehensive nature of Oxford's

(2017) framework enables a multi-faceted analysis of the participants' strategy use.

3.4.2.viii. Key features of strategic self-regulation model relevant to this study

Oxford's (2017) strategic self-regulation model is a vast set of conceptualisations which, ironically, rest on the indeterminate nature of reality expressed through complexity theory. This duality renders it appropriate for analysing the 'shifting sands' of participant experience in this study, expressed through their strategy use. Key features are listed here:

1. **Language learning and use:** The notion of these as mutually formative enhances opportunities for exploration of the participants' experience as L2 language learners who must also use the L2 to engage in a content-based course.
2. **Consciousness as a strategy prerequisite:** The element of 'consciousness' is relevant to the exploratory nature of the participants' strategy use as they face unfamiliar contexts. This need for experimentation may include adaptation of preliminary skill learnings from the EAP course.
3. **Flexible strategy use:** A rejection of rigid strategy categorisation allows for a more realistic understanding of the participants' strategy use, potentially including affective, social and motivational aspects.
4. **Metastrategies:** The function of metastrategies in guiding strategy use aligns with the important goal here of understanding the participants' conscious and individualised choices as they respond to academic challenges.
5. **Value of qualitative research:** The richness of qualitative findings lends itself to the intensity of the participants' challenging transitions across three educational contexts in this study.

6. Fusion of psychological and sociocultural perspectives:

Oxford's integrated model allows for a comprehensive examination of the participants' strategy experiences. In accord with a psychological perspective, this study adopts the three-phase framework of forethought, performance and self-reflection for analysis of assignment strategy implementation, due to its finite, staged nature. Using a sociocultural viewpoint, examination of strategy use includes the participants' application of learnings from the EAP course to postgraduate tasks. The study also notes evidence of self-regulation, agency, autonomy and resilience as holistic learner attributes in the participants' strategy use and, more broadly, their development into independent learners.

These six core features of the strategic self-regulation model provide useful metalanguage and flexible conceptualisations of strategy use to support detailed analysis of participant response to academic challenges.

3.4.3. Usage-based theory

3.4.3.i. Introduction

Usage-based theory (Bybee, 2003, 2006), consistent with social constructivism and complexity theory with regard to the central role of interaction, is utilised in this study to help explain the linguistic challenges and progress of the participants. Indeed, linguistic interactions are considered to play an important role in social constructivist theory in terms of identity formation, as interactants position themselves in relation to others through dialogue (Angouri, 2016).

Usage-based theory demonstrates clearly how language use develops through social encounters: 'we learn constructions while engaging in communication' (Beckner et al., 2009, p. 9). On this basis, according to Bybee (2006), language can be regarded as a complex system.

3.4.3.ii. Framing of language use

The perception of language as emergent through multiple linguistic interactions and usage opportunities can be contrasted with a structuralist concept of language as a static, hierarchically organised system (Bybee, 2003). L2 learners are thereby placed in quite a different role to one accorded by a positivistic perspective, where they may be viewed as having inadequate skills relative to an ideal standard (Beckner et al., 2009; Larsen-Freeman, 1997, 2017). Instead, according to usage-based theory, the focus is on ‘the evolving grammar of the learner adapting to an evolving target grammar’ (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, p. 159). This framing is very different in terms of the agency and dignity it accords to the student and the fluidity it imbues in the learning process, with no definable linguistic endpoint for L2 learners or indeed for L1 English speakers.

3.4.3.iii. Frequency

Analysis based on usage-based theory facilitates understanding of the participants’ grammatical and general linguistic difficulties, by explaining these difficulties through the participants’ limited exposure to L2 forms (Bybee, 2003, 2006). Through frequency, commonly used words and phrases are readily understood, categorised and stored with similar language samples according to their role and function. For L1 English speakers, ‘repetition leads to emancipation’ through modification of the original linguistic item to meet communicative needs (Bybee, 2003, p. 9). This process is illustrated through the varied application of linguistic conventions and exemplars to different situations (Beckner et al., 2009; Blythe & Croft, 2009; Bybee, 2006; Ellis, 2009). The consequence of L2 students’ limited set of exemplar categories as a resource for linguistic choices is likely to be an attempt at approximation which may not correspond to L1 English speaker norms. Applying usage-based theory principles to this study, the participants may make errors with use of common academic expressions, subject terminology and genres, as these can more easily be modified for the needs of a situation by L1 English speakers than by L2 learners.

3.4.3.iv. Conceptual factors

According to usage-based theory, cross-linguistic influences can form a partial barrier to language acquisition, due to habituated cognitive processes linked to L1 forms (Beckner et al., 2009; Oxford, 2011b, 2017). These can impede the acquisition process because 'the conceptual patterns derived from the L1 shape the way that constructions are put together, leading to non-native categorization' (Beckner et al., 2009, p. 11). In the case of this study's participants, confusion may result from grammatical patterns in their L1 conveying a different meaning to those in English. At a broader level, the use of Western genres and methods of argumentation may also communicate culturally alien concepts through their culturally specific means of imparting knowledge.

In closing, this overview of usage-based theory illustrates its utility in capturing participants' pressured, uncertain experiences as they attempt to understand unfamiliar language forms and content in disciplinary material, and then to produce academically acceptable assignment responses within a limited time frame.

3.4.3.v. Key features of usage-based theory relevant to this study

The features of usage-based theory which are most useful for data analysis in this study are as follows:

- 1. Language as emergent through interaction:** This concept positions the participants as active language learners through their interactive experiences at university, thereby highlighting their strategic agency and progress rather than their deficiencies.
- 2. Frequency as a precursor to linguistic progress:** The participants' relatively infrequent exposure to lexical and textual forms may lead to difficulties in understanding disciplinary content and using appropriate language and structure in written assignment responses.
- 3. Cognitive aspects of linguistic differences:** This notion may be applied to unfamiliar cognitive processing and argumentation required of

participants in their postgraduate studies, affecting not only their language use but also their understanding of disciplinary concepts.

These three features are useful for identifying language-related difficulties of the participants which may result in strategy use.

3.5. Summary of Chapter 3

Chapter 3 has outlined the theoretical framework for this study, based on a social constructivist paradigm and three compatible theories: complexity theory, the strategic self-regulation model and usage-based theory. It has explained their core premises and related these to the needs of the study. This framework meets the study's requirements for analysis of students' evolving perceptual frameworks and strategic responses in different educational settings. While social constructivism points to the power of interaction in forming an individual's subjective reality, complexity theory highlights the indeterminate, contextual nature of the process. Grounded in these fundamental principles, the strategic self-regulation model establishes a comprehensive framework for understanding strategy use, while usage-based theory provides a useful means of analysing linguistic issues.

Together, these four theoretical approaches support the objectives of the study and establish a sound framework for its methodological choices.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed explanation of the study's methodological approach, by outlining its fundamental methodological precepts reflected in the participant recruitment process, participant profile, data collection methods and means of data analysis.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1. Introduction

Chapter Four outlines the methodological aspects of the study, including the procedural framework which yielded its findings. The methodological approach taken here is guided by the study's overriding purpose: to investigate the participants' development of an independent learning approach in their first semester of postgraduate studies. Each of the participants' three educational contexts - the L1 undergraduate, EAP and postgraduate settings - provides a different way of teaching and learning. Central to the requirements of the study's methodological approach, then, is the ability to capture the changing nature of participants' lived experiences throughout these transitions.

This methodological endeavour is supported by the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3, which highlighted the crucial role of interaction within a given context for determining human experience. The study's methodological framework actuates these theoretical concepts into procedures to address the research question outlined in section 1.5. Consistency between the theoretical and methodological approaches is thereby achieved, in order to establish the validity and coherence of the study (Hua, 2016; Talmy, 2010).

More specifically, this chapter explains the following:

- Use of a qualitative approach with case study design
- Data collection methods
- Data analysis methods
- Ethical considerations.

4.2. Qualitative approach

A qualitative approach to data collection and analysis aligns with the purpose of this study because it helps to produce comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of students, 'the meanings people bring to [phenomena]' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Moreover, a qualitative approach highlights aspects of human experience relevant to this study: the influence of context on experience, heterogeneity across a cohort, and the interactivity of factors in a

given situation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In contrast, these researchers argue, quantitative research tends towards oversimplification of phenomena to achieve generalisation, isolation of factors from their context, and a foregrounding of proportionality over interactivity. A quantitative approach is therefore seen as ‘the science that silences too many voices’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 11).

The use of qualitative research is particularly important in an intercultural study like this one, which seeks to capture patterns across the participant cohort but avoid ‘the grand narratives of cultural difference’ (Holliday, 2016, p. 28). This nuanced approach has been carried out in other close qualitative studies in the Australian context, featuring in-depth interviews with students from a range of cultural backgrounds: T. Tran (2013), Mickan (2013), Belford (2017), Baik and Greig (2009), Zhang and Mi (2010) and L. Tran (2011). The key to this approach has been termed ‘small culture formation’, which avoids essentialist notions in favour of an emergent, agentic perspective: ‘how we form culture on the run’ (Holliday, 2016, p. 29).

4.3. Research design

This study has a case study design, based primarily on data from interviews to reveal the participants’ experiences from their own perspective.

4.3.1. Case study

A case study design was chosen for this study as case studies enable ‘an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 37). Here, the case study design seeks to achieve deep insights into the participants’ development of an independent learning approach in the postgraduate setting. The participant group is bounded by conditions present during the finite period of data collection from January to July 2019, as well as by their common pathway route to the University via an EAP course completed at the College. Context is therefore a core element of this study, as it investigates the impact of the L1 undergraduate, EAP and postgraduate settings on the participants’ increasing independence as learners. There is

widespread agreement amongst researchers about the importance of context-dependent knowledge in qualitative case study research (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Pearson-Casanave, 2015; Stake, 2005), due to the inherent complexity of changing situations (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Pearson-Casanave, 2015; Yin, 2017). The longitudinal aspect of the study is central to capturing these changes as they impact on participant experience (Dörnyei, 2009). Stake (2005) broadens the contextual focus in qualitative case studies to incorporate the backgrounds of the entity being studied, here in the form of a cohort of international students from different educational backgrounds, studying a postgraduate course in Australia.

As the study's emphasis is on revealing patterns across the cohort rather than highlighting unique individual experiences, this research design can be considered a single case study with embedded subcases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Moreover, it is instrumental rather than intrinsic in nature, as the priority is examining an issue rather than the experiences of individuals (Pearson-Casanave, 2015; Stake, 2005). The type of enquiry conducted here aligns with a core function of case studies, as 'the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed (= explanatory)' (Yin, 2017, p. 1). The case study design has therefore been determined in accord with the research question (Pearson-Casanave, 2015; Yin, 2017), which seeks to reveal 'how' the participants develop an independent learning approach.

Apart from explaining empirical aspects, case studies can also provide valuable knowledge by refining theory (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2017). In this study, the Strategic Self-learning Model, which builds on Oxford's (2017) strategic self-regulation model, is the major contribution of the study. Findings from this study, therefore, reveal the experiences of the participant group and cast light on developmental implications of a common pathway route taken by many international students in Australia.

4.3.2. Choice of settings

The ELICOS college chosen for this study is my former place of work as an EAP teacher. This teaching experience gave me prior knowledge of the participants' likely learning resources, experiences and adjustment process at

the College. My professional networks there also supported the organisation of participant recruitment, as the management and teaching staff created opportunities for me to discuss acceptable ways to invite the students (see Appendix 1).

The University was chosen due to its direct entry arrangement with the College. My prior experience at the University as a postgraduate coursework student, and then postgraduate lecturer, also familiarised me with its practices and procedures, as well as raising my awareness of potential educational issues for the participants. There was, however, no conflict of interest through my prior roles, as no students or staff members previously known to me had any part in the study.

4.3.3. Participants

4.3.3.i. Participant selection

There were two main criteria for participant selection:

1. Successful completion of an EAP direct entry course at the targeted ELICOS college
2. Completion of the first semester of postgraduate coursework studies at the linked Australian university.

In line with the direct entry arrangements in the ELICOS sector outlined in section 1.3, participants were permitted to enrol in their intended University course if they had satisfactorily completed the internal assessment requirements of the exit-level EAP course.

4.3.3.i.a. Choice of postgraduate coursework students

There were two main reasons for focusing on postgraduate students for this study. Firstly, the participants' prior experience of an L1 undergraduate degree would provide a point of comparison to the Australian postgraduate degree program. Secondly, because students' postgraduate courses in Western countries have been found to require more independent learning than their

undergraduate courses (Evans et al., 2018; Fenton-Smith & Humphreys, 2017), the likely adjustment challenges and developmental process of international students may be easier to observe. Coursework students were selected because, unlike research students, they would be exposed to regular lectures and other pedagogically driven learning events at the Australian university. These teaching and learning experiences could be compared to the participants' previous educational experiences in the L1 undergraduate and EAP contexts.

However, it is acknowledged that one of the 18 participants (Sam) was enrolled in a Bachelor of Nursing course. The major reason for Sam's inclusion is that it was his second degree; he had already completed a Bachelor of Arts degree (majoring in Spanish) in China. Sam's choice of an undergraduate degree was immigration-related, to support his Permanent Residency application. Therefore, like the other participants, he had completed an undergraduate degree in his L1 setting and, in his case, worked in South America for a year. At 29, older than several other participants, he brought considerable study and life experience to his second degree.

4.3.3.i.b. Exclusion of nationality criterion

The selection criterion regarding nationality was removed just prior to participant recruitment. The initial intention was to limit the study to students from China, as their relatively homogeneous educational and cultural background might assist a clear, coherent explanation of adjustment processes. It was believed that sufficient numbers of Chinese participants could be recruited in the two busiest terms of the ELICOS year: the last 5-week term of 2018 and the first of 2019. However, Ethics Approval was delayed due to the complexity of the study and the sensitivity of subject documentation, as outlined in section 4.3.4.iii. Therefore, recruitment of students commencing University studies in the Autumn semester of 2019 could only occur in the first ELICOS term of 2019. Due to the pressure to recruit viable numbers of participants, nationality was removed as a criterion. The documents which received Ethics Approval reflect the original focus on Chinese students (see Appendices 2, 3, 6-11). However, in my view, this change has produced a richer, more diverse range of data which

will contribute significantly to the body of knowledge.

4.3.3.ii. Participant sample size

Eighteen participants completed all stages of the data collection process. This number exceeded the planned final target of 12-15 participants, which was to allow for attrition of several participants throughout data collection (Jackson, 2016; Seals, 2017). Initially, 21 participants were recruited, but of these, three did not progress beyond the first interview and, quite surprisingly, all the others completed the three interviews. Of the three who did not complete, one was eliminated from the study as she was a short-term undergraduate exchange student, another withdrew from her course and returned to Taiwan for personal reasons, and the third ended up not activating his one-semester course deferment.

The sample size of 18 is consistent with recommendations of a maximum of 20 participants for studies like this, which primarily seek to reveal in-depth understanding rather than claim broader applicability (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). While the question of data saturation was considered throughout the data collection process, in terms of achieving redundancy of issues and associated data (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Merriam, 2019; Seidman, 2013), the sample size of 18 did in fact produce a sufficient range and depth of data to answer the research question without undue repetition.

4.3.3.iii. Participant recruitment

Participant recruitment proceeded on the basis of purposive sampling, in that the two participant criteria outlined in 4.3.3.i. were applied during recruitment to optimise response to the research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Written approval by the College management was obtained for me to issue student invitations in two ways (see Appendix 1):

1. A short presentation to each exit-level EAP class, accompanied by distribution of invitation leaflets to interested students

2. A short presentation at each of the three exit-level graduation ceremonies, all held on the same day.

The leaflet and transcript of the graduation ceremony speech are provided in Appendices 3 and 4 respectively.

Recruitment was timed for the first 5-week term of the ELICOS year, which typically has peak numbers of students wishing to enter postgraduate studies in the Autumn semester. Five participants volunteered after the initial phase of recruitment, their first interviews occurring 2-3 weeks before completion of the EAP course. The other participants all volunteered in response to the graduation presentations, and their interviews took place within ten days. In all cases, then, the participants had studied at the ELICOS college for a sufficient time (7-30 weeks) to form an opinion about their EAP experience, and they were close enough to university commencement to form expectations of their course.

Measures were taken to elicit a suitable participant group while maintaining ethical standards. To check participants' eligibility for the study and determine their proposed University course, a brief form was completed by interested students. The participants' communication skills were assumed to be adequate for interview purposes, as they had all been placed in the exit-level EAP course (Upper Intermediate to Advanced level of English). Indeed, interviews proceeded without linguistic barriers due to a combination of participants' language skills and my ESL teaching experience. Finally, a small gift was offered but not identified until the first interview, making it an incentive rather than an inducement to join the study (Seidman, 2013).

4.3.3.iv. Participant profile

The final participant group spanned five nationalities and a wide range of ages and university courses. Table 4 depicts the key demographic data about the participant cohort.

Table 4: Demographic data about participants

PARTICIPANT (pseudonym)	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	AGE	ELICOS WKS	UNIVERSITY COURSE (P/G coursework + 1 x U/G*)
Tony	China	28	10	Engineering
Nancy	China	25	10	Marketing
Joanne	China	22	10	Strategic Communication
Mary	China	23	10	IT
Candy	China	25	30	Financial Analysis
Kevin	China	23	10	Finance
Frank	China	24	10	Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP)
Andrew	China	25	20	MBA
Sanit	Thailand	28	30	IT
Lisa	China	30	10	Not-for-profit & Social Enterprise Management
Lois	Thailand	34	10	Law
Mina	Thailand	24	10	MBA
Hiroshi	Japan	24	30	Accounting
Dara	China	35	10	IT
Annie	Vietnam	27	10	Public Health
Felipe	Colombia	25	10	Property Development
Sam	China	29	10	Bachelor of Nursing*
Michael	China	30	10	MBA

4.3.3.iv.a Participants' nationalities

The breakdown of the participant group according to nationality is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Participants by nationality

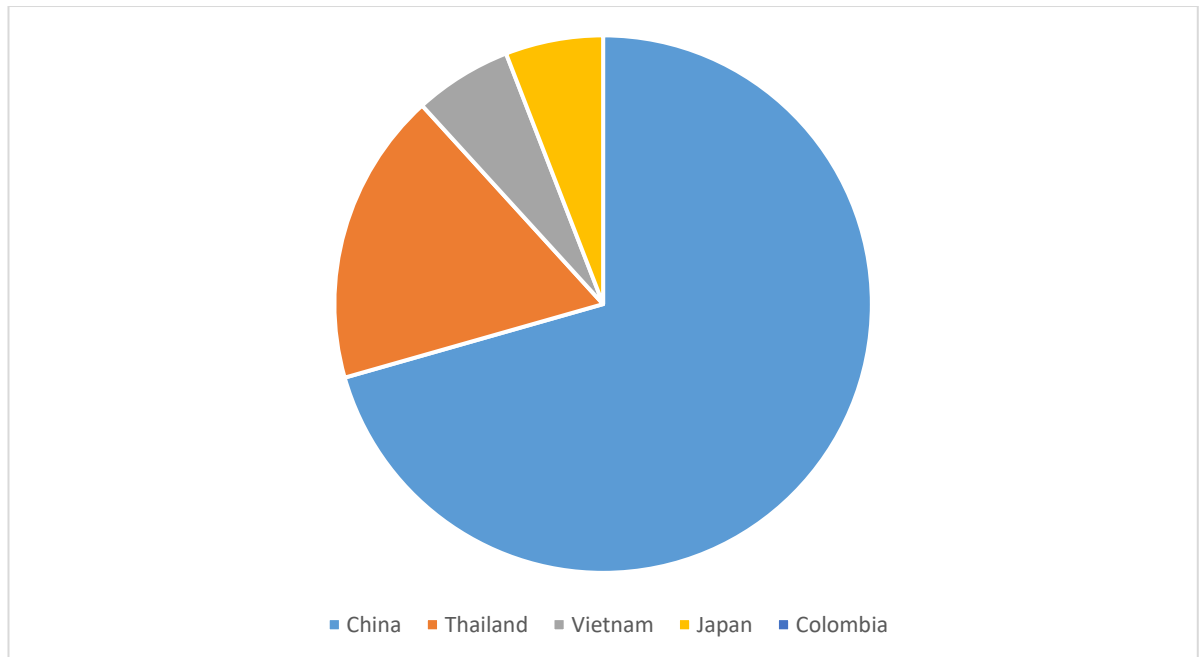
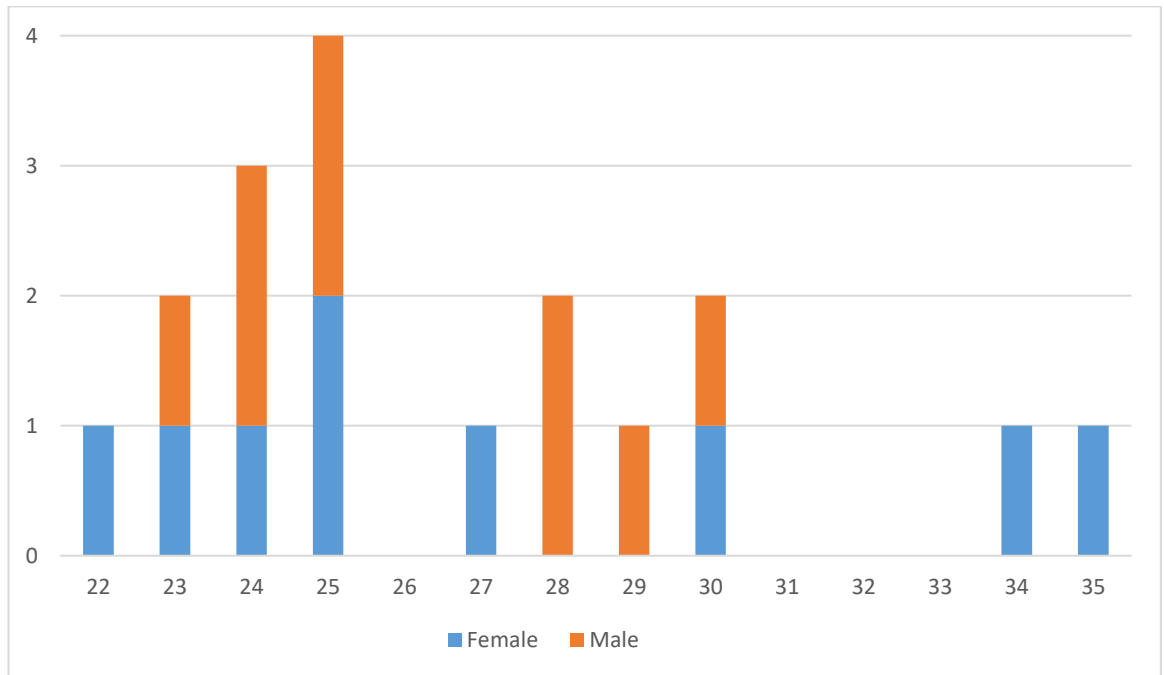


Figure 2 shows that of the five nationalities in the study, the largest group (12 out of 18 participants) came from China. The high proportion of Chinese students corresponds to the dominant numbers of this nationality group, both in ELICOS colleges (30.5% of enrolments) and in higher education (38.3% of enrolments) in July 2019 (Australian Education International, 2019). At the same time, the presence of four other nationalities contributes to the richness of the study. This diversity is particularly evident in the case of the Colombian participant, the only non-Asian participant, with associated differences in educational background.

4.3.3.iv.b. Participants' age and gender

Figure 3 presents the profile of the participant group based on age and gender.

Figure 3: Participants by age and gender



The wide range in the participants' ages reflects their different routes to the postgraduate degree. Most of the younger participants (22 to 25) had not been engaged in paid employment since their undergraduate degree, or (in the cases of Nancy, Candy and Mina) had worked for 6 to 18 months. All had completed their undergraduate degree in the recent past, so were habituated to tertiary study practices. For the great majority of these younger participants, costs of their postgraduate studies were paid by their parents, and only 2 of the 10 (Mina and Felipe) had part-time jobs to support their living expenses.

In contrast, most of the older participants (27 to 35) had been involved in ongoing employment prior to their arrival in Australia. For example, Lisa had worked as a TV presenter for seven years, Dara in hotel management for ten years. In terms of overseas experience, Tony had been employed as an engineer in Africa for three years, and Sam as a translator for Chinese companies in South America for one year. Three of these older participants (Lois, Annie and Michael) had chosen a postgraduate course related to their

existing career, providing them with experiential resources to support disciplinary understanding.

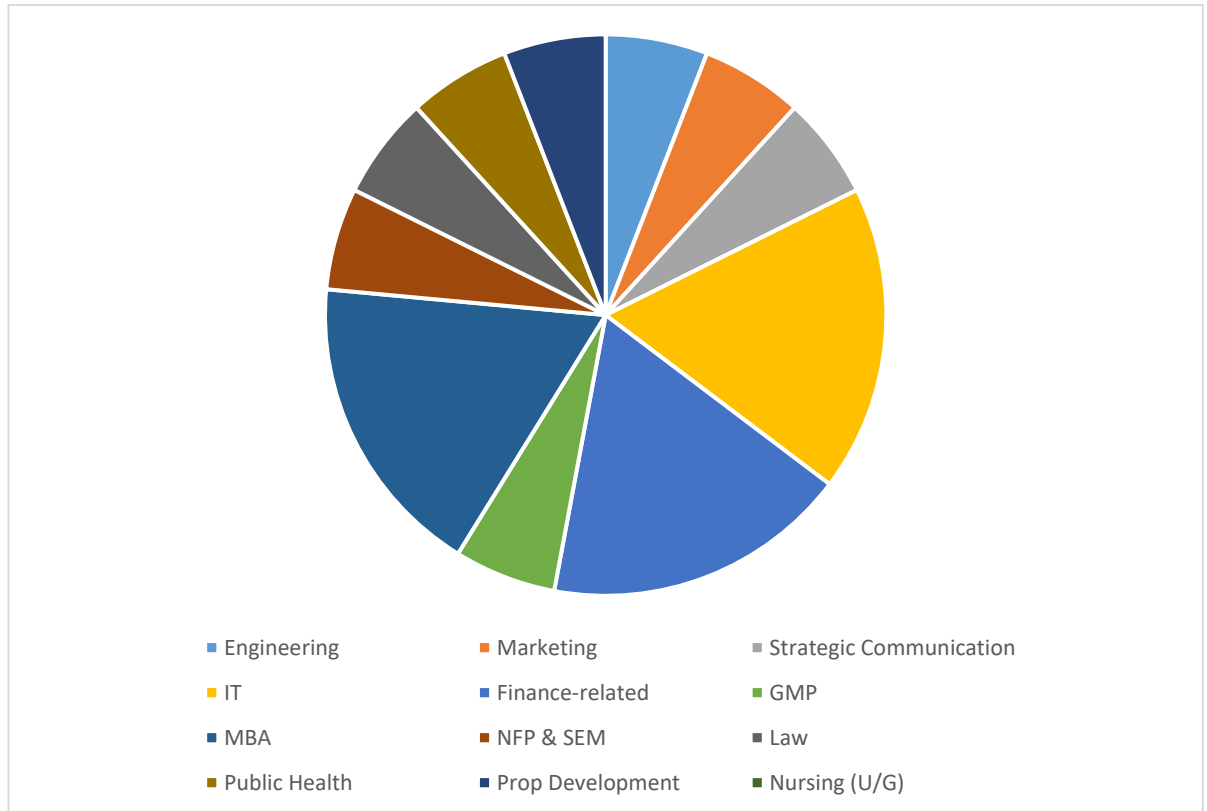
The participants' age differences had an impact on their learning experiences, including motivation, reflecting the broader influence of time on the process of learning (Feryok & Mercer, 2017). Most of the older participants felt motivated to forge a successful career but pressured by financial constraints as, unlike the younger participants, their studies were generally self-financed. Sanit (28 years old) was an exception to this, as he had not settled into any stable employment and his studies were being funded by his parents. From Sanit's perspective, however, this parental support also placed considerable pressure on him - to pass, to gain greater maturity, and to establish a career path in business and/or IT. For the older participants who had been engaged in work for several years (Tony, Lisa, Dara and Michael), the postgraduate course represented a return to a now unfamiliar study routine, requiring substantial personal and cognitive adjustment.

In closing, the range of participant age groups provides a rich source of data for this study, potentially impacting on motivation and response to academic challenges. It is noted that males and females were represented equally in the cohort.

4.3.3.iv.c. Participants' disciplines

The participant group comes from a wide range of disciplinary areas (12), as is illustrated in Table 4 and Figure 4.

Figure 4: Participants by disciplinary area



From the 12 courses shown in Figure 4, 13 subjects were selected for analysis. One linguistically demanding assignment was chosen from each targeted subject to assess the effect of the EAP course on postgraduate assignment work. The numerical discrepancy occurred because some of the subjects were available across different courses, and a range of subjects were undertaken by participants enrolled in the same course. This complexity necessitated ongoing contact with numerous academic staff in order to access subject documents, particularly as several participants changed their subject selection (see Appendix 5). However, it provided the study with a comprehensive range of data from across the University, and this proved fruitful for examination of any task or disciplinary differences.

One limitation of focusing on linguistically demanding tasks is that for courses like Accounting and IT, the assignment selected for analysis was not fully representative of the participants' overall assessment tasks (primarily tests and non-verbal written responses). In Accounting, numerical calculations and multiple-choice tests were the task types in most assessment tasks, while in IT,

knowledge-based tests and assessment of practical skills were dominant. Nevertheless, with the study's focus on language-related challenges in the context of EAP preparation, the choices made were considered appropriate. Moreover, interviews yielded data about these participants' broader academic experiences, including non-linguistic assessment tasks.

4.3.4. Data collection methods

The data sources selected for this study are interviews and documents. Table 5 summarises key information about the study's use of data collection methods. It can be seen from the table that the three interviews constitute the primary data collection source, spanning the period before commencement of the postgraduate course to late in the participants' first semester.

Table 5: Data collection methods

INTERVIEWS			
No.	Length	Time period	Stage of course
1	1 hour	Jan-Feb 2019	Shortly before commencement of postgraduate course
2	1 hour	March-May 2019	After submission of targeted first-semester assignment task
3	45 mins	May-July 2019	After receiving assignment grade and feedback
DOCUMENTS			
Subject Outline (see Table 6) for subject with targeted assignment task			
Task guidelines for targeted assignment			

4.3.4.i. Interviews

Interviews constitute the primary source of data in this study due to their potential source of rich detail regarding the participants' experiences and perspectives (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Seidman, 2013). The interviews adopted a semi-structured form, with questions grouped according to topic areas and varied according to emerging needs. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because the structured element increases the chances of generating data relevant to the research questions, while the flexibility of researcher responses enables exploration of individual experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Seidman, 2013). Moreover, semi-structured interviews are considered more practical than unstructured interviews for novice researchers like me (Gibson & Hua, 2016).

Interview questions (see Appendix 12) were informed by both the relevant literature and six pilot interviews conducted with ex-EAP, postgraduate students prior to the commencement of data collection (Yin, 2017). Interviews with participants were held in a booked room at the University, close to the familiar location of the ELICOS college. Acknowledgement is given to the University's Ethics Office for assistance with finalisation of interview procedures.

The three-stage interview process was planned to reveal the changing perceptions of participants at key points in their transition process. These were the main topics covered at each interview.

Interview 1:

Interview 1 topics were chosen to reveal participant perceptions of their previous and current ways of learning, informing their outlook on postgraduate studies.

- Perception of ways of teaching and learning in EAP course versus L1 undergraduate degree
- Experiences with written assignment tasks
- Expectations of first postgraduate semester
- Educational self-positioning within L1 / ELICOS / postgraduate mix (visual prompt, see Appendix 14)

Interview 2:

Interview 2 topics were designed to elicit participant perceptions of their early-semester postgraduate experiences, as well as their responses to core postgraduate tasks. Their current approach to learning was identified in relation to approaches in past and present educational contexts.

- Perception of ways of teaching and learning in postgraduate course versus L1 and EAP contexts
- Key academic challenges with understanding lecture content and completing targeted assignment task (reference to common student assignment difficulties provided if required, see Appendix 13)
- Strategic responses to these two academic challenges
- Focus on submitted assignment: interpretation of task, evaluation of written response
- Educational self-positioning within L1 / ELICOS / postgraduate mix (visual prompt, see Appendix 14)

Interview 3:

Questions for the final interview addressed the participants' personal and academic learning processes arising from their first-semester experiences. Once again, the participants' current ways of learning were related to past and present educational influences.

- Further reflections on two key academic challenges and response to them (reference to common assignment difficulties provided if required, see Appendix 13)
- Perception of assignment grade and comments (if any)
- Learnings from assignment experience and broader academic experiences
- Personal learnings from the experience of studying and living overseas
- Educational self-positioning within L1 / ELICOS / postgraduate mix (visual prompt, see Appendix 14)

4.3.4.ii. Documents

Subject documentation functions as a secondary data source in this study, in the sense that it is used in conjunction with interview data to illuminate the participants' experience of, and learning from, the targeted assignment task (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In this intertextual comparison, subject documents are used to represent disciplinary requirements which the participants were required to fulfil. The chief forms of subject documentation used in the study are the Subject Outline and task guidelines for the targeted assignment task for each participant. 'Subject Outline' is a term used at the University for a document which outlines a subject's underpinning disciplinary principles, schedule, resources, teaching and learning approaches, and assessment tasks, chiefly to inform the subject's students. The reason for including the Subject Outline in the study's data as well as the task guidelines is that, given the diversity of participants' disciplines, it is important to understand the epistemological principles underlying subject and task requirements, as well as the staging of assessment tasks throughout the semester.

Despite disciplinary differences in subject matter, Subject Outlines tend to have a generic form across the University, expressing their institutional status (Coffey, 2014; Fairclough, 2013). Table 6 explains the terminology used in relation to key sections of the Subject Outlines for the purposes of the study.

Table 6: Relevant sections of Subject Outline

SECTION	FUNCTION
Subject description	Introduces subject in terms of content and ways of thinking
Subject Learning Objectives (SLOs) and Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)	Reflects specific cognitive skills required of students, especially through task verbs (e.g. 'describe' or evaluate')
Teaching and learning strategies	Outlines pedagogical methods and expected role of students in learning process
Assessment	Explains connection of assessment tasks to SLOs and CILOs, summarises assessment task requirements, and (in some cases) outlines progression from task to task

The importance of a discipline-based approach to understanding participant experience of assignment tasks has been highlighted by theorists in the field of English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) and discussed in section 2.6.2.i. in relation to the generic (non-disciplinary) pedagogical approach in the EAP course. Hyland (2016) locates the principle of specificity within the social constructivist paradigm used in this study, in the sense that 'disciplines are largely created and maintained through the distinctive ways in which members

jointly construct a view of the world through their discourses' (p. 21). This statement encapsulates two key aspects of the ESAP approach: the concept of a subject-specific discourse community which is held together by common epistemological perspectives, and the use of particular linguistic forms to voice and indeed create those perspectives (Dressen-Hammouda, 2008; Hyland, 2008, 2016; Mickan, 2013; Woodward-Kron, 2008). The use of these two types of subject documentation thereby assists in determining the degree of congruence between participant understandings of the targeted assignment task and disciplinary expectations, providing useful findings about the participants' adjustment process.

4.3.4.iii. Modification of data collection process

Changes to the data sources during the study are explained here for the purpose of clear, transparent communication (Pearson-Casanave, 2017).

4.3.4.iii.a. Exclusion of questionnaires

While the research design which was granted Ethics Approval included two questionnaires, this element was abandoned during the data collection process. Initially, there were to be two stages at which survey data were sought from participants:

1. while participants were working on the assignment (shortly before Interview 2), to elicit information about challenges and responses to them
2. after receiving their assignment grade (shortly before Interview 3), in case participants did not proceed to Interview 3.

However, it became apparent through early-semester communications with participants that the significant pressure of their postgraduate studies and the substantial three-interview schedule of this study would make the survey component too onerous for them. This change in research design accords with Seals' (2017) call for researcher flexibility in longitudinal studies like this one, due to their demands on participants. Moreover, neither questionnaire proved necessary for supplying key data for the study, for the following reasons:

Questionnaire 1: The participants' responses about their recent assignment experience in Interview 2 provided considerable detail.

Questionnaire 2: All 18 participants did attend the third interview, providing comprehensive answers.

Therefore, while the original research design including the two questionnaires is reflected in the Participant Information Sheets (see Appendices 6 to 8), these were not actually administered.

4.3.4.iii.b. Exclusion of lecturer feedback documentation

Lecturer feedback on assignments was excluded from data collection due to difficulties in obtaining informed consent. Access to this feedback was included in Ethics Approval, including measures to protect the privacy of student participants and lecturers. The approved procedure is reflected in the Participant Information Sheets for Students, Subject Co-ordinators and Lecturers, together with associated Consent Forms (see Appendices 6 to 11). The complexity of this multi-stage procedure is due to the sensitivity of student grades and lecturer comments for both parties.

Consistent with the agreed procedure, the Subject Co-ordinator released to me the Subject Outline and assignment task guidelines for a targeted task. However, it proved difficult to obtain lecturer consent for the release of the participant's grade (and comments, if provided). Reasons for this difficulty included the presence of group assignments in some subjects and allocation of marking to several potential lecturers across some classes. It was eventually decided that having access to the participants' assignment responses, grade and feedback was not essential for the study, as the study's purpose is to reveal the participants' lived experiences. It was therefore left as an option for participants to report on their grade and the gist of lecturer comments.

4.3.5 Data analysis

4.3.5.i Interviews

4.3.5.i.a Steps in analysis of interview data

Interview data were examined in a multi-stage process which sought to establish a thorough understanding of each participant's experiences before locating common elements across the participant group. The major steps in this process are represented in Table 7.

Table 7: Summary of procedure for analysing interview data

STEP	METHOD OF ANALYSIS	PURPOSE
1	Improvised oral summary at end of each interview and beginning of Interviews 2 and 3, with participant verifying accuracy	To check understanding of participant's experience and elicit correction where needed
2	Manual transcription of recorded interviews	To develop deep engagement with the data at a slow pace and micro level
3	Written analytical summary of first and second interviews for each participant, including related interview quotes, then summary of key ideas for Interview 3 (see Appendix 15)	To understand the sequential & overall patterns of experience for each participant. Organised according to key topics, e.g. expectations of University course, to facilitate cross-cohort comparisons
4	Generation of codes and sub-codes from literature & pilot interviews, modified during coding (see Appendix 16)	To base analysis on existing knowledge + respond to emergent data
5	Thematic analysis (coding) using Quirkos software: EAP stage (including reasons for study & views of L1 degree), P/G stage (key academic challenges & strategies) + educational self-positioning	To reveal key reasons / experiences / perspectives across cohort at different stages: EAP course, P/G course - challenges and strategies, learnings (academic & personal)
6	Iterative process of mindmapping interview data (see Appendix 17)	To check veracity of conceptualisation & relationships between codings
7	Triangulation: linking of analytical summaries & codes; perspectives towards L1 degree, EAP & P/G courses; educational positioning at three interviews; types of responses (e.g. translation) & metastrategies; interviews and documents	To contextualise coding within participant's story; to understand changing educational perspectives; to build a complex picture of strategy use; to gauge participants' adjustment to disciplinary requirements
8	Inferring key theme (self-learning, refined to development of independent learning) through recurring ideas during coding	To contextualise participant challenges, strategies & learnings within overall concept
9	Recoding of relevant data according to independent learning theme	To reintegrate data into key theme and identify patterns of behaviour
10	Development of independent learning theme into argument, by identifying & integrating different phases emerging in data (learning for/by/about self) & depicting as diagram	To create an overarching framework explaining participant processes across cohort and over time

Steps 1 to 3, which sought to obtain an overall understanding of participant experiences at each interview and across the three interviews, provided contextual understanding for more specific analysis. Attaining a global, narrative-based perspective is important to overcome potential limitations of thematic coding in learning strategy research, and more broadly applied linguistics research (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Oxford et al., 2014). While coding helps to explain data through categorisation, condensation and interpretation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), its ability to capture complex meanings and multiple divergent sequences, as occur in this study, is more limited (Briggs, 2017; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Gu, 2014; Holliday, 2015). In addition to commencing with an overall perspective, two other steps in data analysis were incorporated to achieve a detailed yet comprehensive understanding, by facilitating ‘a dialectic’ of movement between the general and the specific (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 207):

- The global approach in Steps 1 to 3 and the later linking to codes (step 7)
- The iterative process of drafting a mindmap, which was progressively modified after coding of each interview transcript (step 6). This mapping represented emergent concepts in visual form to clarify understanding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The iterative local-global mapping exemplifies this study’s use of triangulation, an important element in maximising the credibility of case studies (Pearson-Casanave, 2015; Stake, 2005). This mapping also helped to verify the meaning of data fragments by contextualising them within a broader understanding of participant experiences.

4.3.5.i.b Coding procedure

Thematic coding using Quirkos software (Quirkos, 2020) was used to establish common experiences among participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Multiple coding of participant comments was frequently required, consistent with the complexity theory principle that the interaction of factors in a situation produces

new forms (Larsen-Freeman, 2017; Mercer, 2012a; Oxford et al., 2018). In this study, interrelationships reveal the complexity of participants' motivations, challenges, strategies and learnings. The coding of interacting factors is exemplified here in relation to one participant's reason for undertaking a postgraduate degree program in Australia:

'I want to study in a different cultural environment, yeah, and develop my English skill because the English is very necessary for my work in the future, because in China all bank need their staff can speak English or other different languages' (Kevin, Interview 1).

This quote was coded within the section 'Reasons for studying in Australia' for 'different culture', 'English' and 'career', but there is also a connection, indeed overlap, between the development of English skills and career, and implicitly between the English-speaking cultural environment and English skill development. These kinds of interrelationships, repeated in different combinations across the participant group, clearly posed challenges in terms of establishing identifiable patterns (Mercer, 2012a; Ushioda, 2015). A mindmap for this sub-topic, participants' reasons for studying in Australia (see Appendix 17), helped to establish core factors, and was followed by manual mindmapping to clarify relationships between codings.

Coding participants' strategies proved to be particularly difficult, reflecting debate in the strategy field about the suitability of thematic coding for displaying blurry boundaries and strategy interplay (Gu, 2014; Oxford, 2017). This challenge was addressed by multiple coding of strategic responses and staged analysis. In order to imbue a rich narrative-style understanding of participants' academic responses into the strategy analysis, detailed coding of the type of response to a challenging task was undertaken, such as use of translation, asking the lecturer for help, or applying a written exemplar in assignment work. This coding included reasons for choosing the type of response, holistic aspects of the experience, and whether it was deemed effective by the participant. The broad-based nature of this approach is consistent with calls for analytical methods which reveal participants' perspectives on their whole strategy

experience, to enrich analysis based on strategy classification (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Gu, 2014; Oxford, 2011a; Oxford et al., 2014).

In terms of strategy coding, the primary focus was placed on metastrategies, the decision-making strategies which initiate and manage strategy use (Oxford, 2017). This was partly a methodological decision based on the difficulty of coding complex strategy combinations over multiple experiences of 18 participants. However, metastrategies are also fundamental to the study's central argument, that the participants' development into independent learners occurred primarily through their management of strategy use. This argument is developed in Chapter 9 through the detailed explanation of the Strategic Self-learning Model, with specific focus on metastrategies in sections 9.2.2.i-ii.

The metastrategies involved in participants' academic responses were coded according to the four categories identified by Oxford (2017) and their purpose(s) in the specific situation (cognitive, social, affective and/or motivational). As stated above, at the earlier stage of analysis, the primary focus was on the type of response and each participant's experience of it. At this stage, the use of metastrategies was coded and recurring patterns of use noted, such as the frequent use of metacognitive strategies for affective purposes. As the theme of self-learning developed, the focus moved to the role of metastrategies within the participants' development of an independent learning approach. Metastrategy coding was therefore re-examined to inform this function of strategic response within the context of participants' broader development. Representation in mindmaps helped to show patterns of behaviour across the cohort based on the type(s) of metastrategy and experiential aspects associated with it.

In response to the most demanding tasks for the participants, strategy clusters (simultaneous) and strategy chains (sequenced) emerged, requiring data analysis that would represent their complexity (Cohen, 2014; Gu, 2014; Macaro, 2006). The coding of metastrategy clusters is exemplified here through a participant's process of understanding an assignment task:

'The task, I understood almost but I also check with my friends. This thing is easy to resolve because I can discuss with my Chinese friends in Mandarin' (Andrew, Interview 2).

In the coding section 'Doing assignment', this excerpt was coded for 'metacognitive', 'metasocial', 'translation' and 'peers', as well as 'cognitive' and 'social' purposes. As this combination of metacognitive and metasocial strategies appeared across participants and tasks, I examined coding of the circumstances and mechanics more closely, developing an understanding that collaborative effort was a common feature of Chinese social networks at the University. Triangulation of metastrategy classifications with narrative elements thereby contributed to a comprehensive understanding of both individual and cohort strategy use.

In contrast, strategy chains, such as occurred in participants' use of translation strategies, needed to be individually outlined in linear narrative form. Once the broader framework of the three-phase Strategic Self-learning Model was verified through a recursive process of data analysis in conjunction with mindmapping, the most commonly occurring strategy chains were revisited as bidirectional patterns of participant response (see section 9.2.3.ii).

Iteration, then, is at the core of this study's approach to data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). It supported the gradual emergence of self-learning as the study's major theme, gradually refined into a theme of participants' development into independent learners (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Dervin, 2016). Its veracity was confirmed by participants in the last few interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Pearson-Casanave, 2015), illustrating the benefit of simultaneous data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2019). All the relevant data were then recoded according to the independent learning concept and synthesised into a coherent theme, visually represented by the Strategic Self-learning Model.

4.3.5.ii Document analysis

As explained in section 4.3.4.ii, subject documents as a data source in this study provide a marker for determining the degree of alignment of participant understandings with disciplinary expectations. They constitute a secondary source to interviews, which reveal the lived experience of participants. The main tool for analysing subject documentation in this study is critical discourse

analysis (CDA), based on the approach of Fairclough (2013, 2015), informed by other researchers. According to this approach, subject documentation mediates between structure and agency at an institution and functions through social practice, the lens through which this study operates (Coffey, 2014; Fairclough, 2013; Kettle, 2011, 2017).

CDA was chosen as the method of document analysis because it goes beyond linguistic analysis of texts to explore 'how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideology, and the effects discourse has upon social identities, relations, knowledge and beliefs' (Paltridge & Wang, 2015, p. 210). In this case, disciplinary requirements in the form of the Subject Outline and assignment task guidelines have an institutional status, indeed power, which imposes demands on students wishing to achieve satisfactory grades. Gaps in participant understanding, emerging in the data through participant accounts of lecturer feedback and their own perspectives, can be explained by Fairclough's (2015, p. 27) notion of 'power behind discourse'. This notion refers to the limitations on acceptable discourses and genres students may use, and even their access to this knowledge. Ultimately, Fairclough's (2013, 2015) CDA has an agenda of social change, 'advocat[ing] a form of action on the basis of explanatory critique' (Fairclough, 2015, p. 14). In this context, the CDA agenda offers the potential for advocacy to ease international students' adjustment to an independent learning culture in the postgraduate context.

Fairclough's (2015) three-level framework was used to analyse the Subject Outline and assignment task guidelines for each participant. Table 8 depicts the focus of analysis at each stage.

Table 8: Summary of procedure for analysing subject documents (CDA)

LEVEL OF ANALYSIS	ANALYTICAL APPROACH
Description	Identifies structural, grammatical and lexical features to reveal discourse and valued ways of thinking.
Interpretation	Recontextualises text as a form of production (here, as a standardised institutional document) and object of interpretation (here, participants' perception of subject and task requirements).
Explanation	Locates documents within context of institutional power, which impacts on discourse practice due to broader social realities (here, issues in education of international students in Australia) and underlying ideologies (here, in relation to the independent Western university culture).

The three-stage process of document analysis undertaken for this study, together with associated findings, are outlined below. The Subject Outline was the first and primary source, as its function is to provide an overall understanding of the subject. Attention was paid to key parts of each Subject Outline (see Table 6). Guidelines for the targeted assignment task were then analysed, noting the choice of task verbs and specific requirements for analysis and student response.

Description:

- a) *Textual layout and language* were noted, especially standardisation of structure (e.g. headings and sub-headings, mixture of bullet points and paragraphing), omission of first-person voice ('I'), and use of formal disciplinary terminology. These features reveal the purpose of efficiently communicating subject information to students.
- b) *Cross-disciplinary differences* were determined through relative prioritisation of content, grammatical forms and lexical features. Examples are the lengthy and directive requirement of student engagement in an MBA subject using second person voice ('you'), as opposed to the detailed clarity of industry-related requirements in a GMP subject, or the precise listing in noun phrase form of legal topics in a contracts subject.
- c) *Valued ways of thinking and learning* were derived largely from the choice of task verbs. These principles are exemplified by the contrast between the use of 'devise', 'prepare' and 'evaluate' for a GMP subject, suggesting procedural rigour and compliance as core principles, and the use of 'critically appraise', 'evaluate' and 'apply [theoretical perspectives]' for Social Perspectives of Public Health, implying the need for synthesised judgment based on critical thinking.

Interpretation: Subject documents were examined in relation to:

- a) *Their role in the institution.* The specification of academic requirements reflects the authority of the University to set standards for satisfactory performance (Fairclough, 2013). Neither the identity of the writer nor the process of writing is made explicit (Coffey, 2014), representing the documents as established institutional conditions which are not to be questioned.
- b) *Intertextuality.* Assignment task guidelines were contextualised within the broader scope of the Subject Outline to establish task progression (e.g. writing of literature review in targeted task for later IT project proposal) and links to core principles of the subject (in the IT case, rigorous research procedure). At the most important stage, subject

and task requirements were triangulated with participants' interview comments about the task, their grade and lecturer feedback (if provided). The purpose was to reveal potential misalignments and misunderstandings, perhaps due to participants' lack of familiarity with such tasks, or a lack of shared cultural assumptions between staff and international students (Coffey, 2014).

Explanation: Interpretation (step 2) was viewed within the broader context of the independent academic culture of the Western university, juxtaposed with participants' previous L1 undergraduate and EAP learning experiences. Their interpretation of disciplinary requirements was also related to pressures on international education in Australia which likely impacted on their ability to respond to challenging first-semester tasks.

To conclude, while the major focus of this case study is to investigate participants' lived experiences, the triangulation of students' interview responses with subject documentation helped to reveal any mismatch between institutional expectations and student perception of academic requirements. Section 6.3.2.iii outlines these findings and explores any links to disciplinary features. The influence of L1 and EAP educational experiences on participant response is addressed in sections 10.3.2.i-ii, while the impact of broader international education issues is explained in section 10.3.2.v.

Implications for the participants' development into independent learners are discussed in section 9.2.2.i.c.

4.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are at the core of this study. These involve both macroethical (planned) and microethical (emergent) processes, the latter a product of the inherent subjectivity of researcher-participant relationships in small-scale qualitative studies such as this one (Kubanyiova, 2008).

4.4.1 Ethics Approval and implementation

Ethics Approval ETH18-2872 from the researcher's university was granted on 21 December, 2018 (see Appendix 2). The formal Ethics process is based on values of respect, justice and beneficence from the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2.1 (NHMRC, 2018). The methodological rigour emerging through the preparation of the Ethics application supported achievement of these three values. Two examples which established an ethical framework at an early stage of data collection are the request for informed consent and protection of participant confidentiality.

4.4.1.ii Informed consent

Gaining the participants' informed consent to key features of the study occurred just before Interview 1. Consistent with accepted practice, it involved a request for their agreement to the study's purpose, research design, audio-recording of interviews, use of participant data, incentive for completion, and right to withdraw at any time (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Seidman, 2013). Informed consent was also requested from Subject Co-ordinators for supplying subject documentation about the targeted assignment tasks. A similar request to lecturers for use of assignment comments resulted in incomplete consent, and this data source was abandoned as a result (see section 4.3.4.iii). The relevant consent forms are provided in Appendices 9 to 11.

4.4.1.ii Confidentiality

Confidentiality of participant information constitutes 'a delicate balance' between the researcher's desire for useful information and the imperative of maintaining respect for the participant's privacy (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 20). The written assurance of data confidentiality in the Participant Information Sheet for Students (see Appendix 6) was particularly important in this study to minimise any fears participants may harbour about their attitudes and study practices being broadcast within the University community. To protect participants'

confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in all written documents, from manual transcription through to thesis publication (see Table 5), and the participants' hometown was not mentioned (Phakiti & Paltridge, 2015).

4.4.2. Data validation

Data validation issues are positioned here within a broader discussion of ethical issues because data validation is ethically based (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The use of validation procedures in qualitative research has been described as 'a thorny task' (Yazan, 2015, p. 147) due to highly contested positions in the field. In locating this study amongst divergent researcher views as to terminology and meaning, the primary factor is considered to be the theoretical paradigm chosen for the study because it establishes the study's ontological and epistemological principles (Creswell, 2007; De Costa, 2015; Hua, 2016; Yazan, 2015). According to the social constructivist paradigm of this study, meaning emerges from researchers' interpretation of interaction with participants, as opposed to positivistic claims of objective truth. Therefore, in place of Yin's (2017) use of the traditionally positivistic terms validity, reliability and generalisability, even with the qualitative meanings accorded by other researchers (Holliday, 2015; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), this study opts for the use of uniquely qualitative terminology. From the plethora of terms and concepts suggested by researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Jackson, 2016; Pearson-Casanave, 2015), this study utilises three core principles: credibility, methodological rigour and transferability. The conceptual approaches for credibility and methodological rigour, as the most important of these data validation factors, align most closely with the two-part frameworks of Guba and Lincoln (2005) and Merriam and Tisdell (2015).

4.4.2.i. Credibility

The credibility of the researcher's findings, as the term is used in this study, relates to its trustworthiness in producing an appropriate, holistic interpretation of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Pearson-

Casanave, 2015; Phakiti & Paltridge, 2015). Credibility is achieved in this study in three main ways: minimisation of data distortion, reflexivity and triangulation.

4.4.2.i.a. Minimisation of data distortion

Debate about the potential distortion of interview data tends to revolve around the issue of researcher roles, as distanced observer and/or engaged, compassionate interlocutor (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Schwandt, 2000; Talmy, 2010). This study adopts Talmy's (2010) pragmatic resolution, for researchers to locate themselves on the above continuum in accord with the research questions of the individual study. Here, the focus on the participants' lived experiences suggests a researcher role of knowledge-seeking rather than investigation of interview dynamics.

Given this focus, various measures were taken to minimise distortion in interview data, as distortion can jeopardise the credibility of findings and theory development (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Pearson-Casanave, 2015; Yin, 2017). One cause of data distortion is researcher bias, widely seen as inevitable and requiring acknowledgement by the researcher (Creswell, 2007; McKinley, 2017; Pearson-Casanave, 2015; Talmy, 2015). In my case, 35 years of teaching L2 learners have developed in me an empathy with, and admiration for, international students, which has likely influenced my approach to data collection and analysis through a focus on participants' agentive responses to challenges, rather than on their difficulties per se. This perspective has sharpened my critical awareness of dissonance between existing practices and student needs. However, conscious of bias, I have attempted to frame any suggestions of institutional deficiencies in a nuanced, broader context.

There were several other means for achieving credibility by maximising the authenticity of participant accounts. One of these was member checking of my interpretation of interview data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Seidman, 2013). As outlined in step 1 of Table 7, this occurred through participant verification of my improvised oral summary at the end of each interview and through response to clarifying questions at the beginning of Interviews 2 and 3. Other measures

included the manual transcription of interviews, which familiarised me with the data, and the direct quoting of participant responses in this thesis, often in non-standard English (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Seidman, 2013).

4.4.2.i.b. Reflexivity

Reflexivity, 'a clear power asymmetry between the researcher and the subject', can prevent participants from sharing their lived experience (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 37). In this study, the inherent imbalance between researcher and interviewee could be exacerbated by my age (60) and Anglosaxon appearance (Pearson-Casanave, 2015). Moreover, the request to engage in oral critical reflection may be culturally unfamiliar for some participants (McKinley, 2017), and a desire to impress could make participants reluctant to admit academic difficulties or unethical behaviour, such as plagiarism (Lee, 2000).

In order to minimise these issues, I attempted to establish a trusting, respectful relationship with each participant (Lincoln et al., 2011; Seidman, 2013) and to be aware of intercultural dynamics (Angouri, 2016; Dervin, 2016; Woodin, 2016). For example, I began the first interview by expressing my genuine admiration for the courage of all international students and told the Chinese students of my mediocre attempts to learn Mandarin in the previous few months (see Appendix 12). These initial comments appeared to create a safe environment for the participants. The effectiveness of these efforts is suggested by the frankness of interview responses and the completion of all three interviews by the 18 participants.

4.4.2.i.c. Triangulation

Triangulation is widely viewed as an essential prerequisite for achieving the credibility of qualitative case studies (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Pearson-Casanave, 2015; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2017). This study's primary focus on locating patterns across the participant group can be distinguished from that of Stake (2005), who prioritises 'uniquenesses' (p. 457) and 'championing of multiple perspectives' (p. 453). Step 7 of Table 7 shows that triangulation was

initially used to establish understanding of individual patterns of behaviour and their processes over the three interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2005). However, the main purpose of triangulation was to form a knowledge base for finding common experiences across the participant cohort, as indicated in step 9 of Table 7 (Pearson-Casanave, 2015). Cross-participant triangulation was supported by the iterative process of mindmapping to visually represent emergent findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

4.4.2.ii. Methodological rigour

Methodological rigour, as used in this study, refers to the consistency, transparency and security of research procedures (Holliday, 2015; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Phakiti & Paltridge, 2015; Yin, 2017). In alignment with the social constructivist premises of the study, the purpose of methodological rigour here is to demonstrate the dependability of the results based on specific participants and contexts, rather than the replicability of the study as suggested by Yin (2017).

Consistency of procedural processes approved through the Ethics process was maintained throughout the study, apart from the changes to methods explained in section 4.2.3.i., and to the participant profile in sections 4.3.2.ii.b.-c.. This consistency created a similar set of conditions for data collection and analysis for all participants throughout the study, thereby generating trustworthy findings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Triangulation not only achieved credibility, but also supported consistency by providing a verification function from another perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The study's use of triangulation was explained in section 4.4.2.i.c.

Transparency of research procedures and documentation was maintained to produce an audit trail available to other researchers should they seek information about the study's methodological approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Explanation and acknowledgement of necessary changes to the study after Ethics Approval have been provided in sections 4.2.3.i. and 4.3.2.ii.b.-c.. The Appendices include documents which received Ethics Approval, such as Participant Information Sheets, Consent Forms and texts which supported

participant recruitment, as well as an example of an analytical summary (see Appendix 15) and a list of the codes and sub-codes used in data analysis (see Appendix 16). To record the specific meanings of codes, a digital codebook was created, while a researcher journal was used to record and reflect on ongoing decisions (De Costa, 2015).

To ensure *data security*, core data including interview recordings, interview transcripts, subject documentation and research documents for the Ethics application are stored securely in an online location available through the University (CloudStor). All the interview transcripts have been de-identified, and pseudonyms used for participants in all documentation (see Table 5). Another online site provided by the University, Stash, is used for storage of the study's Data Management Plan. The computer storing the research data is password-protected to ensure its security.

4.4.2.iii. Transferability

The positivistic concept of generalisability is not applicable to this study due to its assumption of universal truths that apply across populations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Pearson-Casanave, 2015; Yin, 2017). However, case studies are widely viewed as a source for analytical, or theory-based, generalisation (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Skaife & Reddick, 2017; Yin, 2017), which can provide a basis for transferability. Here, the participants' process of developing an independent learning approach to their studies is represented by the Strategic Self-learning Model (see Chapter 9). It is then up to other researchers to determine the applicability of the model to other sets of participants and their contexts (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Stake, 2005).

Transferability is supported by thick description of findings, to help other researchers determine the relevance of a study to other situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Here, thick description is provided through the contextualisation of participant perspectives in relation to the three educational settings (Phakiti & Paltridge, 2015), the semi-longitudinal nature of the study (Flyvbjerg, 2011), and a multi-faceted approach to strategy analysis.

4.5. Summary of Chapter 4

Chapter 4 has outlined the methodological framework of this study, highlighting the ways in which the participants' experiences are captured to reveal their developmental processes. This is a qualitative case study with two data sources: interviews as the primary data source and subject documents as a secondary source to enhance understanding of participants' disciplinary adjustment. Data analysis for interviews involved narrative-style analysis, coding and mindmapping, which together revealed core patterns of experience across the cohort. The focus of strategy analysis was on participant use of metastrategies, as the decision-making processes which drove strategy use and arguably also participants' development as independent learners. The study has a strong ethical base, with careful attention to data validation issues.

Chapters 5 to 8 outline the study's findings as follows:

- Chapter 5: Factors contributing to participants' outlook on learning in the early weeks of their first postgraduate semester
- Chapter 6: Participants' challenges in their first postgraduate semester
- Chapter 7: Participants' strategic responses to these challenges
- Chapter 8: Participants' learnings from their strategy experiences

More specifically, **Chapter 5** reveals the participants' reasons for studying in Australia and their perceptions of approaches to teaching and learning in the L1 undergraduate, EAP and postgraduate settings.

Chapter 5: Participants' Educational Transitions

5.1. Introduction

Chapter Five reports on the study's findings about factors impacting on the participants' study outlook early in their postgraduate studies. It outlines the participants' primary study goals, both longer-term goals driving their decision to undertake a postgraduate degree in Australia and more immediate goals for the first semester. The chapter also summarises the participants' views of three educational contexts in terms of approaches to teaching and learning: their L1 undergraduate studies, EAP course and first semester of postgraduate studies. These findings provide important information in relation to the research question by informing understanding of the participants' initial perception of the unfamiliar academic culture of the postgraduate course. The participants' perception was a product of their self-directed study goals, the pedagogical approach of the University relative to their L1 and EAP studies, and the participants' lived experience of the postgraduate course compared to their previous expectations of it.

Outlining these key elements which filtered the participants' perception of their first-semester experience will help to explain the Strategic Self-learning Model, a dynamic construct emerging from data about participant experience. This model, which summarises the process by which the participants developed into independent learners in the postgraduate context, is the major contribution of this study. To clarify reference to the model throughout the four findings chapters, its three phases are introduced here. Detailed explanation of the model will be provided in Chapter 9.

Table 9 summarises the three phases of the model.

Table 9: Phases of the Strategic Self-learning Model

PHASE	MEANING
Learning for Self	Self-directed goals and self-perceived needs
Learning by Self	Challenging engagement through strategy use
Learning about Self	Regeneration through self-reflection

Of these three aspects, Learning for Self is the major focus in this chapter, which provides findings relevant to the participants' self-directed goals and self-perceived needs as they engaged with unfamiliar tasks. The Learning-for-Self phase prepares the participants for major strategy use in the Learning-by-Self phase, as a response to these challenges. Self-reflection on strategy experiences in the Learning-about-Self phase led to learnings, both academic and personal, which nurtured the participants' development into independent learners.

As outlined in section 1.3.2, for privacy reasons, the ELICOS college attended by the participants will be referred to as 'the College', and the specific university as 'the University'. The academic learning process undergone by the participants at the College will be termed 'the EAP course'. Throughout the analysis, a complexity theory framework is adopted, highlighting the interrelationship of contextual factors and the nonlinearity of outcomes within shifting educational contexts. References to usage-based theory are made in relation to linguistic issues.

5.2. Reasons for overseas study

According to the data, the participants decided to engage in postgraduate studies at an Australian university to enrich their lives in three main ways:

- For a future career
- For personal adventure
- For the purpose of staying in Australia (through migration or temporary work).

These reasons for study, which occurred in various combinations, reveal the self-directed nature of participants' goals, supporting a case for the concept of Learning for Self.

5.2.1. Future career

Career preparation was by far the most common goal of the participants, often interrelated with the development of English skills, reputation of Australian universities, a competitive L1 job market, career reset, contribution to society, and/or personal adventure. It is noted that the term 'career reset' will be used here instead of the usual term 'career change'. This terminology is being used because six of the participants choosing a different Masters course from their Bachelor degree had not worked in either of the two fields, so they had no pre-existing career. Instead, they had decided to reset their study and career direction in a new field.

Several participants who were faced with a challenging employment market in their home country felt that returning with strong English skills and a postgraduate degree from an Australian university would provide a significant boost to their marketability. Kevin, for example, linked these factors in his reasons for deciding to study Finance at a university in Australia:

'I want to develop my English skill because the English is very necessary for my work in the future, because in China all bank need their staff can speak English or other different languages. And Australia have a high education quality than Chinese qualities because maybe in Chinese, quality is a lot of students just play computer' (Interview 1).

The attainment of good English competence was mentioned by all the participants who planned to return home after their studies (10 out of 18) as optimising career advancement, particularly by facilitating future contacts with foreign customers. The value of English skills for this purpose was exemplified by Nancy, a woman who had previously worked in a marketing position in Shanghai and now hoped to enhance her career development in a fiercely competitive market: 'Your English is better, you have an alternative to have a business with the foreigners' (Interview 1).

Therefore, several factors contributed to participants' career-related decisions to study overseas, occurring in varying combinations and degrees of importance across the cohort. Language development was a high priority for these participants and, consistent with usage-based theory, their decision to study in Australia was assumed to develop linguistic competence through increased interaction in the target language.

5.2.1.i. Career reset

A major feature of the participant group holding strong career motivations was a desire for career reset; in other words, choosing to study in a different discipline from their undergraduate degree or work background in order to strengthen their future job prospects. Career reset is evident in Table 9, which outlines the degree of difference between the participants' undergraduate and postgraduate courses, and notes any experience of working in the postgraduate discipline.

Table 10: Relationship of undergraduate degree/work to postgraduate course

RELATIONSHIP TO U/G COURSE	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	COURSES (U/G TO P/G)
Significant change	9	Wastewater Management to Finance (Kevin) Architectural Design to MBA (Andrew) Marketing and Business Administration to IT (Sanit) Arts to IT (Dara) Engineering to Property Development (Felipe) Hosting (similar to Events Management) to Not-for-Profit and Social Enterprise Management (Lisa) Food Science to MBA (Mina) (but some business experience) Arts to Nursing (U/G) (Sam) Human Resource Management to Strategic Communication (Joanne)
Moderate change	3	Statistics to Financial Analysis (Candy) Traditional Medicine Practice to GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice) (Frank) Media to MBA (Michael) (but Finance work)
Very similar/same	6	Engineering (same) (Tony) Marketing (same) (Nancy) Law (same) (Lois) Accounting (same) (Hiroshi) Public Health (same) (Annie) Communications Engineering to IT (Mary)

These disciplinary changes were generally due to interest in the new field and/or greater job opportunities. For example, Sanit and Dara chose IT as a future-focused career field and, like most participants pursuing career reset, there was a sense of urgency related to their age (28 and 35 respectively). The additional pressure for Sanit was 'because of time, the money that I paid' (Interview 1), and for Dara, 'I have to pass – I don't want to get older and older' (Interview 1). For the Finance student Kevin, the time pressure arose from a need to forge a career without delay: 'I must pass the exam, and after that, I also have some future plan after this two-year education, Masters. So I don't want to waste time' (Interview 1).

Career reset, then, was often accompanied by a strong sense of responsibility and urgency about the success of the venture as there was a lot at stake for these participants.

5.2.1.ii. Contribution to society

Of the participants choosing to study for career-related reasons, three (Frank, Lisa and Annie) did so with a desire to contribute to society. This motivation was accompanied by a strong affective component. For Frank, the goal was to contribute to the development of medicine and food regulation in China; for Lisa, to help disadvantaged people through charity; and for Annie, to promote preventative public health back in Vietnam. This sense of mission is reflected in the following comment by Annie, who was studying on a University scholarship to support health awareness in Vietnam:

'I love Public Health. I have a passion for it. Because Public Health help people and protect and take care of people in communication, er community. Just one or two patient in hospital, but I think it's important to protect a lot of people before they're sick' (Interview 1).

This statement can be contrasted with participants' choice of IT or Finance for pragmatic career purposes. For example, Mary expressed her attitude to studying IT in unemotional terms: 'It doesn't matter. I can start without interest. (*Laughter*) I do this in my life all the time' (Interview 1). This lack of personal

connection to the subject area continued into her tertiary course: 'I don't feel bad about it. Just do it' (Interview 2).

5.2.2. Personal adventure

11 out of 18 participants nominated a desire for personal adventure or self-development as a reason for engaging in postgraduate studies in Australia, although this was often combined with a career-related goal. To these participants, Sydney's multicultural society and perceived freedom of expression offered an attractive opportunity to communicate with different cultural groups and expand their outlook on life. Mary, for instance, contrasted Sydney's freedom with China's restriction on information:

'We have a wall in the Internet. If I go outside, I can get in touch with many people and know many things. I can have many ideas, I can know many traditions, cultures, and I have more ways to think' (Interview 1).

Others expressed goals of developing independence (seven) or cultural respect (four participants), as well as living out a personal dream (six). For many of these participants, therefore, undertaking a postgraduate degree course at an Australian university went far beyond a study plan, to encompass personal goals which they valued highly. A particularly poignant example is that of Lisa, who left a high-level television presenter role in China to study in Australia after a vow to her dying three-year-old son to improve herself: 'I want to challenge myself to make my life more, well, valuable' (Interview 1). Her experience is a powerful illustration of nonlinearity (complexity theory) and a reminder of the need for a holistic approach to understanding student experiences.

5.2.3. Staying in Australia

Seven participants expressed interest in migration, or at least temporary work in Australia, after completing their degree. This reason for studying in Australia was motivated by some of the same appealing societal aspects outlined above. For those engaged in active planning to this end (Tony, Felipe, Sam and Michael), there was an added sense of urgency for this venture to succeed, and

for rapid improvement of their English skills to support integration into the Australian society. All had a partner here, and in Michael's case a young child as well, so a bold collective venture was at stake in all cases. The careful planning of this group was exemplified by the Colombian participant, Felipe, who sought to leave what he perceived to be an inequitable, broken economy and migrate to a friendly, prosperous, more egalitarian society, where he could grow from his previous dependence on his family towards self-sufficiency and maturity in Australia. Felipe's strategy involved applying for Permanent Residency (PR), having an 'escape profession, Engineering', and seeking to maximise points for immigration purposes through success in English language tests (Interview 1).

These three main self-directed goals (career, personal adventure and/or staying in Australia) prompted the participants' decisions to engage in postgraduate studies at an Australian university.

5.2.4. Degree of family influence

It is important to consider the role of family in the participants' decisions to study in Australia, as decisions made under substantial family pressure would cast doubt on a finding that participants were primarily learning for their own purposes (Learning for Self). In fact, half of the participants did not mention their family at all in discussing their reasons for overseas study, and most spoke enthusiastically about the potential personal benefits of their venture.

Parental encouragement was a factor in the decisions of four participants. Their parents variously sought to nurture independence and emotional maturity in their progeny (Joanne and Candy), increase their career prospects (Joanne and Sanit), or facilitate family migration to Australia (Sam). In all these cases, parent-participant relationships were particularly strong. Joanne's experience is worth noting as an example of complex relationships, both with family and with me as the researcher. In Interview 1, the decision to study overseas was presented as a collaborative one initiated by her parents. However, by Interview 3, perhaps due to increased rapport with me, Joanne admitted that she had actually been very reluctant to study overseas, eventually deferring to her parents' wishes. Despite this expressed reluctance, Joanne said she had

become 'more peaceful' as a result of studying in Sydney and her situation was 'maybe a bit better here'. She therefore conveyed greater ownership of her situation, even if only belatedly.

More generally, the participant cohort had clearly engaged in considerable self-reflection before making their study decision. For Sam, whose parents were keen for him to obtain PR, this was a long, arduous process of considering the risks involved for him and for his parents:

'I was struggling one year: should I come here? Because they are conservative people. They don't want a lot of very luxury things. They just want give all the best to their son. I was thinking if I come, but finally I made the call I want to come. It's the cost and the risk. What if I don't get the PR? I have to go back to China' (Interview 1).

In the cases of Lois and Hiroshi, family were supportive of the decision but not directly influential, while Andrew and Lisa actively opposed their parents' wishes. Lisa's conservative Chinese family argued strongly against the whole venture as, in their view, a divorced woman like Lisa should stay in the local area to be protected by the extended family and look after her ageing parents. Andrew's disagreement with his parents was not about overseas study per se, but about the field of study. They advised him to do a Masters in the same field of study as his Bachelor degree (Architectural Design) to enhance his prospects of employment, but Andrew chose to do an MBA 'for developing your mind and get some excellent experience' (Interview 1).

Overall, then, the data suggest that the participants' decision to study in Australia was largely their own. This understanding of participants' self-directed goals is vital for understanding their early first-semester experiences, as the strength of these personal goals appeared to contribute to their shock in encountering difficult early-semester tasks, and to foster a determination to overcome their challenges through strategy implementation.

5.2.5. Shift in goals

After the participants commenced studying at the University, most reported a continued commitment to their original goal of studying overseas, but overtaken in intensity by the need to cope with immediate academic demands. While this represented a slightly different perspective, the self-directed nature of their goals as motivation for study remained intact.

The short-term study goal of participants in their early phase of University studies was generally passing or receiving a satisfactory grade in all their subjects in the first semester. There was often a sense of pressure attached to this goal, due variously to age (two participants), cost (two participants), or seeing a grade either as a reflection of their career-related knowledge (five participants) or their effort (six participants). Despite these different reasons, all the participants felt the imperative to get through their first semester without failing any subjects. This urgency was reflected in the high modality language used to describe their immediate goal:

‘I have to pass’ (Lisa, Interview 2).

‘I have to focus on pass now’ (Dara, Interview 2).

‘I have to get a good grade’ (Candy, Interview 2).

‘I have to pass this semester. I just have to do this’ (Sanit, Interview 2).

‘When it’s difficult, I think, “I have to pass this. I have to do it”’ (Hiroshi, Interview 2).

The short- and long-term goals were explicitly linked by several participants, as is shown by Lois and Mina:

‘I just think I have to try. Just try to a little bit, a little bit every day. It’s my duty because I want to achieve and I think it will help me in my future’ (Lois, Interview 2).

‘I just have the same goal. I’m just thinking what is the reason why I’m here and what I’m doing now will take me to that point. So I just focus on what I’m doing now’ (Mina, Interview 2).

A few found that their original goal was still present, but had faded in the face of present demands. For example, when Tony was reminded in Interview 2 of his earlier priority of establishing a family in Australia over his studies, he commented:

'I think it's different now because when I'm in the College, it was less stressful. But now, we have so many assignments to do, so many due dates one by one, so the most important thing for me is I have to finish and perform more than Pass' (Interview 2).

Sanit and Hiroshi expressed an intense need to pass in IT and Accounting respectively in the context of limited study commitment in the past, but their attitudes differed. For Hiroshi, self-doubt bordered on regret that he had inflicted this struggle on himself:

'When it's difficult, I think "I have to pass this, I have to do it". But then I think, "Why I doing this?!" Sometimes I think about why I choose studying Master, why I didn't choose just work in Japan, because it's really hard now. It is my first time to study this much. In Japan, we just enjoy university life because if they get a job, they can't enjoy life. So they usually don't study at all' (Hiroshi, Interview 2).

On the other hand, Sanit, 28 and under pressure to forge a career in IT, only allowed his mind to engage with positive thoughts of success:

'I can't hide anywhere. There's no choice! I watch the Japanese animation and the main character of this animation say very well, "I want to be a successful person. There's no detour to be a successful". So you have to just go and do it' (Sanit, Interview 2).

This attitudinal difference may be linked to Sanit's age-related pressure and encouraging daily communications with his mother, in contrast to Hiroshi's lack of communication with his parents about his academic struggles. In apparently similar situations, their lived experience was quite different as they viewed it through different prisms of family relations and cultural attitudes.

Therefore, while there was a shift in goal prioritisation for most participants during the early phase of their first postgraduate semester, their goals remained

self-directed and only increased in intensity as they commenced their University studies. The participants' focus on their original, longer-term goal for studying in Australia was reprioritised in light of their immediate academic challenges. The self-directed goals of the participants (Learning for Self) proved to be a vital element driving their adjustment to the requirement of independent learning (Learning by Self) at the University.

5.3. Perception of different educational contexts

To further inform understanding of the participants' perception of their early-semester postgraduate experiences, it is important to understand the influence of their previous experiences in L1 undergraduate and EAP studies. The focus of this analysis is on participant attitudes to ways of teaching and learning in these contexts, as these perspectives may filter the participants' perception of the need for independent learning at the University. These findings are primarily based on data collected in Interview 1, a few weeks prior to their commence at the University. An additional perspective is provided from Interview 2 data, when the participants gave their impressions of the University's style of teaching and learning.

5.3.1. Perception of L1 undergraduate studies

The great majority of participants were critical of the pedagogical approach in their L1 undergraduate course, dismissing it as teacher-directed, with insufficient attention paid to the learners and learning itself. This negative depiction contrasts with the Colombian participant, Felipe, who described his Engineering degree in positive terms as involving close teacher-student relations in small, interactive classes. The participants from Asian countries generally saw the L1 lecturers' goal as limited to student success in examinations, achieved through the students' memorisation of content. This restricted teaching focus was communicated linguistically by the prevalence of the modifying adverbs 'only' and 'just' in virtually all of these participants' descriptions:

'In Chinese classes, I just learn how to pass exam' (Tony, Interview 1).

'[In China,] we cannot have enough opportunities to communicate with teacher. It is difficult to find our teacher in their office room, and the teacher they not explain the knowledges and some matter. They just teaching and don't connect with us' (Kevin, Interview 1).

'Chinese teacher don't care about what information you got. They only want to know what methods you learn for the exam' (Frank, Interview 1).

'In Vietnam, just lecture. Teacher just talk and talk, yeah, and they don't have enough time to interact, to communicate with students because our lessons in Vietnam have many many knowledge and in our class have many many students, maybe from 50 to 100 students. Lecturers don't care more about students. They just say and show all the knowledge and that's all' (Annie, Interview 1).

The demotivating effect on students, implied in some of the above comments, was explicitly mentioned by three of the participants. Comments by two of these were as follows:

'When Bachelor degree in Law [in Thailand], I have no activity in classroom. Just listen the lecturer and take some notes only. Sometime I feel sleepy' (Lois, Interview 1).

'In China, it's one-way communication. The teacher say something, maybe the students sleeping on the table ... it's just for the test' (Lisa, Interview 1).

Several participants also thought that this teaching approach limited the development of their thinking skills in the subject area because teachers only accepted interpretations which accorded with their own views, and they presented knowledge at a superficial level:

'Maybe the teacher [in China] only tell you, "You should do this. You should do that". And if you have different opinion, maybe you don't get a great mark' (Andrew, Interview 1).

'In China, the teacher very seldom ask you to thinking level. The teaching is very exam-oriented' (Sam, Interview 1).

While this was the majority viewpoint, there was also some acknowledgement of the benefits of this pedagogical approach. Tony, for example, appreciated the expectation of rigorous learning because ‘we learn how to study ... what we learn helps improve our ability to learn’ (Interview 1). For her part, Lisa valued the direct delivery of information in China as a way of building students’ knowledge in a new area:

‘Teacher will summary rule or grammar or vocabularies things. They don’t want you feedback, just give you the knowledge. And because we are not native speaker and we are not learn English from child, so we need concentrate time to learn many things. So from that, the Chinese way is very good’ (Interview 1).

Overall, though, the evaluation of L1 undergraduate teaching methods by the participants from Asian countries was negative, especially when juxtaposed with their positive assessment of the EAP experience.

5.3.2. Perception of EAP course

Despite some uneasiness prompted by the requirement for active participation in EAP classes, most participants from Asian countries strongly preferred EAP pedagogy over L1 undergraduate approaches. The EAP teachers were widely praised as kind, helpful and/or caring. For example, Dara commented on the warm classroom tone and attention paid to each student, in contrast to her previous studies in China:

‘The way of teaching is different, much more relaxed. It’s happy. The teacher will focus on each of the students, and then they will know your character’ (Interview 1).

The dynamic, interactive classroom was also a positive factor for most participants. For instance, Hiroshi, a Japanese student who had lacked study commitment in Japan, explained that he enjoyed the College’s teaching style because it involved ‘talk to others and discuss’, as part of ‘creating the idea’ (Interview 1).

In contrast, Mina, while describing the course and teacher as 'great', struggled with the marked contrast from L1 teaching methods: 'I need to adjust, I need to speak, I need to give more my opinion. Everything is difficult' (Interview 1). Similarly, Andrew had difficulty with the expectation to speak in class, explaining that when asked a question, 'if I don't say anything, the teacher will continue to ask you. The reason is I'm a little shy to talk more. But the teacher maybe think I have some problem'. He contextualised this, though, within the broader process of adjustment: 'Maybe I need a little more time to adapt to that. It's not a big problem' (Interview 1).

In contrast to the participants from Asian countries, the Colombian participant, Felipe, experienced the EAP course as having a 'very similar' educational approach to the dialogue-based pedagogy of his undergraduate degree, thereby easing his adjustment process (Interview 1).

It is evident here that, consistent with complexity theory principles, a similar scenario of the interactive classroom elicited different responses, depending on the participants' individual perception of events, both past and present.

The heavy EAP scaffolding of academic tasks was appreciated by all the participants. Typical of these views was Sam's praise for the graduated learning approach to assignment tasks:

'They give you practice step by step. First is the outline, draft final, and just inside of draft and outline there's a lot of tiny practice between these steps that really help to form your final assignment' (Interview 1).

The use of teacher-produced written models to show students how to formulate written responses, a new teaching method for all the participants, was considered highly effective. For Michael, the models were 'really good because I have no idea how to write a formal essay and that give me a clear structure' (Interview 1).

While appreciating the extensive EAP scaffolding, several participants also noted the need for a more active learning approach than in their L1 undergraduate degree. This increased autonomy applied mainly to their assignment work, an unfamiliar form of assessment for most. Frank, for

example, described this added demand: 'I only have to do this by myself, and I have to read the articles times by times, more carefully, to find out what information is important' (Interview 1).

Overall, the EAP course seems to have been a positive experience for most participants, and it provided a favourable comparison to the L1 undergraduate experience of the participants from Asian countries. It appears that the majority valued the interactive, scaffolded pedagogical approach of the EAP course. There was also mention of the need for a more active approach to learning than in their L1 undergraduate studies, but this added autonomy was seen to co-exist with close teacher monitoring.

These findings about the participants' L1 and College experiences are important because they help to inform understanding of their early impressions of the University's requirements.

5.3.3. Expectations of university studies

Most participants appeared to have limited knowledge of their upcoming University course, in terms of task types and the style of teaching and learning. There was a frequent expectation of language-based difficulties, consistent with the usage-based theory principle that a lack of frequent exposure to linguistic interactions impedes language development. However, it seems that the participants had not been sufficiently forewarned of likely pedagogical approaches at the University. If anything, they assumed that because the EAP course was preparing students for university studies, both institutions would have similar forms of instruction and tasks. For example, the Engineering student Tony expected postgraduate classes to be structured similarly to the EAP course: 'In the College, we are small group of 16, 17 students and one lecturer. When I go to the University, I think the lecture will like that, the size of class' (Interview 2). Sanit assumed that the ways of learning at the University would be similar to the College: 'I have to use the approach of the College because we learn the College to know how to study in university' (Interview 1).

There were, however, four exceptions to this expectation of a similar pedagogical approach. These participant views were based on either prior

knowledge or experience, or insights about the EAP course. Both Dina and Felipe had been advised by former postgraduate students about the need for substantially more independent learning at Australian universities, so were prepared for it, at least in this cognitive sense. Still, Felipe expressed concerns about the prospect of independent learning:

'I'm worried. You have to read more and it's more independent. I'm accustomed to have little classes of - maximum - 20. So you have a good relationship with the teacher. They know who you are and what you are doing. But here, you're with you, so it's different' (Interview 1).

Lois' expectation was based on her experience with interactive teaching methods in the MBA she completed in Thailand after her undergraduate Law degree. Indeed, in Interview 1, Lois described her approach to study with these words: 'I love self-learning' (Interview 1). She therefore seemed to be prepared for this aspect of postgraduate studies.

Andrew's expectations of the University course were inferred from the greater agency required in EAP assignment tasks than in assessment tasks in China. However, Andrew also implied that he was uncertain about the form this more active learning approach would take.

5.4. Summary of participants' outlook on entering postgraduate studies

The participants' perceptual framework on entering postgraduate studies developed as a combination of their strong, self-directed goals for study at an Australian university, their views of past ways of teaching and learning, and their expectations of the postgraduate course. Most participants commenced postgraduate studies with limited understanding of their course requirements, including optimal ways of learning, with many assuming there would be a continuation of the heavily scaffolded learning approach of the EAP course. This outlook tended to produce a dichotomous view in the participants' eyes. Their L1 experiences were often framed negatively as unstimulating knowledge transmission for the purpose of examination success, while the EAP course was viewed positively as exemplifying an Australian educational approach likely to

exist at the University. However, it is noted that both included clear, explicit teacher direction to students, despite the EAP course also requiring some additional autonomy on the students' part. The pedagogical similarity in terms of close teacher direction later impacted on the participants' perception of the University, as in most cases, their expectations did not correspond to the reality they encountered.

5.5. Need for independent learning in early postgraduate studies

The participants' initial perceptions of the ways of teaching and learning in the postgraduate course are briefly outlined here to complete this chapter's overview of the three educational contexts from their perspectives. When asked for an overall impression of their early-semester experiences, the participants responded with strikingly consistent descriptions:

'The University, I think for the postgraduate student, the key point is learn by yourself. It's not about the teachers. You learn by yourself' (Dara, Interview 2).

'At the University, teacher didn't give us direction. We need to learn by ourself. And when you have some direction, you need to figure out by yourself as well' (Lisa, Interview 3).

'In the University, we have more time for learn by yourself. That's the big thing for me for my first semester. It's a new challenge and I think you have more responsibility for your study compared to the College, and compared to China' (Nancy, Interview 2).

'Almost of my study is come from myself, a lot of self-study' (Mina, Interview 2).

'I should do everything more by myself, not depending on others' (Kevin, Interview 2).

'I learn now maybe University way because I learn by myself' (Hiroshi, Interview 2).

‘At the University, I think I have to do everything myself because you have many many difficult things to do. You have to solve problems by yourself’ (Annie, Interview 2).

‘It’s very, very, very autonomous. Very different’ (Felipe, Interview 3).

‘[The lecturer] gave you inspiration, just offered you a method of study, and we have to study by ourself’ (Sam, Interview 3).

What emerges is a study context where students saw the need to engage in a significant amount of self-directed learning to cope with their studies. They presented the postgraduate setting as new, unfamiliar, and requiring changes to their habitual ways of learning.

5.6. Self-learning

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the Strategic Self-learning Model is a representation of participants’ first-semester experiences. It has three phases:

- Learning for Self
- Learning by Self
- Learning about Self.

This chapter has detailed extensive evidence of Learning for Self, in terms of the strong self-directed goals of the participants and their identification of the need for independent learning in the postgraduate setting. As is demonstrated in Chapters 6 and 7, these two factors were the key drivers of participant efforts to meet task requirements through strategy use in the Learning-by-Self phase of the model. The third phase, Learning about Self, is evidenced in Chapter 8 through the participants’ self-reflection as a key component of their developmental process. Figure 4 illustrates these fundamental sequential and causative functions in a simplified linear version of the Strategic Self-learning Model.

Figure 5: The Strategic Self-learning Model (linear version)



The Strategic Self-learning Model is explained in detail in Chapter 9, including the function of iteration in a more complex version of the model.

5.7. Summary of Chapter 5

Chapter 5 has provided an overview of the participants' outlook as they entered postgraduate studies. This outlook was explained through the filter of two key elements: the participants' self-directed study goals and their perception of the University's ways of teaching and learning relative to their L1 undergraduate degree and EAP course. This contextualisation helps to explain the participants' initial surprise at the strongly independent nature of postgraduate task demands, when juxtaposed with the explicit and/or heavily scaffolded teaching in the L1 and EAP contexts.

The participants' strongly held goals fuelled a determination to meet postgraduate requirements, including adjustment to the independent learning culture of the University. In subsequent findings chapters, these goals and participant awareness of task needs will be shown to drive the participants' development as independent learners, through strategy use and self-reflection. This developmental process is represented by the Strategic Self-learning Model, with its three phases of Learning for Self, Learning by Self and Learning about Self.

Chapter 6 outlines academic challenges faced by the participants in their first postgraduate semester in relation to two core academic tasks: understanding lecture content and completing a written assignment task.

Chapter 6: First-Semester Challenges

6.1. Introduction

Chapter Six outlines the major academic challenges faced by the participants in their first semester of postgraduate studies. Following the previous chapter's overview of participant transitions from L1 undergraduate to EAP to postgraduate studies, this chapter provides a specific account of the participants' early difficulties as they faced unfamiliar academic demands in their postgraduate course. To reiterate, Chapter 5 provided evidence of the pedagogical dissonance between the relatively explicit teacher direction in the participants' L1 undergraduate and EAP courses, and the greater responsibility for independent learning expected of students in the postgraduate setting. Chapter 5 also introduced the Strategic Self-learning Model as a representation of the participants' developmental process. It comprises three phases: Learning for Self, Learning by Self and Learning about Self.

This chapter provides extensive evidence of the participants' skill gaps, necessitating strategy use on their part to meet task requirements. Strategy use, a key expression of the Learning-by-Self phase due to the conscious, purpose-driven effort behind strategy implementation, constitutes one important element in participants' development into independent learners. Therefore, this chapter and the next one, which reports on participants' strategy use, work together to demonstrate key aspects of their development.

In this chapter, the focus of analysis of the participants' first-semester challenges is on two core academic tasks: understanding lecture content and completing an assignment task. These two tasks were chosen because they emerged from the data as intense, formative experiences across the participant cohort. Lectures were seen as an important means of accessing subject content and engaging with academic staff and peers, while assignments were viewed as high-stakes endeavours contributing to course grades. Two other reasons for focusing on assignment tasks were the participants' limited assignment experience, as reported in Chapter 5, and the opportunity to determine the impact of EAP instruction in this area.

This analysis is primarily based on the three interviews held with each participant, including reference to paralinguistic features such as gestures and tone of voice to reveal affective elements (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Seidman, 2013). In addition, data drawn from subject document analysis were triangulated with participant perceptions of their assignment experience, to investigate the degree to which the participants understood disciplinary requirements.

Throughout this analysis of the two types of academic tasks, a complexity theory approach is once again adopted, highlighting the importance of contextuality and the contribution of multiple interacting factors to participant experience. Usage-based theory is utilised to inform understanding of language issues.

6.2. Understanding lecture content

Findings about the participants' ability to understand lecture content will be outlined as follows:

- The need for independent learning due to comprehension difficulties
- Affective aspects of the lecture experience
- Factors affecting lecture comprehension, both institutional and learner-related.

6.2.1. Evidence of need for independent learning

Understanding lecture content in their first semester proved to be a particularly difficult task for most of the participants. Lecture attendance was insufficient for most to grasp the content, beyond fundamental points. The necessity of supplementing their limited lecture comprehension with substantial additional effort was prominent in participant comments, especially in relation to early-semester experiences. As Mina stated: 'In a lecture, I'm just sitting there, get an overview of everything and then just do it by yourself, read it by yourself. If you don't read, you don't understand' (Interview 2). Lois commented on a similar need for independent learning and the reasons for it: her lack of knowledge of

the subject area, poor listening skills, and desire to engage with her lecture cohort:

‘I have no background in legal research, so I have to start from zero to learn by myself because in the class, I cannot catch the word, I can’t participate with my friends’ (Interview 2).

From the perspective of usage-based theory, Lois’ weak communication skills precluded opportunities for interaction which, ironically, might have supported their development. Similarly, linguistic deficiencies affecting comprehension and the ability to request clarification occurred for the Engineering student Tony, in his case compounded by the pedagogical context due to ‘so many students and less interaction with the teachers’ (Interview 2). The combination of these factors necessitated independent learning, which, however, placed additional time pressure on his studies: ‘So I have to learn by myself. Those things take too much time’ (Interview 2). Amongst other participants, Annie (Interview 2) spoke of the ‘need to catch up’ after each lecture, Hiroshi (Interview 2) stated that ‘always I have to look up the language, the meaning’, and Nancy (Interview 2) explained that she had to ‘read the articles first, before the classroom, then I can understand’.

In closing, participants’ difficulty in accessing important lecture content led to a perceived need for supplementary independent learning.

6.2.2. Affective aspects of lecture experience

Given the participants’ strong, self-directed goals and their limited prior knowledge of University expectations, it is unsurprising that initial struggles with understanding lecture content had an affective impact on most.

Participants with very limited comprehension of lectures generally experienced the most intense negative emotions. These participants reported feeling ‘frightened because I totally lost in the classroom’ (Nancy, Interview 2) and ‘worried about my assignment because I cannot hear my teacher’s thoughts, I couldn’t understand’ (Annie, Interview 2). The very first lecture in IT proved to

be a shock for both Mary and Sanit, who recounted their experiences with some distress in their voices:

‘I feel, “Oh! Maybe I need to go back to home. I think I will fail if this ...”
That’s scary!’ (Mary, Interview 2)

‘I didn’t think studying in university is difficult like this. I’ll explain my feeling in the first class of all classes. The lecturer was saying anything. It was two hours, but I didn’t understand anything. I feel like I wanna cry’
(Sanit, Interview 2).

In complexity theory terms, the participants’ previous ability to understand EAP classes was disrupted, initiating a new pattern of experience and response consistent with a phase transition.

However, a few participants with better listening skills had a smoother transition to understanding lecture content and described it in a measured tone. For example, the only non-Asian participant, Felipe, could follow lectures, but reported feeling tired because ‘you have to pay more attention to the words’ (Interview 2). One highly organised participant, Frank, also had minimal problems due to his preparation in China:

‘I did lots of practice on listening. I watch the English movies, I watch the English talk shows to practise my listening before my College course in China. That help me now. I can understand the lectures’ (Interview 2).

Another participant with relatively strong listening skills, a Chinese MBA student, reported that he could understand about 80% of lectures, adding, ‘Of course, there’s still something that is like a mystery’ (Michael, Interview 2). Implied in his choice of words and tone of voice is that his incomplete understanding did not carry a strong emotive load.

6.2.3. Factors affecting lecture comprehension

In accordance with complexity theory principles, the participants’ lecture comprehension will be viewed as a product of dynamic, interacting factors. The major factors impacting on comprehension of lecture content will be analysed in terms of institutional factors and learner-related factors.

6.2.3.i Institutional factors

The participants reported that pedagogical and organisational aspects of content delivery made it necessary for them to learn independently. In terms of pedagogy, six participants commented that instead of the explicit instructions they were accustomed to in their L1 and College settings, less specific directives were common at the University. For Joanne:

‘In China, teacher will say, “Today you need to read this article and tomorrow you need to give me what you think about this article”. But in Australia, teacher will tell you, “This week, you need to read what kinds of articles”’ (Interview 2).

Like Joanne, five other participants contrasted the need for University students to support lecture comprehension through substantial reading with their L1 system of knowledge delivery, where lectures provided sufficient information for content-based examinations. In terms of organisational practices, Sam compared the class schedule at the University to both his Chinese undergraduate degree and the College. He saw the University as having ‘limited class. They can’t explain everything. We have to learn by ourself’ (Interview 3).

These unfamiliar institutional factors, related to poor lecture comprehension, appeared to be viewed through the lens of the participants’ more structured and less confronting L1 and EAP institutional practices.

6.2.3.1.a. Characteristics of lecture delivery

For many participants, the speed of the lecturer’s delivery was a barrier to full understanding. Nancy and Felipe contrasted the rapid delivery with the slower pace of their College teachers, implying that the transition between study contexts was too fast. Due to the pace of delivery, Annie commented that she could only ‘understand the topic and the idea, but not all of the words’ (Interview 2). The use of reduced phonological forms was also noted by Nancy, as ‘the words sounded different, like “Marking” instead of “Marketing”’ (Interview 2).

For the three IT students and the single Nursing student, the Indian accent of one or more lecturers exacerbated other issues of lecture delivery. This was a serious issue for the IT student, Mary, in her early weeks: 'They have very strange accent. I can't understand them in the class. I have four class. Three of them the teacher is Indian. I can't understand nothing. It's so bad!' (Interview 2).

6.2.3.1.b. Lecturer awareness of student difficulties

Problems associated with lecturer delivery prompted several participants to infer that these lecturers had limited awareness of their needs. This assumption applied, firstly, to participants with difficulty understanding lecturers' accents: 'Most lecturers don't care about the accent, don't think, "I have to speak clearly so others will get it". No, just "Go through it, go away"' (Sanit, Interview 2). More generally, the fast-paced instruction of several lecturers led some participants to conclude that lecturers overestimated the students' knowledge base. Tony's comment in this regard exemplifies the overlapping factors impacting on participant experience:

'The lecturer is economist. He thought everything he speak is very easy, but for us, it's just like another language. Language and difficult ideas make hard. It's not because of their way to pronounce. The problem is from us. The others, Indian or local students, can understand them well, but we can't' (Interview 2).

Mina saw herself falling behind in a way which never occurred in her EAP course:

'The tutor doesn't wait for you. She just keep going. In the College, everything was slower, much slower, and I felt better than this. I can catch up: "I'm here with you, teacher". But sometimes in this class, I just lost and teacher keeps going because everyone is OK' (Interview 2).

In fact, Tony stopped attending lectures in one subject as there seemed to be no point in doing so: 'I can't understand, so it's kind of waste of time' (Interview 3).

Consistent with the importance of frequency in usage-based theory, participants accustomed to the measured speaking style of EAP teachers struggled to cope with the University lecturers' speed of delivery, assumption of subject knowledge, and (in some cases) accent.

A few participants, however, had a more positive experience of lectures and tutorials, with Sam commenting 'I feel I can really learn a lot from [my tutor]' (Interview 2) and Frank appreciating the structured and explicit approach of one lecturer in GMP.

For several participants studying courses with L1 English-speaking peers who were professionals in the field, it appeared that lecturers were pitching knowledge and language levels to these students rather than to them. Two of the participants (Lois in Law and Felipe in Property Development) had quite similar experiences in this regard. In both cases, their peers were mostly L1 English speakers with extensive industry knowledge, including associated legal terminology. The participants felt that their lecturers were unaware of their needs, Lois because of her insufficient listening skills ('I can't catch the words') and Felipe primarily because of his lack of working experience in the legal field:

'It was a Law subject, and the Law language I don't have it. He just talk in a natural way because he suppose that everyone knows that. A lot of people know that things because they work with that' (Felipe, Interview 2).

For both Lois and Felipe, therefore, there was a sense of being alone in their difficulty of understanding legal terminology in lectures. The organisation of lectures in block mode, to cater for the majority L1 English-speaking professionals, placed additional pressures on their comprehension: 'There is no time for you to process the information because it's really fast' (Felipe, Interview 2).

Problems related to lecturer delivery, then, suggest a misalignment between lecturer expectations and participant needs, causing comprehension difficulties.

6.2.3.ii. Learner-related factors

Apart from some participants' listening skill deficiencies, the major learner-related factors impacting on the participants' lecture comprehension were a lack of familiarity with subject matter and reticence to ask questions of lecturers or peers.

6.2.3.ii.a. Familiarity with subject matter

Most participants' lack of familiarity with their chosen discipline was a considerable barrier to their comprehension of lecture content. As stated in section 5.2.1.i, 9 out of the 18 participants chose Masters courses which had no relationship to their undergraduate degree or working background, while 3 chose courses with some previous connection. The change to a new discipline was consistently described as 'difficult' and created a need for these participants to master new concepts by themselves.

This challenge was clearly demonstrated through the experiences of two participants who had a partial connection to their previous studies and/or working experience. For Candy, who progressed from an undergraduate degree in Statistics to a Master of Financial Analysis: 'There is some connection. If something I learnt before, it's quite easy for me now. I also have some new knowledge, but this knowledge is not difficult for me' (Interview 2). In contrast, 'Accounting is quite difficult because I don't know Accounting from other degree. I have to learn how to do it' (Interview 2).

Similarly, Michael divided his Masters experience into two distinct categories on the basis of familiarity:

'With the Calculating [subjects], I'm very good at it. I understand almost every single word in the lecture because of my working experience. For the Economics for Management, I still not that good at it' (Interview 2).

Dara, who chose IT for her Masters study without a previous study or work background in the area, had foreknowledge of the need for additional learning because of advice from a former College and University student:

‘She said if you haven’t got the IT background, you have to spend more time to learn in those self-learning ways’ (Interview 2).

Differently from the other participants, this prior understanding supported Dara’s adjustment to her course.

An outlier experience early in the semester was that of Lisa, who had changed from a Bachelor degree in Hosting (somewhat like Event Management) to the quite different postgraduate course of Not-for-Profit and Social Enterprise Management. Despite the change in subject area being ‘a little bit hard’, this was more than balanced by the support Lisa received from her L1 English-speaking peers:

‘Our tutor and lecturers is very fantastic and we have a good communication in every class. And I think every class I have a little bit contribution for the whole class. And whole class is local student and a lot of them, they’re doing, working the NFP. Classmates always help me’ (Interview 2).

Her contribution as a student from China was valued, enhancing her sense of purposeful engagement:

‘My tutor let me make a video to introduce the University because she knows I was a host and we discuss a lot of difference between China and Australia. I think it’s very helpful and very encouraged me to keep doing it’ (Interview 2).

Overall, it appears that the downside of participants choosing an unfamiliar subject area to reset their career was an initial experience of disorientation as the lecture concepts proved difficult to master, necessitating autonomous learning to supplement lecture content.

6.2.3.ii.b. Reticence about seeking help

The reluctance or inability of most participants to seek help from lecturing staff exacerbated difficulties in understanding lecture content. For these participants, the prospect of asking a question in a lecture loomed as a frightening proposition best avoided, driving them into independent learning as the only

viable way of accessing content. Anxiety or fear of humiliation was mentioned by several participants as a disincentive to asking questions. Lois' comment was typical: 'Everyone raise his or her hand and try to participate in the class, but I keep quiet. I can't raise my hand because I afraid I will speak in wrong way or misunderstand' (Interview 2).

Embarrassment about language deficiencies was also mentioned by five other participants, who found the university lecturers less approachable than their EAP teachers: 'I'm a bit afraid to ask professor because they more look strict' (Hiroshi, Interview 2).

Mina explained her reticence to ask questions in a lecture in terms of the stark contrast to the academic culture in her Thai undergraduate degree:

'I'm still not used to it. When I study in Thailand, if I have a question, everyone else will look at me with, "Are you showing off?" Because no one say anything. When a teacher ask, "Does anyone have any questions?" just nothing. We don't speak much, don't give an opinion, don't speak up' (Interview 2).

In addition to their reticence about asking questions in a lecture, most participants felt unable to ask their L1 English-speaking peers for help and tended to communicate with international students from other countries if no L1 peers were available. For example, Lois, the Thai student studying Law, found that she was surrounded by L1 English speakers, with only one international student to compare notes with: 'I feel very lonely, but I have one friend from Indonesia. We talk each other, yeah, but she's only in one subject like me' (Interview 2). To place this in context, Lois clarified that in Thailand, she was accustomed to close peer support:

'I have many friends in Thailand. We normally study in group and we can discuss with the others something that we don't understand. This is totally different from the way in my country' (Interview 3).

Even though Felipe had strong oral and aural English skills, his lack of personal connections, including with previous students, prevented the collaborative approach in his Colombian studies:

‘In Colombia, it was really easy because I had a lot of networking. Always, always, always I had at least one or often more people who already closed that subject. So I was really, really really prepared. Here I am alone’ (Interview 2).

A lesser challenge in this respect was experienced by Frank and Annie, who described themselves as independent by nature, but still felt isolated as they had no L1 peers. As the Chinese student Frank explained: ‘At first I feel alone when I come to GMP. I don’t know where I can get help and ask anyone about any question’ (Interview 2). However, over time, growing friendships with other international students helped him to create a support network. Annie, the only Vietnamese student in her Public Health course, remained without peer support, but her maturity and ease with independent study appear to have sustained her despite feeling ‘sometimes a little lonely’ (Interview 2).

A slightly different situation prompting independent action occurred for the Japanese student Hiroshi, who had readily sought help during his EAP course from his teacher and more capable classmates. At the University, however, he was cast onto his own resources because, apart from fearing the more remote university lecturers, his Chinese friends from the College were similarly confused about the subject matter: ‘They also struggle. They told me, “I don’t understand”, so I didn’t ask them’ (Interview 2). As a result, Hiroshi felt he had no alternative but to operate independently: ‘I just did it by myself’ (Interview 2).

The common element in this analysis is that a number of participants were unable to check the meaning of lecture content due to reticence about asking the lecturer and/or a sense of isolation from potential sources of help amongst their peers, driving them to seek understanding through their own efforts.

6.2.4. Summary of challenges with understanding lecture content

It proved difficult for the great majority of participants to understand lecture content in the early phase of their postgraduate studies. As lecture content was a vital source of core subject matter, the participants recognised the need to engage in independent learning.

The participants were faced with quite a different approach to content delivery than in their undergraduate studies, where contact hours were longer, lectures communicated detailed content in their L1, there was less supplementary reading, and the tasks were explicitly outlined. Listening comprehension difficulties were foremost among the factors contributing to the participants' lack of understanding. Other interrelated factors were the form of lecture delivery, lack of familiarity with a new subject area, and reticence about asking for clarification from lecturers or peers.

6.3. Completing assignment tasks

While some of the participants' challenges with completing assignment tasks were similar to those involved in understanding lecture content, a rather different picture of student experience emerges. Unlike their lecture experience, the participants felt supported with their assignment work, primarily due to the intensive teaching of assignment skills in the EAP course. The scaffolding of assignment tasks by some university lecturers also reduced the sense of uncertainty and degree of challenge for the participants. However, assignments were still viewed as daunting obstacles with high-stake outcomes. This analysis outlines key findings as follows:

- Impact of EAP learnings
- Institutional and learner-related factors affecting assignment experience
- Differences across subject areas.

Findings about the first two areas are based on interview data, while findings related to the third area emerge from the triangulation of interview data with subject documentation. Together, this analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the participants' challenges with assignment tasks in their first semester and the degree to which they perceived a need to engage in independent learning.

6.3.1. Impact of EAP course on postgraduate assignment experiences

The influence of EAP instruction on participant experience of postgraduate assignments was significant, so an initial overview of this factor will be conducted. However, the ameliorating impact of lecturers' assignment scaffolding on the need for participants to engage in strategy implementation will be discussed in Chapter 7, as this support formed part of the context for strategy use.

On completing the EAP course, virtually all the participants nominated the learning of assignment skills, including academic English writing skills, as the most valuable and relevant aspect for their University studies:

'I think it's useful, it's much important, because I don't know how to write an essay. In China, it's the different structure, different information, how to write an essay. If I learn this in the College, my university assignment maybe more easily writing' (Candy, Interview 1).

'The writing is useful. The assignment. The work on how I should write in the assignment – the reporting verbs, like that. Concession, reflection. I think I could use all of them in my Master degree because I've never done that before' (Mina, Interview 1).

Typical of the broader cohort, these participants clearly valued the perceived relevance of College assignment tasks for future University studies, particularly due to their lack of familiarity with these skills from the L1 environment. As reflected in the above two comments, assignment-related skills included instruction in specific genres and linguistic forms in written academic English.

Further evidence comes in later interviews, where several participants offered comparisons between former EAP students and international students who had entered university by other means. Tony, for example, linked the graduated learning of genres in the EAP course to these students' increased confidence with University assessments:

'Now at university, you can easily find which students come from the College and which are not. The report writing and some skills, presentation, it's really help us to finish our assessments right now. We

already know what the structure the lecturer want us to write. The other Chinese students, there's nothing familiar. Ten weeks or twenty weeks in the College, we gradually accept this huge information, but for them, they have to immediately' (Interview 2).

Candy explained the value of academic writing skills taught in the EAP course through the example of a Vietnamese peer who entered via a language test score:

'Her writing is not academic. She have a great English so she don't have to study in the College, but she don't know how to write' (Interview 2).

Dara's metaphoric description of the EAP course as 'a bridge' (Interview 2), encapsulates the view of most participants, that the EAP course provided useful skills for academic transition, particularly in relation to assignment writing.

6.3.2. Other factors affecting postgraduate assignment experience

Despite the useful EAP preparation for assignment work at the University, knowledge and skill gaps still existed for the participants, requiring additional effort on their part, although these gaps were not as dramatic as for understanding lecture content. Similarly, affective issues were certainly present, but not as overwhelming as the anxiety about accessing lecture content. For this reason, discussion of affective issues will be integrated within an analysis of factors affecting postgraduate assignment experience, rather than explored separately as before. Once again, core assignment issues for the participants will be analysed according to institutional and learner-related factors, followed in this case by an analysis of areas of difficulty with some disciplinary associations.

6.3.2.i. Institutional factors

6.3.2.i.a. Lack of experience with assignment tasks

Assignment tasks constituted a substantial, if varying, part of the participants' assessment weighting. However, as outlined in section 5.3.1, most of the participants had commenced their University studies with only limited

experience of assignments. Moreover, 14 of the 18 participants had only completed two assignments in the EAP course, and the other 4 participants a maximum of 6 each. While there were oral and written assessments in the EAP course, requiring participants to organise their study priorities, at the University, the number and intensity of demands were considerably greater:

‘I think it’s different now because when I’m in the College, it’s less stressful. But now we have so many assignments to do, so many due dates one by one’ (Tony, Interview 2).

The frequency of university assignments impacted on the rhythm and pace of the participants’ work throughout the semester, imbuing it with a relentless quality:

‘In China, we just go to the class and finish the final exam and that’s that. But in Australia, you need to go to class and do groupwork and assignments. Never stops’ (Frank, Interview 3).

Additional time and effort were required for the participants to meet their assignment challenges: ‘If local people use only one hour [for assignments], maybe for me three hours’ (Lois, Interview 2).

The pressure to continue studying at the required intensity to meet task requirements was evident in the slouched postures and stressed responses of Mina (MBA) and Lois (Law). Mina’s emotive language expressed strain - ‘OMG, it was so hard... it took me so long...’ (Interview 2) - while Lois made it clear that the continuous assignment demands took her to the edge of her resilience:

‘The first subject to submit I will start first and just finish this one and start next one. But during this time that I doing my research, brain strain and everything, I think I will die! It’s very tough. Every day, I just sit in my room and not going anywhere. I stay up to 3am or 2am. I have not much time to do my research. I didn’t experience this before. It’s very bad’ (Lois, Interview 2).

For these two participants and others, daunting assignment demands based on research and extensive reading were ‘totally different’ to their L1 undergraduate assessments (Mina, Interview 2). For the Communications student, Joanne,

there was also a stark difference between her current course assessments, consisting only of assignments and presentations, and the L1 system, featuring explicit guidance by tutors, examination-based assessment and relatively undemanding assignment tasks:

‘[In China,] the teacher will tell you some information about the exam. You just need to remember that before the exam. We usually use one or two days for that. And for the assignment, it’s very short, and we don’t need to write the references. The assignment is just what you think, you write’ (Interview 2).

Exceptions to the number of assignments at the University occurred in some IT and calculation-based Finance subjects, where the seven participants had more tests than assignments. However, three participants in this group also took subjects with a substantial assignment component.

6.3.2.i.b. Lack of knowledge of assessment system

For a few participants, a lack of experience with assignments extended to a lack of understanding of the assessment system at the University. For instance, Joanne (Communications) and Sam (Nursing) arrived at the ELICOS college assuming that, as in China, they would receive good grades if they developed a friendly relationship with the teacher. Sam described this as ‘national Chinese bureaucratic company stuff. Relationship, it may affect your score’ (Interview 3). Sam’s continued belief in the power of teacher-student relationships throughout the first semester affected his strategy choices, while Joanne adjusted to merit-based grading in the EAP course. While Sam’s outlook in his first semester remained unchanged, for Joanne, the conflicting cultural norms led her to reflect on the role of diligence in assessment grading:

‘You know, I work very hard and I want to get a good mark. It’s very different in China. If the teacher know you are very hardworking, the teacher will say, “Oh, I can give you a pass!” But in Australia, they will be fair to every student, the equal chance’ (Interview 2).

Joanne's processing of these culture-based differences is therefore proposed as another form of independent learning. Joanne experienced another misunderstanding related to assessment procedures, when she submitted an assignment of poor quality on time, but without informing her lecturer that she had been suffering from chicken pox. Her actions followed norms in China, where, according to Joanne, on-time submission was mandatory to develop student resilience.

Lack of familiarity with academic customs and procedures, then, necessitated additional learning by participants, which in Sam's case likely extended beyond the first semester.

6.3.2.i.c. Skills not taught in EAP course

Tasks proved to be particularly difficult if the relevant skills had not been introduced in the EAP course. This difficulty applied to two main areas: theory-based analysis and online searching skills.

All four participants completing an MBA assignment commented that the requirement for analysis based on two self-selected theories was very challenging as theory-based analysis was not part of the EAP course. In Andrew's words:

'I'm not sure this is correct. In the College, it's not use theories, it's just analyse according to criteria and use some suggestion' (Interview 2).

The additional difficulty of this type of analysis was explained conceptually by another participant in terms of the need to understand the subjective nature of theories and then apply them analytically:

'[The theories] have different points of view. For the Master, they all require the critical thinking. That's what you have to do, otherwise you won't get a good mark' (Michael, Interview 2).

'Critical thinking' here is used by Michael to refer to analysis based on different perspectives external to the student (here, theoretical principles), raising the difficulty level relative to EAP assignments. Other examples of difficulty with

application of theory were reported in a business case study and an economics task which required analysis of the US-China trade war using economic models.

A further, rather significant gap resulted from the failure of the EAP course to teach participants online searching techniques. As a result, searching for resources in the postgraduate context was described as ‘difficult for us to capture’ (Nancy, Interview 2). Indeed, Sam posed the rhetorical question: ‘The University and College are directly connected, so why they don’t teach us these practical things?’ (Interview 2).

6.3.2.ii. Learner-related factors

Key learner-related factors influencing participants’ ability to complete assignment tasks were a perceived lack of task clarity and language issues, exacerbated by negative affect. The perception that a task lacked clarity appeared to be due to non-specific instructions and/or skill deficiencies of the participants. Section 6.3.2.ii.a will report on these two sources of difficulty.

6.3.2.ii.a. ‘Unclear’ tasks

A perceived lack of clarity in assignment tasks led to stress and confusion for many of the participants, causing them to enquire further in order to understand the task requirements. Tasks were typically labelled as ‘unclear’ if they were seen to be lacking in detail, whether that applied to the task description, information about the required textual form, or the absence of a model as had been provided at the College. Given that the participants’ knowledge of academic genres was generally limited to a few core genres from the EAP course, the absence of explicit guidance was challenging for them. For example, Annie described her task as difficult because ‘my teacher just say, “You have to do that”. Just say content, this is the question, no ideas about format and other things. You have to think and create’ (Interview 2). This placed pressure on the participants to determine how to construct their response. Tony and his Chinese peers became ‘very worried’ about the appropriate form of an early-semester Engineering assignment: ‘We didn’t know the structure of the assignment, so it’s very uncertain’ (Interview 2).

However, what was 'unclear' to the participants could sometimes be attributed to a lack of familiarity. This difficulty can be shown through the struggles of the Chinese MBA students Andrew and Lisa to understand two key terms in their assignment task, 'managing' and 'stewardship'. The issue appears to have been both linguistic and cultural in nature, as the two words correspond to one Mandarin character. However, different pedagogical approaches between the EAP and postgraduate courses also became apparent in Lisa's comment:

'I tried ask my tutor and my tutor said, "Oh, it's a very good question. You can explore by yourself" (*laughing*). At the College, if you have the specific question, you can ask the teacher until you understand it. But now, you should study by yourself. And you don't know which one is the right answer. It's a process of study' (Interview 2).

Lisa noted the postgraduate need for self-directed effort to resolve the lexical issue. However, she did not yet appreciate the epistemological difference between, on the one hand, the postgraduate need to explore a range of definitions and, on the other hand, the expectation of one objectively correct definition in the EAP course (and implicitly her L1 education as well). The postgraduate course, therefore, required her to be more independent in terms of self-directed effort and critical thinking about the range of definitions in the literature.

Similarly, Sanit described his task of theory-based analysis of a business case study as unclear, but on closer examination, his confusion related more to a skill-based difficulty in accessing information from a variety of sources and applying it to the case in a synthesised form:

'To be honest, I don't understand the question, it's quite indirect. You have to find the answer from different places. And after I take from somewhere else and I have to put together and analyse in my brain' (Interview 3).

In closing, when participants described their assignment task as unclear, this often meant a perceived lack of explicit instruction about the appropriate writing format or analytical requirements. However, in most cases, the problem is better attributed to a lack of task familiarity. Whatever the cause, participants needed to clarify the task through their own efforts.

6.3.2.ii.b. Language issues

There were three main areas of linguistic challenge mentioned by the participants in relation to assignment work:

- Decoding an assignment task
- Writing a clear academic response
- Paraphrasing (especially in technical subjects).

Firstly, lexical confusion made it difficult for some participants to understand the assignment task. One example of this has already been explained in relation to the difference between ‘managing’ and ‘stewardship’ in an MBA task. Another interesting example, that of Frank in his GMP assignment, reveals the difficulty in understanding a technical task due to the preponderance of English homonyms:

‘This course, every vocab have different meanings, but especially in medical-industrial, it’s more likely. Some normal words have some academic meaning, some specific meaning in this industrial. For example, “concentration”. In my mind, I concentrate on that, but in medical-industrial, it’s about the percentage of the things in the liquid’ (Interview 2).

Like Frank, the Nursing student Sam found it difficult to start his assignment task because of language issues, but in his case, it triggered his pre-existing procrastination and anxiety issues:

‘Two weeks before the assignment due, I open my laptop lid, like hundred of times. I want to write it, but find any process of, like, reading, finding the article, or finding the key words of the assignment, to paraphrase, could make me feel difficult’ (Interview 2).

The combination of linguistic issues and information overload paralysed Sam into inaction:

‘I think it’s mainly about the language obstacle, language barrier. You may feel difficult to start, especially when there’s thousand of articles and you don’t know which key word you need to put into a searching engine, then find which article, which paragraph to read’ (Interview 2).

Ultimately, though, Sam saw his procrastination habit as a personal failing: 'When it comes to your study, you need to respond for your gaining of knowledge. I feel I'm not so responsible for myself' (Interview 2).

A second linguistic issue mentioned by several participants is a difficulty in explaining their intended meaning in a satisfactory academic form. This issue was described as frustrating and time-consuming due to their limited knowledge of lexical and syntactical academic forms. In Joanne's case: 'I understand the content, but I don't know how to write and explain that. I can explain that in Chinese, maybe, and maybe in speaking English. Just the academic writing is the most problem' (Joanne, Interview 3).

The contrast of L2 awkwardness with the ease of L1 expression was also expressed by Felipe, in terms of the effort involved in creating a coherent and concise written response:

'Writing is horrible. I was really frustrated. I have to use more words than I will use in my language. So I have to be more general to say one specific thing, and here I have to be really specific because I only have 1,000 words, or 1,500 words or whatever. In Spanish, I'm very specific, but in English, I don't have the words to say the same thing' (Interview 2).

Thirdly, difficulties with paraphrasing were mentioned by participants in technical fields, where the frequency of specific terminology placed pressure on the need to avoid plagiarism. This was the case for the IT student Mary, whose group had a high similarity rating of 40% for their draft assignment response:

'It's two really academic articles and they have many specific words. So we can't change this word, but when we use this word too often, we have a very high similarity' (Interview 2).

Language issues, then, pervaded several areas of participant experience, impacting on their ability to understand a task and express understanding of core concepts in an academically acceptable way. Together, these challenges required the participants to engage in time-consuming, independent work to clarify and fulfil the task requirements.

6.3.2.iii. Task alignment

Within the broader experience outlined above, differences emerged across the cohort based on two key factors:

- Conceptual and skill-based demands of tasks
- Participants' grasp of task requirements and ability to fulfil them.

Data from subject documentation (Subject Outline and assessment task guidelines for the targeted task) were triangulated with the participants' interview comments about the subject and targeted task. In order to bring clarity to a complex landscape, participant experiences will be organised into three categories:

1. Substantial alignment of understanding with task requirements, despite minor skill challenges
2. Partial alignment of understanding with task requirements, with some conceptual misunderstandings and/or skill challenges
3. Substantial difficulty aligning with task requirements, especially with core subject principles and skill requirements.

6.3.2.iii.a. Substantial alignment of conceptual understanding

A substantial alignment of participant understanding with conceptual demands generally occurred when past educational experiences helped to familiarise participants with the cognitive and skill requirements of a task and, in most cases, where the task itself was not overly demanding. For example, the literature review task of IT students Mary and Dara reminded them of the College writing exam, in that both tasks required comparison of two articles, with some critical assessment, in a literature review format. The task's purpose was explained in lectures and the Subject Outline as research-based preparation for a project proposal which would be implemented the following semester. This communication of the purpose was reflected in the Subject Outline through task verbs 'critically evaluate' and 'construct (research report)'. The group nature of the assignment also decreased the difficulty level. As Mary commented afterwards: 'It's easy ... even more easy than the College' (Interview 3). Similarly, Dara's detailed account of the steps in her analysis

conveyed a familiarity with the cognitive aspects of the task. The main difficulties these two participants experienced were more of form than content – for Mary, paraphrasing despite a preponderance of technical terms, and for Dara, determining the textual format due to variations from the College version.

Other examples of participants with a firm grasp of the key conceptual and linguistic requirements of a task were Frank (GMP), Lois (Law), Annie (Public Health) and Felipe (Property Development). The first three of these were familiar with the subject area from their L1 undergraduate degree, while Felipe understood the broader skill requirements of synthesised analysis and explanation, but felt uneasy about his content knowledge due to a lack of previous disciplinary experience.

For both Lois (Law) and Annie (Public Health), the postgraduate tasks required lengthy, synthesised evaluative analysis after extensive research. In Lois' subject, Corporate Governance, the requirement for higher order thinking is specified in the Subject Learning Outcome (SLO) task verbs: 'apply their advanced understanding', 'evaluate and compare', and more broadly in the Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs): 'critical analysis and evaluation', as well as research skills and communication. Close parallels are seen in the SLO task verbs for Annie's subject, Social Perspectives for Public Health: 'critically appraise', 'evaluate' and 'apply (theoretical perspectives)', while the combined CILOs and Graduate Attributes refer to 'reflective critical thinking to enable critical appraisal of current practice, policy and research'.

Despite their difficulty level, both tasks resembled the participants' previous L1 tasks in related fields. The analytical approach required in Lois' Corporate Governance assignment was familiar from her L1 Law degree and the content from her L1 MBA degree. Annie's Public Health task had similarities to the final research report for her L1 degree. Furthermore, both participants displayed an ease with complex analytical thinking. In Lois' words:

'In Thailand, I love writing in my language, analysing. I think here if I can understand the question, I can do the research. Critical thinking, I think that's very important. We have to think deeply, deeply, to know what is the best answer for the business' (Interview 3).

With this task aligned to many of her academic strengths, Lois was able to engage fully with the Corporate Governance task, although she found the dense legal language in articles difficult to comprehend. Similarly, Annie conveyed her understanding of the task by describing how she produced a synthesised analysis 'just all in my head' (Interview 2) and explaining her strategy of 'follow[ing] the criteria to get the mark' (Interview 2).

In short, while this group still had substantial challenges with their tasks, familiarity and skill strengths enabled them to understand the requirements and engage with them.

6.3.2.iii.b. Partial alignment with conceptual task requirements

Five participants had a broad understanding of task requirements, but skill gaps with a conceptual dimension impeded their efforts. For example, Nancy (Marketing), Sam (Nursing) and Andrew (MBA) struggled to understand the requirement for an evidence-based argument, both in terms of concept and implementation. Indeed, Nancy failed her assignment on digital marketing due to her failure to support points with citations, despite this statement in the task guidelines: 'Remember to justify your recommendations based [on] your research'.

Sam had a greater awareness than Nancy of the need for an evidence-based discourse, contrasting it favourably with his previous education and life in China:

'The most academic thing I've used is Wikipedia, the most academic thing. People in China, they are always affected by the fake science. But what I found is evidence base. I can search more articles. It gives more confident, more credit' (Interview 2).

However, Sam did not know how to position himself as a student within the knowledge base, implying that the broader concept of evidence-based discourse was there, but not sufficient understanding of its application: 'I've never done this before. I had difficulty in finding the boundary between me saying and the evidence' (Interview 2). In Sam's case, the task guidelines highlight application of content knowledge to patient needs, requiring students

to ‘align your critique with evidence-based references (e.g. texts and journal articles)’. The need for reference to an external source is also embedded in the Subject Outline of the relevant subject, as each SLO is linked to a specific industry Standard of Practice. Sam’s difficulty in this area, therefore, went to the heart of the subject’s core Nursing principles.

In a somewhat similar vein, Kevin was aware of the need for analysis in his Economics assignment, but he did not fulfil this requirement because his skills, even in Mandarin, were limited to description. The importance of analysis is reflected in the Subject Outline, where SLO’s require students to ‘select, manipulate and interpret economic data to analyse economic conditions and developments’. Therefore, the disjuncture between Kevin’s limited understanding of analysis and the task requirements impacted on his ability to satisfactorily complete the task.

6.3.2.iii.c. Substantial difficulty aligning with task requirements

There were two main reasons for participants’ substantial misalignment with task requirements:

- Task difficulty relative to their skillset
- A failure to understand the purpose of a task.

Firstly, some participants were simply overwhelmed by the number of unfamiliar concepts and skills they needed to master. This was true to varying extents for three of the four participants doing the MBA task, which required participants to write a ‘critically informed, academically persuasive report’ of 2,500 words about an organisation with questionable ethical practices, utilising two theories. The Subject Outline features a strongly worded discourse linking students’ use of critical thinking to the leadership value of ‘self-responsibility’. Core principles were thereby embedded in both the subject description and task.

Interestingly, participants did not question these values, but they struggled with the number and range of skill demands. For example, Lisa and Mina failed to use independently accessed academic sources - Lisa because she felt overwhelmed by the task, and Mina because she did not know how to access

academic sources. Lecturer feedback to Lisa, Mina and Michael was that they all had insufficient theory in their analysis. Interview data suggest that Mina and Michael lacked the requisite analytical skills, while Lisa did not attend the lectures where theories were explained and did not understand them. Neither Andrew nor Lisa realised that arguments must be supported by evidence, while Michael was so burdened by time management issues that he copied excerpts from media articles and failed as a result.

Similarly, in Sanit's IT subject, broader time management issues and an inability to understand relevant lecture content or theories required in his task combined to obscure his focus. In terms of conceptual understanding, 'I couldn't understand because it's theory and theory is difficult to get. We can't imagine what that thing is, so it take more time' (Interview 2). Because of this lack of theoretical understanding, 'It was hard to explain the case study' (Interview 3). The requirement of critical analysis is explained in the Subject Outline as preparing students for presenting business with IT proposals, and is highlighted in the SLO task verbs, three of the six being 'evaluate' or 'assess'. Meeting these requirements was very difficult due to Sanit's limited experience of synthesised tasks and theory-based analysis. Therefore, participants in these two subjects struggled with multiple unfamiliar task demands, within the context of course pressures.

The second major reason for participants experiencing substantial misalignment with core subject requirements was an initial lack of clarity about a task's purpose. In Joanne's case, she understood the core research focus of her Communications subject, expressed in the Subject Outline as 'integrating research into strategic communication projects for diverse organisations'. However, Joanne was confused about the purpose of her research task, until the lecturer explained to her that 'the structure is to find what the problem and to explore the reasons, then give the suggestions. Now I know why I do that' (Interview 2).

A similar problem is highlighted by the contrast between two of Tony's assignments in an Engineering subject: Task 2 (developing a research question), which he described as 'very difficult' and Task 3 (a literature review), which was termed 'not difficult for me' (Interview 3). Although a statement in the

Subject Outline defines the purpose of Task 2 as ‘to identify knowledge gaps and prepare a project proposal’, Tony did not understand the lecture explanations, felt overwhelmed and was confused by the task’s purpose. Task 3 was considerably longer and more complex, but heavily scaffolded and familiar from the College examination, with the purpose explained by a personal Supervisor. Interestingly, Tony framed this as a difference in pedagogical approach between an outcome-based system in China, where the whole task would have been clarified at the outset, and Australia, which he saw as more process-driven.

This section has revealed varying degrees of misalignment with subject tasks, revealed through analysis of interviews and subject documentation. These difficulties were primarily due to conceptual and skill difficulties, which relate back to the core issue of a lack of familiarity. There was a loose correlation of conceptual issues with more discursive, theory-based courses like Law and MBA, rather than technical courses like GMP, Nursing and IT. However, a simplistic categorisation based on these disciplinary differences would obscure the effects of other factors discussed in the above analysis.

6.3.3. Summary of assignment challenges

Although EAP instruction bridged some gaps in the participants’ assignment skills, they still encountered a number of difficulties. The unfamiliar intensity of study demands throughout the semester, associated with a succession of assignment tasks, placed pressure on the participants and led to affective challenges. Moreover, a misunderstanding of tasks, due to language issues and the requirement for skills not taught in the EAP course, caused confusion and stress for several participants. Tasks involving substantial critical thinking and synthesis of ideas were perceived as particularly difficult.

6.4. Summary of Chapter 6

The experiential landscape of participants in relation to understanding and engaging with assignments proved to be somewhat different from that of understanding lecture content, largely due to the greater scaffolding of

assignment skills in the EAP course. In both cases, though, a lack of familiarity underpinned difficulties faced by the participants. In the case of lectures, linguistic issues made it difficult for the participants to comprehend the rapid, often idiomatic delivery of content, and this difficulty was exacerbated by their reluctance to ask for help. In relation to assignment tasks, the degree of difficulty of lengthy tasks requiring critical analysis and extended argumentation challenged the participants' skillset gained largely from their EAP course. Affective issues were a feature of participants' experience in both lecture-related and assignment tasks. However, with reference to the emergent Strategic Self-learning Model, the participants' strong self-directed goal of passing (Learning for Self) generated a determination to resolve academic issues in their own way.

Chapter 7 outlines the participants' strategy implementation in response to these challenges. It highlights the participants' resourceful, strategic responses in the Learning-by-Self phase of the model, fostering their development as independent learners.

Chapter 7: Strategy Use as an Exercise of Learner Independence

7.1. Introduction

Chapter Seven outlines the major strategies used by the participants in response to challenges in two core postgraduate tasks: understanding lecture content and completing an assignment task. It follows on from the previous chapter's explanation of academic challenges in these two areas. The findings about the participants' extensive strategy use in this chapter provide important evidence of their engagement in independent learning in the postgraduate context. Based on Oxford's (2017) definition, L2 learning strategies require some degree of conscious intention and a purpose, and they are orchestrated flexibly to meet task needs. Strategy use, therefore, corresponds to key notions of independent learning, as an active study approach in which students assume responsibility for their own learning. (See sections 2.5.1.1-ii and 10.3.1.ii for further explanation.) This chapter's analysis of factors contributing to the participants' strategy implementation is relevant to their self-perceived task needs in the Learning-for-Self phase of the Strategic Self-learning Model, while findings about the nature of their strategy use informs understanding of Learning by Self. Together, they provide important information about how the participants developed into independent learners.

Key features of Oxford's (2017) strategic self-regulation model will structure and inform understanding of interview comments, including the three-stage task framework of forethought, performance and self-reflection for assignment tasks and the notion of metastrategies for strategy management. As with the previous findings chapters, this analysis adopts a complexity theory outlook which acknowledges the interrelationship of factors in a complex system.

7.2. Strategy use for understanding lecture content

Chapters 5 and 6 outlined the significant challenges faced by the participants as they transitioned from the direct, detailed communication of information in their L1 educational context, through the heavily scaffolded EAP course, to the initial

shock of lecture delivery at the University. In order to fulfil their self-directed academic goals (Learning for Self), participants needed to access lecture-based disciplinary content. Participants' skill gaps led them to engage in substantial strategy use, regarded here as an exercise of independent learning, or Learning by Self. The data from Interviews 2 and 3 reveal two main lecture-related strategies used by the participants:

- Implementation of a preview-lecture-review framework to support listening comprehension during the actual lecture
- Translation of lecture slides into the L1.

Other strategies, often used in combination, were inference, seeking help and independent research.

7.2.1. Key lecture-related strategies

7.2.1.i. Preview-lecture-review framework

Most participants commented that previewing and/or reviewing lecture materials helped compensate for their weak listening comprehension skills. Unlike the actual lecture, this access to content via reading could be done in their own time. However, under multiple study pressures, few of the participants adopted the full preview-lecture-review framework or maintained it for long. Their strategic decisions in this regard were also influenced by whether the three-phase framework was presented to students as essential or optional, with the Business and IT staff most insistent in this regard.

For those who did regularly implement the process over several weeks, this became a multi-staged, agentic process of building and deepening knowledge, as shown by the examples of Mary, Candy and Hiroshi. All had weak language skills, but a strong, career-related motivation to succeed. While Mary and Hiroshi had achieved poor L1 undergraduate outcomes which they now sought to redress, the impetus for Candy was to reset her career after an unsatisfactory job experience in China. For all three, then, a strong motivational drive gave strategy implementation an urgent, affective quality. This is clear in Mary's statement of intent, spoken in a loud, determined tone:

‘I have to learn by myself, I need to learn, I want to learn, that’s my choice. I think maybe I changed ... What I say is study’ (Interview 2).

Mary’s new commitment to her studies is reflected linguistically in the repetition of ‘I’ and use of high modality verbs, and her commitment was manifested through a systematic approach to understanding lectures. However, Mary prioritised implementation of the three-phase approach to one subject, in which she found the lecturer’s Indian accent unintelligible:

‘I was not a good student before, not only the grades, but also some ways I deal with my study. Now I think I can do something with my work. Before the class, I can preview something, the textbook and the website. After class, I download the Powerpoint slide and translate to Chinese and learn it by myself’ (Interview 2).

Mary’s sense of agency and autonomy as she regulated her behaviour parallels Hiroshi’s new commitment to his studies: ‘I didn’t do before. I must do now because I can’t follow. If I didn’t do, I can’t follow’ (Interview 2). Hiroshi’s disciplined efforts led to progressively improved comprehension:

‘I prepare, preview and review a lot. Before going to the lecture, I read the textbook and slides. In preview, I can understand general idea. And then I go to lecture, then I get more detail. And then I can feel what the lecturer’s saying and what is this meaning. And also I review what the lecturer said and what the slides about, more detail, you know. But it’s still pretty hard!’ (Interview 2).

The developmental benefits of the three-phase process were also highlighted by another Finance student, Candy, who noted the importance of learning disciplinary language and content: ‘We have a lot of thing to do. But when I do this thing, I learn the language, and when I input my time, I output my knowledge’ (Interview 2). Candy reported that the preview-lecture-review process increased her understanding to 90% of the lecture content, as opposed to 60% without it.

In all three cases, then, the strategy sequence of the three-phase procedure appeared to support the participants’ adjustment process. This strategic

approach is clearly metacognitive in nature as it required participant awareness of their linguistic deficiencies relative to lecture demands and organisation of strategy implementation, involving access of useful materials and management of their use through coordinated strategies. However, this strategy framework likely also had affective and motivational purposes for the participants, pacifying their concerns and driving them towards their academic and career-related goals.

On the other hand, Kevin and Frank, two participants with stronger English skills who also utilised the three-phase procedure, had a more dispassionate attitude. They, too, were driven by career ambitions, but their choice of a methodical system was explicitly linked to personal preferences for a systematic approach rather than urgent needs. For example, Frank's choice of this procedure aligned with his perceived academic and personal strengths:

'I like to do that because I think I can. I have the capability to do a thing and I can do better than other people because I have higher capability and I work harder. So I think I should do better than other people and should be able to do it by myself' (Interview 3).

For both participants, strategy use, while clearly metacognitive in nature, had cognitive and motivational purposes, but lacked the affective component of the previously discussed group of participants. This difference appears to be attributable to both personality and skill-based factors.

The review of lecture slides also had an important function of content revision for assessment purposes in the cases of four participants. The experiences of Nancy and Sanit demonstrate the stress of independent strategy implementation under pressure. Both faced impending assessments – Sanit an assignment due in three days' time and Nancy two upcoming mid-semester examinations. In both cases, the participants anxiously realised that they did not understand the lecture content sufficiently, driving them into intensive review of the lecture slides. Motivational and affective drivers were clearly present in both cases. In Nancy's case:

'Before the mid-term exam, I have to understand everything although I don't understand! First, I just review all the things for five lectures, the

knowledge, just the Powerpoint and the reading, maybe some sources that the tutor give it to me, to the class. I still feel the time is limited 'cos when you read the articles in English, your speed is very slow. I try my best to read as much as possible, but I still cannot finish, so I feel very nervous and afraid when I attend the exam' (Interview 2).

As Sanit reported, the effort involved in lecture revision consumed additional time:

'I have to learn it by myself to understand it. I read the stuff in the lecture slides, Powerpoint, and I also I had to watch the Youtube video to get more understand. So I had to do that extra, by myself. I spent around three hours' (Interview 2).

Therefore, the preview-lecture-review strategy tended to be implemented in more urgent situations where it was needed for vital knowledge acquisition, pointing to the key role of contextual factors in the participants' strategy design.

7.2.1.ii. Modification of preview-lecture-review strategies

There was widespread evidence of flexible and individualised strategy use, whereby participants modified their strategy use according to shifting needs. When the three-phase framework was recommended by lecturers, it was agentically viewed by the participants as a set of options rather than rules. These were contingent choices made within the specific context of a subject's demands, dependent on the provision of requisite materials: 'Before I go to the class, I can scan what we need to learn in this lecture. Some subjects yes Powerpoint, some no. Some before, some after' (Joanne, Interview 2).

For most of the participants, changes in their use of strategies based on the preview-lecture-review framework came after thoughtful reflection. This strategy modification will be illustrated through the examples of Joanne and Dara, subsequently contrasted with that of Lisa. Dara carefully monitored the effectiveness of her strategy system relative to her goal of understanding IT content and her constant time constraints. After a few weeks, she changed from reading slides after lectures to reading them beforehand: 'You always chasing

the tutor's step. It's not good for me' (Interview 2). Associated with this change was a decision to move her seating position to the centre of the lecture room for better concentration, rather than positioning herself near the doors for a quick, convenient exit. Dara's change from reviewing to previewing lecture slides was clearly metacognitive in nature, redirecting her learning approach after careful consideration.

A similar example of thoughtful, individualised redesign of strategy use, but on the larger scale of the shift from the L1 to the Australian postgraduate setting, is Joanne's experience. Seeking to retain her useful habit of lecture note-taking and slide review from China, Joanne asked the University lecturer in the first class to provide the Powerpoint slides after lectures. However, when the lecturer responded by providing the slides *before* lectures, Joanne embraced this change and modified her approach: 'It's good. Before I go to the class, I can scan what we need to learn in this lecture' (Interview 2). Joanne thereby implemented metacognitive strategies to understand lectures, supported by a metasocial strategy which drew on her innate sociability. She modified a methodical approach learnt in China for optimal effectiveness in the postgraduate setting.

The thoughtful, dispassionate metacognitive decision-making of Joanne and Dara in changing their lecture-based strategies can be contrasted with Lisa's more affective drivers. After an enthusiastic start to the semester, Lisa found herself more interested in tutorials than lectures due to their interactive nature, and this attitude impacted on Lisa's strategy choices. She prioritised preparation for tutorials over lectures: 'I need to preview the case so I can talk in the class'. She also began to miss lectures 'because it's not required to have interaction, and the slides show every theories. If you miss one, you can check the slides and get some information'. The opportunity to review the video version of the lecture was taken twice by Lisa, 'but it's too long and only have a Powerpoint screen with talking, no people there' (Interview 3). Lisa's strategic choices contributed to her barely passing her assignment, as she had missed the theory explanation available in lectures.

Therefore, while most participants implemented carefully considered variations of a preview-lecture-review framework to understand lecture content, Lisa

provides an interesting outlier example. Affective and social drivers appear to have impacted significantly on her metastrategic decisions, demonstrating the holistic nature of strategy use and the implications of certain choices.

7.2.1.iii. Translation strategies

One of the most effective ways that participants supported their understanding of lecture content was through extensive and flexible use of translation strategies for decoding lecture materials. Translation strategies ranged from complete translation of lecture slides and associated reading materials to the use of a bilingual dictionary for key words, with variation across tasks and the cohort.

Complete translation in the form of machine translation was described by participants as an increasingly viable option due to technological developments in software like Google Translate or, for most of the Chinese students, Youdao: 'I click a whole paragraph, and it appears in Mandarin. The translation is much better in recent years. It's not very far away. We can understand it' (Sam, Interview 3). Despite the widespread use of Youdao by the Chinese participants, their accounts of its use were often delivered with a wry grin or laughter, betraying embarrassment. As Nancy stated, 'In fact, all of the Chinese students do that! *(laughing)* It's a quick way for you to understand the sentence and the whole article' (Interview 2).

One key function of machine translation was to build on existing knowledge learnt in the L1, as explained by the Nursing student Sam: 'When we are doing the reading prework, we really want to understand some connection in Chinese to previous learning, like organs, pancreas, heart that we already know in Chinese' (Interview 3). Machine translation, then, facilitated graduated learning through a form of self-scaffolding.

Machine translation was generally used as a convenient option for a particularly difficult situation. Most participants utilised it as a fallback position after trying another method, as is explained in section 7.2.1.iv, while a few used machine translation automatically for challenging subjects. Mary, for instance, used it regularly in an IT subject where the lecturer's accent precluded understanding: 'I download the PowerPoint slide and translate to Chinese and learn by myself'

(Interview 2). Therefore, machine translation was generally used after participant assessment of their contextual needs.

Two quite different approaches by Chinese students using complete translation emerged in the cases of Tony and Michael, in the first case through machine translation, and in the second, through the student's own efforts. For the Engineering student, Tony, and his Chinese peers, there was a twofold, rather extreme strategy for lectures which were unintelligible to them:

'Sometimes in lecture, I and Chinese friends, we don't listen to the lectures, just translate the slides with Youdao. But not just translate, we also use Baidu, similar like Google. We just note the topic and what the word means. We learn by ourselves' (Interview 2).

The strategy of engaging in independent research without listening to the lecturer's oral explanation was viewed by Tony and his peers as a rational choice, through the filter of their urgent need to understand disciplinary content. In contrast, a more linguistically capable Chinese student in an MBA subject engaged intensively with the lecture by listening and translating: 'I try to do it simultaneously. I type in Mandarin under the slides and I check the words in my computer. It's hard to keep up, but I can just manage it' (Interview 3). It appears, then, that all these participants made thoughtful metacognitive choices to maximise their chances of accessing subject matter as efficiently as possible, within the context of their skillset.

A few participants were quite critical of complete translation. In the case of machine translation, this was generally because 'electronic devices is not people' so 'there is some misunderstanding' (Joanne, Interview 2). More broadly, the lack of direct correspondence between ideas and their linguistic expression in the L1 and L2 forms rendered complete translation unreliable in some participants' eyes. As Kevin stated: 'In China, we have different habit about language that will cause some confusion' (Interview 2). Kevin's concerns were based on a painful examination experience which prompted a change in his strategic direction:

'When I was studying some English definition, but in my brain it's Chinese language, so sometimes the Chinese meaning is a little bit different, so in

the exam, I also have some misunderstanding about the questions. I want to translate every word, but when I do that, it's confusing. It's like Google Translation.' (Interview 3).

Reflecting on his definitional issues for the examination, Kevin changed to using a monolingual dictionary for difficult words and linking them using inferential skills:

'I think it's just English-to-English dictionary. I need to use English to remember English knowledges. If a certain sentence have one or two words I don't know, if I use logical thinking, I can understand it' (Interview 3).

For the above reasons, most participants rejected complete translation as the only tool. Instead, several opted for a monolingual dictionary for key lexis like Kevin, others preferred a bilingual dictionary, and flexible use of both was common throughout the group. Like Kevin, inference was mentioned by a few participants as a strategic tool to decode text, supported by dictionary use. Moreover, monolingual and bilingual dictionaries were sometimes both consulted to circumvent unhelpful translation: 'I look in Japanese-English and English-English dictionary, because in Japanese dictionary maybe is totally different meaning' (Hiroshi, Interview 2).

7.2.1.iv. Modification of translation strategies

Modification of translation strategies occurred both during a task and over time. Within a task, multi-phase strategy sequences with optional components were common across the group, reflecting the participants' monitoring processes. In Joanne's case: 'At first, I just translate one word. If I can [understand] the sentence, I pass. But if I don't understand, I just translate everything. I just copy from the slide and paste in the Google Translate. It's easy!' (Interview 2). Dara's strategy sequence included a separate search of the topic, similar to Tony's previous example. She read the slides first in English and then did a Google search of the topic in Mandarin if the main points had eluded her: 'If you don't understand, it's Google, you know!' (Interview 2). Dara would then return to the English version of Google and finally the slides themselves.

Clearly, these processes consumed significant amounts of time, which itself became a factor in considering strategy modification. Participants' complex design of translation strategies at the beginning of semester tended to be simplified as subject content became more familiar. As an example, Hiroshi's initial strategy, previewing slides supported by machine translation, was simplified by his final interview to translating 'just some words' using a bilingual dictionary. Similarly, Dara started the semester using the Mandarin version of the resources provided for the majority Chinese student cohort. However, the Mandarin version was 'much shorter than English' and 'totally different'. Attempting to compare the English and Chinese versions proved time-consuming, 'so I give up, just read the English' (Interview 2). In the same subject, Mary originally used machine translation for review of unintelligible lectures, but by Interview 3, it was only used for her most difficult subject because 'I don't have time' (Interview 3). Strategy modification, then, also became an exercise in independent time management.

In contrast to this balancing of comprehension with time efficiency through varying amounts of translation, four participants attempted to use only English. Frank, for example, adopted a strong position in this regard, reflected linguistically in his use of repetition and short, stark statements: 'With translation, I think I study English. What I study more is English. Why I need a translation? What I learn is English. It's the right thing' (Interview 2).

The key reason for the participants' different default strategies of using machine translation or the original English version appears to have been the greater language-based challenges of the first group in accessing lecture content, especially early in the semester. As Tony said, 'It's too difficult for us' (Interview 2). What this section on translation strategies highlights, then, is the complex, individualised and shifting landscape of the participants' strategy use for accessing lecture content, utilising their L1 knowledge where needed.

7.2.1.v. Requesting help

7.2.1.v.a. Help from staff

Due to anxiety and embarrassment about their language skills, many participants chose to remain silent during and after classes despite significant comprehension difficulties. This reticence, discussed in section 6.2.3.ii.b, impacted on the participants' usage of metasocial strategies. Nevertheless, four participants did ask for clarification, attributing it mainly to their innate sociability rather than to habitual actions. In Nancy's case, asking questions during postgraduate lectures did not occur at her Shanghai university. However, clarifying points with her lecturer was a manageable change for her 'because I'm optimistic and very brave to talk with others. So maybe it's not very difficult for me to ask questions or express myself' (Interview 3).

For Candy, requesting help in the postgraduate course represented a move to greater independence after her closely monitored progress by College teachers:

'I have to do more things. At the College, they will ask me what you don't understand, but in the University, we have to find what we don't understand and ask the teacher or another people or ask the leader in the [support class]. It's self-learning' (Interview 3).

The majority of participants, however, did not contact their lecturers when they were confused about lecture content.

7.2.1.v.b. Help from peers

As outlined in section 6.2.3.ii.b, several participants experienced isolation from their peers for most of their first semester, especially if their peers were L1 English speaker professionals or there were no conational peers. Mutual support in these cases tended to develop later in the semester, involving other international students. Frank, for example, was the only Chinese student in his course, but after several weeks, he began to exchange information with Indonesian students: 'It's helpful for me to learn more' (Interview 3). Tutorial discussions achieved similar outcomes, but as organised activities with prescribed tasks, the participants' involvement required less autonomous

strategy implementation than in the previously discussed cases. For this reason, tutorial interaction is excluded from this analysis.

A significant feature of peer support was the reliance of Chinese participants on conational study networks, especially in courses with substantial numbers of Chinese students, such as IT, Finance and Engineering. For example, Mary commented that in her IT course, conversations with her Mandarin-speaking peers were ‘maybe bad for my English skills, but it’s easier for me to get through, get into the class’ (Interview 2). Similarly, as mentioned in section 7.2.1.iii., the use of online research during Engineering lectures by Tony and his Chinese peers exemplifies the proactive, collaborative approach of this national group. Tony’s use of first-person plural (‘we use Baidu / don’t listen to the lectures’) was typical of the language used by several Chinese participants, reflecting a metasocial strategy for cognitive and social purposes. For a few, Chinese social media was also an avenue for clarifying meaning.

Apart from this Chinese support network, most participants felt constrained by their limited English skills from requesting peer help with lecture content for much of their first semester.

7.2.2. Improved comprehension over time

It became progressively easier for most participants to understand lecture content, due mainly to increasing familiarity with subject terminology. Interestingly, this improvement seemed to be independent of their strategy selection. The comments of three participants who adopted different language-based strategies illustrate this point.

Tony, who used machine translation of lecture slides and independent L1 search of the topic, commented on the value of initially understanding a concept in Mandarin: ‘When I first see [a technical] word in lecture, I can’t understand it, but after the Baidu, I can understand what that means. Next time I use that word, I don’t need to translate. Those words will not be difficult for me’ (Interview 3).

Secondly, Annie’s use of a bilingual and/or monolingual dictionary for challenging words helped expand her vocabulary: ‘I think the way I translate key

words, I learn more about the vocabulary. So after that, I see them and understand' (Interview 2).

Finally, for Frank, who studied in English where possible, the subject matter was familiar from his undergraduate degree, and a strategy of methodically reviewing new terms in the lecture materials reduced his comprehension gap to specific points: '[Understanding the lecture] has become better because I've learnt a lot of vocab' (Interview 3).

Therefore, while the early weeks were very challenging for many of the participants, repeated exposure to the content and lexis, supplemented by their own strategic engagement with subject materials, lessened the need for strategy use.

7.2.3. Summary of strategies for understanding lecture content

In order to address initial difficulties in understanding lecture-related disciplinary content, participants engaged in substantial, diverse strategy use which demonstrated agency, autonomy and self-regulation. Within the Strategic Self-learning Model, this strategy use is primarily located in the Learning-by-Self phase. The findings provide substantial evidence of participants utilising an independent approach to their studies, which had not been required to the same extent in the closely guided educational contexts of their L1 and EAP courses.

The main strategies used by participants were establishing a preview-lecture-review framework and using translation to understand written lecture materials. Strategy management was primarily metacognitive, but also metasocial at times. Cognitive purposes were most prevalent, but motivational and affective purposes were also evident in challenging situations. Shifts in strategy use occurred as participants monitored and modified their strategies to maximise access to knowledge within time constraints.

7.3. Strategy use for completing assignment tasks

As explained in section 6.3.1, participant experience of postgraduate assignments was different from that of understanding lecture content because the participants were able to utilise more EAP skill learnings to meet their challenges. The most relevant learnings were linked to assignment work, especially ways to write in academic English. However, considerable independent learning through strategy use was still required to meet task requirements. In recognition of the inherently staged nature of assignment work, the findings on assignment strategies will be presented in a structure based on Oxford's (2017) three-phase model:

1. Forethought: understanding the task
2. Performance: searching for sources, access of relevant content, synthesis of source content, writing response
3. Self-reflection: academic and personal learnings (to be explained in Chapter 8).

7.3.1. Forethought: Understanding the task

It was difficult for most participants to understand assignment task requirements, in terms of content, language and form of their written response. Some contextual factors reduced the need for strategy use, often used in combination:

- Detailed guidelines
- Oral explanation of the task
- Model / exemplar
- Lower difficulty level of the task.

The heaviest scaffolding was provided for three demanding tasks in different disciplines.

1. For a lengthy MBA assignment requiring case study analysis incorporating theories and other sources, a detailed booklet, prepared in conjunction with University literacy staff, was provided to each student. It recommended a multi-phase assignment process for students and

provided annotated written models of the response.

2. A Digital Marketing task was scaffolded in two ways. Firstly, an initial group task prepared students for the individual component - a two-stage model replicated in IT, Finance and Communications assignments. In addition, the task was made easier 'because the requirement from the tutor is very detailed' (Nancy, Interview 2).
3. A complex Engineering literature review, requiring synthesis of 15 sources, was made more achievable by additional weekly classes for students who had not achieved a sufficient grade in an initial literacy test. These classes took the students through a step-by-step process of how to approach the task.

Across the cohort, if participants felt confused by task requirements, they tended to implement complex strategy sequences. In Tony's case:

'I looked on Google. I translated this question in Mandarin and we used Mandarin to search on Baidu. Also there are Mandarin slides on the folder for postgraduates. And then we looked back to the English lecture to finally understand. And I ask the Assistant Lecturer, he's a Chinese PhD student, with Mandarin after class. He explain what we have to do' (Interview 2).

From the above strategies, Tony's use of Mandarin and the mutual support of his Chinese student peers ('we') appear most salient. This complex strategy sequence included strategy clusters, such as the combination of metacognitive and metasocial strategies when searching on Baidu with peers. The purposes of these metastrategic decisions were cognitive, social and perhaps affective in nature due to Tony's task-related stress.

As another example, Frank's uncertainty about subject terminology in his GMP task (see section 6.3.2.ii.c.) generated a sequence of strategies. He noted unfamiliar terms in the task, used a bilingual dictionary to look up potential meanings of these terms, and then checked whether they made sense in the specific context: '[I] look again and think "Is that right?"' (Interview 2). Frank's

awareness of potential semantic confusion related to homonyms in technical lexis, together with his use of inferential logic, formed a strategy response which also expanded his lexical knowledge.

In closing, the importance of understanding an assignment task led to complex strategy design, implementation and management by the participants, especially if there was a perceived lack of clarity and/or scaffolding in the task itself.

7.3.1.i. Strategies for reducing task anxiety

Most participants experienced anxiety due to the unfamiliar and high-stakes nature of their assignment tasks. Amongst a variety of strategies for alleviating anxiety, one common pattern emerged, applying throughout the assignment process of several participants. Nervous at the prospect of doing their task, these participants made a plan or commenced one part of the task, thereby pacifying their unease until the next phase of uncertainty occurred. These waves of anxiety followed by metacognitive decisions to act, for cognitive and affective purposes, formed strategy sequences which reflect the holistic nature of the participants' assignment work. Participant management of these sequences pacified, but did not eliminate, their anxiety, as reported by Hiroshi:

'When I get the subject assignment, I think it's not so difficult but some confusion about it. When I start writing, I was panic about it because first assignment. I thought, "This is hard, this is really hard!" But it's change to not so much panic when I got idea. I thought "Oh, I can write it!" I do something, I feel a bit better. But this assignment have Body 1, Body 2. I do Body 1, then I feel relaxed. Then I do Body 2, and I feel "OMG!" And I finished it, but still a bit nervous' (Interview 2).

A somewhat surprising finding was that three participants attended a Counselling session at the University, albeit with mixed results. These visits occurred after referrals from the student academic support service, due to participant concerns about assignments and related time management issues. Of four referrals, two participants found benefit in talking through their issues and receiving guidance, one participant did not attend (ironically due to time

pressures), while another participant (Joanne) attended one session, but found it of no use:

'In the [student academic support] centre, they say, "Oh girl, you're very overwhelmed! Maybe you should go and see the Counsellor". I went, but they said, "I don't know how to help you". Actually, I don't need that. I just want to know, "Can you tell me the methods to do this assignment?" but they tell me, "You're very overwhelmed. You need to see the Counsellor" (*laughing*)' (Interview 2).

7.3.1.ii. Reviewing lecture material

Many participants looked back through their lecture materials to help with the content-related aspects of their assignments. Several did this for every task, such as Lois, who commented, 'I have to understand everything about the lessons. Otherwise, I can do in the wrong way' (Interview 2).

In contrast, Frank was one of a group of participants who only undertook this procedure for a difficult assignment task, in his case one that was unrelated to his undergraduate degree: 'So I think read the slides again. Maybe I could find something in my slides and make connection [to the task], and maybe I could find something from the Internet if the slides doesn't work. But I did find connections' (Interview 3).

A few participants who were still unclear after reviewing lecture material clarified understanding with peers and/or the lecturer. However, for weaker students, reviewing lecture material was no guarantee of clarity. For example, Sanit struggled to understand the slides but felt he had to continue with the assignment: 'I don't have much time. I have to pass any way' (Interview 3).

Therefore, reviewing lecture content was a key strategy to engage with the task and carried out independently in most cases.

7.3.1.iii. Requesting help

In contrast to the participants' reluctance to contact academic staff or peers for clarification of lecture content, they were often willing to ask for help in relation to an assignment task. This is perhaps due to its assessment function in the context of the participants' determination to pass all their subjects (see section 5.2.5).

7.3.1.iii.a. From academic staff

Consultations with lecturers occurred mostly in person, either by appointment or during a class. Even participants who would normally be reluctant to ask for help from the lecturer often did so, such as a naturally independent learner, Frank, in his difficult and unfamiliar GMP assignment: 'I asked once my teacher and once my classmates. I asked the requirements of the assignment because I felt confused about that. That was good for me, it helped me' (Interview 2).

Although several participants accessed the University's generic academic support service, most felt that it could not provide them with the subject-specific task guidance they required. As Joanne stated: 'I think it's not very useful because they are not the Professor of this subject. What is effective way is to ask our Professor' (Interview 2).

Three participants commented that they did not approach this service because they felt the time involved would only add to their problems. In contrast, Lois and Dara, who implemented perhaps the most comprehensive academic strategies of all participants, found the workshop sessions and online tools helpful in conjunction with other measures. As Lois commented, 'Everything helped!' (Interview 2).

To summarise, the high-stakes nature of the assignment tasks appears to have motivated the participants to seek help from lecturers to clarify their assignment task, less so the University's academic support service.

7.3.1.iii.b. From peers

The chief purpose of requesting help from other students was for understanding the assignment task. As with lecture comprehension, Chinese students tended to support one another: 'The task, I understood almost but I also check with my friends. This thing is easy to resolve because I can discuss with my Chinese friends in Mandarin' (Andrew, Interview 2). Clarification of the task and relevant content was thereby facilitated for Chinese students like Andrew through the support of metasocial strategies in his L1.

An interesting variation of this pattern is that of Hiroshi, a Japanese student who had no L1 peers in Finance and was afraid to ask his lecturers for help. Instead, he accessed the collective knowledge of Chinese students through a friend: 'For Chinese students, they have big group, many contacts. So my friend ask some of their friend who understand, and then I can get some help' (Interview 3).

7.3.1.iv. Using a model or exemplar

As stated in section 6.3.1, the participants greatly appreciated EAP instruction on core genres because of their lack of L1 exposure to this writing approach. The positive EAP experience of model-based instruction convinced participants of the value of models in demonstrating the appropriate structure and language for assignment responses. The focus of this discussion, therefore, will be on the participants' strategic efforts to apply models provided to them, adapt genres introduced in the EAP course, and access models or student exemplars where they were not provided by the institution.

The scarcity of models in postgraduate subjects, compared to their frequent occurrence in the EAP course, was remarked on by a number of participants. As Annie commented: 'I think at the College, if you have to write something, you have an example about that. But in the University, no model, not in any subjects' (Interview 2).

7.3.1.iv.a. Value of model

Institutional models were reported to be particularly useful for engaging with unfamiliar textual forms in task requirements. This function was highlighted in

Tony's contrast between his first and second Engineering assignments, as explained in section 6.3.2.ii.b. Part of his confusion in the first was that 'the lecturer don't give us the example of the good assignment. We don't know the structure ... it's very uncertain' (Interview 2). In contrast, the second task included two models, 'so we know what the assignment will be, the structure will be' (Interview 3).

Apart from demonstrating the overall structure, models were seen to elucidate the method of analysis, as with Andrew's MBA assignment: 'Most of the sections is use the two theories to analyse. This is the hardest thing because I'm not sure this is correct. I just read the models to see how to do it' (Interview 2). The model in this case helped to compensate for the absence of instruction in theory-based analysis in the EAP course.

The provision of a model and written guidelines in some subjects made a significant difference to participant experience. For example, all four participants doing a challenging analytical MBA task commented on the value of the detailed guidelines and two annotated models, which they applied through an iterative process of relating the guidelines to the model and their own draft.

Even if clear guidelines were provided, participants often felt the need to see a model as well, so as to clarify the expected structure. A misunderstanding as to the required structure in a reflection-based MBA assignment was linked by Andrew to the absence of a model:

'[The task specified] three stages: pre-reflection, mid-reflection and post-reflection, different times. Maybe different requirements of each reflection. For me, I just used the guidelines to answer the questions. But the teacher wanted it all together. We don't have clear instructions and no model' (Interview 3).

In his final reflection on the semester experience, Andrew framed his need for clear directives in terms of his role as a new student without sufficient skills to function independently: 'Because my first semester I don't know anything, so I should check [the guidelines and models]. Maybe next semester, I will summarise my experience and know how to pass the subject' (Interview 2).

Andrew's comment highlights the perceived importance of expert guidance for adjustment to unfamiliar postgraduate demands.

7.3.1.iv.b. Accessing a model

For most participants, who were not supplied with a model, it was striking how many accessed one from outside their course in order to visualise an acceptable form. For example, this strategy helped Frank to create a validation plan for his GMP assignment:

'At first I don't know what is validation plan, so I Google it. I find three or four examples and I know what I should write and what should be involved in a good validation plan. What's more, I also read some Chinese example. Then I found I could have something to write!' (Interview 2).

Similarly, after locating multiple models, several participants developed a synthesised form incorporating the required content. For instance, Kevin, who had always struggled with analytical skills and was new to Economics, located and synthesised a range of features in online models:

'On Google, I put in "how to analyse". I saw two [models] and I can find differences and find which model I can use. Actually, I will mix them, find some specific steps. And then I used data from task and followed structure and specific steps' (Interview 2).

A somewhat questionable strategy used by several participants was to search for other students' writing samples as an exemplar for their own. This typically followed frustrated efforts to clarify the required form and involved an online search, often with student peers. In Tony's case, confusion lingered after online searches and enquiries to the Chinese Assistant Lecturer, until the collective effort of his Chinese peer group clarified the matter:

'The most helpful thing, I think, I discussed with my classmates and we finally found an old example maybe for the past semesters, a student's writing online. Not this university, maybe other university's assignments, but same topic, same question about find the research questions. You just learn follow their structure, but I don't look at the content' (Interview 3).

Sometimes tutorial groups engaged in a joint strategic effort:

‘At first, I don’t know how to write it, but I asked my classmates in my group. They showed me some examples from former students they knew, some friends, good students. The article will give me some ideas how to write it’ (Nancy, Interview 2).

The reliability of these student exemplars is clearly in question, and indeed Hiroshi’s exemplar was the draft of his friend, described as only a fair student. More importantly, of course, this raises issues of academic integrity. However, participants presented this strategy unashamedly as a choice made under considerable pressure, given their limited experience of genres and the lack of a model as visual support.

Other sources of models used by the participants were the University’s academic student support service and EAP models adapted to meet the tertiary requirements. As an example of creative modification, Annie, unable to access a model for her lengthy, challenging Public Health assignment, successfully adapted the template of a College business-style report.

What emerges, then, is the participants’ ingenuity, resourcefulness and flexibility as they accessed and modified models to fulfil the task guidelines. This synthesised approach required predominantly metacognitive strategies, but also metasocial strategies for those accessing peer support.

7.3.2. Performance: Accessing source content and writing response

The performance phase of assignment work required participants to complete a range of relatively unfamiliar tasks, including accessing relevant content, constructing an outline, and writing a response.

7.3.2.i. Accessing relevant content

In order to access relevant content, participants needed to fulfil two sub-tasks: searching for sources and finding information relevant to the task.

7.3.2.i.a. Searching for sources

As mentioned in section 6.3.2.i.c, the participants had little or no prior instruction in online searching techniques in their EAP or postgraduate course unless, like Lois and Dara, they had proactively accessed workshops offered by the University's academic student support service. Therefore, the participants tended to improvise searching techniques. Sam, for example, began searching for sources about oral health with a basic understanding of the process: 'It's about your own thinking about breaking down the question into key words, they're related' (Interview 2). He then explored different options, although his somewhat cryptic explanation points to the danger of improvisation without sufficient instruction:

'Maybe it's not exactly this word, maybe you need some upstream approach about Nursing. I just think with my own experience, like if you brush your teeth and your tongue very frequently, you may give out feeling you don't want to eat food. I just played around with that and thought about my experience. It's like revolution of the !!' (Interview 2).

7.3.2.i.b. Finding relevant information

Once the participants had located suitable sources for their task, they needed to access relevant content. To do so, most drew on their still-developing academic reading skills taught in the EAP course, supplemented to varying degrees with translation strategies.

Selective academic reading skills: Diverse combinations of reading strategies were reported, such as beginning with the Abstract and/or Conclusion of an academic article, or scanning the text to find relevant points for the task. In most cases, these approaches to reading had only been encountered in the EAP course, so can be viewed as strategies rather than established skills. The newness of these reading strategies, including the customisation of strategies to task needs, is apparent from Tony's comment:

'In the College, teacher told us don't read whole article. And we should read Abstract, Introduction and Conclusion - it's enough for us to write a literature review' (Interview 2).

While this approach represented a strategy shift from Tony's L1 approach, Lois' experience demonstrates delayed application of EAP reading strategies. At Interview 2, she still used past practices: 'I read from beginning to end. I have no focus' (Interview 2). This habit changed dramatically during the next month of intensive assignment pressure in Law:

'During the research time, I can't read all. I have to select and just read the paragraphs I think I can use for my research. I will read Abstract first. If it's not suitable, I will not read it anymore. If I think it's suitable, normally I will read the Conclusion. If it's fine, I will go to find key words that I want to read for my assignment. I look at sub-headings and all that. That changed. No time! I just think, "I have to survive"' (Interview 3).

A similar delay in skill uptake until events demanded change was reported by Andrew, who contrasted his slow, repetitive and linear reading approach in the more leisured EAP circumstances with his focused reading of key sections at university.

These examples, then, reveal the process of nonlinearity in the participants' reading strategy development, due primarily to changing educational contexts and associated task expectations. The value of the EAP skills was appreciated, but not always immediately applied by the participants.

Use of translation: Translation was generally used in combination with selective reading strategies. However, there was less use of machine translation for assignments than for early-semester lecture challenges. Several participants reported that they initially attempted to read the original article, then moved to machine translation for difficult sections. Annie's comment below reveals, once again, the tailoring of reading strategies to the specific task at hand:

'Sometimes the Google Translate make me feel confused. After that, I try again just translate some key words and after that, I read again this paragraph in English and try and guess the ideas, because I just need some evidence to write my essay' (Interview 2).

As only specific evidence was needed, rather than detailed comprehension of the whole text, Annie's strategies were designed to meet that objective.

Two of the participants acknowledged using machine translation as their default strategy, as they did for lecture content. Sam presented this as an efficient way of accessing content for his task, whereas Lisa's response conveyed a self-critical perspective, describing herself as 'very ashamed' and 'lazy'. (Interview 3).

Overall, then, translation emerged as a comfortable support and/or backup for accessing content under assignment pressure, typically utilised in conjunction with other academic reading strategies.

7.3.2.ii. Constructing an outline

Similar to written models, very few participants had learnt how to write a detailed outline in their country, but they saw the value of doing so in the EAP setting. Constructing an outline was a strategic process, whereby participants analysed source material and synthesised it into an outline to fulfil the task.

The importance of critical thinking for postgraduate success was highlighted by several participants, such as Michael:

'The College, just a few sentence in the Conclusion part, but at the University, it can take you 1,000 words within the articles, because in each one you need your critical thinking, supported by the theories. So it's different, you have to think all the time' (Interview 2).

Critical thinking was described in a variety of ways, such as 'reflection' (Michael, Interview 3), 'compare things to explain it' (Andrew, Interview 3) and 'think deeply, think deeply about [the implications]' while you 'use the articles' (Lois, Interview 3). Making an outline was a difficult process for the participants, with wide variations in strategy approach. Lois and Annie, for example, worked with multiple screens open on their computers as they allocated information to a core outline, and then to their emerging draft. Frank adopted a methodical approach of linking lecture slide content, online sources and the task to produce a draft, while Tony subdivided his task into multiple questions before allocating information to each. All of these were presented as self-initiated, habituated approaches, underlining the individualisation of independent learning.

Similarly, participant outlines varied widely, despite the common understanding of an outline as a concise version of planned content to scaffold written response. The key points in these efforts were attempting to ‘make it logical’ (Kevin), ‘learning how to structure your assignment, how to organise that’ (Frank, Interview 2) and controlling the content: ‘Outline could let yourself know what you will write, and you could spend time on right points’ (Frank, Interview 2).

Joanne, completing a two-stage assignment requiring group-generated slides followed by an individual written memo, saw the slides as serving an outline’s purpose: ‘do the slides like outline, and then do the writing’ (Interview 2). In contrast, Lois created an outline based on the task before beginning her research, to ‘help me to go straight to the point in my research’ (Interview 2).

There is evidence, then, of attempts to apply the outline concept using metacognitive strategies, individualised according to the participants’ perceived task needs and personal preferences.

7.3.2.iii Writing a response

Formulating a written response required strategies in two main areas:

- Applying genres learnt in the EAP course to slightly different postgraduate task requirements
- Writing the response.

7.3.2.iii.a. Transferring EAP task types

Tasks appeared to be more manageable if, as mostly occurred, participants saw similarities between a type of task taught at the College and one encountered at the University. This transfer involved both genres and types of analysis. The participants made connections between exit-level EAP tasks and postgraduate assignments which required a report, comparative analysis, case study and/or literature review. Noting a similarity in genres served a scaffolding function, shown by Michael’s linking of an MBA task to EAP learning of two related genre forms:

‘Everyone needs practice to be perfect, like the writing for [the exit level] assignments, case study and comparative analysis. Those two are the key part in this assignment for [the MBA subject]. It was a report of a case, so it’s like a case study. You have to understand the case first, then try to make some reflection’ (Michael, Interview 2).

Frank’s connection of a College report task with one for GMP involved him establishing that both required synthesis of external sources with the specific task, in a report genre: ‘a combination like that, so same at the College and the University’ (Interview 2). This kind of comparison required participants to utilise critical thinking skills to determine how to approach their assignment task, clearly involving metacognitive strategies.

The transfer of EAP skills to a new setting and task through independent analysis was also apparent in the participants’ ability to note both similarities and differences between textual forms. In complexity theory terms, the new context was an identifiable modification of their former one, creating a state of partial order within which participants could function effectively. However, from a usage-based theory perspective, the reference to College texts was still difficult as participants’ exposure to exemplars was limited.

Indeed, one postgraduate genre (a reflective report) which had not been taught in the EAP course caused problems for the Finance student, Hiroshi: ‘For me, a difficulty is type of writing is different from what I studied in the College. It’s really different. I can use “I” and “my”, like “in my opinion”, so a bit confusing, because before I couldn’t do it’ (Interview 2).

Due to EAP instruction in impersonal genres such as reports and discursive essays, Hiroshi inferred that the first-person pronoun was unsuitable for all academic writing. This inference seemed to conflict with his lecturer’s advice to use first-person voice in the task, thereby causing confusion. Hiroshi, it appears, did not see pronouns as a linguistic tool in the reflection task for expressing personal experience. His ability to engage critically with the unfamiliar genre was limited, whether due to rote teaching of textual forms in the EAP course, or to his own misunderstanding of the flexible, purpose-driven nature of genres.

Noticing slight differences between textual forms required careful analysis by participants, but also reduced their cognitive task load and helped them to identify knowledge gaps. For example, Dara linked a literature review for a research-related subject in her IT course to previous reports she had written in China and at the College, but also noted specific disciplinary features 'because this is IT': 'You have to draw the graph, some data, analyse this and you have to put the feature in the report. So this is different' (Interview 2).

7.3.2.iii.b Writing the response

It was daunting for the participants to produce responses which were far longer and more complex than in the EAP course. Apart from the usage of written models outlined above, EAP teachings which required application to postgraduate writing tasks were the introduction to key genres, academic language and paraphrasing skills. Application of these developing skills required intensive use of metacognitive strategies, as well as perseverance. For example, the strain of producing a concise, coherent written response was considerable for Felipe, as writing that would have taken him a few hours in Colombia took close to a week in English: 'You have to learn what words to say to explain yourself in a very critical and specific way' (Interview 2). The word 'learn', coupled with the academic purpose ('explain'), points to the strategic and developmental aspects of the activity. Similarly, Sam's approach to understanding a student's positioning within an evidence-based argument reveals a metacognitive learning process, in his case quite personal:

'I ask myself, "What's my soul in this?" It's like my idea of how I arrange this. Author 1 appear here and Author 2 appear here and give explanation in my own way. I feel better. I realised this by thousands of time opening and closing the lid of my laptop, I realised that' (Interview 2).

For these participants and others, there is a sense of moving through difficulty, but gaining a sense of achievement and knowledge through determined strategic effort.

The importance of grammatical accuracy was also mentioned by a few participants, who pointed out that at university, they lacked the close guidance of the EAP teachers. Two participants reported using Grammarly software for checking their written responses, while a more active approach was adopted by Annie, who used academic articles as a kind of model for her own writing: 'I think reading helps with grammar because some specific grammar I can use' (Interview 2).

In closing, the participants were often able to utilise EAP learnings for the writing component of their task, but doing so required thoughtful strategic efforts on their part.

7.3.3 Summary of strategies for completing assignment tasks

In completing their assignment tasks, the participants drew on prior EAP learnings, particularly those related to genres and academic writing skills. They also relied on postgraduate scaffolding of assignment tasks in various forms. However, considerable strategy implementation was still needed for participants to understand and fulfil task requirements, particularly the mode of analysis and appropriate form of the written response. The main strategies used by the participants were task-aligned reading strategies supported by translation, lecture content review, requests for help from staff and peers, and utilisation of a model or exemplar. Strategies to adapt EAP learnings were implemented throughout the assignment process.

7.4. Summary of Chapter 7

This chapter's report on the participants' strategy use has provided useful information in response to the research question, by highlighting how the participants' varied, flexible strategy use positioned them as independent learners. These findings relate primarily to the Learning-by-Self phase of the Strategic Self-learning Model. It was the participants' skill gaps and the requirement of critical thinking in many postgraduate tasks which necessitated strategic responses. For both understanding lecture content and completing an assignment task, metacognitive strategies dominated, but in the case of

assignment work, there was a greater willingness to seek assistance from others. When faced with particularly difficult tasks, the participants engaged in complex strategy use, initiated by metastrategies and for varied purposes.

In this analysis, a paradox emerged, namely that participants appreciated scaffolding to support their efforts to fulfil unfamiliar tasks, yet it was primarily the skill gaps left after EAP instruction which prompted extensive strategy use and independent learning. This paradox will be explored in Chapter 9.

Chapter 8 reports on findings relevant to the Learning-about-Self phase of the model. It provides evidence of the participants' awareness of their developing independence as postgraduate students, involving both academic and personal learnings.

Chapter 8: Reflection On Growing Independence

8.1. Introduction

Chapter Eight reports on the participants' awareness of their development into independent learners within the postgraduate context. Findings on this phase of the participants' process follow the explanations in Chapters 5 to 7 of their academic challenges and strategic responses to them. Chapters 5 and 6 attributed these challenges to skill gaps, pedagogical differences across three educational contexts, and the transition to a more independent learning environment in the postgraduate context. Chapter 7 then explained participants' strategic responses as resourceful efforts to apply previous EAP learnings and improvise, where needed, to meet unfamiliar task requirements.

Within the Strategic Self-learning Model, this chapter's findings relate primarily to the Learning-about-Self phase, as participants reported on academic and personal changes in approach to their studies, and more generally to their lives. Learning about Self occurred as a result of experiences of independent strategy use (Learning by Self), motivated by self-directed drivers (Learning for Self), and performed a regenerative function for future strategy use.

Findings from this chapter will help to address the research question, in terms of the role of self-reflection in the participants' developmental process.

8.2. Reflective processes supporting growth of independent learning approach

Participant self-reflections will be examined in relation to three increasingly broad topics:

- Learning processes in the postgraduate course which fostered an independent study approach
- Use of past and present educational resources to adjust to an independent academic culture
- Growth of maturity and independence at a personal level.

These topics are understood to be interrelated from a complexity theory perspective, and can indeed be viewed as complex systems impacting on the larger complex system of the participants' transitional experiences.

8.2.1. Reflection on progress in meeting postgraduate academic demands

To recap, Chapter 5 reported on pedagogical shifts across the three educational contexts of L1 undergraduate, EAP and postgraduate courses, including the participants' clear delineation of the postgraduate culture as requiring independent learning: 'I learn now maybe University way because I learn by myself' (Hiroshi, Interview 2). Participant awareness of this postgraduate requirement, then, led to strategic attempts to learn independently and subsequent reflections on the process.

The participants' substantial skill gaps as they commenced University studies were another factor necessitating independent learning, as explained in Chapter 6. Comparisons were made by several participants between the gap in difficulty between EAP and postgraduate tasks. As Andrew stated:

'In the College, I just study three hours every day, I can easy pass all the subjects. But now even I spend lots of time for prepare this assignment and all my tasks, it's also hard to pass' (Interview 2).

The experience of bridging these academic gaps and engaging with critical thinking tasks through strategy use were topics for reflection by the participants. This reflection provided a means to learn from unfamiliar experiences and reset their study plans for future challenges.

8.2.1.i Critical thinking skills

Critical thinking tasks appear to have driven conceptual development in participants and simultaneously encouraged an independent approach to their studies. This developmental process was demonstrated in participant reflections on the challenging MBA assignment task (see section 6.3.2.iii.c). This task provides a particularly useful example because the lecturer feedback included detailed in-text comments as well as a global comment. The effect of having

specific comments was quite significant as they appeared to enhance participant understanding of areas requiring improvement. For example, Mina's account of her lecturer's comments showed that she understood the lack of evidential support for her argument: 'It tells me with two of [the management factors], I didn't have enough theory and I didn't have reference to connect to my analysis' (Interview 2). While the general concept of an evidence-based argument was already understood by Mina, these lecturer comments formed a focus for her self-directed efforts at improvement in the next assignment for this subject:

'I've learnt about my connecting the articles to my analysis, but maybe I didn't do it good enough in this. But now I'm doing Assignment 3 and I'm trying to develop this point. I'm trying to support my points with articles. Really, I didn't do enough in this assignment, like she say' (Interview 3).

Mina's reflection on this discursive task then moved to the broader conceptual level, providing a basis for transfer to other analytical tasks: 'I think I've learnt to develop my critical thinking' (Interview 3).

Although Andrew and Lisa received similar feedback to Mina, they had not sufficiently internalised the need for evidence during their EAP course. The lecturer's comments, therefore, provided a useful intervention which led them to modify their conceptual understanding of academic argumentation. Andrew described this feedback episode as 'a good experience' which revealed 'a misunderstanding' on his part. He explained that 'before this assignment, I just think I can develop my own idea', but now 'I should need a citation to support it' (Interview 3).

Lisa came to a similar conclusion, showing understanding of the purpose as well: 'That will let the reader believe your view' (Interview 3). Lisa's insight helped to promote her understanding of critical thinking: 'I think I didn't give the case for reflection. I used more part to describe something. It's just on the surface, not very deeply thinking' (Interview 3). She then postulated possible reasons, opening the way to understanding and change:

'I think because I didn't read the criteria carefully, so I mostly focused on the [company's] problem. I didn't apply and do the further thinking. Or

maybe sometimes I was lazy and I didn't think it carefully or just use more time to think it. This assignment time, there were three or four assignment plus some presentation, so I didn't do it carefully' (Interview 3).

This reflection, evidencing a willingness to take responsibility for her actions, opened potential avenues to future independent learning. It is apparent from these examples that the development of critical thinking skills was a staged process for the participants, with variations based on their prior conceptual understanding of evidence-based argumentation. Their development in this area was nurtured by a combination of detailed lecturer feedback and a willingness to learn through self-reflection.

The need for time and practice to learn critical thinking skills was illustrated through Tony's literature review task for Engineering. This task required students to establish a gap in the literature as a focus for research in a subsequent project. Tony grappled with the notion of critical thinking throughout his task, from the first explanation by the lecturer:

'The lecturer told me if I want to find that gap, we need critical thinking. First, I don't know what that means and I repeat the translation things, the research online things. I know "critical", I know "thinking", but what's that mean?' (Interview 3).

Lecturer feedback on Tony's response specified that his summary of the research gap for his project needed to be clearer. It is evident from Tony's reflection below that he did have a fundamental understanding of the function of a research gap in determining the focus of a study, and he was able to diagnose reasons for difficulties in this area:

'I think the gap is not clear. I should evaluate very clear to show what the gap is or why that gap I choose. I think if you want to locate the gap very clearly, these 15 articles you must look very deeply and read very clearly. I think maybe I didn't pay enough time to read all of it' (Interview 3).

Ultimately, Tony realised that while this task experience had given him a basic grasp of critical thinking, a more comprehensive understanding would evolve

over time: 'Now I understand what that means, the critical thinking. After more practice, I can gradually understand that' (Interview 3).

A final example is that of Nancy, who failed her Marketing assignment because she had not used any citations in her response. This reason only became apparent when she was invited to discuss her result with lecturing staff. Significantly, this interaction cleared Nancy's confusion and clarified the need for evidential support in her future assignments.

The above examples illustrate that developing critical thinking skills as one key aspect of becoming an independent learner was a gradual process for participants, learnt through reflection on specific experiences during a task in conjunction with lecturer feedback. The impact of less specific lecturer comments on participant learning is addressed in section 8.2.1.v..

8.2.1.ii. Fulfilling task requirements

Self-reflection in response to assignment feedback also helped to inform participant understanding of difficulties in meeting specific task requirements, providing them with a new strategic outlook on future tasks. While reflection on difficulties with critical thinking was explained in section 8.2.1.i, the participants' failure to fulfil requirements could also apply to other types of tasks. One example is provided by Frank's challenges with understanding a compliance-based GMP task. Reflection on his experience and the lecturer's comment brought him to an understanding of his issue: 'I lost some points in my assignment and the lecturer said, "At this point you should do X X X". They were good comments. I missed something' (Interview 3).

Frank inferred that limited disciplinary lexis was at the core of his task comprehension difficulties and resolved to remedy the problem:

'I think I will take some things my way. I will read some books or papers from this industry. I think the most important thing for me now is to know the meaning of the vocab. It will become easier for me to learn and do the assignments. If I find more vocabs, I will try to translate into Chinese and make this vocab become not new for me' (Interview 3).

Therefore, the reflection process propelled Frank into a plan to design new strategies, positioning him in a role of responsible agency. Similar lecturer feedback about the omission of specific information from a procedure in a Nursing assignment brought Sam to a more general conclusion than Frank, that greater course experience would clarify this kind of requirement: 'I don't know enough at this stage' (Interview 3).

Therefore, feedback on any failure to fulfil task requirements assisted participants in reflecting productively on their experience.

8.2.1.iii. Lecture review for assessment purposes

Assessment work tended to generate strategy use and subsequent self-reflection if the participants were uncertain about aspects of the task. The learning process which resulted from lecture review, assessment task completion and self-reflection is exemplified by the experiences of Nancy (Marketing) and Sanit (IT), introduced in section 7.2.1.i. In both cases, this review involved urgent independent learning for upcoming assessments (Nancy two examinations and Sanit an assignment). In Nancy's case:

'The change is happened before the mid-term exam. I have to understand everything although I don't understand! It's difficult for Chinese students, for me, to find the related sources. The key word is difficult for us to capture. I feel the time is limited 'cos when you read the articles in English, your speed is very slow. I feel very nervous and afraid when I attend the exam.' (Interview 2).

Nancy's strategic efforts were challenging and undertaken independently. However, she received Pass grades for the two examinations and reflected on her new sense of self - 'the change': 'I feel more confident 'cos although my target is higher than Pass, I still think it's the first step for my university life. Especially it's a big change for my life, different from the life I was living in China' (Interview 2). Nancy's reflection framed this sequence of events in terms of survival, adjustment and growth in a culture requiring self-responsibility for learning. This new positioning strengthened her self-perception as a resilient independent learner.

Sanit, realising he did not understand the content required for his assignment due in three days' time, read through the lecture slides and materials for three hours with bilingual dictionary support: 'I don't understand clearly in the class, so I have to learn it by myself to understand it' (Interview 2). While Sanit struggled to grasp the full meaning, he eventually received a Pass for the assignment, viewing his experience in the context of a broader challenge to become more mature and resourceful: 'I need to put myself in the hard time' (Interview 3).

In closing, the pressure of understanding disciplinary content for assessment tasks tended to generate intensive strategy use, together with personal and academic insights from self-reflection.

8.2.1.iv. Study management

The conscious, self-reflective development of study management skills provided another means for greater independence of the participants. The implementation of time management strategies to cope with multiple assignments provides the clearest example of this process. For example, Sanit's unsystematic approach to his early postgraduate tasks, which caused him 'panic' and 'stress', prompted him to create a study timetable based on an evaluation of task demands and his own academic capability: 'I made schedule now. I'm not a good student, so I have to manage the score. In this subject, I aim to pass, depends on subject' (Interview 3). Sanit's further reflection on the outcome of this strategic intervention indicates a greater sense of control over his academic process and his anxiety: 'I feel better because I know the path, the direction I have to do, rather than sit and no concentration' (Interview 3).

While Sanit implemented a time management strategy after reflecting on stressful assessment experiences, two other participants resolved to redesign their study approach. Sam (Nursing) concluded from his assignment struggles, riven with procrastination and anxiety, that he needed to 'make a better plan for the assignment'. He reflected on his reasons for failing to do so: 'I'm so floppy in the days before that ... tired ... can't concentrate', and then returned to his resolve to 'do better planning' (Interview 3).

A similar sense of independent agency emerged from Michael's disappointment with an MBA assignment result, once again related to time management issues. Michael's Fail grade, due to his high similarity rating, arose from the limited time he had allocated to the task. He initially blamed this problem on family responsibilities: 'I only have 1 to 2 hours at midnight to do this task. I can't really think logically or clearly' (Interview 2). However, by Interview 3, Michael's reflections demonstrated greater self-responsibility and a determination to change his strategies for the next assignment:

'I will use much of my own words. In other words, not just transferring others' words into other fancy words, but try to read it first and rethinking before you write. That might be better to show your own understanding than just copy it and paraphrase it' (Interview 3).

Michael's deflated feelings at failing this task prompted him to write me a lengthy email, with permission to include it in the research data. In it, he stated his motivation for changing his approach ('I don't want to let it happen again forever'), acknowledged 'a better understanding of academic writing from the unhappy experience', and listed a number of resolutions for future tasks, relating to better time management and lower expectations: 'I aim too high. I should go back to the ground and learn how to achieve the average level, then aim higher' (Email, 3 June, 2019). Throughout Michael's reflections, agency, autonomy and resilience are evident, fired by his determination to succeed in the future.

The examples of Sanit, Sam and Michael demonstrate growth, through reflection on struggle, towards self-responsibility as independent learners.

8.2.1.v. Factors associated with less effective self-reflection

While the above participants gained useful insights from reflecting on their assessment experiences, several participants appeared to learn little. This was particularly the case for participants who received an assignment grade without a lecturer comment, or those who struggled to understand a global comment. Of the former group, a few participants experienced frustration at a missed learning opportunity: 'I feel confused. I'd like to understand so I can put it in the other

assignment' (Felipe, Interview 3). Others responded with a bland acceptance and limited their reflection to the grade: 'Because mark is really high, of course I feel happy. I don't know what happened, but it's OK. I want to pass!' (Mary, Interview 3). There was also some uninformed speculation about the reasons for a grade if no comment was provided: 'A girl told me her tutor is very nice and the average for her class is about 27, so I said, "Oh my God! I should be in that class!"' (Dara, Interview 3).

Of those who received a non-specific global comment, frustration and confusion were again common participant responses. For example, Annie (Public Health) felt that feedback about a need for greater elaboration of her proposed policies did not resonate with her experience of the task:

'I know what he's saying, but I don't know why he want more detail because I tried to write more detail, the way we can overcome the difficulties. Yeah, I write it! So I don't understand' (Interview 3).

Annie's example provides a marked contrast to the previously discussed MBA students as, based on in-text lecturer comments, they were able to reflect and learn from their attempts to use critical thinking skills.

A further reason for less effective self-reflection was the reluctance of a few participants to engage in active learning. Those with weaker skills, like Sanit and Hiroshi, tended to be relieved at passing and showed less interest in learning from specific comments. In Hiroshi's case, introduced in section 6.3.2.ii.a., his concerns about passing a Finance task due to a lack of familiarity with the reflection genre were replaced by delight when he received a Credit grade. In the interview, Hiroshi showed little interest in the lecturer comments, interpreting the experience instead as a signal of greater maturity and success with this particular genre: 'I'm a little bit grown up now. I had a challenge and I've overcome it. Becoming more experienced and trained. This kind of reflective report, I can do it now and I can do it better' (Interview 3). Consistent with Hiroshi's previous perception of genres as discrete entities, he saw his grade as reflecting mastery of one genre and did not recognise the opportunity to examine feedback on other issues, such as disciplinary content and conceptual thinking.

As another example of less productive reflection, Candy, who failed the language component of her assignment, initially doubted that improvement was viable: 'After exam, I will have holiday and I don't want to think about it. I just want to relax. But if I have to study in the University, I focus on my course, so I still don't have time to focus on my language' (Interview 3). However, Candy then seemed to change her mind after reflecting that more written assignments loomed in coming semesters: 'I think the most important for improve is my writing – oh! A lot of writing! I have to think about it! I have to laugh. Cry can't help me to end this thing!' (Interview 3). An internal dialogue is evident here, but without a specific focus or planned intervention, perhaps due to Candy's longstanding avoidance of her grammatical difficulties.

Less effective self-reflection of participants, then, tended to occur if assignment comments were not provided or non-specific, or if the participants were more focused on passing than learning from their experience.

8.2.2. Changes in educational self-positioning

Another aspect of the participants' development into independent learners is revealed through their responses on educational self-positioning at the end of each interview. As outlined in section 4.2.3.vi.a, participants indicated their way of learning at each interview stage in terms of L1 undergraduate, EAP and/or University approaches. Shifts across the three interviews provide an overall view of participants' developing independence as learners.

8.2.2.i Interview 1

Hybridisation of learning approaches was a key feature emerging from the data, with 15 of the 18 participants drawing from their L1 and EAP ways of learning. From the L1 context, rigorous study methods for practising grammar and learning vocabulary were most frequently nominated (five participants), followed by a strong study ethic (two participants). From the EAP setting, the interactive, scaffolded instruction was mentioned as an effective learning tool by four participants, including Hiroshi: 'Creating the idea, I really like College style. Talk to others and discuss' (Interview 1). Two others valued the focus on skill development at the College.

It appears, then, that on completion of their EAP studies, participants utilised an integrated way of learning based on their L1 undergraduate experience and the new EAP approach.

8.2.2.ii. Interview 2

At Interview 2, several weeks into their first postgraduate semester, there was a greater range of responses as to educational self-positioning, with seven participants reporting that they drew from all three contexts, six from the College and University, and five only from the University.

For those who positioned themselves at the centre of the three interlocking circles, L1 influences related largely to their study ethic and habits, the College course solely to academic skill teaching, and the University to an independent learning approach. These results are exemplified by Kevin's response:

'Now as a student, I think I'm in the middle of everything. From China, I think is a positive attitude, such as study is first. So if I don't finish my duty, I feel very uncomfortable. From the College, it is good study habits, like writing and listening. And the University, I should do everything more by myself, not depending on others' (Interview 2).

Those who located themselves at the junction of the College and University approaches commented on the value of EAP skills for University studies. Once again, most of the comments about the University related to adaptation to the independent learning culture. A typical response of this group came from Tony: 'I think I'm between the College and University. I'm using what the College taught me and also I'm doing the University way, with self-learning' (Interview 2).

Of the five participants who aligned themselves solely with the University approach, adjustment to the required independent study approach and passing by fulfilling requirements were the key factors. This dual pressure was expressed by Sanit: 'I'm here now, this is hard, and I should adjust to stay in this area. I can't go back to my country. I must pass' (Interview 2). Annie was the only participant to express a view on the University's independent learning

culture, through her belief that the problem-solving pedagogical approach in her Public Health discipline would help ‘address the issues in the future’ (Interview 2).

8.2.2.iii. Interview 3

While Interview 2 findings featured a fairly even range of educational self-positioning, by Interview 3, 10 of the 18 participants identified themselves with the University ways of learning. Seven of these based their positioning on a transition to independent learning, even if the process still induced strain, as was the case for Lisa:

‘At the University, teacher didn’t give us direction. We need to learn by yourself. And when you have some question, you need to figure out by yourself as well. But in the College, when you have some problem, you can ask the teacher and teacher will tell you. You just remember the answer, but the University, you need to explore the answer. I’m sort of trying the University way, but it’s a bit uncomfortable’ (Interview 3).

Independent learning was expressed by Andrew in terms of the requirement to ‘check the information by myself’ and seen as ‘the big difference from the College and my country’ (Interview 3). He contrasted this need to source resources with previous undergraduate and College practices, where the teacher provided all the materials for students.

There were also comments in this group about the fading relevance of College teachings, now that the skills were largely internalised and postgraduate tasks required independent learning: ‘I think I still use some of the skills that I’ve got from the College, but [it] is too easy now for me, so I’m kind of adjust myself into the University, into self-study’ (Mina, Interview 3).

Surprisingly, the second largest group at Interview 3 positioned themselves educationally between L1 undergraduate and University approaches, based on the continued use of study methods they had learnt in their country: ‘From China is to review things and take notes to make your knowledge to be well-organised’ (Joanne, Interview 3). Offering a different perspective, Frank saw

himself as operating beyond the three-circle framework: 'my way', regardless of which country or institution he was studying in. Ironically, the core of his personal method was a self-sufficient approach to learning.

To summarise, there are four key findings across this three-stage interview process:

1. Identification with the L1 undergraduate context was mainly based on useful study methods the participants continued to use.
2. Self-positioning according to College approaches related mostly to the learning of academic skills felt to be useful for postgraduate studies.
3. There was significant hybridisation of educational approaches during periods of major adaptation, but a noticeable shift to alignment with the University ways of learning at the last interview.
4. Reasons for self-positioning within the University context were mostly linked to adaptation to an independent learning approach.

This set of data, then, supports the view that the participants developed greater independence as learners during their first-semester postgraduate studies. However, it also points to the contribution of shifting hybridisation throughout this process, as participants pragmatically retained ways of learning which still had value for them.

8.2.3. Reflection on personal qualities related to independent learning

Many of the participants reported development of greater maturity and independence both as students and individuals as a result of their challenging first-semester experiences. The interrelationship of academic and personal processes is exemplified by the comments of Joanne and Lois below.

Joanne, who had described herself in Interview 1 as an immature, overly emotional young woman, summarised her changes as an integrated process: 'Although it's very hard, but I grew up (*laughing*). I developed some learning skills, I improved myself' (Interview 2).

Lois' powerful reflection, too, evidences the holistic nature of her development:

'[Studying in Australia has] changed my attitude. Before I came here, I think I can't stay alone. Everything I do, I need to rely on other people. I can't study without friends or family. But study here is totally different. For me, alone, I have not much friends. I think it's changed. I can stay by myself, I can live by myself' (Interview 3).

By studying and living independently out of necessity, Lois became more resilient and self-sufficient. Independent study emerged as a new option for her, supported by personal changes.

8.2.3.i. Overcoming academic challenges as a path to maturity

Participant comments about the importance of greater maturity and independence were often couched in terms of overcoming problems in the unfamiliar study environment. The importance of this development for the participants, implied in Lois' statement above, is also expressed by Hiroshi:

'[This course] is challenging. And if I overcome this challenge, maybe I will more grow up. For me, I think this is the most important of my life so far because I haven't had experience of this kind of challenge, so it is hardest and most interesting' (Interview 3).

Similarly, Sanit actually welcomed his inability to communicate with IT group members due to his poor oral skills, describing it as 'very good experience'. He explained his purpose in studying as to 'get some more experience and something that I never seen in my life' (Interview 2). The self-directed nature of his venture and the important role of overcoming challenges are apparent in Sanit's comment and his subsequent resolution to 'put myself in the hard time' (Interview 3).

Both Nancy and Joanne spoke of developing a greater sense of courage through overcoming challenges. For Nancy, these challenges were academic in nature, but in Joanne's case, they related to living in a foreign country and needing to look after herself, experiences also mentioned by Mina and Frank as nurturing their self-sufficiency.

Nancy's courage grew from her academic efforts and achievement in having passed all her subjects:

'I think I'm braver than when I came to the Australia, more than [when] I passed the College exams. And in my studies, I not afraid to meet the difficulties. If I overcome it, I believe I can do it. I did do it! This semester I tried my best. I feel proud of me (*laughing*)!' (Interview 3).

Therefore, overcoming challenges emerged as a key means for the participants to develop greater maturity, independence and a sense of achievement.

8.2.3.ii. Types of personal development

Personal development was described in various ways which supported an independent learning approach, especially the following:

- Self-regulation
- Resilience
- Autonomy.

8.2.3.ii.a. Self-regulation

The main form of personal development reported by the participants was a greater ability to regulate feelings and thoughts despite difficulties, so that they could continue productively with the next stage of their studies. For example, Sanit changed his habitual rejection of unappealing situations: 'Sometimes I have to think "I don't care", if I think "I don't like it". I just have to pass' (Interview 2). In a similar cognitive shift, Mary replaced her disinterested outlook from her Chinese undergraduate degree with an expectation of high standards in her IT course: 'I think [high standards] should be a habit. If I think the first time "Pass is OK, just let it go", maybe second time I will think this too' (Interview 3). Finally, Joanne reported that she had developed greater equanimity towards her studies: 'In China, I used to like to complain to my friends, to my parents. But after experience all of the things, I think never to complain, just to try your best to do that, even it's hard' (Interview 3).

8.2.3.ii.b. Resilience

Self-regulation tended to enhance resilience. For example, despite Lois' daunting challenges in Law, which she described as 'brain strain' and 'very tough', she told herself that she 'just have to do a little bit, a little bit every day' (Interview 2). Another self-regulation tool promoting resilience was Mina's reframing of a negative experience in the context of a more positive future: 'It's gonna be better. This is the first semester and everything is new for me' (Interview 2).

While most of the participants engaged in self-regulation with minimal outside help, thereby activating their growing independence, Sanit was closely guided by his mother. However, her counsel that he was ultimately responsible for himself only strengthened his determination to become more resilient:

'I told [my Mum] everything when I have a problem or feel down, and my Mum said, "To be honest, I can't help you anything, because I'm staying in Thailand and you're in Australia. So you have to find some way to survive". I think it's good' (Interview 2).

8.2.3.ii.d. Autonomy

Exercising increased autonomy was typically couched as a reduced dependence on others both personally and academically, evident from Lois' statement that 'I can stay by myself, I can live by myself' (Interview 3). Similarly, Felipe reflected that the necessity of completing his assignment by himself developed his independence as a learner:

'[Unlike in Colombia,] here I am alone, but that was also good for me because I learnt to do it. You are alone with you, but also you don't know who to ask. So my best friend was Google. It was the only place where I could ask. Now I'm not worried because I did what I could' (Interview 2).

For Mary, increased independence meant the freedom to generate self-motivation in a more liberal environment:

'I think maybe my feeling is changed because in my hometown, our teaching style is "You have to do this, you must do this". And in Sydney,

you have many choice. You can learn, you can don't learn, you can just fail, that's your choice. I have to learn by myself, I need to learn, I want to learn, that's my choice. I think maybe I changed! What I say is study' (Interview 2).

On the other hand, for Annie, a highly independent and reserved student, confusion about her lecturer's assignment comments prompted a plan to seek help from lecturers and the student academic support service the following semester. This plan can be regarded as another type of independent learning through Annie's self-directed sourcing of assistance outside her usual behavioural parameters.

8.2.3.iii. Less effective personal processes

Positive changes were less evident in the cases of three Chinese participants: Lisa, Sam and Michael. All three reported unresolved struggles which dominated their reflections about the semester.

For Lisa, who expressed enthusiasm for her studies in the early, primarily interactive stage of her course, assignment pressures and a habitual aversion to reading and writing tasks combined to impact on her confidence and strategy choices. This self-doubt is reflected in several similarly worded statements: 'I'm still exploring how to write a good assignment', 'I'm sort of trying the University way but it's a bit uncomfortable' and 'I'm trying to find the way' (Interview 3).

In Sam's case, a longstanding procrastination habit resurfaced during his Nursing assignment, prompting self-criticism about his inability to concentrate: 'When it comes to your study, you need to respond for your gaining of knowledge. I feel I'm not so responsible for myself' (Interview 2). By the end of semester, Sam had made no real progress with this issue, which affected his self-confidence.

Finally, while Michael was stressed due to marital conflict about study pressures, and disappointed at failing a key MBA assignment, he made numerous resolutions for the next semester. These forward-looking determinations gave Michael a greater sense of agency than the other two

participants.

8.3. Summary of Chapter 8

Chapter 8 has provided evidence of the participants' reflection on their developing independence as learners from three different perspectives:

- Performance in academic tasks, fostering academic skill development and an independent study approach
- Pragmatic changes in educational self-positioning, with hybridisation prominent during times of adaptation and an increasing alignment with the independent academic culture at the University
- Growth in personal qualities supporting independent learning.

This chapter has provided important findings to address the research question, in terms of the mechanics and nature of the participants' development as independent learners. These findings are relevant to the Learning-about-Self phase of the Strategic Self-learning Model.

Chapter 9 synthesises the study's findings in response to the research question. It provides this response within a comprehensive explanation of the Strategic Self-learning Model.

Chapter 9: The Strategic Self-Learning Model

9.1. Introduction

Transformation is at the heart of participant experience in this study. Analysis of the findings reveals that the participants' adjustment to the unfamiliar independent learning culture of the Australian university was a complex and dynamic process, impacted by transitions through a pathway involving their L1 undergraduate degree program, EAP course, and finally postgraduate studies. An independent approach to learning is widely regarded as characteristic of Western universities (Hammersley-Fletcher & Hanley, 2016; Kember, 2001; Kettle, 2017; McGrath-Champ et al., 2013; Quan et al., 2016; Ryan, 2013c), placing immense pressure on students from different educational backgrounds to adapt in their first semester. The participants' accounts of their rapid, challenging, but necessary adjustment to this new way of learning provide valuable insights into their developmental process.

Chapter Nine discusses participant experiences in relation to the literature to provide a detailed, comprehensive response to the research question:

How do former EAP students develop an independent approach to learning in their first semester of postgraduate coursework studies in Australia?

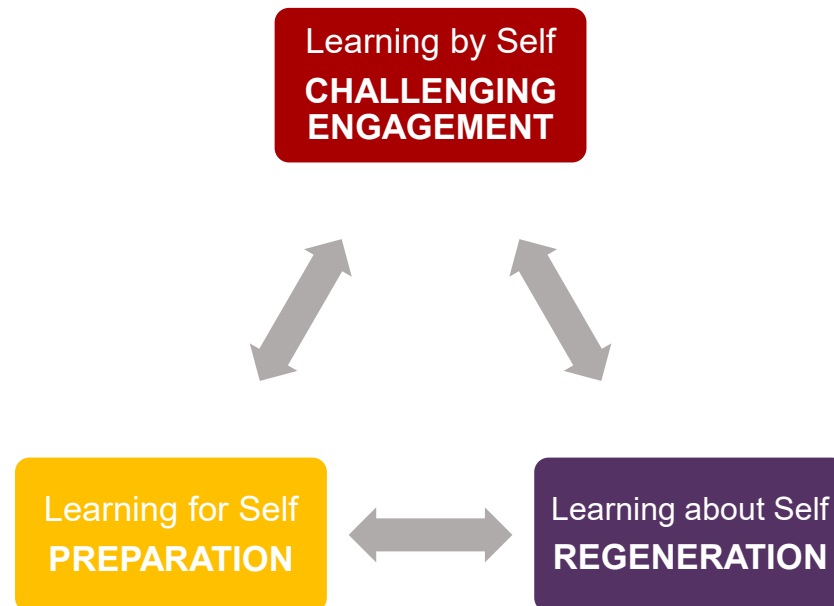
It provides this explanation through the framework of the Strategic Self-learning Model, which is the major contribution of the study. This model represents the participants' processes as they became independent learners in the postgraduate setting, revealing a complex landscape imbued with paradox.

9.2. Explanation of the Strategic Self-learning Model

The Strategic Self-learning Model (Figure 6) depicts the participants' development of an independent learning approach as a dynamic, iterative process. This version is a more complex iteration of the simplified linear form introduced in section 5.6. Further diagrammatic detail of the factors contributing to each of the three phases of the model will be shown in the context of

discussion of each phase, with the complete version of the model provided at the end of the chapter.

Figure 6: The Strategic Self-learning Model (phase version)



This model builds on Oxford's (2017) strategic self-regulation model, utilising its holistic and flexible framing of strategy use. Oxford's three task phases, based on the framework of Zimmerman (2008), have a fundamental conceptual alignment with the three phases of the Strategic Self-learning Model, as indicated in Table 11 and explained in section 4.3.5.i.a..

Table 11: Task phases in the two models

PHASE	STRATEGIC SELF-REGULATION MODEL (Oxford, 2017, p. 75)	STRATEGIC SELF-LEARNING MODEL
1	Forethought (task goals, analysis and planning)	Learning for Self (self-directed goals, analysis of task-related needs and planning)
2	Performance (strategy use for performing task and strategy monitoring)	Learning by Self (task-related strategy use fostering independent learning)
3	Self-reflection (evaluation of task performance, strategy effectiveness and learner attributes)	Learning about Self (academic and personal learnings related to increasing independence through self-reflection, e.g. strategy modification)

The epistemological alignment of the Strategic Self-learning Model with Oxford's (2017) strategic self-regulation model is apparent from their common positioning of learners as protagonists driving their own development by means of strategy use. However, the purpose of the two models is different, reflected in their features. Oxford's model focuses primarily on the nature of strategy use, while the Strategic Self-learning Model represents broader developmental processes resulting from strategy use. As one example, Oxford examines learner attributes, or 'strength factors' (2017, p. 65), primarily in terms of their contribution to effective strategy implementation, rather than learner development from strategy use. The iterative component of Oxford's conceptualisation is expressed most clearly in a subsequent publication in

terms of regeneration after strategy implementation, as students ‘recognize when they have made progress, and keep the cycle going’ (Oxford et al., 2018).

Key features distinguishing the Strategic Self-learning Model from Oxford’s (2017) model are as follows:

1. Instead of Oxford’s inclusion of the word ‘self-regulation’ in the model’s title and task-based terms ‘forethought’, ‘performance’ and ‘self-reflection’ for the three phases, terminology in the Strategic Self-learning Model reflects its primary focus on developmental aspects. This focus is apparent from the use of ‘self-learning’ in the title and three different aspects of ‘learning’ and ‘self’ for its three phases. Participant development towards an independent study approach is thereby framed as a learning process for, by and about the self. The study’s investigation of this process for international students entering university via an EAP course is reflected in the research question and purpose of the study, as outlined in sections 1.4. and 1.5.
2. Strategy monitoring and modification during a task are positioned in the self-reflective Learning-about-Self phase, as opposed to their siting in the performance phase (corresponding to Learning by Self) in the models of Oxford (2017) and Zimmerman (2008). This positioning in the Strategic Self-learning Model highlights the reflective participant role in modifying strategy use during a task, a crucial element in participants’ growth into independent learners. It achieves this objective by depicting strategy modification as a bidirectional movement between phases, while iteration occurs primarily through transfer of learning in adapted form to subsequent tasks. Strategy modification is particularly important in the context of this study. The participants faced an academic setting based on an unfamiliar independent culture, but also one requiring them to experiment with strategies due to the preponderance of tasks beyond their skillset.
3. Learning by Self focuses primarily on the participants’ use of metastrategies, rather than their entire strategy use as in Oxford (2017)

and Zimmerman (2008). This focus is consistent with the study's detailed examination of the decision-making processes in strategy use, an exercise in autonomy which developed the participants' independence as learners.

Despite these distinguishing features, the Strategic Self-learning Model has a similar conceptual orientation to Oxford's (2017) strategic self-regulation model and contributes further understanding of developmental outcomes from strategy use related to changing ways of learning. Its contribution to the knowledge base also includes multiple factors specific to participant experience in the challenging context of unfamiliar learning environments. Examples are the participants' adjustment to the independent learning culture of the University after different ways of learning in their L1 undergraduate and EAP settings, their adaptation of preparatory EAP learnings to University tasks, and the functions of metacognitive and metasocial strategies in their developmental process.

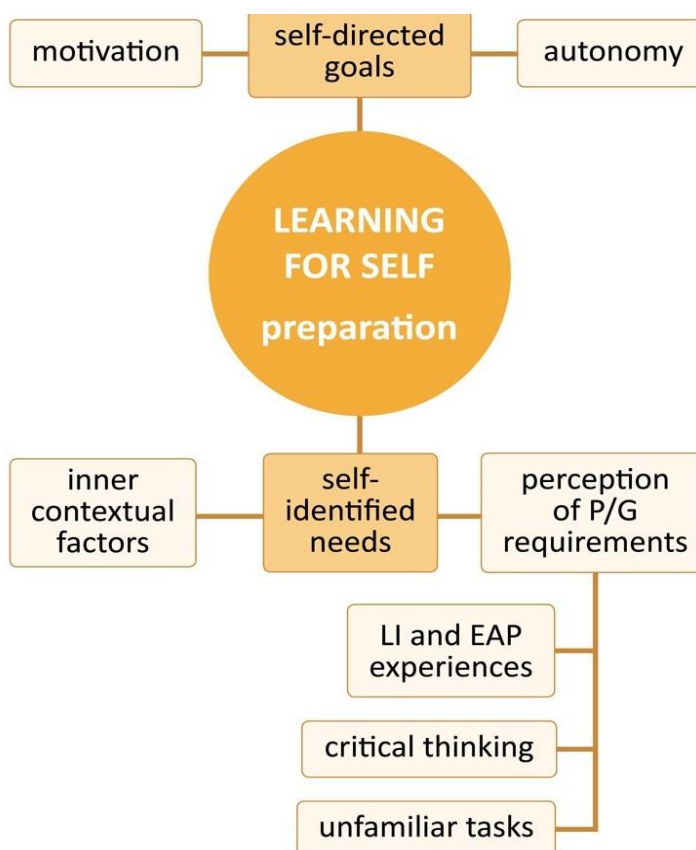
The three phases of the Strategic Self-learning Model will be explained in terms of their functions in the participants' developmental process and the main factors involved. While the phases are discussed here separately for the sake of clarity, the model constitutes one system with interrelated parts, consistent with complexity theory principles (Beckner et al., 2009; Dörnyei, 2017; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). Indeed, affective and cognitive factors drive strategy use throughout, and smaller systems are nested within larger ones (Amerstorfer & Oxford, 2018; Oxford et al., 2018). For example, functions associated with all three phases exist within the Learning-for-Self phase: identification of planning needs, implementation of planning strategies, and reflection on their effectiveness. However, for the purpose of communicating a clear response to the research question, the discussion will focus on the core, three-phase developmental process undergone by the participants.

9.2.1. Learning for Self

As indicated in Figure 6 above, the Learning-for-Self phase of the Strategic Self-learning Model has an important preparatory function, both in terms of the

participants' strategy use and their broader developmental process. The detailed representation in Figure 7 below highlights the two main aspects of this phase: self-directed goals and self-identified needs.

Figure 7: Learning for Self



9.2.1.i. Self-directed goals

The participants' self-directed goals emerged from the data as the key influence on their study outlook, as these goals activated the participants' strategic efforts to meet postgraduate demands. By setting and utilising study goals, the participants positioned themselves as agentive, motivated and autonomous learners, attributes which proved conducive to their development as independent learners. This is a significant finding, offering a new way of conceptualising the study outlook of postgraduate international students. While past research has similarly highlighted the importance of learner goals for

spurring motivation and driving strategy use (Macaro, 2006; Oxford, 1990; Pintrich, 2000), more recent studies have tended to focus on motivation, in interaction with other factors, as the main driver of learners' behaviour (Cohen, 2010; Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Ushioda, 2011; Woodrow, 2015). The validity of this motivation-based research is acknowledged in terms of its ability to capture dynamic forces at play. However, in this study, data prominence, in the form of the participants' repeated comments about the role of their self-directed goals in inspiring their learning efforts, justifies positioning these goals as initiators of motivation and autonomy in the Learning-for-Self phase (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Dervin, 2016). Due to their importance in initiating strategy use and, through it, the participants' development as independent learners, self-directed goals in the Learning-for-Self phase embrace not only task-specific goals (as in Oxford's model), but also broader short- and long-term study goals. This aligns the study's approach with the 'agency for becoming' concept of 'a self-initiated act of imagining and decision-making' by international students seeking to transform their situation (Tran & Vu, 2018, p. 183).

As outlined in section 5.2, the participants' long-term goals for completing a postgraduate degree at an Australian university related primarily to career development, with personal adventure and a desire to stay in Australia nominated as other key reasons. Similar to Heng's (2020) US study of Chinese students, freedom in various guises was a prime motivator for this study's participants: freedom to explore different ways of living, meet diverse types of people, and choose a course which might lead to an exciting future. A sense of calculated risk was apparent from participant comments on their long-term goals, including awareness of the degree of challenge and financial investment involved. The notion of participant risk in a high-stakes environment is central to understanding two key points: the intensity of the participants' approach to their studies and the importance of their goals in sustaining them through difficult experiences.

Consistent with this intensity, strong affective and cognitive elements were present in most participants' goal descriptions. This evidence supports the increasing recognition of holistic factors in student engagement with university

studies (Kahu, 2013; Kettle, 2017). Affect was particularly prominent in the comments of the three participants who sought to contribute to society in their future career, through words like 'love' and 'passion'. Once at the University, the affective component of the participants' short-term goals appeared as a sense of urgency to prevail in their immediate academic challenges, expressed in high modality language like 'I have to ...', 'I must ...'.

Affect took a different form, however, in the comments of most participants studying in IT and Accounting courses. It appeared as a fierce determination to succeed, but motivated largely by the prospect of a well-paid, secure career rather than an intrinsic interest in the chosen discipline. Significantly, the strategy choices of these participants were equivalent in thoughtfulness to those of the majority of the cohort. Their strongly held career goals appear to have overridden a fundamental disinterest in the subject matter. This finding supports Oxford's (2017, p. 184) claim that proponents of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) are somewhat rigid in limiting use of deep processing strategies to learners who are intrinsically motivated by their area of study. Similarly, in a study of first-year student engagement in deep learning at an Australian university, a future orientation was found to be the chief distinguishing factor between engaged and less engaged students (Horstmanshof & Zimitat, 2007). It may be concluded that the participants' goals fuelled their commitment to succeed in their studies, regardless of their personal interest in the specific subject area. Consistent with the strategy-based approach of this study, these goals are best viewed not just as factors contributing to the preparation phase, but also as metamotivational strategies, forming 'the guiding light' which directed the participants to action (Oxford, 2017, p. 193). Strategy use in the Learning-for-Self phase, then, represents the participants' self-regulatory efforts to energise their academic responses within specific contexts.

The detail and self-direction of participant goals were found to be primarily cognitive in nature, although affect was an interrelated factor. In the case of long-term goals, cognitive elements were present in the content of participants' diverse long-term plans, together with perceived career and lifestyle benefits. The cognitive elements in the participants' short-term goals were expressed in terms of the minimum acceptable outcome for their first semester ('pass', 'get a

good grade'), accompanied by reasons for its importance, including personal expectations and support for family migration.

Significantly, the participants' short-term academic goals were seldom expressed in relation to their perceived ability level, but as an achievable outcome based on the necessity of success and their willingness to work hard. This attitude may seem to support depictions of students from 'CHC' countries as diligent (Gutierrez & Dyson, 2009), attributing success to effort and endurance rather than innate ability (Li et al., 2010; Yan & Berliner, 2011). Indeed, in a study of Japanese learners of English, cultural influences were thought to be at the core of their 'growth mindset' (Mercer & Ryan, 2010, p. 436). However, as several of the participants reported a lax study approach prior to studying in Australia, this question remains open. Regardless of the reason for their determined study outlook, it is argued that this attitude not only supported the participants' goal-setting process, but also contributed to their development into independent learners, as academic success was seen to depend on factors under their own control. This position is supported by evidence in the language learning field suggesting that a growth mindset supports the process of learning (Mercer, 2012b)

However, the individualised nature of the participants' goals also emerged strongly in the data, consistent with Ushioda's (2009, p. 220) 'person-in-context relational view'. For example, the prospect of studying an MBA was viewed variously by four participants as an opportunity to expand ways of thinking, enhance career prospects back home, engage in self-improvement, or support a young family migrating to Australia. The participants' individual values and personality appeared to be equally relevant to their perception of opportunity as did their life circumstances. This diversity highlights the importance of the 'small culture approach' taken in this study (Holliday, 2011, p. 204), as it helps to de-essentialise student cohorts, particularly those from 'CHC' countries (Heng, 2018; Hua, 2011; Tran, 2011; Tran, 2013a).

The above findings about the participants' study outlook support other research about the function of motivation and autonomy in activating learner efforts through strategy use, with motivation seen as largely affective and autonomy as providing self-direction (Cohen, 2010; Griffiths, 2018a; Oxford, 2017; Ushioda,

2011). Confirming the interrelationship of motivation and autonomy emerging from the study's data, self-motivation has been termed 'hot cognition' (Oxford, 2011a; Oxford et al., 2014). Therefore, this study is aligned with other research on the role of motivation and autonomy in forming a student's outlook. However, it breaks new ground by highlighting self-directed goals as initiators of motivation and autonomy, at least in the high-risk context of this study's participants. The role of the participants' self-directed goals will be further explained below as heightening the perceived need for strategy use, the chief mechanism by which participants developed as independent learners.

9.2.1.ii. Self-identified needs

The second main aspect of the Learning-for-Self phase of the Strategic Self-learning Model is participant identification of task-related needs. These perceived needs are important because they influenced the participants' task-related strategy choices. The concept of self-identified needs builds on the forethought phase of Oxford's (2017) model, in which students analyse task requirements and plan strategies to fulfil the task. However, the self-identified needs in the Learning-for-Self phase of the Strategic Self-learning Model are also informed by contextual factors in the postgraduate setting which required an independent learning approach, thereby enhancing the phase's developmental function for the participants. This localised perspective is consistent with the growing trend for strategy researchers to highlight individualised strategy use in specific contexts, as opposed to universally applicable 'truths' (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Oxford, 1990; Rose, 2015).

According to a study of researcher views by Oxford (2017), strategy use is broadly viewed as a conscious, purpose-driven activity which already implies a measure of independent thinking. Indeed, Oxford (1990, p. 10) argues that learners' self-direction 'is often a gradually increasing phenomenon' as they 'become more confident with the idea of their own responsibility'. However, in the case of the participants, this process was truncated due to their sudden, enforced transition to postgraduate ways of learning. Therefore, in considering the Learning-for-Self phase of participant development, it is important to identify

factors contributing to this rapid transition in the form of self-identified task needs impacting on strategy choices.

The three major factors influencing the participants' perception of strategic needs as part of their broader development into independent learners were their self-directed goals, perception of postgraduate requirements, and utilisation of inner contextual resources.

9.2.1.ii.a. Impact of self-directed goals

The self-directed nature of the participants' goals had the effect of intensifying their perceived need for strategy use. This pattern was particularly noticeable for participants who had previously been disengaged from their studies in the L1 environment. These participants' new commitment to academic and career success changed their learning style (Macaro, 2006), largely by increasing the frequency and complexity of their use of metacognitive and cognitive strategies. These changes were due to an internal pressure to succeed ('I have to pass', Sanit, Interview 2) and a sense of agency ('Now I think I can do something with my work', Mary, Interview 2). For this group of participants, self-directed goals, supported by self-regulation of study attitudes, enabled them to override habitually undisciplined study patterns in favour of strategies targeting task needs. These changes serve to qualify Cohen's (2010, p. 173) position that learner awareness of 'the fit between their style preferences and the strategies that they select' is vital for success, as these participants were challenged to transform their ways of learning.

9.2.1.ii.b. Perception of postgraduate setting

An important finding from this study is that the participants' awareness of the unfamiliar independent learning culture of the postgraduate course guided their strategy design, which in turn supported their adjustment to this way of learning. This finding builds on other research highlighting the need for effective strategy use to align with a learner's task and goals within a given context (Griffiths, 2018a; Macaro, 2006; Oxford, 2011b, 2017). It adds to this research by foregrounding the requirement for student awareness of the dominant ways of

teaching and learning of an educational setting, in this case the postgraduate requirement of an independent study approach.

The participants' perception of their Australian postgraduate course as a very unfamiliar study environment occurred through the lens of their L1 undergraduate and EAP experiences. Past educational experiences thereby influenced the participants' shifting self-concept as learners in the postgraduate setting (Mercer, 2011b). Similar to Chinese students in a US study, the postgraduate setting was seen as a learning culture where 'blind discipline is devalued and self-directedness is encouraged' (Yan & Berliner, 2011, p. 180). The starkness and unanimity of the participants' initial perceptions of the postgraduate course are encapsulated in one participant's comment, repeated with slight variations across the cohort: 'You learn by yourself' (Dara, Interview 2).

This study's investigation of teaching and learning modes during pathway student transition to university responds to Benzie's (2011, 2015) call for research in this area, based on her concerns about a lack of pedagogical consistency between EAP and postgraduate settings. This study goes further by including L1 pedagogy in its investigations, thereby contributing significantly to the knowledge base on international student transition via an EAP pathway. The reference point for this analysis is the notion of student responsibility, as it is a widely accepted component of the independent learning approach at Western universities (Busher et al., 2016; Hughes & Bruce, 2016; Kell & Vogl, 2006; Spiro et al., 2012).

Participant accounts of their learning experiences in the L1 undergraduate, EAP and postgraduate settings suggest that they were guided more by pragmatic than by cultural principles. Beginning with the L1 undergraduate course (see section 5.3.1), the 17 participants from China, Thailand, Vietnam and Japan described their direct, explicit L1 instruction in negative terms, such as 'one-way communication ... just for the test' (Lisa, Interview 1). This view generally extended to their L1 ways of learning which, as found in other studies, involved substantial memorisation of content (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Tran, 2013a). In contrast, the Colombian participant gave a positive account of his L1 studies based on the utility and stimulation of the interactive pedagogical approach.

The negative evaluation of L1 ways of learning by participants from the four Asian countries calls into question cultural, 'CHC' explanations for passive student behaviour (Li & Wegerif, 2014; Phuong-Mai et al., 2005). While this behaviour could perhaps be attributed to respect for authority and expertise (Ryan, 2013c), in fact, L1 pedagogical approaches were criticised by the participants as impersonal, unstimulating and not conducive to learning. It is true that a few participants employed hybridised learning approaches throughout their studies in Australia, by including L1 study methods such as reviewing classwork and memorising vocabulary. However, the salient factor in participant explanations was the perceived usefulness of these approaches, rather than an alignment with cultural values. These findings support other depictions of international students from 'CHC' countries as pragmatic and individualistic learners (Heng, 2018; O'Dwyer, 2017; Tran, 2013a), rather than a homogeneous group conforming to 'CHC' norms (Campbell & Li, 2008; Li & Wegerif, 2014; Phuong-Mai et al., 2005). Further evidence challenging an essentialist 'CHC' perspective is that there was no noticeable difference between the L1 accounts of participants from China, Vietnam, Japan and Thailand, despite Thailand being excluded from 'CHC' classifications. The pragmatism of the participants proved to be an important factor facilitating their adjustment to the very different learning environment of the postgraduate setting.

Another key finding is that participant awareness of the postgraduate expectation of independent learning, seen through the filter of their L1 learning experiences, prompted the participants to identify a need to adjust to these new requirements. For the 17 participants from Asian countries, one of the differences to L1 teaching practices was the relative lack of specificity of postgraduate content delivery. Consistent with findings from other research (Heng, 2018; Tran, 2013a; Yan & Berliner, 2011), the less explicit task instructions and limited provision of learning materials by lecturers accorded the participants more responsibility for their learning. Similarly, the provision of only core subject content in postgraduate lectures, compared to the detailed L1 lecture content over longer contact hours (Ding, 2017; Tran, 2013a), necessitated considerably more reading outside class. In the words of one

participant, this less structured delivery constituted 'limited class', requiring the students to learn independently: 'They can't explain everything. We have to learn by ourself' (Sam, Interview 3). Awareness of pedagogical differences applied equally to the Colombian participant, in that his interactive undergraduate classrooms, featuring close teacher support, were seen to contrast markedly with the lecture-based delivery of his postgraduate course.

This study is one of very few to have examined students' perception of changed ways of learning, in terms of strategy use, in a significantly different educational setting from their L1 environment. Another such study was undertaken by Gao (2006), who noted major strategy changes by English learners as they moved from studies in China to a British setting with far less prescriptive requirements. This study supports Gao's (2006) main finding that strategy use is based not only on individual cognitive choices, but also on input from the learning community. Moreover, both sets of participants struggled initially with the greater degree of independence required at a Western university. However, there are also significant context-related differences between the two, which affected the students' experiences. Unlike this study, the focus of Gao's research was English language learning processes. Once in Britain, the participants were found to reduce their previous usage of memorisation-based strategies in favour of informal interaction with native speakers. In contrast, it appears that this study's context of a high-stakes, content-based, L2 postgraduate course resulted in substantially increased strategy use. This explanation is consistent with Oxford's (1990, p. 136) argument that the challenges of a new, overwhelming learning environment can be overcome by the 'conscious use of metacognitive strategies', but also underscores the need for contextualisation for understanding strategy use (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Rose, 2015).

The above finding as to the participants' pragmatism was confirmed by their experiences of EAP and postgraduate pedagogy. Despite the unfamiliarity of the dialogic, heavily scaffolded EAP teaching approach for the participants from Asian countries, they generally appreciated the relevance of EAP instruction for their future university studies. This positive evaluation of EAP skill teaching mirrors findings in other studies (Dooey, 2010; Dyson, 2014; Floyd, 2015;

Terraschke & Wahid, 2011), but here it is also argued that the participants' criterion of relevance evidences a forward-looking, utilitarian outlook. Further support for this pragmatic outlook is that once studying at university, several participants commented on the continuing value of their EAP skills, but none mentioned the interactive pedagogical approach of EAP teachers. Moreover, the University's independent learning culture was reported neutrally, as an observed reality requiring adjustment on their part, rather than as a challenging epistemological framework. Using the words of Gram et al. (2013, p. 771), the participants seemed to meet the new educational reality with a 'pragmatic openness ... in an almost technical way'.

While it may be tempting to see EAP and university settings as constituting a Western approach to education, it is instead argued that L1 and EAP settings in this study displayed pedagogical similarities in terms of their largely teacher-directed pedagogy aimed at intensive content and/or skill acquisition. Despite the requirement for some learner autonomy in the EAP course, there was still a significant gap to the independence required in the postgraduate setting. This broader context of pedagogical changes during the L1-to-postgraduate transition helps to explain the participants' initial shock in their first few weeks of postgraduate studies, when they were expected to adopt substantially more responsibility for their learning. This surprised reaction suggests that while EAP pedagogy was effective in teaching academic skills, it did not optimally prepare the participants for the University's ways of learning.

This review of pedagogy across the three educational contexts has revealed two important findings: the pragmatic study outlook of the participants, facilitating adjustment to postgraduate requirements, and their awareness of the different ways of teaching and learning at the University, prompting them to plan for strategy use. Both aspects of the participant outlook transformed their early postgraduate experiences into an exercise in independent learning.

9.2.1.ii.c. Inner contextual factors

The third factor contributing to the participants' identification of needs for task performance relates to their self-perception as students and as individuals. This

factor combines with the participants' self-directed goals to form what has been described as their 'internal context' (Ushioda, 2015, p. 52), the inner resources participants brought to their strategy choices. The study's aim of revealing the breadth of individual experience aligns with that of researchers advocating the inclusion of narrative elements in strategy research (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Oxford, 2011a; Oxford et al., 2014) and acknowledging the inadequacy of frequency-based strategy research (Cohen, 2011; Rose, 2015).

Consistent with the participants' pragmatism, their strategy choices were based on three linked traits: their preferred learning style, personal tendencies and perceived ability level. This study found a close alignment between the participants' preferred learning style and their strategy choices, often with a connection to personality traits. Evidencing a strategic outlook, most participants explained their choice of response as an application of individual strengths, in both an academic and personal sense. For example, the use of metasocial strategies by four participants in deciding to request lecturer help with understanding subject content was uniformly attributed to their ease of communicating with others, and ultimately to their sociable nature. In contrast, the autonomous learning style of two participants was explained as a preference for studying and living by themselves. Finally, participants with a highly analytical approach to tasks and strategy design tended to describe their methodical outlook as a habitual trait. These findings support other research suggesting a close association between preferred ways of learning and strategy design (Cohen, 2010; Griffiths, 2018b; Macaro, 2006), with further links to personal characteristics (Cohen, 2011). More broadly, they point to the individualised and holistic nature of strategy choices (Cohen, 2010; Oxford, 2017).

In relation to the participants' perceived ability level, an interesting juxtaposition emerged between study goals and strategy choices. The participants' goals appeared to be independent of their perceived level of competence, as diligence and determination were viewed as the chief determinants of success. However, when it came to selecting strategies for a specific task, the participants did consider their skillset.

The participants' consideration of their ability level in determining strategy needs can be illustrated in relation to understanding lecture content, a significant challenge early in the first semester. Strikingly, this need for strategy use was often expressed by participants as a need to learn by themselves, confirming the close link between strategy planning and independent learning. For example, three participants with self-described weak English skills decided to implement a three-stage framework of previewing lecture slides, attending the lecture, and then reviewing the slides afterwards. None of the other participants did so, apart from the two participants mentioned above, whose methodical natures appear to have determined their strategy use regardless of linguistic competence.

Similarly, participants' choices from the range of potential translation strategies tended to reflect their lecture comprehension skills. Machine translation of lecture slides was mostly used by those struggling to understand lecture content in other ways. This strategy was seen to provide a quick, convenient way to provide meaning, confirming similar findings in this area (Ducar & Schocket, 2018; Karnal & Pereira, 2015). Evidence that these participants strategically tailored use of machine translation to their skillset is provided by the contingent nature of their strategy use. For example, comparison of the translated text with the English version might be followed by use of a bilingual dictionary or inference for unclear translation or difficult words. This finding counters views that machine translation induces dependence in learners (Ducar & Schocket, 2018). Its usage by the participants constituted a strategic decision based on their skillset, and the frequency of use decreased with growing familiarity of disciplinary lexis.

The participants' inexperience with assignment tasks after the L1 focus on examinations (Gutierrez & Dyson, 2009) also provides evidence that their skillset influenced the need for strategy implementation. Task requirements of critical thinking emerged as a key source of challenge for the participants, particularly the need for complex analysis or synthesised written forms. Other research has similarly concluded that writing tasks involving critical thinking are a core difficulty for international students (Graves & White, 2016; Kettle, 2017; Wahyudi, 2016), especially evidence-based argumentation (Heng, 2018; Kettle,

2017; Ryan, 2010) and constructing extended responses with synthesised sources (Kettle, 2017; Ryan, 2010). This study's contribution lies in recognising the role of participant identification of unfamiliar requirements of critical thinking in driving their strategy use and, simultaneously, their development as independent learners.

To summarise, the participants felt relatively unrestricted by competence factors when they set short- and long-term goals for study, but paid more attention to their skill levels when deciding how to strategically fulfil these goals. It is argued that the self-directed nature of the participants' goals combined with awareness of their perceived learning style, personality traits and ability level to foster an independent approach to their studies. These factors highlight the value of self-regulation in achieving academic tasks (Rose, 2012), as well as its broader function in strengthening agency, a sense of self and learner autonomy (Winne, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). Findings about these key factors help to inform understanding of the adaptability of international students studying at Western universities (Gram et al., 2013; Heng, 2018, 2020; Tran, 2013a).

However, there were several cases where the pragmatic outlook of participants interrelated with the changed study environment, preventing the use of a preferred learning style if it was considered unhelpful in the new context. This finding is consistent with Tran (2013a) concerning the flexible adjustment of 'CHC' students to Western academic norms. It also supports the complexity theory principle that new forms result from interacting factors in a complex system (Oxford et al., 2018). The specific contribution here, developed further in discussion of the Learning-about-Self phase, is that the participants' change to unfamiliar strategies judged to be more effective was challenging, but through this process, nurtured their resourcefulness.

Examples of the perceived need to change habitual responses occurred across participant experiences. For example, several participants struggling to understand lectures felt unable to engage in their usual social strategy of asking peers for help, whether because there were no conational students in their subject area, international student peers were equally confused, or block mode delivery prevented collaboration. This caused a sense of disorientation, evidenced by one participant's comment that learning independently of peers

was ‘totally different from the way in my country’, where mutual checking of understanding was ‘normal’ (Lois, Interview 3). Furthermore, the decision of half the participant cohort to study in a completely different postgraduate discipline from their undergraduate degree made it necessary for them to identify new learning strategies appropriate to the subject area. These relatively rapid adjustment processes involved experimentation with new strategies, which were confusing at times (Yan & Berliner, 2011), but positioned the participants as pragmatic strategists directing their own learning process.

In contrast to this dominant pattern, strategic responses of a few participants were less pragmatic in nature and may have delayed their development into independent learners. This kind of response typically involved participants continuing ingrained but ineffective study behaviours for the task at hand while submitting to affective impulses. For example, strategic choices by two participants to abandon engagement with difficult lecture content, and by another to copy sources in his assignment response due to time-induced stress, led to negative outcomes which they later addressed through self-reflection. Consistent with Oxford (2017)’s examination of less effective strategy users, these participants engaged in metacognitive avoidance strategies without sufficient self-regulation of affect. Their examples highlight the value of a pragmatic outlook for development of an independent study approach by foregrounding the need for appropriate use of metacognitive strategies, without ignoring holistic needs.

Learning for Self, then, involved the synthesis of self-directed goals, awareness of the independent learning demands of postgraduate studies, and pragmatic application of study and personal preferences to meet task requirements. The participants’ experience of the Learning-for-Self phase helped to determine their strategy use in the Learning-by-Self phase, which, through practice, further developed their role as independent learners.

9.2.2. Learning by Self

Learning by Self is a crucial phase in the participants’ development as independent learners in the postgraduate setting. It is in this phase of the

Strategic Self-learning Model that the participants implemented the major strategies related to their academic tasks. A significant finding from this study is that the participants' metastrategy use, by providing experience with organising response to unfamiliar and challenging learning situations, helped them develop into independent learners.

Figure 8 depicts the Learning-by-Self phase of the Strategic Self-learning Model.

Figure 8: Learning by Self

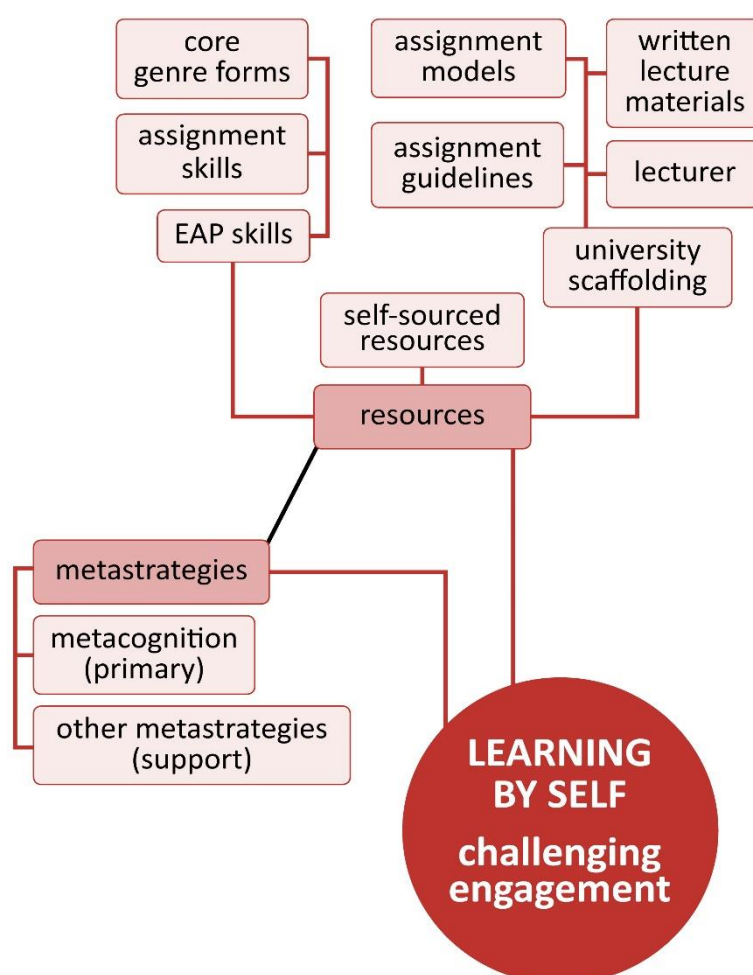


Figure 8 illustrates how resources were utilised by the participants in their strategic decision-making, represented by the black line connecting 'resources' with 'metastrategies'. The participants' strategic decisions can be explained by two main factors: the need to respond to unfamiliar academic demands and the

requirement for independent thinking in many postgraduate tasks. These kinds of tasks have been linked in the literature to critical thinking, active learning, evidence-based argumentation and student-centred learning (Evans et al., 2018; Gram et al., 2013; Hughes & Bruce, 2016; Kettle, 2017; Ryan, 2013c; Saravanamutu & Yap, 2014). The participants' independence as learners, therefore, was enhanced as they responded to an educational environment which itself demanded independent thought and action. The participants' enhanced responsibility for their own learning reflects a fundamental feature of independent learners in the literature (Busher et al., 2016; Heng, 2018; Kell & Vogl, 2006; Spiro et al., 2012).

As explained in section 3.4.2.iv, the use of metastrategies for strategy management is a holistic expansion by Oxford (2011b) of the widely used notion of metacognition, to include metasocial, meta-affective and, in Oxford's (2017) model, metamotivational strategies. A major finding of this study is that the key 'executive control and management function' of metastrategies (Oxford, 2017, p. 155) fostered the participants' development into independent learners. This finding echoes those of a useful study into the growing autonomy of undergraduate Chinese students at a Hong Kong university, particularly the central role of participant management of challenge in this development (Ding, 2017). It is argued that here, the complex concept of metastrategies produces similar conclusions, but adds rigour and specificity to the framing of participant experience in an even more unfamiliar postgraduate setting in a Western country. The chief focus of the subsequent discussion, then, is on the participants' metastrategy use and its varying purposes, rather than the array of cognitive, social, affective and/or motivational strategies which might result from these metastrategic decisions. These decisions, together with their organisational aspects, are the main focus of attention here, with monitoring and evaluation of strategies to be discussed in relation to Learning about Self.

A central theme of this study, to be explored in relation to the Learning-by-Self and Learning-about-Self phases of the model, relates to an intriguing paradox emerging from participant data. While the participants eagerly sought support in their transition from the L1 and EAP settings to the postgraduate course, the most significant development in their independence and associated qualities of

self-regulation and resilience appeared to occur when they were cast onto their own resources.

Exploration of this paradox and ways in which the Learning-by-Self phase promotes independent learning will be undertaken in relation to the following topics:

- The role of metacognitive strategies as the primary means of organising response to unfamiliar tasks
- The role of other metastrategies in managing complex strategy use
- The nature of participants' strategy use as challenging engagement
- The supportive role of postgraduate scaffolding.

9.2.2.i Role of metacognition as primary metastrategy

Metacognitive strategies proved to be by far the most common type of metastrategy used by participants, as they sought to make sense of unfamiliar academic demands and determine a suitable cognitive response with reference to their limited skillset.

9.2.2.i.a. Use of metacognition

Chapter 7 outlined the participants' extensive use of metacognition to manage the use of cognitive strategies for different purposes, whether cognitive, social, affective and/or motivational in nature. It is argued that this management function placed the participants in a role which challenged them to adopt an autonomous, self-regulatory approach to their studies. For example, linguistic issues, which can be explained by the participants' lack of frequent exposure to relevant items (Bybee, 2003, 2006), were addressed largely by metacognitive and cognitive strategies, as in Cohen (2011). Participants' strategic responses included translation of lecture slides in order to understand subject content, as the lectures themselves proved difficult to comprehend. To organise this cognitive strategy use, the participants needed to determine the availability of the slides before and/or after the lecture and the means to access them, assemble translation resources appropriate to the difficulty of the task, make ongoing decisions as to the usefulness of supplementing translation with

inference and/or reading of other written sources, and oversee synthesis of the slide content with their comprehension from the lecture itself. The participants' 'conscious use of metacognitive strategies' appears to have helped them cope with these unfamiliar and sometimes overwhelming demands (Oxford, 1990, p. 136). Unsurprisingly, challenges were often greatest, and strategy use most active, if a skill required in a postgraduate task had not been introduced in the EAP course. In relation to the paradox under discussion, it appears that the participants placed themselves in an executive role conducive to their development as independent learners through regulation of their study behaviours and of learning tools available to them.

One key area where the participants assumed responsibility for their learning is the use of metacognitive strategies for transfer of academic skills from the EAP course. This function reflects findings about the key role of metacognition in transfer to a new academic context (Negretti, 2012; Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011). The high value placed by participants on academic skill teaching in the EAP course, as outlined in section 6.3.1, is confirmed by EAP research (Dyson, 2014; Floyd, 2015; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). However, the transfer of EAP-acquired skills to a university context has suffered from a lack of research, highlighting the importance of this study's findings in a vital area affecting student adjustment to university.

9.2.2.i.b. Transfer of EAP assignment writing skills

While the participants appreciated the EAP focus on teaching assignment skills, transferring the associated writing skills to postgraduate tasks proved challenging. This difficulty can be understood with reference to the participants' L1 educational background, where they had minimal experience of assignments, including constructing an outline and the use of written models. Other studies have already pointed to writing as the weakest skill for ex-EAP students entering university (Dyson, 2014; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). Nevertheless, it was the metacognitive and cognitive efforts of participants to address this weakness by transferring EAP skills which provided them with experience as independent learners.

The participants found transfer most difficult when the required postgraduate genre had only partial correspondence with EAP-taught genres. In these cases, they frequently noted similarities and differences between the relevant genres or viewed the genres in terms of functions (comparison, reflection, synthesis) rather than listed features. These findings are consistent with other studies on genre transfer highlighting the importance of metacognitive genre awareness, or understanding of the purpose and mechanics of genre features (Negretti, 2012, 2017; Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011). The exception in this study, a participant who struggled to transfer core genre teachings to writing in an unfamiliar form (reflection), is instructive in this regard. Transfer was impeded by the participant's limited view of genres as a set of prescribed features, rather than as linguistic features targeting a textual purpose. This participant would perhaps be categorised in Reiff and Bawarshi's (2011) framework as a 'boundary guarder' rather than a 'boundary crosser' (p. 325) as the other study participants might be termed. These findings on genre transfer cast light on factors influencing effective genre transfer in the EAP-to-postgraduate transition.

Therefore, while the participants' difficulties in genre transfer encouraged independent effort on their part, without the requisite skills in metacognitive genre awareness, their ability to implement effective strategic responses was constrained. In relation to the paradox under discussion, this evidence points to the delicate balance between practice-based autonomous learning as a vital tool for promoting independent learning and the need for skill instruction to ensure that students successfully meet task requirements.

9.2.2.i.c. Role of disciplinary factors in written tasks

While some researchers have proposed that EAP instruction in generic writing skills may be counterproductive for subsequent disciplinary tasks (Benzie, 2015; Counsell, 2011; Dyson, 2016), their research has lacked specificity. Therefore, this study's findings about factors (disciplinary or otherwise) impeding the participants' ability to fulfil requirements for written responses are an important contribution to the field.

Findings in section 6.3.2.iii reveal a complex landscape of participant experience which had a partial connection with disciplinary demands. Problems tended to occur in subjects requiring theory-based analysis and/or lengthy discursive responses, such as occurred in MBA, Finance and Law courses. Participant difficulties in these tasks, which required substantial critical thinking and synthesis skills, extended to conceptual elements specific to the discipline. As critical analysis was often foregrounded in the subject documentation as a core graduate outcome, participants' failure to use evidence-based argumentation or theory-based analysis constituted a substantial misalignment with subject principles. In contrast, more technical subjects in courses like IT, Nursing or GMP attracted fewer problems due to scaffolding of tasks and less onerous requirements, including shorter responses and a standard report format.

These general disciplinary tendencies, however, were qualified by other intervening factors, such as the participants' previous experience with similar tasks and their academic and linguistic competence. Despite these individual and disciplinary variations within the cohort, nearly all participants commented on the difficulty and length of postgraduate assignments relative to those in the EAP course, prompting a need for metacognitive response.

The above analysis of the key role of metacognition in postgraduate written assignments leads to a key finding of this study, that the participants' extensive and individualised use of metacognition as the dominant metastrategy nurtured qualities characteristic of independent learners: self-responsibility, autonomy, resourcefulness and self-regulation. The participants responded independently to unfamiliar task demands by organising the implementation of cognitive strategies which they had not yet automatised as skills. This strategy use included the need to utilise, in modified form, learning resources from their EAP course. Self-regulation, then, was central to their academic responses, paralleling Winne's (2011) finding that self-regulatory learners typically exhibit a strong use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

9.2.2.ii. Role of metastrategies in complex strategy use

There were two important findings in relation to the participants' use of metastrategies. The first finding was that their orchestration of metastrategies and strategies in clusters and sequences promoted an independent study approach. This complex strategy use was used in response to particularly difficult tasks, similar to Oxford (2017). Secondly, while metacognition met the primary academic needs of participants and fostered an independent study approach, other metastrategies acted in a largely supportive capacity. This finding helps to inform the paradox under discussion through the dual roles of metastrategy use: the promotion of academic autonomy and the fostering of a sustainable new student role by meeting social, affective and motivational needs.

Within the individualised nature of the participants' strategy implementation, a general pattern emerged, namely of metacognition leading a complex strategic response, in several cases accompanied by metasocial strategies, and often for a range of purposes. To illustrate this pattern, an Engineering student used a cluster of metacognitive and metasocial strategies within an extended strategy sequence in an attempt to understand a difficult assignment task. This involved individual translation of the task and searches in Mandarin for related content, before comparing this information to the lecture slides in English. The metasocial aspects emerged through two strategic efforts involving his Chinese peer group: asking the Mandarin-speaking Assistant Lecturer for clarification and checking peer understanding of the task requirements. This strategy use all occurred within a context of confusion, stress and high motivation for these students, highlighting that the metacognitive and metasocial strategies had not only cognitive and social purposes, but affective and motivational ones as well.

More broadly, the use of metasocial strategies by groups of Chinese students was a widespread occurrence. This collaborative approach, used in conjunction with metacognitive strategies, was largely confined to students in courses such as IT, Finance and Engineering, where there were large numbers of students from China. Checking disciplinary content and task requirements were the chief functions of this networking activity. The effectiveness of Chinese student networks was facilitated by use of the L1 and mutual understanding amongst

the students arising from their common background. Ultimately, though, it appears that completion of assignment tasks was undertaken individually, and that these strategies served an important clarification function for the participants as they engaged with unfamiliar demands in their first postgraduate semester. This finding supports other research noting that Chinese students at Western universities often prefer to study with the support of conational networking groups (Ma, 2017; Quan et al., 2016; Rienties et al., 2013; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013), and that conational engagement with academic tasks assists these students in managing unfamiliar demands (Li et al., 2010; Yan & Berliner, 2013).

Another recurring feature of participant experience represented in the above example is the multiplicity of purposes associated with a given metastrategic choice. While these choices were primarily metacognitive and sometimes metasocial in nature, their purposes were at times cognitive, social, affective and/or motivational. Affective and motivational purposes of strategy use were often interrelated due to their overlapping features, as found in other research (Griffiths, 2018a; Oxford, 2017). Reflecting this interrelationship, affective and motivational issues emerged as mutually formative in participant difficulties with understanding lecture content, facing daunting examinations, or feeling overwhelmed while writing an assignment response. In these cases, the participants typically acknowledged their concerns, but interestingly, their major responses were largely metacognitive in nature as they organised appropriate cognitive strategies to address the academic issues. In contrast to this metacognitive response, there was little allusion to meta-affective and metamotivational strategies to pacify anxiety and lift faltering motivation, other than reaffirming short-term goals and, for a few participants, positive self-talk. The participants' self-regulation of negative feelings was therefore confined largely to completion of the task. This finding may be explained by Griffith and Oxford's (2014) claim that the forms of self-regulation utilised by students can vary according to their sociocultural background.

In a general sense, these findings evidence the fluidity of strategy types and uses found in other research (Cohen, 2010, 2011; Oxford, 2017). However, more specifically, they reveal important information regarding the role of social,

affective and motivational elements in supporting metacognitive strategy implementation. The orchestration of this synthesised strategy implementation as a self-regulatory response (Oxford, 2017) formed a central component of the participants' growth as independent learners in the daunting postgraduate context.

9.2.2.iii. Strategy use as challenging engagement

Strategy use in the Learning-by-Self phase involved struggle for many of the participants. An important finding from this study is that the participants' determined efforts to meet task requirements, often under strain, formed an integral part of their development as independent learners. This finding provides a fresh contribution to the knowledge base on EAP studies, as there has been insufficient attention to the strongly affective component of ex-EAP students' experience in their first semester at university. Moreover, even in the broader field of international student transition to Western universities, the great majority of strategy-based studies about adaptation have instead been limited to students' use of metacognition in applying past learnings to a new task (Negretti, 2012, 2017; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011; Rose, 2015).

While existing research has yielded important insights into students' mental processing, affective components have sometimes been ignored, along with their developmental implications. Indeed, emotions such as anxiety or fear have often been viewed as unfortunate concomitants of international students' engagement with a new study environment (Gao, 2006; Yan & Berliner, 2013). However, in alignment with this study's approach, a new, more positive focus on the role of negative emotions in fostering resilience is emerging (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Oxford, 2017; Oxford et al., 2007). The study has a similar affinity with research viewing strategy use as part of a learner's challenging but valuable journey, in which strategies are seen to offer not only solutions, but also opportunities for growth (Oxford et al., 2014). To explain the role of the participants' experience of struggle in their development as independent learners, evidence of challenging strategy use will be examined here, then explored further in its developmental function in discussion of Learning about Self.

This study found that experiences involving struggle took two interrelated forms for participants:

- A feeling of being overwhelmed at the quantity, pace and difficulty of postgraduate task demands
- Confusion about the nature of task demands.

Workload issues had a substantial affective impact on the participants, reflecting findings in Ding (2017) about the adjustment difficulties of international students. Assignment work was found to induce stress in the participants, while their difficulty in understanding lecture content in the initial weeks bordered on panic for those with only minimal comprehension. These intense feelings were similarly experienced in relation to upcoming examinations assessing knowledge of lecture-based content. Significantly, the participants often explained stressful postgraduate experiences by contrasting them with considerably easier, heavily scaffolded tasks in the EAP course.

Affective responses were also noted in another under-researched area within EAP literature: delayed application of EAP learnings in the postgraduate setting. Negative emotions were associated with two different types of responses, as outlined in section 7.3.2.i.b. Several participants who had not yet implemented academic reading skills taught in the EAP course did so belatedly under pressure to understand difficult academic articles. In the words of one participant: ‘No time! I just think “I have to survive”’ (Lois, Interview 3). In contrast, the stress of feeling overloaded with assignment task demands impeded the application of EAP instruction in evidence-supported argument in the case of MBA and Marketing participants. These findings on delayed uptake of material taught in the EAP course contribute useful information about EAP skill transfer, with current research findings limited to gaps in EAP skill instruction (Counsell, 2011; Dyson, 2014; Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015).

Feelings of confusion also featured prominently in participant accounts. Assignment tasks perceived as unclear, whether due to the unfamiliarity of task requirements or the difficulty of synthesising sources, often produced feelings of uncertainty. In relation to lecture comprehension, confusion frequently arose if participants were studying a course with little or no relationship to their

undergraduate degree, as was the case with at least half the cohort. This sense of disorientation was exacerbated by an inability to understand lectures, isolation from peers, and a requirement for independent effort in contrast to the scaffolded instruction in their EAP course. Confusion also occurred during participants' implementation of translation strategies, due to the presence of multiple potential meanings for lexical terms, as well as semantic complexities associated with direct translation. Research into machine translation, widely used by the participants, has found that it engendered similar semantic difficulties for L2 students (Ducar & Schocket, 2018; Karnal & Pereira, 2015).

While other studies have suggested that ex-EAP students have insufficient skills for assignment tasks at university (Counsell, 2011; Dyson, 2014; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011), as well as for comprehending university lectures (Dooey, 2010; Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Kell & Vogl, 2006), this study provides important new information about the unsettling presence of strong affective factors during the first semester at university. These feelings occurred during the participants' experimentation with strategies in the face of unfamiliar and difficult tasks. The role of affect will be discussed further in the context of Learning about Self, through participants' reflections on their developing qualities as independent learners. The discussion here lays the groundwork for an argument that feelings of unease and confusion were ultimately transformative for the participants as these feelings formed an integral part of their strategic response to new situations. This argument responds to the paradox outlined in section 9.2.2, by highlighting the role of negative affect in the participants' development into resourceful and resilient learners.

9.2.2.iv. Support from postgraduate scaffolding

The institutional support provided to the participants in their first-semester studies casts further light on the paradox by explaining the impact of scaffolding on the participants' emerging independence as learners. University support for assignment work took various forms, but those considered most valuable were the provision of detailed guidelines and annotated models (MBA, Engineering), a two-phase assessment process of group then individual tasks (Finance, Marketing, IT and Communications) and additional assignment-focused classes

for weaker students (Engineering). These features were seen to provide useful scaffolding for specific tasks in the participants' challenging first semester, whereas the university's generic student support service was often considered less effective due to a lack of disciplinary knowledge. This preference for disciplinary over generic academic support parallels findings in other Australian studies (Baik & Greig, 2009; Tran, 2013).

Further clarification of the importance of first-semester support for the participants emerges in relation to the provision of written models (teacher-produced) and/or exemplars (student samples). After genre instruction in the EAP course, guided as per usual practice by written models (Chong, 2018), the relative absence of models in the postgraduate setting was noted with disappointment by the participants. In usage-based theory terms, they lacked 'exemplar clusters' which would enable them to map a new task onto a range of similar pre-existing forms (Bybee, 2006, p. 717). The high value placed on models and/or exemplars mirrors other studies on international students' assignment experiences (Dixon et al., 2019; Handley & Williams, 2011). In participant comments on the two subjects which did provide them, the visual exemplification of textual structure was described as the major benefit. Explanation of key features was another reported benefit, whether in the form of annotation or lecturer talk (Carless & Chan, 2016; Chong, 2018).

An important finding from this study is that if participants were not supplied with a written model, they tended to source their own and apply it to the task at hand. Most of the participants accessed models/exemplars from a range of sources: Internet searches for a similar genre in their subject area, past students' work in similar tasks, or even a peer doing the same assignment. Sourced exemplars were compared, sometimes in a group of students, to establish common features, and then related to the task at hand. Clearly, the extensive strategy use involved in these investigations helped to foster the participants' independence as learners. However, the dangers of this approach in their first semester, in terms of potential plagiarism and uninformed analysis, point to the need for a pedagogical balance between encouragement of independent learning and scaffolding of correct forms. Moreover, they highlight a dissonance between EAP and university pedagogical approaches. In terms of

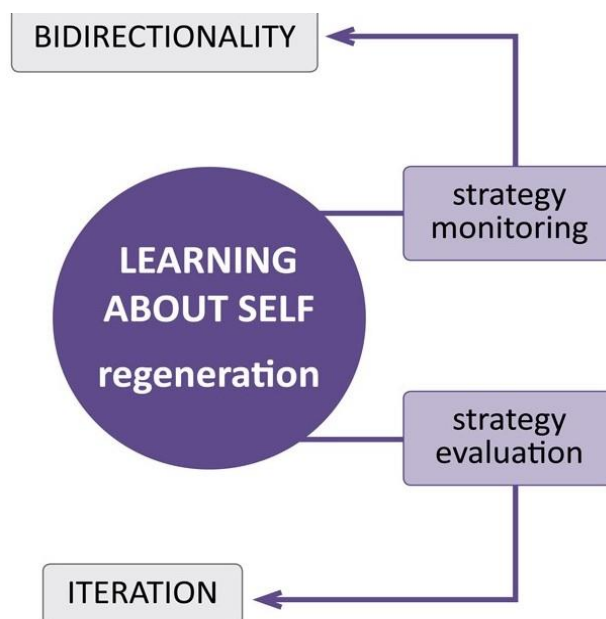
the paradox under discussion, while strategy use encouraged participants' development as independent learners, it appears that there was a greater need for balance from guided instruction in order to foster disciplinary enculturation (Hyland, 2008, 2016; Leung & Street, 2017).

In closing, Learning by Self was a vital phase for the participants' transformation into independent learners in the postgraduate setting. In this phase, the participants organised and implemented strategies made necessary by their own skill gaps and the expectation of student independence in the postgraduate course. Metacognitive strategies were prominent in this phase, exercising the participants' ability to respond independently to unfamiliar academic requirements in ways appropriate to their skillset and previous learnings from the EAP course. The challenging nature of this strategy use emerged as a key feature of participant experience, testing their flexibility and resilience both academically and personally. Support emerged in the form of metasocial strategies and institutional scaffolding, ameliorating the participants' experience of individual struggle and clarifying ways to engage with first-semester demands. The participants' developmental process proceeded from intensive strategy implementation in the Learning-by-Self phase to reflection on learnings and growth in the Learning-about-Self phase of the model.

9.2.3. Learning about Self

Learning about Self is a crucial phase in the Strategic Self-learning Model because it highlights the participants' awareness of themselves as emerging independent learners. The potential for change is enlivened in this phase due to participant monitoring and evaluation of strategy use, aspects of task review which have been widely recognised in the literature (Dörnyei, 2009; Negretti, 2012; Oxford, 2011b, 2017; Rose, 2015; Winne, 2011). The key aspects of this phase, strategy monitoring and strategy evaluation, are highlighted in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Learning about Self



In the Learning-about-Self phase depicted in Figure 9, the dynamic function of self-reflection is foregrounded in its primary function of regeneration. This focus is consistent with key features of complex systems: their openness to change, sensitivity to feedback and adaptiveness (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, 2017; Oxford et al., 2018). Central to this dynamism in the participants' experience is awareness of the impact of strategy experiences on their learning, their sense of self, and their options for future strategy use as independent learners.

Consistent with the study's developmental focus, the following discussion of the Learning-about-Self phase will highlight perceptual and behavioural changes arising from participant self-reflection. These changes will be discussed in relation to two key concepts shown in Figure 9: iteration and bidirectionality. Iteration is understood here as a repeated cycle involving learning, while bidirectionality refers to 'feedback among the phases' (Oxford, 2017, p. 73). These concepts represent the processes by which participants adjusted their strategy selection through self-reflection, either after one task in preparation for future ones (iteration), or during the performance of a task (bidirectionality). In order to highlight the agentive and ultimately transformative function of these processes, strategy monitoring is discussed as part of this phase, in contrast to

its inclusion in the performance phase of Oxford's (2017) and Zimmerman's (2008) models.

As will be shown through the participants' strategy adjustments, iteration and bidirectionality exemplify a core paradox of complexity theory, namely that 'despite [complexity's] lack of overt government, ... there are patterns everywhere' (Beckner et al., 2009, p. 18). While learning outcomes were not predictable due to the complex interrelationship of contributing factors, common patterns occurred across the participant group in relation to strategy revision. The regenerative function of self-reflection is visually depicted in the phase version of the Strategic Self-learning Model (Figure 5). Iteration is represented by clockwise arrows connecting phase to phase, with the most salient connection from Learning about Self at the completion of strategy implementation to Learning for Self at the beginning of the next task. Meanwhile, the recursive element of bidirectionality is shown with anticlockwise arrows, reflecting the participants' efforts to revise strategies to better meet task requirements.

9.2.3.i. Iteration

A core finding of this study is that the process of iteration, nurtured by self-reflection, regenerated the participants' study approach in the direction of independent learning. Iteration has been regarded by several researchers as a key element in a language learner's developmental process (Cohen, 2011; Macaro, 2006; Oxford, 1990, 2017). Oxford (2017, p. 73) acknowledges that iteration is a salient feature of a broader-scale, ongoing process of strategy use, as the self-reflection phase 'prepares the learner to make educated choices of strategies for another task'.

For these reasons and those outlined in section 9.2.2, the Strategic Self-learning Model is presented as a valuable theoretical construct which builds on Oxford's (2017) model for the purpose of revealing developmental aspects of strategy use within an unfamiliar learning environment. Although other studies have demonstrated that skill development results from strategy use (Macaro, 2006; Oxford, 1990; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011), the Strategic Self-learning Model offers a new understanding as it frames strategy implementation due to skill

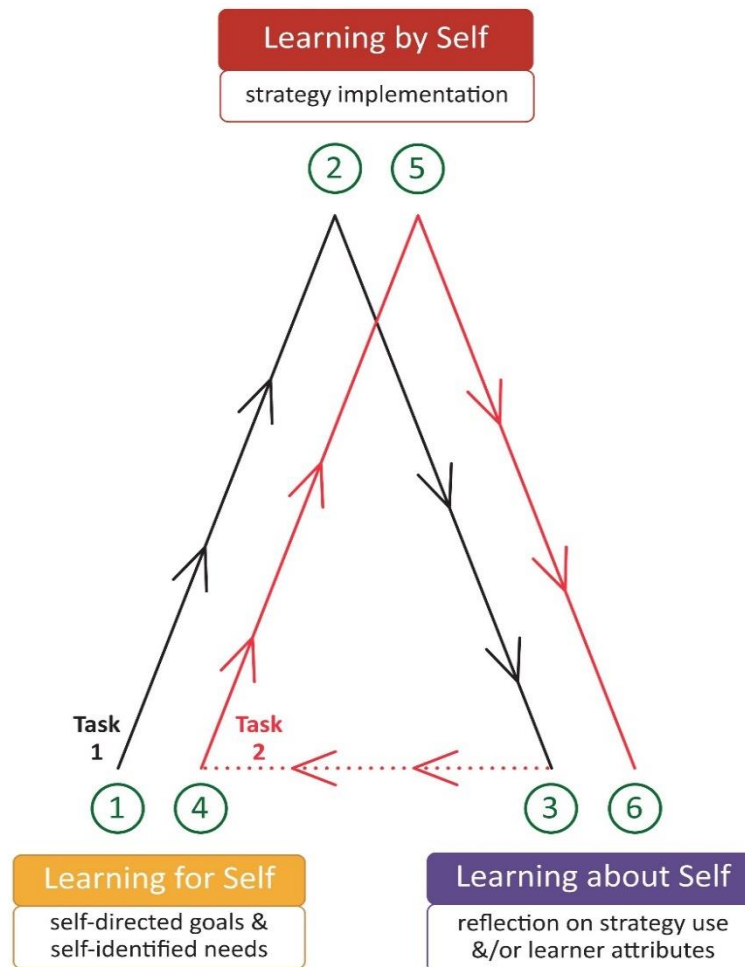
deficits, coupled with self-reflection, in terms of a transformation in learning approach. It therefore provides a fresh perspective on the developmental function of strategy use.

This study's investigation of iteration was facilitated methodologically by the semi-longitudinal design, regarded as an underused and effective tool for strategy research (Cohen, 2011) and an important component of research based on complexity theory (Dörnyei, 2009; Larsen-Freeman, 2017). The extended period of data collection allowed for several cycles of task completion, involving ongoing interaction of contextual factors and potential redirection of participants' strategic efforts after each self-reflection phase.

The key iterative function in the Strategic Self-learning Model occurred through the participants' strategy review in the Learning-about-Self phase, impacting on their assessment of needs for the next task (Learning for Self). Iteration occurred in two main forms, as indicated in Figure 10:

- Revision of strategy design after evaluating previous strategy use
- Development of useful attitudinal traits, or 'strength factors' (Oxford, 2017, p. 65), influencing future strategy use.

Figure 10: Iteration in the Strategic Self-learning Model



9.2.3.i.a. Revised strategy use

The participants tended to revise their strategic approach to future tasks after evaluation revealed that this approach had not fulfilled task demands. The influence of their evaluation on the subsequent task is represented in the diagram by the dotted line and backwards-pointing arrows connecting number 3 to number 4. Sections 8.2.1.i-ii explained how this pattern was particularly evident in participant reflection on the targeted assignment task, as it had a finite nature and feedback was provided. There were two main findings about the participants' use of feedback as a tool for self-reflection. They inform understanding of the role of feedback in fostering independent learning and the kind of feedback experience conducive to this development.

Self-reflection based on lecturer feedback:

The participants' assignment experiences reveal that self-reflection on lecturer feedback encouraged an independent learning approach. This finding supports previous research noting the function of assignment feedback in promoting student autonomy and responsibility (Ferguson, 2011; Orsmond et al., 2013), but explores in more detail the developmental function of student reflection on feedback. The participants' self-reflection enhanced their independence as learners whether or not the task required the use of critical thinking skills, traditionally associated with independent learning (Evans et al., 2018; Gram et al., 2013; Hammersley-Fletcher & Hanley, 2016; Hughes & Bruce, 2016). As explained previously, the two major factors contributing to changing ways of learning were participant engagement with tasks which inherently required independent learning and skill deficits necessitating agentive, strategic responses. In the case of assignment tasks, lecturer feedback generated a dialogic function with participants, acting as an impetus to their growth in understanding.

The developmental role of task review can be illustrated through the experiences of six participants who decided to revise strategies for future assignments in response to feedback (see section 8.2.1.i). Four of these participants (MBA and Marketing) realised from lecturer comments that they had provided insufficient evidential support for their arguments, one participant (Engineering) improved his understanding of how to identify a research gap in the literature, and another (GMP) concluded that he had missed some parts of his task due to limited lexical knowledge. In the first five cases, areas of weakness identified in lecturer feedback could be linked to the participants' embryonic use of critical thinking skills, the sixth less so. The conceptual growth of the five participants towards understanding critical thinking was shown to be a gradual learning process involving conceptual and skill-based aspects, supported by lecturer feedback. As a key part of this development, the need to progress from intellectual understanding to automatised skill was reflected in the Engineering student's comment: 'Now I understand what that means, the critical thinking. After more practice, I can gradually understand that' (Tony, Interview 3).

In contrast, the sixth case, occurring within a subject based on compliance principles rather than critical thinking, concerned a participant's misunderstanding of part of the assignment task. Lecturer feedback prompted him to redesign his future study approach to include expansion of his disciplinary lexis, a reconfiguration which also exercised independent learning skills. For all these participants, then, self-reflection leading to a revised approach to assignment tasks represents an iterative pattern which advanced their development as independent learners.

The participants' iterative development through strategy revision reflects their role as active students responsible for their own learning process. Two other examples are the establishment of a time management schedule in response to difficulty meeting deadlines and requests for assignment guidance from disciplinary academic staff after unsatisfactory experiences with the generic student support service. The framing of independent learning in terms of student responsibility is supported by other studies noting this expectation at Western universities (Busher et al., 2016; Kell & Vogl, 2006; Spiro et al., 2012). This study goes further by linking the assumption of responsibility for learning to strategy use, including self-reflection as a regenerative tool to optimise future study approaches.

Optimal feedback experience:

The study's findings support other research noting the importance of two factors for effective learning from task feedback: the content of feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kettle, 2017) and the willingness and/or ability of students to respond appropriately (Carless & Boud, 2018; Poulos & Mahony, 2008). In terms of content, the specificity and usefulness of lecturer comments proved to be a key factor supporting participant learning, as found in other studies (Blair & McGinty, 2013; Kettle, 2017; Zhang & Zheng, 2018). This study advances these findings by interrelating specificity and usefulness with the form of lecturer feedback, as a global comment with in-text comments, a global comment by itself, or a grade with no comment. These content- and form-based factors are particularly important due to the need of international students to receive expert

guidance with often unfamiliar tasks (Zhang & Zheng, 2018). With reference to the paradox under discussion, effective feedback supported participant ability to engage with future tasks, but simultaneously fostered skills conducive to independent learning.

In terms of the form of feedback, participant understanding of deficiencies and paths to improvement was enhanced by the provision of in-text lecturer comments. For example, the MBA participants, who had received global and in-text feedback on their lack of evidence in a demanding discursive task, were able to pinpoint specific instances where it was needed. From this intertextual communication, the participants reflected productively on the requirement of evidential support, thereby advancing their understanding and allowing them to reconfigure their strategic approach for future tasks. However, consistent with their pragmatic outlook, none of the participants questioned the epistemological validity of tasks requiring critical thinking. For example, they did not criticise the notion of argumentation as an expression of individual perspectives, despite its relative newness to them, but instead focused on the practical requirements to be fulfilled. This pragmatism, it is argued, assisted the participants in adjusting to a new educational paradigm as they conceived of it in largely technical terms, 'simply an ability to be learned' (Gram et al., 2013, p. 771).

In contrast, standalone global comments were found to have a variable impact on participants' learning. Comments with specific advice provided learning opportunities, while general comments tended to confuse the participants. This finding is supported by research pointing to the value of specific assignment feedback (Blair & McGinty, 2013; Kettle, 2017; Zhang & Zheng, 2018), but also highlights the fact that it can occur in global and/or in-text feedback. However, a complete absence of written feedback was consistently found to generate unhelpful participant responses for learning, as the participants either engaged in uninformed speculation as to their reasons for the grade, or reported feeling frustrated or indifferent at the lack of guidance. This finding points to the importance of teacher feedback as a means to transform assessed tasks into learning opportunities (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Olave-Encina et al., 2020; Ramsden, 1998).

In relation to the study's paradox, it appears that the specificity of lecturer feedback did not impede the agency of the participants, but rather guided it, so feedback became a useful tool for self-reflection and, through it, the growth of student independence. These findings add significantly to previous research about the need for specific, useful feedback in two ways. They couple this requirement with effective forms and types of feedback, and they view optimal feedback as a support for learner independence.

With regard to student response, as the second factor impacting on the participants' feedback experience, the study's findings support other research concluding that student attitude to feedback is a crucial factor in their ability to respond productively (Carless & Boud, 2018; Dixon, 2014; Olave-Encina et al., 2020; Poulos & Mahony, 2008). While most of the study's participants were keen to learn from lecturer comments, two participants displayed little interest. For one of these participants, despair about her writing skills made improvement seem impossible, while the other participant limited his goals to passing as he felt overwhelmed by assessment-related demands. Their examples align with findings by Carless and Boud (2018), namely that an open, appreciative attitude to lecturer feedback and an ability to cope affectively with negative comments are fundamental to students' ability to reflect effectively on feedback. It is argued that this willingness to learn new ways of approaching tasks was also fundamental to the participants' ability to assume responsibility for their studies.

9.2.3.i.b. Awareness of developing strength factors

This study found that the participants developed personal 'strength factors' (Oxford, 2017, p. 65) during the Learning-for-Self and Learning-by-Self phases of the Strategic Self-learning Model, and that they processed these changes through reflection during the Learning-about-Self phase. Moreover, it was found that the participants' awareness of this growth encouraged more autonomous, self-reliant approaches to their studies. Therefore, participant reflections on these changes had an iterative impact on their future strategy use. As with revised strategy use, this regenerative impact is represented by the dotted line in Figure 10. Section 8.2.3 outlined the two major strength factors which proved

relevant to this study: resilience (through self-regulation) and autonomy. The role of strength factors was explored in terms of the process fostering their growth through strategy use and their subsequent activation, or preparedness to do so, in future tasks. Awareness of developing strength factors, then, has a regenerative function as it informs the identification of needs in the next Learning-for-Self phase.

Resilience proved to be a vital trait for facilitating participant adjustment to major educational and linguistic changes in the postgraduate course, which for most constituted an 'L2 learning crisis' (Oxford et al., 2007, p. 131). Consistent with Oxford (2017), self-regulation was found to have a key role in fostering a resilient outlook, reinforcing the importance of self-regulation for strategy success through its ability to productively direct emotions and attitudes (Cohen, 2010; Oxford, 2017). This study's examination of the iterative function of self-regulation in fostering resilience contributes to the emerging research area of resilience as an outcome of strategy use (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014).

The involvement of all three phases of the model in the development of resilience over time is exemplified by participant responses to successive waves of anxiety during an assignment task (see section 7.3.1.i). Identifying feelings of panic or confusion about engaging with the task (Learning for Self), participants frequently started work on the task to pacify these feelings (Learning by Self). Cognitive strategies, then, were deployed with the purpose of regulating affective issues. Awareness of a decrease in anxiety due to these self-directed efforts (Learning about Self) enabled participants to plan and implement the next stage of their assignment work, until similarly anxious feelings arose, the need to address them was again identified, and the cycle continued. Through repeated cycles such as these, the participants became aware of their increased resilience as learners and of their changed needs for strategy design. Findings about this process align with those of another study (Oxford et al., 2007) which concluded that learner crises involving a perceived lack of agency can be addressed through measures promoting resilience.

The iterative effect of the strategic use of strength factors is also evident from participant reports of mutually developing attributes of self-regulation, resilience and autonomy, as outlined in section 8.2.3. Felipe's comment, for example,

illustrates the synthesis of autonomy and resilience in a developmental process which, notably, he refers to as a form of learning: '[Unlike in Colombia,] here I am alone, but that was also good for me because I learnt to do it. You are alone with you, but also you don't know who to ask' (Interview 2).

It is significant that, given the participants' initial characterisation of the University course as requiring independent learning, autonomy emerged as the common element in participant reflections on attitudinal changes. As an example of a participant identifying all three strength factors in combination, Lois reflected that she had prevailed with her Law assignments despite 'brain strain' and the panicked thought 'I will die!' (Interview 2). Along with her enhanced resilience, her confidence had increased 'because I can survive now' (Interview 3), and she felt she could study independently for the first time. Her future strategy choices would presumably reflect this transformation.

As outlined in section 3.4.2.vi, Oxford's (2017, p. 80) definition of autonomy used for this study is as follows:

'Learner autonomy [is the] ability and willingness to take responsibility for one's learning, along with the action necessary to make this happen as relevant to the cultural context'.

The notion of learner responsibility is foregrounded in this quote as an agentic outlook supported by effective behaviour, consistent with previously mentioned conceptualisations of independent learning at Western universities (Busher et al., 2016; Kell & Vogl, 2006; Spiro et al., 2012). It is acknowledged that evidence for the 'action' referred to in the above quote was only sometimes present in participant accounts, due to the limited time-scale of data collection, but the participants' expressed willingness to change their study approach is considered sufficient for these purposes.

To summarise, autonomy and resilience (fostered by self-regulation) were the key strength factors contributing to the participants' development into independent learners. This finding is based on numerous examples of the participants' strategy use under pressure, their gradual alignment with the University culture of independent learning, and self-described personal changes in their outlook. Indeed, strength factors such as those discussed above have

been regarded as key attributes of independent learners (Afshar & Movassagh, 2017; Dörnyei, 2005; Gram et al., 2013). These findings, highlighting the developmental function of strength factors, constitute a response to Oxford's (2017) call for research into their role in learners' strategy use.

A further finding consistent with the above discussion of strength factors is that the participants' review of their progress included interrelationships of cognitive and affective factors, as well as of personal and academic ones. This perspective aligns the study with other research viewing academic self-reflection as a holistic construct (Dörnyei, 2009; Olave-Encina et al., 2020; Oxford, 2017), whereas it is more often presented as a metacognitive appraisal of task performance (Macaro, 2006; Negretti, 2012; Winne, 2011). The holistic aspects of self-reflection were particularly important for these participants as their urgent need to become independent learners in an unfamiliar study environment necessitated not only the requisite cognitive skills, but also awareness of growth in personal attributes. Self-reflection in the Learning-about-Self phase, then, supported a conscious development of traits conducive to independent learning.

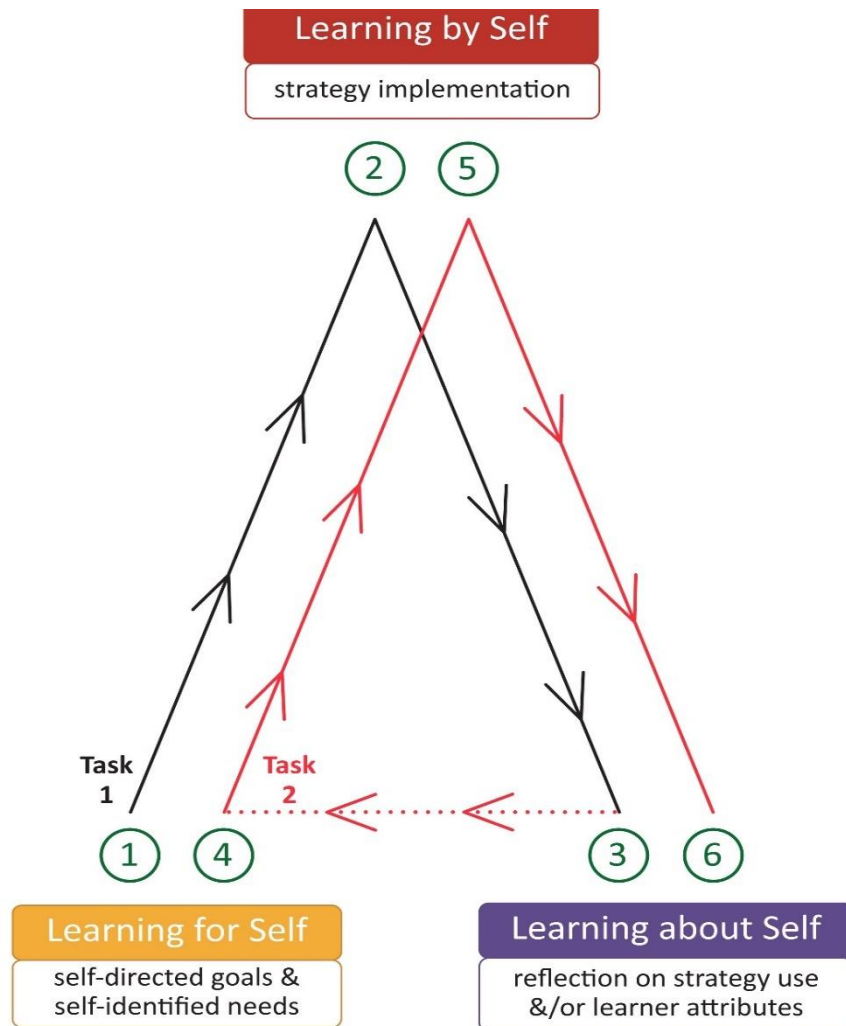
9.2.3.ii. Bidirectionality

While iterative processes within the Strategic Self-learning Model enabled participants to progress to future strategy use with greater insight into themselves as learners, bidirectionality involved flexible strategy adjustment during task completion, once again after reflection. Bidirectionality, a core complexity theory concept, was fundamental to the transformative process of the participants as they modified strategies to better meet task requirements. Research into L2 use of bidirectionality has focused on the mutually formative functioning of various aspects of L2 learners' processes, such as motivation and identity (Ushioda, 2011), motivation and autonomy (Cohen, 2010), cognition and affect (Rose, 2015), and learner and context (Oxford, 2017). Here, however, bidirectionality is viewed in terms of the regenerative role of strategy modification, through the participants' fluid movement between phases of the Strategic Self-learning Model, particularly Learning about Self and Learning by Self.

These findings contribute significantly to the literature as strategy modification during a task is an under-researched area. The major focus of research attention has been on task-to-task skill transfer, particularly through the use of metacognition (Clark & Hernandez, 2011; Macaro, 2006; Negretti, 2012, 2017; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011; Selwyn & Panina, 2018; Snow, 2010). In Oxford's explanation of her (2017) three-phase model, she does specify that 'learners do not always follow the phases in a linear order' (p. 74). She supports the principle of bidirectionality by referring to the 'feedback loops' proposed by Zimmerman and Schunk (2011, p. 1), with learners able to 'adapt their functioning' after evaluating the effectiveness of their actions relative to their goals. Similarly, in Gu's (2012) strategy model, student potential for strategy modification after evaluation is featured. However, throughout the language learning strategy field, there appears to be a lack of detailed discussion of strategy modification from an evidential base. This study's findings, then, provide fresh insights into the mechanics of strategy adjustment, within the context of L2 participants in an unfamiliar postgraduate setting.

Figure 11 depicts a basic form of bidirectional phase sequencing by the participants.

Figure 11: Bidirectionality in phase sequence (Pattern 1)



The following sequence represents the steps illustrated above:

1. Learning for Self (LFS): Self-directed goal of completing task and self-identification of requirements
2. Learning by Self (LBS): Implementation of strategies to meet need
3. Learning about Self (LAS): Reflection, revealing that task was not adequately fulfilled, leading to modification of strategy design
4. LBS: Implementation of modified strategies
5. LAS: Reflection, revealing that identified need has been fulfilled.

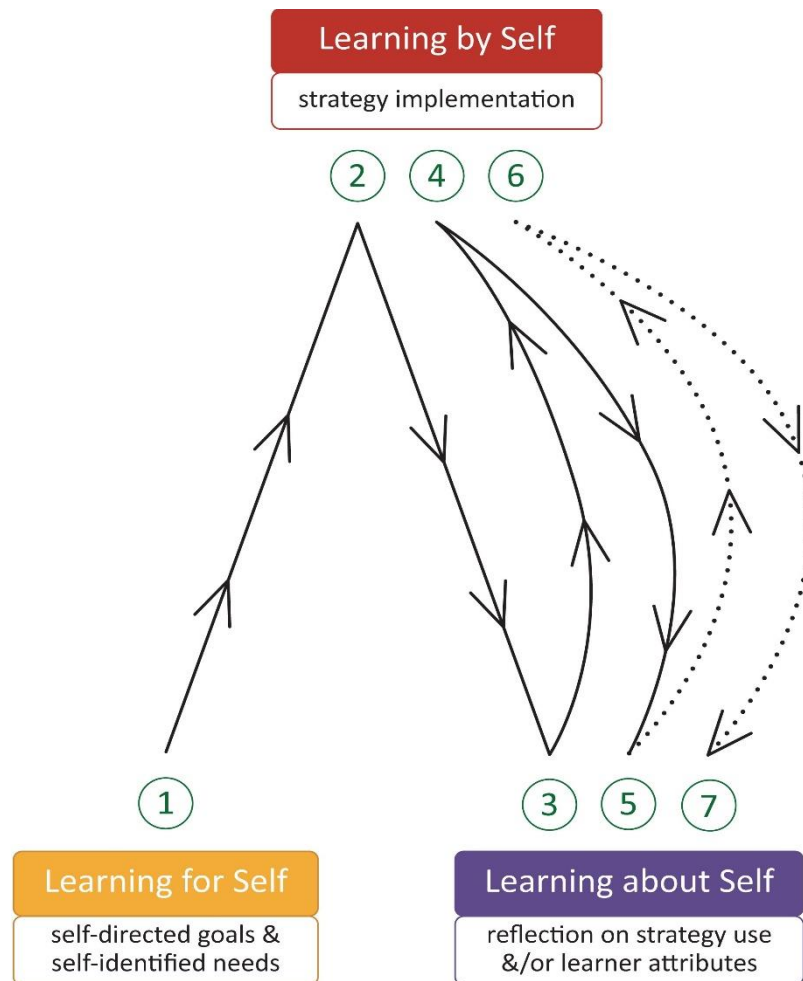
Bidirectionality can be illustrated through participant attempts to understand postgraduate lecture content, because their significant difficulties in this area necessitated strategy experimentation and adjustment over weeks until a

satisfactory level of understanding was achieved. Research into the lecture comprehension of ex-EAP students at Western universities suggests that it is a concerning issue for students commencing at university (Dooley, 2010; Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Kell & Vogl, 2006). Missing from these EAP studies, however, are findings about the ways in which these students respond to their lecture comprehension difficulties. Therefore, this study's findings about bidirectional processes involving lecture-related strategy use address a gap in the research.

The strategy which was most frequently modified by the participants for understanding a lecture's disciplinary content was translation of lecture materials, consistent with research indicating the significant lexical issues in L2 lecture comprehension (Vandergrift & Baker, 2015). The prevalence of bidirectionality in the use of translation strategies, represented by feedback from step 3 to 4 in Figure 11, may be attributable to the participants' ready access to a range of online translation options, which led to varying strategy designs utilising machine translation and/or bilingual dictionaries, accompanied by monolingual dictionaries and contextual inference. The more complex strategic forms at step 4 tended to be used by participants with self-reported language deficiencies.

Pattern 2 of bidirectionality, shown in Figure 12 below, represents the participants' multi-staged strategy use for addressing particularly challenging tasks.

Figure 12: Bidirectionality in phase sequence (Pattern 2)



Continuing the above lecture-based context, Figure 12 represents responses by participants who were deeply concerned about their minimal comprehension in the first few weeks of postgraduate studies. The response to this dilemma by an Engineering student is illustrative of this complex and contingent strategy use:

1. LFS: Self-directed goals + self-identification of needs (urgency yet limited skillset)
2. LBS: Baidu (Chinese search engine) search of lecture topic
3. LAS: Reflection, confirming key points in topic, with support of Chinese peers
4. LBS: Reading lecture slides in English

5. LAS: Reflection on key points in slides, with support of Chinese peers + individual evaluation of need for further strategy use
6. LBS (if required): Use of bilingual or monolingual dictionary for difficult words
7. LAS: Reflection, confirming comprehension sufficient for disciplinary purposes.

As another example of the pattern in Figure 12, a Public Health student struggled to understand lengthy academic articles needed as assignment sources, but she developed a flexible strategic plan for these situations. After attempting to read the original article in English and then using Google Translate for any sections proving difficult, the participant optionally reread these sections with use of a bilingual dictionary and inference.

Participant accounts of this kind of complex strategy use, involving strategy clusters and contingent strategy sequences, were frequently accompanied by concerns about the time expenditure involved. Other studies have also found that time management issues of international students arising from skill gaps can necessitate additional independent learning beyond the scheduled activities (Busher et al., 2016; Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Heng, 2018). This study goes further by contextualising the participants' time management strategies, often implemented under considerable stress, within a broader developmental process represented by the Strategic Self-learning Model.

These findings on the participants' strategy adjustment lend further support to holistic conceptualisations of strategy review. Applying Oxford's (2017, p. 156) notion of learners' 'metaknowledge' as a multi-faceted means of reflection, 'knowledge of self in context' (2017, p. 156) is relevant to strategy review by the participants. Holistic elements in this lecture-related review process included awareness of their strong motivation to pass and anxiety about comprehension issues. As other examples of holistic drivers for strategy modification, but with less effective outcomes, one participant began to leave MBA lectures early if her friends had not attended, and a Nursing student attempted unsuccessfully in various ways to overcome anxiety-induced procrastination about his assignment task. Social and affective factors, then, impacted on participant self-reflection leading to strategy adjustment, in addition to the primarily metacognitive

decision-making processes. Overall, it is argued that the participants' pragmatic, holistic review of strategy effectiveness enabled them to modify their strategies to better meet task requirements, and that over time this agentic, flexible learning approach nurtured their independence as learners.

In closing, section 9.2. has explained the dynamic participant process represented by the Strategic Self-learning Model. The participants designed and implemented strategies in response to the challenges of an unfamiliar postgraduate setting, which was itself grounded in an independent academic culture. They then generated the potential for further change through self-reflection. These iterative and bidirectional processes nurtured the participants' independence as learners.

As a visual summary of the participants' developmental process, the integrated form of the Strategic Self-learning Model is depicted in Figure 13.

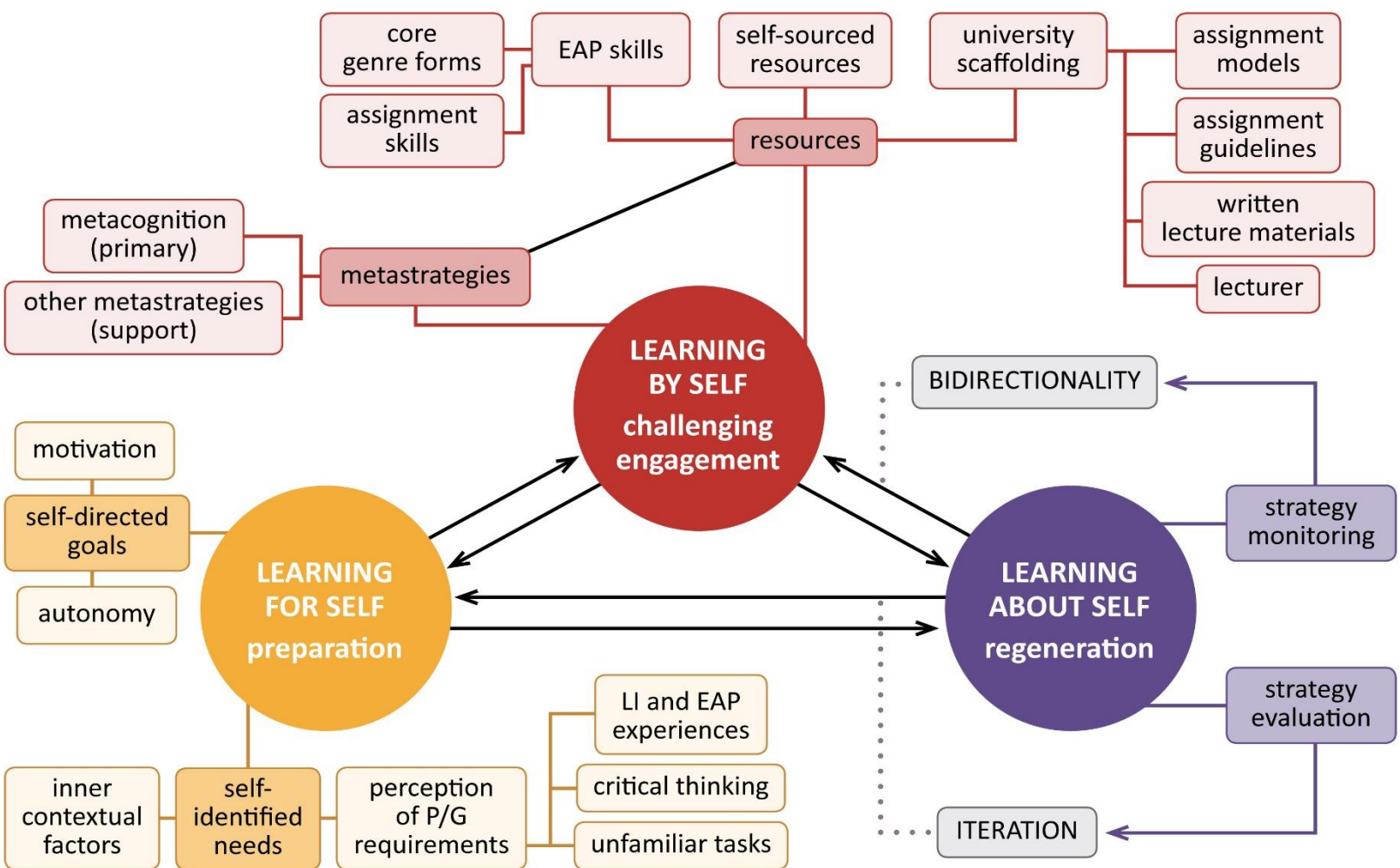


Figure 13: The Strategic Self-learning Model

Figure 13 represents the participants' development into independent learners as a process underpinned by the recurring elements of challenge and support, and influenced by contextual factors. The dynamic concepts of iteration and bidirectionality are shown by the black arrows connecting phases, linked to the important regenerative function of Learning about Self by dotted lines. The combination of these elements characterises the process undergone by the participants as transformative and driven by the self.

9.3. Summary of Chapter 9

Chapter 9 has explained the study's significant contributions to understanding the experiences of former EAP students in their first semester of postgraduate studies at an Australian university. This explanation was undertaken within the structure of the three-phase Strategic Self-learning Model, which represents the participants' dynamic process of becoming independent learners in the postgraduate setting. The study's findings were located within an integrated research landscape of EAP instruction, strategy use, independent learning and international student adjustment to Western universities, creating a powerful narrative of participant development. The function of each phase of the model was explained: Learning for Self as preparation for strategic response to unfamiliar tasks, Learning by Self as the challenge of strategy implementation, and Learning about Self as the regenerative element driving strategy change and participant development into independent learners.

Chapter 10 summarises the fundamental approach of the study, together with its conclusions and recommendations for EAP and postgraduate courses. It proposes future research to build on the important insights which have emerged from this study.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

10.1. Introduction

This study investigates the challenging adjustment process of international students as they embrace new ways of learning at an Australian university. In contrast to the essentialist, negative portrayals of international students in the media (see section 2.2), the study gives voice to the participants' experience, revealing their agency, their diversity, and their openness to change, both academically and personally. The complexity of the participants' adjustment process is due in part to their need to navigate two unfamiliar and pedagogically different educational settings: a preparatory EAP course at an ELICOS college, followed by postgraduate studies at an Australian university. The process by which the participants transformed themselves into independent learners in the challenging circumstances of their first semester is the focus of this study.

Chapter Ten begins by reviewing core aspects of the study, before outlining the contribution of the study's findings to the literature, both in terms of the research approach and international student experience. It ends by making recommendations for relevant institutions and future research.

10.2. Review of the study's precepts and procedures

The study's theoretical and methodological approaches are based on its purpose: to investigate the process by which ex-EAP students develop an independent approach to learning in their first semester of postgraduate coursework studies in Australia.

10.2.1. Theoretical framework

As explained in Chapter 3, the study is based on a social constructivist paradigm, within which a three-part theoretical framework operates. This framework is epistemologically consistent and aligned to the purpose and context of the study. The three theories utilised in this study are briefly outlined below:

1. **Complexity theory**, acting as a metatheory (Larsen-Freeman, 2017), provides a broad conceptual framing of human activity, highlighting its instability and the interrelationship of multiple factors in forming and reforming patterns of behaviour within a given context. This innate flexibility provided an ideal framework for understanding the evolving experiences of the participants as they engaged with new and unfamiliar learning situations.
2. **Oxford's (2017) strategic self-regulation model** conceptualises strategy use as a flexible, holistic endeavour. Through its structure yet fluidity, this model facilitated clear explanation of participants' strategic attempts to fulfil challenging postgraduate demands. Importantly, the model allowed for examination of contextual and experiential aspects to enhance understanding of individuals' strategic responses. This analysis provided substantial evidence of a growing independence in participants' study approach, a product of both necessity and their own resourcefulness.
3. **Usage-based theory** (Bybee, 2003, 2006) foregrounds the important role of frequent exposure to linguistic items in the development of an individual's language skills. As the participants' engagement with their postgraduate studies was through their L2, this theory was helpful for explaining linguistic issues prompting strategic responses by the participants.

This integrated theoretical framework provided a comprehensive set of tools for making sense of the diverse and dynamic experiences of the participants in their first postgraduate semester.

10.2.2. Methodological approach

The case study design incorporated three interviews with each participant and analysis of university subject documentation, providing rich qualitative data for understanding participant experiences. The study's longitudinal approach

captured changes across three educational contexts: the participants' L1 undergraduate, EAP and postgraduate courses. The value of this approach for studying language learner development (Cohen, 2011; Dörnyei, 2009; Larsen-Freeman, 2017) was confirmed, as well as the importance of viewing longitudinal studies in terms of domain-specific settings as well as length of time (Feryok & Mercer, 2017). Consistent with the longitudinal nature of the study, interview questions about the participants' 'educational self-positioning', an innovation of this study, facilitated understanding of the participants' ways of learning throughout their two educational transitions (Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015). Together, this approach to data collection and analysis produced in-depth findings about the participants' process of becoming independent learners in the postgraduate setting, within the broader dual-transition context. Finally, the number and range of university courses studied by participants produced a comprehensive set of data which found expression in the Strategic Self-learning Model (see Chapter 9).

10.3. The study's contributions and their significance

This study contributes important insights into the experiences of international students transitioning to a Western university, particularly those entering via an EAP pathway. More broadly, it builds on existing approaches to studying international student experience and provides new avenues of enquiry. The major findings of the study are represented in the Strategic Self-learning Model, which constitutes a comprehensive response to the research question. It is noted that these findings are specific to the participant cohort in this study, consistent with the principles of analytical generalisation (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Skaife & Reddick, 2017; Yin, 2017). Other researchers can determine the applicability of the findings to other participants and contexts (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Stake, 2005). In sections 10.3.1 and 10.3.2, the study's contributions to the literature based on its research approach will be outlined first, followed by findings which enhance understanding of international student experience.

10.3.1. Contributions based on research approach

10.3.1.i. Research based on learning approach

This study viewed international student transition through an underutilised lens, namely students' developmental process as they adjust to the independent learning approach required at Western universities. Research on this aspect of international student adjustment has tended to focus on students' difficulties in thinking critically and independently, rather than on their strategies in response to this challenge (Gram et al., 2013; Kettle, 2017; Ryan, 2013a; Tran, 2011). Moreover, studies about the EAP-to-university transition have generally framed academic adjustment in terms of students' skills (Benzie, 2011; Dooley, 2010; Dyson, 2014; Floyd, 2015; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). The validity of a perspective based on ways of teaching and learning has been acknowledged in other EAP research (Benzie, 2015; Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Kell & Vogl, 2006), but not explored to the level of detail of this study. The disjuncture between English Australia guidelines for ELICOS colleges to prepare students for ways of learning at university (Brandon & O'Keefe, 2017a) and the participants' surprise at the unfamiliar academic culture in their first few weeks of postgraduate studies points to the importance of this study's in-depth analysis of teaching and learning approaches across the EAP pathway.

A fresh perspective is provided in this study by inclusion of the participants' perception of their L1 undergraduate degree, supplementing the customary research focus on EAP and postgraduate courses. Moreover, an innovative data collection method introduced in this study, educational self-positioning, helped to trace participants' hybridised use of past and present ways of learning throughout their two educational transitions. These new research components have resulted in valuable findings, revealing the perceived learning approaches across the three educational settings and resultant impact on participants' ability to adjust to the university's independent academic culture.

The adjustment of the broader international student population to an independent learning culture has received more attention by researchers (Busher et al., 2016; Heng, 2018; Hughes & Bruce, 2016; Kettle, 2017; Ryan, 2013a). Studies have focused on various aspects of independent learning, including critical thinking, time management and problem-based learning,

usually couched in terms of reasons for students' adjustment difficulties and/or classroom activities to nurture independent thinking. Within this field of research, the significant contribution of this study is the generation of the Strategic Self-learning Model, as a coherent, integrated, staged representation of the process by which the participants perceived their development of an independent study approach in their first postgraduate semester.

Rather than constituting an alternative to a skill-based research approach, potentially limiting the range of the research focus, this study has shown that research based on learning approaches can embrace skill issues. The participants generally used strategies when the skill requirements of a task were too difficult or inherently required independent thinking and, consistent with other studies, their agentive, autonomous responses were emblematic of an independent study approach (Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Heng, 2018; Quan et al., 2016). A focus on learning approaches of former EAP students is particularly beneficial, as these students' language, writing and critical thinking skills form significant barriers to learning at university (Bretag, 2007; Dyson, 2014; Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Floyd, 2015; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011).

The study's detailed examination of participant experience, culminating in the comprehensive Strategic Self-learning Model, highlights the value, effectiveness and range of a research approach to international student adjustment based on ways of learning. An alternative framing in the literature, based on students' growing autonomy, is discussed in section 10.3.2 in relation to their strategy use.

10.3.1.ii. Research based on strategy theory

Two aspects of this study's strategy-based approach to understanding international student adjustment build on existing approaches to create effective options for future inquiry:

- The use of a theory based on language learning strategies as a basis for understanding international student adjustment to an L2 disciplinary context

- The examination of international students' strategy use to explain their development into independent learners.

These two avenues of research will be examined in the next two sections.

10.3.1.ii.a. Use of language learning strategy theory

This study's use of a theory from the language learning strategy field in order to investigate international student adjustment to an L2 postgraduate context represents a useful extension of the types of contexts generally investigated by these researchers. The domain of their research has mostly been foreign language learning, with Griffiths (2018b, p. 17), for example, identifying language 'learning strategies' as the target of enquiry, in contrast to 'learner strategies', which may be for communication or other purposes. In contrast, the L2 participants in this study were studying a content-based postgraduate course delivered in English. However, Oxford's (2017, p. 48) definition of L2 learning strategies used for this study, which includes the purpose of 'improving language performance or use', suggests application beyond foreign language learning contexts. Moreover, it is argued that the study's use of a theory based on language learning strategies is consistent with the position of Oxford (2017) and most other researchers surveyed by her, that language learning and use are mutually formative.

Adopting this approach represents an acknowledgement of concerns about international students' linguistic competence in the Australian context. These concerns are expressed in ongoing academic debate (Baik & Greig, 2009; Mickan, 2013; Zhang & Mi, 2010), increasingly stringent regulation of the university and ELICOS sectors (Australian Government, 2019; TEQSA, 2020), and the ELICOS charter of improving students' language skills prior to university admission (Brandon & O'Keefe, 2017a). The study's position on international students' linguistic issues is aligned with that of Kettle (2017), as their impact is acknowledged, but viewed in combination with other factors.

The importance of linguistic issues in this study is their influence on participants' ability to engage with academic tasks, necessitating the use of strategies as active, autonomous responses to these difficulties. The role of language issues

as part of a confluence of factors driving strategy use is exemplified by participant challenges with understanding spoken lectures, which they attributed to poor listening skills, the lecturer's accent, use of idiomatic language, and a lack of disciplinary experience affecting content and lexical knowledge. Similar language-related factors in lecture comprehension have been noted in other studies of international student experiences (Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Kell & Vogl, 2006; Vandergrift & Baker, 2015). Strategy use in the participants' case took the form of a preview-lecture-review approach to understanding lecture slides, as well as inference, various methods of translation, and clarification with peers and lecturers. Explanations based on usage-based theory (Bybee, 2003, 2006) of participants' language-based difficulties provide further support for the validity of a research approach based on language learning strategies for L2 content learning in a university context. This study's approach, then, supports the application of conceptual frameworks such as Oxford's (2017) flexible model to investigate L2 task engagement requiring language beyond the learners' current skillset.

10.3.1.ii.b. Examination of strategy use for investigating learning approaches

This study adds to the limited knowledge base on student adjustment to an unfamiliar postgraduate learning culture of independent learning, investigated through strategy research. The suitability of utilising a theory in the strategy field for this task is supported by the inherently agentic quality of strategy use, as learners implement strategies 'with some degree of consciousness ... in order to regulate multiple aspects of themselves' (Oxford, 2017, p. 48). Moreover, the grounding of Oxford's (2017) model in complexity theory, with its core principles of instability, interactivity and contextuality, makes her model particularly useful for examining international student development in changing and unfamiliar learning settings.

This study's strategy-based approach builds on two other studies with a similar recognition of student agency and flexibility, but with some differences as well. Gao's (2006) study was based on an English language course at a UK university, while Ding's (2017) investigation of Chinese students' adjustment to a Hong Kong university focused on undergraduate students, with strategy use

considered secondary to autonomy. Findings from this study's context of a postgraduate course at an Australian university, where the requirement for independent learning and its unfamiliarity are likely intensified relative to these two examples (Evans et al., 2018; Fenton-Smith & Humphreys, 2017), highlight the utility of capturing student development through their strategy use.

Strategy use within an autonomy framework has been regarded as an effective perspective for viewing growing independence by international students, not only in Ding's (2017) study, but also amongst researchers in the self-regulated learning field (Wenden, 1991; Zimmerman, 2000). Instead, this study suggests that strategy use within a learning approach framework may provide a more useful avenue for this purpose. Autonomy is clearly relevant to strategic response in terms of its dual aspects of self-responsibility and accompanying action, based on Oxford's (2017, p. 80) definition. However, Oxford's conceptualisation, utilised in this study, positions autonomy as a learner attribute supporting strategy use and resulting from it, thereby contributing to students' development into independent learners. In contrast, an independent study approach at a Western university is a broader concept, a way of learning which involves students in ongoing engagement of various kinds with academic tasks, including strategy use for challenging aspects.

As demonstrated by this study, the examination of international students' development into independent learners can fruitfully be examined in terms of their strategy use. The structured yet fluid strategy framework of Oxford's (2017) model helped to provide a systematic explanation of student response to challenging first-semester tasks. The holistic concept of metastrategies provided a means of examining participant decisions, driving cycles of strategy use and broader development. The generation of the informative and useful Strategic Self-learning Model validates the results of this research approach, based on theoretical principles from the language learning strategy field, for revealing insights into international student adjustment to postgraduate ways of learning at a Western university. Its utility lies in the potential to enhance and apply understanding of international student experience for the benefit of future generations of these students. The key organisations advantaged by this research approach and the resultant Strategic Self-learning Model could include

peak bodies and networks that oversee Western universities and English colleges, as well as the educational institutions themselves. In Australia, the relevant bodies are English Australia, the peak industry body guiding the delivery of direct entry programs in ELICOS colleges (Brandon & O'Keefe, 2017a, 2017b), the colleges providing EAP courses, and Australian universities.

10.3.2. Contributions to understanding international student experience

This study has made a number of significant findings which enhance understanding of international student experience, both in terms of their development into independent learners and more specific aspects of their experience.

10.3.2.i. Challenging, hybridised adjustment process across EAP pathway

The study contributes valuable knowledge about participant adjustment to changing ways of teaching and learning across their two transitions to postgraduate studies, revealing a staged process which, unlike most ELICOS research, incorporates the influence of L1 studies. From this expanded research approach, two significant findings emerged.

Firstly, for the 17 participants from Asian countries, there was a substantial difference in pedagogical approaches between the L1 undergraduate, EAP and postgraduate settings. These differences were associated with different ways of learning, necessitating considerable adjustment by the participants and placing pressure on their ability to fulfil expectations in their first postgraduate semester. L1 teaching was found to impart detailed content in an explicit teacher-directed style, resulting in learner reliance on memorisation, repetitive practice and other rigorous study methods. On the other hand, EAP pedagogy was based on a dialogic approach with heavy scaffolding of generic skills, eliciting a more active student approach, but still under the close guidance of the teacher. In contrast to both, postgraduate lectures delivered only core disciplinary content, with students expected to take responsibility for much of the learning process in the form of additional reading, time management and assignment work. While the Colombian participant experienced his L1 undergraduate and EAP instruction

as similar in style, he was daunted by the independent postgraduate learning culture like the other participants.

These findings raise important questions about the pedagogical role of EAP courses as preparation for university studies. The ability of EAP courses to equip students for an independent learning approach within a 10-12 week direct entry course is likely constrained by pressures from low university language entry scores, which are in turn affected by broader funding issues (Birrell, 2006; Bretag, 2007; Dyson, 2014). This pressured context, together with commercial imperatives of ELICOS colleges (Kell & Vogl, 2007), suggests that EAP courses need to achieve a difficult and delicate balance between scaffolded skill development and the nurturing of more self-sufficient, resourceful approaches to study.

Secondly, the study makes important contributions to knowledge in relation to hybridisation of participants' learning approaches in the EAP and postgraduate contexts. It frames participant adjustment as staged, agentic and individually determined, as the participants displayed openness to changing habituated learning approaches and recognised the need to support these changes through continued use of study methods still found to be effective. Indeed, hybridisation was greatest at times of transition, with most participants aligning with the University's independent study approach by the end of semester. Another interesting finding was the continued utilisation of some L1 study methods by several participants, such as reviewing class content and associated vocabulary. This finding shifts the framing of L1 influences from unhelpful factors to be overcome (Ding, 2017; Tran, 2013a), to resources to be used where appropriate. The study's findings about participants' hybridised adjustment process provides a fresh perspective to inform the pedagogical approach and broader understanding of international students' experiences of EAP teachers and first-semester university lecturers.

10.3.2.ii. EAP preparation for disciplinary studies at university

This study's findings echo concerns expressed in other EAP research about dissonance between the generic skill preparation of EAP courses and the

disciplinary requirements of university studies (Benzie, 2015; Counsell, 2011; Dyson, 2016). The participants found the transition to unfamiliar types of analysis and genre forms challenging, particularly in tasks which required critical thinking or extended argumentation supported by evidence.

There were three key findings in this area which contribute new understandings to the EAP knowledge base. The first of these is that familiarity with disciplinary aspects was an important issue for participants with limited or no prior experience of study or work in their disciplinary area, in this case referring to 12 of the 18 participants. This lack of familiarity impacted on their knowledge of linguistic elements and ability to adjust to value-driven disciplinary expectations, which ranged across subject areas from compliance to synthesised evaluation. This aspect of postgraduate student profiles is therefore an important factor in considering student needs at university and suggests that the inclusion of some disciplinary elements in EAP courses would be helpful.

The second key finding relates to methods of teaching core academic genres, as occurs in most EAP courses (Chong, 2018). This study provides evidence that the participants' adjustment to new genre forms at university was easier if they were able to exercise metacognitive genre awareness, or an understanding of genre features by linking them to the genre's purpose rather than rote learning (Negretti, 2012; Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011). Participants' ability to make conceptual links between a required genre in an assignment task and previously known genres assisted them in transferring their knowledge. This finding clearly has implications for the ways in which core genres are introduced in the EAP course.

The third key finding, as revealed in a triangulated analysis of subject documentation and interview response, relates to the immense difficulties which occurred in disciplinary tasks requiring theory-based analysis or evidence-based argumentation. These difficulties occurred mainly in the subject areas of MBA, Finance and Law, although individuals' linguistic competence and disciplinary familiarity tended to be ameliorating factors. This finding points to the importance of incorporating skill teaching tailored to participants' future disciplinary needs in EAP instruction.

10.3.2.iii. Pragmatic outlook of international students

Findings relating to the fundamentally pragmatic decision-making of the participants contribute to the debate on the impact of students' 'CHC' background. These findings align the study with other research rejecting a strict, 'CHC'-based conceptualisation of students from some Asian countries (Heng, 2018, 2020; Quan et al., 2016; Tran, 2013a). While an association between 'CHC' factors and participants' L1 study methods was thought likely, the fundamental pragmatism of participants was found to support adjustment to different ways of learning in the EAP course, and then the postgraduate degree program.

This study makes two new contributions to the knowledge base associated with the participants' pragmatic outlook. The first is that the participants' educational self-positioning, or their choice of study approaches throughout the EAP-to-university pathway, was determined largely by pragmatic factors rather than by cultural constraints. Unhelpful L1 and EAP methods were abandoned in the drive to adapt to the prevailing ways of learning in the EAP, then postgraduate settings. This positioning of the participants as protagonists directing their own developmental process counters simplistic media depictions of international students as academically weak, helpless victims of universities' dependence on their fees (Baker, 2019; Burton-Bradley, 2018; Worthington et al., 2019a). Instead, this study gives voice to the participants, embracing their agency and diversity.

The second contribution relates to the participants' process of learning to use critical thinking skills in the postgraduate setting. It was found that participant response to lecturer feedback on the targeted assignment was utilitarian in nature, based on their recognition of a failure to include certain features of a discursive text, but with little apparent awareness of epistemological elements. The participants, therefore, came to realise *what* was needed in their response, such as citations as evidential support, but paid little attention to *why* these features were needed. This finding echoes a similar one in Gram et al. (2013), that international students tend to view evidence-based requirements as technical issues. However, it challenges the assumption that awareness of culturally based educational values is necessary for international student

acquisition of critical thinking skills (Owens, 2011; Ryan, 2013b, 2013c). It also raises questions about the optimal means of teaching critical thinking skills to international students: by explicit explanation of value-driven principles or, consistent with students' pragmatic outlook, as a set of requirements to be fulfilled. Future research is clearly needed in this area.

10.3.2.iv. Development of independent learning through challenge and support

A major finding from this study is that both challenge and support were fundamental aspects of participants' development into independent learners. This finding contributes significantly to the understanding of first-semester postgraduate adjustment of international students. It is central to understanding the paradox explored throughout Chapter 9, that participants eagerly sought support to cope with unfamiliar tasks, yet it was the experience of challenge which drove their independence. As stated previously, difficult tasks tended to elicit strategic responses which exercised participants' growing autonomy, a finding echoed in other studies (Fischbacher-Smith et al., 2015; Heng, 2018; Quan et al., 2016).

However, a key contribution of this study is that the role of support was also found to be important in participants' developmental process, enabling them to fulfil both task requirements and holistic needs in their stressful first semester. Explicit academic direction, such as detailed assignment guidelines with exemplars, specific feedback on written assignments, and extra classes in some disciplines for students with literacy issues, was helpful for facilitating disciplinary enculturation (Kettle, 2010). Peer and lecturer support, accessed through participants' use of metasocial strategies, served a dual function, easing affective concerns and providing useful guidance on task completion. This study's focus on holistic concerns reflects a similar recognition in Saravanamutu and Yap (2014) of the influence of these factors on students' development into independent learners. Self-sourced support was also important to address anxious feelings, through strategies like the use of positive self-talk to encourage persistence with difficult assignments. Recognition of the importance of strategy use in addressing affective concerns is supported by other research (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Oxford, 2017; Oxford et al., 2007), with

additional confirmation of the role of negative emotions in learner development (Oxford et al., 2014).

This study draws on the literature in this area in its integration of participant response to holistic and task-related issues, within the context of adjustment to an independent learning culture. This synthesised approach generates a comprehensive understanding of student experience to inform pedagogy and institutional settings in postgraduate courses.

10.3.2.v Internationalisation through inclusiveness

This study provides useful data to inform academic debate about the internationalisation of Western universities. The social practice approach adopted in the study focused on the localised perspective of student experience, as a rich source of data reflecting broader issues. For example, inclusivity has been considered a key factor in the quest for an internationalised university, through pedagogical and curricular choices which cater for the diversity of the student population (Campbell & Li, 2008; Leask & Bridge, 2013; Ryan, 2005). This study provides mixed results regarding inclusiveness. As stated in the previous section, first-semester scaffolding of assignment tasks helped to fulfil this function for the participants. It is also noted that the University has effective programs not mentioned by the participants, which support international students by generating staff awareness of inclusive approaches to pedagogy and curriculum.

Less helpful features reported by the participants include the initial unintelligibility of rapid, idiomatic lecture delivery without allowance for accented speech, the infrequent provision of assignment exemplars for unfamiliar types of tasks, and the lack of disciplinary knowledge by the University's academic student support staff. Furthermore, class scheduling was shown to impact on the ability of some participants to form supportive relationships with peers. Delivery of content in block lecture mode, which catered primarily for full-time professionals with insufficient time for weekly classes, exacerbated these participants' sense of isolation.

More broadly, participant difficulties in fulfilling the assignment requirements in the Subject Outline and task guidelines need to be seen within the context of funding-related pressures on international education in Australia. This analysis is vital for fulfilling the agentic role of CDA outlined in section 4.3.5.ii, through understanding of broader societal influences on participant interpretation of requirements in subject documentation. Funding shortfalls tend to place downward pressure on language entry requirements for universities in the drive to attract international students (Burton-Bradley, 2018; Hunter, 2019a), impacting on the entry requirements and length of EAP courses. These factors likely place additional pressures on international students in their first postgraduate semester.

There was also limited evidence of intercultural communication, in terms of interactions across cultural and educational boundaries (Hua, 2011). This finding confirms other research about international students' linguistic and cultural difficulties in communicating with L1 English-speaking students (Belford, 2017; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013) and the tendency for Chinese students to associate with their conational group (Ma, 2014; Quan et al., 2016; Rienties et al., 2013; Yan & Berliner, 2013). The study, therefore, provides a localised perspective on first-semester barriers to the internationalisation goal of encouraging mutual understanding (Heng, 2020; Hua, 2011; Tran & Vu, 2018).

Further research is clearly needed in the area of internationalisation, to fulfil its goals of inclusiveness and intercultural understanding (Arrowsmith & Mandla, 2017; Fischer & Green, 2017; Watson & Widin, 2015).

10.4. Recommendations

Recommendations outlined in this section arise from the significant contributions explained in section 10.3. The recommendations are organised into three parts: recommendations for ELICOS colleges, for Australian universities, and for future research.

10.4.1. Recommendations for ELICOS colleges

English Australia guidelines specify the dual role of ELICOS colleges (Brandon & O'Keefe, 2017a, 2017b), of teaching useful academic skills required at university, while introducing students to ways of learning in these institutions. Given evidence of the tendency for EAP courses and researchers to focus primarily on skill-based elements, these recommendations refer primarily to the latter role of preparing students for an independent academic culture.

Recommendation 1: To provide regular tasks for students to complete with an increasing degree of independence

This recommendation relates to section 10.3.2.i, regarding the need for EAP courses to prepare students for the independent study approach required at university.

Examples of such tasks are:

- Analysis of academic articles on a weekly basis, with reduced scaffolding, but retaining a framework for students to complete in table form
- Tasks requiring critical thinking skills (e.g. compare/contrast, cause/effect, argumentation with evidence), performed in groups, then pairs, then individually
- Class visits to university lectures, with progressively more challenging tasks to complete and with decreased assistance from both the teacher and peers.

Recommendation 2: To provide opportunities for students to explore their future disciplinary area

This recommendation relates to section 10.3.2.ii, in terms of the need for some disciplinary content in direct entry EAP courses.

Possible activities are as follows:

- Research tasks about a student's first-semester studies

- Discipline-specific exit-level EAP assignment tasks. These tasks would be prefaced by instruction in challenging skills for certain disciplines, e.g. theory-based analysis for Finance, MBA and Law.
- Increased dialogue between EAP and disciplinary staff at the university, to familiarise EAP teachers with first-semester disciplinary content and expectations.

Recommendation 3: To introduce new genres to students by explaining linguistic and structural features in terms of the genre's purpose

This recommendation relates to section 10.3.2.ii, concerning the need to develop EAP students' metacognitive genre awareness in order to facilitate genre transfer.

This type of awareness may be fostered in the following ways:

- Genre instruction using a model with its purpose linked to genre features
- Pairwork practice to identify and link features to the same purpose in another text
- Practice in genre transfer to tasks requiring a related genre, using reduced scaffolding.

Recommendation 4: To raise awareness of students' preferred study methods and incorporate these in EAP teaching approach

This recommendation arises from section 10.3.2.iii's explanation of the participants' pragmatism, in particular their tendency to choose study methods according to their perceived usefulness.

Teachers' awareness of student pragmatism could enhance EAP instruction and support students' changing approaches to learning as follows:

- Survey or brief interview at beginning and end of exit-level EAP course about each student's preferred study methods, e.g. for learning of vocabulary / grammar, forms of writing, expression of opinion

- Incorporation of aspects of preferred learning methods in teaching approach, to reflect pragmatic preferences and stabilise students' changes to learning approaches
- Group or whole class discussion of shifts in students' learning methods, to support their developmental process.

10.4.2. Recommendations for Australian universities

The following recommendations for Australian universities are based on section 10.3.2.iv.'s finding that participants' development into independent learners involved both challenge and support. First-semester challenges of international students are widely documented in the literature because they are particularly acute (Ryan, 2013c), whether viewed through a perspective based on skills or learning approaches. For this reason, most of the recommendations below address the need for support and guidance during students' first-semester development into independent learners. Paradoxically, several of these relate to ways in which students can act as effective independent learners.

Recommendation 5: To orientate international students to the university's requirement of independent learning at the commencement of their studies

This recommendation arises from the finding in section 10.3.2.i as to the challenging transitional process for international students as they adjust to the independent academic culture of postgraduate studies at a Western university. It also addresses the need for inclusiveness as a core aspect of internationalisation, as stated in section 10.3.2.v. It is noted that, as found by Floyd (2015), the need to explain unfamiliar university expectations may be even greater for international students entering university directly, rather than via an EAP course.

Suggestions to orientate the students to an independent way of learning are as follows:

- Course orientation sessions about the expected student approach to learning and reasons for it, linked to core disciplinary values and graduate outcomes
- Similar messages in each subject with specific recommendations, e.g. need for preview-review framework for understanding lecture content, i.e. guidance towards students' effectiveness as independent learners
- Specific written feedback on areas of difficulty in assignment feedback, with opportunities for further staff and resource support.

Recommendation 6: To provide scaffolding for challenging skill-based issues in certain disciplines

This recommendation is made in response to the study's finding (see section 10.3.2.ii) that theory-based analysis and evidence-based argumentation were particularly difficult for participants in Finance, MBA and Law courses due to their lack of experience with these tasks and/or their level of complexity.

The following measures may assist with these difficulties:

- Provision of annotated exemplars of student response to these kinds of tasks, with dialogic activities to develop student understanding
- Detailed written guidelines outlining recommended steps for engaging with these tasks
- Discipline-based student support or generic university student support with informed guidance about difficult first-semester assignments.

Recommendation 7: To support disciplinary enculturation through access to lecture content

This recommendation is made in response to the difficulty, experienced by most participants, in understanding spoken lectures (see section 10.3.2.v).

Useful measures to achieve this goal may include the following:

- Slow, steady lecture delivery with minimal slang in the first few weeks, particularly by lecturers with strong accents

- Clear signalling of key disciplinary concepts and terminology, using intonational cues and visual highlighting
- Student access to lecture slides several days before each lecture.

Recommendation 8: To support inclusiveness and intercultural understanding

This recommendation relates to the internationalisation goal referred to in section 10.3.2.v.

- Student buddy program for first-semester support, discussion of educational differences, and practice in oral English skills for new international students
- Mixed nationality groupwork, including tasks requiring cross-cultural comparison
- Inclusion of opportunities for subject-related student interaction in subjects delivered in block lecture mode

10.4.3. Recommendations for future research

Further research is needed to build on the findings of this study. Several avenues for future research are listed below. Recommendations are made for research investigating approaches to teaching in EAP courses, the EAP-to postgraduate transition for international students, and teaching at university level.

Research about teaching approaches in EAP courses:

1. Pedagogical approaches in a range of ELICOS colleges, evaluated by staff and students in terms of development of independent learning
2. Comparative effectiveness of a range of EAP activities in developing independent learning approach in students, including critical thinking skills
3. EAP teachers' experience of pedagogical approaches aimed at developing independent learning in international students

4. Evaluation of optimal pedagogical methods in EAP courses of teaching genre and task transfer

Research about the EAP-to-postgraduate transition:

5. Effectiveness of collaboration between EAP and disciplinary postgraduate staff for lecture induction activities and discipline-related assignment tasks
6. Similar EAP-to-postgraduate study to the current one, but at different institutions

Research about teaching and learning at university level:

7. Evaluation of ways of academically and holistically supporting postgraduate students' development into independent learners at university
8. Evaluation of methods for fostering intercultural learning at university
9. Effectiveness of teaching evidence-based argumentation from perspective of skills and/or different educational values
10. Development of independent study approach in students' second postgraduate semester
11. Ways of incorporating disciplinary knowledge about difficult first-semester assignments into generic university student support service
12. Influence of COVID-19 disruption to established ways of teaching and learning on mechanics of Strategic Self-learning Model.

These avenues of research would inform the organisation and delivery of EAP and postgraduate courses by catering for student needs and creating greater alignment between their practices. Changes to practice based on this research would benefit international students transitioning to postgraduate studies at a Western university, particularly those entering via an EAP course.

10.5. Limitations of the study

This research project ran relatively smoothly, in terms of recruitment of more than the intended sample size of participants, the continuation of virtually all participants throughout three lengthy interviews, and the richness of the data collected. My natural affinity with international students entering via an EAP pathway, together with the participants' willingness to share quite personal aspects of their experience, may be factors in this outcome. However, the harmony of this situation could also have skewed data validity through recruitment of motivated participants and researcher bias towards the participants' perspectives.

While participant recruitment was based on purposive, convenience sampling and all volunteers conforming to the study's participant criteria were accepted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), the very process of volunteering may have produced a cohort determined to succeed and keen to talk about their changing experiences as learners. What can be said with some assurance is that the participant cohort represented a range of study experiences in the past and in their first postgraduate semester. Due to the participants' strong desire to succeed in their studies by fulfilling institutional requirements, it is likely that they demonstrated key aspects of *how* they developed into independent learners, which at least provided valuable data to answer the research question.

In terms of researcher bias, my positive experiences of teaching international students may have influenced my perceptions as researcher. While every attempt was made to rigorously record and analyse interview comments, it is possible that my prior view of these students as brave, diverse and admirably open to change inadvertently produced results which reflected this viewpoint. Indeed, there is broad agreement amongst researchers that researcher bias is almost inevitable (Creswell, 2007; McKinley, 2017; Talmy, 2015). However, acknowledgement of the kinds of subtle influences I have mentioned here is considered the most effective measure to minimise data distortion.

Perhaps the major limitation of this study is its restricted focus to one ELICOS college and the university linked to it by direct entry arrangement. While both are well-established institutions, it is possible that the study's findings are not

fully applicable to other corresponding institutions. Floyd (2015) states that most EAP courses include the requisite focus on development of an independent study approach to prepare students for university. However, this function was not fully realised in the EAP course of the ELICOS college chosen for this study. Further investigation in other institutions is necessary to establish a fuller understanding.

It is noted that the disruptive impact of COVID-19 on the international student sector throughout 2020 is not considered a limitation of this study. The study's findings and conclusions were based on data collected in the first seven months of 2019. The impact of changed factors, such as an increase in online learning, on students' development as independent learners is a topic for future research.

10.6. Concluding thoughts

In section 1.2., I outlined my reasons for undertaking this PhD project. After a long career of teaching international students, including in EAP courses and postgraduate studies, I sought to contribute to their wellbeing in a different way which might eventually benefit individuals in the classroom. By giving students a voice to tell their experience of transitioning from the protective environment of an ELICOS college to the vast, impersonal and utterly different environment of a postgraduate course at an Australian university, I hoped to generate new understandings of their process. My experience through this study has exceeded my expectations, in terms of the richness of participant accounts and the powerful, self-driven developmental process which emerged from data analysis. Furthermore, there was a sense of travelling alongside the participants, as in response to the surprising unfamiliarity of the doctoral process, I experienced my own version of the Strategic Self-learning Model. Strategic planning, implementation and self-reflection were central to my iterative process of learning a new level of independence as a doctoral candidate.

My hope is that insights from this study will influence the approaches used by staff at relevant institutions, leading to changes which better support the first-semester developmental process of international students.

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Appendices

In order to protect the privacy of people and institutions associated with this study, references to the ELICOS college and university relevant to this study, together with their staff, have been redacted.

Appendix 1: Email to English College

18 October, 2018

Hi [REDACTED]

Thanks very much for meeting with me this morning and being so supportive of my project. Here is a summary of the points we discussed in relation to my upcoming recruitment of [REDACTED] students for the study.

[REDACTED] has already agreed to the following:

- I may speak at the AE5 Graduate Ceremony or in that final of the AE5 course in Term 1, 2019.
- I can ask teachers to pass on flyers to their students in class.

These are the additional opportunities we discussed today, in order to maximise recruitment opportunities:

- I put a flyer on the wall of each AE5 classroom.
- I explain the study briefly to teachers in an AE5 level meeting early in the term.
- I talk to each AE5 class for 2 minutes about the study in the week(s) before Graduation.

These three points are to be discussed with the AE5 Level Leader [REDACTED] in late November to check her agreement and work out implementation details.

- A senior [REDACTED] staff member (probably the Director of Studies [REDACTED]) introduces me at the Graduation Ceremony and encourages students to participate.
- The process is conducted in two terms: Term 10 2018 and Term 1 2019.

I believe that these measures will give the study a good chance of finding enough participants to conduct useful research.

Thanks again for your support – much appreciated.

Kind regards

Laurel Acton

Appendix 2: Ethics Approval

Dear Applicant
December, 2018

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Thank you for your response to the Committee's comments for your project titled, "High wire, in transit: investigating the early assignment experiences of postgraduate Chinese international students at an Australian university". The Committee agreed that this application now meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) and has been approved on that basis. You are therefore authorised to commence activities as outlined in your application.

You are reminded that this letter constitutes ethics approval only. This research project must also be undertaken in accordance with all UTS policies and guidelines including the Research Management Policy (<http://www.gsu.uts.edu.au/policies/research-management-policy.html>).

Your approval number is UTS HREC REF NO. ETH18-2872.

Approval will be for a period of five (5) years from the date of this correspondence subject to the submission of annual progress reports.

The following standard conditions apply to your approval:

- Your approval number must be included in all participant material and advertisements. Any advertisements on Staff Connect without an approval number will be removed.
- The Principal Investigator will immediately report anything that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project to the Ethics Secretariat (Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au).
- The Principal Investigator will notify the UTS HREC of any event that requires a modification to the protocol or other project documents, and submit any required amendments prior to implementation. Instructions can be found at <https://staff.uts.edu.au/topic/sub/Pages/Researching/Research%20Ethics%20and%20Integrity/Human%20research%20ethics/Post-approval/post-approval.aspx#tab2>.
- The Principal Investigator will promptly report adverse events to the Ethics Secretariat (Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au). An adverse event is any event (anticipated or otherwise) that has a negative impact on participants, researchers or the reputation of the University. Adverse events can also include privacy breaches, loss of data and damage to property.
- The Principal Investigator will report to the UTS HREC annually and notify the HREC when the project is completed at all sites. The Principal Investigator will notify the UTS HREC of any plan to extend the duration of the project past the approval period listed above through the progress report.
- The Principal Investigator will obtain any additional approvals or authorisations as required (e.g. from other ethics committees, collaborating institutions, supporting organisations).

- The Principal Investigator will notify the UTS HREC of his or her inability to continue as Principal Investigator including the name of and contact information for a replacement.

I also refer you to the AVCC guidelines relating to the storage of data, which require that data be kept for a minimum of 5 years after publication of research. However, in NSW, longer retention requirements are required for research on human subjects with potential long-term effects, research with long-term environmental effects, or research considered of national or international significance, importance, or controversy. If the data from this research project falls into one of these categories, contact University Records for advice on long-term retention.

You should consider this your official letter of approval. If you require a hardcopy please contact Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au.

If you have any queries about your ethics approval, or require any amendments to your research in the future, please do not hesitate to contact Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Tim Luckett
(Acting) Chairperson
UTS Human Research Ethics Committee
C/- Research & Innovation Office
University of Technology, Sydney
E: Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au

Appendix 3: Student invitation leaflet

These leaflets were distributed to College students who were interested in the study, following short presentations given during exit-level classes and the Graduation Ceremony.



Moving on to your Masters?

You are warmly invited to **join an exciting new research project** about how **international students from China transition to postgraduate studies** at [REDACTED].

The researcher is Laurel Acton, who is a former [REDACTED] teacher and now a PhD student at UTS.

If you participate, you'll be interviewed by Laurel during Semester 1, 2019 about **your experience of starting postgraduate study and how you approach your first assessment task** at [REDACTED].

What will you get out of it?

- Insights into how you approach assessment tasks at university
- Some useful feedback on your approach to academic tasks
- A gift as thanks for your participation
- You'll be contributing to the success of future Chinese international students like you!

Appendix 4: Speech at College Graduation Ceremonies

8 February, 2019

Hello everyone. My name is Laurel Acton – you might remember me visiting your class a few weeks ago to tell you about my PhD study. First of all, CONGRATULATIONS on your graduation and HAPPY NEW YEAR!!

Your study journey has begun, and of course the next stage is big and exciting and challenging – your first semester at [REDACTED]. That's what my PhD is about, finding out about the transition of [REDACTED] students to Masters study at [REDACTED]. I've already had some great interviews with students, and I'm here to announce that I'm expanding the study to students from all countries, not just China, so we get a really rich mixture of people and experiences and can understand your stories. So I'd like to invite all the future Masters students to join the study, especially now that your course is over and you have more free time.

Just reminding you that there'll be interviews and a couple of questionnaires, everything finished by May. And your identity will be kept private – no one will know it's you. It's a great chance to reflect on your process in your first semester, and it's good speaking and listening practice too. At the end, I'll give you a small gift and some feedback on how I see your approach to your studies.

So if you're maybe possibly interested in joining the study, please take one of these leaflets and email me THIS WEEK. You're also welcome to talk to me after the Graduation, near the leaflets, OK? I'd like to start the interviews as soon as possible.

Finally, I wish you all a relaxing break, then a really positive start at [REDACTED]

Thanks everyone.

Appendix 5: Email to Subject Co-ordinators

Dear Dr [REDACTED]

My name is Laurel Acton and I am a Stage 2 doctoral candidate in UTS School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and my supervisor is A/Professor Susan Oguro. My PhD study looks at the transition experiences of postgraduate students who have previously studied at [REDACTED] (English college). Students participating in the study are from multiple [REDACTED] courses and faculties and the focus of the research is to understand how each approaches a first-semester assessment task.

Two of the participant students in my study are enrolled in your subject [REDACTED]. My study has been approved by UTS Human Research Ethics Committee and requires me to inform you as the Subject Co-ordinator. Attached for you is the Information Sheet for Subject Co-ordinators and associated Consent Form. **If you are satisfied with the contents, could I ask you to reply to this email with the following statement:**

I understand the contents of the Participant Information Sheet for Subject Co-ordinators for the study with UTS HREC Approval No. ETH18-2872 and hereby provide consent.

For the participant students from [REDACTED] I will be collecting data on how they approach Assessment Task 1: [REDACTED]. As per the Information Sheet attached, I need to inform relevant teaching staff, so could I ask you to let me know who will be marking this particular assessment task so I can inform them of the study.

If you wish to clarify any of these points, I am happy to meet with you or answer questions by email at Laurel.N.Acton@student.uts.edu.au or by phone ([REDACTED]). Alternatively, you may wish to contact my Supervisor at Susan.Oguro@uts.edu.au.

Thank you very much for considering my request.

Kind regards

Laurel Acton

Appendix 6: Participant Information Sheet – Students

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

High wire, in transit: investigating the early assignment experiences of postgraduate Chinese international students at an Australian university

UTS HREC Approval No.: ETH18-2872

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

My name is Laurel Acton and I am a student at UTS. My supervisor is Associate Professor Susan Oguro.

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research is to find out about how postgraduate Chinese international students manage the transition from an ELICOS college (here, [REDACTED]) to postgraduate studies at an Australian university (here, [REDACTED]). The focus is particularly on how they approach their first assignment in one of their subjects, including how they use resources and strategies to cope with any difficulties along the way. This study positions the students as active learners who draw on a variety of educational and personal resources to engage with the new university environment and learn from their experience.

WHY HAVE I BEEN ASKED?

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are an international student from China and you are, or soon will be, a graduate from the [REDACTED] Academic English program moving to postgraduate studies at [REDACTED] in the next semester.

IF I SAY YES, WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate, I will invite you to take part in a few activities, which will be completed by May 2019:

When	What	Details
Feb 2019	Interview 1 (45 mins)	Participant experience of [REDACTED] & differences from previous study contexts What participants expect from [REDACTED] studies
April 2019	Questionnaire responses while working on assignment (10 mins)	Participant identification of two difficulties with assignment & how participants have approached them
May 2019	Interview 2 (1 hour) after submitting assignment	Participant experience of postgraduate course More detail on any difficulties with assignment & how participants approached them
May 2019	Questionnaire (3 questions) after receiving assignment feedback (10 mins)	Brief written reflection on what participants have learnt from their assignment experience
May 2019	Interview 3 (20 mins)	More detailed reflection on what participants have learnt from their assignment experience

In order to understand your assignment experience fully, I would like to access subject documents, including your assignment response with the lecturer's grade and feedback. Your personal information (and the lecturer's information) will not be identifiable for publication purposes and will not be available to other researchers at the completion of the study. In your case, this means your name, age and area of

residence in China will be changed to protect your privacy. If you agree to release your graded assignment response, I will then ask the Subject Co-ordinator for their consent to release the assignment document. If the consent is given, the Subject Co-ordinator will redact (remove) the lecturer's identity and send me the document, only for the purposes of the study. If the Subject Co-ordinator consents, he/she will also send me the Subject Outline and the Assignment Task guidelines. You do not need to send me any documents.

As a token of appreciation for your involvement in the study, you will be presented with a double Hoyts cinema voucher at the completion of the final interview.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?

Yes, there are some risks/inconvenience. They are possible feelings of discomfort from talking to me about your assignment experiences, especially about any difficulties you have had with your assignment. You may also feel embarrassed explaining how you dealt with assignment challenges. Reflecting on your experience and what you have learnt from it could be unfamiliar and perhaps difficult for you. However, I will try to make you feel comfortable in the interviews, and you may find reflecting on your process of change with me as an interested listener helpful for you.

DO I HAVE TO SAY YES?

Participation in this study is voluntary. It is completely up to you whether or not you decide to take part.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I SAY NO?

If you decide not to participate, it will not affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of [REDACTED]. If you wish to withdraw from the study once it has started, you can do so at any time without having to give a reason, by contacting me at Laurel.N.Acton@student.uts.edu.au or my Supervisor, Associate Professor Susan Oguro, at Susan.Oguro@uts.edu.au.

If you withdraw from the study, your data samples will be destroyed – interviews and transcripts, questionnaire responses and assignment documents.

CONFIDENTIALITY

By signing the consent form you consent to the research team collecting and using personal information about you for the research project. All this information will be treated confidentially. Your personal details (name, age and area of residence in China) will be changed so you cannot be personally identified. Your identity on your assignment response (and the identity of the lecturer marking your assignment) will be removed. There will be no disclosure of your information to [REDACTED] staff or students. The data will be stored in a secure online location. We would like to store your information for future use in research projects that are an extension of this research project. In all instances your information will be treated confidentially.

Your data may be shared in de-identified form at conference presentations with education professionals and researchers, in my PhD thesis (to be published in 2021 or shortly afterwards) and in publications. Your experiences will help to increase understanding of international students' academic adjustment in a number of ways.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?

If you have concerns about the research that you would like to discuss, you can contact me, my Supervisor, or a Mandarin-speaking academic at [REDACTED] who has had a lot of experience with Chinese international students. His name is [REDACTED] and his email address is [REDACTED]

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Appendix 7: Participant Information Sheet – Subject Co-ordinators

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR SUBJECT CO-ORDINATORS

High wire, in transit: investigating the early assignment experiences of postgraduate Chinese international students at an Australian university

UTS HREC Approval No.: ETH18-2872

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

My name is Laurel Acton and I am a doctoral student at UTS. My supervisor is Associate Professor Susan Oguro.

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research is to find out about how postgraduate Chinese international students approach their first individual assignment at an Australian university (here, [REDACTED]). My particular focus is on students who enter via the ELICOS pathway (here, [REDACTED]).

To give you a more specific picture of the study, the following table summarises the approximate timeline and involvement of the student participants. Exact times of assignments will naturally vary from subject to subject.

When	What	Details
Feb 2019	Interview 1 (45 mins)	Participant experience of [REDACTED] & differences from previous study contexts What participants expect from [REDACTED] studies
April 2019	Questionnaire responses while working on assignment (10 mins)	Participant description of any difficulties with assignment & how participants have approached them (recorded in private & sent to me)
May 2019	Interview 2 (1 hour) after submitting assignment	Participant experience of postgraduate course More detail on any difficulties with assignment & how participants approached them
May 2019	Questionnaire (3 questions) after receiving assignment feedback (5-10 mins)	Brief written reflection on what participants have learnt from their assignment experience
May 2019	Interview 3 (20 mins)	More detailed reflection on what participants have learnt from their assignment experience

WHY HAVE I BEEN ASKED?

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are the Subject Co-ordinator of one of the subjects selected by the student participants and your subject has an individual assignment task which is suitable for this study. In order to understand the process undergone by the participants, I need to access subject documents, which will help to reveal the participants' perceived experiences in relation to the university's requirements. The student participants in your subject have already provided signed consent to release their marked assignment response with grade and lecturer comments. On the basis of this consent, I am requesting that you release to me this document and others outlined below for the purposes of the study.

IF I SAY YES, WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate, I will invite you to provide me with access to these subject documents. Specifically, this would involve the following:

- Subject Outline
- Assignment task guidelines
- Participants' marked assignment response with grade and lecturer comments (lecturers' identity to be redacted by you to protect their privacy)

I will also provide you with an Information Sheet to distribute to lecturers involved in marking the participants' assignment tasks.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?

Yes, there are some risks/inconvenience. They are possible discomfort at participants' comments about the assignment task and the subject in general, as well as about the grade and feedback they receive. It is noted here that the focus will NOT be on evaluating individual lecturers' judgements as to the effectiveness of participants' assignment tasks. Instead, it will be on the participants' response to the feedback in terms of their perception of its meaning and their learning from the assignment process as a whole. Any potential harm to individuals will also be minimised by de-identification of you, lecturers and student participants at the data analysis stage. It is hoped that this study may facilitate greater understanding of the ELICOS pathway to postgraduate studies and lead to enhanced experiences for both staff and students.

DO I HAVE TO SAY YES?

Participation in this study is voluntary. It is completely up to you whether or not you decide to take part.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I SAY NO?

If you decide not to participate, it will not affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of [REDACTED]. If you wish to withdraw from the study once it has started, you can do so at any time without having to give a reason, by contacting me at Laurel.N.Acton@student.uts.edu.au or my Supervisor, Associate Professor Susan Oguro, at Susan.Oguro@uts.edu.au.

If you decline to give consent to releasing the subject documents, I will seek another suitable subject for the study and terminate the involvement of the participants affected if another subject option is not available.

CONFIDENTIALITY

By signing the consent form you grant permission for the subject documents to be released to me for research purposes. All the information in these documents will be treated confidentially and the data concerning all named persons de-identified. The data will be stored in a secure online location. We would like to store this information for future use in research projects that are an extension of this research project.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?

If you have concerns about the research that you think I or my supervisor can help you with, please feel free to contact me or my Supervisor at the above email addresses.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

NOTE:

This study has been approved by the University of Technology Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee [UTS HREC]. If you have any concerns or complaints about any aspect of the conduct of this research, please contact the Ethics Secretariat on ph.: +61 2 9514 2478 or email: Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au, and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any matter raised will be treated confidentially, investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix 8: Participant Information Sheet for Lecturers

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR LECTURERS

High wire, in transit: investigating the early assignment experiences of postgraduate Chinese international students at an Australian university

UTS HREC Approval No.: ETH18-2872

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

My name is Laurel Acton and I am a doctoral student at UTS. My supervisor is Associate Professor Susan Oguro, contactable at Susan.Oguro@uts.edu.au.

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research is to find out how postgraduate Chinese international students approach their first individual assignment at an Australian university (in this case, [REDACTED]). I am interested in particular in the students who enter via the ELICOS college pathway (here, [REDACTED]). I will be looking at any difficulties perceived by the students in relation to their first assignment and how they attempt to deal with them using educational and personal strategies. Apart from raising awareness of these students' experiences, this study may facilitate greater understanding of the ELICOS pathway to postgraduate studies and potentially lead to enhanced experiences for both students and staff.

To give you a more specific picture of the study, the following table summarises the approximate timeline and involvement of the student participants. Exact times of assignments will naturally vary from subject to subject.

When	What	Details
Feb 2019	Interview 1 (45 mins)	Participant experience of [REDACTED] & differences from previous study contexts What participants expect from [REDACTED] studies
April 2019	Questionnaire while working on assignment (10 mins)	Participant identification of two difficulties with assignment & how participants have approached them
May 2019	Interview 2 (1 hour) after submitting assignment	Participant experience of postgraduate course More detail on any difficulties with assignment & how participants approached them
May 2019	Questionnaire (3 questions) after receiving assignment feedback (5-10 mins)	Brief written reflection on what participants have learnt from their assignment experience
May 2019	Interview 3 (20 mins)	More detailed reflection on what participants have learnt from their assignment experience

Apart from hearing the participants' experience as outlined above, I will also be looking at subject documents to better understand participants' perceived process in relation to institutional requirements. These will be the Subject Outline, Assignment task guidelines and participants' assignment responses with grade (not mark) and lecturer feedback. All of these are to be provided by the Subject Co-ordinator. The student participants have already given signed consent for their marked assignment task to be released for the purposes of the study. The Subject Co-ordinator has given signed

consent to releasing the subject documents, including marked assignment documents, also for the purposes of the study.

WHY HAVE I BEEN ASKED?

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a lecturer of one of the subjects to be undertaken by the student participants and your subject has a suitable individual assignment task for the study's purposes. Your contact details were obtained from the Subject Co-ordinator of this subject.

WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

I will invite you to do nothing differently from what you would normally do in your role as a lecturer in this subject. The focus is not on your work, but on the participants' experience of the assignment process.

The Subject Co-ordinator and the student participants are the only parties who will need to take action of any kind.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?

Yes, there are some risks/inconvenience. They are possible discomfort at feeling your actions are being observed and perhaps judged, as well as a potential sense of threat to your professional reputation.

While lecturer grading and feedback is an understandably sensitive area, you can be reassured that the focus will NOT be on evaluating individual lecturers' judgment of the effectiveness of student participants' assignment responses. Instead, it will be on the participants' response to the feedback in terms of their perception of its meaning and their learning from the assignment process as a whole.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All the information in these documents will be treated confidentially and the data concerning all named persons de-identified. The Subject Co-ordinator has agreed to redact your identity in the feedback from the assignment before he/she sends this document to me. The de-identified form will be maintained through the data collection and analysis stages of the study. Similarly, in any publication, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.

The data will be stored in a secure online location. We would like to store this information for future use in research projects that are an extension of this research project.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?

If you have concerns about the research, please discuss them with your Subject Co-ordinator or contact me at Laurel.N.Acton@student.uts.edu.au or on 9514 5269, or my supervisor at Susan.Oguro@uts.edu.au.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

NOTE:

This study has been approved by the University of Technology Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee [UTS HREC]. If you have any concerns or complaints about any aspect of the conduct of this research, please contact the Ethics Secretariat on ph.: +61 2 9514 2478 or email: Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au, and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any matter raised will be treated confidentially, investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix 9: Consent Form - Students

CONSENT FORM

High wire, in transit: investigating the early assignment experiences of postgraduate Chinese international students at an Australian university

HREC Approval No.: ETH18-2872

I _____ agree to participate in the research project *High wire, in transit* (HREC no. ETH18-2872) being conducted by Laurel Acton, Laurel.N.Acton@student.uts.edu.au and ph. 9514 5269.

I have read the Participant Information Sheet or someone has read it to me in a language that I understand.

I understand the purposes, procedures and risks of the research as described in the Participant Information Sheet.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.

I freely agree to participate in this research project as described and understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without affecting my relationship with the researchers or the University of _____.

I understand that I will be given a signed copy of this document to keep.

I agree to be:

☐ Audio recorded

I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that:

☐ Does not identify me in any way

☐ May be used for future research purposes

I agree to:

☐ Release my assignment response with grade and lecturer feedback for the purposes of this research. I understand that the Subject Co-ordinator will also need to give consent to releasing the graded assignment and if this occurs, the Subject Co-ordinator will send the assignment to the researcher with the lecturer's identity redacted.

I am aware that I can contact Laurel Acton if I have any concerns about the research.

Name and Signature [participant]

____/____/____

Date

Name and Signature [researcher or delegate]

____/____/____

Date

Appendix 10: Consent Form – Subject Co-ordinators

CONSENT FORM FOR SUBJECT CO-ORDINATORS

High wire, in transit: investigating the early assignment experiences of postgraduate Chinese international students at an Australian university

HREC Approval No.: ETH18-2872

I _____ agree to participate in the research project *High wire, in transit* (HREC no. ETH18-2872) being conducted by Laurel Acton, Laurel.N.Acton@student.uts.edu.au and ph. 9514 5269.

I have read the Participant Information Sheet for Subject Co-ordinators or someone has read it to me in a language that I understand.

I understand the purposes, procedures and risks of the research as described in the Participant Information Sheet for Subject Co-ordinators.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.

I consent to:

☐ Releasing subject documents to the researcher for the purpose of the study: Subject Outline, Assignment task guidelines and marked student assignment responses of the participants with grade (not mark) and lecturer comments. The release of the student participants' assignment responses will only proceed on the basis of both their prior signed consent to release these documents for the purpose of the study and my signed consent.

☐ Redacting the identities of the lecturers concerned before sending them to the researcher.

I freely agree to participate in this research project as described and understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without affecting my relationship with the researchers or the University of _____.

I understand that I will be given a signed copy of this document to keep.

I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that:

☐ Does not identify me in any way

☐ May be used for future research purposes

I am aware that I can contact Laurel Acton if I have any concerns about the research.

Name and Signature [participant]

____/____/____

Date

Name and Signature [researcher or delegate]

____/____/____

Date

Appendix 11: Consent Form – Lecturers

CONSENT FORM FOR LECTURERS

High wire, in transit: investigating the early assignment experiences of postgraduate Chinese international students at an Australian university

HREC Approval No.: ETH18-2872

I _____ agree to participate in the research project *High wire, in transit*, HREC Approval No. ETH18-2872 being conducted by Laurel Acton, Laurel.N.Acton@student.uts.edu.au and ph. 9514 5269.

I have read the Participant Information Sheet or someone has read it to me in a language that I understand.

I understand the purposes, procedures and risks of the research as described in the Participant Information Sheet.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.

I freely agree to participate in this research project as described and understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without affecting my relationship with the researchers or the University of _____

I understand that I will be given a signed copy of this document to keep.

I agree to:

☐ Release to the researcher marked assignment document(s) with lecturer feedback which relate to student participant(s) in the study, only for research purposes.

☐ Redact my identity before doing so

I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that:

☐ Does not identify me in any way

☐ May be used for future research purposes

I am aware that I can contact Laurel Acton if I have any concerns about the research.

Name and Signature [participant]

____/____/____
Date

Name and Signature [researcher or delegate]

____/____/____
Date

Appendix 12: Interview guide

This was the basic framework I followed for asking interview questions to participants, with flexibility of response to participants, as noted below.

As these interviews are semi-structured, the questions and response will be modified in response to participant comments.

Interview 1

(Towards/at end of College course)

1. Go through Participant Information Sheets 1 and 2 carefully with participant and obtain informed consent.
2. Explain recording setup and ensure setting is comfortable and private.
3. Engage in initial rapport-building conversation, e.g. expressing admiration for international students like them, relating story of my poor efforts to learn Mandarin and recent trip to China, asking about their hometown and impressions of Sydney.

Questions:

Reflections on recent and past educational studies:

1. I'd like to find out about your [redacted] course. What was it like for you?
2. I'm going to give you some possible words to describe your course, and I'd like you to tell me which one is closer to your experience. (Probe for explanation for each answer.)
 - Easy or difficult?
 - Enjoyable or not enjoyable?
 - Interesting or not interesting?
 - Useful or not useful?
3. I'd like you to think about your [redacted] course compared to other courses you did in your country – perhaps your undergraduate degree or an IELTS course or something else that you did in the recent past.
 - What happened in the classroom at [redacted]? What were the ways of teaching and learning?
 - Was that the same in your other courses before?
 - How were those different ways of teaching and learning for you?
 - Which do you prefer?
 - (If differences) Has it been easy or hard to change your learning style at [redacted]?
4. How did you find your 5A assignment? Again, please tell me which one is closer to your experience.
 - Easy or difficult?
 - Interesting or not interesting?
 - Useful or not useful?

5. How did you find your 5B assignment?
 - Easy or difficult?
 - Interesting or not interesting?
 - Useful or not useful?
6. What aspects of the 5A and 5B assignments were familiar to you from previous studies in your country?
7. What aspects of the assignments were new to you?
8. What did you do well in the assignments?
9. What challenges did you have with the assignments?
10. I'd like you to talk about one of those challenges with an assignment and tell me how you responded to it – what you thought, felt and did. Which one would you like to talk about?

(Prompt if hesitant: Here are some very common difficulties that students have with their assignments. Let's look through these together and you can see if some were difficult for you. ***See Appendix 13 for document shown to students in interview (based on literature and pilot interviews): 'Common student difficulties with assignments'.***

11. And how did you respond to that challenge?

Expectations of Masters course:

12. How are you feeling about starting your Masters course at the University? First of all, how do you think you'll go with your studies?
13. Now tell me about yourself as an international student at the University – the social aspect of starting your Masters course. How are you feeling about that?
14. Finally, how do you feel personally about starting your Masters course?
15. How prepared do you feel for your Masters course? (Speaking / listening / reading / writing / subject knowledge)
16. What kinds of assignments are you expecting?
17. Do you think they'll be similar to [REDACTED]?
18. Do you think they'll be similar to what you've done in your country?

Educational self-positioning:

19. Now I'd like you to look at this diagram. It shows three circles for Your country, English college and Australian University. Where do you see yourself as a student?

Think about how you're feeling in your course, the kinds of challenges you've had in your assignment, the ways you've responded to the challenges – just generally how you see yourself as a student now and how you learn. (Encourage participant to point to spot on diagram and explain.) **See Appendix 14 for diagram.**

Interview 2

(Shortly after submitting the first assignment response in the designated subject)

- Remind student of recording and ethics considerations, e.g. confidentiality and right to withdraw.

Recent experiences of Masters course:

1. How has the semester been for you in general since I last spoke to you?
 - Academically (Probe, including different subjects, S/L/R/Wr skills & genre)
 - Socially (Including who talked to and worked with)
 - Personally (Probe gently for feelings, pressures including family, health etc)

Understanding and perception of assignment task:

2. We're going to chat about the assignment you've just submitted. First, tell me about this task. (Show assignment task as point of focus for discussion.)
 - What did you have to do?
 - How did you work out what to do?
 - Have you ever done anything similar to this before – in your country, at the College, or somewhere else?
 - How did you feel about doing the assignment when you first got it?

General reflection questions:

3. Now I'd like you to tell me about your experience with the assignment.
 - How easy or difficult was it for you?
 - Are you satisfied with your assignment?
 - Which parts do you think you did well?
 - Tell me more about how your approach made each part good.

Forethought and performance stages, including challenges and response:

- After you got the assignment, did you make a plan? What happened at that stage?
- We've talked about how you did some parts well, but now I'd like to talk about any difficulties you had when you started working on the assignment. (Prompt if hesitant: Here are some very common difficulties that students have with their assignments. Let's look through these together and you can see if some were difficult for you.)
- Now I'd like you to choose two of the difficulties you've just named for us to discuss in more detail. What would you like to choose? I know you

talked about some difficulties on your audio-recordings – and thanks for that – so you might like to talk in more detail about the same ones or something different.

- OK, when you realised X was difficult, what did you think and feel about it?
- And what did you do? (Break into steps if possible, probing for reasons for strategy use and details of use.)
- Was that something you've learnt in China, at [REDACTED] or in your Masters course? (Probe for evidence of committed / surface / hybrid adaptation as per Tran L., 2011).
- (If evidence of hybridisation) It seems that you've used some skills that you've learnt in A and B and put them together. Can you explain to me why you took that approach? Tell me exactly what made you come to that decision.
- Now let's talk about another difficulty you had with the assignment. Which one would you like to discuss?
- Repeat questions from 'When you realised that was difficult ...?'

Educational self-positioning:

4. Now I'd like you to look at this diagram. It shows three circles for Your country, English college and Australian university. Where do you see yourself as a student? Think about how you're feeling in your course, the kinds of successes and challenges you've had in your assignment, the ways you've responded to the challenges – just generally how you see yourself as a student now and how you learn now. (Encourage participant to point to spot on diagram and explain.) **See Appendix 14 for diagram.**
5. Complete interview by verifying a few major points made by the participant in the interview, to check understanding. Let the participant know what will happen next in the study – receiving their assignment feedback, followed by the final interview. Thank the participant.

Interview 3

(After participants have received assignment grade and feedback from their lecturer)

Recent experiences of Masters course:

1. How has the semester been for you in general since I last spoke to you?
 - Academically (Probe, including different subjects, S/L/R/Wr skills & genre)
 - Socially (Including who talked to and worked with)
 - Personally (Probe gently for feelings, pressures including family, health etc)

Reflection on assignment result/feedback and learnings from assignment experience:

2. So how did you feel about your assignment result?

3. And the lecturer's comments?
4. I'm going to give you a couple of minutes to make some notes, in your language if you like, before you start talking to me. The question is: What do you think you've learnt from this assignment experience? I mean ideas or skills that you want to take into your future assignments to get the best possible results. (Probe for academic, social, personal / affective and motivational aspects.)

Educational self-positioning:

5. Now I'd like you to look at this diagram. It shows three circles for Your country, English college and Australian university. Where do you see yourself as a student now? Think about how you're feeling in your course, the kinds of challenges you had in your assignment, the ways you responded to the challenges – just generally how you see yourself as a student now and how you learn. (Encourage participant to point to spot on diagram and explain.) **See Appendix 14 for diagram.**

(Complete interview by verifying a few major points made by the participant in the interview, to check understanding. Then present the participant with movie voucher, thank them for participating and wish them all the best with their studies. Tell the participant that they can email me if they have any further thoughts or concerns about the study.)

Appendix 13: Common student difficulties with assignments

This document, compiled on the basis of the literature and pilot study responses, was used as an optional support for participants during Interviews 1 and 2, in case they had difficulty in identifying specific difficulties with their assignment.

Did you have any of these problems with your assignment? They are put in groups here, but each dot point is a difficulty you could talk about.

Understanding what the task wants you to do:

- Using appropriate content (information) from your subject
- Knowing what to do, step by step
- Genre (genre) and language style (how to write it)
- How you need to use sources (readings, clips etc)

Using sources:

- Finding sources
- Understanding sources
- Critical reading
- Synthesising (combining) sources to make an argument
- Paraphrasing (putting others' ideas into your own words)
- Including quotes from sources in your writing
- Using citations correctly
- Reference list

Language:

- Vocabulary (academic words and technical words from your subject)
- Using a variety of sentence structures
- Accuracy (correct grammar)

Assignment process:

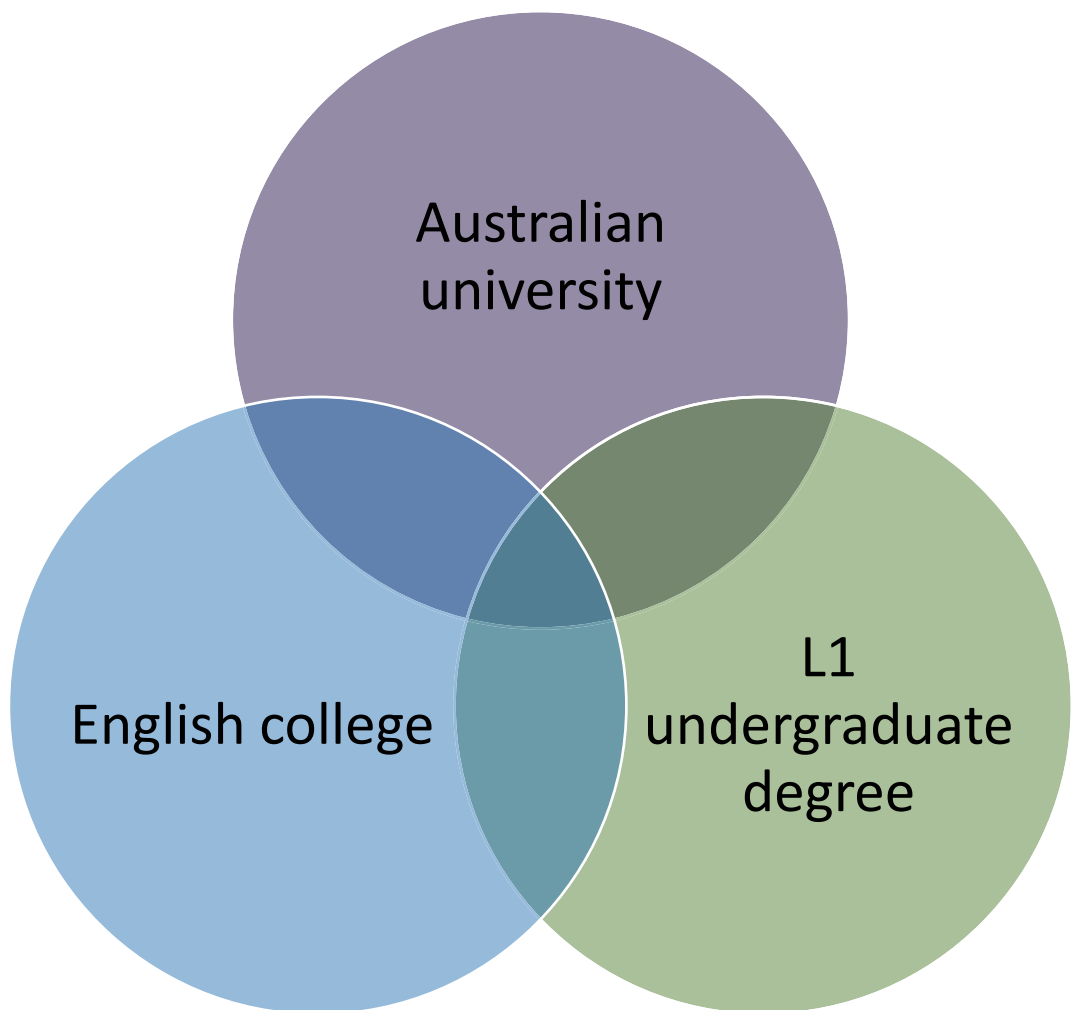
- Planning assignment
- Managing assignment while doing it (e.g. time management)
- Getting help from lecturer / HELPS / friends etc
- Drafting before final submission

OR

- Other difficulty: _____

Appendix 14: Visual prompt for Educational self-positioning

In each interview, participants were asked about their perception of ways of teaching and learning at their institution. (Interview 1 also included their impressions of teaching and learning in their L1 undergraduate degree.) At the end of each interview, participants were asked to point to the place in the diagram which represented their current ways of learning. This is termed 'Educational self-positioning' in the study.



Appendix 15: Example of analytical summary

After transcribing each interview, I wrote an analytical summary, to provide me with a thorough understanding of the participant's individual process before commencing coding of the group's experiences. Here are excerpts from analytical summaries of the first two interviews for one participant.

PARTICIPANT 10

Interview 1: 14 February, 2019

Reasons for choosing overseas Masters course:

P10 (28 years old, from Bangkok Thailand) has been on a personal journey of growing maturity during his two years in Australia, bringing him to his next step of commencing a Master of IT at [REDACTED]. He did a Bachelor of Marketing and Business Administration degree in Thailand first and worked in that field for two years before deciding that further study in this field would not necessarily progress his career:

And also before I came in Sydney, I had worked for two years, so I have a work experience about Marketing and Sales. And I think for me, studying MBA is not helpful for me. I think because I see Marketing or Business have to get work experience rather than degree in my opinion, because I already have the business knowledge so I think it's enough. I have to study something very different, so that's why I chose IT.

It was not clear from the interview why P10 actually sought a change of career direction through further study, but his next step was to come to Australia to study English during a one-year stay to improve his English skills. However, after some time at an English college in Sydney, P10 extended his stay when he found he enjoyed living here, in particular, the lifestyle and multicultural character of Sydney appealed to him as a way to communicate with people from different countries and expand his personal perspectives as a result:

Living in Sydney is very amazing and I like living in here. I like the environment and atmosphere. Now I love speaking English rather than Thai language ... I think English language is very important to speak with diverse people from different countries ... Different experience and different attitude and perspective, and I can learn something positive and something negative about the people from different countries.

During this time, P10 began to explore the possibility of further, career-related study in Sydney, with a possible eye to seeking migration. Reflecting a still young outlook, he originally pursued the idea of studying Cookery at TAFE or another college, following his friend's plan and enhancing his prospects of migration:

Actually, I just want to follow my friend because I have a close friend from Korea and we have a close relationship and I just want to follow him to study Cookery, but I think it would be very helpful in this country because there are a lot of cafes and restaurants, so maybe I have opportunity to work and earn money.

With P10 experiencing difficulties in his cooking job and being advised against it as a career by his Head Chef, he began to doubt this course of action. P10 then consulted his mother, with whom he has a close and trusting relationship, together with a number of friends. His mother pointed to his lack of talent at cooking and his circle of advisers persuaded P10 that he had better prospects of IT, building on his Marketing background in a world of growing technology:

I asked my Mum and after that I asked my friend who worked in IT, and they say – and many friends say – 'I think you should study IT because nowadays everything is use IT and systems,

especially data and change to make the system', and I think – I'm not sure I like or not – but I'm a little interested.

Interview 2: 18 April 2019

Overall experience of [REDACTED] studies:

Overall, P10 has been surprised by 'everything' in his course:

I didn't think studying in university is difficult like this.

He finds the overall organisation involved in having four subjects instead of the one continuous course and teacher at [REDACTED] to be quite difficult to manage:

Everything mix up. I have four subjects and I don't know what should I do first. I have to plan the schedule, like today what am I going to be doing? I have to plan that. That's very hard. Sometimes it's only 3 hours, but it's actually 6 hours, but I think it's worth it if I can understand.

Understanding the content has proved very challenging for P10 due to his lack of IT experience and his inadequate language skills. He describes a major challenge of this type with one of his subjects:

I think the difficulty of subject, some knowledge that I can't even, 'What are you talking about?' I want to ask that. I have one subject that I don't understand anything now. It's Database subject. Anyone that already passed this subject, they say that it's easy, you can do it. But now I've studied for 5 weeks but I don't understand. I don't know. I think it's not difficult, but I don't know what should I do about it.

Beyond the specifics of understanding content, speaking and listening difficulties dominate P10's experience, summarised by him as 'all communication'. In terms of listening, it has been very hard for him to understand the lecturers, especially those who have foreign accents. His first lecture was a particularly distressing experience which, however, has strengthened him for future challenges:

I'll explain my feeling in the first class of all classes. The lecturer was saying anything, it was two hours, but I didn't understand anything. I feel like I wanna cry. Honestly, I talked to the lecturer and say 'I don't understand anything of what you have been explaining so far', and she say only one thing, 'You'll be fine. You will be fine. Don't worry'. Now I remember that I will be fine.

This is a pattern repeated in P10's responses, where he faces great difficulty, but then receives reassurance about the bigger picture and/or sees the difficulty within the context of his personal motivation for coming to Australia. In both cases, this gives the experience a broader meaning and settles his mind. Another example of reassurance is the continuing important role of P10's mother throughout his journey:

I told her everything when I have a problem or feel depressed, not depressed, down. I told my Mum everything and my Mum said,

'To be honest, I can't help you anything, because I'm staying in Thailand and you're in Australia. So you have to find some way to survive. I think it's good. And she say one thing that is good, that my culture, this is very support, some type of words is very support in my culture. She say, 'If you can study something very difficult and you can overcome them, that means other people or most people can't do like you, and you will get better job or higher job than others'.

Appendix 16: Codes and sub-codes used in data analysis

The meaning of each code as applied in thematic data analysis is available on QUIRKOS software.

REASONS FOR STUDY

Career:

Competitive, English, reset, prestige

Study reset:

Quality of uni, subject

Overseas:

Growth, again, intercultural (English), dream

Want to settle:

Quality of life, career opportunities

Family:

partner, parents

SELF-LEARNING

Motivation:

Self-directed, contribution, grades, career, maturity, staying

L1 system:

Tests, follow, career, limited, L1 support, thorough, book

College:

Adaptation, agency, expansion, special, Chinese, self-learning

Expectation:

Pass, L1, understand, research, self-sufficient, agency, new, isolated, worry, don't know

College effect:

Familiarisation, missing, skills, contrast, speaking, groupwork, support (teacher & friends)

Learning:

Maturing, skills, group learning, adaptation, hybridisation

UNDERSTANDING LECTURE CONTENT**Difficulties:**

Task, support, groupwork, reticence, language, workload, isolation, familiarity, understanding, research, subject, roles (information source)

Strategies:

Translation, changes, peers, lecturer, research, inference, avoidance, notes, preknowledge, organisation, recording, preview-review

Metastrategies:

Metacognitive, metasocial, meta-affective, metamotivational

Previous:

L1, College

COURSE:

IT, Finance, MBA, Law

DOING ASSIGNMENT TASKS**Difficulties:**

Unfamiliar, stress, specificity, model, support, L1College, system, knowledge, language, unclear, hard

Strategies:

Genre, process, change, lecturer, translation, read, apply College, groupwork, peers, services, writing, review, apply Guidelines/Model, research, time management

Metastrategies:

Metacognitive, metasocial, meta-affective, metamotivational

Course:

IT, MBA, Finance, GMP, Property Development

Educational self-positioning:

L1, L1College, College, CollegeUni, Uni, L1CollegeUni, L1Uni

Links:

L1, College (+ missing)

Appendix 17: Example of mindmapping as data analysis tool

Mindmapping played an important role in data analysis. In the example provided below, mindmapping helped to establish cause-effect relationships between factors (internal and external) in the participants' context and the concept which resulted from their interaction. A basic mindmap such as the one below was followed by mindmapping using pencil and paper, to explore interrelationships between factors.

