



UNIVERSITY OF  
TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

**Towards understanding the diversity of  
English for Academic Purposes students  
at the University of the South Pacific**

Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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## **Certificate of original authorship**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Date:

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## **Dedication**

*To the wonderful,  
cheerful,  
full of life lady,  
called to rest so soon.*

*Veena Singh -*

*this one's for you.*

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CLESOL	Community Languages and English to Speakers of Other Languages
DFL	Distance and Flexible Learning
DRP	Directed Reading Program
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EGAP	English for General Academic Purposes
EOP	English for Occupational Purposes
EPP	English for Professional Purposes
ESAP	English for Specific Academic Purposes
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
EVP	English for Vocational Purposes
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
LLF11	Foundation English (course)
NA	Needs Analysis
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NNS	Non-Native Speaker
NS	Native Speaker
PEM	Proficiency in English Measure
PSA	Present-Situation Analysis
Q1	Questionnaire 1
Q2	Questionnaire 2
SELMOUS	Special English Language Materials for Overseas University Students
SLS	Student Learning Support
TBLT	Task-Based Language Teaching
TENOR	Teaching English for No Obvious Reason
TSA	Target-Situation Analysis
USP	The University of the South Pacific
UU114	English for Academic Purposes
VET	Vocational Education and Training



# Abstract

The focus of the thesis was to establish the relationship, if any, between the diverse groups of students at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, and the needs and abilities they bring to their studies in the English for Academic Purposes course offered by the university. In order to achieve this, in the first instance, a needs analysis was conducted to identify the challenges faced by the students, and to distinguish any fundamental differences in terms of the challenges faced by these students from individual cultural groups. It was anticipated that the needs analysis would reveal useful demarcations between the diverse groups of students. However, it was also expected that the study would help identify the similarities in terms of these challenges among the various groups of learners. Once these challenges had been identified, the second aim of the project was to identify how the EAP course at the University endeavoured to address these challenges. In short, the thesis set out to identify the needs of the students, understand these in terms of how they approach and make sense of the EAP course, and understand the matches and mismatches between what is needed by these groups of students and what the course offered in its current form.

In order to carry out this research, three main data sources were used. Firstly, applying the principles of document analysis, the university's EAP course documents (assignments, course books, and supplementary resources were scrutinised). The information gathered from this exercise was used to generate items for the two questionnaires and interview schedules that were used to collect data from the participants. The first questionnaire was administered to the student-participants in week 4 of their EAP course while the second questionnaire was distributed in week 11. This was done to compare the confidence levels of the students at the beginning and

towards the end of the course. This allowed for the comparison of trends and confidence ratings of the diverse groups of learners. To supplement these data, interviews were also conducted with teachers of the EAP course. The use of this mixed-method approach and various sources allowed for triangulation of data.

The current study was thus proposed for a number of reasons. Firstly, the literature review revealed that EAP needs analysis studies in the South Pacific region are scarce, and as such the extent of knowledge on this important area is limited. This thesis contributes to the existing literature by offering another perspective; none of the earlier studies had investigated the differences and the similarities among the cultural sub-groups. It is a valuable to incorporate a cultural dimension because it allows for the demarcation of needs based on cultural requirements and differences. The Pacific region has a rich set of cultural heritages, and being linguistically diverse makes it an even more fertile area for research.

A theme that emerged in the findings is the presence of a university culture that is different to the prior experiences of Pacific students. This culture is governed by a number of intertwined factors such as academic demands, westernised notions of knowledge and how this knowledge is presented, the utilisation of critical thinking skills and so on. The USP students, like other university students, have to adapt to this new culture and learn to conform to its requirements. Depending in part on their background, students appear to adapt differentially to these new cultural norms.

This study highlights some significant findings that would aid teachers, curriculum developers, and educationists among others to gain a richer cultural understanding of the South Pacific region. This understanding, it is hoped, will lead to the creation and development of more appropriate course content to meet the specific needs of Pacific students. It should be noted, however, that while the study provides

some evidence for cultural differences in terms of learning needs and expectations of Pacific students in the EAP context, because of the low numbers involved in the sub-groups, these findings should be treated cautiously when making any applications or extrapolations.

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Learning English has become important globally. This is mainly because being able to communicate effectively in English is associated with being able to find good jobs and make progress. The English language has as such transcended cultural barriers to become an international language for business, trade, politics, science and technology and so on. Richards (2001, p.1) labels the ESL industry as “one of the world’s largest educational enterprises” as “millions of children and adults worldwide devote large amounts of time and effort to the task of mastering a new language”. As such, the English as a Second Language (ESL) industry is a major income-generating industry in many parts of the world. For instance, in Korea, this multi-billion dollar industry earns “roughly \$15 billion” annually, and “directly touches the lives of almost every single school and university student, as well as a substantial percentage of people”, including senior citizens (Walcutt & Lazo 2011, p. 51).

With this comes a crucial question about why people learn English, and what implications would the various reasons for learning have on the curriculum that is taught. West (1994, p. 1) highlights that it is important to know “what learners will be required to do with the ... language in the target situation”. In the tertiary education context, Shing et al. (2013) suggest that there are generally three groups of learners of English. The first is those who want to improve their general English proficiency. The second group consists of those who have relevant qualifications to practise in their professional fields but need specific English language skills to be able to communicate effectively with their counterparts. These learners would be interested in English for Occupational Purposes. The third group identified by Shing et al. (2013) includes learners of English whose main goal is to be able to use English in academia. Phillipson

(1992, p. 166) argues that the global spread of the English language is an inhibiting influence because it “substitutes and displaces other languages”, and at the same time may “impose new mental structures on learners”.

The use and status of the English language across the Pacific varies considerably. In most Pacific nations, English is the medium of instruction in primary and secondary schools. However, the level of exposure to this language varies across the South Pacific. In Fiji, for example, English is spoken widely, whereas in Kiribati, the use of this colonial language is minimal. Burnett (2013) clarifies that even though the English language is stipulated as an official language in Kiribati, in the last 40 years, there has been a considerable decline in English literacy, adding that this problem in Kiribati “appears particularly pressing” (p. 352). Mugler and Lynch (1996) and Mugler and Benton (2010) provide a good description of how the linguistic diversity in, and the colonial history of, the South Pacific nations are reflected in the way languages are used in education, commerce, jurisdiction and so on. In at least 12 of the 22 South Pacific nations that Mugler and Benton (2010) discuss, “English is designated by constitutional or statute law as an official language” (p. 171). Other languages also have official status: French in four of the 22 nations, Spanish in one and Fiji-Hindi is one of the official languages in Fiji.

With such diversity in the student population that enters a Pacific institution like the University of the South Pacific, it is imperative that the students and their needs are known, and that appropriate courses are developed to cater for their needs. Curriculum design entails a process of evaluation of what is required. Once a course has been designed and implemented, efforts are made to reflect on whether the course meets the needs of the students it is meant to serve. This challenge becomes even more essential to

tackle when the student population is diverse and rich in cultural, religious, linguistic and political variations.

Bearing in mind the broad aim of this thesis of studying the cultural differences between students enrolled in the face-to-face EAP students at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, and how these differences may impact on their needs, this introductory chapter will provide brief descriptions on

- the cultural and linguistic diversity in the Pacific
- the English for Academic Purposes course and its two main strands:  
English for General Academic Purposes and  
English for Specific Academic Purposes
- the study site – The University of the South Pacific (Suva, Fiji)
- needs analysis in EAP
- the research questions
- the justifications of the research aims
- the methodological framework adopted
- some useful definitions
- delimitations of the research, and
- the outline of the thesis

## **1.2 Background to research**

### **Cultural and linguistic diversity in the Pacific**

The Pacific Ocean is home to a diverse group of people who not only speak more than one language in most cases, but also have cultural practices that are distinct from others found within this region. In the South Pacific region alone, data from Ethnologue's (Lewis et al. 2013) website reveals that a sum total of 215 languages are spoken by a group of people whose total population is just over 2 million (see Table

1.1). This ratio by far makes the South Pacific a linguistically and culturally rich region. This diversity is even wider in Melanesia (see definition in section 1.6 later in this chapter) where most of the South Pacific languages are found (71 in the Solomon Islands and 108 in Vanuatu).

While most of the languages in this region belong to the Austronesian language family, there are some languages that have no Austronesian traits, and what language family they belong to is a contentious issue among linguists (Reesink 2013). These languages are referred to as Papuan languages in the literature (Reesink 2013). Bellwood (1991) provides a succinct description of how the Austronesian languages spread from “Taiwan through to western Melanesia, and later into uninhabited territories, in ... the Pacific islands east of the Solomons” (p. 90). There are speculations about the movement of the Austronesian speakers thousands of years ago, one of which is the development in agricultural practices that subsequently led to expansion of population and the need to find new land (Bellwood 1991).

Table 1.1

*South Pacific Country Profiles (information extracted from Lewis 2013)*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>National or Official Languages</b>	<b>Literacy Rate</b>	<b>Immigrant Languages</b>	<b>Living Languages</b>
Cook Islands	17791	English	95%	0	5
Fiji	838000	Fijian Hindustani English	94%	12	10
Kiribati	93000	Kiribati English	92%	1	2
Marshall Islands	54000	Marshallese English	98%	0	2
Nauru	10000	Nauruan English	97%	6	3
Niue	1900	Niuean	95%	1	2

		English			
Samoa	181000	Samoan	99%	0	2
		English			
Solomon Islands	495000	English	77%	1	71
Tokelau	1500	English	94%	0	2
Tonga	102000	Tongan	99%	1	3
		English			
Tuvalu	9600	English	95%	0	3
Vanuatu	234000	Bislama	81%	7	110
		English			
		French			
Total	2037791	-	-	29	215

While the Austronesian languages have many similarities in terms of vocabulary and the way they are structured, in most cases, people from different nations are unable to fully comprehend each other. In such cases, English is usually used as a lingua franca (others being the local standard dialects such as Bauan in Fiji, Pijin in the Solomon Islands and Bislama in Vanuatu). Indo-Fijians also form a large part of the campus community in Fiji and they speak a non-Austronesian language, Fiji Hindi, which is a koine, or dialect, of Hindi, an Indo-European language spoken widely in India.

Melanesian people, however, do have another language apart from English that can be used as a lingua franca. This language is the Melanesian Pidgin, which has three dialects: Pijin (spoken in the Solomon Islands), Bislama (spoken in Vanuatu) and Tok Pisin (spoken in Papua New Guinea). Lynch (2010, p.227) says that there is “a strong case on the grounds of lexical and grammatical similarity, as well as history” between these three varieties to group them together as Melanesian Pidgin, and refer to the three variants as “dialects” of the Melanesian Pidgin. Two of the three, Pijin and Bislama are found in the South Pacific region (Lynch & Mugler 2002).



In terms of cultural practices, the Pacific people generally have strong beliefs and display strong pride in them, although people seem to associate very strongly with their sub-cultures. In a survey conducted in 2012 in three Melanesian countries and Timor Leste, Leach et al (2012) found that 90.5% Solomon Islanders and 91.5% Ni-Vanuatu equated national pride with their “distinctive culture” (p. 12). However, in terms of the many cultural groups that exist in the two nations, 82.8% Solomon Islanders and 86% Ni-Vanuatu respondents said “it is better if groups maintain their distinct languages, customs and traditions” (p. 14) rather than to have them “adapt and blend into one society” (p. 14).

These Pasifika traditions are at odds with typical western pedagogies. Traditionally, the Pacific societies follow a hierarchical community structure where a chief is usually anointed to represent and guide the people. This is their leader and, usually a male; his words cannot be ignored, and his ideas cannot be questioned. Essentially, this figure stands next to god who, according to McNamara (2012), is the Biblical god and/or the spirit gods. In many Fijian villages today, while Christianity is widely practised, beliefs in ancient gods and spirits, and in their power, “are still common” (McNamara 2012, p. 17). In the classroom, this leadership role is loosely transferred to the teacher who cannot be seriously challenged. According to Ochs (1988) Pacific children are conditioned from an early age to be submissive learners who are required to be mostly careful listeners and observers, and quite often admonition is used to ensure this. White (2013) notes that ‘silence’ has a prominent role in Pasifika cultures. In the classroom, White observed that “several students had a pattern of sitting silently and staring vacantly at their teacher when called upon to answer a question” (p. 333) and related this to the notion that “silence is a symbolic and fundamental structure of communication” (p. 4). Additionally, Table 1.0 highlights the differences in literacy

rates among the 12 South Pacific nations, and this variation contributes to the diversity in the region further. While most countries' rates are in the 90s, the Solomon Islands has 77% and Vanuatu's rate is 81%.

Furthermore, colonialism has had a significant effect on both the peoples of the Pacific and their culture. While most Pacific nations are former British colonies, the Melanesian nation of Vanuatu, formerly known as the New Hebrides, was also colonized by the French (see Table 2.1 in Chapter 2); Ni-Vanuatu culture and languages would have been influenced accordingly. For example, French words would have been incorporated into the local languages, and French cuisine may have had an impact on the local food. Ashcroft et al. (2003, p.118) write that, "new transcultural forms" are created "within the contact zone produced by colonization". Most cultural anthropologists – for instance Rutherford (1990) and Bhabha (1994) - associate this evolution of culture with the theory of 'hybridity'. In the area of language, many changes have taken place as a result of colonization. Mugler and Lynch (1996), highlight the extent of the imposition of the English language during colonization and how important this "metropolitan language" (p.3) still is in most parts of the Pacific. In another paper, Lynch and Mugler (1999) describe how this metropolitan language has in fact deviated from the standard variety of English, and has morphed into another dialect/variety of English: Pacific English.

The role of the European missionaries who travelled the Pacific converting the indigenous people to Christianity is also important in ascertaining the cultural behaviour of Pacific students. Latu and Young (2004, p.173) describe this as a "command-and-do military technique". Quite simply, Pacific students are accustomed to following instructions and not necessarily engaging in discussions. It is common to find students

in the classroom who will remain generally passive, whether at the primary, secondary or tertiary level.

To date, there is no empirical investigation into how these differences among the Pacific community may impact on the delivery of educational materials in English at tertiary level although there is a body of research primarily at pre-tertiary education level (Chapman & Tunmer 2011; Dickie 2008). Such studies are needed now when these groups of students are constantly interacting and engaging with the English language. The findings of such studies would also allow course designers some pertinent perspective on the nature of these students, and thus help in the development of relevant materials for study.

### **English for Academic Purposes (EAP)**

The demand and growth of the English language for study purposes at tertiary institutions led to the development of a special branch of English for Specific purposes called English for Academic Purposes (or EAP). As the name suggests, it aims to teach English language skills to facilitate learning at universities. Jordon (2002, p.69) suggests that “the need for EAP has increased immensely over the last few decades”, mostly because “English has become an even more widespread international language”. Shing and Sim (2011) claim that tertiary students have different language needs and this cannot be achieved by teaching them all the same type of English. This notion was earlier supported by Evans and Green (2007) who found that most undergraduates needed more than just general English support. Thus, not only may students have different end-points, but their starting-points may be different as well. Furthermore, Achugar and Carpenter (2014, p. 61) highlight that in educational institutions, the “linguistic minority population has increased significantly” and that “these students tend to lag behind in academic achievement”. They attribute this to their lack of EAP

competence. Thus, the field of EAP developed as “a result of dissatisfaction with the lack of generalizability of ESP [English for Specific Purposes] courses” (Shing, Sim & Bahrani 2013, p.32) to cater for the linguistic demands of tertiary students who would otherwise be disadvantaged if such support was unavailable (Halliday 1983).

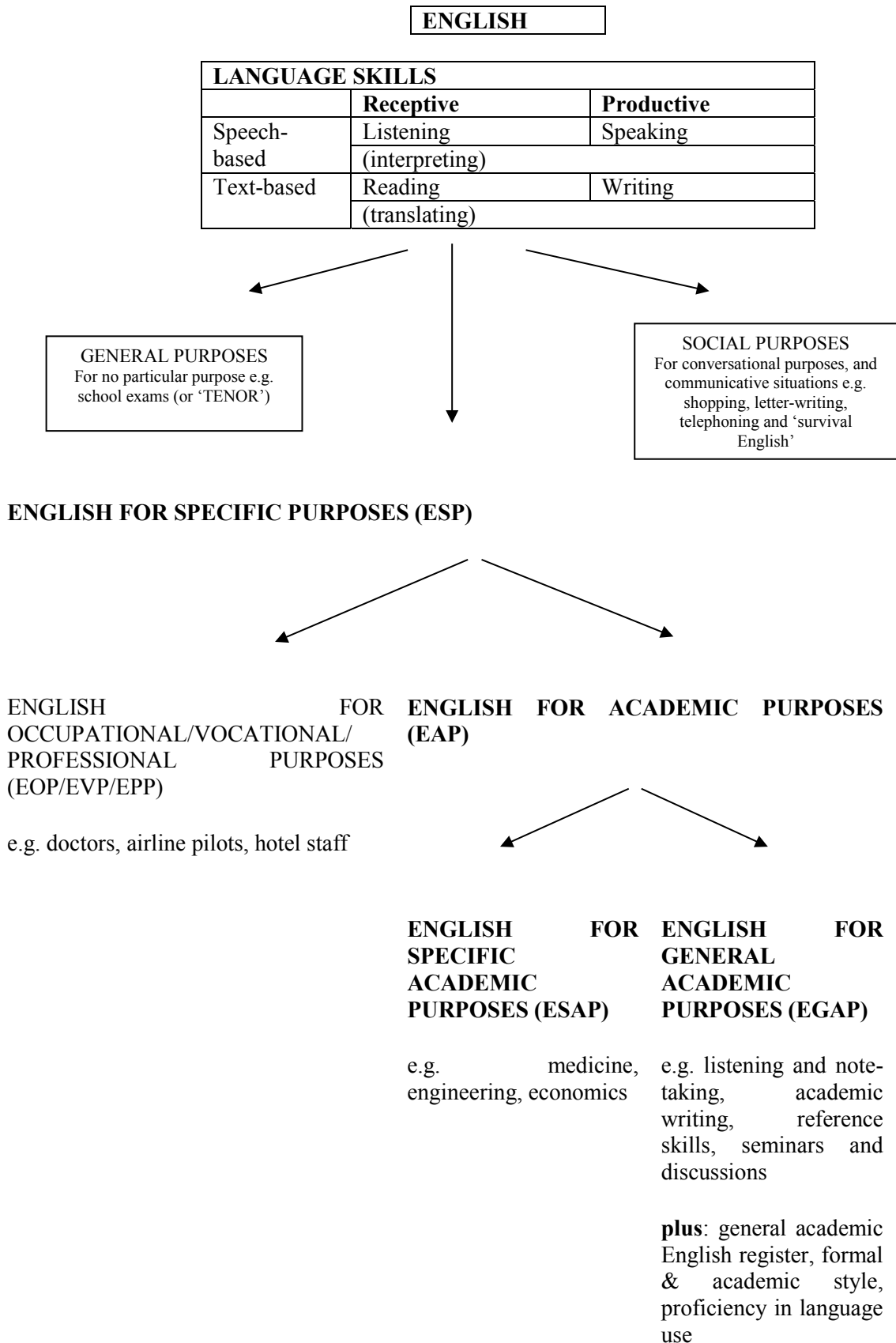
Jordon (1997) divides English for academic purposes into two main branches (a more detailed classification is presented in Figure 1.1). The first – English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) - is a more generic course where the focus is on teaching general academic skills, while the second – English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) - is focused more on discipline-specific content. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) suggest that the main difference between the two strands is that the emphasis of the ESAP courses is on the real tasks that students will do in their university courses while EGAP courses teach skills using more generic topics. Shing, Sim and Bahrani (2013, p. 32) specify that “ESAP is the language required for a particular academic subject such as medicine or engineering, and its contents include the language structure, genres, vocabulary and the particular skills needed for the area of study”.

### **The University of the South Pacific (USP)**

The University of the South Pacific (USP) serves students from 12-member nations who belong to diverse cultural and linguistic groups. The student body consists of Micronesians (from the northwest Pacific), Polynesians (mostly from eastern Pacific region) and Melanesians (from southeast Pacific – see map, Appendix A) who speak some 200 languages and have distinct cultural practices. The cultural and linguistic diversity, therefore, create challenges for USP teachers who do not only have to understand the different cultural backgrounds that their students come from, but also

Figure 1.1

*English: Purposes (modified from Jordon 1997, p.3)*



realize that their Melanesian students may not always speak English as a second language. In most cases, English for this group of students may be a third, fourth or a fifth language. While English is spoken in all of the 12 countries that form part of the USP community, the degree to which the students are able to use this language varies.

The USP teachers in the early 1990s started dialogue on how best to deal with the multi-faceted challenges presented by the varying nature of their students, and decided to offer a credit-bearing in-session course in study skills to help their students with their academic English (Chand 2007). In 1993, USP started teaching its English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course in response to the urgent need expressed by the University community. This course was designed to meet the needs of the students and to allow them to progress in their studies. In the face-to-face mode, the course is in-session (as opposed to pre-session). This means that UU114 students study their major subjects (such as Economics and Accounting) alongside the EAP course.

Currently, UU114 English for Academic Purposes is taught in face-to-face as well as in distance mode, and attracts over 1500 students per semester. As a result, the University recruits a number of teachers in Suva, Fiji to provide face-to-face sessions for on-campus students. The University campuses outside Suva (Lautoka and Labasa campuses in Fiji) and in the other 11 South Pacific nations employ teachers who provide weekly one-hour face-to-face sessions for those students enrolled in the distance mode. Students do not sit any placement test and therefore the classes are not divided according to levels (intermediate, upper intermediate, advanced and so on). Furthermore, UU114 is a compulsory course that can be taken in any semester during the students' degree programs. Owing to the large number of individual country group representations in the USP community, students are generally able to identify each

other's ethnicities through appearance, accent, clothes and language. Teachers are also able to recognize the country background of their students by similar means.

The current version of the EAP course at the University of the South Pacific is generic (EGAP). As of February 2010, this iteration of the EAP course became compulsory for all students. This has resulted in vast increases in student numbers and a further strain on resources. With a rich diversity of students enrolled in the course, the individual EAP needs of these students no doubt vary. For example, a physics student will want to learn about writing physics laboratory reports and will not find writing essays on general topics like 'the advantages of studying in the distance mode' of much use. Moreover, all students will need to increase their vocabulary banks in their own disciplines, so there will be a need to incorporate this in the EAP course.

Since its inception in 1993, the course has been revised once only, in 2006. Green and Sameer (2007) presented a paper at the CLESOL conference in New Zealand identifying reasons why the course was revised and the procedures that were followed. The revision was undertaken following numerous discussions with lecturers from other disciplines. Most lecturers consulted at the time indicated that the course needed to address the most important need of students, which was to write good English. Green and Sameer (2007) also noted that EAP students also often faced difficulty in all aspects of EAP; from conceptualization of an argument to the writing of a discursive piece, there would almost always be problems. It was thus evident EAP students at USP were facing numerous challenges, and that their teachers (both in EAP and in their disciplines) were beginning to doubt the usefulness of the EAP course.

Hence, the revised course focused more on developing the writing skills of students. A 15-step approach to writing an assignment was designed (Green 2006). The focus of this approach is to provide students with structures that they can imitate. The

following are the pertinent steps of this approach, which are essential in writing a good essay:

- Step 1: students analyse the topic to understand its requirements.
- Step 4: ideas are generated through brainstorming.
- Step 10: ideas are developed into paragraphs
- Step 12: the introductions and the conclusions are written.
- Step 14: writing a reference list is introduced.

Soon after being put in place, this new approach to teaching EAP at USP was welcomed by the EAP teachers, and a number of students also commented on the usefulness of the course on their course evaluation forms (Green & Sameer 2007).

However, to date, there has been no formal post-course enquiry, analysis and evaluation, although informal discussions reveal a positive response to this new version. In her thesis, Chand (2007) proclaims, however, that the listening needs of students are not adequately covered in the current version of the course, and calls for the inclusion of more authentic listening materials. Chand's observation is an interesting one because it raises the need to have an evaluation of the current program. Such an evaluation could then help re-define the focus of English for Academic Purposes at the University of the South Pacific. While this may be a reason for my thesis, the need to understand the differences between the cultural groups at the USP, and how these cultural differences and experiences may impact on their learning of English are more pertinent to my thesis.

### **Needs analysis**

Teaching a group of students a curriculum that has been devised on an ad hoc basis is not deemed appropriate in an ESL classroom (Jordon 2002). In fact, a survey by Cowling (2007) found that many educational institutions lacked cognizance of or undermined the importance of needs assessment as a vital step towards curriculum



design. Zhu and Flaitz (2005), in attempting a definition of needs analysis (in EAP), suggest that needs analysis is done to identify students' academic language needs, and that in doing so, researchers can identify the tasks that students will be expected to do in their university courses and the skills that they would need to have in order to accomplish these tasks. Long (2005, p. 1) suggests in his rationale for needs analysis that "a one-size-fits-all approach has long been discredited by research findings". The varying backgrounds of students, coupled with their current and target needs, should inform ESL curriculum design.

In English for Academic Purposes, needs analysis is considered a crucial component (Tajino, James & Kyoichi 2005; Jordon 1997). This is because tertiary students not only need to improve their discipline-specific vocabulary skills, but also need to understand the different genres and text types that they would be exposed to in their academic courses. In terms of English language needs of a group of Hong Kong University students, Evans and Green (2007) found undergraduate students needed to learn more about academic English than general English.

A needs assessment becomes even more important when a student cohort comprises members of many cultures. Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002, p. 6) highlight that societies

differ from one another along both social and cognitive dimensions, offering contrasts not just in their fields of knowledge, but also in their ways of talking, their argument structures, aims, social behaviours, power relations and political interests.

These differences may have a bearing on the perceptions of students from different communities, and so must be taken into consideration when designing curriculum. The University of the South Pacific is one such institution where a given class could potentially have students from 12 different countries, and who can speak a sum total of some 200 languages. The way these communities behave, and their argumentation styles may be different. For instance, those students with strong Christian beliefs may quote from the Bible to argue against topics such as homosexuality, or support the use of corporal punishment.

### **1.3 Research problem and research questions**

Given the fact that the client-base of USP's EAP course comprises a diverse group of people who have different cultural, linguistic and socio-political experiences, the following research questions emerge:

1. What critical differences exist among USP students studying EAP in the face-to-face mode in terms of their language, cultural and other backgrounds?
2. Given the varieties, to what extent and how does the course in its current form meet the needs of the students?
3. What implications does this have for the design and implementation of this and similar courses?

In order to deal with these questions, the research sets out to:

1. understand the background of the student population: cultures, languages, education and historical events (such as colonial links) that may have a bearing on their current role and attitudes and aptitudes as students;
2. perform a needs analysis of the students for an EAP course using triangulated sources (Long 2005), and investigate and evaluate the correlation between the

results of this analysis and the content, approaches and outcomes of the course in its current form;

3. propose recommendations as to how these new findings can inform the course, in terms of meeting the various needs of its students.

According to Long (2005, p.28), triangulated sources involve the collection of data from a variety of sources for comparison purposes “to increase the credibility of their [researchers’] interpretation of those data”. This “important procedure” is a relatively new inclusion in the literature on needs analysis (Long 2005, p.29).

#### **1.4 Justification for the research**

A needs analysis to ascertain the challenges faced by a group of culturally diverse face-to-face students at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji would make a significant addition to the existing literature on this. A review of the literature reveals that very few studies in the region have focused on needs analysis (Deverell 1989; Khan & Mugler 2001; Chand 2007; Green & Sameer 2007), and none have given their analysis a cultural focus. Deverell’s (1989) study was primarily interested in the relationship between students’ English proficiency test scores and their performance in a Foundation studies program at the University of the South Pacific, while Khan and Mugler (2001) looked at how effectively the final year of secondary schooling in Fiji prepared the students for university studies in terms of their English language abilities. Chand’s (2007) PhD dissertation identified the current and future needs of Pacific students in terms of their listening skills. This study focused only on the listening skills of a group of distance students enrolled in the EAP course at the time. A final piece of research on needs analysis was conducted by Green and Sameer (2007) that identified EAP needs of students at the time, with two primary data sources: students’ written assignments and dialogues with some academic lecturers on their expectations of

students' English language abilities. Thus, as an extension to the Green and Sameer (2007) study, my research focus on cultural implications makes it a unique study in the South Pacific region, and generates new and original knowledge. There is very little that is known about what cultural differences exist between people of the Pacific, and how these differences could be accommodated in any ESL curriculum that is designed for them.

Furthermore, the use of a constructivist approach, grounded by symbolic interactionism theory, adds this ethnographic research to the already existing database of studies that have used these theories to explicate their findings (Noweski & Meinel 2012; Charon 2009; MacDonald 2005). The constructivist approach, which acknowledges the construction of meaning through interaction with the stakeholders using various ethnographic tools, has gained much popularity since its inception, and "new theoretical bases for constructive ... learning have emerged, with the result that we now seem to know a great deal more about ... learning processes than before" (Terwel 1999, p. 196). As such, this study endeavours to supplement existing literature in two ways by contributing towards filling a large gap that exists in the Pacific in needs analysis in EAP that focuses on the cultural and linguistic needs of various Pacific islanders, and by adding to the existing list of studies using constructivism and symbolic interactionism theories grounded in an ethnographic research.

In terms of filling in the gap in Pasifika research, the results of this study will be of substantial value to universities and tertiary institutions in the Pacific. Bearing this out, Halliday's (1983) review of existing EAP courses in the South Pacific region at the time helped enhance awareness among Pacific scholars that Pacific students need to be trained well to be able to decode academic language that they would encounter in their academic courses. Similarly, the current study sets out to inform educators, policy

makers, EAP and non-EAP specialists, and Pacific students of the challenges that students from different cultural groups may experience when studying at an English-medium university. For the practising tertiary educator, the results of this study will have implications for classroom delivery and curriculum design. For the policy makers, this study provides relevant information on the importance of EAP courses in multilingual environments, and why students from various linguistics backgrounds should be encouraged to enrol in such courses. For EAP students, the results offer an understanding of how their cultural differences may contribute towards challenges in learning EAP, and help them to be aware of the specific problems students from their countries – and the general problems that all students - face in such courses.

The results of this study can also be used to guide any future course revisions of EAP courses where the student population is not culturally homogenous. The USP course was written in 1993, and underwent major revisions following Green and Sameer's (2007) small-scale needs analysis to revise the course. Owing to a larger focus on methodologies to perform the current needs analysis, the results may provide valuable information for any future revisions of this and similar courses.

## **1.5 Methodology**

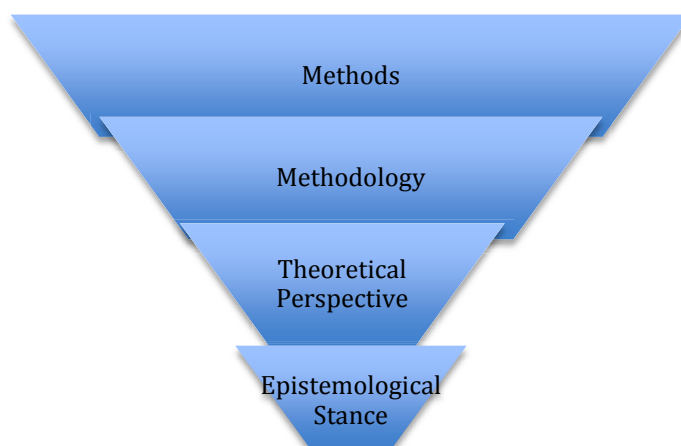
The focus cohort of this thesis is a group of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers and students at the University of the South Pacific, in Fiji. Essentially, the study questions warrant a needs analysis of a sample group. Thus, a strategic methodology was designed to allow for the collection of data to perform this needs analysis. This methodology can be described using Crotty's (1998) research process. Although Stinson and Bullock (2013, p. 8) contend that Crotty's "explication has oversimplified decades of ... philosophical debates about the meaning of knowledge and how knowledge might be produced", they still found it useful to use his ideas as a

basis of their own discussion of methodologies. Furthermore, in his review of Crotty (1998), Thompson (1998, p. 287) suggests that Crotty's research process model is "simple" and encourages researchers to "think of the four elements", which Crotty describes as "the data collection techniques, the strategy behind the techniques, the philosophical stance informing the strategy, and the theory of how we know what we know".

Crotty's (1998) research process description aims to explain the epistemological stance that underpins the study. The description builds on the instruments that were used to collect data (such as questionnaires and interview schedules), followed by a justification of these methods by describing the research methodologies. The third phase of the process focuses on describing the theoretical perspective that substantiates the researcher's assumptions. Finally, all these phases lead to an explanation of the general epistemology that the whole research encompasses. Crotty's description can be explained in the following diagram:

Figure 1.2

*Crotty's (1998) Research Process Phases*



For the purpose of my thesis, Crotty's processes have been reversed so as to allow the understanding and the justification of the research methods that were used. The epistemological stance was used as an umbrella underpinning the study, followed by the discussion of the theoretical perspective stemming from the epistemology. This was followed by a description of the methodology principles, which then helped explain the research tools and provided a justification for why these were used.

The theory of constructivism (Dunlap & Grabinger 1996; Merrill 1991; Kolb 1984; Scheer, Noweski & Meinel 2012) is used as the main epistemological base of this thesis. This theory stipulates that knowledge is "individually and idiosyncratically" discovered (Liu & Matthews 2005, p. 387). This implies that our interaction with the world creates, and continuously modifies, our perception of the world. Using the constructivist viewpoint, my thesis sought to construct meaning (with regard to the challenges faced by EAP teachers and students) and to make sense of these.

To interrogate the assumptions that I as a researcher had, the theoretical perspective used was "symbolic interactionism" (Crotty 1998; Blumer 1969; Charon 2009). This perspective sits on three principles: our reactions are governed by meanings attributed to concepts; these meanings are derived from social interactions; and they are in a constant state of modification. There are two main reasons why the symbolic interactionism perspective was adopted. Firstly, it fits into the general epistemology of constructivism, and secondly, the aims of the research demanded a perspective that focused on the understanding of knowledge through interaction and modification (dialogues with teachers and student responses to questionnaire items). To complement the symbolic interactionism perspective, the Vygotskian socio-cultural approach was also adopted owing to its relevance in building cognitive understanding in social

contexts (Iskold 2003). This approach also has its basis in “articulation of ideas [for] learning and development” (Atherton 2009, n.p.).

To engage the research participants into a discussion of the EAP course, the research design was guided by the theories of ethnography (see Atkinson et al. 2002). This theory concentrates on observing the world through the viewpoints of participants, rather than through the eyes of the researcher. By eliciting information from the teachers and students, it was possible to create an understanding of how the course operated and what challenges both the teachers and the students of the course faced. The primary tools for data collection in an ethnographic study are questionnaires and interviews (MacDonald 2005) and thus these were used.

This study utilised what Bryman (2012, p. 37) calls “mixed methods research” because both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used. The research methods employed to gather data were document analysis (Stark & Torrance 2005; Wesley 2010), questionnaires (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000) and interviews (Berry 1999; Tuckman 1972; Patton 1987). Two questionnaires were administered to the students: one in the beginning of their EAP course, and the second at the end of their course. The data were collected in three phases. The first, phase 1, involved the collection of relevant documents pertaining to the EAP course at the University of the South Pacific (such as course outlines, textbooks, and assessment tasks and schedules). Information from these documents was then used to create questionnaire items and interview questions that were used in the next two phases. Phase 2, which took place in April 2012, included the distribution of questionnaire 1 to students, and interviews with EAP teachers. Phase 3 in June 2012 saw the administration of questionnaire 2 to the students. Figure 3.1 (in Chapter 3) presents a diagram outlining these phases of data collection. A total of 80 students and 9 teachers of the University of the South Pacific



took part in this study. When the second questionnaire was administered to the students in June 2012, only 65 of the initial 80 students responded. Teacher interviews were not recorded after the recording device was damaged by water - a casualty of a cyclone, and discovered much too late to find a replacement.

## **1.6 Definitions**

The following stipulative definitions have been used in this thesis.

The *Austronesian language family* refers to a very large group of languages that are spoken by most of the people in the Pacific, and which share the same proto- or ancestor language, extending as far as Madagascar. The Ethnologue website provides a detailed breakdown of the sub-groups of the Austronesian language family (Lewis et al. 2013).

The word *course* in the University of the South Pacific context refers to *subjects*. For example, a single subject such as ‘Introduction to Psychology’ is referred to as ‘a course’ and the word ‘subject’ is not used in this context.

*I-Kiribati* is a term used to refer to the indigenous people of Kiribati.

*Indo-Fijians* (also referred to as Indian Fijians) are descendants of Indian indentured labourers who were taken to Fiji during the indenture system between 1879 and 1916. They speak a variety of Hindi, commonly referred to as a *koine* by linguists (Kerswill 2004; Mugler & Lynch 1996; Mangubhai & Mugler 2006).

*Melanesian* refers to a group of island nations where more than one language is spoken. In the South Pacific region, the Melanesian countries are Vanuatu (over 80 languages), the Solomon Islands (over 60 languages) and Fiji (although some parts of Fiji are associated more with Polynesians). (See map in Appendix A).

*Micronesian* refers to a group of island nations made up of mainly atolls. In the South Pacific region, the island nations of Kiribati, Nauru and the Marshall Islands belong to this group. The dominant language is the indigenous language of each country: Kiribati, Nauruan and Marshallese. (See map in Appendix A).

*Ni-Vanuatu* is a term used to refer to the indigenous people of Vanuatu.

*Polynesia* refers to island nations that include the Cook Islands, Tonga, Niue, Samoa, Tokelau, and Tuvalu in the South Pacific. The dominant language is the local indigenous language (Cook Islands Maori, Tongan, Niuean, Samoan, Tokelauan and Tuvaluan) although English may also be used extensively. (See map in Appendix A).

*Pasifika* refers to people of Pacific origins. It is a term commonly used in literature on Pacific people (Matheson 2013; Spiller 2013).

## **1.7 Delimitations of scope and key assumptions**

Like most research projects, this study's scope is limited by a number of factors. Firstly, the focus of the thesis is to understand the cultures and ascertaining the needs of students enrolled in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course at the University of the South Pacific. While these students were concurrently studying subjects such as Education, Mathematics, Chemistry, Accounting and so on, the analysis of their needs

was based on the EAP course. No attempt was made to understand the needs of these students in other subjects that they were studying other than the text types pertaining to these fields of knowledge.

Secondly, the geographical area where these students come from is part of the South Pacific region. The Pacific Ocean is vast, and island countries located in the north, east and west of the Pacific (such as Papua New Guinea, Guam, Easter Islands and so on) were not represented in the sample. The sample represented 12 Pacific nations only, namely the Cook Islands, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Tokelau, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, the Marshall Islands and Niue (see Appendix A for a map of the South Pacific region). While the results of this study could potentially be generalized to include the Pacific community, any such generalisation is not made within this thesis, and any should be made with caution.

Furthermore, for comparison purposes, the data were categorized according to four cultural groups: Micronesian, Melanesian, Polynesian and Indo-Fijian. The first three are broad groups (see definitions above), and within each group, the individual countries' cultures are distinct. This thesis does not aim to suggest that these groupings are discrete groups. Also, the purpose of this thesis is not to support the use of these group names, or to question the origins of these terms. The three Pacific categories are widely used in the literature for the purposes of self-identification and therefore it seemed appropriate to use them in this thesis. Again, while the results could be generalized for other Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian countries that are not part of the South Pacific, this thesis does not suggest that the results are indicative of all Micronesian, Polynesian and Melanesian cultures.

Another factor contributing to the establishment of the scope for this thesis is the student cohort group that was included in this study. A selection of UU114 English for

Academic Purposes students enrolled in Semester 1 of 2012 was randomly chosen to be included in this study. Since then, the course may have undergone changes, which are inevitable in any course. Students at the end of a course fill in course evaluation forms, and teachers are expected to read through these and make appropriate changes to their delivery of the course. Thus, a study conducted with a similar selection of students from a different year may potentially provide different data.

Finally, the cohort selected represented a small percentage of the total enrolments for UU114 at the time. Of the almost 900 students who were enrolled in the course in Semester 1 of 2012, only 80 students took part in the survey. Of these, 42 out of 80 were Melanesians (the largest group), 12 out of 80 were Micronesians, 13 out of 80 were Polynesians and 13 out of 80 were Indo-Fijians. This thesis acknowledges that 80 is quite a small number, and that resulting inferences, particularly with regard to sub-cohorts, need to be treated with some caution.

## **1.8 Outline of the thesis**

The thesis follows a traditional format where results are described and then discussed separately. There are seven chapters in the thesis:

Chapter 1 introduces the background, research questions and justification of research, followed by a brief description of the methodological framework used to collect and analyse data.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relevant to the main topic. It begins by focusing on the historical development – or evolution (West 1994) – of needs analysis, followed by a discussion of the approaches and the methods used by researchers to undertake this process. A number of needs analysis studies are then critiqued where special attention is

put on the approaches and methods utilised. In the second half of this chapter, the focus shifts to the Pacific, and begins by discussing the value of needs analyses in a multicultural/multilingual student population university such as the University of the South Pacific. Following this, a small number of available studies/reports pertaining to needs analysis in the Pacific are then analysed. The relative absence of such studies in itself helps identify the gaps in this crucial research area, thereby lending more support for the current thesis.

Chapter 3 describes the methodological framework, using Crotty's (1998) research process, which was undertaken in reverse order for the purposes of the current study.

The data are described in two chapters. Chapter 4 describes the information collected from student questionnaires 1 and 2 by presenting information in tables for comparison purposes. The data are also divided into nine sections based on themes that emerged from the results (such as 'reading skills', 'grammar skills' and so on).

Chapter 5 presents information obtained from teacher interviews. The presentation of data in two chapters does not indicate that there is no relationship between the two sets of results. This was done so as to not end up with an excessively long data description chapter.

Chapter 6 discusses the results from chapters 4 and 5. The implications of the results are also discussed.

Finally, the thesis presents a conclusion and recommendations chapter.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Needs analysis in EAP: origins, approaches and the Pacific**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

With the world becoming a global village, and travel between countries becoming more accessible, it is usual to find cultural diversity in many institutions around the world. Gearon et al. (2009, p. 3) aptly conclude that

One of the most critical realities of contemporary education in a globalised world is the growing cultural, racial and linguistic diversity in schools and the problems involved in educating large numbers of students who do not speak the dominant language as their home or heritage language.

This diversity is found not only in previously English-monolingual countries but also in countries with a longer multilingual tradition, such as India and the Pacific nations. Earnest et al. (2010, p. 157) acknowledge, “changes in the tertiary education sector have resulted in academic staff having to accommodate a higher proportion of students from diverse backgrounds”. Moreover, Achugar and Carpenter (2014) observe that cohorts have different cultural, linguistic and economic experiences, and these experiences “result in differentiated linguistic resources” (p. 61). Therefore, when these diverse groups of students converge in an institution, they are “confronted with different cultural practices, literacy experiences and knowledge from those of their primary socialisation” (Achugar & Carpenter 2014, p. 61).

Often, this diversity becomes a catalyst for the dominance of a powerful language, especially in higher education. In most cases, this language is English. One of the important variables that contribute to this is the existence of extensive professional

literature in English. Hamel (2007), for instance, states that more than 75% of social science and 90% of science journal articles are in English. In his Masters thesis about the Pacific, Halliday (1983) noted that owing to a long tradition of oral culture, materials in Pacific languages are limited, and scientific materials such as journals in Pacific languages do not exist. With developments in online technology, the world is even more exposed to materials in the English language. As a result, Pacific institutions have no option but to use existing documents in English for teaching purposes. This, combined with the colonisation of most Pacific countries by Great Britain, has made English an important language in the Pacific.

Furthermore, not all Pacific Island students speak English as a second language. For those in Melanesia, English may be a third, fourth and even a fifth language (Mugler & Lynch 1996; Mangubhai & Mugler 2006). When placed in an English-speaking tertiary institution where they are not only expected to read academic texts, but also to critically analyse information and present opinions in both written and oral formats, these students are already at a disadvantage. Earnest et al. (2010, p. 157) highlight that “multicultural and pluralistic nations require that particular attention be given to students with little experience in academic communities”. Therefore, Halliday’s (1983) call for an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program in every Pacific tertiary institute was a valid one. Not only do most Pasifika students need guidance in improving their academic skills, they also often require a considerable amount of assistance in improving their grammar and vocabulary skills in English. Without this type of support at the tertiary level, Pacific students may face major hurdles in their university studies, and institutions might sustain high failure rates.

Long and Richards (2001, p. xiii) describe the establishment of the EAP discipline as an “educational response” to the demands imposed by studying in

academic English. It entails the study of academic language and seeks to equip students with the necessary tools to deal with tasks in their university courses. Western in design, EAP notions are not easily grasped by Pacific students for whom most of what they learn in EAP will be foreign in concept. To illustrate, members of individual cultures deal with the idea of “borrowing” information from others differently. While in the western context, information from others is subject to questioning, this may not be prudent in the Pacific where high power distance societies were found to operate (The Hofstede Centre 2013). Thus, it is imperative that EAP programs are designed so as to be comprehensible to the students who will use these programs as a bridge to understand western/university ways of doing things.

Furthermore, the selection of textbooks for use in such programs requires careful thinking, especially in terms of contextual relevance. For instance, *EAP Now!* (Cox & Hill 2004), which is a graded textbook (Intermediate level, upper intermediate level and so on) is designed to equip students with reading, speaking, listening and writing skills that they “will require in order to be successful in English tertiary education” (Cox & Hill 2004, p. iii). While Pacific students may find the generic EAP content in this book, such as staging introductions and conclusions in argument essays (pp. 42-45), useful, essay topics such as the following two extracts may prove challenging contextually as they may not see the relevance of writing essays about Australia or China:

China in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is committed to strengthening exchange and cooperation with countries around the world. What are the historical and political factors, which have led to this policy shift, and what will be the possible economic consequences? (p. 12)



It wasn't until the 1960s that the rights of minorities became a focussed issue for many Western countries. Trace the history of the policies in Australia, which led to the end of the 'White Australia' policy in 1974. (p. 16)

Furthermore, in Lochland's (2008, p. 4) study of Japanese ESL students in an Australian EAP program, one of the findings was that "the interplay between the sociocultural characteristics of [learners] and the contextual particulars of Australian EAP study abroad programs impact SLA". His students, who were studying in Australia, found the international topics in the syllabi irrelevant, as they wanted to learn more about Australia. He concludes "the absence of authentic, context-specific materials in the EAP programs ... may have a detrimental effect on students' motivation to acquire English" (p. 59). In the case of Pacific students, they would find learning about familiar topics more appealing. Moreover, Richards (2001, p. 5) believes that textbooks in general "may not reflect the interests and needs of students".

### **Needs analysis**

In attempting to offer a working definition of 'needs', and how this may be different in meaning from 'need', Vandermeeren (2005, p. 159) suggests, "language needs ... can be used to refer to ... what they [language learners and users] think they need in relation to language use and training". A need, on the other hand, is an objective concept "as something one objectively ought to have" (p. 159). Richards (2001, p. 31) defines needs as what a learner has to learn, and says that when identified they can be "fairly specific ... and should determine the content of any course". He goes on further to say that such needs are often "described in terms of performance ... what the learner will be able to do at the end of a course of study" (p. 33).

In many models of course design (for example Coffey 1984; Holec 1981, Richards 2001), needs analysis is seen as an important step or stage in deciding what to include in the course. In setting the benchmark for needs assessment in EAP, Richterich (1983, in Jordon 1997, pp. 22-3) poses some fundamental questions:

1. Why is the analysis being undertaken?
2. Whose needs are to be analysed?
3. Who performs the analysis?
4. What is to be analysed?
5. How is the analysis to be conducted?
6. Where is the EAP course to be held?

These important questions highlight the multidimensionality of performing a needs analysis. As such, the realm of needs analysis is complex. Jordon (1997, p.22) represents this enormity by using the notion of an ‘umbrella’ within which a range of analyses is identified:

1. target-situation analysis
2. present-situation analysis
3. deficiency analysis
4. strategy analysis
5. means analysis

These approaches to needs analysis are described in more detail further in the chapter in the section titled ‘needs analysis approaches’.

This thesis sets to identify the differences that exist between learners of different cultural backgrounds in an EAP course at the University of the South Pacific, with the view of ascertaining needs that may be particular to the individual cultural learner groups. While there is a significant amount of literature on needs analysis (such as those

reviewed later in this chapter) in ESP/EAP, those that focus on multi-national EAP classes, in particular, in terms of the differences between culturally diverse groups of students are extremely rare. Such studies would enhance the understanding both of curriculum designers and teachers, allowing them to respond to the needs of these students better. It is this gap that this thesis aims to fill, and it is hoped that more studies in this area will be done in future.

While the University of the South Pacific is unique in the sense that it is owned by 12 countries, and has students from these 12 countries who are culturally and linguistically different from each other, there are many universities around the world that serve students from around the world. The University of Technology, Sydney, for instance, was recently “named among the top 25 most international universities” by Times Higher Education (Quigley 2014), implying that at this Australian university, one would expect to find students of various nationalities. Therefore, research identifying the cultural differences (in terms of how people learn and process knowledge) would be beneficial.

Thus, this chapter will attempt to describe the domain of needs analysis in ESP, and present a critical review of some of the existing literature. This is an important step because an understanding of the past methods and past needs analysis attempts will contribute to a better understanding of what needs assessment entails. Also, this knowledge will help needs assessment practitioners to “avoid repeating mistakes of the past and re-inventing the wheel” (Long 2005, p. 2).

This chapter will deliberate on some of the literature concerning needs analysis in English for academic purposes. It will first provide a brief historical discussion of the emergence of the EAP domain, followed by a description of the origins and subsequent evolution of needs analysis, as described by West (1994). This is vital to establish

because it helps conceptualise the extent and kind of work that has been undertaken in this area. A working definition of needs analysis is also offered in this section. Next, the chapter describes the various approaches that have been used to perform needs analysis and identifies the people associated with these. Some criticisms of these approaches are also discussed. The following needs analysis approaches are discussed:

- target-situation analysis
- present-situation analysis
- the learning-centred approach
- learner-centred approach
- strategy analysis
- means analysis
- task-based approach

Following this, the chapter then describes a number of needs analysis studies displaying current practices, focussing on the methods used in each. These studies report findings from Japan (Lambert 2010), Korean students in Hawaii (Chaudron et al. 2005), Iran (Eslami 2010), Lebanon (Bacha & Bahous 2008), and, from Australia, Brisbane (Liyanage & Birch 2001) and Sydney (Agosti & Green 2011). These studies are included in this review because of their relative currency, and the diversity of their contexts.

The next section identifies the need to have an EAP program in Pacific institutions, after presenting a historic overview of the evolution of needs analysis in the South Pacific. This historic overview begins with an examination of the findings of a seminal study on EAP in the Pacific – Halliday's (1983) thesis on the need to have EAP courses in the Pacific. This work is important because it provided an account of EAP practices in three Pacific institutions at the time. Following this, the chapter presents a

brief description of the issues currently affecting Pacific education, and the impact of culture on individuals, wherein the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis is explored. Finally, an evaluation of the literature on needs analysis in EAP in the Pacific, most of which have been based on the University of the South Pacific, is presented. The works of Deverell (1989), Khan and Mugler (2001), Chand (2007) and Green and Sameer (2007) are discussed.

## **2.2 Development of English for Academic Purposes (EAP)**

The growth of the ESL industry has been documented by many writers (Jordon 2002; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons 2002; Singh 2013; Fox, Cheng & Zumbo 2013). This growth has also contributed towards tremendous development within the ESL industry (West 1994; Jordon 2002; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons 2002). EAP emerged as a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) when academics realised that their students needed to be able to acquire skills to successfully tackle their university tasks (Shing, Sim & Bahrani 2013). Several purposes of EAP have been offered:

- (i) to teach English to facilitate learners' study or research in English (Flowerdew & Peacock 2001; Jordon 1997).
- (ii) to develop new kinds of literacy such as "equipping students with the communicative skills to participate in particular academic and cultural contexts" (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons 2002, p. 2).

Jordon (2002) presents a comprehensive history of the development of English for Academic Purposes in Britain. He begins by highlighting that in the 1960s, language support that was given to international students was generally on an "ad hoc" basis (p. 70). There was no structured class where students learnt about how best to improve their academic English abilities. There were, however, some universities (Jordon identifies four) where diagnostic tests to identify students' language strengths and relevant

curriculum were being developed. In June 1972, SELMOUS (Special English Language Materials for Overseas University Students) was formed, providing the catalyst to the development and growth of EAP (Jordon, 2002). The importance, and the relative position of designing courses to assist international students in their academic studies, is well supported by Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002, p.1) who suggest that “the dissemination of academic knowledge has transformed the educational experiences of countless students”, and these students need to “gain fluency in ... English language academic discourses to understand their disciplines and to successfully navigate their learning”.

Over the years, there have been a number of shifts in the area of EAP. Jordon (2002) identifies three main modifications. Perhaps the most important one is the presence of increased awareness “regarding cultural conventions and learning styles” (p. 73) where the need was for empowering students to “read and reason critically”. Together with this, the need for students to summarise, paraphrase and synthesise ideas from other sources also gained prominence. A third significant shift was the focus on collaborating with subject specialists (such as Economics academics) to deliver discipline-specific curriculum. While the academics stand divided on whether discipline-specific curriculum in an EAP classroom is beneficial (Hyland 2006) or not (Spack 1998), other writers, such as Hunter and Tse (2013, p. 237) believe that “the processes of writing and knowledge construction” should be “integrated within the discipline and taught by the disciplinary specialist”.

Another development in EAP has been the extensive use of the expression ‘academic literacy’ which is what Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002, p. 4) call the acquisition of a “complex set of skills ... which are increasingly argued to be vital underpinnings or cultural knowledge required for success in academic communities”.

Jacobs (2005, p. 485) believes that exploring and constructing knowledge in tertiary education requires a “fluent control and mastery of the discipline specific norms, values and conventions for reading and writing”. Agosti and Green (2011, p. 30-31) take this further by adding that to get the most out of university education, students should “use their existing academic literacies skills as a platform from which to analyse and evaluate the academic conventions of the discourse community”. They recommend a discipline-specific academic literacies course that would provide scaffolding and guide students to achieve this competency.

Jordon (2002) also has a section highlighting research interests in EAP discussing studies done by Johns (1981), Cownie and Addison (1996) and Jarvis (1997) who have all conducted interviews with EAP teachers to gather their views on EAP teaching. Jarvis’s research is of much interest to the development of EAP as he was concerned with the use of IT in EAP, which at that time was a new area. He concluded that “it is perhaps more helpful to think in terms of ‘information systems for academic study’ rather than ‘IT in EAP’” (in Jordon 2002, p. 76). Jarvis’s research documents perhaps one of the most important milestones in English language teaching: the inclusion of the Internet in the EAP curriculum. With this inclusion, there were some concerns as well. For instance, one of the drawbacks of the Internet is that it may perpetuate plagiarism (Dahl 2007; Duggan 2006), a problem that is relevant to any Pacific study.

In the final section of his paper, Jordon (2002) notes two main directions for the future concerning the delivery and continued growth of EAP. Firstly, while student numbers have increased exponentially, there has been a marked increase in Chinese students, “with a greater diversity of language levels and more awareness of IT” (p. 77). This observation highlights the changing nature of EAP clientele, and raises the need to

regularly revise EAP syllabi, and on the part of institutions, to “invest in updating the resources” (p. 77). Jordon’s second direction for the future is the need to have teacher-training programs that would focus on EAP teaching. This is essential given the fact that the demand for EAP has risen significantly. Jordon calls the general English teacher training courses “insufficient” (p. 77).

### **2.3 Origins and evolution of needs analysis**

In the 1920s, Michael West introduced the concept of “needs analysis” in the language learning domain in India, covering two broad concepts (West 1994, p. 1). One was to identify the uses of the foreign language in the target situation (that is, how would the language being learnt be used for the purpose that it is being learnt for) and the second was to work out how this foreign language could be best learnt in the time available. The term “English for Specific Purposes” (ESP) was first coined at the Commonwealth Conference on the teaching of English as a second language (the Makerere Conference) in Uganda in January 1961. This led to the surge in discussions on needs analysis (West 1994).

Schutz and Derwing (1981, p. 30) comment that after West’s introduction in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of ‘need’ was absent from the literature until the 1970s when it re-emerged as an important concept in language learning and teaching. The writers suggest that during this 50-year hiatus, it was most probable that “most language planners ... bypassed a logically necessary first step” (Schutz & Derwing 1981, p.30). This does not mean that teachers did not consider needs analysis prior to this re-emergence. As West (1994) notes, language teachers quite often follow their intuition or an informal analysis on what needs to be taught. This intuition is largely influenced by what Borg (2003, p. 81) calls “teacher cognition”. In his comprehensive review of research on teacher cognition, Borg stipulates “teachers are active, thinking decision-



makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalised, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs” (p. 81). In terms of classroom practice, Borg cites a number of studies that lend support to the view that “language teachers’ classroom practices are shaped by a wide range of interacting and often conflicting factors” (p. 91). It was not until the 1970s that some researchers, such as Richterich (1973), Stuart and Lee (1972), Munby (1978), and Jordon and Mackay (1973) among others started advocating for analyses of what needs to be taught based on student need (cited by West, 1994).

Once needs analysis in second language education gained momentum in the 1970s, it continued to be examined as researchers started exploring, and re-defining its various scopes (such as target situation analysis, deficiency analysis, means analysis and so on). West (1994, p.1) states that the “evolution” of needs analysis can best be described in four stages, with the scope in each stage shifting to a different focus. He lists these as:

- stage 1 (the early 1970s) - a focus on occupational needs in ESP and use of target situation analysis (see the next section for a description of this approach);
- stage 2 (late 1970s) – continued use of target situation analysis, while the focus shifted to academic needs in ESP;
- stage 3 (1980s) - inclusion of general language teaching with ESP, and adoption of various means of analysis (see West 1994, p.1);
- stage 4 (future-oriented at the time, with no specific period identified) – prediction of more integrated and computer-based analyses and a focus on material selection.

In its current usage, needs analysis has assumed an important place in curriculum design. It is defined as “the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners require a language and arranging the needs according to priorities” (Richards et al. 1992, cited in Jordon 1997, p.20). The operative words in this definition are *determining* and *priorities*. Determining involves considering a range of input data, such as what background knowledge do the students possess, what do they need to be able to produce towards the end of the course, what variations are there in terms of their language abilities and so on, and arriving at decisions about them. Often quite subjective in nature, these decisions will have a major influence on the next equally subjective stage, which is prioritising the information. Here, a needs analyst will need to go through the needs analysis data, using a pre-determined criteria to prioritise the needs. For instance, in a class of 20 new EAP students, a needs analysis may reveal various needs such as those relating to grammar, vocabulary, sentence construction, paragraphing, paraphrasing, time management and so on. Often courses have limitations of time, so a teacher may not be able to deal with all the identified needs. In such cases, the teacher may prioritise those needs that s/he feels needs to be addressed immediately. In a multi-cultural context, such as that in the University of the South Pacific’s EAP classes, the processes of determining and prioritising can be challenging as the analyst will need to take into consideration the cultural differences between the students that may have a bearing on what needs to be taught. Owing to the highly subjective nature of these two processes, it is important that needs analysis be performed by experts in the field and that special training be offered to those who are novices in this area.

Richards’ (2001, p.51) defines needs analysis as, “procedures used to collect information about learners’ needs”. These procedures have, since the 1970s, been more systematically developed, used, re-designed and re-used. In fact, with differing focus

points in each evolution stage offered by West (1994), needs analysis has become an umbrella term under which there are several different types; these will be discussed later in this section. While some approaches did not endure, such as the Munby Model of 1978, which was seen as inflexible, complex and time consuming (West 1994), these have helped provide useful input into the designing of later models.

Needs analysis assumes significance because, as Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) claim, this instrument can help identify the target language needs of those learning English. By determining through various instruments what students already know, and mapping this information with what students need to know towards the end of the course, the gap between the two can be identified. This gap represents the space that needs to be filled and the language teacher will thus design lessons appropriately to achieve this. The main job of the teacher is to use this information to develop apposite curriculum that will endeavour to meet the needs of the learners. West (1994) acknowledges that while teachers have always carried out their own needs assessment prior to the 1970s, research interests in this area gained momentum during the 1970s and have over the years developed tremendously. Such developments are considered vital because they help counter possible previous tacit assumptions about learner needs.

Prior to the systematic application of needs analysis, there were other analysis methods. In the 1960s and the early 1970s, register analysis was common. Jordon (1997, p. 228) explains that register analysis typically involved statistical analyses of the language such as for “verb tense frequencies and vocabulary frequencies for different subjects (ESP) in order to provide grammar registers and lexicons of those subjects.” These statistical analyses were almost exclusively at the word and sentence level, and thus did not satisfy those who were interested in extended texts (Jordon 1997). Thus in the 1970s and 1980s, discourse analysis, which is the study of naturally occurring

language data such as the study of speech patterns in an office environment, became more popular. Bartlett (2005, p. 313) suggests that discourse analysis can be performed from a micro-analytic perspective (“types of speech acts, illocutionary force, and features of conversation”) and from a macro-level standpoint (“how a task is completed”). After the 1980s, needs analysis became the dominant approach. Braine (2001, p.195) argues that the needs analysis phase is the coming of age in ESP.

Within needs analysis, there have been considerable developments. According to Braine (2001), with the publication of Munby’s (1978) *Communicative Syllabus Design*, there was a shift from what the teachers thought their students needed, to obtaining data from students through various methods to work out what their “needs”, “wants” and “lacks”, or gaps in knowledge, were. This positive shift paved the way to allow needs analysts to think about other variables such as constraints (cultural attitudes, facilities) and the learning environment.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) used *needs* to signify what the learner has to know in order to function adequately in the target situation, which is often decided or presumed by the course writer. On the other hand, *wants*, are those attributes that the learner thinks he or she needs. In many cases, the ‘wants’ may be quite different from the ‘needs’. The third term, *lacks*, refers to the “gap between the existing proficiency and the target proficiency of learners” (Braine 2001, p. 195). Hutchinson and Waters also refer to *constraints*, which are “the external factors such as staff, time and prevailing cultural attitudes that must be taken into consideration when conducting needs analyses” (Braine 2001, p. 195). All of these are considered important aspects of needs analysis.

Another area of development within needs analysis is the methods used to extract data. Jordon (1997, pp. 28-38) summarises fourteen possible ways of collecting information for needs analysis:

1. advance documentation;
2. language test at home;
3. language test on entry;
4. self assessment by students;
5. observation and monitoring;
6. class progress tests;
7. surveys using questionnaires;
8. structured interviews;
9. learner diaries;
10. case studies;
11. final tests;
12. evaluation/feedback;
13. follow-up investigations; and
14. previous research.

Robinson (1991) has fewer methods of analyses:

1. questionnaires;
2. interviews;
3. observations;
4. case studies;
5. tests; authentic data collection; and
6. participatory needs analyses.

Her authentic data collection method drew some interest among the advocates and researchers of needs analysis. According to Robinson (1991, p.14)

authentic data collection refers to the making of audio or video recordings, for example of real-life business negotiations or of lectures in students' specialist departments, and to the collection of print material, for instance samples of commercial correspondence, samples of students' examination scripts, the books and journal articles that the university students are required to read.

These materials are essentially what the target discourse community would use in reality, and therefore, an analysis of these would reveal the type of language that the learners will be exposed to and which they will need to learn in an EAP class. This method is considered by Braine (2001, p. 196) to be the most reliable method of data collection in needs analysis. Robinson (1991, p. 14), however, warns "a problem with the collection and analysis of authentic material is that it may be difficult to determine what is salient and useful and what is merely interesting." Long (2005) believes that the use of multiple sources to extract information for needs analysis "will increase the quality of information gathered" (p. 32). In a business English needs analysis study in Japan, Cowling (2007) employed the use of multiple sources to obtain data. His sources included staff at the training section that requested the business English course, the English language instructors and the learners. He chose to include multiple sources because

identifying the specific needs of the students was not always clear, and by casting a large net to cover many sources allowed for more opportunities to identify needs

and also to filter out any inaccurate perceived needs through the use of triangulation. (Cowling 2007, pp. 428-9).

## **2.4 Needs analysis approaches**

Another major development in needs analysis in ESP is in the approach. The first of the two most common of these is referred to as the *target-situation analysis* (TSA), which attempts to focus on “the students’ needs at the end of a language course, and target level performance” (Jordon 1997, p. 23). Munby’s (1978) influential sociolinguistic model is best known for utilising the TSA method. Using Munby’s approach, a profile of the students’ language needs is arrived at which can then be used by curriculum writers to develop a communicative syllabus that would cater for the needs identified from the profiles. According to Coleman (1988), there are two assumptions that underlie Munby’s model. First of all, this model assumes that learners’ identity is not a deficit and secondly, that all needs identified can be satisfactorily met individually.

However, there have been some valid criticisms of this model. West (1994) criticizes this approach for two main reasons. In the first instance, it is complex and time-consuming and second, the approach collects data about the learner and not from the learner. More recent approaches have focused on involving the learner in the needs analysis from the start (Jordon 1997). Another criticism of the Munby model according to Jordon (1997) is that his classifications of language to be practised in EAP/ESP were derived from social English (everyday conversations) and not from the target professional language community for which the needs assessment was being undertaken.

The second key approach is called the *present-situation analysis* (PSA) proposed by Richterich and Chancerel (1977). In this approach, the students’ state of language development is measured at the beginning of the course using methods such as surveys,

questionnaires and interviews. Richterich and Chancerel recommend the use of three or more methods of obtaining data so that a clear picture of the present language needs of the students can be ascertained. This approach assumes that “the learner is at the centre of the system, which includes the surrounding society and culture” (Jordon 1997, p. 24). It ignores what the learners will need in the target language community since only the present language needs are given prominence, which in itself is a significant drawback of this approach. Alharby (2005, pp. 19-20) suggests two further drawbacks of this approach is that “a team of specialists” is required for the analysis to be conducted, and that an “excessive use of generalizations in order to cover profile from different countries” is needed. It seems also logical to believe that the information supplied by the learners themselves may not necessarily reflect their true needs. Learners’ ‘wants’ may take precedence over their real needs, or they may not necessarily be better informed than their teachers about their needs. Jordon (1997) recommends that course designers consider using both PSA and TSA.

Following these two main approaches, needs analysts have combined the two approaches to obtain meaningful and useful data. A learning-centred approach to ESP was proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) who believed that other approaches gave too much emphasis to language needs, and that there was not enough focus on how learners learn. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), “learning is a process of negotiation between individuals and society” (in Jordon 1997, p. 25). This entails the belief that learning is a complex process and therefore it is important for course developers and teachers, among others, to identify how this process works.



Table 2.1

*Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) classification of learners' target and learning needs (Jordon 1997, p. 25)*

<b>Target Needs</b>	<b>Learning Needs</b>
Why is the language needed?	Why are the learners taking the course?
How will the language be used?	How do the learners learn?
What will the content areas be?	What resources are available?
Who will the learner use the language with?	Who are the learners?
Where will the language be used?	Where will the ESP (or EAP) course take place?
When will the language be used?	When will the ESP (or EAP) course take place?

The learning-centered approach distinguishes between *target needs*, which is what the learner needs to do in the target situation and, *learning needs* which focus on what the learner needs to learn. Target needs are then separated into three areas: *necessities*, *wants* and *lacks* (discussed previously in this chapter). Jordon (1997, p. 25) provides a summary table (see Table 2.1) that defines the two focal points.

Like other approaches, the learning-centred approach has also received some significant criticisms. Benesch's (1996) contention with Hutchinson and Water's approach is that it "may have underestimated the possibilities for change offered by existing structures" (p. 736). This criticism is in response to the learning-centred approach's dismissal of a learner-centred approach on the grounds that it is a "theoretical attack on established procedures" (Hutchinson & Waters 1987, p. 72). Hutchinson and Waters further contend that "since most learning takes place within institutionalized systems, it is difficult to see how such an approach could be taken, as it more or less rules out pre-determined syllabuses, materials, etc." (Hutchinson & Waters 1987, p. 72). This comment is quite contentious as it is possible to adapt pre-

determined syllabuses to learner-centred classes. Essentially, a syllabus is a guide that the teacher can modify to suit the needs of his/her class (Petrova 2008).

Other theorists, however, lend support to the learning-centred approach. For example, Nation (2000) calls the distinction between necessities, wants and lacks useful and calls for the inclusion of a “negotiated syllabus” (p. 5) when designing a new language course. West (1994, p.3) also suggests that this model has a “useful classification of needs which may be seen to reflect differing viewpoints and to give rise to different forms of needs analysis”. Watson (2003, p. 154) adds that the learning needs (“the how”) are as important as the language needs (“the what”) and that earlier research conferred little emphasis on learning needs.

The next phase of needs analysis development saw Berwick (1989) and Brindley (1989), among others, accord prominence to learner-centred approaches. Making the learner the focus of the analysis, three dichotomies were presented:

1. “perceived” needs versus “felt” needs;
2. process-oriented interpretation versus product-oriented interpretation; and
3. objective needs versus subjective needs.

The first of these concerns the question ‘who should inform the needs?’ “Perceived needs” are those that the language expert (teacher or needs assessor) assumes, while “felt needs” are those that emerge from the point of view of the learner (Berwick 1989). Brindley (1989) made two important distinctions. He called for a focus on process-oriented interpretation rather than on a product-oriented one. Rather than concentrating on the language that learners will be expected to produce and utilize in the target situation, focus should centre on how these learners’ affective and cognitive factors – motivation, wants, learning styles and so on - contribute to their learning.

The second distinction is between objective and subjective needs of the learners (Brindley 1989). While objective needs can be obtained prior to a course from a variety of information about the learners, subjective needs, which are largely influenced by learner personality, confidence and so on, can be deduced during the course. It is apparent from the learner-centred approach that learners' linguistic dispositions, and their affective and cognitive variables are taken into consideration during the needs assessment.

Another approach that gained momentum in the 1980s is called "strategy analysis" (Jordan 1997, p. 27). This type of needs analysis focussed on the strategies that learners employed to learn another language. This approach shifted the focus from working out what learners needed to learn to understanding the methods used by learners (West 1998). Allwright (1982), who is seen as a pioneer of this approach (Jordan 1997; Songheri 2008), endeavoured to differentiate between learner perceptions of (i) the skills they see as relevant for their study, (ii) the needs where they place high importance and priority, and (iii) what gap exists between what learners already know and what they need to know. However, some strategies used by learners may not contribute well to language learning, and therefore, using these strategies as the basis for course design could potentially be futile. For example, some of the strategies utilised by learners (such as rote learning) have been considered "inappropriate or inefficient" by teachers (Jordan 1997, p. 27). In such cases, Jordan advises EAP teachers to raise awareness among their students in terms of what may work best for them.

Another approach to needs analysis is to focus on the aspects that may be classified as hurdles for students, such as technical equipment, methods of teaching, (lack of) appropriate resources, cultural differences and so on. This approach is

called “means analysis” (Jordan 1997, p. 27), and it primarily focuses on understanding “the local situation ... the teachers, teaching methods, students, facilities ... to see how a language course may be implemented” (Jordan 1997, p. 27). The obvious advantages of this approach are that it is sensitive to local situations in a country and it does not promote the use of foreign models of teaching and learning.

Long (2000, 2005) suggests a task-based approach to needs analysis. Rather than focusing on “structures or other linguistic elements”, teachers and researchers should collect “samples of the discourse typically involved in performance of target tasks” (Long 2005, p. 3). For example, in identifying the needs of a group of EAP learners, the tasks they will be required to perform in their future courses (such as laboratory reports in a biology class) should be collected and analysed to identify what elements of EAP should be included in the course. In support of this approach, Lambert (2010, p. 100) says that “information about what learners have to be able to do ... in order to succeed in their lives and careers after graduation is crucial”.

In explaining his approach, Long (2000) distinguishes between three distinct levels of task analysis. The first involves target task analysis where the everyday tasks individuals will be required to perform in the target situation are collected and analysed. The next level involves categorising the tasks so as to allow the development of courses to meet the needs of individual groups of learners. Pedagogic tasks are then developed in the final stage. These are the materials and activities that the learners will use in the classroom.

Task-based needs analysis is the first component of the six-component Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) program (Doughty & Long 2002; Long 2000; Long & Norris 2000) which has gained significant attention in recent years. Chaudron et al. (2005) describe in detail a task-based needs analysis that was part of a larger study that

eventually led to the development of a prototype for task-based instruction (summarised later in this chapter). Target tasks are defined as “uses of language in the world beyond the classroom’ (Nunan 2004, p. 1). Long (2005, p. 4) suggests that a significant number of current needs analysis studies adopt a task-based stance because previous studies (for example, Arden-Close 1993; Boshier & Smalkoski 2002; Jacobson 1986; and Selinker 1979) have found that in most cases learners were unable “to accomplish the tasks required of them”.

In a study conducted in Western Australia, Oliver et al. (2013) support the use of task-based needs analysis for its capacity to ascertain the tasks that a group of Indigenous students in a country school would be required to perform in their future place of work. Their main aim was to identify the language and literacy needs of the students that would allow them to perform these future tasks. The authors used multiple sources of information to strengthen their study. These included semi-structured interviews with students, teachers and industry people, document analysis and on-site observations (both in schools and students future potential workplaces). This allowed for data triangulation, which is “an important component of NA [needs analysis], particularly when using qualitative methods as it enhances the reliability of findings” through verification of information gathered from various sources (Oliver et al. 2013, p. 41). Oliver et al.’s (2013) study is a good example of how needs analysis data can be used not only to inform and re-design an existing course to match the needs analysis outcomes, but also to create a database of information for other potential stakeholders who may find this database useful. The authors created a website where relevant information about Australian Aboriginal students, such as “background information on languages and dialects”, and “guidelines for investigating the language and literacy learning needs of their students” (Oliver et al. 2013, p.37) can be accessed by teachers at

the college to assist in the design of their VET courses. For a study that concentrates on the South Pacific region, Oliver et al.'s needs analysis is relevant as it focuses on the needs of a group of students indigenous to a country where students from many other cultures are also found. This strengthens the need to do needs analysis from a cultural perspective because the needs of students from individual cultures may vary.

Whilst still relatively new, the task-based approach has received substantial criticism. Seedhouse (2005) questions the validity of using tasks as the foundation for developing entire courses, while Widdowson (2003) is not satisfied with the definition of tasks in general, or on the emphasis given to authentic language use. Other researchers (Li 1998; Carless 2004; Butler 2005) have questioned the practicality of task-based approaches in Asian countries where traditional methods of teaching, such as memorisation, are preferred.

Long (2005, pp. 22-24), however, presents a case for the use of tasks as the unit of analysis. Apart from allowing coherence in course design, he identifies five additional reasons. Firstly, industry job descriptions are “formulated in terms of background knowledge, performance standards, and tasks” (p. 22). This defence makes sense as tasks here refer to what the candidates would be expected to perform, and thus providing training in knowing how to complete such tasks would be beneficial. Long's second argument rightly points out that linguistic-based analyses produce “lists of decontextualised structural items” (p. 23), which may not have much resemblance to real-world uses. Third, “task-based analyses are able to show more about the dynamic qualities of target discourse” (p. 23) which other forms of analysis are not able to do as effectively. Fourth, domain experts, who often have extensive knowledge in the types of task, could work with linguistics experts to design programs. While Long's justification may seem positive, it may prove to be a practical challenge to get domain experts and

linguists to work together given that they may not have enough time since they often have other jobs to do. Long's fifth defence is that such needs analyses "readily lend themselves as input for the design of a variety of ... second and foreign language courses" (p. 23). Long's these arguments are convincing, and helps understand why task-based needs analysis has received significant support today.

With a plethora of needs analysis procedures and approaches, there are stark differences in how this important educational principle is embraced by institutions. Oanh's (2007) comparative study demonstrates the extent of needs analysis differentiation among institutions. Oanh (2007) studied two EAP programs to explore what needs analysis procedures were used and how successful – or otherwise – these were. He compared programs in two institutions, one in New Zealand and the second in Vietnam. Through the use of interviews and class observations, he determined that while the EAP programs utilised needs analysis procedures, "the level of focus and practice was different" (p. 324). His major finding was that the New Zealand institution had a heavy focus on needs analysis and used a variety of procedures to identify what their students needed most. This involved having an ongoing evaluation and making regular changes to the program to "tailor the program to meet students' needs". This type of ongoing assessment is imperative as student cohorts never remain the same. A placement test was also used in the beginning of the course and the teachers administered three questionnaires at various intervals in the course. There was a significant amount of flexibility in what the program taught and how this was taught.

In contrast, the Vietnamese institution was more rigid and influenced by the theory of language learning proposed by Hall (1993), Krashen (1982) and others who "suggest that one learns a language by proceeding along the four-skills path" that is, listening, reading, writing and speaking skills (Oanh 2007, p. 338). While teachers were

required to follow a pre-determined teaching plan, they had the flexibility to design the program. However, it was reported that due to “lack of qualified teachers, time and resources” (p. 339), this was not possible. This is an important finding because it raises the problems faced when the content of a course is left flexible – Nation’s (2000) negotiated syllabus. Oanh also discovered that teachers had the discretion to assume what their students needed, as no formal assessment was done with the students when they started their classes. The teachers were, however, “aware of a lack of needs analysis in the program design ... and tried to fill in the gaps” (p. 340). This comparison highlights the role played by time, resources and a lack of qualified teachers, in ensuring the delivery of a needs-based course. Oanh (2007, p. 344) suggests that, “the New Zealand student needs analysis system could well be a model for the Vietnamese classes, where official needs analysis was not a common practice”.

## **2.5 Current research on EAP and needs analysis**

The chapter will now focus on selected needs analysis studies, with particular emphasis on the methods used, with the aim of shedding light on the mechanics involved in a needs analysis development process.

Wette’s (2011) discussion of meeting the curriculum, learning and settlement needs of refugee students in New Zealand is evidence of the kind of diversity one would expect in an ESP class with a multi-national student population, such as the one found at the University of the South Pacific. She writes about how four teachers developed materials throughout a university preparation course in an Auckland-based institution, to meet the individual needs of the students. In providing justification for such an action, she asserts that a learner-centred approach is needed in such cases because the “learners often come from disparate backgrounds and have very different needs” (Wette 2011, p. 60). This is an important assertion since it hits the very core of programs where learners



do not bring with them the same ‘English skills capital’. While there are both advantages and demerits of using teacher-produced and commercially produced materials, Wette maintains that the “responsibility for materials use” should be assigned to “classroom teachers” (p. 73).

In her attempt to understand the principles behind the selection and use of course materials in refugee and migrant resettlement ESL programs, Wette interviewed four experienced teachers, once a week for 16 weeks. Through these interviews, she discovered the reasons the teachers gave and the guiding principles they used to select materials for class use. While the majority of the students were of South-East Asian origin, some were from North America and the Middle-East, making the classes culturally diverse. Even though the students were pre-tested and put in appropriate level-classes (elementary, intermediate and upper-intermediate), in at least one class, there was a “range of proficiency levels and language learning experience” (Wette 2011, p. 69).

The teachers made their classes learner-centred in a number of ways. Content themes were negotiated with the students, and culturally appropriate content materials were selected (and those that were inappropriate were discarded). Materials were developed during the course allowing teachers to include what their learners needed to learn at the time and were also occasionally based on what the learners had requested or indicated preferences for. Furthermore, course materials included “opportunities for cross-cultural discussions” (Wette 2011, p. 69). Wette’s teachers said that designing course materials for a culturally diverse group of learners was a daunting experience. This was, as Wette noted, because “the settlement and learning needs, interests, attitudes towards and degree of involvement with the local community of students were often quite diverse” (p. 70). This assertion is pertinent to my study as it fosters the need to

study a multi-cultural context, and aim to understand how these culturally diverse groups of learners may have different set of needs.

While not specifically an English language needs analysis in the ESL context, Earnest et al. (2010) discuss challenges faced by non-Australian students who study in Australian universities. Focussing specifically on students from refugee backgrounds, they identify the needs of these diverse groups of students. The main method of inquiry is interpretive, qualitative approach where semi-structured and focus group interviews were the main forms of data gathering. Their student participants were from Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Eritrea and Ethiopia. These students were either studying at Curtin University or had graduated from other Australian universities. The authors justify the use of these methods by stating that such methods provide “a rich and detailed set of data about thoughts, feelings and impressions in their [participants’] own words” (Earnest et al. 2010, p. 161).

The major finding was that there were “significant differences between the African, Afghan and Australian teaching styles” (Earnest 2010, p. 163). The African and Afghan teaching styles were described as “more teacher-centred, with constant reminders to do work and to focus” (p. 163) – something that was not found to a greater extent in the Australian classrooms. The existence of such differences implore researchers to dwell further afield and study what other differences between distinct learner groups may exist that would have implications for course design. The authors also noted there were variations in terms of participants’ “years of experience speaking English” (p. 164), which contributed towards causing hindrance to participants’ involvement in tutorials and other classroom discussions. Another difficulty posing the participants was the extent to which the web and technology was used in Australian institutions, and the students’ lack of awareness of these tools. Earnest et al. (2010, p.

165) wrote “students consistently noted that the use of internet for research was the most difficult challenge to overcome at university”.

These studies are pertinent to the USP study because they echo the need to be vigilant of individual learning needs of students from different cultural backgrounds. Such studies implore teachers and curriculum planners to think about how to make the teaching content relevant, and at the same time, comprehensible to the individual students who are in the classroom. The lack of studies, where individual cultural differences between students impact on curriculum design and teaching, has created a void in this area. This thesis aims to contribute towards filling this void. The next few studies that are being discussed do not specifically look at the role of cultural differences in needs analysis, but they do support the importance of needs analysis and what methods and approaches have been used to conduct these studies.

Using West’s (1994) notion of TENOR (Teaching English for No Obvious Reason) as a justification for a study on task-based needs analysis, Lambert (2010) explores the needs of a group of Japanese university students in southern Japan who were English majors. Using five sources of information, the participants’ future language needs were explored. Among these was a five-year job placement record that provided information on previous graduates’ job placement after graduation. Other sources of information were interview sessions, an open item direct-mail survey of graduates over the five-year period prior to the study, a follow-up email to the participants of the study, and a closed-item direct-mail survey of graduates in the previous 25-year period preceding the study (Lambert 2010, p. 101). The study found that “English majors at this university needed to be able to complete at least five types of tasks for positions in business and education” (Lambert 2010, p. 108). These included:

locating information, translating Japanese to English, summarizing information, editing English documents and interpreting Japanese English (p. 109).

Based on his findings, Lambert recommends that Japanese universities should move “away from TENOR” towards “programs that take needs analysis seriously and reflect learners’ future lives and careers” (p. 108). However, he concedes that “graduates’ L2 use, and consequently their needs, will continually evolve” and that “results of needs analyses will thus always be provisional and will never provide a definitive or exhaustive perspective”.

In another study, Chaudron et al. (2005, p. 225) describe the task-based needs analysis stage of a TBLT program for teaching Korean as a foreign language. Their main aim was “to develop prototype task-based instruction” after obtaining data through unstructured interviews, questionnaires and target-discourse analysis. After conducting written questionnaire surveys with the Korean language learners at the University of Hawaii, the team discovered two common target ‘social survival’ tasks which were ‘following street directions’ and ‘shopping for clothing’ (p. 226). Following this, “authentic Korean discourse samples ... were collected” (pp. 226-7). For example, authentic recordings were made where a native speaker (NS) and a non-native speaker (NNS) of English would ask for short-distance and long-distance directions from passer-by native speakers of Korean. Three typical patterns of interaction were identified from these recordings. Teaching materials were then designed which reflected these common interaction patterns. This method of obtaining information is what Robinson (1991) called authentic data collection. By focussing on such types of data, a clear idea about what students’ target language aims should be can be ascertained.

In Iran, Eslami (2010) used needs analysis to identify the mismatch between learners' perceptions of problematic areas in EAP, and those of their teachers. Almost 700 EAP students enrolled in a total of four universities in Iran and their teachers were used as participants through the use of questionnaires. According to Eslami (2010, p. 3) "current EAP practice [in Iran] is largely ad hoc, lacking in course design ... and proper evaluation" and there is "no systematic needs analysis". Due to this, Eslami undertook to identify misrepresentation, if any, between learners' and teachers' perceptions of learner problems in EAP programs. Her needs analysis discovered that there was an urgent need for the learners to "increase their proficiency in general English" (p. 7) first before being able to learn the mechanics of EAP. USP teachers of EAP who believed that some of their students' English language skills were a deterrent to them learning EAP skills also raised this notion. Eslami's study highlighted learner preferences for learning that included more learner-centred classes and interactive activities. She called for teachers to continuously seek ways of upgrading their teaching skills to "facilitate interactive classrooms with students of different English proficiency levels" (p. 7). Overall, her study concurred with most other studies in this area, in concluding that "there are discrepancies among perceptions of instructors and students" (p. 7). This observation strengthens the need to exercise caution when planning and designing courses. Talking to learners about what their needs are is a useful way of understanding the learner.

Another study investigating the perception of students and instructors was conducted at a Lebanese university, by Bacha and Bahous (2008). Their focus was primarily on the writing needs of business students in an EFL context and was in response to an ever-growing call from lecturers that their students' English language proficiency was weak. On the contrary, the business students often questioned the

relevance of undertaking a generic English language course. The study found that there was an urgent need to improve the English proficiency level of the students. However, given the fact that most students and teachers agreed that students' "writing skills in the business discipline at the tertiary level are important" (Bacha & Bahous 2008, p. 88), the authors suggested the designing of an English for Specific Business Purposes (ESBP) curriculum. In such a course, with more specific business writing tasks, the students will notice the relevance of studying it.

Furthermore, discipline-specific needs have also received much attention of late, as the shift away from a generic EAP course to a subject-specific program is well under way, especially in what Belcher (2006, p. 150) refers to as "noncenter countries" – in other words, countries where English is not most people's first language. Liyanage and Birch (2001) discuss the challenges faced when incorporating discipline-specific tasks in a generic EAP program in order to cater for the discipline-specific needs of their students. The greatest challenge was that their students were from a multitude of disciplines, so having a specific discipline-oriented EAP program was not feasible. They divided their students into what they called a comparison (or control) group and an experimental group. Their comparison group undertook a typical English for Generic Academic Purposes program with no emphasis on discipline-specific needs, while the second group had tasks that were relevant to their study disciplines. The authors concluded that, "the integration of discipline-specific tasks into an EGAP class ... was successful in relating the content to students' academic backgrounds and addressing the language difficulties of students in their disciplines" (Liyanage & Birch 2001, p. 65). The location of this study was in Brisbane and the student population was multi-national. Thus, one question that can be asked is would the results of this study have been

different for students from different cultures? Or, were the differences between the students negligible? A study into this would provide a more reliable answer.

Another needs analysis study that supports the delivery of a discipline-specific curriculum was conducted by Shing, Sim and Bahrani (2013). They combined two needs analysis approaches – Target Situation Analysis and Present Situation Analysis – to gauge the academic English needs of a group of students at a Malaysian university using various questionnaires. They collected data from three groups of participants, namely students, EAP teachers and teachers who taught other content subjects such as Accounting. By engaging these three groups, the writers believe that it allowed them to “provide a more complete and comprehensible picture when deciding on the language course content” (p. 33). They discovered that their student cohort had greater difficulty in using academic language than in comprehending subject matter content. The authors support the delivery of a discipline-specific EAP program. One of the conclusions reached is that a proper needs analysis drawing information from a variety of sources was not conducted at this university and therefore there were gaps in the program. This is a significant finding because their study revealed a number of focus points in each of the four skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) that the EAP course should focus on.

Shing et al.’s (2013) research is valuable for a number of reasons. Firstly, it supports performing needs analysis before designing any curriculum. Furthermore, the authors’ needs analysis revealed that the students, EAP teachers and academic content lecturers’ ideas about what challenges students faced were different. For instance, in terms of speaking skills, while the students rated themselves as “facing only a little or no difficulty”, all the EAP teachers said that “all of their students ... had either a lot of difficulty or some difficulty in all the speaking sub-skills” (Shing et al. 2013, p. 37). A

third reason why this study is a significant addition to the existing literature on needs analysis in EAP is that it justifies the importance of needs analysis and highlights how the results of needs analysis can be used to improve existing courses.

In another ESAP oriented study, Kirschner and Wexler (2002) provide a thorough description of a unit of work in an EAP course specifically designed to meet the needs of history and arts program (film, theatre, music) students at a university in Israel. The authors argue that for a relatively homogenous group as this, it is essential to produce a curriculum that would be meaningful to the students. Thus, they support the delivery of an English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) course rather than a generic EAP course. They used Pally's (2000) term *sustained content-based instruction* to refer to discipline-specific content teaching in EAP. Their paper provides a comprehensive justification as to why a discipline-specific EAP program is more suited to the needs of students. They used a film, *Caravaggio*, which is about the life and art of Michelangelo, as the fundamental text, and they complemented this with readings about art in that period and a video interview of the director among other materials. Kirschner and Wexler's paper is useful because it strengthens the role and importance of ESAP, with illustrations on how to deliver an ESAP programme. For a needs analyst, this paper provides a fine example of how needs analysis data can be used effectively. One of the complaints that the authors make about existing literature on EAP syllabi is that they usually do not have detailed descriptions of the materials used in the classroom. Their paper is an attempt to fill this gap.

Shing and Sim's (2011) paper provides some useful insights into "the conduct of EAP needs analysis in ESL and EFL contexts" (p. 1). They provide a summary of the developments in EAP, and how in recent times, this field has been divided into two further branches: English for Generic Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for



Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). One of the crucial points the authors raise is that sometimes the number of students in the EAP program will have a bearing on whether to offer EGAP or ESAP. For instance, if there are not enough students to be put together for an ESAP class focussing on Accounting, then these students may be put with other discipline students and an EGAP course may be offered. One area that the authors have not considered are the ramifications of having a multi-cultural class, where there may be individual differences between cultures that may contribute to the successful completion of any needs assessment. The authors also speculate future developments in EAP. They quote Mo (2005) who predicts that in the future, there will be more focus on developing EAP skills among pre-tertiary or pre-university students. This prediction is worth considering especially now since EAP has gained much prominence with proliferations in student enrolments in universities. Not too long after Mo's prediction, Richardson et al (2007) report the inclusion of academic vocabulary teaching in a science class at a high school in the US. The ESL students in this class had difficulty passing their earth science course and the teacher's assessment showed that a lack of vocabulary in earth science among students was responsible for this. Thus, she decided to teach vocabulary that would help her students do well in their earth science course. This report provides useful evidence to the claims put forward by Mo (2005) that the teaching of academic English will extend to high schools.

Furthermore, the mismatch between teachers' perceptions of their students, and what students thought about themselves has also been reported in the literature. For instance, in a needs assessment study exploring the needs of a large group of Turkish students at an English medium Turkish university, Akyel and Ozek (2010) used triangulation to extract information. This information was used to identify the actual needs of the 2328 students who were studying various degree programs. The aim of the

study was to use the needs assessment results to modify the English preparatory course that these students had to do before being able to enrol in their degree programs. Teachers and students were given a questionnaire to complete, and a selected group of teachers and students were also interviewed individually. The findings revealed a difference in the perceived needs of the students. While most teachers said that mastery in reading and listening skills was far more important for university success, the students felt that they needed more assistance with speaking and listening skills. It was also found that the curriculum was more test-oriented. “The instructional materials used for reading and writing were designed to teach through testing.” (Akyel & Ozek 2010, p. 975).

This needs assessment study confirms the relative importance of conducting a needs analysis and ensuring that the curriculum sets out to address the needs of students identified in such studies. Akyel and Ozek’s (2010) study also highlights the mismatch in terms of perceived needs between students and teachers. This strengthens the view that needs analysis should encompass extraction of information from all stakeholders’ points of view.

The literature described thus far has exclusively examined needs analysis in established language classes. The ESP programs have been ongoing and researchers have focused on how needs analyses are conducted. The next description presents a different situation. Grounded in task-based language teaching, Agosti and Green (2011) describe how, through needs analysis, a specialised EAP curriculum was designed. To determine the immediate needs of their pre-sessional EAP students, Agosti and Green (2011) administered a simple needs analysis procedure. Their students were from diverse academic and cultural backgrounds, and were enrolled in the MA in Applied Linguistics program in an Australian university. The presence of such diversity at the

international level deems it all the more necessary to ascertain what knowledge students already possessed and what more they needed. This is because individual countries have different education systems, which would make it difficult for teachers to decide what general areas to focus on. With varying educational standards and differing cultural perspectives influencing educational ideas, the authors felt that many students were “at risk of not achieving their [full] academic potential” (p. 28).

The pre-sessional program was based on the principles of academic literacies, which, according to Jacobs (2005, p. 485) “refers to the fluent control and mastery of discipline specific norms, values and conventions for reading and writing as a means of exploring and constructing knowledge in higher education.” In order to decide on what topics to include in the pre-sessional EAP program, the writers reviewed the types of assessment tasks that students were expected to complete in their applied linguistics units. They also sought suggestions from the linguistics teachers. What they found from this initial piece of research was that a great majority of the assignments were in written format, a finding that has also been documented by Feast (2002). One area of concern is that the authors did not address the diversity presented by the students from different cultures. Their treatment of the student population as a single group may have clouded any cultural differences within this group.

It was then decided that a diagnostic assessment tool be used to identify the individual needs of the students and to ascertain the major areas to focus on. It was decided that their students would write an expository essay because this type of writing was commonly required in linguistics courses. The diagnostic essays, written in 1.5 hours and with a limit of 250 words, were then analysed to identify students’ present needs (what students showed they were capable of producing successfully) and target

needs (what students needed to be able to produce successfully towards the end of the course).

The studies described in this section have highlighted the relative importance of needs analysis, especially in terms of ascertaining syllabus content. Various needs assessment strategies have also been documented, with studies being done in various countries. None of the studies have focussed on the disparities between students from different cultures. The remaining sections of this chapter will shift the focus to the South Pacific. In order to gain a better understanding of the differences between cultural groups at the University of the South Pacific, it is necessary to examine the types of experiences these students would have had in their countries. Thus, the next section will stress on the impact that colonialism and the arrival of the missionaries to the Pacific has had on the Pacific people and their culture.

## **2.6 Colonialism and missionaries in the Pacific**

The spread of colonialism in, and the arrival of Christian missionaries to the Pacific contributed towards changes in local traditions, customs and languages. Table 2.2 presents a fairly reductive, but a good reference point summary of the key colonisers in the Pacific who have had major influences on the general lifestyles of Pasifika people. Most of the information is from Douglas and Douglas (cited in Bray 1993, p. 335), except for information about the Marshall Islands, which has been extracted from Spencer (1996, p. 19).

Several writers have documented influences of colonialism and missionaries on Pacific people. Crowley (2006), for instance, discusses how missionaries in Vanuatu “often attempted to suppress traditional practices” (p. 167), although they did blend in some Christian events with traditional events such as “traditional celebrations ... for the harvest of the new season’s yams ... with Easter” (p. 167). Furthermore, Crowley cites

evidence that suggests that these missionaries, in trying to maintain the sanctity of the translations of the holy scriptures into local languages, produced “new written religious texts” by putting in language structures that were “odd translations” that the Ni-Vanuatu had willingly accepted (2006, p. 168). Moreover, the missionaries developed the writing systems used for the translation of religious texts into Vanuatu’s many unwritten languages at the time, and these systems have prevailed since (Crowley 2006).

Table 2.2

*Present Constitutional Status and Colonial Histories of South Pacific Countries*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Present constitutional status</b>	<b>Principal colonial rulers</b>
Cook Islands	Self-governing in free association with New Zealand	UK (1888 – 1901) New Zealand (since 1901) Self-government since 1965
Fiji	Independent sovereign state	UK (1874 – 1970)
Kiribati	Independent sovereign state	UK (1892 – 1979)
Marshall Islands	Independent sovereign state	German occupation (1885 – WWI) Japanese occupation (after WWI - until WWII) USA (after WWII)
Nauru	Independent sovereign state	Germany (1888 – 1914) Australia (1914 – 1968) Japanese occupation (1942 – 1945)
Niue	Self-governing in free association with New Zealand	New Zealand (since 1901) Self-government since 1974
Samoa	Independent sovereign state	Germany (1899 – 1914) New Zealand (1914 – 1962)
Solomon Islands	Independent sovereign state	UK (1893 – 1978) Japanese occupation (1942 – 1944)
Tokelau	Dependency of New Zealand	UK (1889 – 1925) New Zealand (since 1925)
Tonga	Independent sovereign state	Treaty gave UK control over foreign affairs (1901 – 1970)
Tuvalu	Independent sovereign state	UK (1892 – 1978)
Vanuatu	Independent sovereign state	Anglo-French Condominium (1906 – 1980)

(mostly from Douglas & Douglas, cited in Bray 1993, p. 335 )

Another prominent Pacific writer, Thaman (1993, p. 250) points out that “the dominant ideologies and cultures” of western nations “have had a lasting impact upon the [Pacific] region’s indigenous peoples, their cultures and the school curriculum”. With several hundred years of rich oral traditions, the modern Pacific Islanders education has switched towards western writing traditions. Thaman (1993, pp. 250-251) maintains that

the ideologies and practices of curriculum decision makers, beginning with early Christian missionaries, followed by colonial administrators and now overseas-trained indigenous educators and foreign consultants, have greatly affected, and continue to affect, curriculum development in the region.

Spencer (1996) writes that after World War II, the United States was appointed trustee of the Marshall Islands by the United Nations. During this time, “English was generally put forward as the prestige language”, and proficiency in English was “an essential qualification for those aspiring to hold a government job” (p. 19).

Mangubhai and Mugler (2006) also document the influence of Christian missionaries and the colonial powers that ruled over Fiji. The Bauan dialect was selected as the main dialect to translate religious texts primarily because the Bauan chief at the time was the most powerful person in Fiji. As a direct result of this decision, the written form of Bauan “became the standard against which language could be judged correct or incorrect and a yardstick for literary Fijian” (Mangubhai & Mugler 2006, p. 43). With such written accounts of the influential nature of colonial powers and missionaries, it can be safely generalised that such influences would have been in most parts of the Pacific.

## **2.7 The status of English in the Pacific**

In the Pacific, there is a significant number of languages, most of which are Austronesians. The use of English, which is a colonial language, varies around the Pacific. Mugler and Lynch (1996) report that in the Pacific, there are several groups of languages that are used in the Pacific communities (see Appendix A for an ethno-linguistic map of the South Pacific). The most significant group is ‘vernacular languages’, which includes speakers’ mother tongue and other Pacific languages that they speak. While most of these languages belong to the Austronesian language family, there are some Papuan languages (mostly spoken in the highlands of Papua New Guinea), an Indo-European language (a variety of Hindi spoken in Fiji) and a Dravidian language (Tamil). The latter two languages are spoken mainly in Fiji and were introduced by the Indian indentured labourers in the late 1800s – early 1900s). The second most important group presented by Mugler and Lynch is ‘metropolitan languages’ which include the languages introduced in the Pacific by traders, missionaries and colonizers.

While English is a major metropolitan language in most of the Pacific, it is not the only one. French is also spoken in some Pacific countries including Vanuatu. Mugler and Benton (2010, p. 171) outline that in terms of resolving conflicts in courts, English is the main language in four of the twelve member countries of the USP, namely Cook Islands, Samoa, Kiribati and Fiji. In the Marshall Islands, the authors note that Marshallese is used while in Niue the court can decide between Niuean or English. In terms of education, English is the main stipulated medium of instruction in schools in Melanesia and Fiji whilst in Polynesia, the national language is used extensively in schools (Mugler & Benton 2010, p. 173). However, in most Pacific countries, code-switching is persistent throughout primary and secondary

schools (Tamata 1996; Manu 2005) and despite having stipulations about using English as a medium, “the role of former colonial languages is often less extensive than one would expect from their official status” (Mugler & Benton 2010, p. 173).

The amount of usage of English differs extensively in the Pacific. In Fiji, English use dominates in the government sphere, education and in the media (Mangubhai & Mugler 2006) whereas in most parts of Polynesia, local languages are used in the “education system, as well as in other official and semi-official contexts” (Mugler & Lynch 1996, p. 6). In most countries, English language learners encounter limited levels of exposure to the English language. Such exposure is mostly from the media such as newspapers, television, radio, and more recently, the Internet. However, the type of English that Pacific people are exposed to is a variation of its own. Kelly’s (1975) seminal work on ‘Fiji English’ identified grammatical and lexical variations of use among a group of students in Fiji. She claimed that her participants spoke a different variety of English that was common among most English language speakers in Fiji. In later studies, Tent (2000) and Green (2012) also concluded that there is an emerging Pacific variant of the English language. This includes borrowings (or copyings) from other languages that the speakers are exposed to. Subsequently, these speakers use this Pacific variant when they produce written/spoken assignments. Owing to the fact that their English is different from the one they encounter in their textbooks, comprehension becomes challenging for these students.

## **2.8 Pacific education: current issues**

Formal education in the Pacific was introduced by the colonial powers that ruled Pacific nations in the past. The concepts they introduced was generally alien to Pacific people, but over the years these have virtually gained prominence. Today, Pacific educators are concerned that Pacific values are being undermined by the current



education system, which is primarily ‘western’ in content and delivery. A number of native Pacific scholars have shown concern on this matter. This section will summarise the main issues related to the current education systems in the Pacific.

At a colloquium in 2001, a group of Pacific educators, mostly from the University of the South Pacific, gathered to discuss future directions in Pacific education. The gathering, titled “Re-thinking Pacific education” was conceptualised after several scholars voiced the need for “exploring new directions and alternatives in education and development, which might prove more meaningful to Pacific people” (Institute of Education 2002, p. 12). Delegates at the colloquium expressed concerns that quality human resources that were needed to achieve developmental goals were not being produced by the education system at the time. One of the outcomes of this meeting was to embed and integrate “Pacific values, beliefs, knowledge systems, skills, attitudes and behaviours” in the education system (p. 14). Other researchers have also highlighted the dissimilarity between Pacific values and those imposed by western education system in Pacific schools (Pene, Taufe‘ulungaki & Benson 2002; Thaman 2002).

Tuimalealiifano (2007) offers a valuable commentary of some of the pertinent discussions raised by various scholars on Pacific education. Firstly, Pacific education system is seen as introducing elements foreign to Pacific Islanders. In Fiji, for example, the education system sees examination of knowledge as an essential element that forms the foundation of teaching content and pedagogies. Tavola (2000) suggests that if education in Fiji was to be made more meaningful, then the education system should shift away from being exam-centered. Thaman (2002) sees formal education as foreign and university education as portraying a Euro-centric worldview. Taufe‘ulungaki (2003,

p. 31) identifies the educational concepts of independence, privacy and consumerism as elements “alien to Pacific cultural ways of believing, knowing, doing and learning”.

Another issue affecting Pacific education is the use of the English language that is seen as having a significant impact on Pacific Islanders. The imposed colonial language is seen by Tuimaleliifano (2007) as (i) affecting the thinking and worldview of Pasifika communities, (ii) undermining the vernacular, which is viewed as inferior to English by the younger generation, and (iii) forming a learning barrier. A third issue is the substandard teaching that is provided by teachers who do not focus on encouraging critical thinking, learning and the general ability to use knowledge (Fasi 2002; Teairo 2002), but rather on learning information to regurgitate in examinations (Tavola 1991). In response to the concerns raised by Pacific Island educators, Tuimaleliifano (2007) asserts that Pacific nations have undergone significant changes in recent decades. She warns that modern technology is slowly affecting the lifestyles and the behaviour patterns of Pacific peoples, and especially in the ways of “learning, storing and sharing knowledge and in communicating it” (p. 27). She suggests that any re-thinking of education that does take place should focus on the developments in the last 30 years. This, she believes, should entail Thaman’s (2002, p. 23) “worthwhile learning”, where students are taught, “to think critically, using the best approaches of both worlds to arrive at appropriate choices and decisions” (Tuimaleliifano 2007, p. 34).

These discussions are significant because whatever happens in primary and secondary schools in the Pacific that affects the behaviour of students will eventually flow on to university studies. For a university teacher, the dilemma presented is to cultivate and preserve Pacific cultures, and at the same time disseminate western ideologies imposed by education systems. In expressing this dilemma further, Thaman (2008, p. 4) notes that some Pasifika educators have two pedagogical sources:

On the one hand, their [teachers'] professional training commits them to the rationale and practices of a western-derived school curriculum, while on the other, their personal identities are often rooted in their own cultural traditions and norms.

A single group of teachers may not be able to make decisions about how to create the balance between cultural and western ideologies in education without the support of a consortium of teacher associations and education ministries. Tuimaleliifano (2007) notes that in her ad hoc discussions with a group of Pacific Island students, one of the revelations was that students were keen on learning about western philosophies because they see significant value in them and believe that such knowledge is vital for progress in this modern world. This dilemma is in fact widespread. In Australia, Fogarty (2012) condemned the assertions of a Member of Parliament that Aboriginal students in remote areas need western education and that their parents must compromise their cultural life to give their children a better economic future. In Nigeria, Felix (2012) writes that western education is linked to achieving goals and gaining prosperity, and traditional values and knowledge are not part of the education system. If teachers, for instance, decide to include lessons inculcating local cultural notions, then this may be contrary to the students' expectations. Moreover, in a classroom in Fiji, one might expect to find students from distinct cultural groups, even among Fijian nationals, such as ethnic Fijians (or I-Taukei), Indo-Fijians, Chinese and Rotumans. If the teachers decide to focus on cultural notions, which culture/s would they choose? Would they have knowledge about others' cultures? A teacher in one of the interviews for the study on which this

thesis is based raised this issue highlighting that she does not know how other cultures work and what the expectations of people from these cultures were.

## **2.9 On culture**

“A cultural mask is the process by which a person comes to construct a personal ethnic identity. Moreover, a cultural mask also includes the manner in which an individual uses and ultimately projects that ethnic identity” (Huffman 2001, p.7). This definition could imply that the mask that s/he wears covers the real person. Perhaps a better expression would be ‘cultural construct of self’ as the word *mask* denotes hiding one’s true identity. The number of Huffman’s “cultural masks” present in the Pacific would be substantial, given the fact that the Pacific is a vast ocean with a multitude of languages spoken and cultures practised. This section will focus on ideas relating to culture and thought, cultural dissonance and those offering dimensions to help identify attributes of cultures.

### **2.9.1 Culture and thought**

Cultural experiences influence the way human beings perceive the world, and scholars have recognised this since at least the late eighteenth century (Swoyer 2011; Cook 2011). Cassirer (1923/1955, p. 12) points out that “the analysis of reality in terms of things and processes ... do not precede language ... but that language itself is what initiates such articulations and develops them in its own sphere”. What this means is that humans use language to identify concepts, and because language is a cultural phenomenon, our conceptions may be culturally defined (Silverstein 2004). However, it was not until much later that this ideology gained eminence. The works of Edward Sapir (1929) and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1956) attracted many scholars to the belief that there was a strong relationship between the language people speak and the way they view the world. Sapir (1929, p. 210) wrote “simple acts of perception are very much more at the

mercy of the social patterns called words ... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation". He proclaimed that "the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group" and that "no two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality" (p. 209). Later, Whorf (1956, p. 213) asserted that "the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by ... the linguistic systems in our minds", implying that depending on the languages we speak, our interpretations and how we construe worldly phenomena would be thus influenced.

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, as it is more commonly known today – other names of this theory are 'linguistic relativity theory' and 'Whorfianism' (Wilce 2014), became popular among American anthropologists in the early twentieth century, since for behaviorists, the theory was "congenial because they thought that many aspects of human behaviour and thought were learned" (Swoyer 2011, p. 29). In its strongest form, the hypothesis assumes that thinking is not possible without language (Carroll 1956; Kay & Kempton 1984). Closely associated with this is Vygotsky's argument that learning a second language is facilitated by having advanced knowledge of one's first language, because when learning a foreign language one uses "word meanings that are already well-developed in the native language and only translate them" (Vygotsky 1986, p. 161).

While the view that language determines the way speakers think has attracted significant number of challenges since its inception (Boroditsky 2011), a weaker version of the hypothesis has been widely accepted, which stipulates that the language we speak influences the way we think. Boroditsky's (2001) experiments lend support to the view that languages influence the thought processes of individuals. In one of her experiments,

she found that “habits in language encourage habits in thought” (p. 12). She came to this conclusion after finding that her Mandarin and English speakers perceived the concept of time differently. Other studies, such as that of Perlovsky (2009) and Franklin et al. (2008) have also lent support to this. However, this does make one wonder if thought has an equal effect on language. Does thought influence language?

This discussion of linguistic relativity is pertinent in, and has ramifications for, a study seeking to identify needs of culturally diverse students. The postulations and findings of studies of linguistic relativism (such as Boroditsky 2001, 2011; Franklin et al. 2008; Perlovsky 2009) raise questions about whether speakers of various Pacific languages who gather at a single place to study would have linguistically and culturally divergent ways of processing information. While the stronger form of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis may have lost its following in recent times, the assertion that language and thought are connected is generally non-contentious today (Swoyer 2011). Swoyer (2011, p. 25) asserts “features of a person’s language influence how they think, and they influence it in systematic ways”.

In a review of cross-national literature exploring the relationship between culture and thought processes, Oyserman and Lee (2008) present some important conclusions. They add that those who live in different societies, and are exposed to different norms of behaviour and belief patterns, “are likely to have differing experiences” (p. 311). Societies may be what Hofstede (1990) labelled collectivist (where individuals fit into the general structure of the society and serve its needs) or individualist (where societies treat members as individuals and seek to promote their individual well-being and contributions). Oyserman and Lee believe that this difference in cultural experiences can “provide new insights into psychological processes” (p. 311) of these individuals and the societies they belong to. In societies where individualism and collectivism traits

are prominent, they are “more likely to influence judgments and behaviours” (Oyserman & Lee 2008, p. 313).

Such studies have demonstrated that there are differences in how people define self, the way in which relationships with other people are created and perceived, and what elements are valued. These differences imposed by cultural experiences coupled with evidence from research, spark debates about whether or not culture has a role in the way humans perceive their and others’ worlds. Oyserman and Lee (2008), however, suggest that the evidence is inconclusive, and recommend further research. In the case of Pacific societies, the existence of high power distance in its hierarchical structure of society, would influence how these people view the world around them. Therefore, a study focussing on cultural differences between these people is much needed.

### **2.9.2 Cultural dissonance**

The apparent mismatch between Pacific values and those presented in the school curriculum (as discussed above) can be explained according to cultural discontinuity hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, “the cultural value-based learning preferences and practices of many ethnic minority students ... are discontinued at school” (Tyler et al. 2008, p. 281). Essentially, this implies that the practices in the school may be different from those at these students’ homes. For some individuals, starting university studies is an emotionally charged affair. This is even more the case if the students are from minority communities (such as overseas students) or from cultures that are inherently traditional and conservative in their beliefs, customs and rituals. Living away from home may exacerbate the feelings imposed by cultural dissonance, and may contribute to generating barriers to learning. In the Pacific, the relationship that people have with their land is significant to the point that the land is a dominant factor in determining the people’s identity and sense of belonging (Nabobo-Baba et al. 2012). In

a study focusing on Native Americans who leave their communities to enter universities in the US, Bickel and Jensen (2012) conclude that in order to give these students optimal opportunity to do well at universities, it is essential to form “support groups” that would help these students to adapt to the new cultures of tertiary institutes. The writers used the cultural discontinuity hypothesis to analyse their data. According to this theory, “some groups do well in school because their personal cultures sync well with the school culture they are attending” (Bickel & Jensen 2012, p. 416). One interpretation of this hypothesis suggests that if a cultural group’s values, beliefs and behaviours are in opposition to or are undervalued by the pedagogies of universities, then these discrepancies will pose barriers to academic success for students who belong to these cultural groups.

Huffman’s (2001) discussion of the stages that “estranged” and “transcultured” students undergo is relevant here. He noted that students who were emotionally sensitive and were not able to adapt to the new environment rapidly went through the four stages of “initial alienation, disillusionment, emotional rejection, and disengagement” (p. 10). However, those who managed to adapt to the new environment, and proceeded to “interact on two cultural levels” (“transcultured” students) essentially progressed through four internal stages of “initial alienation, self-discovery, realignment, and participation”. They eventually were able to adapt to the university environment. Huffman ascertains that the initial stage for both groups of students is important as this is when students either begin to disengage or participate. Bearing this in mind, perhaps it is important to reiterate Bickel and Jensen’s (2012) proposition that students from culturally diverse backgrounds should be provided with initial support that would help them to achieve academic success and enable them to participate (and not disengage).



### **2.9.3 Collectivist nature of Pacific societies**

In their description of culture, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) and Hofstede (The Hofstede Centre 2013) provide certain dimensions that can be used to offer general descriptions of cultures in an attempt to understand the dynamics of those cultures. These dimensions (7 in the former and 6 in the latter) attempt to categorise cultures according to continua based on the identified features. Two particular dimensions are relevant when discussing Pacific cultures. According to Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), an ‘individualist’ society is one where personal freedom is valued and people are seen as responsible for their own behaviour. In a direct contrast, a ‘communitarian’ society imposes the centrality of group membership where the group is seen as more important than the individual. In communitarianism, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner highlight that decision-making is not an individual task, and decisions made collectively in a group are highly valued. Similar to this notion is Hofstede’s (The Hofstede Centre 2013) “collectivism” where society members expect their families and relatives to look after them in return for loyalty. Hofstede’s dimensions have, however, received criticisms such as most nations are groups of ethnic units and therefore should not be treated as a homogenous whole (Jones 2007).

Frank and Toland (2002) associate Pacific cultures with Hofstede’s (The Hofstede Centre 2013) high power difference cultures. They suggest that owing to the existence of high power distance in their cultures, Pacific Islanders tend to not question the views of their seniors. This attribute impacts the classroom as well where teachers (and other scholars) are never challenged. When Pacific Islanders are in a conflict situation, Frank and Toland (2002) suggest that they are “likely to use avoidance, intermediaries or other face saving techniques” (p. 4). In such societies, students from various ethnic groups form their own groups at schools where other ethnicities are

present. The authors suggest that such groups tend to collaborate on assignments, have social gatherings and have very little interaction with members of other ethnic groups. This description of Pacific students at the University of the South Pacific is quite relevant as anecdotal evidence suggests that students do form groups where the members are from their own ethnic communities. Frank and Toland (2002) also suggest that indigenous Pacific students are more collectivist than their Indo-Fijian counterparts.

Claims have also been made in the literature on the field dependence of Pacific students. In their seminal work on cognitive styles of learners, Witkin and Goodenough (1977) discuss in detail the differences between field dependent and field independent learners. These are presented as a continuum, allowing learners to be placed anywhere between the two extremes. Field dependent learners' performance of tasks is "strongly dominated by the prevailing field" (p. 7) while those who are field independent, view the task as "more or less separate from the surrounding field" (p. 7). Witkin and Goodenough stress that a field independent person would "overcome the organisation of the field" (p. 9) whereas a field dependent person would "adhere to the organisation of the field" (p. 9).

In another study, Hansen-Strain (1993) discovered that students from the South Pacific tended to be field dependent. These learners "are drawn to people" (Witkin & Goodenough 1977, p. 11), and more likely require "externally defined goals and reinforcements" (p. 19). Witkin and Goodenough (1977, p. 25) also speculate that these learners "may need more explicit instruction in problem-solving strategies or more exact definition of performance outcomes than field independent students". However, they also maintain that while these cognitive styles remain relatively stable, they are not "unchangeable" (Witkin & Goodenough 1977, p. 15). Hansen-Strain (1993, p. 94) confirmed this by citing evidence from her longitudinal study that there was a "gradual

increase in analytical restructuring abilities associated with university experience” among the field dependent students. She emphasised that this change is “significant”. In the South Pacific context, these discussions are crucial and shed light on what type of cognitive styles Pacific islanders can be associated with. This discussion also has implications for teachers who must be aware of their field dependent learners and provide them with explicit instructions and give them reinforcements. At the same time, teachers should allow for making transition towards becoming field independent where analytical skills are needed.

## **2.10 The need for EAP in the South Pacific**

The South Pacific region covers a vast area of the Pacific Ocean. Bordering closely with Australia and New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Hawaii, the region boasts some 12 sovereign nations. With a multitude of cultural practices, this group of nations speaks a total of some 200 languages.

The earliest study in EAP in the South Pacific can be traced as far back as 1983. Halliday’s (1983) dissertation at the University of Sydney is the earliest piece of work on EAP studies in the Pacific. In an attempt to write a proposal for a new denominational college in the Pacific, he explored the delivery of EAP and the testing of students in English in three Pacific institutions. The main issues he considered was why English is needed in Pacific institutions, presenting a case for the need to teach EAP. He maintained that, “South Pacific students will need English [at university] because ... their own languages do not have the necessary books for study” (Halliday, 1983, p. vii). He argued that Pacific students are “handicapped” from the moment they enter a university because they do not have the necessary skills to deal with academic materials in English. Thus, a specialised EAP program is

needed to prepare these students and to allow them a smooth transition into their tertiary studies.

Halliday (1983) also discussed some challenges that Pacific students may typically face in a university environment. For example, he asserted that “one of the most obvious defects” is that Pacific students read slowly (p. 71). This can be attributed to the fact that Pacific cultures are heavily oral and reading is not emphasised. Halliday attributed the slow reading to the “slow eye movements ... and the vocalisation of the words” (p. 71). He recommended that if teachers focus on teaching students to “cover more words with one eye movement” and to discourage them “from saying words over to themselves” (p. 71), then the slow reading problem can be alleviated. Low et al. (2002, p. 4) also suggest that “very limited number of print materials ... in the home or school setting ... could cause a delay in acquiring reading skills” from an early age. The University of the South Pacific students speak some 200 languages in total and in some cases, English is often their fifth or sixth language. With no proper assessment of their reading skills, it is thus vital that a special EAP program, which addresses their reading and writing skills, be promoted in any Pacific tertiary institution.

### **2.11 ESP needs analysis in the Pacific**

A search on specific literature on ESP needs analysis in the Pacific yielded only a small group of studies (Deverell 1989; Khan & Mugler 2001; Chand 2007; Green & Sameer 2007). Chand’s (2007) PhD dissertation on listening needs of English for Academic Purposes students in the Pacific is a major work on ESP needs assessment in the Pacific. Thus, the lack of research in this area justifies the need for further needs analysis study in this culturally and linguistically diverse region.

Deverell’s (1989) small-scale study explored the correlation between entry-level English proficiency test scores and success rate in the students’ foundation-level courses

at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. She collected Proficiency in English Measure (PEM) scores – an English proficiency test devised by the university – for a three-year period and matched these to the number of foundation courses undertaken by these students. The results indicated that science students needed to attain a higher score in PEM than the social science students in order to pass their foundation courses. According to Deverell (1989, p.12), “the purpose of producing these tables was primarily to gain an increasingly accurate way of identifying students whose lack of proficiency in English was likely to affect adversely their overall academic achievement.” As a result of this study, those students who were identified to be at risk were then given supplementary classes in the English Resources Unit, a unit specifically established to address the English language needs of the university’s student population. The PEM and the English Resource Unit are no longer active at the University of the South Pacific. Such a study is beneficial in the sense that it enables early detection of students who may need additional English language support prior to starting their university courses. A focus on cultural differences between students would have potentially been more revealing.

In another study, Khan and Mugler (2001) were primarily interested in exploring the relationship between the Fiji Form 7 syllabus (the final year of high school) and the language needs of first year university students. An earlier study (see Landbeck & Mugler 1996) indicated that most University of the South Pacific (USP) students found the transition from high school to university life difficult. In most cases, students were unaware of what was expected of them at university. Khan and Mugler used questionnaires and interviews to obtain data from 248 Form 7 students in Fiji, their teachers, 132 university students and 12 university teachers. They also undertook document analysis to investigate the Form 7 English curriculum (1991 version) as

prescribed by Fiji's Ministry of Education. They found that while the students generally rated highly for their ability in the four macro skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking), the university teachers were less positive. The study also found that the Form 7 syllabus needs, "to expand sections most relevant at the tertiary level" (p.20). Studies of such nature where the transition from high school to university studies help reveal any barriers that these students may face owing to lack of appropriate pathways. Such studies may also identify positive transition.

In her PhD dissertation, Chand (2007) explored the listening needs of distance learners of EAP at USP. For triangulation purposes, she included past learners of EAP. Through student questionnaires, teacher interviews and classroom observations, the current and the future listening needs of these distance students were studied. She observed that for students learning through distance had its own set of challenges. With no regular face-to-face teaching, learners had to make sense of the course materials. A significant number of distance-mode learners at the USP live in remote areas with limited resources and no electricity. This means that online study options that are taken for granted in 'the West' cannot be assumed in such circumstances. Chand concludes that the listening course materials were not enough to meet the needs of the students. Her study revealed that the students did not use the listening materials to the extent they should have, with some not using the materials at all. She further noted that the majority of students did not find these resources relevant and wanted authentic materials. Furthermore, due to this lack of attention to the listening component of the course, learners who later studied other courses through the face-to-face mode had difficulties listening attentively to lecturers and taking down notes.

Green and Sameer's (2007) paper highlights how the UU114 EAP course was re-designed to suit the needs of the students at the University of the South Pacific. The

review was conducted over a year and involved various stages. One of the stages was a needs analysis. The review team used various methods to perform this analysis. Firstly, consultations with academic staff from other disciplines were held to identify the problematic areas relevant to academic English of their students. Next, a scrutiny of a cross-section of students' examination scripts from 12 Pacific countries allowed the team to identify major issues. Another important data source was past student evaluations of the course. Students' diagnostic essays written in week 1 of the course were also studied. This needs analysis revealed that a major problematic area was students' writing. Most students in the course were unable to write coherent paragraphs (Green & Sameer 2007). The review team then decided to focus the revised version of the EAP course on developing writing skills as this was seen to be the most pressing need.

## **2.12 Summary**

In summary, the theory of needs analysis has evolved after undergoing several periods of development. Essentially, needs analysis in ESP is vital to avoid teaching what West (1994) calls TENOR (Teaching English for No Obvious Reason). EFL and ESL students place trust in their teachers to provide optimum help so they can function adequately in English speaking societies.

It is also vital for any needs analysis practitioner to explore the archives of needs analysis and understand the evolution that it has undergone. The approaches and methods of needs analysis need to be understood so that an appropriate and well-designed needs analysis is undertaken. Needs analysis is perhaps not a new concept in the Pacific, but there is certainly an urgent need to undertake more studies so that the Pacific literature is strengthened on this vital area, and that appropriate programs are developed and delivered to students.

This thesis aims to provide a more accurate picture of the needs of Pasifika students by focussing on cultural differences between these students. So far, only a few needs assessment studies have been published in the Pacific (Deverell 1989; Khan & Mugler 2001; Chand 2007; Green & Sameer 2007). It is important to have systematic and deliberate works, such as this thesis, made available to the wider community to identify possible areas of future research and contribute to improvement of programs. The University of the South Pacific presents an opportunity for an interesting case study given the fact that its student clientele is culturally heterogeneous. The representation of 12 different Pacific nations - Cook Islands, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Vanuatu, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Tokelau, Niue, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu (see Appendix A for a map of the South Pacific region) - in the University's student body demonstrates the need to examine cultural implications on needs assessment.

Needs analysis studies treating students as a homogenous group may fall short or are inadequate because they may capture just a part of the picture. Studies such as the one done by Earnest et al. (2010) have found that there are differences in terms of the teaching styles that students in a multi-national EAP class had experiences in their home countries. They also found that there were differences in terms of the amount of time students from different countries had spent learning English. Such knowledge about students' background may prove useful in curriculum design. Therefore, such studies implore researchers to find out more about the differences between students from different cultural groups. It is anticipated that my study will extend a new perspective on needs analysis in the Pacific, which teachers and applied linguists will find both useful and informative, and which will serve the needs of students. This study sets out to capture a fuller picture of the EAP needs of Pacific Islanders, and one more helpful to Pacific Island students and teachers.



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This study is concerned primarily with the differences that exist among culturally diverse students at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Suva, Fiji, and how these differences may affect their learning in an EAP course, and their acquisition of English for their subsequent or concurrent courses and beyond. The literature review has identified a number of needs analysis studies in general in the Pacific, suggesting that there is a gap in the research in this area. Having explained how my study is different from other studies in the Pacific context in the previous chapter, this chapter explains what methods were followed, and what theoretical perspectives underpinned the research.

The chapter begins by establishing and justifying the research focus. It draws on my personal experience as an English for Academic Purposes teacher at the USP, and how this experience led to my current enquiry. Following this, the participants (including the institution and the EAP course) are described briefly. Next, the four basic elements of the research process (Crotty 1998), namely the epistemology (theory of knowledge), the theoretical perspective (philosophical stance), the methodology (plan of action) and the methods (instruments used) are explained. This is done to “ensure the soundness” of the research and “make its outcomes convincing” (Crotty 1998, p.6). The chapter ends with a discussion of the ethical considerations that were deemed important for my study.

### **3.2 The research focus**

In his advice to novice needs analysts who may be commissioned to identify syllabus content, Jordon (1997) advises that the needs analyst may be overwhelmed by the availability of so many approaches and methods of needs analysis. He warns that it

is important to “remember that there is no single approach to needs analysis, and that circumstances are different and change”. (Jordon 1997, p.38)

The delivery of curriculum in the classroom, irrespective of what subject is being taught, depends largely on what the teacher perceives the needs and abilities of the students to be. Every planner must exercise some degree of caution when making decisions of this nature, as the needs and abilities of students might not be well known at the time. There can also be serious repercussions arising from the decisions made. Thus it is essential that every teacher is equipped with the right tools to analyse the needs of the students they are teaching.

This thesis seeks to identify the potential issues such as learning style preferences, and cultural bonding in students (that is, to what extent do student groups both in and outside the classroom remain culturally homogenous and/or include cultural diversity), that may emerge in a diverse EAP class, and how best to deal with such concerns. Catering for a student population from a multitude of cultural practices and with a plethora of linguistic differences, the University of the South Pacific’s English for Academic Purposes course “UU114” is an appropriate and a unique place for making and evaluating such assertions. The University of the South Pacific, which is jointly owned by 12 South Pacific nations, was established in 1968 to serve people from the various island nations. Bearing in mind the needs of the students from the Cook Islands, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Tokelau, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Tuvalu, Kiribati and Niue (see map in Appendix A), the University’s founding teachers and administrators designed courses and programs for the South Pacific peoples to (i) make higher education more accessible and (ii) facilitate the gap in the knowledge by providing courses relating to the Pacific (The University of the South Pacific 2013; Cowell 1967). It was, however, not until the early 1990s that the

University, recognising the problems students faced in expressing themselves in the English language, developed an EAP course.

During my employment at the University of the South Pacific, my coordinator role allowed me to engage with students studying through the 'Distance and Flexible Learning' (DFL) mode. These students were based in the 12 South Pacific countries and kept contact with me via satellite and video links on a weekly basis. I also taught those who were studying the course on campus in the face-to-face mode. One of my main roles was to prepare assignment questions for both groups of learners. This task was relatively challenging as the diverse nature of the students, defined by their cultural, religious, linguistic and logistical (lack of resources in certain areas) differences, had to be addressed.

It was during this time that I began investigating cultural diversity in the classroom. For instance, I noticed that most of the Solomon Island students in my classes consistently displayed a good level of critical thinking skills and used sophisticated ideas in their expositions. On the other hand, those from Kiribati almost always struggled to convey their message in writing. However, when given an opportunity to speak (outside class), they displayed much more ability. The problem seemed more closely related to their ability to express themselves in a language that is only used occasionally in their country. Another interesting observation was with the group from Fiji. While the native Fijians could speak clearly and could write well, not all Indo-Fijian students displayed these traits. It became obvious to me that cultural and/or other differences may have an impact on this and that this relationship warranted further study. Thus, my PhD topic started to take shape.

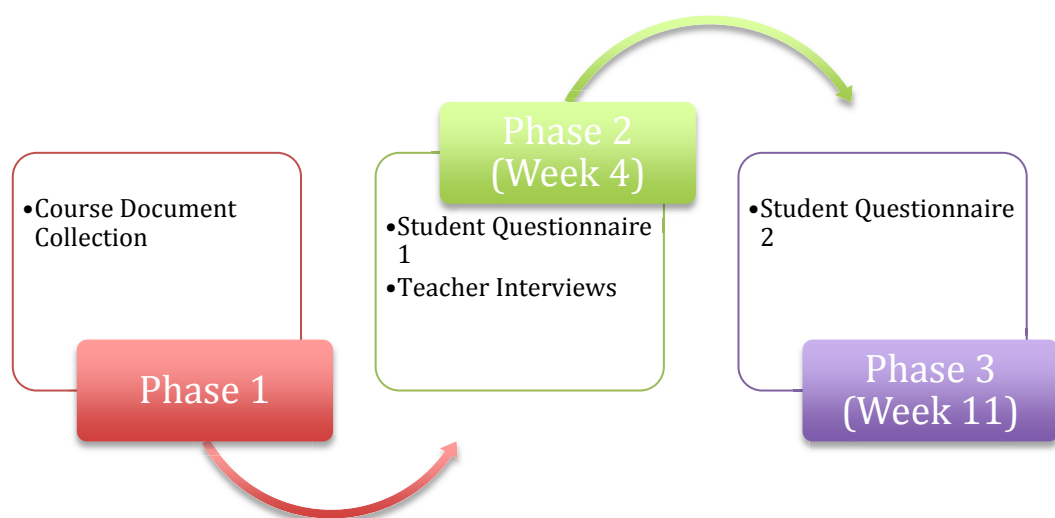
The core questions informing this study are (i) how do cultural and other differences contribute to the existing challenges that EAP students and teachers face in

their attempt to impart or grasp the notions of this subject in a language that is not their first, and, (ii) how can a knowledge of these differences inform delivery of EAP and similar courses?

To deal with these questions, data were collected in three phases. In phase 1, the EAP course's (UU114) documents such as course outline, summary of assessment tasks, course books and so on were obtained to design questions for the questionnaires and interview schedules. Phase 2 took place in week 4 of the EAP course in 2012. It involved collecting information from students through a questionnaire and from teachers by means of semi-structured interviews. Student questionnaire 2 was administered in week 11 of the same iteration of the EAP course, and this formed the third phase of data collection. Further details on the instruments are supplied later in the chapter.

Figure 3.1

*Phases in Data Collection*



This section will describe (i) the epistemological stance, the theoretical perspective and the research methodology that was adopted, (ii) the institution where the study was conducted, (iii) the academic subject that was used a backdrop to the study (iv) the instruments that were used to collect data, and (v) the ethical concerns that were considered. These descriptions, and in some cases justifications, will help explain the methodology followed in conducting the study.

### **3.3 The research approaches**

This study can be categorised as what Bryman (2012, p. 37) describes as “mixed methods research” because it uses both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. While the student questionnaires quantified data, which was relatively small, in terms of students’ study skills behaviour patterns, the teacher interviews gathered qualitative data. Bryman also distinguishes between what is quantitative and qualitative research. Whereas quantitative research, “embodies a view of social reality as an external, objective reality”, qualitative research sees social reality as “a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals’ creation” (Bryman 2012, p. 36). However, this very nature of qualitative research makes it more prone to subjectivity, more so than quantitative data. McKellar (n.d.) notes that

As there is no empirical way to get at what is going on inside someone's head, or in the heads of a group of individuals, many of the data collection methods used in qualitative research are necessarily interpretive and mediated by language and culture. Mediation might also be seen as layered and complex in this type of research as the subject must interpret their experience and then the researcher must then interpret that interpretation.

This series of interpretations is what makes the work of researchers challenging, while at the same time, they endeavour to capture the richness and complexity of lived

experiences. Despite these challenges, qualitative methods of research continue to be employed in the social sciences (Bryman 2012).

The following sub-sections will describe the four elements, suggested by Crotty (1998, pp.2-3), which are essential in developing any research proposal. Two basic questions need to be explained: (1) what methods and methodology will be used in the research, and (2) how can these choices be justified? In order to respond to these questions, Crotty (1998) suggests that the epistemological stance, the theoretical perspective, the methodology (or plan of action) and the methods (or procedures) should be outlined (Figure 1.2 in Chapter 1 highlights Crotty's research process phases). While Crotty's description aims to show how methods, methodology and theoretical perspective inform the epistemology used in research, for the purposes of my study, this process has been reversed. This was done to explain (and show) how the epistemology, theoretical perspective and the methodology informed the methods used to obtain data.

### **3.3.1 Epistemological stance**

This section will describe the epistemological assumptions that informed the design of the study. Epistemology, which pertains to "the nature of knowledge" (Hamlyn 1995, p. 242), is concerned with "providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate" (Maynard 1994, p. 10). While there are numerous epistemologies, this project used the theory of constructivism (Dunlap & Grabinger 1996; Merrill 1991; Kolb 1984; Scheer, Noweski & Meinel 2012) as its epistemological base. In order to understand the situation under study in its form, it is important and most appropriate to apply the theory of constructivism. The constructivist viewpoint is that "knowledge is not a self-sufficient entity" and that "knowledge is not directly transmittable from person to person, but rather is individually and idiosyncratically

constructed or discovered” (Liu & Matthews 2005, p. 387). This implies that our view of the world is constructed as we interact with it, and continues to be modified each time we interact. Wilson (2011, n.p.) further notes that while the principles of constructivism theory rest “on a descriptive base” (describing what learning is), they expand “to guidelines for instructional design” (what learners should do and how assessment and feedback should be part of the learning activities).

The construction of knowledge occurs during interactions with the social world. When a new concept is discovered, an attempt is made to reconcile it with previous knowledge, and adjust what the initial beliefs may have been. New information may also be disregarded either on the basis of irrelevance or on any other reason deemed appropriate at the time, or modified to integrate with existing views and knowledge. Also, old knowledge may be discarded in the light of new knowledge. This theory therefore implies that in order to understand the world, the researcher needs to ask questions, explore and assess what is already known. Using this philosophy, my project sought to understand meaning as the participating teachers and students relayed it. This then acknowledged the role of the “construction” of meaning by interacting with the various stakeholders through a combination of ethnographic tools, which are discussed later in the chapter.

### **3.3.2 Theoretical perspective**

This section discusses the theoretical perspective that informed the methodology chosen for the thesis. Such perspectives serve to both interrogate and substantiate the assumptions that a researcher may have about the research. Crotty (1998, p. 7) emphasises that it is important to provide “a context for the [research] process” and ground “its logic and criteria”. The methods selected for this project sought to engage the participants of the study (who had either a direct or an indirect association with EAP)

in a semi-structured discussion of their environment. This required participants to both give opinions on existing practices and thereby access information stored in their minds (cognitive engagement), and to reflect on these both socially and culturally to not only assist the research but to also, as Kelly (2006) suggests, represent the constructions of their own identities and perspectives as teachers and students. When adopting a particular method of data collection such as an interview, researchers may worry about the subjectivity of the responses or the misinterpretation of the questions. Crotty (1998, p. 7) advises that we can bring to a point of examination these assumptions “by expounding our theoretical perspective, that is, our view of the human world and social life within that world, wherein such assumptions are grounded”.

One theory that fits in well with constructivism is symbolic interactionism (Crotty 1998; Blumer 1969; Charon 2009), which is the theoretical assumption adopted in this study. Heavily influenced by the works of Mead (1934), and developed into a theoretical perspective by Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionism rests on three basic principles:

1. people’s reactions to and interactions with concepts are based on the meanings that they attribute to them,
2. these meanings derive from the social interaction that one has with other entities, and
3. these meanings are in a constant process of modification as one comes into contact with the outside world.

Blumer (1969) suggests that our interaction with others is not a reaction to what others say or do, but rather an interpretation or definition of these. Furthermore, Iskold (2003) points out that knowledge that we have from our formal education, imagination or other



experiences is always in a state of flux. As we experience phenomena (whether through formal means of schooling or through social encounters), we build our view of the world.

Thus, my ethnographic study of the views of teachers and students of an EAP course at USP fits well against the backdrop of symbolic interaction. Charon (2009) writes that one of the central ideas of symbolic interaction is that people should be seen as thinkers, and thus what they say (or do) is reflective of this thinking ability. In light of symbolic interactionism, interview responses are seen as a result of the respondents' cognitive processes. While the respondents modified their interpretation of the EAP course as they involved themselves cognitively, I (as a researcher) also modified my understanding of the course through this social and semiotic interaction. Anderson's (1985; 2010) work on cognition is also pertinent to this study. He suggests that a great wealth of knowledge can be accessed through engaging in discussions and discourse. This study sought to cognitively engage the participants to access their knowledge and to reflect on their beliefs on EAP teaching and learning. For instance, the interviews prompted teachers to consider their experiences in class, especially those that were relevant to the research focus.

One of the questions asked teachers to engage in a discussion about any particular issues they may have observed with students from individual cultural groups. For example, they were asked if in their experience they had noticed if students from particular cultural groups had any challenges with regard to their learning that other students did not seem to display. As these issues had not been documented by the interviewees, such as in the form of diary notes, the information they provided came from their own recollection. During the interviews, the teachers would occasionally pause to consider the questions asked. Sometimes, they gave responses to questions

asked earlier in the interview at a later stage. For example, following her interview, teacher 5 realised that she had some new information to give about cultural groups, which she had not considered at the time the question was asked. This indicated that the questions and topic had probed her thinking, and the more she thought about the questions, the more she found to say in response.

The Vygotskian socio-cultural approach is also relevant to building cognitive understanding in social contexts (Iskold 2003). It is a theory, according to Wright (2012, p. 17) that “provides a lens through which differences in cultural cognitive processes can be explained and through which interventions can be developed.” It asks for, among other things, the inclusion of broader social and cultural perspectives when interpreting learning (Vygotsky 1978). This notion is a useful one for any research dealing with a culturally and socially mixed group of participants, as is the case at the University of the South Pacific. According to Atherton (2009, n.p.) “the articulation of ideas was central to learning and development” for Vygotsky. It is through engagement with the environment both socially and culturally that a learner ‘constructs’ new meanings, which is what the teachers, the students and I as the researcher were involved in.

### **3.3.3 Research methodology**

This section discusses the research design that was developed to gather data for the study. Influenced by ethnographic theory, which seeks to observe the world from the point of view of the participant rather than that of the researcher (Atkinson et al. 2002), the research sought to elicit and understand the views of the teachers and students of the generic EAP course offered at the University of the South Pacific in the face-to-face mode at Laucala campus in Fiji. In his review of the book, *Handbook of Ethnography* (Atkinson et al. 2002), Milgate (2007, p. 43) defines ethnography as being “rooted in the first-hand experience of the research setting” and being “committed to interpreting

the point of view of those under study”. It involves a direct study of the participants through observations and interactions. Ethnographic research design is gaining popularity increasingly in the social sciences. The interest in ethnographic narrations of people’s lives has, according to Goldbart and Hustler (2005) gained momentum in the last 40 years. The authors suggest that because researchers test out their existing hypotheses and are “open to research problem reformulation” (p. 18), this makes the results of their ethnographic surveys appealing.

To elicit information, my study used interviews and questionnaires, which are the basic tools used in ethnography where “researchers engage systematically with those they are studying by participating in their lives and methodically asking questions about the information they are acquiring” (MacDonald 2005, para 1). As a researcher, I became engaged in an aspect of the participants’ lives – their experience in teaching/learning the EAP course, where they shared with me their ideas.

Furthermore, LeCompte and Preissle (1993) suggest that by using ethnographic research in education, the researcher is able to generate theory by describing the context in which learning takes place. Such methods can also be used to assess existing programs and design intervention strategies. Spradley (1979, p. 3) emphasises that “rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people” and as such Patton’s (1987) guided interview approach provided useful information on how best to engage the EAP teachers at the University of the South Pacific to identify their views of the EAP course through interviews. Furthermore, Boyle-Baise and Sleeter (1996, p. 378) suggest that ethnographic research in culturally diverse settings reveals that “actions and meanings are complex and people view them differently”. While this is a broad assumption that would apply to any given setting, a culturally and linguistically diverse

community like that at the University of the South Pacific may yield complexities of its own.

### **3.3.4 Research methods**

Central to any research is the methods and procedures used to collect information that is useful. The choice of these procedures depends on a number of factors, like qualitative/quantitative nature of enquiry, the type of subjects dealt with (humans in natural surroundings and animals in laboratories), time and logistics, and so on. Owing to the fact that geographical barriers significantly affected the amount of time I was able to spend with my participants, instruments were designed to allow for the collection of data bearing in mind the time constraints.

In an attempt to understand the critical differences between students from different cultures and how these differences impact on their needs in an English for academic purposes course, the study utilised a number of complementary methods. Data for my research were gathered by means of three different modes: document analysis, questionnaires and personal interviews. It was not possible to record the interviews because the digital voice recorder was damaged in transit as a result of Cyclone Daphne (Nabaivalu 2012). This damage was discovered on the day of the interviews and a second recorder could not be arranged. As a contingency, thorough interview notes were made. This study applied what Denzin (1978) calls ‘methodological triangulation’, where a number of instruments are used to gather data. Researchers often use triangulation to attain a wider and a deeper understanding of the area being investigated (Olsen 2004). This can also enhance the accuracy and the validity of the data (Denzin 1978; Creswell & Miller 2000) as well as the reliability (Brown 1995). Hussein (2009) provides a comprehensive description of triangulation in social science research. In studying the welfare benefits offered by a group of employers to their employees,

Hussein used both qualitative and quantitative methods to obtain data. His main aim was to support triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative methods by “neutralizing the flaws of one method and strengthening the benefits of the other for ... better research results” (p. 2).

This section will describe in detail what research methods and instruments were used to collect data. It begins by describing the participants, which includes the institution, the EAP course central to the study, and the teachers and students who provided information. Next, the section highlights the research instruments that were used and endeavours to provide justifications for these.

### **3.2.4.1 The participants**

A total of 80 English for Academic Purposes students and 9 EAP teachers – both groups from the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji – took part in this project, which was conducted in April and June of 2012. The participants’ selection can best be described by what Kitchenham and Pfleeger (2002, p. 19) call “non-probabilistic sampling” which is “created when respondents are chosen because they are easily accessible or the researchers have some justification for believing that they are representative of the population”. The participants of the USP study included the EAP teachers and the EAP students. Before describing the participants, the institution where these participants were from and the subject they were teaching/studying will be described.

### **The institution**

The University of the South Pacific’s Laucala Campus is located in Suva<sup>1</sup>, Fiji and is close to the city centre. It is a relatively large campus with a student population of 21,594 in 2011 (The University of the South Pacific 2012). Of these, 21% were

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Data Website lists Suva’s population at approximately 177000 in 2011.

studying in the face-to-face mode, 49% in the distance mode and 30% in multimodal form. There are a number of residential colleges for on-campus students (called ‘Halls of Residence’), which house students from other parts of Fiji and from around the South Pacific. Owing to its multicultural and multilingual student body, English is by far the most common lingua franca, although students from Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands often use a variety of Melanesian Pidgin (Bislama or Pijin) for communication with each other. According to the University of the South Pacific (2012) in 2011, 53.29% of the students were from Fiji.

The University of the South Pacific (USP) was chosen for my institutional research for two main reasons. One, my familiarity with this university, the EAP staff, and the university’s modes of operation made it easier for me to carry out my research. I also knew that my proposal to carry out the surveys would not pose significant difficulties with the USP authorities since I had previously worked at this institution as an EAP teacher and was aware of the University’s supportive attitude towards research. The second reason for choosing this institution lies in the composition of its student population. Because it serves 12 countries within the South Pacific region, the students speak a combined total of some 200 languages and have varying cultural practices. This multitude of cultural and linguistic diversity in a single classroom poses interesting challenges and opportunities for teachers.

### **The subject “UU114”**

The subject that the participants were asked to comment on was called “UU114 English for Academic Purposes”. It was a 14-week in-session English for General Academic Purposes course taught in both face-to-face and distance mode. While in most universities students study EAP (pre-sessional EAP) prior to joining their principal program of study, at the USP the EAP course is offered during a regular university

semester where those enrolled also study other mainstream subjects. This is called in-session EAP, which also allows those from outside the campus city (where the course is offered in the face to face method) to spend less time away from their homes. During the summer break, the course was also taught for four weeks on various campuses around the South Pacific. With the key focus on improving academic writing skills, the course took students through a basic 15-step approach to addressing assignment topics and producing written work. A description of the course is provided in Chapter 1 and a summary sheet has been provided in Appendix E. Other skills such as comprehending academic texts, referencing and critical thinking were addressed throughout the semester. Different text types such as discussion and causal analysis essays were taught and practised in class. Oral presentation was a component of the assessment schedule. A course book, written by a University staff member (Green 2006), was used as the main text.

Because it is a compulsory subject, UU114 attracts between 900 and 1200 face-to-face students per semester (Course Coordinator 2012, pers. comm.). In Semester 1 of 2012, there were 1100 students. These students were divided into groups, with each group assigned two classes of 2-hour blocks each per week. Attendance at sessions was not compulsory but the assessment schedule included a participation component. Teaching was done in interactive, workshop mode with students attempting tasks in groups of up to 5. The teacher would monitor the groups by checking their progress, commenting on their work and responding to student queries. The subject culminated in a three-hour final examination where students wrote a 600 to 800-word opinion essay in response to a given prompt. They were assessed on their ability to comprehend the topic and write in a formal, structured format. Referencing was not required in the examination. The final grade depended on both the assignments done throughout the

semester and the final examination. While students were required to obtain a minimum of 24 (out of 60) in their course work and 16 (out of 40) in the final examination, in order to pass the course, they needed a minimum sum total of 50% (UU114 Course Outline 2012).

### **The EAP teachers**

For this study, nine English for Academic Purposes teachers (two males and seven females) were interviewed. Four other teachers could not be interviewed due to their personal circumstances. The initial plan was to interview all thirteen EAP teachers. Table 3.1 presents information about the teachers. There was no official USP data available on the ethnic composition of its staff at the time.

The subject (locally referred to as ‘course’ or ‘unit’), UU114, has a course coordinator who oversees the subject. A face-to-face coordinator and a distance and flexible learning coordinator assist the course coordinator. Under the direct command of the course coordinator and the assistants are the classroom teachers who are hired as ‘Teaching Assistants’. Their main responsibility is to teach the EAP syllabus, assess assignments and presentations, and mark examinations and tests. At the end of every week, the EAP team at the Laucala campus meets to discuss the current and the following week’s teaching.

Table 3.1

#### *Teacher Information*

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
1	15 years (EAP)	41+	F	Polynesian
2	3 years (EAP)	26-40	F	Indo-Fijian
3	3 years (EAP) 6 years (high school)	26-40	M	Indo-Fijian
4	4 years (EAP)	26-40	F	Indo-Fijian



5	13 years (EAP)	41+	F	Indo-Fijian
6	4 years (EAP)	26-40	F	Indo-Fijian
7	4 years (EAP)	26-40	M	Indo-Fijian
8	3 years (EAP)	26-40	F	Melanesian
9	3 years (EAP)	26-40	F	Melanesian

These teachers were selected because they had at least three years of EAP teaching experience at the University and as a result had knowledge of both the subject matter and the types of students they taught. Another reason for the selection was that these teachers taught in the face-to-face delivery of the course, which was the focus of the study. Prior to the interview, teachers were contacted via email and given explanations about the nature of the project. Once they understood their role as informants, they were given a consent letter to sign that allowed the interviews to proceed.

### **The students**

All students who took part in the survey were enrolled in the EAP course. While most were between 18 to 25 years of age (60 students), 18 students were between 26 to 40 and 2 students were over 41. Typically, at the University of the South Pacific, the majority of the students fall in the 18 to 25 age group. Students from 11 of the 12 countries served by the USP were included. On this occasion, there were no enrolments in the course from the Pacific nation of Niue. Figure 3.2 shows the student breakdown, according to country, and Table 3.2 gives the breakdown according to gender and cultural groups. Furthermore, the student population included students enrolled in the various degree programs, which ranged from Arts (History, Politics, Sociology, for example), Commerce (Accounting, Economics, Management, Banking), Education, Engineering, Sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics) and Law. Figure 3.3 provides a breakdown of this.

Figure 3.2

*Student Participation Numbers in Questionnaire 1 (Q1) and Questionnaire 2 (Q2) According to Country*

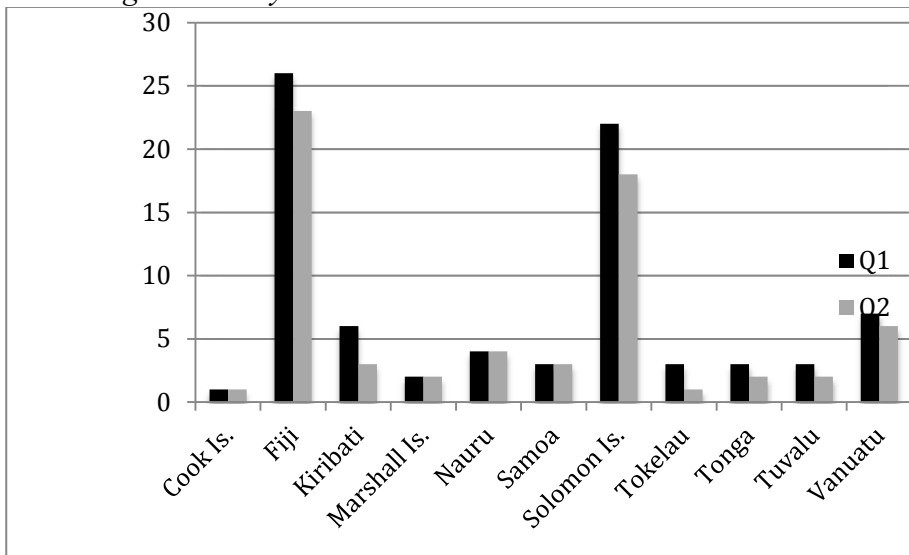
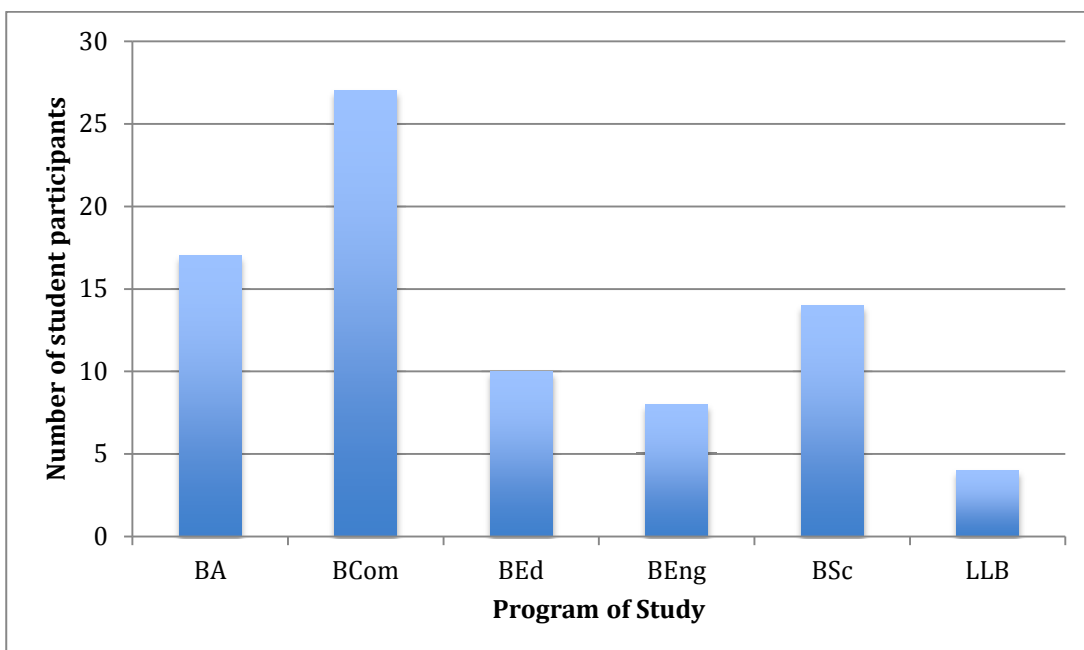


Figure 3.3

*Percentage of Participants Enrolled in Different Programs*



Note: BA (Bachelor of Arts); BCom (Bachelor of Commerce); BEd (Bachelor of Education); BEng (Bachelor of Engineering); BSc (Bachelor of Science); LLB (Bachelor of Laws)

Table 3.2

*Number of Student Participants, According to Gender and Cultural Groups for Questionnaire 1 and Questionnaire 2*

Cultural Groups	Country		Questionnaire 1			Questionnaire 2		
			Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Indo-Fijians	Fiji (Indo-Fijians)		5	8	13	5	8	13
	Kiribati		2	4	6	1	2	3
Micronesia	Marshall Islands		1	1	2	1	1	2
	Nauru		2	2	4	2	2	4
Melanesia	Vanuatu		0	7	7	0	6	6
	Fiji (I-Taukei <sup>2</sup> )		8	5	13	5	5	10
	Solomon Islands		15	7	22	12	6	18
Polynesia	Cook Islands		0	1	1	0	1	1
	Samoa		2	1	3	2	1	3
	Tokelau		1	2	3	0	1	1
	Tonga		1	2	3	1	1	2
	Tuvalu		1	2	3	1	1	2
	<b>Total</b>		<b>38</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>65</b>

In week 4 of the course, when Questionnaire 1 was administered, a total of 80 students took part. It was anticipated that at least 10 students from each country would be included in the survey, however, the course enrolment numbers of some nationalities were lower than anticipated for reasons that were difficult to ascertain. When Questionnaire 2 was administered in week 11 to the same students, only 65 (of the 80) filled in their responses. Two possible explanations for this drop in numbers could be related to attrition and decline in attendance in the course. Towards the end of university semester, student attendance tends to decline.

<sup>2</sup> In 2010, the Fijian administration decreed that all native (or indigenous) Fijians be referred to as 'I-Taukei'. This is a Fijian word that means "indigenous", "native" and "landowner".

### **3.3.4.2 The instruments**

#### **Document analysis**

“Documents can be examined for immediate content, changing content over time and the values that such changing content manifests” (Stark & Torrance 2005, p.35) and both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis can be employed to perform this examination. For instance, a quantitative content analysis could involve looking for types of assessment tasks in a course outline and coding them according to salient characteristics, while on the other hand, a qualitative interpretive analysis seeks to discover the hidden meaning in texts (Stark & Torrance 2005). For the purposes of my study, a qualitative approach to document analysis was used. Wesley (2010, p. 12) presents “a series of guidelines for the effective and trustworthy completion of qualitative document analysis” in his working paper. Of prime importance is the need to offer “a genuine interpretation of reality, or an accurate reading of a particular (set of) document(s)” (p. 5).

Wesley’s (2010) guidelines informed the document analysis, which was conducted to study the curricula of the academic English course. The following documents were analysed: course outlines, minutes of the first EAP staff meeting for the term, course books and an accompanying resource book, assessment tasks and examination question papers. The course outline, for instance, helped identify the relationship between the course objectives and the assessment tasks. A summary table was created where course objectives were aligned with the assessment tasks. A study of the course materials, specifically the course book and its accompanying resource book, was also undertaken. A second summary table was created to highlight the main units in the course book, and the focus of activities in each unit. (Both summary tables have

been put in Appendix E). The analysis of these documents allowed the researcher to understand the various components of the courses, that is, what the course consisted of, how it was structured, what assessment tasks were administered to monitor student progress, and what help was available for students, among other issues. The analysis also provided useful insights into un-structured questions that were included in the interviews.

Special permission was also obtained to study the contents of the minutes of a staff meeting for the EAP teachers. This was important because teachers discussed problems faced in their EAP sections. The meeting, organised in week 4, gave the teachers the opportunity to discuss how the first four weeks of the course had progressed and to identify any issues that they had faced during this period. Some of the issues raised at the meeting included: shortage of the course book in the University bookshop, late enrolments (it was noted that a number of Solomon Island students arrived late into the country owing to a delay in the processing of their scholarship grants) and how to get these students to catch up with the rest of the students, and so on. The teachers discussed ways of dealing with the issues raised in the meeting. Future staff meetings were held once every week during the semester. Relevant information from the course documents that were studied as part of my survey were extracted and put in a summary document (see Appendix E). Information from this contributed to the construction of questionnaire and interview items, as well as towards the description of the course in various parts of the thesis.

### **Questionnaires (print form)**

In order to elicit information from the EAP students, two sets of questionnaires were used. Because a large number of students participated in this activity, it was virtually impossible to carry out interviews. The questionnaires were distributed to a

group of students selected according to their nationalities to ensure that as many nationalities as possible were included. This way of grouping cultures according to nationalities worked well for Micronesian and Polynesian countries, such as Nauru and Tonga. On the contrary, for the Melanesian countries (Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu), it was not as straightforward. This is because among the three Melanesian countries, some 150 languages are spoken, suggesting the existence of many cultures within this group. However, for the purpose of convenience, all Solomon Islanders were treated as belonging to a broad Solomon Islands group, and all Ni-Vanuatu students formed a broad group. Any grouping below this level would render the groups too small for trends to be evident. Fijian students were divided into two cultural groups, Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians. This was done because these two groups belong to two different cultures altogether, which bear no major similarities. Besides, the student population at USP is mostly made up of indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians.

The first questionnaire was administered to the student participants in week 4 of the course while the second set was administered in week 11. The questionnaires were administered and completed by the students while they were attending their EAP session in the classrooms. The questionnaire items asked students to rate their confidence levels on a number of EAP skills near the beginning of the course (week 4) and towards the end of the course (week 11). By doing this, it was anticipated that any shifts in confidence levels, in terms of the broad cultural groups, would be evident. The questionnaires also allowed for a large number of questions to be asked in a limited space of time. It was not possible to administer a before-the-course questionnaire because the students would have been in their own countries at the time and logistically it would have been a difficult process to track down these students.

The questionnaire design was based on Gravatt, Richards and Lewis's (1997, cited in Richards 2001, pp. 80-88) student questionnaire administered to University of Auckland's ESL students. Gravatt, Richards and Lewis's questionnaire items were also needs analysis related, and sought students' opinions on skills they possessed and skills that they would like to improve on. Most of these questions were relevant to my study as well, and they provided ideas on how I could phrase my questions.

The first questionnaire (Questionnaire 1 – see Appendix B), which was administered in week 4 of the course, sought to identify the students' views on the

- EAP programs, and how useful the students felt the course was for them;
- difficulties they envisaged in responding to the requirements of the EAP course (for example, use of technology, ability to respond to the assessment requirements of the course, and so on)
- purposes for them undertaking the course.

For comparison purposes, the student respondents were asked to complete another questionnaire (Questionnaire 2 – see Appendix C) in week 11. This questionnaire sought to find out to what extent and how the students' end goals had been met and what difficulties they had faced during the course. Individual comparisons between what each student said in the two questionnaires were not made, as the focus was more on group identities. Furthermore, such comparisons would have potentially compromised anonymity.

Moreover, demographic information such as respondent's first language(s), and cultural information was included. Before distributing the questionnaires, the students were provided with an explanation about the research goals, and were advised that they may choose not to participate in this research. A consent form was used. Each

questionnaire had a personal background section. The questions were divided into sections (see Table 3.3).

Most of the questionnaire items required students to provide ratings on a scale of 1 to 5. The Likert-style (Likert 1932) scale was adopted because single-item measures such as yes/no type questions are “unreliable”, “cannot discriminate against fine degrees of an attribute”, and “lack precision” (Gliem & Gliem 2003, p. 83). A combination of closed and open-ended questions, aligned with Cohen, Manion and Morrison’s (2000, p. 248) description of a semi-structured questionnaire was used. The benefit of having this type of questionnaire, according to the authors, is that while it “sets the agenda” it does not attempt to “presuppose the nature of the response” (p. 248).

Table 3.3

*Summary of Questionnaire Sections*

<b>Questionnaire Number</b>	<b>Section 1</b>	<b>Section 2</b>	<b>Section 3</b>	<b>Section 4</b>
1	Demographic Information (9) *	Use of Language (2)	Current English for Academic Purposes (6)	Course: Academic (1) Other Courses
2	Demographic Information (9)	Cultural Experiences at the USP (8)	Current English for Academic Purposes (6)	Course: N/A

\* The number of questions in each section is included in brackets.

Another advantage of asking open-ended questions is that a broader reflection of the respondent’s opinion can be achieved. For example, one of the open-ended questions in Questionnaire 1 asked respondents to identify what they expected to gain from the course. This was placed after a section of closed-type questions. By asking this question, it was anticipated that respondents might provide information that the earlier sections of the questionnaire could not. Most of the science major students, for instance, wrote in one of the open-ended questions that they would like to learn about writing



scientific laboratory reports, a genre that is not currently taught in the EAP course. However, having open-ended questions has a few drawbacks. Firstly, coding data may not be easy, and they also have “a larger item non-response” (Reja et al. 2003, p. 161) when compared with other types of questions. To ensure that this did not happen, open-ended questions were only used as appropriate.

Written questionnaires have several advantages as well as disadvantages. Walonik (1997) emphasises they are easy to analyse, are familiar to respondents, reduce bias and are less intrusive than interviews. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) add that they tend to be more reliable, their anonymous nature allows greater honesty, they are economical (in terms of time and money), and the number of respondents reached can be extensive. However, questionnaires also yield a number of problems. There is a possibility of a low response rate, they allow little flexibility to the respondents and hence do not allow the researcher to probe responses, and do not take into consideration the non-visual cues that an interview might yield (Walonik 1997). In the USP study, the questionnaires were administered during class time and were collected on the same day. A final version of this questionnaire was devised after document analysis of the course outline was conducted. Bell’s (2005, pp. 150-153) 19-point questionnaire checklist was used to guide the formulation of questions and the administration of the student questionnaires. Her checklist item 3, for instance, raises an important point: “Is a questionnaire the best way of obtaining the information?” (p. 152). Given the student numbers that the USP study dealt with, logistically, the questionnaire method proved the best option.

### **Personal interviews**

Personal interviews with EAP teachers were conducted because, as Walonik (1997) suggests, this method can lead to in-depth and comprehensive information.

DeVault and McCoy (2006, p. 22) suggest that in institutional ethnography, interviews are commonly referred to simply as “talking with people” and when done systematically, they can yield a wealth of information. Teachers, who the authors call “frontline professionals”, are common informants in an institutional ethnography (p. 27), and interviewing them may pose its “own distinctive challenges” (p. 28). DeVault and McCoy (2006, p. 28) highlight that frontline professionals are “trained to use the very concepts and categories that institutional ethnographers wish to unpack”. The writers suggest that the interviewer must “find ways of moving the talk beyond institutional language” by probing into them.

Using Berry’s (1999) questioning techniques, interviews were conducted with the EAP practitioners at the USP to ascertain their views on the EAP needs of their students, and on the purposes of the course. All teacher participants had at least 3 years of EAP teaching experience, and two of the teachers had been with the USP much longer than the others. This inclusion was useful because the two teachers had witnessed and experienced the many developments that had taken place in EAP teaching at USP.

Patton’s (1987) guided interview approach was used to conduct the interviews. Berry (1999, n.p.) asserts that in this type of interview, the interviewer, while perhaps having a basic checklist of relevant topics to cover, is also “free to explore, probe and ask questions deemed interesting to the researcher”. While this technique may be useful for eliciting information about specific topics, Wenden (1982, p. 39) also believes that it “allows for in-depth probing while permitting the interviewer to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study”.

The nine teacher interviews were conducted individually in the teachers’ offices. This gave the teachers a familiar space where they felt more comfortable. Interviews lasted from 10 to 15 minutes, and comprehensive notes were taken. Unfortunately, a

technical problem with the voice recorder, which was discovered on the day of the interviews, made it impossible to record the interviews. In order to ensure that all the important information was recorded, the technique of seeking clarification throughout the interviews was utilised. This meant that information supplied by the teachers was checked with the informants on several occasions. At the end of each interview, a brief summary of the main ideas was presented to the teachers. If any information warranted additions or modifications, then the summary allowed teachers to amend the information.

The interviews sought to gather information on teachers' beliefs about teaching EAP, the types of problems they believed their students encountered while studying EAP, and how they as teachers attempted to address these problems. All interviews were guided by Tuckman's (1972; 1999) guidelines for interviewing procedures. Tuckman notes that the interviewer should, as frankly as possible but without affecting responses, brief the respondent as to the purpose of the interview and make the respondent feel at ease. Also, the respondent's informed consent should be obtained as well. "At all times, an interviewer must remember that [s/]he is a data collection instrument and try not to let ... biases, opinions, or curiosity affect his behaviour (Tuckman 1972, in Cohen & Manion 1994, p. 286). Before interviewing the teachers, an information letter outlining the details of the research was given to them. Following this, a consent letter was provided and the teachers' approval to be part of the interview was sought. Copies of the information and consent letters can be found in Appendix F. During the interview, the teachers were made comfortable, and at no time did they appear to feel stressed.

With a semi-structured interview schedule, it was possible to encourage an in-depth discussion between the interviewer and the interviewee. In a semi-structured

schedule, an interviewer asks a set of prepared questions. However, if a response prompts a new question relevant to the study, then the interviewer is able to include this as part of the interview. In a highly structured interview, this flexibility is not permitted. It is this flexibility with semi-structured interviews that, according to Noor (2008, p. 1604) allows the researcher “sufficient scope to approach different respondents differently while still covering the same areas of data collection”. Newton (2010) also reports that structured interviews would not have allowed him to probe more deeply into responses provided by his student respondent in a study looking at students’ perspectives on a college course.

Teacher interview responses were grouped into five generic categories:

- (i) teachers’ background information (years of teaching experience, age-group, cultural background)
- (ii) challenges faced by the teachers (pedagogical issues)
- (iii) challenges faced by the students as perceived by the teachers
- (iv) teacher observations on students from different cultural backgrounds
- (v) teachers responses to problems (such as pedagogical or linguistic challenges).

These groupings informed the discussion of the interview data in chapter 5. Student questionnaire responses were entered into an Excel worksheet, and various Excel formulae were used to carry out statistical calculations. These included tallying the number of times the participants chose the responses on the Likert scale, (referred to earlier) for individual questions. Specialist statistics programs, such as SPSS, were not used because the data were not relatively large. In this case, simple MS Excel calculations sufficed.

### 3.4 Data analysis

When both questionnaires had been administered, the results were put in a Microsoft Excel worksheet. To make the data entry process easy, each student's questionnaire was allocated a recognition number. For example, FJ1 meant questionnaire number 1 from Fiji, SI5 meant questionnaire number 5 from the Solomon Islands, and so on. On the Excel spread sheet, the first column identified these recognition numbers. The subsequent columns were designated to the individual questionnaire items (for example, 13b referred to questionnaire item number 13, part b). For example:

<b>Code</b>	<b>13b</b>	<b>13c</b>		<b>14i</b>	<b>14j</b>	<b>15c</b>	<b>16a</b>
<b>IF1</b>	5	4		3	1	2	4
<b>IF2</b>	4	5		1	1	5	5
<b>IF3</b>	5	5		3	2	4	4
<b>IF4</b>	2	3		1	2	4	5

A separate similar Excel spread sheet was created for Questionnaire 2. The spread sheets were organised according to the four cultural groups. All Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu results were put in one section (the Melanesian Group). Likewise, a Polynesian Group, a Micronesian Group and an Indo-Fijian Group were created.

For each questionnaire item, using Excel's formulae, a tally was arrived at. This allowed one to see how many Indo-Fijian students chose 1 for questionnaire item 13b, and so on. A similar tally was also created for the entire group of participants. For example:

	<b>13b</b>	<b>13c</b>
1	12	11
2	6	8
3	23	25
4	20	17
5	19	19

In the above example, for questionnaire item 13b, 12 students chose 1, 6 students chose 2, 23 students chose 3, 20 students chose 4 and 19 students chose 5. Nine themes (as used in Chapter 4) were identified from the results. Means for all responses, including for individual cultural groups, for each questionnaire item were also calculated. This was done for comparison purposes. The data was not subjected to statistical analysis such as ANOVA and t-test analysis because of different and small sizes of groups. These statistical tests would not have yielded any statistically significant difference in the data. The teacher interview responses were recorded in a book and then later transferred to Microsoft Word and presented in four key themes. These are discussed in Chapter 5.

### **3.5 Summary of the procedure**

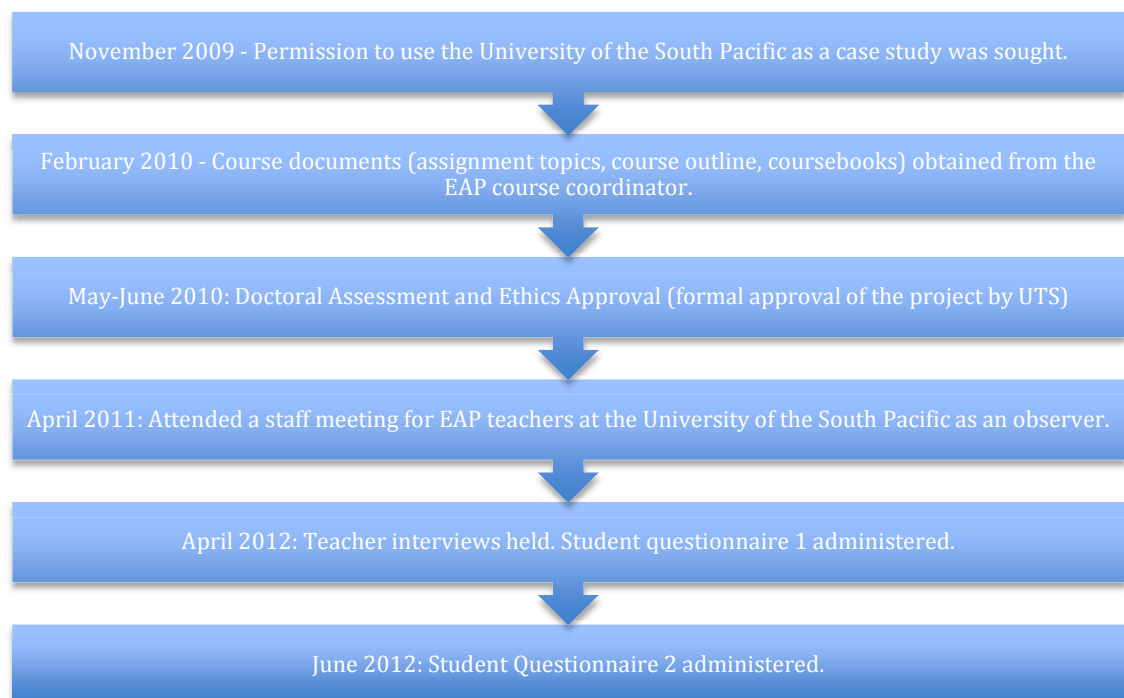
The following is the step-by-step procedure that was followed (see Figure 3.4 for timeline of activities):

- (1) After gaining approval from the University of the South Pacific, several visits to the institution were made to engage in discussions with the course coordinators and to collect relevant course documents.
- (2) A number of course documents were examined and notes were taken as appropriate. These documents included the course outline, the assignment tasks, the marking criteria for each assignment, the course book, and the minutes of a staff meeting. The course documents provided valuable information for the teacher interview and the student questionnaire items.
- (3) The teachers were informed of the purpose of the visit. The procedure that was to be followed in gathering data was briefly explained to the teachers and an informed consent was sought.

- (4) Teacher interviews were held in the School of Language, Arts and Media's meeting room. Each teacher was interviewed individually, and at a time convenient to him or her.
- (5) The students were briefed on the research, and after giving their consent, they were provided with Student Questionnaire 1 (see Appendix B). The teachers kindly allowed time for this in their lessons, and as a result, all of the questionnaires were collected on the same day. Instructions were explained to the students, and any request for clarification arising out of this was responded to.
- (6) Student Questionnaire 2 was administered in week 11 of the semester. The teachers also gave permission for this activity to be carried out in class.

Figure 3.4

*Timeline of Activities*



The questionnaires were collected and subsequently analysed. Teacher interview responses were placed into four categories: (i) challenges faced by the teachers, (ii) challenges faced by the students as perceived by the teachers, (iii) teacher observations on students from individual countries, and (iv) teacher responses to related problems.

The questionnaires for the students were piloted with a small number of USP students (who had previously completed the course), and were modified as necessary before being used for the study itself. For instance, a question item asking students to rate their confidence on “referencing and researching” was changed to two separate items about “referencing” and “researching” after one of the pilot respondents said that he was highly confident about his researching skills but less so with referencing. Running the pilot was thus an important exercise that assisted in the modification of the questionnaires. Supervising staff also provided input into questions (both for the interview schedule and the student questionnaires), resulting in modifications thereof.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical principles are abstract and it is not always obvious how they should be applied in given situations ... Some of the most intractable ethical problems arise from conflicts among principles and the necessity of trading one against the other. The balancing of such principles in concrete situations is the ultimate ethical act (House 1993 cited in Piper & Simons 2005, p. 56).

House’s ideas sum up the importance that researchers place on ethics. When dealing with other lives, care must be taken to not exploit the subjects. While a researcher is



interested in sharing knowledge with the rest of the world, it is also critical that no knowledge should be obtained in ways that are considered unethical.

Two important concepts form the core of the discussions on ethical considerations. Firstly, social scientists believe that it is important to “adhere to a concept of informed consent” (Piper & Simons 2005, p. 56). This means that any human subject should not be coerced into taking part in any study. When dealing with students, this notion becomes even more important in the context of an imbalance in power relationships. Schoeffel and Meleisea (1996) ascribe certain passivity to Pacific Island students, suggesting that these people’s decision to participate in events may be influenced by those who have authority over them. This was taken into consideration in my research, because in my teaching experience, I had noticed that my students would generally not refuse a teacher’s request. Most students would also not know that they have a right to decline to take part in any research in which they are approached to be participants. It thus becomes imperative for any researcher to inform the participant in clear terms what the purpose of the research is and how it may impact on him/ her as an informant. Sometimes, it may not be possible to foresee the risks that participants may incur, so Piper and Simons (2005, p. 56) suggest a “rolling informed consent” which can be negotiated once potential risks are identified.

Furthermore, when dealing with groups of people, for example students, there is a possibility of peer pressure. Some members of the group may be pressured into participating by other group members. To reduce the likelihood and impact of this situation, the researcher approached the subjects individually and obtained signed written informed consent forms. Essentially, the same approach was followed with teachers before any interview took place. All participants of the USP study were 18 years of age or over at the time of the study.

According to Piper and Simons (2005, p. 57), an important notion in discussions on ethical considerations is “confidentiality in the process of conducting the research” and the anonymity of the participants who will be reporting. Confidentiality is the act of not revealing the identity of any participant. Anonymity, on the other hand, is the “procedure to offer some protection of privacy and confidentiality” (p. 57), and in such cases, the researcher remains unaware of who the respondent is. Thus, in the USP study, student responses were anonymous, and while the researcher knew the teachers’ identities, their responses were treated and reported in confidence.

However, it may often be not possible to provide anonymity. In such situations, Piper and Simons advise, “to seek clearance from the individuals concerned for the use of data in a specific context or report” (p. 57). If participants specifically request to be identified in the research then this should be taken into consideration. Student anonymity was ensured through a number of ways. In the first instance, the questionnaires did not ask students to identify themselves. Moreover, the researcher did not know the students. In terms of the teachers, their names are not used in the thesis. Each teacher was, however, allocated a code (teacher 1, teacher 2, and so on) that had been selected randomly.

A third issue is the burden that is imposed on the informants. While there may be certain benefits for participants who take part in a study, there are nonetheless some important drawbacks, mostly as a result of power dynamics, that a researcher should consider. Interviews, which are generally considered to be more intimate than questionnaires, present a number of challenges for the interviewee. Firstly, an interview can make an informant uncomfortable, especially if he or she feels that the interviewer is probing into an area considered personal. Such intrusions should be avoided insofar as this is possible, and thus careful thought needs to be put into the questions that are

asked. Another related issue is the manner in which an interviewer presents him/herself. An intimidating tone can put a respondent in an awkward position and this may affect the responses that he or she gives. Therefore, in order to put their informants at ease, an interviewer must be aware of their own demeanour and ensure that they are aware of how their participants are feeling.

Two further issues relate to the informants who take part in interviews and questionnaire surveys. One of these is the amount of time that a participant is asked to give to the researcher. For instance, a participant who has a busy schedule will attempt to answer the questions as quickly as possible, or may not be interested in a questionnaire that has a number of questions. Besides, by agreeing to be part of a study, the informant has already pledged their valuable time. Participants feeling vulnerable is another issue worth considering. The informant may see the revelation of certain types of information as potentially risky as this may put him or her in conflict with the stakeholders. So, it is suggested that all researchers gauge their informants' feelings and steer away from questions that may cause such inconvenience to them.

To ensure a successful attempt at collecting primary data, in my study, the ethical considerations discussed above were adhered to. The confidentiality and the anonymity of all participants was maintained through a number of ways. Apart from not requiring participants to identify themselves (as discussed earlier), the questionnaire responses were kept confidential and only the researcher was privy to them. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted in a private room, with only the researcher and interviewee present, and the questionnaires have been kept under lock and key.

The potential burdens imposed on the participants were also considered. Several strategies were put in place: (i) questions asked in both instruments were carefully analysed for any potential negative effects they may have had on the informants, (ii) the

participants' general feeling (during the interviews) was continuously gauged (although there was no need for any adjustment to be made), (iii) my personal appearance and the manner exposed during the interviews was kept professional, and (iv) interviews were organised at times that teachers had suggested.

### **3.7 Limitations**

#### **3.7.1 Familiarity with the course, institution and teachers**

Having taught the EAP course at the University of the South Pacific, I was familiar with the institution, the course under study, the teacher-participants, and the way the course was structured and delivered to the students. One of the positive implications of having this knowledge was that logistically, conducting the research was more straightforward because I was familiar with the site and the teachers, and how the course was structured and run. However, this familiarity may have initiated some preconceived ideas about the institution, the students and the teachers, which may have had a bearing on the analysis of the data. Another important issue is the fact that I was a 'returning teacher'; I had been an EAP teacher at this university from 2000 till 2009. While this experience allowed me familiarity with the way the course was run as well as prior acquaintance with most of the teachers, I did remind myself that I was an observer, and that I should not allow preconceived ideas about the place, the teachers and the students to affect my research. Beyond this, I also needed to be vigilant and interrogate any preconceived ideas that I had.

#### **3.7.2 Instruments and sampling**

Interviews and questionnaires, which were used to gather primary data, have both advantages and disadvantages. While a single questionnaire can gather information on a wide range of subjects, Mann (1998, p. 143) highlights two important drawbacks. The first is that "the returned questionnaires may reflect only the opinion, needs, and

views of those who have been able to respond” and as such questionnaire responses cannot be always “assumed to be a valid and accurate representation of the population in question”. In light of this assertion, my description and analysis of data focus only on the participant sample, and do not extend to treat the group as being representative of the University of the South Pacific community.

The second problem with questionnaires is that they reveal self-assessment of an individual’s perceived needs, and this varies from individual to individual. Mann (1998, p. 143) concludes that “individuals’ perceived needs may reflect an incomplete picture of desired abilities and outcomes and relationships between them”. For instance, a person may believe that they need more help to improve their writing skills, and may well not be aware of deficiencies in other skills such as reading and so on. This is an important point in needs assessment, and as such, any needs-based information gathered from questionnaires is treated as being perceived needs rather than actual needs of the participants.

Interviews provide additional sets of limitations. One, the responses depend on the moods of the interviewees, as well as on the relationship dynamics between the interlocutors. My interviewees were people with whom I have worked in the past, and this element of familiarity may have contributed to the interview dynamics. However, I was also conscious of the fact that these teachers were sacrificing their time to respond to my questions, and that my questions may have situated them in a stressful position. In response to these, I tried to keep the interviews short, and ensured the participants that their responses were confidential. To help them be at ease, I occasionally supported their responses by relating them to my personal experiences as an EAP teacher at the university.

### **3.8 Summary**

To sum up, 80 students and nine teachers of the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Fiji were selected to identify whether critical cultural differences between students contribute differentially to challenges for these students in responding to the demands of the EAP course at the USP. Using ethnographic tools of data collection, teacher interviews, student questionnaires and document analysis allowed for a platform to understand the challenges. Information from same student participants were gathered in weeks 4 and 11 of the course to allow for a comparison of the data. Furthermore, the principles of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity were considered to ensure an ethically sound methodology. The limitations of the various tools utilised were also deliberated on before selections were made.

## **Chapters 4 and 5: Findings**

The next two chapters will describe the information obtained from the student and teacher participants of the study. Owing to the large amount of information supplied by the two groups of participants, the presentation of results has been divided into two chapters (Chapter 4 and 5). Chapter 4 describes students' responses in the two questionnaires that were administered: one near the beginning of the course and the second towards the end of the course. Chapter 5 describes the teacher interview responses. This division does not indicate that the results from the two sources are to be seen as individual sections that have no relationship to each other. A synthesis of the information supplied by the teachers and the students is provided in Chapter 6, which discusses the implications of the findings.

## **Chapter 4: Description and Analysis of Student Questionnaire Responses**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the first set of data that was obtained from the student participants of the survey. It aims to present the views and beliefs of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students at the University of the South Pacific's (USP) Laucala Campus in Suva, who were part of the student cohort in semester 1 2012, and who volunteered to participate in this research through the medium of questionnaires.

Two questionnaires were administered to gather the data. The first (Q1), administered in week 4 of the EAP course at the time, sought students' beliefs about their EAP skills and what they were hoping to achieve on completion of the course. They were also asked about other courses they were enrolled in, and how their EAP study could influence these. Some of the questionnaire items pursued students' expectations of the course as well. The second (Q2), conducted in week 12 of the same course and given to the same students (as Q1), asked students to rate their confidence in similar areas outlined in Q1. They were asked to reflect on their EAP studies, rate their confidence in their EAP skills and comment on whether their course expectations had been met.

The data presented in this chapter is divided into two sections. The first, shorter section presents data on the participants' use of the English language in various domains. The second section compares data from the two student questionnaires, and has been divided into nine categories:

1. study management
2. assessment



3. academic research skills
4. reading skills
5. writing skills
6. vocabulary skills
7. grammar skills
8. listening skills
9. speaking skills.

These classifications emerge from the items in the two questionnaires. While there may be some overlap between the categories, these classifications helped organise data. In each category, data is presented in two sub-sections: results from Q1 (administered towards the beginning of the course) and results from Q2 (administered towards the end of the course). Results for each questionnaire item are presented in tables. The first column in each table identifies the cultural groups and the actual number of students in these groups. The second column presents the mean, calculated for the purpose of making comparisons. These values are between one and five, reflective of the five-point Likert scales used in the questionnaires. The next five columns present the percentage values of participants who chose each of the five points in the Likert scale. The numbers were converted to percentages for easy comparison. While the results are presented in percentages, the number of participants within each cultural group was relatively small for three groups. Therefore, the interpretation of the data should be done with caution. In addition, it should be highlighted that in the questionnaires, students had options between one and five for closed-type questions. Word equivalents for each number were omitted for the sake of simplicity. The descriptors attempt to capture the flavour of the strength of the responses.

The following cultural groups have been used to present the data:

- the Indo-Fijian group
- the Melanesian group
- the Micronesian group
- the Polynesian group.

The three Pacific groups were chosen because they are commonly used Pacific demarcation labels, used by many writers (like Norton 1993; Mangubhai & Mugler 2006; Thomas et al. 1989). The Indo-Fijian group represents the descendants of Indian indentured labourers brought to work on plantations in Fiji by the British between the late 1800s and early 1900s. Culturally significantly different from the three Pacific groups, the Indo-Fijian group has thus been set as a distinct group of learners. The Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian groupings have been used in the literature to mark distinctions between the three groups of Pacific Islanders.

The next chapter (Chapter 5) will present data obtained from the interviews conducted with the teachers of the EAP course. This is presented separately to allow for a simpler discussion, and to avoid any confusion between the two sets of data.

## **4.2 Language Use at Home, School and Work**

In Q1, the participants were asked about their use of language in naturalistic settings. These included familial, social and educational domains. Thirty of the 80 respondents also commented on language use in the work domain. The following tables present data related to this. It should be noted that these tables and the discussion that follows reveal a complex arrangement of language use in context, which sheds light on the abilities, as well as the potential difficulties, faced by these students.

Table 4.1

*Language Use in Familial, University and Work Domains*

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>First Language</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Both</b>
With family	80	76 (95%)	2 (2.5%)	2 (2.5%)
With friends	80	20 (25%)	50 (62.5%)	10 (12.5%)
With lecturers/tutors	80	0	80 (100%)	0
With workmates	30	13 (43%)	14 (47%)	3 (1%)
With supervisors/managers at work	30	11 (37%)	18 (60%)	1 (3%)

Table 4.2

*Language Use in Primary and Secondary School Settings*

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>First Language</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Both</b>
In lower primary	80	43 (54%)	31 (39%)	4 (5%)
In upper primary	80	34 (43%)	40 (50%)	6 (7.5%)
In secondary/high	80	11 (14%)	65 (81%)	4 (5%)

All of the participating Micronesians, Indo-Fijians and Melanesians, and 10 out of 13 Polynesians use their first language rather than English when speaking with their family members. This equates to 95% (or 76 out of 80) participants. The responses displayed irregular patterns when respondents were asked about their use of English with friends. The majority of Melanesians (26 out of 42) use English, while the rest alternate between English and their first language. Twelve out of 13 Polynesian respondents said they use English most of the time when communicating with friends. The Indo-Fijian and Micronesian Groups were almost equally divided between English and their first language. However, all respondents from Kiribati stated that they use their first language with friends. All respondents said that they use English with university lecturers and tutors.

In the work domain, the use of a particular language depended, to some extent, on the respondent's nationality. Of the 30 respondents who have had some work experience, four were Micronesian, four Indo-Fijian, 18 Melanesian and four Polynesian. Of the four Micronesians, three reported using mostly their first language, whereas all the participants from Fiji (Indo-Fijians and Fijians) reported using English with workmates and their superiors. In the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, respondents mostly used their first language, although at times they used English. Tongans and Samoans reported using mostly their first language, while two Tokelauans said that they used English more than their mother tongue.

In terms of school education, it was not until the Micronesians reached secondary school that English was used more than the local language. All respondents from Kiribati reported that English was not used in secondary school. During the first three years of primary school in Fiji, the medium of instruction was a vernacular language. However, English was the dominant language from upper primary onwards. All Ni-Vanuatu respondents said that English was used throughout their primary and secondary school education, while the Solomon Islanders received most of their primary education in a local language. In Polynesia, English was predominant in secondary school education.

The rest of this chapter focuses on the students' responses to the main items in the two questionnaires. This description is organised according to nine themes that emerged from the data.

### **4.3 Study Management**

Most university students who have a full study load are required to complete a significant number of assessment tasks. At the USP, markers request word-processed written assignments (UU114 Course Outline 2012). While this is a generally accepted

prerequisite in universities in developed countries, it can be a hurdle for remote Pacific Island students who may not have much contact with computers. Further, the life of a student is generally occupied with educational and social activities, as well as familial and cultural obligations, activities that would require a significant amount of students' time.

Cheung (2009, p. 974) says that many studies indicate that 'students attending classes would, one way or another, perform better on assessment than those skipping lectures. Class attendance has been repeatedly shown to be correlated with grades across a wide range of disciplines.' Two questionnaire items in my study asked participants to rate their ability to attend classes and submit assignments.

#### **4.3.4 Q1 responses: beliefs about study management at the beginning of the course**

At the beginning of the course, over 80% of the participants were highly confident that they would be able to attend four hours of classes for the course, every week. The mean values for each group (for both questionnaire items) show a general tendency towards high confidence. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 demonstrate these.

Table 4.3

*How Confident are You About Attending Four Hours of Classes Per Week?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	4.3	8	5	6	15	66
Indo-Fijians (13)	4.7	8	0	0	0	92
Melanesians (42)	4.2	9	7	5	14	64
Micronesians (12)	4.3	0	0	17	42	42
Polynesians (13)	4.2	7	7	7	7	69

*Note.* 1 = not confident

5 = completely confident

Table 4.4

*How Confident are You About Submitting All Assignments on Time?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	4.1	6	4	10	30	50
Indo-Fijians (13)	4.9	0	0	0	8	92
Melanesians (42)	3.9	9	7	9	28	45
Micronesians (12)	4.2	0	0	17	50	33
Polynesians (13)	4.0	7	0	15	38	38

*Note.* 1 = not confident

5 = completely confident

Among the four broad groups, Indo-Fijians showed the most confidence (92% for the highest level on the scale) in meeting this requirement. The other groups closely followed, with about 80% rating highly (4 and 5 on the scale). While similar results were obtained from all groups for confidence ratings on submitting all assignments on time, those who rated very high confidence only made up 50%, 16% less than the highest rating for attending classes. This indicates that the students appeared to be more confident in attending classes than submitting assessment tasks.

#### **4.3.5 Q2 responses: beliefs about study management towards the end of the course**

In the second questionnaire, administered towards the end of the course, the same participants were asked to rate how difficult it was for them to attend the four-hour weekly sessions, and to submit assignments on time. At least 10 of the 65 respondents found that it was difficult to attend classes regularly, while 14 out of the 80 respondents claimed that the submission of assignments on time proved to be ‘very difficult’ (see tables 4.5 and 4.6 below).

Table 4.5

*How Difficult Was it For You to Attend Four Hours of Classes Per Week?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Difficulty Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	2.1	48	17	21	10	5
Indo-Fijians (13)	1.7	67	8	17	8	0
Melanesians (34)	2.7	44	18	26	9	3
Micronesians (9)	2.3	22	22	22	11	11
Polynesians (9)	2	56	22	0	11	11

*Note.* 1 = not at all difficult      5 = very difficult

The majority of Indo-Fijians, Melanesians and Polynesians did not express facing much difficulty with attending classes. However, the Micronesians had outlying ratings for assignment submission. Two out of the nine Micronesians did not have any difficulty with class attendance, while another two found it a difficult task to achieve.

Table 4.6

*How Difficult Was it For You to Submit All Assignments on Time?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Difficulty Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	2.9	17	13	30	11	22
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.5	42	8	25	8	17
Melanesians (34)	3.1	9	15	35	12	24
Micronesians (9)	2.3	11	0	44	22	0
Polynesians (9)	2.9	22	22	0	0	44

*Note.* 1 = not at all difficult      5 = very difficult

In terms of submitting assessment tasks, the individual groups again displayed varying patterns. Four of the nine Micronesians experienced moderate levels of difficulty, while four of the nine Polynesians found submitting assignments very difficult. Eight of the 34 Melanesians also said the same.

#### **4.4 Assessment**

Assessment is a vital component of courses taught at universities. According to Bachman (1990, p. 310) all assessment materials should be ‘a representative sample of tasks from a well-defined target domain.’ This target domain is what Fulcher (1999, p. 222) refers to as the ‘situations in which the student will be expected to survive’. Therefore, in the context of EAP for university students, assessment tasks should ideally be representative of the issues they could face in their university courses, which, in turn, should reflect future professional situations. At the USP, assessment is divided into coursework and a final examination. In order to achieve a satisfactory grade in the overall course, candidates have to achieve a minimum of 40% in each component. This minimum requirement is set by the university and applies to all courses taught. Achieving a low score would have ramifications for performance in future courses as well as on the confidence levels of the students who score low pass marks. For UU114 EAP, the coursework constitutes 60%, while an end-of-term examination accounts for 40% (UU114 Course Outline 2012). If a student fails either of the components or does not pass the EAP course, they may not be able to enrol in second year degree courses. Most of the assessments for UU114 are in essay form, between 600 and 800 words. This follows from a study conducted by Green and Sameer (2006), which found that most courses at the USP require students to produce sustained arguments, often above 1000 words. These essays vary in form. While some courses require discussion essays, others require argumentative or causal analysis. Thus, UU114 assessment tasks have been developed to reflect these requirements (Green & Sameer 2006).

The questionnaires in the current study asked participants to rate their confidence in meeting the formative assessment requirements of the course. For Harlen and James (1997, p. 369), formative assessment refers to tasks that allow evaluators to



know ‘about pupils’ existing ideas and skill’ and recognise ‘the point reached in development and the necessary next steps to take’. In UU114, all face-to-face students are required to write three 600- to 800-word research essays, and take a short mid-semester test of two hours’ duration. These constitute the coursework, and are to be attempted during the semester. The main purpose of these tasks is to identify the skills learnt by students and what improvements are needed.

The UU114 essays were in different formats. The first was a researched argument essay where students were to present their viewpoint on a given topic. An example of a topic is ‘Discuss the benefits of having the mass media in the Pacific’ (UU114 Assignment Schedule 2010). In the second essay, students discussed two opposing viewpoints and presented their supporting opinion on the topic ‘Examine the advantages and the disadvantages of various types of entertainment on the people of a Pacific country’ (UU114 Assignment Schedule 2012). In the third essay, students had a choice: they could either write a compare/contrast essay where similarities and differences between two issues were to be presented, or a causal analysis essay where causes and effects of a given issue were discussed. All essays required formal citation, using the Harvard System of referencing. The second type of formative assessment, the mid-semester test, required students to compile a bibliography list (this term was used interchangeably with *reference list*), write a summary and a critical evaluation of a short passage, and explain the meanings of a selected list of lexical resources used in the short passage.

#### **4.4.4 Q1 responses: beliefs about assessment at the beginning of the course**

In the first questionnaire, two items focused on assessment in the study and asked students to speculate about their confidence in writing the three essays and attempting the mid-semester test. Both items received similar results (the mean ratings

were 3.4 and 3.3 for each). Fifteen per cent of the respondents indicated that they were not at all confident in writing three essays. However, 49% chose higher confidence scales, with 24% saying they were very confident in producing the essays. Forty-five per cent of the respondents expressed high levels of confidence in their ability to accomplish the test requirements. Of these, 24% said that they were completely confident.

Table 4.7

*How Confident Are You About Writing Three 800-word Research Essays?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.4	15	7	29	25	24
Indo-Fijians (13)	4.1	0	8	15	38	38
Melanesians (42)	3.1	2	9	31	14	24
Micronesians (12)	3.0	17	8	33	42	0
Polynesians (13)	3.8	7	0	31	31	31

*Note.* 1 = not confident at all      5 = completely confident

Table 4.8

*How Confident Are You About Attempting a Bibliography and Reading Test?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.3	14	10	31	21	24
Indo-Fijians (13)	4.1	0	0	23	46	31
Melanesians (42)	3.2	21	9	28	9	31
Micronesians (12)	3.1	8	17	42	25	8
Polynesians (13)	3.2	7	15	38	31	7

*Note.* 1 = not confident at all      5 = completely confident

While the number of participants who said that they had either no or low confidence in attempting the test was lower than for the higher confidence ratings, it is nonetheless worth noting that four out of six Kiribati students (part of the Micronesian group) expressed no or low confidence. Similarly, nine out of 22 Solomon Islanders

were unconfident. Moreover, at least 31% of the respondents had moderate levels of confidence. This implies that a significant number of students were not sure about whether they had confidence or not in accomplishing the coursework component of the course. Further, the overall 15% and 14% no confidence ratings respectively for the two items suggest that a small group of students lacked confidence in dealing with the assessment requirements. This suggests that it is vital that the needs of these individuals be considered.

A large proportion of Indo-Fijians (with a mean score of 4.1 for both) said that they were highly confident that they could write the essays and successfully attempt the test. For the three broad Pacific groups, between seven and 21% suggested that they were not confident with either of the assessment tasks, with Melanesians being the highest in both questions, at 21%. This suggests that perhaps some strategies may be needed to boost the confidence of students from the Pacific nations, especially those from Melanesia.

#### 4.4.5 Q2 responses: beliefs about assessment towards the end of the course

Table 4.9

*How Difficult Was It For You to Accomplish the Three 800-Word Research Essay Assignments?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Difficulty Ratings (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (65)	2.7	17	24	33	17	8
Indo-Fijians (13)	3	17	17	33	17	17
Melanesians (34)	2.6	24	26	26	18	6
Micronesians (9)	2.8	0	22	44	11	11
Polynesians (9)	2.8	11	22	44	22	0

*Note.* 1 = not at all difficult      5 = very difficult

Table 4.10

*How Difficult Was It for You to Complete the Bibliography and Reading Test?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Difficulty Ratings (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (65)	2.7	11	32	40	13	5
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.8	8	33	33	25	0
Melanesians (34)	2.4	18	35	38	6	3
Micronesians (9)	2.8	0	33	33	0	22
Polynesians (9)	3.2	0	11	56	33	0

*Note.* 1 = not at all difficult      5 = very difficult

By the end of the course, the number of respondents who did not feel confident at all dropped by almost 50%, suggesting that writing the essays and attempting the test was not very difficult for half of those who did not have any confidence in the beginning. There was also a tendency for respondents to indicate moderate levels of difficulty, with at least 40% finding the bibliography and reading test neither very difficult nor easy.

Among the four broad groups, 34% of Indo-Fijians said that they found the essays difficult to write, while 22% of Micronesians and Polynesians indicated likewise. A greater proportion of the Melanesians said they had no trouble at all writing the essays (24%), while a further 26% said that they only experienced very minor difficulties. In terms of the bibliography and reading test, 33% of the Polynesians and only 9% of the Melanesians found it difficult. Most of the participants had moderate difficulty with the test in each group.

#### **4.5 Academic Research Skills**

Research involves the ability to retrieve information relevant to a topic, identify the most pertinent ideas and incorporate and communicate this externally acquired information in a convincing manner. Closely associated with this is what Johnston and

Webber (2003, p. 336) call information literacy, which is ‘the adoption of appropriate information behaviour to obtain, through whatever channel or medium, information well fitted to information needs, together with critical awareness of the importance of wise and ethical use of information in society’.

Information literacy is a skill that most Pacific students are not exposed to much, if at all, in their pre-university life. There are various reasons for this: lack of appropriate resources to use in research, research not encouraged by the assignments given by teachers, research not explicitly stimulated by teachers, or there may be no culture of the practice in the general community. A further reason could be that in some places, accessible information is limited. Those who do have an understanding of what research entails may be unaware of the conventions required when using researched material.

In her paper reflecting on her professional journey as a teacher at the USP, Koya (2005, p. 14) highlights the common misconception that her students often have with researching and referencing:

In assignments, some students believe that the quality of written work is dependent on the number of direct quotes they present. In some extreme cases, students provide a series of quotes without any real discussion. In other papers, students ... may attempt to discuss the materials read but do so by providing even more citations.

These observations demonstrate students’ lack of confidence: they deem it necessary to incorporate into their own work a large volume of other writers’ ideas. The EAP teacher is thus presented with the daunting task of not only teaching how to research, but also how to use the information acquired in the most ethical and convincing manner. For the student, both of these areas may present additional challenges. The two questionnaires

administered at two separate points in the course asked participants to rate their confidence in various research requirements: from needing help with conducting research, to incorporating materials into their writings.

#### 4.5.4 Q1 responses: beliefs about research skills at the beginning of the course

The majority of participants believed at the beginning of the course that they would need a good amount of help in conducting research for their assignments (see Table 4.11 below). Twenty-six per cent expressed needing a great deal of help, and a further 28% moderate levels of help. Only 9% were highly confident that they could do research without any assistance.

Table 4.11

*How Much Help Do You Need in Conducting Research?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (80)	4	9	13	28	25	26
Indo-Fijians (13)	3	23	8	46	8	15
Melanesians (42)	3.7	5	14	17	31	33
Micronesians (12)	3.3	0	8	58	25	8
Polynesians (13)	3.4	15	15	15	23	31

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

The Melanesians and Polynesians expressed requiring more help, while most Indo-Fijians (46%) and Micronesians (58%) stated needing moderate help. At least 23% of Indo-Fijian participants had full confidence in their ability to conduct research without any help. The initial results indicate that USP teachers may need to gauge the research experience of their students and provide some form of confidence boost to encourage them to positively engage in this vital academic activity, and find ways of increasing their aptitude for the process.

Table 4.12

*How Much Help Do You Need with Referencing?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.6	8	9	24	29	30
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.2	23	15	8	23	31
Melanesians (42)	3.7	7	5	21	36	28
Micronesians (12)	3.5	0	8	50	25	17
Polynesians (13)	3.9	0	15	23	15	46

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

Being new to the area of referencing, most students conceded that they required a good deal of assistance in completing citations accurately. At least 30% selected the ‘a lot of help needed’ option. While 24% had moderate confidence, only 8% said that no help was needed. Among the four cultural groups, the Micronesian group was the only atypical one. While most of the students from other groups indicated needing considerable help with referencing, 50% of the Micronesians suggested requiring moderate assistance. However, the mean values for all the groups were between 3.2 and 3.9.

Most participants were either moderately confident or highly self-assured of using materials from other sources in their writing and referencing these accurately (see Table 4.13). While some 36% expressed moderate confidence levels in this area, 34% chose higher confidence scales with at least 14% being very confident. About 11% said they were not confident at all.

Table 4.13

*How Confident Are You Incorporating Materials from Other Sources into Your Writing and Referencing Them Accurately?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.1	11	19	36	20	14
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.6	8	38	38	31	23
Melanesians (42)	3.1	12	17	33	21	17
Micronesians (12)	2.9	8	33	25	25	8
Polynesians (13)	2.4	15	31	54	0	0

*Note.* 1 = not confident

5 = completely confident

Indo-Fijians typically rated higher levels of confidence than other groups, at 54%. However, 38% showed very little confidence. None of the Polynesian students chose any of the high confidence options. Fifty-four per cent were moderately confident, 31% had very little confidence, and 15% were not confident at all. This group also had the lowest mean, at 2.4. Only 33% of Micronesians and 38% of Melanesians displayed higher confidence than other groups in selecting materials from readings and using them with accurate citations in their assignments.



Table 4.14

*How Confident Will You Be at Preparing In-text Citations and Bibliography Entries Towards the End of the Course?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.9	4	6	19	38	34
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.9	8	0	23	31	38
Melanesians (42)	4.1	0	7	14	36	43
Micronesians (12)	3.3	17	8	17	50	8
Polynesians (13)	3.8	0	7	31	38	23

*Note.* 1 = not confident

5 = completely confident

The majority of participants expressed high confidence in being able to accurately cite sources in their assignments and compile reference lists. Of the 72% who suggested high confidence, 34% were very confident. Only 4% said that they were not confident at all, and 17% of these were Micronesians. Over 50% in each cultural group conveyed high confidence. Thirty-one per cent of Polynesians had moderate levels of confidence. These results suggest that most of the participants had a significant level of trust in the course and possibly in themselves, believing that their research and referencing skills would improve. This is a positive outcome as it implies that at least the participants of this study have a confident outlook on the course.

Table 4.15

*How Much Library Research Will You Need to Do in Your Other Courses?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	4	4	6	14	19	54
Indo-Fijians (13)	4.6	0	0	8	23	69
Melanesians (42)	3.8	7	5	9	19	52
Micronesians (12)	4.2	0	8	17	25	50
Polynesians (13)	3.8	0	15	31	7	46

*Note.* 1 = none

5 = a great deal

Undertaking library research plays an important role in students' success at university. This has been confirmed by the results of this survey, with 54% suggesting that they anticipate doing a considerable amount of library research in their other courses. All cultural groups echoed this view. Thirty-one per cent of Polynesians indicated the possibility of doing a moderate amount of research in their other courses.

Table 4.16

*How Much Referencing Work Will You Do in Your Other Courses?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	4.1	5	6	11	16	59
Indo-Fijians (13)	4.8	0	0	0	23	77
Melanesians (42)	4	5	9	12	9	60
Micronesians (12)	4	17	0	8	17	58
Polynesians (13)	4	0	7	23	31	38

*Note.* 1 = none

5 = a great deal

At the beginning of the course, most participants expected to do 'a great deal' of referencing in their courses. A high 59% selected this category. In-text citations and preparing bibliographical entries are closely associated with research. Thus, it is logical that if a large number of research activities in other courses are expected, there will also be higher expectations about referencing. Among the cultural groups, most participants

stated having to do a large amount of referencing in their assignments in other courses, although a good number of Polynesians (23%) stated having to do a moderate amount of referencing.

#### 4.5.5 Q2 responses: beliefs about research skills towards the end of the course

Table 4.17

*Now That You Have Almost Finished the Course, How Much Help Do You Still Need Conducting Research?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (65)	3	13	22	24	22	17
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.9	17	33	17	8	25
Melanesians (34)	2.9	15	21	18	24	18
Micronesians (9)	3.1	11	11	33	44	0
Polynesians (9)	3.3	0	22	44	11	22

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

The responses of the participants were dispersed. At least 39% thought that they still needed a substantial amount of help with research, even though they had almost completed the course. Thirteen per cent were confident that the course had given them enough practice and knowledge in this area, and a further 22% thought that they needed very little help with conducting research. Twenty-four per cent needed a moderate level of help. A higher percentage (44%) of Micronesians were sceptical about their research abilities and believed that they needed quite a bit of help. Most of the Polynesians were moderately confident. Indo-Fijians appeared the most confident group, with 17% not requiring any form of assistance, and another 33% needing very little assistance, although the mean values for Indo-Fijian and Melanesian students were the same at 2.9. In comparison with data from Q1, there was a clear general shift towards needing less

help, although it was not a major shift. Overall, the percentage of students requiring a substantial amount of help dropped from 51% to 39%.

Table 4.18

*How Much Help Do You Still Need with Referencing?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	2.9	11	30	21	25	11
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.2	8	25	25	25	17
Melanesians (34)	2.8	15	26	15	26	12
Micronesians (9)	2.8	11	33	22	33	0
Polynesians (9)	2.9	0	44	33	11	11

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

When students were asked how much help they needed with referencing after having almost completed the course, the survey responses were well distributed across the scales. The numbers on either sides of the continuum are significant. While some 41% expressed high levels of confidence in being able to handle referencing well, 36% were doubtful and had asked for more help. The three Pacific Island groups (Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian) were more confident (41–44%) in their ability to complete in-text citations than their Indo-Fijian counterparts (33%).

Table 4.19

*Now That You Have Almost Finished the Course, How Confident Are You Incorporating Materials from Other Sources into Your Writing, and Referencing Them Accurately?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Confidence Ratings (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (65)	3	8	13	40	30	6
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.2	8	8	50	25	8
Melanesians (34)	3.1	3	15	32	35	9
Micronesians (9)	2.4	11	22	33	22	0
Polynesians (9)	2.8	22	0	56	22	0

Note. 1 = not confident

5 = completely confident

There was a general tendency (the mean score was 3) to have higher confidence in extracting information from external sources and using them in writing after the course was almost completed. Forty-four per cent of Melanesian students expressed higher confidence than other groups. While most Indo-Fijians (50%) and Polynesians (56%) had moderate confidence, the Micronesian group was less confident at 33%.

Table 4.20

*How Well Has the Course Prepared You to Complete In-text Citations and Bibliographies?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (65)	3.3	6	16	33	25	19
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.5	8	8	33	25	25
Melanesians (34)	3.2	9	15	32	21	21
Micronesians (9)	3.2	0	22	33	44	0
Polynesians (9)	3.4	0	22	33	22	22

Note. 1 = not prepared at all

5 = fully prepared

Despite most students still needing more help with research and referencing, 44% were satisfied that the course had prepared them well to complete in-text citations and bibliographies. Thirty-three per cent had moderate confidence, while 22%

expressed not being prepared enough. While the majority (over 40% in each) in each cultural group was positive about the course's attention to referencing and bibliography skills, a significant number (32–33%) in each said they were moderately prepared to deal with citations and reference lists.

## **4.6 Reading Skills**

The questionnaires administered to the participants contained several items aimed at eliciting learner beliefs on reading. These included investigating opinions on finding specific information in the text and understanding the main points, reading speed and general confidence in reading academic texts.

Reading academic texts can be a laborious and monotonous task for some students. Such texts can even be incomprehensible if the reader's language abilities and reading skills are weak. Writers of academic English courses can be aware of this problem, and often incorporate reading sessions into their courses. Out of many reading techniques available to teachers, three are often used in reading classes: scanning, skimming and active reading. Scanning involves looking through a text very quickly, in search of specific information such as a date. Skimming is similar but not as quick, as it involves reading full sentences (often the first sentence of all paragraphs). Active reading is when the reader highlights information in the text and makes notes. Various scholars have created special reading programs to help readers achieve their goal. Reading methods like SQ3R: Survey-Question-Read-Recite-Review (Robinson, 1946) and David Rose's (2005) 'Learning to read: reading to learn', among others, have been developed to assist learners in reading better. Rose's method is used to teach reading to students of academic English at the USP.

#### 4.6.4 Q1 responses: beliefs about reading skills at the beginning of the course

Table 4.21

*How Much Help Do You Need with Reading a Text Quickly to Understand Its General Meaning?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (80)	3.2	18	18	21	16	28
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.5	38	15	15	15	15
Melanesians (42)	3.3	14	19	21	12	33
Micronesians (12)	3.4	8	25	17	17	33
Polynesians (13)	3.2	15	7	31	31	15

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

Most participants believed at the beginning of the course that they lacked confidence in reading a text quickly to get its general meaning, although a significant minority did express the belief that they required no help or very little help. Some 44% of the participants were not confident about this, with at least 28% expressing a complete lack of confidence. Conversely, 18% said that they did not think they would need any help as they were highly confident, with another 18% stating the need for very little assistance. Among the four cultural groups, the Indo-Fijian group appeared the most confident (with a mean score of 2.5). Most Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian participants suggested that they needed a substantial amount of help in understanding the general meaning of a text. The mean values for these groups were between 3.2 and 3.4. Understanding the essence of a text is useful because it allows one to make sense of the supporting details that may be presented in the remainder of the text.

Table 4.22

*How Much Help Do You Need Understanding the Main Points of a Text?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.2	14	18	24	24	21
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.5	38	8	31	15	8
Melanesians (42)	3.3	9	24	17	25	24
Micronesians (12)	3.4	8	8	33	33	17
Polynesians (13)	3.5	7	15	31	31	15

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

While a majority of the participants at the beginning of the course believed that they would need substantial help in comprehending the main meaning of academic texts (45%), about one-third (32%) also stated little to no help was required. Fourteen per cent were confident that they would be able to deal with academic texts without assistance, and a further 18% opted for requiring very little help. The mean values for Melanesians, Micronesians and Polynesians were between 3.3 and 3.5, suggesting a general tendency towards requiring moderate help. The Indo-Fijian group appeared the most confident, with a mean score of 2.5. Understanding the main points of an academic text is essential because it will allow the formulation of ideas in writing, for instance, and will provide a good grounding in argumentation.



Table 4.23

*How Much Help Do You Need Improving Your Reading Speed?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.1	23	20	14	18	26
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.8	31	23	8	15	23
Melanesians (42)	3.1	24	17	14	19	26
Micronesians (12)	3.8	8	17	8	17	50
Polynesians (13)	2.5	23	31	23	15	7

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

At the beginning of the course, needing help improving reading speed generated a varied set of opinions. Forty-four per cent of participants were not confident with their reading speed, while 43% expressed higher levels of confidence. Most of the Indo-Fijian (54%) and Polynesian participants (54%) expressed high levels of confidence, suggesting very little to no help needed in improving reading speeds. While Melanesians were fairly divided across the scale, the Micronesian students' mean score was 3.8, suggesting an inclination towards requiring more help.

Table 4.24

*How Confident Are You Reading Textbooks and Making Useful Notes?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.7	6	8	23	34	30
Indo-Fijians (13)	4.2	8	0	8	31	54
Melanesians (42)	3.6	9	5	31	28	26
Micronesians (12)	3.8	0	17	17	42	25
Polynesians (13)	3.8	0	15	15	46	23

*Note.* 1 = not confident 5 = completely confident

At the beginning of the course, almost two-thirds of students (64%) articulated that they were highly confident reading textbooks and making useful notes. Only 6% indicated that they were not confident. This pattern was evident among all four broad

cultural groups. Fifty-four per cent of Indo-Fijian participants said that they were highly confident in achieving this task. The mean scores ranged from 3.6 (Melanesians) to 4.2 (Indo-Fijians).

Table 4.25

*How Confident Will You Be Reading Academic Materials with Ease Towards the End of this Course?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Confidence Ratings (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (80)	4	5	3	10	40	41
Indo-Fijians (13)	4.5	0	0	0	46	54
Melanesians (42)	4.1	5	5	7	31	50
Micronesians (12)	3.6	17	0	8	58	17
Polynesians (13)	3.9	0	0	31	46	23

*Note.* 1 = not confident    5 = completely confident

Apart from a small group of Micronesians (17%), most participants had high expectations that the course would improve their academic reading skills. Some 41% said they were very confident that the course would help them achieve this goal, while another 40% said they were highly confident. All cultural groups expressed high confidence, with at least 50% of Indo-Fijian and Melanesian groups selecting the ‘completely confident about this’ option. Those who do not live in large cities may have limited access to reading materials. A study on the reading culture of Pacific peoples will provide helpful insights into this important academic task.

Table 4.26

*How Much Academic Reading Are You Expecting to Do in Your Other Courses?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	4	8	4	15	19	53
Indo-Fijians (13)	4.2	8	8	15	0	69
Melanesians (42)	3.8	9	0	21	17	47
Micronesians (12)	4.0	8	8	0	42	42
Polynesians (13)	4.4	0	7	7	23	62

*Note.* 1 = none

5 = a great deal

The bulk of participants felt that reading academic texts would form a major part of the study requirements in their other courses (subjects) at the university, with at least 53% anticipating ‘a great deal’ of reading. Another 19% said that they expected a significant amount of reading. This pattern was observed among all the cultural groups: 69% of Indo-Fijians, 64% of Melanesians, 84% of Micronesians and 85% of Polynesians. Some 8 to 9% of participants did not expect any academic reading in their other courses, a naïve belief. As previously mentioned, academic reading is an important component of any EAP program, and this stipulation can be found in UU114’s course outline. Teachers also emphasise the importance of reading at university. Thus, it is natural for students of academic English who do not have a major reading habit to have inordinate hopes from an EAP course.

#### 4.6.5 Q2 responses: beliefs about reading skills towards the end of the course

Table 4.27

*Now That You Have Almost Finished the Course, How Much Help Do You Still Need with Reading a Text Quickly to Understand its General Meaning?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (65)	2.8	10	27	38	16	8
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.2	25	50	8	17	0
Melanesians (34)	2.7	9	29	32	9	15
Micronesians (9)	3.2	0	11	56	33	0
Polynesians (9)	3.2	0	0	78	22	0

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

In terms of understanding the general meaning of an academic text, a positive trend was noticed. Where initially a large number of participants expressed needing a significant amount of help with this, at the end of the course, most had shifted their opinion towards requiring moderate help. This indicates that for these participants, there may have been some progress in this area even though they had moved from requiring a significant level of help to requiring a moderate level of help. Indo-Fijian participants showed the greatest shift. In the beginning, 15% said that they needed little help with reading a text quickly. Towards the end, this number increased to 50%. Most participants from other cultural groups stated needing moderate levels of help.

Table 4.28

*How Much Help Do You Still Need in Understanding the Main Points of a Text?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	2.8	11	30	27	19	11
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.4	33	25	17	17	8
Melanesians (34)	2.9	6	35	18	21	15
Micronesians (9)	3.2	0	22	44	22	11
Polynesians (9)	2.7	11	22	56	11	0

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

Towards the end of the course, some 15% of respondents shifted from needing a significant amount of help to needing less assistance with understanding the main ideas in an academic text. While this is not a major shift, it is nonetheless a positive indication that at least some of the participants' confidence increased in this reading skill. Among the Indo-Fijians, close to 50% of those who initially needed moderate help shifted towards requiring less assistance. About one-third of students stated that they did not need any help at all. Among the Melanesians there was a minor positive shift: the percentage of those needing only some help increased from 24% to 35%. More Micronesians and Polynesians expressed needing moderate help: from 33% to 44%, and 31% to 56%, respectively.

Table 4.29

*How Much Help Do You Still Need in Improving Your Reading Speed?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	2.4	24	22	37	11	3
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.2	33	33	17	17	0
Melanesians (34)	2.3	26	21	29	12	6
Micronesians (9)	3	0	11	78	11	0
Polynesians (9)	2	22	22	44	0	0

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

The overall mean score of 2.4 indicates that participants had high confidence in their reading speed. Initially, 44% stated needing a significant amount of help. This number dropped to 14%, while the percentage of those who were moderately confident rose from 14% to 37%. Clearly, the students had been exposed to some reading techniques in the course, and were presented with opportunities to practise these techniques in concurrent courses. The greatest change was observed among the Micronesian participants' ratings. Initially, some 50% said they needed a substantial amount of help. This number fell to zero as more participants shifted towards the middle section of the scale (78%). The other cultural groups showed minor positive shifts.

Table 4.30

*How Confident Are You Reading Textbooks and Making Useful Notes Now That You Have Almost Finished the Course?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	3.5	2	13	19	49	14
Indo-Fijians (13)	4.2	0	8	0	58	33
Melanesians (34)	3.4	3	9	24	47	12
Micronesians (9)	2.4	0	44	22	22	0
Polynesians (9)	3.9	0	0	22	67	11

*Note.* 1 = not confident    5 = completely confident

Most participants were highly confident that the course had helped them become better at reading textbooks and making useful notes, although no major shifts were noticed. While some 30% had initially felt that they would be very confident at the end of the course, this number decreased to 14% as more shifted towards being highly confident. Apart from the Micronesian group, the other cultural groups showed similar trends: most were highly positive that the course had made them better at extracting good notes from their readings. More Micronesians shifted negatively, as 44% expressed having little confidence in their reading abilities. With an overall mean score of 2.4, this group appeared to be the least confident. Initially, 67% of Micronesians had expected to gain higher confidence in this skill.

Table 4.31

*How Well Has the Course Prepared You to Read Academic Materials with Ease?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (65)	3.6	8	8	29	32	24
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.8	8	0	25	42	25
Melanesians (34)	3.7	6	3	26	29	32
Micronesians (9)	2.9	11	11	56	22	0
Polynesians (9)	3	11	33	11	33	11

*Note.* 1 = not prepared at all      5 = fully prepared

While most participants initially stated very high confidence in the course improving their reading skills and preparing them to read academic texts with ease, at least 27% of the respondents shifted conversely. However, the majority were quite positive: 32% said they were well prepared, and 24% said they were ‘fully prepared’ to read academic texts. The majority of Indo-Fijians (67%) were highly confident in their academic reading skills. A similar trend was also observed in the Melanesian participants. While the majority were highly confident (61%), 26% stated being moderately prepared, a figure that increased from 7% in the first questionnaire. In comparison to Q1 responses, more Micronesians and Polynesians indicated they were less prepared. Fifty-six per cent of Micronesians stated being moderately prepared (this was 8% at the beginning of the course), while 44% of Polynesians rated very low confidence (this figure was only 7% in the first questionnaire’s results). Overall, among the four groups, Indo-Fijians were the most confident (3.8) and Micronesians the least (2.9).

#### **4.7 Writing Skills**

The ability to think critically about issues and express related arguments are some of the expectations of university students. Critical literacy, according to



McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004, p. 52) ‘helps ... students expand their reasoning, seek out multiple perspectives, and become active thinkers’. Knowing how to present written arguments is a vital asset in tertiary study, and in recognising the importance of this, many universities have set up special writing courses that aim to help students develop writing skills (such as Purdue University’s ‘Online Writing Lab’). In a needs analysis study conducted by Green and Sameer (2006) at the USP, two critical findings emerged within the local context:

- i. most USP assignments required students to produce formal pieces of writing, usually in the form of essays; and
- ii. most students indicated in the evaluation forms for the EAP course that they needed more assistance in writing.

These discoveries led to a complete revision of the existing EAP course at the time, with the revised version incorporating a heavy emphasis on writing (Green & Sameer 2006).

The questionnaires in this study included a number of questions that sought to identify the participants’ assessment of their writing skills. These questions ranged from asking about confidence in writing paragraphs, to developing ideas and putting paragraphs together to form larger essays. Students were also asked about meeting word limit requirements.

#### 4.7.4 Q1 responses: beliefs about writing skills at the beginning of the course

Table 4.32

*How Much Help Do You Need with Writing Clear Paragraphs?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (80)	3.6	8	11	31	19	31
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.8	15	8	69	0	8
Melanesians (42)	3.9	7	9	17	24	43
Micronesians (12)	3.2	8	25	33	8	25
Polynesians (13)	3.7	0	7	38	31	23

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

A large proportion of the participants (50%) believed at the beginning of the course that they needed a substantial amount of help writing clear paragraphs, with 31% wanting the maximum possible help. However, another 31% were moderately confident about how much help they needed. The majority of Melanesians and Polynesians asked for greater levels of assistance, while most Indo-Fijians (69%) were moderately confident. The Micronesian participants' responses were dispersed along the scales.

Table 4.33

*How Much Help Do You Need Completing a Long Essay?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (80)	4	8	8	21	30	33
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.9	15	15	38	23	8
Melanesians (42)	4	7	2	7	38	43
Micronesians (12)	3.3	8	8	50	17	17
Polynesians (13)	3.9	0	15	23	23	38

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

Most participants suggested that they needed a significant amount of help writing longer essays. This was recorded at 63%. Eighty-one per cent of the Melanesian group thought that they needed such help, while 61% of Polynesians expressed similar

concerns. Most Indo-Fijians (38%) and Micronesians (50%) were moderately confident about how much help they needed with completing an essay. In comparison to other groups, which ranged between 9 and 15%, Indo-Fijian participants were more confident in their essay writing skills, as 30% suggested needing very little to no help at all. Their mean of 2.9 was also the lowest among all groups. This difference is important. One explanation for this could be that schools in Fiji emphasise expository type essay writing, especially in senior secondary years (Khan & Mugler 2001). However, by comparison, most indigenous Fijians (I-Taukei), part of the Melanesian group for the purposes of this study, had very low confidence in their ability to write essays. Further studies examining this difference between Indo-Fijians and indigenous Fijians may be more revealing, as this may reflect further cultural differences.

Table 4.34

*How Much Help Do You Need Developing Ideas?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.5	10	14	24	19	34
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.9	8	38	23	15	15
Melanesians (42)	3.6	17	7	14	21	40
Micronesians (12)	3.5	0	17	42	17	25
Polynesians (13)	3.8	0	7	38	15	38

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

A large number of respondents indicated needing varying levels of help in developing ideas. A significant 53% expressed being weak at supporting arguments in their essays. However, some 24% had high levels of confidence, and a further 24% were moderately confident about this. A large number of Indo-Fijians (46%) said that they needed very little to no help with this, while most Polynesians (53%) and Melanesians

(61%) requested more assistance. A significant number of Micronesians (42%) asked for more help, although a further 42% were moderately confident.

Table 4.35

*How Much Help Do You Need Meeting the Word Limit of Essays?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.3	15	13	23	25	25
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.5	31	23	23	8	15
Melanesians (42)	3.6	12	9	14	33	31
Micronesians (12)	3.3	8	8	50	17	17
Polynesians (13)	3.2	15	15	23	23	23

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

Half the sample population stated requiring major assistance meeting the word limit of essays in the EAP course. This is of interest because such essays are only required to be 600 to 800 words long. However, most secondary schools do not require their students to write more than 250 words at a time (Khan & Mugler 2001). For some newly enrolled tertiary students, writing 600 to 800 words might initially be quite challenging. While most Indo-Fijians (54%) expressed high confidence in being able to meet the word limit, most Melanesians (64%) and a good number of Polynesians (46%) said they needed a substantial amount of help. Fifty per cent of Micronesian participants were moderately confident about meeting the word limit.

Table 4.36

*How Confident Are You Writing Essays in English?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3	9	10	25	39	18
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.5	15	0	31	23	31
Melanesians (42)	3.5	5	12	26	40	17
Micronesians (12)	3.5	8	17	8	50	17
Polynesians (13)	3.2	15	7	31	38	7

*Note.* 1 = not confident    5 = completely confident

The majority of respondents (57%) expressed high confidence in being able to write essays in English. This may stem from their experience writing many short essays in secondary school—the Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate English curriculum, offered to students in Tonga, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Nauru, states that students are expected to write between 200 and 300 words (Secretariat of the Pacific Board for Educational Assessment 2011). While the mean scores among all groups ranged between 3.2 and 3.5, 25% of the Micronesian participants displayed less confidence writing essays in English.

Table 4.37

*How Confident Will You Be Writing Academic Essays without Difficulty Towards the End of the Course?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	4.1	4	4	14	40	39
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.9	8	0	15	46	31
Melanesians (42)	4.1	2	7	12	33	45
Micronesians (12)	3.8	8	0	17	50	25
Polynesians (13)	4.2	0	0	15	46	38

*Note.* 1 = not confident 5 = completely confident

An overwhelming majority of participants believed the course would greatly enhance their essay writing skills. Seventy-nine per cent of participants appeared to have a positive perception of the course. Fourteen per cent were moderately confident, and 8% reported a lack of confidence. Similar trends were noticed among all cultural groups, with high confidence rates ranging from 75% to 84%.

Table 4.38

*How Many Essays Are You Required to Write in Your Other Courses?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	2.8	26	14	21	20	16
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.2	46	15	8	31	0
Melanesians (42)	2.8	26	14	17	19	19
Micronesians (12)	3.1	8	25	33	17	17
Polynesians (13)	3.2	23	0	38	15	23

*Note.* 1 = none 5 = a great deal

When asked how many essays they were expected to write in their other courses, no clear pattern emerged, as participants towards both ends of the scale were similar in number: 40% indicated that they might write a few essays or none at all, while 36%

expected to write quite a few essays. Twenty-six per cent were certain that they would not have to write any essays in other courses. The mean scores, however, suggest that the Indo-Fijian students, with a score of 2.2, expected to write fewer essays than students from other cultures.

Table 4.39

*How Much Report Writing Will You Do in Your Other Courses?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (80)	4	11	8	25	19	35
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.8	15	0	31	0	54
Melanesians (42)	3.5	9	7	26	19	33
Micronesians (12)	3.2	17	17	17	33	17
Polynesians (13)	3.8	7	7	23	23	38

*Note.* 1 = none    5 = a great deal

Most participants (54%) expected to write a number of reports in their other courses. Thirty-five per cent believed they would be required to submit many reports in other courses. A further 11% indicated not needing to write any reports. These figures indicate the importance of teaching text-types in EAP courses, and how useful these would be to the students.

#### **4.7.5 Q2 response: beliefs about writing skills towards the end of the course**

A number of participants indicated that their paragraphing skills had improved, as a positive shift was observed in the results for this question (see Table 4.40 below). In the beginning, 50% wanted help; however this dropped to just 31% at the end of the course. Conversely, those who said they needed less assistance increased from 19% to 37%. This implies that the course had a positive impact on these students' paragraphing skills. All cultural groups showed varying degrees of positive shift. Despite this, 44% of Polynesians, 39% of Melanesians and 25% of Indo-Fijians were sceptical and called for

higher levels of help. These numbers indicate that a significant number of students need further assistance developing their writing skills at the conclusion of the EAP course.

Table 4.40

*Now that You Have Almost Finished the Course, How Much Help Do You Still Need with Writing Clear Paragraphs?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	2.9	10	27	29	14	17
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.9	8	33	33	8	17
Melanesians (34)	2.9	12	21	24	21	18
Micronesians (9)	2.4	11	33	56	0	0
Polynesians (9)	3.1	0	33	11	11	33

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

Table 4.41

*How Much Help Do You Still Need Completing a Long Essay?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	3	13	24	25	17	19
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.8	25	25	17	17	17
Melanesians (34)	2.9	12	24	24	12	24
Micronesians (9)	2.9	11	22	33	33	0
Polynesians (9)	3.4	0	22	33	22	22

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

Generally, there was a clear shift during the course towards needing less assistance with essay writing. Despite this, there was no clear majority. In the beginning, 63% indicated they needed a significant amount of help. This dropped to 36% at the end of the course. Conversely, those who needed little to no help rose from 16% to 37%. A similar shift was also observed among the Indo-Fijians and the Melanesians, but less so among the Micronesians and the Polynesians. Towards the end of the course, the number of participants who felt they needed considerable help was at



34% for Indo-Fijians, 36% for Melanesians, 33% for Micronesians and 44% for Polynesians, indicating that while a positive shift was generally observed, the number of students unconfident about writing essays was still significant towards the end of the course.

Table 4.42

*How Much Help Do You Still Need Developing Ideas?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	2.9	16	19	33	16	14
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.3	25	33	33	0	8
Melanesians (34)	2.7	18	24	24	12	18
Micronesians (9)	3.1	11	0	56	33	0
Polynesians (9)	3.8	0	0	44	33	22

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

A positive shift was observed with students' confidence in developing ideas. Those requiring more help decreased from 53% to 30%. The rates for requiring little or no assistance, and those who needed moderate help, increased slightly. This suggests that although more students had gained confidence in developing ideas, a large number (33%) stated needing moderate levels of assistance (30%). Among the cultural groups, Indo-Fijian participants were more confident about this than other groups (with a mean score of 2.3), while most Polynesians suggested having very little confidence (with a mean score of 3.8).

Table 4.43

*How Much Help Do You Still Need Meeting the Word Limit of Essays?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	2.4	25	27	25	14	6
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.3	33	33	17	8	8
Melanesians (34)	2.3	29	18	26	15	6
Micronesians (9)	2.3	22	33	33	1	0
Polynesians (9)	3	0	44	22	22	11

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

There was a clear shift among the participants who needed more help meeting the word limit of their EAP assignments. From an initial 50%, this figure dropped to 20%. Those who reported being highly confident increased from 28% to 52%. According to the course outline, the students would have written three essays by the time they completed the second questionnaire, and have composed a number of in-class writing activities. This suggests that their confidence in writing the required number of words may have been improved by the practice that the three essays provided. While all groups displayed positive trends, a significant number of Polynesian students (33%) suggested lack of confidence.

Table 4.44

*Now That You Have Almost Finished the Course, How Confident Are You Writing Essays in English?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	3.2	6	17	29	32	13
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.9	17	17	25	42	0
Melanesians (34)	3.3	3	18	24	29	21
Micronesians (9)	2.6	11	11	44	22	0
Polynesians (9)	3.3	0	22	33	33	11

*Note.* 1 = not confident about this 5 = completely confident about this

At the end of the course, most participants in all cultural groups were highly confident in being able to write essays in English. However, the number of Indo-Fijians who were not confident initially increased from 15% to 34%. While the results are encouraging, it is worrying to note that a larger number of Indo-Fijians had low confidence levels in their ability to write essays in English.

Table 4.45

*How Well Has the Course Prepared You to Write Academic Essays Without Difficulty?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	3.5	3	8	32	46	11
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.3	8	0	42	50	0
Melanesians (34)	3.7	3	3	26	44	21
Micronesians (9)	3.3	0	11	44	44	0
Polynesians (9)	3.1	0	33	22	44	0

*Note.* 1 = not prepared at all 5 = fully prepared

Over half of the survey population believed that the course had helped them write better academic essays. With 57% reporting that the course had prepared them well to write academic essays in future courses, there is a clear implication that the course was successful for a large number of the participants. While most participants

from the four cultural groups rated high confidence in being well prepared to write academic essays (44% to 61%), a significant number of Polynesians (33%) expressed low confidence. In addition, the percentage of respondents who were moderately confident was significantly higher in each group (26% to 44%).

#### **4.8 Vocabulary Skills**

Possessing academic vocabulary skills ensures the ability to use precise words to express arguments, as well as the ability to avoid the repetitive use of lexical items. To assist in the development of academic vocabulary in students, Coxhead (2001) designed a now widely used wordlist called the Academic Wordlist, which aims to provide the most common words found in academic texts. Nation (1995) has also contributed to the development of vocabulary studies, and is a well-known researcher in this field.

Several questionnaire items in the current study aimed to elicit learners' views and beliefs on vocabulary. These ranged from rating confidence in being able to use exact words to express oneself, to developing vocabulary pertinent to the field of study. The participants' ability to infer meanings of unfamiliar words without the use of a dictionary was also ascertained.

#### 4.8.4 Q1 responses: beliefs about vocabulary skills at the beginning of the course

Table 4.46

*How Much Help Do You Need in Acquiring the Right Word to Express Yourself Clearly?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (80)	3.4	16	8	24	19	33
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.2	8	8	38	15	23
Melanesians (42)	3.6	17	7	17	19	40
Micronesians (12)	3.1	17	8	42	17	17
Polynesians (13)	3.3	23	7	15	23	31

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

At the beginning of the course, a little over half the sample population (54%) believed that they needed a substantial amount of help identifying precise words to express themselves. Similar percentages of Indo-Fijians were divided between being moderately confident and needing help (38% for both). Fifty-nine per cent of Melanesians needed higher levels of help, with 40% of these indicating ‘a lot of help needed’. Most Micronesians (42%) had moderate levels of confidence, although 34% indicated higher levels of help were needed. While 54% of Polynesians identified a need for assistance, 23% also felt that their vocabulary skills were sufficient and that they did not need any further support.

Table 4.47

*How Much Help Do You Need Inferring the Meanings of Unknown Words in a Text?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3	15	16	26	21	21
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.5	31	15	38	8	8
Melanesians (42)	3.3	12	14	28	21	24
Micronesians (12)	3.5	8	17	17	33	25
Polynesians (13)	3.2	15	23	15	23	23

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

In terms of needing assistance with working out meanings of words from context, the participants' responses were dispersed across the scales. Although 42% suggested needing more support, 31% said they needed very little or no help at all. A further 26% identified as moderately independent in this skill. The cultural groups did not reflect any consistent pattern. While most Indo-Fijians said that they either needed very little help or no help at all (46%), and a further 38% were moderately confident, a higher percentage of students from other cultural groups expressed a general tendency to require more assistance.

Table 4.48

*How Much Help Do You Need Learning Vocabulary Relevant to Your Major Area of Study (e.g. Economics)?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.3	16	16	18	21	29
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.5	38	8	23	23	8
Melanesians (42)	3.5	14	12	19	21	33
Micronesians (12)	3.7	8	25	0	25	42
Polynesians (13)	3.2	7	31	23	15	23

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

Most participants want and need to learn vocabulary pertinent to their field of study. For example, those who study science would like to learn words they are expected to use in their science assignments and classes. At least half of the survey population suggested this. Another 32% expressed high levels of confidence, with 16% needing no help in discipline-specific vocabulary development. A large number of Indo-Fijians (38%) felt that they did not need any help at all, and 31% of Polynesians expressed needing very little help. A large number of Melanesians (54%) and Micronesians (67%) said they needed more extensive help with the development of their vocabulary.

#### 4.8.5 Q2 responses: beliefs about vocabulary skills towards the end of the course

Table 4.49

*Now That You Have Almost Finished the Course, How Much Help Do You Still Need in Acquiring the Right Word to Express Yourself Clearly?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (65)	3.1	8	19	33	27	11
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.8	8	25	50	8	8
Melanesians (34)	2.9	9	21	26	26	12
Micronesians (9)	3.1	11	22	22	33	11
Polynesians (9)	3.7	0	0	44	44	11

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

A significant number of participants felt that they needed considerable help with using appropriate vocabulary. While 38% were in this category, a further 33% expressed needing moderate levels of help. Twenty-seven per cent expressed needing little to no help at all. Among the cultural groups, while most Indo-Fijians (50%) were moderately confident, most participants in the other cultural groups expressed needing more assistance. However, the numbers were not significantly higher, except for Polynesians. Fifty-five per cent of Polynesians indicated needing a substantial amount of help, while a further 44% were moderately confident. Their mean score was also relatively higher than other groups, at 3.7.



Table 4.50

*How Much Help Do You Still Need Inferring the Meanings of Unknown Words in a Text?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	2.8	6	32	29	16	13
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.6	8	58	8	17	8
Melanesians (34)	2.7	6	29	24	12	18
Micronesians (9)	3.2	0	22	44	22	11
Polynesians (9)	2.9	11	11	56	22	0

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

On whether they needed help inferring meaning of words from context, a significant number of respondents (38%) reported needing little to no help. Twenty-nine per cent indicated that they needed some help, while a further 29% were moderately confident. Among the cultural groups, most Indo-Fijian participants (66%) specified needing little to no help, while most Micronesians (44%) and Polynesians (56%) had moderate confidence. A significant number of Micronesians (33%) also expressed needing a large amount of help. The Melanesian students' responses were well dispersed across the scale.

Table 4.51

*How Much Help Do You Still Need in Learning Vocabulary Relevant to Your Major Area of Study (e.g. Economics)?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (65)	2.7	6	40	32	14	6
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.5	8	42	42	8	0
Melanesians (34)	2.7	6	38	24	18	9
Micronesians (9)	3.1	0	22	56	11	11
Polynesians (9)	2.3	11	56	22	11	0

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

Forty-six per cent of participants felt they did not need much help with learning vocabulary relevant to their field. A further 32% indicated moderate independence, with a high proportion of Micronesians (56%) in this category. A significantly higher number of Indo-Fijians (50%), and Polynesians (67%), and 44% of Melanesians were highly satisfied, requiring very little to no help with learning discipline-specific vocabulary.

#### 4.9 Grammar Skills

One of the first skills that students of any language (including English) learn is syntax, and often in very systematic ways. In English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in Australia, teachers engage in discussions about grammar points, such as labels for and the usage of key tenses (past perfect continuous, past continuous and so on). In the Pacific, students generally start learning to listen to, speak, read and write in English from as young as six years. By the time they arrive at university they would have learnt a number of grammatical features, and would have had extensive practice using these features. However, the level of exposure to the English language inside and between individual countries varies. For instance, people who live in Fiji's urban areas will have relatively more exposure to the English language than those who live in Kiribati, where

instruction in senior secondary schools is primarily in the local language. This is explored further in Chapter 6.

Not every student who studies at the USP would possess strong English grammar. In a typical EAP class, one would expect to find students with varying levels of grammatical competence. What makes this more challenging for the teacher, as well as the student, is that EAP classes do not teach grammar points per se. Teachers may comment on grammatical errors in students' writing, and common errors may be discussed briefly in class. The EAP program at the USP focuses more on the development of academic skills, and so the specific teaching of English grammar by focusing on grammar points is not scheduled in the course programme. However, if teachers feel that their students need a session on a grammar point then they will teach it.

The two questionnaires in this survey included a number of questions asking students to rate their confidence in their grammar and punctuation skills.

#### **4.9.4 Q1 responses: beliefs about grammar skills at the beginning of the course**

In Q1, four items related to respondents' views on their grammar and punctuation skills. This included commenting on punctuation, writing complex sentences and accuracy. Overall, a significant majority of the participants indicated low confidence in their use of punctuation and in writing complex sentences. However, they also believed that they had greater accuracy in writing sentences.

Table 4.52

*How Much Help Do You Need Using Correct Punctuation?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.2	18	13	23	20	26
Indo-Fijians (13)	3	31	8	38	0	23
Melanesians (42)	3	17	14	19	19	28
Micronesians (12)	3	17	17	17	33	17
Polynesians (13)	4	7	7	23	31	31

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

The study found that the participants generally lacked confidence in using punctuation correctly. The results from the initial questionnaire showed that a significant number (46%) of the respondents were not highly confident about their punctuation use, while a further 26% considered that they needed a significant amount of help with this. Twenty-three per cent of Indo-Fijians, 28% of Melanesians and 31% of Polynesians confessed a lack of confidence, and that they needed ‘a lot of help’ in improving this important skill. The mean score for Polynesians was a high four, indicating that this group was the least confident. Punctuation is often confused in students’ writings, and novice ESL writers often make numerous errors in their usage of commas, colons and periods. Bett (2010), for instance, found in an error analysis study that punctuation (and spelling) had the highest error rate.

Table 4.53

*How Much Help Do You Need Writing Complex Sentences?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.7	9	13	15	29	35
Indo-Fijians (13)	3	23	23	8	8	38
Melanesians (42)	4	7	9	9	33	40
Micronesians (12)	3	8	17	33	25	17
Polynesians (13)	4	0	7	23	38	31

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

Most respondents indicated needing a considerable amount of help writing complex sentences. Twenty-nine per cent indicated that they needed some help, while 35% indicated needing ‘a lot of help’. In terms of the four broad groups, Indo-Fijians seemed to have more confidence, with 23% suggesting that no help was needed. Seventy-three per cent of Melanesian respondents felt that they lacked confidence in this skill. Most of the Micronesians (33%) expressed needing moderate levels of help. In terms of mean scores, Melanesians and Polynesians were the least confident groups.

Being able to write complex sentences accurately is an important academic English skill. A complex sentence expresses a relationship between two or more complete thoughts. This relationship is expressed through the use of subordinating conjunctions such as ‘because’, ‘although’ and so on. Understanding the difference in meaning and use between all the possible subordinating conjunctions is not easy for all learners of English. It is thus understandable that most participants of the survey reported having low confidence.

Table 4.54

*How Confident Are You Writing Accurate Sentences in English?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.3	9	15	28	31	16
Indo-Fijians (13)	4	8	8	15	38	31
Melanesians (42)	3	9	14	36	26	12
Micronesians (12)	3.5	8	17	8	50	17
Polynesians (13)	3.2	7	23	31	23	15

*Note.* 1 = not confident    5 = completely confident

Most respondents rated high confidence in their ability to write accurate sentences in English. This was observed among all groups of participants. While 16% of all participants were completely confident, 31% were very confident. Only 9% said that they did not think they were confident, and this ranged between 7 and 9% between the cultural groups. Indo-Fijians and Micronesians rated higher levels of confidence. Most Melanesians and Polynesians possessed moderate confidence.

Table 4.55

*How Confident Will You Be of Your Ability to Write Grammatically Correct Sentences in English Towards the End of the Course?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	4.1	6	3	10	38	44
Indo-Fijians (13)	4.2	8	0	0	54	38
Melanesians (42)	4.2	7	2	9	28	52
Micronesians (12)	3.8	8	8	8	42	33
Polynesians (13)	4.1	0	0	23	46	31

*Note.* 1 = not confident    5 = completely confident

Most participants believed the course would help improve their English grammar skills, especially in writing. While 38% specified they were confident about this, a further 44% were very confident. This pattern was observed among all cultural

groups, with more than half of the Melanesian students being very confident. Only 6% of all participants were moderately confident about this, with about 7 to 8% per cent of Indo-Fijians, Melanesians and Micronesians falling into this category.

In summary, two learner beliefs about grammar skills emerged from this survey: (a) most participants were not confident in their grammar skills, and (b) thus believed that a course like EAP would help them in this respect. A number of factors can help explain why most students have a positive belief in the course's ability to improve their grammar skills. In the first instance, the course is called 'English for Academic Purposes', and inherently, this can be understood to mean that the course will teach English language skills.<sup>3</sup> Another reason why most students are optimistic about improving their grammar skills in an EAP course could be that in Pacific schools, 'English' is a school subject that deals with English grammar, reading comprehension, and varieties of English and literature. Hence, another common misconception is that a course that contains the word 'English' will do the same.

#### **4.9.5 Q2 responses: beliefs about grammar skills at the end of the course**

Most participants believed they did not need much further help using correct punctuation (see Table 4.56). While 35% needed help, 37% required very little help and 5% needed no help at all. In comparison to learners' beliefs about grammar skills in the first questionnaire, it is clear that towards the end of the course, their confidence shifted to a large extent, and they were more confident in using punctuation. This phenomenon was observed in all cultural groups. However, most Micronesians (56%) and a significant proportion of Polynesians (44%) were moderately confident. Initially, Indo-Fijians were the only ones who were highly confident in their use of punctuation.

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<sup>3</sup> In 2006, when I was lecturing in an introductory linguistics course, a student approached me and asked when we would address English grammar. She had assumed that because the course was called 'Introduction to Language Studies' that she would learn English grammar, and that would help improve her English sentences.

However, it is interesting to note that while initially 31% of Indo-Fijians did not think they needed any help with punctuation, none of them opted for ‘no help needed’ in Q2.

Table 4.56

*Now That You Have Almost Finished the Course, How Much Help Do You Still Need in Using Correct Punctuation?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	2.8	5	37	27	25	5
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.2	0	42	8	42	8
Melanesians (34)	2.7	6	38	21	24	6
Micronesians (9)	3	0	22	56	22	0
Polynesians (9)	2.6	11	33	44	11	0

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

The results thus indicate that there was a generally positive shift in students’ ideas about using punctuation in English. However, there was no clear pattern favouring any cultural group, suggesting that each group progressed similarly. This positive move may stem from the feedback that teachers gave on their students’ writing. In the teacher interviews, all teachers said that they try to focus on major grammatical errors in students’ writing, with the hope that the students will take note of them and endeavour not repeat those errors (Chapter 5 discusses this further).



Table 4.57

*How Much Help Do You Still Need Writing Complex Sentences?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	3.1	6	24	35	17	16
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.8	17	25	33	8	17
Melanesians (34)	3	6	26	26	12	24
Micronesians (9)	2.9	0	22	67	11	0
Polynesians (9)	3.4	0	11	33	56	0

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

No major pattern was noticed when students were asked towards the end of the course whether or not they were confident writing complex sentences. However, a minor shift was seen towards being more positive about it. In the first questionnaire, a large majority (64%) was not confident in their ability to write complex sentences. From 64%, the figure in the second questionnaire fell to 33%, with only 16% remaining highly apprehensive. Indo-Fijians' ratings for 'no help needed' dropped by about 50% (from 31% initially, to about 17%) implying that a number who had been highly confident realised that they needed some level of help. In all cases, most respondents shifted towards having moderate confidence. Fifty-six per cent of Polynesians felt that they still needed some help writing complex sentences.

Table 4.58

*Now That You Have Almost Finished the Course, How Confident Are You About Writing Accurate Sentences in English?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	3.2	6	14	37	24	16
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.5	8	17	17	33	25
Melanesians (34)	3.2	6	26	26	12	24
Micronesians (9)	2.3	11	11	67	0	0
Polynesians (9)	3.2	0	22	44	22	11

*Note.* 1 = not confident    5 = completely confident

In terms of beliefs about writing accurate sentences in English, 40% of the students rated high confidence, with a further 16% remaining very confident. In comparison to the earlier questionnaire results, this number dropped by only 7%. At best, beliefs about writing accurate sentences had shifted, but only slightly, towards lack of confidence, although a great majority still believed that they were highly confident. A small number of Indo-Fijians had lower confidence. Conversely, 12% of the Melanesians shifted towards being completely confident. Interestingly, the 67% of Micronesians who initially said they felt highly confident shifted towards having moderate confidence. None of them opted for any of the high confidence ratings in the second questionnaire.

Table 4.59

*How Well Has the Course Prepared You to Write Grammatically Correct Sentences in English?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (65)	3.5	5	6	38	38	13
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.3	8	8	33	42	8
Melanesians (34)	3.5	3	6	29	44	15
Micronesians (9)	3.2	11	0	56	22	11
Polynesians (9)	3.3	0	11	56	22	11

*Note.* 1 = not prepared at all      5 = fully prepared

Overall, a slight majority believed that the course improved their grammar skills. A total of 51% of all participants had higher ratings, indicating that the course had enabled them to write grammatically better sentences in English. Most of the Indo-Fijian and Melanesian participants thought highly of the course in this respect. The majority of Micronesians and Polynesians, however, were moderately confident.

#### 4.10 Listening Skills

With a rich culture of oral traditions, Pacific Islanders have been attuned to listening to others for generations. In early Pacific history, before the arrival of European colonisers, explorers and missionaries, traditional folklore was passed on through generations by word of mouth (Reynaud 2006). Missionaries introduced print media to the Pacific some 200 years ago, and today most traditional myths, legends and ways of living are well documented. Formal ceremonial languages (Brison 2001) can often be heard at traditional gatherings even today. At a Fijian welcome ceremony, for instance, when a *tabua* (whale's tooth) is presented, a specially trained cultural speaker often gives an elaborate speech (Brison 2001).

However, listening in a second language may come with its own challenges. Firstly, the lexis or type of vocabulary used will have a bearing on how much will be comprehended. Technical jargon and less common words will often create barriers in understanding the message in a speech, for example. Listening to different or unfamiliar accents may also prove challenging. A large number of lecturers at the USP are from outside the Pacific: India, Australia, Germany, New Zealand and so on, and most Pasifika students are not used to listening to these speakers. Another challenge is multi-tasking while listening to a lecture. A typical student, while listening to a lecture, will need to listen, sift out information and put that in their notebooks. What information they record is another area of study that may produce interesting results.

#### **4.10.4 Q1 responses: beliefs about listening skills at the beginning of the course**

At the beginning of the course, an overwhelming majority (62%) believed that they would need help understanding different accents (see Table 4.60). Thirty-six per cent indicated needing a significant amount of help. These accents would be those that the students have to deal with at university on a daily basis, like those of their lecturers, tutors, laboratory demonstrators and other students.

Table 4.60

*How Much Help Do You Need Understanding Different Accents?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.6	13	10	14	26	36
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.4	15	15	15	23	31
Melanesians (42)	3.5	14	7	12	33	31
Micronesians (12)	3.5	17	8	17	25	33
Polynesians (13)	4.2	0	15	15	7	62

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

All cultural groups displayed a similar pattern: a significant number communicated needing more help. Sixty-two per cent of Polynesian participants indicated that they would need extensive help. A small group of people (13% overall) were confident listening to unfamiliar accents.

Table 4.61

*How Confident Are You Listening to Lectures and Taking Useful Notes?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3.8	5	9	24	25	38
Indo-Fijians (13)	4.1	8	8	8	23	54
Melanesians (42)	3.9	5	9	19	28	38
Micronesians (12)	3.8	0	8	42	17	33
Polynesians (13)	3.5	7	7	38	23	23

*Notes.* 1 = not confident 5 = completely confident

Most participants (63%) rated high confidence in listening to lectures and taking notes, with 38% expressing total confidence. A mere 5% felt not at all confident, and this ranged between 0 to 8% in the four cultural groups. While most Indo-Fijians and Melanesians were highly confident in being able to listen to lectures and taking useful notes, a large proportion of Micronesians (42%) and Polynesians (38%) were moderately confident.

At the beginning of the course, the participants were also asked how confident they expect to be in listening to lectures and taking notes. Table 4.62 presents their expectations.

Table 4.62

*How Confident Will You Be Listening to Lectures and Taking Useful Notes Towards the End of the Course?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Confidence Ratings (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (80)	4.3	1	3	14	26	56
Indo-Fijians (13)	4.7	0	0	8	15	77
Melanesians (42)	4.2	2	2	14	31	50
Micronesians (12)	4.3	0	8	8	25	58
Polynesians (13)	4.3	0	0	23	23	54

*Note.* 1 = not confident    5 = completely confident

Towards the beginning of the course, most respondents believed that their academic listening skills would improve because of the course. An overwhelming majority (82%) was confident that the course would allow them to become better listeners in lectures and take down useful notes. This pattern was displayed in all four cultural groups. The Indo-Fijian group was highly positive, with 77% indicating that they were completely confident. Almost one-quarter of Polynesians (23%) were moderately confident. The mean scores for this questionnaire item ranged from 4.2 to 4.7.

Overall, data from the initial questionnaire reveals that most participants held a positive view about their listening skills. Most of them were confident that they can take useful notes, and most also believed that the course would make them better at this. However, it should be noted that most participants were also sceptical about listening to lecturers who have unfamiliar accents.

#### 4.10.5 Q2 responses: beliefs about listening skills towards the end of the course

Responses to questions presented to participants towards the end of the course did not demonstrate any major shifts, except in understanding accents. The course itself did not have any lectures, so authentic listening did not take place within the course. However, in tutorial classes, students listened to their teachers' instructions and explanation of content material, and to other colleagues during discussions and presentations. In their concurrent courses, the students did get several opportunities to listen to authentic, real-time lectures. In week nine of the UU114 course, a two-hour workshop on developing listening skills was conducted, at the end of which students were given a listening test (not part of their continuous assessment).

Table 4.63

*Now That You Have Almost Finished the Course, How Much Help Do You Still Need in Understanding Different Accents?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (65)	3	16	17	22	25	16
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.7	25	25	25	8	17
Melanesians (34)	2.8	15	24	21	21	15
Micronesians (9)	3	22	0	33	44	0
Polynesians (9)	3.8	0	0	11	44	33

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

While 41% needed more than moderate levels of help in understanding accents, those who had said they needed a considerable amount of help declined in number. Initially, 36% opted for 'a lot of help needed'. After completing most of the course, this number decreased to 16%. This indicates that some students had a positive shift. The percentage of those who needed no help rose from 13% in Q1 to 16% in Q2. In terms of the individual cultural groups, the Polynesian respondents appeared the least confident.

Table 4.64

*Now That You Have Almost Finished the Course, How Confident Are You Listening to Lectures and Taking Useful Notes?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	3.6	3	8	22	43	21
Indo-Fijians (13)	4.4	0	0	0	58	42
Melanesians (34)	3.5	0	6	29	41	18
Micronesians (9)	2.6	11	22	22	33	0
Polynesians (9)	3.4	11	11	22	33	22

*Note.* 1 = not confident    5 = completely confident

Towards the conclusion of the course, 64% of participants were highly confident in their academic listening skills. Only 3% were not confident, with another 8% reporting low confidence. Indo-Fijian participants appeared the most confident, with a mean score of 4.4. Among the Melanesians, confidence dropped slightly (from 64% to 59%). However, more participants moved towards moderate confidence, indicating a positive shift. In the first questionnaire, none of the Polynesian respondents thought they needed any help listening to lectures and taking notes, but towards the end of the course, this number had risen to 11%. The Micronesian group was the least confident.



Table 4.65

*How Well Has the Course Prepared You in Listening to Lectures and Taking Useful Notes?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	3.6	10	6	29	22	33
Indo-Fijians (13)	4.3	8	0	17	8	67
Melanesians (34)	3.6	9	6	26	24	32
Micronesians (9)	2.9	11	11	56	22	0
Polynesians (9)	3.4	11	11	22	33	22

*Note.* 1 = not prepared at all      5 = fully prepared

In response to how well the course had prepared them for listening and note-taking, 55% of respondents demonstrated an encouraging response. While 29% were moderately confident, a further 10% felt that they were unprepared. Sixty-seven per cent of Indo-Fijian participants deemed themselves fully prepared as a result of the course. In comparison, only 32% of Melanesians and 22% of Polynesians attained this level of confidence. None of the Micronesians had high confidence; 56% were moderately confident. This number was 17% at the beginning of the course. In essence, all cultural groups demonstrated positive shifts, although the mean scores ranged from 2.9 (Micronesians) to 4.3 (Indo-Fijians).

#### **4.11 Speaking Skills**

Speaking is a skill that often does not feature prominently in university assignments. While it is common to find assessment tasks that require students to respond in writing, the assessment of speaking is infrequent. In the face-to-face mode of the EAP course, the final three weeks were dedicated to the in-class delivery of oral presentations by students.

In a university classroom, speaking skills are highly valued by tutors and lecturers. While the courses may have fewer assignments requiring students to speak, in tutorial discussions, generally unassessed, speaking skills are very important. Thus, the two questionnaires had items that sought to elicit the participants' views and beliefs on their speaking abilities, and what they thought about and expected from the course in this regard.

#### 4.11.4 Q1 responses: beliefs about speaking skills at the beginning of the course

The questionnaire items on speaking sought to capture typical speaking situations in a classroom context, such as the leading of discussions and giving oral presentations.

Table 4.66

*How Much Help Do You Need in Leading Classroom Discussions?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (80)	3.5	11	9	34	13	34
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.1	23	0	38	23	15
Melanesians (42)	3.7	9	9	26	12	43
Micronesians (12)	3.6	8	8	42	0	42
Polynesians (13)	3.2	7	15	46	15	15

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

The majority of participants (47%) needed an extensive amount of help, with 20% having high levels of confidence in their ability to lead classroom discussions. A further 38% were moderately confident. Among the four cultural groups, a higher percentage expressed needing moderate levels of assistance. Fifty-five per cent of Melanesian participants had low levels of confidence, while the same level of confidence in Indo-Fijians, Micronesians and Polynesians ranged from 30 to 42%. A

higher percentage of these participants were moderately confident, with participant numbers ranging from 38 to 46%.

Table 4.67

*How Much Help Do You Need in Giving Oral Presentations?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (80)	4	13	11	24	16	36
Indo-Fijians (13)	3	23	15	46	8	8
Melanesians (42)	3.6	17	7	17	19	40
Micronesians (12)	4	0	8	25	25	42
Polynesians (13)	3.8	0	23	23	7	46

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

Initially, most respondents were not confident in giving oral presentations in class, and asked for more assistance in being able to do this. Thirty-six per cent indicated needing a considerable amount of help, while a further 16% thought they needed far more than just a little help. A further 24% expressed needing moderate assistance. A large proportion of Melanesians (59%), Micronesians (67%) and Polynesians (53%) thought they needed quite a bit of help in learning about oral presentation delivery. While 46% of Indo-Fijians were moderately confident, 38% expressed high levels of confidence (at least 23% said that they did not need any help). With a mean score of four, the Micronesian group appeared the least confident.

Table 4.68

*How Confident Are You at Giving Oral Presentations in English?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Confidence Ratings (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (80)	3	11	11	38	28	11
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.3	1	0	38	31	15
Melanesians (42)	3.2	9	12	36	26	14
Micronesians (12)	3.1	8	17	33	42	0
Polynesians (13)	2.8	15	15	46	15	7

*Note.* 1 = not confident    5 = completely confident

At the beginning of the course, the total number of people indicating high levels of confidence (ratings 4 and 5 on the Likert scale) in presenting talks was similar to those with moderate levels of confidence, 38 and 39% respectively. Only 11% said that they did not feel confident at all. In terms of the cultural groups, a large proportion of participants in each group was moderately confident (33 to 46%). While the other groups ranged from 40 to 46% in having high confidence in giving oral presentations, the Polynesian participants appeared less confident than the others did. Their mean score was 2.8, while the other groups' ranged from 3.1 to 3.2.

Table 4.69

*How Confident Will You Be at Delivering Oral Presentations Towards the End of the Course?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Confidence Ratings (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (80)	3.9	6	5	16	35	38
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.6	15	0	15	46	23
Melanesians (42)	4.1	5	5	17	26	48
Micronesians (12)	4	0	8	17	42	33
Polynesians (13)	3.7	7	7	15	46	23

*Note.* 1 = not confident 5 = completely confident

At the end of the course, an overwhelming majority believed they had high levels of confidence in making oral presentations, suggesting that a large number of participants viewed the course positively in this regard. Seventy-three per cent had high confidence in the course, and only 11% registered low confidence. All cultural groups expressed high levels of confidence, with nearly half of the Melanesians (48%) being very confident. The mean scores for the groups ranged between 3.7 and 4.1.

Table 4.70

*How Many Oral Presentations Are You Expected to Deliver in Your Other Courses?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (80)	3	14	14	30	19	21
Indo-Fijians (13)	4	8	8	31	31	23
Melanesians (42)	3.1	14	14	28	14	24
Micronesians (12)	3	17	17	25	33	8
Polynesians (13)	3.1	15	15	38	7	23

*Note.* 1 = none 5 = a great deal

Many courses at the USP, particularly in the social sciences, include oral assessments. Sciences such as Biology and Chemistry do not generally include oral assessments. Not all participants expected to have a speaking assessment in their other

courses. Although 40% of participants said that they were expecting quite a number of oral presentations in their other courses, a further 30% expected a moderate number of presentations. Most of the participants in each of the cultural groups expected to produce a number of oral assessments in their courses. Most Polynesians (38%) expected a moderate number of oral presentations in other courses.

#### 4.11.5 Q2 responses: beliefs about speaking skills towards the end of the course

Table 4.71

*Now that You Have Almost Finished the Course, How Much Help Do You Still Need in Leading Classroom Discussions?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Participant Responses (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (65)	2.7	22	17	22	25	8
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.8	17	25	25	25	8
Melanesians (34)	2.6	21	15	18	29	9
Micronesians (9)	2.1	44	11	33	11	0
Polynesians (9)	2.7	11	22	22	22	11

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

A positive shift was noted when participants were asked how much help they thought they needed in leading classroom discussions. At the beginning of the course, 47% said that they needed a substantial amount of help with this, while 11% said that they needed no help. Towards the end of the course, those who needed a substantial amount of help stood at 33%, while 22% indicated that they did not need any help at all. These shifts are positive. The Micronesian participants showed a highly significant shift with a mean score of 2.1. Forty-four per cent suggested that they did not need any help, whereas in the beginning of the course, this figure was a low 8%. Other groups indicated minor but encouraging shifts.

Table 4.72

*How Much Help Do You Still Need in Giving Oral Presentations?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	2.7	19	17	30	22	8
Indo-Fijians (13)	2.8	17	17	42	17	8
Melanesians (34)	2.8	15	21	21	29	9
Micronesians (9)	2.8	22	22	22	22	11
Polynesians (9)	2	33	0	56	0	0

*Note.* 1 = no help needed 5 = a lot of help needed

Another positive trend was noticed when participants were asked how much assistance they needed in giving oral presentations. From 52% initially needing high support, this figure declined to 30%. This suggests that a number of participants gained confidence in delivering oral presentations. Among the cultural groups, the greatest shift was seen with the Polynesian participants. At the beginning of the course, 53% of Polynesians needed a substantial level of assistance in completing their oral presentation assignments. Towards the end of the course, this number had declined to zero. In addition, the majority of Polynesians (56%) were moderately confident. In comparison to other groups, the Polynesian mean was far lower at 2.

Table 4.73

*Now That You Have Almost Finished the Course, How Confident Are You Making Oral Presentations in English?*

Participant Groups (number of participants)	Mean (1–5)	Confidence Ratings (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
All (65)	3	8	13	43	17	14
Indo-Fijians (13)	3	17	8	42	25	8
Melanesians (34)	3.3	0	6	47	18	21
Micronesians (9)	2.6	11	22	33	11	11
Polynesians (9)	2.3	22	33	33	11	0

*Note.* 1 = not confident    5 = completely confident

Towards the end of the course, 43% had moderate confidence in delivering oral presentations, suggesting a negative shift. A further 31% reported high confidence. However, at the beginning of the course, those who had high expectations from the course, and had suggested very high confidence, stood at 74%. There was a general shift from high confidence to moderate confidence among the four cultural groups. Thirty-three per cent of Micronesians and 55% of Polynesians had very low to no confidence. At the beginning of the course, 8 to 14% of these participants had reported low confidence.

The results from this part of the survey indicate that 21% of participants needed some further assistance in developing oral presentation skills, and more practice was needed to allow them to improve at giving oral presentations in other courses. Special attention should perhaps be given to Polynesian and Micronesian students, whose mean scores of 2.6 and 2.3 suggest general low confidence.



Table 4.74

*How Well Has the Course Prepared You to Give Oral Presentations?*

<b>Participant Groups (number of participants)</b>	<b>Mean (1–5)</b>	<b>Participant Responses (%)</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
All (65)	3.4	10	8	37	29	17
Indo-Fijians (13)	3.6	8	0	33	42	17
Melanesians (34)	3.5	6	6	32	26	26
Micronesians (9)	2.9	22	0	44	33	0
Polynesians (9)	2.6	11	33	44	11	0

*Note.* 1 = not prepared at all      5 = fully prepared

Despite a number of respondents shifting towards having low confidence in giving oral presentations, 46% said the course had generally helped in developing their oral presentation skills. A further 37%, however, were moderately confident. Among the four cultural groups, Indo-Fijians and Melanesians generally showed positive responses, with 59% of Indo-Fijians and 52% of Melanesians indicating that they were well prepared by the course. The Polynesians and the Micronesians were at 44% each, with another 44% of Polynesians suggesting low levels of preparation. Both groups had mean scores of less than 3.

#### **4.12 Summary**

The results of the survey do not indicate any particular general trends towards being highly confident or lacking substantial self-confidence in the categories of questions asked. However, it can be said that in most cases, positive shifts occurred between what the respondents perceived about their EAP skills in the beginning of the course, and how they saw themselves towards the end of the course. In a number of cases, many respondents, from various cultural groups, were doubtful about some of their EAP skills.

Most participants expressed high confidence in being able to submit all assignments on time and in attending all scheduled classes for the course. While towards the end of the course the majority were highly confident, suggesting that they did not have much difficulty meeting these requirements, it was also noticed that a significant number (between 21 and 30%) of participants shifted to being moderately confident. A similar trend was also noticed with confidence ratings on writing the essays and taking the reading and bibliography tests.

The participants also revealed that they expected to engage in a significant amount of research and referencing in other courses. At the beginning of the course, most participants lacked confidence in researching and referencing without help from the course. Towards the end of the course, most participants shifted from low confidence to moderate confidence. This implies that the course had a positive impact on a significant number of the participants, with regard to research and referencing. However, the results also indicate that the semester-long researching and referencing experience was not enough to provide a significant number of students with high confidence. Most Polynesians and Micronesians suggested low confidence levels in this area. A study exploring the reasons why these two groups had low confidence levels is recommended, so that appropriate intervention strategies could be implemented to assist them.

Reading skills generated more optimistic responses. Towards the end of the course, most students felt that their reading skills had improved. This optimism is promising, as academic reading is a vital component of academic life. The UU114 course uses Rose's (2005) reading method to engage the students in meaningful reading. The results indicate that most participants of this survey found this reading program quite beneficial and have become more confident in their reading skills.

Conversely, the results from questions on writing skills indicate that a significant number of participants lacked confidence in essay writing skills, suggesting that they needed more practice to obtain higher levels of confidence. A significant number of Polynesian students expressed low levels of confidence, suggesting that this group may require some form of early intervention. Another finding that emerged from the data is that while the course included compulsory sessions in essay and report writing, a significant number of students said that they were not expected to write many essays or reports in other courses. Science student participants, for instance, indicated in their questionnaire responses that they did not need to write essays in their courses, and so felt it was better if they learnt about laboratory reports, as they were required to write at least one per week in each of their science courses. Ideally, the EAP class should be divided into groups with homogenous requirements, and the course syllabus could be made flexible to respond to the needs of these individual groups. For example, science students could be placed in a single class and instead of writing several essays, they could spend more time developing report-writing skills. Having this type of homogenous group would involve a significant amount of planning and additional resources.

Vocabulary skills, an area related to reading, garnered both positive and negative responses. Most participants said that their vocabularies had improved because of the course. Towards the end of the course, they were aware of more discipline-specific vocabulary essential for their development as scholars in their own areas of study. This development could also be due to their engagement with academic texts in other courses undertaken concurrently. A considerable number of students, however, did mention that they would like to see more vocabulary development.

In terms of grammar and listening skills, most participants gave positive responses. With lower confidence levels in both categories at the beginning of the course, more participants felt the course helped them with these skills, increasing their confidence. However, not everyone felt this way, as a significant number of students rated low confidence in both skill areas. In terms of grammar, the UU114 course did not include any particular focus in class. According to the EAP teachers interviewed, grammar was not taught because it was assumed that the students had adequate grammar skills to enter the course, and that there was not enough time to cover all aspects of grammar in the EAP class. However, when marking students' essays, most prominent grammatical errors were pointed out and explained to the students.

Finally, most participants felt that their speaking skills had improved during the course, but a significant number were not confident in their speaking abilities. A higher percentage of Polynesian and Micronesian respondents had low confidence in this regard. Those with low confidence, especially Polynesians and Micronesians, should have intervention programs to assist them gain confidence in their academic speaking skills. These could be in the form of additional speaking classes, in which students are given the opportunity to make oral presentations and take part in discussions. It is imperative that university students develop strong speaking skills so that they are able to present their arguments convincingly.

The views expressed in the questionnaires were self-reports and therefore subjective. The inference is that such views do not necessarily represent a truly accurate profile of the students and cultural groups. The opinions expressed were purely individual. However, they may indicate how students felt about the course, and shed light on what their perceived needs were.

The next chapter will explore the results of the interviews conducted with a group of EAP teachers at the USP. These teachers' opinions may also shed light on the beliefs expressed by their students in the questionnaires.

## **Chapter 5: Description and analysis of teacher interview responses**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In a study of the cultural implications on needs analysis in an EAP course, the view of teachers is imperative as it offers a different perspective. The previous chapter focussed on students' views of EAP and English language skills both at the beginning and towards the end of the course. This chapter will highlight the views of nine teachers who were interviewed individually as part of this study. This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, the challenges faced by the teachers whilst teaching the EAP course are identified. These challenges, concerned with the course, the students and the resources that were used to deliver the course, cover a range of issues:

- (i) those dealing with students' lack of: a sense of independence, grammatical competence and understanding of academic requirements and expectations,
- (ii) those dealing with the restrictions imposed by the available resources, compounded by large student numbers in the class, and
- (iii) those relating to the teaching of the course: teaching workload, age groups of students, ethnic groupings and so on.

In the section following this, the challenges faced by the students, as seen from the teachers' perspective, are discussed. This section raises several issues identified, which are:

- insufficient practice time in the classroom for students to learn the structures taught
- students' unfamiliarity with, and lack of sensitiveness to, plagiarism
- varying proficiency in English language skills
- students' lack of sense of belonging

- time taken to adjust to tutors and lecturers, and to their teaching styles, and
- unfamiliarity with a range of academic practices.

The third section presents observations on individual cultural groups, as observed by the teachers during the semester. The teachers provided useful personal observations on students belonging to the following cultural groups that were identified by the teachers themselves:

- indigenous Fijians
- Indo-Fijians
- Samoans
- Tongans
- Ni-Vanuatu and Solomon Islanders
- I-Kiribati, and
- challenges not specific to any cultural group.

However, the observations do not imply that all members of the individual cultural groups behave in similar ways.

The final section of the chapter highlights the strategies employed by the teachers to deal with some of the challenges faced by teachers and students in the course.

These are:

- providing feedback on students' grammar skills
- having group and individual student consultations outside class hours
- establishing a drop-in centre to assist students (“UU114 Korner”)
- using email to facilitate assistance, and
- giving constructive feedback on assignments.

This discussion of teacher strategies is vital because it helps to identify what teachers do in the classroom to help their students acquire EAP skills. For a needs analyst, knowing this can help in understanding what the needs of the students are.

## **5.2 Challenges faced by the teachers**

A discussion with the nine teachers about the challenges they faced while teaching EAP skills revealed a number of relevant factors that contributed to the various levels of diversity in the classroom. For a needs analyst, a discussion of this nature is essential because it presents a description of the existing situation. In this case, it displayed the current challenges in the EAP classes. A needs analyst may find this knowledge useful for needs identification. The following section will thus highlight the challenges that teachers reported facing in their EAP classes. The viewpoints have been organised into ten categories.

### **Older students**

A major challenge perceived by the teachers was the difficulty experienced by mature students entering university. While the majority of the student participants were recent high school graduates, a quarter of the students (25%) were over the 18-25 age range. Figure 5.1 shows the age group distribution. Those above the age of 25 were those students who probably:

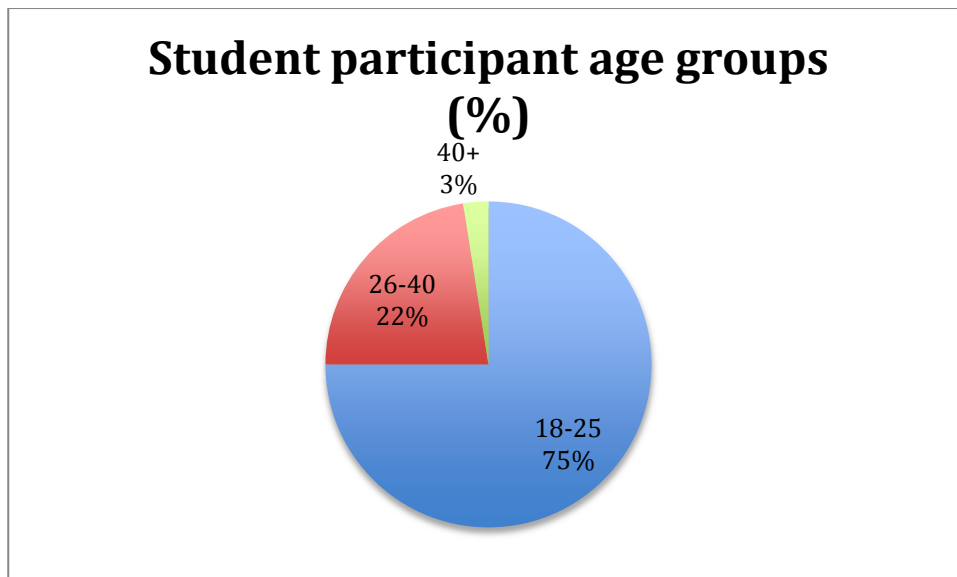
- may have not been able to pursue higher education immediately after high school owing to their circumstances (for example, financial constraints);
- may have returned to finish higher education studies after a leave of absence;
- may have transferred from distance education mode where they would have been part-time students;
- may not have done well in high school to gain admission into university and have now returned after gaining work experience; or



- may be studying EAP as a bridging course.

Figure 5.1

*Age Groups of Student Participants*



When these mature-age students are put in a class where the majority of the students are much younger and fresh out of high school, they may feel alienated. Their views on life, and their ways of behaving in class may be quite different from those of their younger colleagues in the classroom. Having had more life experience, their outlook on the topics discussed in class may be different, and in some cases, these may vary considerably from other students' views.

For a teacher, having this kind of diversity in the classroom can be both an advantage and a challenge. One of the benefits of having a group of older students in the class is that they would present different, and sometimes more mature arguments which the younger classmates may find both "enlightening and useful" (Teacher 1). They may also provide "practical examples from their life experiences" that may help fill in gaps of knowledge for the younger contemporaries (Teacher 9). Furthermore, they may have

cultural knowledge that younger students from their countries may not. However, for the teacher, having mature students may be challenging as well (Teachers 1 and 9).

Teacher 1 noted “mature students have difficulties in getting back into academia”. This means that having had stayed away from formal schooling for a significant period of time, they may not be able to adjust into the university culture quickly. This teacher proceeded to tell me about an older student who once complained about the way the younger students behaved, and how some students dressed up. For this student, such behaviour was unheard of when she was a younger student. Furthermore, the older students may also have a gap in the practice of writing cogent arguments (Teacher 9). Teacher 9 said that after finishing (or leaving) school, they would not have had much, if any, need to write essays exploring arguments and justifying positions.

The cultural implications associated with being an older student was another issue reported by teacher 1. She explained that in Pacific societies, raising a family and looking after the needs of the members of one’s family are paramount. For someone who is in their 30s, looking after the family (traditional female roles such as cooking meals and doing housework, or traditional male responsibilities such as providing shelter to the dependents) and taking part in cultural events and church activities, strongly define their personal and cultural identity. Being preoccupied with study requirements may not be seen as contributing to being a responsible family member. Another cultural implication of being an older student concerned the dynamics of the classroom. Teacher 9 felt that as a Fijian teacher, she “had to be culturally accommodating to the needs of mature students”. She related this to the cultural belief that maturity and respect are esteemed cultural values in the Pacific, and younger people look up to older ones for advice. If in a classroom, an older student made a mistake

while verbally responding to the teacher's question, then this may be embarrassing for the student, and it would create an awkward situation for the other students as well.

### **Lack of independence in learners**

Two of the teachers (teachers 1 and 4) believe that most recent high school graduates rely on their teacher considerably, to the point that it becomes frustrating for the teacher. According to teacher 1, this usually spans the first four weeks of the class, and students quickly realise that they will need to be more independent when they do not score well in their first assignment, which is due at the end of week 4. Teacher 4 said, "they [the students] are not independent learners" because simplifying the teaching of a subject to the extent of "spoon feeding" discourages the students from becoming independent thinkers. A teaching strategy where the teacher simplifies the content so that students are able to grasp it is beneficial. However, this strategy becomes a problem when students start relying on the teacher, and expect the teacher to do the work for them, eventually leading to students not exercising independent thinking.

The inability of the students to think critically and to evaluate materials was another cause of challenge for the EAP teachers. The ability to evaluate evidence used as substantiation, and present this convincingly is a valuable asset for any student. Teacher 4 said that some of her students "need help being critical thinkers" as they would often present arguments that were not substantiated. She went on to say that the course was "making them [the students] more dependent" – something that she was unable to do anything about immediately. Critical thinking is part of the marking criteria for the essays that students produce, and also forms a major part of the reading test where a critical evaluation of the content is required (UU114 2012 Course Outline).

Teacher 7 believes that at times the guidance (in the form of scaffolding) provided can exceed the intended effect, leaving the students more reliant on teacher

input. He explained that, at times, he would have to provide “feedback on basic grammar points” namely on the use of articles in English. He often had to explain “what is wrong and why”. He relates much of this to lack of confidence in students and suggests that there is a strong need to build confidence in the students and to “get them out of their shells”. This, he believes, can be quite challenging for any teacher. Another explanation offered was that over the years spent in primary and secondary schools, these students would have “become comfortable with the teacher providing them with all the materials”, and there is perhaps “no sense of interest” in exploring issues themselves (teacher 6). Teacher 7 would be happier if his students would probe on their own the basic problems they have (how to use definite and indefinite articles in English, among others) and perhaps approach the teacher to check if their investigations yielded accurate results. A discussion on the notions of critical thinking and critical literacy is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, the works of Paul and Binker (1990) and Coffey (2010) provide good useful discussion on these notions.

### **Lack of resources**

Teachers 2 and 5 listed improper facilities and lack of resources at the university as contributing factors to the challenges they faced. Teacher 2 highlighted that the structure of a classroom, the types of tables and chairs students have, the amount of light and ventilation in the room and the acoustics in the classroom will all contribute to a teacher’s successful delivery, and how well the students grasp the subject matter. The provision of good amenities may also create an interest in learning. Teacher 9 commented that one of her classrooms did not have “proper ventilation” and in another, the tables were fixed and could not be moved about to allow “for better group work opportunities”. This made it difficult at times to keep her students fixed on the group

tasks that she had for them to do in the class. In the modern classroom, facilities allow for better delivery of subject matter, and enhance student learning.

A general lack of modern ICT resources in the classrooms also posed challenges for teachers. With no smart boards and Internet access in the classrooms, teachers used traditional methods of teaching using blackboards/whiteboards and overhead projectors. An ICT resource, Moodle, was used to create a virtual classroom environment outside the class. Teacher 5 said that she would put materials on Moodle (such as a paragraphing exercise) that students could download to work on. Teacher 6 downloaded “EAP exercises from various websites”, and distributed these to those “students who needed extra help”. She used to give links to the websites but realised that her “students did not take the initiative to go on to the websites and do the tasks”. Printing out these activities and giving them to her students seemed an effective option to teacher 6.

### **Class size and classroom overcrowding**

Class size was another barrier to the delivery of the course. A number of teachers said that they had large class numbers. This, according to teacher 3, ranged from 25 to 34 per class. Those teachers who had numbers towards the higher end of this range found it very challenging to cater to the needs of the individual students. According to teacher 2, with so many students in one section, and with each teacher having to teach 3 to 4 sections, there was “less opportunity to focus on individual needs”. Large classes also meant that there was usually a substantial amount of marking to do, and quality feedback had to be given within a reasonable timeframe. A number of teachers commented that this occupied most of their time and as a result, they were unable to engage in research that was encouraged by their employer. Teacher 8 made the comment that large class sizes meant that she could not have “enough reinforcement activities” to assist those who perhaps had difficulty understanding the

concepts taught. On the other hand, teacher 3 said that despite the large class numbers, he found this manageable as he had developed strategies (such as using group work) to deal with teaching large classes when he was a high school teacher.

### **Students' grammatical competence**

Teachers found their students' grammatical competence inadequate. In the student questionnaires, 24% of participants expressed lack of confidence in their grammar skills at the beginning of the course. However, a significant number (51%) felt that their grammar skills had improved during the course. Four of the nine teachers commented that some of their students, especially those from Kiribati, lacked competence in basic grammar, suggesting variations in the level of competence among the cultural groups. Reading to understand work from these students proved a challenge for a number of teachers. On grammatical competence in English, teacher 4 said that "poor level of students' English language made it frustrating to read their essays". They added that the course did not focus on teaching grammar and so these students were often directed to Student Learning Support (SLS) - a special unit within the University developed to look after the English language and the academic skills of students. At the time of the interview, there was no mechanism put in place to follow up on students' meetings with the SLS. The University of the South Pacific's website (2012) provides the following information on Student Learning Support. SLS was established within each Faculty to allow teachers to provide more specific English language support to the students. The Faculty of Business and Economics, for instance, has its own SLS division that houses a number of "Student Learning Specialists". These personnel may provide one-to-one consultations with students on any matter related to English language, and run group academic skills workshops (such as one on writing effective literature review). Students can also collect printed materials on various academic

English topics such as ‘Writing introductions’, ‘Using direction words’ and so on. There are also online resources that students can utilise to enhance their academic English skills.

### **Teaching workload**

Six of the nine teachers found the teaching schedule and workload burdensome, and this made it difficult for them to focus on other important tasks expected of academics, for example conducting regular research and taking part in professional development exercises. With approximately 900 face-to-face students in the course at the University in semester 1 of 2012, and 12 teachers teaching a total of over 30 classes, the teaching schedule for the course was demanding. Classes began as early as 8am and finished each weeknight at 8pm. Some teachers had to work on the weekends as well. Teachers 3 and 4 said that teaching in the evenings, and also on weekends, was quite challenging for them. Teacher 4 said that teaching on a Saturday was a “major sacrifice” for her. A number of teachers also felt that they did too much marking. Teacher 6 said that much of her time was spent having consultation sessions with her students and marking their essays. Teacher 7 added that the marking was “quite unrealistic at times”, especially when the gaps between assignment due dates were fairly close to one another.

### **Student diversity**

Varying degrees of student diversity were described as challenging by a number of teachers. Teacher 5 said that this was a challenge for the USP teacher in two ways: one, how does a teacher deal with different cultural viewpoints in the class, and two, what do teachers know about the cultural beliefs of these students, and how these would impact on the students. The complexity of this diversity is further enhanced when the student population constitutes 12 different cultures, and several sub-cultures within each. At the University of the South Pacific (USP), student diversity has several dimensions:

cultural diversity, diversity in English language competency, diversity in terms of where in their degree program the students are. All of these had pedagogical implications for the teachers. The first one of these, cultural diversity, is perhaps the most significant one. The University of the South Pacific is “owned” by 12 South Pacific nations and serves students from these nations. The majority of the students are, however, from Fiji. Table 5.1 later in the chapter presents information about student enrolments in 2011.

The second type of diversity, the range in English language proficiency, is unavoidable in any course at the USP. The level of exposure to the English language varies greatly from country to country, and even within countries along rural/urban lines. English may be one of the official languages in all countries of the Pacific, but this does not mean that it would be used widely. People’s first choice would naturally be their mother tongue (in the case of Melanesian countries, the Melanesian Pidgin). In Kiribati, the medium of instruction in secondary schools is mostly the Kiribati language, while in Fiji, English is the dominant language of instruction.

The third kind of diversity involves students being in different stages of their degree program. According to Teacher 5, the ideal situation would be if all students were in the first year of their degree program. However, this does not happen, as students who are in their second or final year may be enrolled in the course as well. Placement tests are not used to differentiate between the EAP levels of students. The course is endorsed compulsory by the University and so every student irrespective of which year they are in their program must obtain a pass grade in UU114 in order to graduate. Teacher 5 also said that those who are in their second and final year would have had experience in writing academically and, thus, teachers may need to keep this group of students challenged in the class.



Perhaps a common element among the three kinds of diversities discussed above is the fact there are differential amount of EAP knowledge and expertise that various groups bring to class. With different experiences in their own countries, which include interactions with different people, how much academic information an individual student possesses will be different both in quantity and quality from other students.

### **Academic requirements and expectations**

The students' lack of competence in meeting academic conventions caused much frustration to the teachers. The UU114 course outline (2012) stipulates that hard copies of all assignments must be submitted by the due date, should be typed with double spacing, and also submitted for plagiarism checking on Moodle – “a learning platform designed to provide educators, administrators and learners with a single robust, secure and integrated system to create personalised learning environments” (Moodle 2014, para. 1). Academic conventions demand that long quotes should be indented. These are technical requirements which teacher 6 believes caused frustrations to the markers when students did not adhere to them. Several of her students were not familiar with how to use Moodle, although the University did have orientation sessions for new students. Some students submitted their assignments, but uploaded these into wrong courses on Moodle. This suggests that the potential lack of technical expertise may be a problem.

Another requirement of the course is four hours of class attendance every week. Teacher 1 emphasised that at least for the first four to five weeks of the course, students should not miss any session. This is because the course teaches the basics of essay writing (in 15 steps) during this period and the teachers cannot hold “repeat sessions for those who miss out” (teacher 6) without compromising the delivery of the rest of the course content.

## **Dealing with silence**

Teacher 8 raised an important concept: how does one deal with silence? Traditionally, Pacific islanders are listeners, and silence is a form of respect marker that shows that they are acknowledging what a speaker may be saying to them (Nabobo 2001; Tuafuti 2010). In a classroom, teacher 8 said this can be problematic. If a teacher asks a question like “Do you understand” and the students respond with silence, this could mean many things:

- yes I understand you
- I do not know yet whether I have understood or not but do go on
- I am confused
- I am using silence to show my respect to you. (Sameer 2005)

The challenge is for the teacher to determine which of the above would apply in the context. Teacher 8 believes that silence in the classroom can potentially lead to assumptions made by teachers, and quite often she had discovered that there was “a gap between what she taught and what the students processed”. She said that often students would nod their heads to suggest that they had understood, but then their writing exercises and assignments did not “reflect a full understanding of what had been taught”. Teacher 9 added that silence in Fijian culture is a sign of respect, and teachers who are not familiar with Fijian culture may interpret this differently.

Another explanation for this ‘silence’ could be related to what Thaman (2009) says about learning styles in the Pacific. She points out that “the influence of culture ... tends to discourage [Pacific] students from questioning and being competitive” (p. 2) in the classrooms. She relates this to the fact that “Pacific indigenous learning strategies

include observation, imitation, and trial and error rather than verbal instruction, the dominant strategy in the classroom” (p. 2). This type of learning exposure can thus result in silence across the Pacific cultures, which may be “interpreted by some teachers as rude, indifference, or not being able to act appropriately in class” (p. 2). Teacher 9, who is also a Pacific Islander, was never sure of what the “silent response” from students actually meant.

### **Ethnicity**

Another challenge for the teachers was the high number of two ethnic groups in classes. This was highlighted by teacher 9 who said that the majority of her students belonged to one of two ethnic groups: either Indo-Fijian or indigenous Fijian. This is an unavoidable situation at the University of the South Pacific, because the majority of student enrolments is from Fiji. According to the University statistics (see Table 5.1), in 2011, 57.8% of face-to-face students were from Fiji.

One of teacher 9’s classes was made up of predominantly indigenous Fijians. When other students would leave class early, her Fijian students interpreted this as “culturally, a sign of disrespect, especially when the teacher is also an indigenous Fijian”. This presents another related challenge for a teacher who has to deal with “students’ lack of sensitiveness to others’ cultures”. Teacher 9 commented that sometimes her students would use local concepts (such as *tabua*, which is the Fijian word for *whale’s tooth*, and which is also culturally significant to Fijians) that other cultural groups would not be familiar with. This would sometimes lead to discontent among other students. Citing herself as an example, teacher 9 also suggested that some teachers do not have a good understanding of other cultures, and therefore are often unaware of what is culturally acceptable and what is not in other cultures. This is an important observation, as according to Thaman (2009, p. 2), “in a culturally diverse

Pacific region, a teacher's ... cultural understanding and sensitivity are extremely important considerations for learner success".

Table 5.1

*Number and percentage of students enrolled at the University of the South Pacific in 2011.*

<b>Country</b>	<b>2011 Figures</b>	<b>%</b>
Cook Islands	58.8	0.5
Fiji	6680.5	57.8
Kiribati	621.5	5.4
Marshall Islands	72.5	0.6
Nauru	31.2	0.3
Niue	17.6	0.2
Samoa	301.9	2.6
Solomon Islands	1766.9	15.3
Tokelau	39.1	0.3
Tonga	601.7	5.2
Tuvalu	225.5	1.9
Vanuatu	1012.1	8.8
International	133.8	1.2

Excerpt from: Table 4: Equivalent full-time students (EFTS) by country of citizenship, 2001-2011 (The University of the South Pacific 2012, p.11).

### **5.3 Challenges faced by the students**

In a study that incorporates triangulation methods of data collection, having an understanding of what teachers thought about their students' challenges was essential. This information can be used to ascertain the needs of the students being studied. This section will therefore discuss the challenges that the teachers felt their students faced in their EAP classes. It should be highlighted at the outset that, again, the amount of knowledge that each student brings to class would be potentially different for each cultural group.

#### **In-class practice time**

Most students do not have enough time in class to practise the grammatical structures taught, because the classes focus on the development of EAP skills. Teacher 1 believes that it is important for the students to be able to master the 15 steps (a special writing program covered in the course – discussed in Chapter 1) in order to be able to understand the basics of writing. However, owing to time constraints, there is not enough time in class for students to practise these structures.

### **Plagiarism**

Using information from an external source and not acknowledging appropriately is one of the major challenges of USP students. Teacher 1 believes that most Pacific people live in ‘communal cultures’ where nothing really belongs to an individual in the community they live in. She cited the example of a mango tree in a community compound surrounded by village houses. While the tree may have been planted by an individual, the community understands that the fruits are meant to be shared, and therefore no prior permission is needed to pick fruits. Perhaps, she believes, her students are influenced by this belief and freely “borrow” information from sources without giving due recognition to the source. Teacher 3, who has taught for a number of years in a secondary school in Fiji, believes that students plagiarise at university because they are not taught proper referencing skills in secondary schools. He added that students work on projects in schools and get information from the Internet, but their teachers are never strict on picking up on plagiarism. Teacher 2 believes that it is important to change the mind-set of the students to make them realise that copying someone else’s words is unethical.

### **English language skills**

A number of teachers said that an important challenge faced by their students is the inability to use the English language accurately. Most believe that this issue is not

addressed well in secondary schools, especially paragraphing and sentence construction (teacher 5), and because the EAP program does not have the space to teach grammar and mechanics, the problem remains unresolved. Furthermore, this problem is exacerbated by the variations in the type and amount of English language input that students receive in their individual countries. In Chapter 6, this thesis proposes dimensions of disadvantage that can be used to gauge how disadvantaged a student may be, say in terms of English language abilities, owing to their relative location in their countries.

### **Sense of belonging**

Most students who travel away from home and live on their own feel displaced and homesick during the first few weeks of the course. Teacher 2 believes that students “need time to be socialised into the culture of doing things”. They also need time to establish new social settings so that they are able to focus on their studies better. Teacher 2 also mentioned that a few of her students, who may have been in this situation, had joined “wrong groups” and, as a result, deviated from their studies. To illustrate this, she shared the story of ‘Peter’ (a pseudonym) who was from one of the Pacific countries. In the first few weeks, she noticed he hardly said anything in class. After week 5, his attendance dropped. Upon talking to her students from Peter’s country, the teacher discovered that Peter had met some students from his country and had been spending time with them. She also learnt from her students that Peter’s living allowances paid by his scholarship program was used for socialising, leaving him without money for his daily transportation and sustenance needs. Peter’s case was eventually alerted to the University’s counselling section. Moreover, some students also found the dressing styles of other students “distracting” (Teacher 9). These regional students were “not used to such modern attire worn by some Fiji students”. She

highlighted that in traditional Pacific communities, girls wearing short shorts to school were unheard of, and those who were traditional in their beliefs found this uncomfortable.

### **Adjusting to teachers**

Teacher 5 said that it took a while for some students to adjust to her teaching style. At the USP, a typical first year student will generally be enrolled in four subjects, and will have a lecturer and a tutor in each. Each teacher will have his or her own teaching style, and the student will need to adjust to these quickly. Teacher 9 added that teaching speed is also something that students in the mixed-level EAP classes have to adapt to. With a full syllabus to cover, sometimes the teacher may not be able to wait for students to catch up.

### **Academic practices**

Most teachers said that the transition from high school to university is generally not smooth, as “gaps of knowledge” (teacher 2) exist when students initially arrive at university. Teacher 5 said that those students who did preliminary or foundation studies at USP did better in the EAP course than those who came directly from secondary schools. This is because the University’s preliminary and foundation English programs are designed to provide pathways to UU114, where programs teach similar EAP skills, but at a more basic level. For instance, LLF11 “is designed to help students improve proficiency in various study skills and aspects of communication in preparation for studies at post-Foundation level” (The University of the South Pacific 2013). The course teaches how to write shorter academic texts, and provides instructions on paragraphing and referencing. After completing this course, those students who proceed to do UU114 may not find the contents unfamiliar. The English curriculums in secondary schools do not provide as smooth a transition (see Khan & Mugler 2001).

The teachers identified several elements that they believe contribute to transitional challenges. Teachers 2, 5 and 6 said that their students generally lack independence. Teacher 5 said that this was perhaps instigated by the secondary school system where, in most cases, “rote learning is used”. Teacher 6 added that her students failed to be critical thinkers. She added that this was displayed in their writing assignments, where they would make claims and fail to substantiate their arguments. Teacher 2 talked about students in her class who had no concept of time management, and often relied on the teacher to decide what they should do when.

Another gap identified was in the area of research, in that seven of the nine teachers said that secondary schools do not focus on developing students’ research skills: to critically assess the relevance of information, and to use them accurately in their writings. Teacher 4 highlighted that most of her students did not use academic readings to cite from, and that most of their reference list entries were of generic sources. For instance, websites such Wikipedia or general dictionaries like Oxford Learners would be used extensively and exclusively to define terminology in students’ papers.

Teacher 9 identified working in groups as challenging for the new university students. She said that in secondary schools, students work with members of their own ethnic groups and are able to relate to them well. When they arrive at USP, they are expected to work in groups where members may be from different cultural groups. In her observations, she has noticed that students generally choose members from their own ethnic groups to work with in class.

Moreover, the writing structure that is taught in the class may be “foreign” (teacher 8) to most students, and students may have learnt different styles of writing in their secondary schools (teacher 9). The EAP course, in trying to remain uniform, teaches structures of essay writing, and expects students to follow these structures



closely. What they learn in their classes is what they are assessed on (in the marking criteria). For instance, the course teaches paragraphing by focusing on four elements identified by an acronym: SEXI. The acronym stands for Statement, Explanation, Example, Implication (UU114 Course Book 2012). In the marking criteria for research essays, a student will get 4 out of 4 for paragraphing if the “SEXI pattern [is] effectively developed” (UU114 Research Essay Marking Criteria 2012). If students write an essay using a structure learnt outside the university, then they may not be seen as meeting the criteria pre-established in the marking guide. For example, in the introduction, students are taught that they need to begin by introducing the subject, then establish the limitations of the subject, identify the issue they will be discussing and finish with a thesis statement (UU114 Course Book 2012). A marking criterion awards them points if the students have these four elements in their introduction. For students who have learnt different structures, learning the UU114 structure and being able to remember it and not get confused with their own structures, can be a challenge (teacher 9).

Finally, using complex vocabulary to express precise meanings is a high-demanding skill for many. According to the teachers, most students use simple vocabulary, and are often unable to express precise meanings. Some use a thesaurus to identify synonyms but are quite often unaware that the context in which the words are used can affect the meaning. Teacher 8 said her students often have difficulty using words appropriately, and sometimes they use them out of context. Teacher 4 mentioned that she often had to “simplify complex vocabulary” so her students would “be able to comprehend”. Uncommon expressions such as “atrocities” when used in class needed to be explained and simpler synonyms were used (Teacher 4).

## **5.4 Teacher perceptions about cultural groups**

This section will identify the cultural observations shared by the teachers on students from individual countries: Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Kiribati. These do not imply that all students share the same cultural traits identified by the teachers, but they are useful observations made by the teachers for the purposes of this study. Some of these comments are accorded to ethnicity, but they attempt to understand strengths and weaknesses, challenges and opportunities for the student body. It should also be highlighted that while some comments are shared by a number of teachers in some instances, others depend on the comment from one teacher.

### **Indigenous Fijians**

Comments by teachers about Fiji students in general included Indo-Fijian students as well. Teacher 1 said that she had noticed that students from Fiji generally understood lesson content fairly quickly. What this means is that she did not have to simplify lesson content much for her Fiji students to comprehend. One of the explanations for this could be that this teacher has been teaching in Fiji for over ten years and is aware of the learning styles of Fiji students and is thus able to provide them with the type of explanation they are familiar with. However, given the short period of time that her students had spent with her when the interview was conducted, it was not possible to gauge the familiarity of the students towards her teaching style. Teacher 3 also noted that most students from Fiji were generally better at English grammar and were able to construct better sentences than students from most other cultural groups. While no possible explanation was given for this, it is nonetheless an important observation.

In terms of indigenous Fijians, Teacher 2 said that they were generally on “Fiji Time” – an expression commonly used locally to refer to the general laxity towards

punctuality among the Indigenous Fijian community. Teacher 5, however, noted that time management was a general problem associated with all cultural groups at the University of the South Pacific, irrespective of where they were from. She also noted some positive comments by saying the indigenous Fijian students were generally more proficient in language skills, persistent learners, and would request assignment due date extensions (adding that it was more common for students from other cultural groups to submit assignments late without requesting for extensions). Teacher 8 added that Indigenous Fijian students' speaking skills (fluency, diction, enunciation and pronunciation) were better than most others'.

### **Indo-Fijians**

Apart from the ability to comprehend lesson content more quickly (teacher 1), Indo-Fijians were identified as having strong study ethics (teacher 2). They are determined to attain good grades so that they can achieve their goals. Deo and Phan (2006, p. 7) in their study of learning approaches of culturally distinct university students note that Indo-Fijian students “are increasingly pressured by their parents and community to excel academically”. The authors believe that this pressure is responsible for surface-based learning that is prevalent among these students, where memorisation and rote learning are favoured. Teacher 5 noted that most of her Indo-Fijian students had average proficiency in English and that there was a general lack of professionalism in some of her Indo-Fijian students. For example, she noticed that “most of the assignments that were handed in late were from Indo-Fijians”, with no request of an extension received prior to the submission. This comment was at odds with teacher 2's. While a late penalty of 20% per day applies to late assignments (UU114 Research Essay Marking Criteria 2012), some students were unaffected by this policy until they received the penalty (teacher 5).

## **Samoans**

Teacher 1 noted that her Samoan students “generally learned EAP concepts easily”, and were “much faster at learning” than her Tongan students. Teacher 6 said that she liked having Samoan students in class because they were “good at contributing to classroom discussions” and also had a “good sense of humour”. Most Pacific learners are passive, and being silent is an important cultural trait for them (Nabobo 2001; Tuafuti 2010). However, “most Samoans are not passive learners” (teacher 6), and by having such students in class, her classroom discussion activities were facilitated by these students who would “engage the rest of the students in the discussion” (teacher 6).

## **Tongans**

Teacher 4 noted that her Tongan students were generally weak in English language skills and needed a substantial amount of assistance with critical thinking skills. While there has been no study undertaken to ascertain reasons for this, it can be theorised that this is related to a number of factors. Mackie (1981, p.38) boldly assumes that “children who are frequently ... hit ... for expressing their beliefs learn to avoid deciding, suggesting or acting on their own initiative”. In her paper on child punishment in Tonga, Kavapalu (1993) highlights that in most Tongan societies, child beating is a common practice, often “embedded within a more general theory of personhood and development” (p. 317). Kavapalu (1993, p. 317) further highlights that the child is often seen as “foolish”, “ignorant” or “crazy”, and thus needs to be developed to become “socially competent”. This practice may have a bearing on the development of critical thinking. Another reason could be, as Mackie (1981, p.38) writes, due to “efforts [of many tertiary institutes] to organise them [the students] through examinations”. She believes that this may cause a lack of confidence in thinking.

## **Ni-Vanuatu and Solomon Islanders**

Teacher 1 highlighted that students from Vanuatu were better at understanding ideas than their Solomon Island counterparts. She believes that using English is not a major problem for students from these two Pacific nations, a comment shared by teacher 3 who said that some Ni-Vanuatu students' English language skills were better than those of other students in his class. Teacher 2 indicated that students from both countries were "quite keen and hard working" with teachers 4 and 5 expressing similar sentiments. It is apparent from these comments that students from Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands are generally seen as not demanding as much attention as students from other Pacific nations.

## **I-Kiribati**

Six of the nine teachers expressed concern about students from Kiribati: most students from this Micronesian country needed a substantial amount of assistance in successfully completing the EAP course. Teacher 1 reported that most members of this group needed remedial work, but she was unable to do this in class because of lack of time, a comment shared by teacher 4 as well. Teacher 1 highlighted that these students had difficulty with writing and speaking skills. Adding to that, teacher 2 suggested that the university environment may be overwhelming for them, and there is a need to work out solutions to assist them to adjust to university life. Teacher 4 also said that her I-Kiribati students generally lacked critical thinking skills that often caused problems in their writing. These problems ranged from lack of coherence in ideas to superficial coverage of ideas. Teacher 9 suggested using slower speech when teaching, although she acknowledged that she was unable to do this all the time in her lessons, as she had other groups of students as well. She did notice that there were times when her I-Kiribati students would silently mimic the teacher's question before responding.

## **Challenges faced by all groups**

Among the challenges highlighted by the teachers, there were, however, some which were not restricted to specific groups. One of these was time management, mentioned by teachers 2 and 5, who said that this was a common problem. Time management refers to being able to think ahead and plan work so that all tasks are achieved in good time. While no research has formally been conducted to substantiate the existence of lack of adherence to time, anecdotal evidence and discussions with the EAP teachers reveal that most Pacific islanders prefer to deal with problems in their own time, although sometimes this may not be true.

The general lack of English language skills among most students was another issue highlighted by all teachers. While a number of teachers said that I-Kiribati students needed most attention in this regard, it was also revealed that this was not a problem for them alone. Subject-verb agreement, correct punctuation and sentence construction were common problems. Similar viewpoints were also expressed with respect to students' EAP skills. Students from across all cultural groups had trouble citing, using information from other sources, and organising ideas cogently. Much of this could be attributed to the lack of experience in following EAP conventions. According to teacher 5, those students who had come through USP's foundation program, where basic EAP skills were taught, performed better than those students who came directly from high school. The foundation program cost \$FJD435 per course in 2012 according to the USP's fees schedule (The University of the South Pacific 2012). This would have made it more expensive than completing the final year in high school, and which may also be the reason why most USP students do not do the foundation program.

Another important observation noted by teacher 8 is the choice of essay topics that students had to write about. She said:

Some topics are challenging for students from certain countries. For example, topics like ‘old people’s home’ may be relevant to Fiji students, but other countries’ students may find this irrelevant since they do not have such facilities in their own countries.

Most Pacific societies value their elders who are often seen as transmitters of culture (Nabobo 2001; Tuafuti 2010). As such, they are looked after by their kin and are not put in residential places for old people. While such facilities do exist in Fiji, they are not viewed positively by the communities at large. Thus, it is understandable that those who come from countries where these facilities are unheard of, may find difficulty in comprehending the necessity to have such facilities. On the contrary, writing about unfamiliar topics would promote independent thinking and force a learner to find resources on the topics.

### **5.5 Teacher attempts at resolving some of the student challenges**

Finding resolutions to the problems faced by their students was not easy for the teachers. Heavy teaching schedules, consultations with students and marking of assignments made it difficult for the teachers to deal fairly with the individual problems identified in the preceding sections. Some teachers had other community duties and personal development programs (such as organising and taking part in workshops - a few EAP teachers were also active members of NGOs) that required their time. Despite these barriers, the teachers did manage to attend to the most pressing problems faced by their students. This section will identify some of the problem-solving strategies employed by the teachers to assist students from all cultural groups.

## **Feedback on students' grammatical skills**

All teachers mentioned providing as much feedback as possible on students' writings. Five of the nine teachers reported that they tried to identify the major grammatical errors that impeded communication of ideas. They also identified those errors that were persistent. Mistakes, or slips, such as the occasional misspelling of a word were sometimes ignored. Teacher 4 highlighted that the students can correct some of these spelling mistakes if they used the spell-checking feature on Microsoft Word. She was unable to understand why her students did not utilise this feature. Moreover, teachers did not want to discourage the students by identifying a large number of mistakes and errors. If students enquired about these errors, then teachers provided the grammatical explanations. Owing to time constraints and lack of space in the course to deal with all grammatical points, all teachers reported directing their students to the Student Learning Support (SLS) unit, which was established by the University to respond to students' English language difficulties.

Each faculty has at least two SLS staff who are qualified English language teachers, and have postgraduate qualifications. Students are able to make appointments, either in groups or individually, to consult these experts who would advise them on how they could improve. The teachers also revealed that if they felt that a number of students needed a special session on a particular grammatical point, for example constructing sentences with relative clauses, then they would arrange SLS appointments for these students by organising special sessions. However, it was noted by the teachers that there was no follow-up on these, and on whether students who had been identified and directed to SLS actually did keep their appointment. The SLS keeps record of students' visits: date of visit, areas requested help in, SLS staff who attended to the student and



what actions were taken. Students' personal details including cultural/linguistic background are not recorded.

### **Student consultations**

All teachers had consultation sessions with their students outside class hours. The University stipulates that every academic staff member is expected to dedicate at least 2 hours per week for student consultations. During this time, students can approach their teachers (lecturers and/or tutors) individually to discuss any difficulties they might have with the course. This is an important opportunity for Pacific students since they can be relatively shy and not ask questions in class, as highlighted by teacher 8. In order to encourage students to utilise these special consultation hours, teachers identified a number of strategies:

- “I try to come across as approachable as possible” (teacher 7).
- Students do not need to make appointments (all teachers). Teachers allocate fixed times and students can visit them during these hours.
- “I leave my door open when I can afford to see students outside class and consultation hours” (teacher 1).

Despite these efforts, the teachers pointed out that not all students who needed individual help utilised the consultation hours. The reasons for this can only be speculated at this stage. One could be students are not available at the fixed hours allocated by the teachers. Other reasons for non-participation could be lack of interest and shyness. All teachers indicated that those students who consulted them outside class hours were generally from all cultural groups.

### **Course drop-in centre (*UU114 Korner*)**

A drop-in centre, referred to as the *UU114 Korner*, was introduced for the first time in 2012 to provide more opportunities for the EAP students to have one-on-one

sessions with EAP teachers. The unique spelling (for 'Korner') was used to make it more appealing and friendly to the students (UU114 Course Coordinator, pers. comm.). According to Teacher 5, this drop-in centre was established for two reasons: (i) to make up for the restrictions imposed by teachers' fixed consultation hours; and (ii) to allow for more opportunities for students to interact with teachers and to deal with any problems they might have.

The centre runs Monday to Thursday from 10am to 4pm, and has at least one EAP specialist on hand to respond to student queries. The EAP teachers take turns, with each shift lasting a total of two hours, adding to their existing workload. Teachers interviewed said that the centre is a "positive development" (Teacher 3), which has allowed more students to approach the EAP teachers and have their issues addressed (Teacher 5). Some of the tasks that these teachers perform at the drop-in centre include providing feedback on students' essay drafts for the course, responding to EAP-related questions students may have, assisting in the deconstruction of assignment topics and so on. Students have the opportunity to visit the centre individually or in pre-arranged groups.

### **Email assistance**

At least three of the teachers (teachers 2, 3 and 9) said that they have often had email correspondence with their students. Although not in large volumes, a number of their part-time students (who work during the day and attend evening face-to-face sessions), as well as some day students, had emailed the teachers with EAP related queries. These ranged from asking what the assignment question meant, to what the individual elements of a paragraph constituted, to strategies on improving their EAP skills. An electronic medium such as email eases the barrier that may exist between the teacher and their shy Pacific students. Written correspondence is perhaps not as

disconcerting for the student as discussing the same issues verbally, although for ESL students, writing might be daunting as well.

### **Feedback on assignments**

All teachers said that they endeavoured to give as much constructive feedback on students' essays as possible so that students were able to gain more. Teacher 3 emphasised giving "detailed feedback" while teacher 9 said that for the first two assignments, she provided as many comments as possible, and then reduced the number of her comments in other subsequent assignments. Teacher 7 highlighted that he did not give out the marked assignments in class, since he wanted to hand these out personally. He believes that when students get their assignments, most of them will take a quick glance through them, note the mark they had been given and then put the marked assignment away, perhaps never to be looked at again. In giving them out individually, he is able to raise the issues in the assignments, and at the same time help to clear any doubts the students may have.

### **Other forms of solutions**

Three other ways of helping students overcome their challenges in the EAP course were mentioned by the teachers. Simplifying complex vocabulary for the students was one of these. Teacher 4 said that a number of her students often had difficulty identifying the meanings of complex vocabulary in their reading tasks, and inferring meaning from context proved difficult for these students. She helped her students by providing simpler words, and at the same time encouraged them to learn the complex words.

Another strategy was to provide extra sessions for a special group of students. Some regional students arrived late owing to personal circumstances (such as scholarship delays, or flight disruptions). Teacher 3 said that to assist her late starters

who had missed sessions on the 15 steps (of essay writing), she had regular extra sessions for these students until the steps had been covered.

A strategy mentioned by teacher 5 highlighted one of the important uses of Moodle. All students were expected to utilise Moodle, and submit their assignments through this medium as well. A special chat facility on Moodle allows students to interact with other students. Like emails, this helps break the barriers that are present during face-to-face communication. Through this medium, the students are able to discuss assignment topics, lesson notes and general EAP matters with each other.

## **5.6 Summary**

This chapter has identified teacher perceptions on the challenges that teachers faced in the delivery of the EAP course at the University of the South Pacific in Semester 1, 2012, the difficulties faced by their students, the cultural groups that have particular problems as perceived by the teachers, and the solutions used by the teachers to resolve these challenges. Teacher perceptions are important because they help provide an alternative perspective on the complexities of the challenges faced by the students. Furthermore, by sharing their ideas on the challenges faced by teachers and students, they have offered a description of their EAP classes. This description is useful for needs analysis because it identifies how diverse the EAP classes are.

Most teachers indicated having to deal with diversity in the classroom as a significant challenge for them. This ranged from different age groups of students, to variations in their proficiency and diverse cultural groups. Each type of diversity presented its own set of issues for the teachers. The presence of older students meant teachers had to be aware of cultural implications and potential responsibilities of these students such as parenting, and mixed proficiency levels in the classroom required more careful preparation of lessons. Most teachers also pointed out challenging workloads

that required a large portion of their time. This included teaching hours, student numbers and assessing students' work, and responding to general student queries. Most teachers felt that these did not often allow them to provide quality feedback in good time.

The most prevalent challenge teachers felt their students faced was a lack of understanding of academic conventions, and being able to respond to EAP tasks. This was usually associated with the lack of such training in students' secondary school education. Moreover, being at a university was a new experience for most of the students, and this in itself presented some problems: how to listen to lectures, time management, being independent learners, using Moodle and other university tools, and abandoning learning styles unconsciously encouraged by their former schools (like rote learning). Feelings of being displaced, and homesickness were also associated with this, and potentially some students may see their stay in Fiji as a 'holiday'. While these views were expressed with regard to the teachers' current students at the time of the interview, the teachers added that these were issues they found among students every semester. Thus, a special case for intervention programs to help reduce the student difficulties can be mounted.

When asked to identify issues associated with individual cultural groups, the teachers listed problems encountered by some of the cultural groups, focussing on groups that formed the majority in their classes at the time. This, however, did not suggest that smaller groups' problems were unknown to the teachers. It was pointed out that Indigenous Fijians had generally better oral skills and wrote better English than most other groups. They were deemed professional and polite. However, some teachers noted that they often had problems with completing tasks on time. Indo-Fijians were identified as being generally good at English language skills, and perceived to have

strong study ethics. One teacher did note that some of her Indo-Fijian students lacked professional skills. Students from Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands were identified as being diligent and having a good level of English skills. Tongan students were perceived as being less independent and students from Kiribati required more personalised attention. These observations on individual cultural groups, although perceptions at this point, are highly significant. While these perceptions may not be accurate, they would still influence teachers' approaches. A study aimed at focussing on this aspect would help identify individual needs of Pacific students at the University of the South Pacific that would help in developing special programs to assist them. One of the points identified by the teachers was that while they had observed these issues with the individual cultural groups, it did not mean that other students did not have similar issues.

To assist their students in the course, the teachers employed various techniques. While they provided as much grammatical feedback as possible, they realised that this was best handled by a university-established unit, Student Learning Support. The rest of the strategies were used by the teachers. Consultations with students were held in teachers' offices, as well as in a newly set up drop-in centre ("UU114 Korner"). Email correspondence with students was also used, especially with those students who were unable to visit teachers personally because of work commitments. Teachers also indicated giving as much constructive feedback on students' assignments as possible, and one teacher went to the extent of explaining these verbally to individual students as well. Despite the scarcity of time, and the lack of resources, teachers used a variety of means to help the students achieve their goals. Pacific students are generally shy, and may not speak much when in the presence of other people (Tuafuti 2010). Thus, having

opportunities where they can converse with their teachers independently (outside class consultation hours) allows them to gain more confidence.

In conclusion, the teachers' responses help create a profile of Pacific EAP learners although the distinctions between different cultural groups were not identified much. While there could be many reasons for this lack of information, one possibility is that perhaps the problems faced by Pacific islanders in terms of EAP skills are uniform. There is, however, a section in the chapter where teacher comments about individual cultural groups have been noted. Such information is valuable to understand the needs of these groups of students. Having described the interview responses from the EAP teachers at the University of the South Pacific, the next chapter will attempt to discuss the implications of the findings.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The focus of the thesis was to establish the relationship, if any, between the diverse groups of students at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, and the needs and abilities they bring to their studies in the English for Academic Purposes course offered by the university. In order to achieve this, in the first instance, a needs analysis was conducted to identify the challenges faced by the students, and to distinguish any fundamental differences in terms of the challenges faced by these students from individual cultural groups. It was anticipated that the needs analysis would reveal useful demarcations between the diverse groups of students. However, it was also expected that the study would help identify the similarities in terms of these challenges among the various groups of learners. Once these challenges had been identified, the second aim of the project was to identify how the EAP course at the University endeavoured to address these challenges. In short, the thesis aimed to identify the needs of the students, understand these in terms of how they approach and make sense of the EAP course, and understand the matches and mismatches between what is needed by these groups of students and what the course offered in its current form.

In order to carry out this research, three main data sources were used. Firstly, applying the principles of document analysis, the university's EAP course documents (assignments, course books, and supplementary resources were scrutinised). The information gathered from this exercise was used to generate items for the two questionnaires and interview schedules that were used to collect data from the participants. The first questionnaire was administered to the student-participants in week 4 of their EAP course while the second questionnaire was distributed in week 11. This was done to compare the confidence levels of the students at the beginning and



towards the end of the course. This allowed for the comparison of trends and confidence ratings of the diverse groups of learners. To supplement these data, interviews were also conducted with teachers of the EAP course. The use of this mixed-method approach and various sources allowed for triangulation of data.

One of the difficulties faced during the data-gathering period was the inability to be physically present at the research site owing to the fact that the research site and the researcher were in two different countries. This spatial distance contributed to a number of complications. There were delays in getting information via email owing to the busy schedule of the teachers, and complications in organising interview sessions with teachers. In order to deal with these issues, a research assistant was appointed who later withdrew due to work commitments. This distance also proved expensive and contributed to the consumption of time. Another cause of worry was the lower number of student participants than hoped for. It was anticipated that 130 students (10 from each cultural group) would participate in the study. However, this was not achieved because of lower enrolment numbers from some of the member countries of the University. For instance, in the semester when the questionnaires were administered, only one student from the Cook Islands had enrolled in the EAP course. Thus, in total, some 80 students responded to the questionnaires. A number of on-site visits were also made.

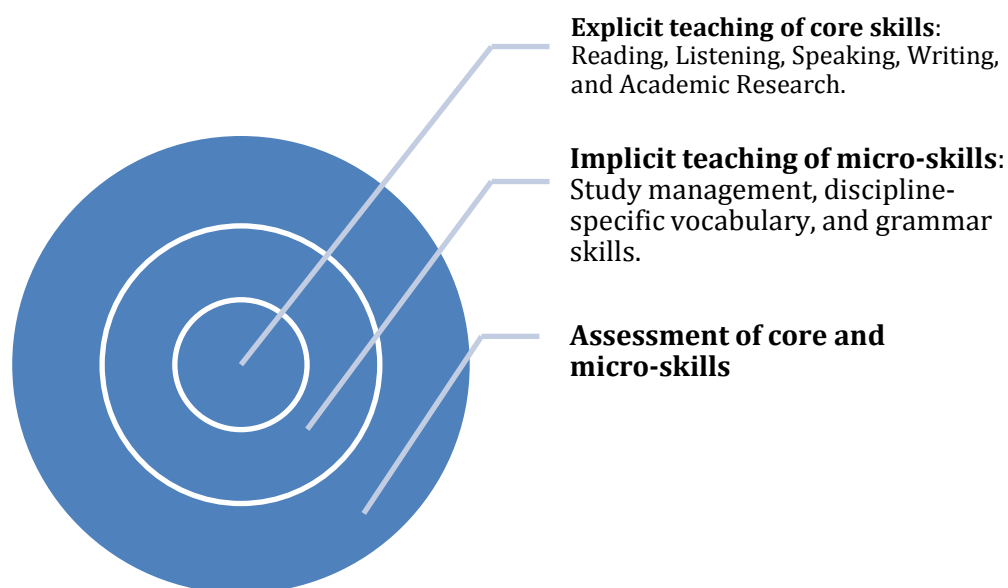
## **6.2 Results categories: implications**

This discussion chapter sets out to highlight the main findings of the study, and focuses on the implications emerging from the results. The discussion has been divided into nine broad sub-topics, which were also used to stream the results in chapter 4. These broad sub-topics in totality form the boundaries of the EAP course that is taught at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. Figure 6.1 explains the relationship

between these nine sub-topics. The diagram represents exclusive layers presented as discrete components of teaching.

Figure 6.1

*The EAP Course at USP*



(based on information obtained from UU114 Course Outline for 2012 and student questionnaire response themes).

At the core of the course are the key academic skills of reading, listening, speaking, writing and researching. These skills are taught explicitly during the course (UU114 Course Outline 2012). During the course, teachers also teach (albeit implicitly) study management skills, discipline-specific vocabulary and grammar skills. These are taught through setting tasks for students to complete, and through feedback on these tasks. To assess the extent to which these core and micro-skills have been acquired by the students, the outer ring of the concentric circle represents the assessment tasks. These are the essays, tests and final examination that are completed by students during the course. Essentially, the core skills are complemented by the micro-skills, which are all then assessed through the assessment tasks.

This section of the chapter will discuss the implications of the results, which have been divided into the nine sub-topics (categories) that have emerged from an analysis of data. Several studies have also been referred to in this section to demonstrate the relationship between results of this thesis and findings from other studies.

### **6.2.1 Study management**

The questionnaire items for study management focussed on students' confidence in meeting the attendance requirements of the course during the semester, and submitting all assignments on time. Overall, it can be said that while most students (81%) initially, that is, at the beginning of the semester, felt confident about attending classes and submitting assignments, in practice, this posed some difficulties. The second questionnaire revealed that there was a diminution in confidence. The number of respondents who had high confidence shifted from 81% to 65%, with a 15% increase in moderate levels of confidence. This pattern was evident across all four cultural groups: Micronesians, Melanesians, Polynesians and Indo-Fijians. The initial display of high confidence may be attributed to the students' perception that attendance is perhaps not an important factor in success, and that it is something that is more easily accomplished than writing essays. Another possible speculation for this could be that these students were naive and had not realised initially how demanding the course would be. On the contrary, as the demands of university study became apparent, they would have realised that amidst assignments, cultural commitments and social events, it was perhaps easier to forgo attending EAP classes to make time for other activities. It is therefore essential that students have an understanding of the demands of the course before it begins, although impressing this upon students may not be straightforward.

This problem with attending university classes is not uncommon in academic institutions. In a study exploring the reasons why undergraduate marketing students at

an Australian university failed to attend classes, Dolnicar et al. (2009) found several causes. These ranged from students' perception of subject difficulty and quality of class content and delivery, to students' own performance in these subjects. The authors infer that these reasons are universal and not just restricted to marketing students. Keen (2006) suggests that missing classes can have detrimental effects on students' performance in class assessments and exams. In fact, it is only logical to assume that not attending classes may perpetuate a vicious circle leading to failure. The USP study did not focus on identifying the reasons for absenteeism, but the Dolnicar et al. (2009) study suggests possible causes. A further reason for low attendance could be cultural. Pacific cultures place significant importance on social gatherings, cultural activities, church activities and traditional ceremonies, and formal education activities often take second priority over these (Nabobo 2001). Thus, if the timing of a cultural event, for instance, clashes with a university lecture, then Pacific Islander students may not attend the lecture in favour of the cultural event. At times, inter-island students and those who live in other countries, may travel home to attend important cultural events. While some may argue that since university students are adults, they should be encouraged to take ownership of their own learning, others feel that in the first year of studies, students should be given advice on what may work for them and what may not. This clearly seems a clash between western and Pacific ideologies. There is no suggestion here that universities should assume responsibility of students' learning, but encourage autonomy among students by assuming an advisory role in the first year of learning.

A considerable number of students (33% in total) found great difficulty in submitting assignments on time. A large number of Melanesians, Polynesians and Micronesians expressed facing varying degrees of difficulty, with 6 out of the 13 Polynesians conceding this was very difficult for them. It is apparent that there is a

mismatch between students' pre-perceived confidence and what they encountered. In addressing these issues, a number of strategies can be put in place to raise awareness among the students and to help them deal with this issue. Ideally, they should be informed of this in the beginning so that they are able to think about how to manage their time. A useful idea would be to video-record ex-students talk about what they wish they had known at the start of the course, and play this recording to newcomers. Moreover, a workshop staged in the early period of the course on time management would be beneficial. Special mentoring programs for students are often established to ensure that disadvantaged students are able to achieve academic success, and these programs have been found to be beneficial (Light 2001; Campbell & Campbell 1997). In a report discussing the importance and relevance of mentoring programs for 'Pasifika' students (students of Pacific Islander and Maori descent) Mara and Marsters (2009) suggest that these students often need such programs to enhance their chances of achieving success in tertiary institutions. The authors focus on Pasifika students in general, and do not delve into the individual cultural groups within the Pasifika community. While it may not be feasible to offer small-group mentoring support to University of the South Pacific students owing to large student enrolments in the course, perhaps the establishment of support classes would be an alternative response.

### **6.2.2 Assessment**

Respondents were asked about their confidence in their ability to respond to the assessment requirements of the course, excluding the end of semester examination. During the course, students were required to submit three researched essays (between 600 and 800 words each), do an oral presentation, and attempt a reading and referencing test.

Overall, this study reveals that in terms of difficulty encountered in responding to assessment tasks, most of the respondents expressed no strong opinion, although at the beginning of the course there was a tendency to rate higher confidence (between 45 and 59% suggested high confidence). Towards the end of the course, there was a general downward shift towards moderate levels of confidence, with between 18 – 25% expressing high confidence. This suggests that the students did not find responding to the assessment requirements as easy as they had predicted initially, although a majority did not find the assessments too difficult to deal with. It should be noted that between 18 and 25% of the respondents found the two assessment tasks difficult to deal with. Another significant point is that when students filled in their responses for Questionnaire 2, they had already received most of their assignment grades. This may have affected their ratings. This decline in confidence ratings is perhaps an eye-opener for both students as well as teachers. It suggests that for students, the task of responding to assessment requirements (writing researched essays and taking a reading and referencing test) took students by surprise in terms of its demands. With this kind of information available on hand, students can be warned about the misconception so that they can better prepare themselves for these tasks. For teachers, this finding implies that they may need to re-assess the way these tasks are presented to students, and what kind of support is provided to students to get the tasks completed. This in fact is not necessarily negative as teachers often may approach tasks with a naive understanding of how complicated they might be.

These moderate levels of confidence are not specific to the Pacific context. In a study conducted in Spain, Comas-Forgas and Sureda-Negre (2010) explored the reasons why students plagiarised in their university assignments. The authors suggest that students' lack of confidence in responding to their university assessment tasks can be

attributed to students' poor time management skills and the large number of assignments often required by lecturers. They believe that this, in turn, leads to dishonest practice in academic assignments. Vardi (2012) further maintains that the ability to incorporate external sources in one's arguments is a skill that takes "time to develop and hone" (p. 921). In the context of the University of the South Pacific students, producing arguments in a language that the students have not mastered completely poses further complications. Moreover, in a typical semester, these students enrol in at least four subjects and the demands imposed by these subjects can be quite significant. These factors may contribute towards students' modest levels of confidence in responding to university assessment tasks.

In their interview responses, while a number of teachers alluded to plagiarism being a problem among their students, at least two teachers made this comment explicit. Teacher 1 said that plagiarism is a "problem across the board" because high schools do not address this issue well. This was also raised by Teacher 3, who added that it was important to "change the mindset" of the students to make them realise that "copying others' work is unethical". There is a broadly acknowledged belief among academics that students from Hofstede's (1990) high power distance cultures tend to plagiarise more than students from individualistic cultures (Martin 2011). This is attributed to the existence of "different ethical constructs". Students might "be prone to plagiarism because of their educational system and cultural norms" (p. 4). This is relevant here because Pacific cultures (including Indo-Fijian cultures) have been found to be collectivist and are high power-distance cultures where the views of seniors are never questioned (Frank & Toland 2002). However, Martin's (2011) own study of plagiarism by American and non-American students discovered the opposite: "they [collectivists] appear to plagiarise less than individualists" (p. 16). Furthermore, Croxford (2001, p. 57)

advises that there are some cultures that view authorities on various subjects differently from how westerners view them. In such cultures, authorities are not to be challenged. Some members of these cultures may also see “tampering with the author” as “an unwarranted infringement of physical privacy” (p. 56).

### **6.2.3 Academic research skills**

Undertaking academic research is a significant component of university courses. This is reflected in the assessment tasks that university students are expected to produce in their courses. For example, the UU114 assessment tasks including essays and oral presentations require students to incorporate materials from external sources, and the accompanying marking criteria highlight the importance of in-text referencing and reference lists.

In my study, the University of the South Pacific student participants typically painted a positive picture when asked about referencing and researching. At the beginning of the course, most participants (72%) said that they expected to improve during the course their level of understanding with respect to accessing information from external sources and using these in their own works to support their arguments. This expectation may stem from the fact that academic researching is generally not promoted in secondary schools. Several writers have suggested that the schooling system and the educational practices of many schools in the Pacific are exam-driven, wherein the regurgitation of knowledge is encouraged, with little or no emphasis on research (Bacchus 2000; Phan & Deo 2008; Tavola 1991). Phan and Deo (2008) further imply that in Pacific schools, “learning is passive, authoritarian, and non-reflective” where knowledge cannot be contested. In such exam-driven learning environments, there is little space for engaging in academic research.



Therefore, as academic research is not accorded high priority in Pacific secondary schools, most participants of the survey had high expectations from the course in this regard. It is also possible that given the lack of exposure to research in schools, the students may not have encountered the prospect of academic research prior to seeing the questionnaire items. They believed that the course would help them to tackle the associated issues such as paraphrasing, in-text citations and the general extraction of vital information, and enable them to use these skills in other courses. Even though towards the end of the course a large majority (44%) said that the course had indeed prepared them well in this regard, a significant number of participants expressed needing more help (22%). This group is not atypical. A report that investigated how native speaker college students in the US perceive the research process, indicated that generally, “students reported being challenged, confused, and frustrated ... despite the convenience, relative ease, or ubiquity of the Internet.” (Head & Eisenberg 2009, p. 13). They note that students often get frustrated because there is too much information available on the research topic, which leaves them overwhelmed.

A further concern of the students was the fact that information does not remain static, and researchers have to constantly look for updated information. While the Internet has created a vast store of information, it has not contributed to making what Head and Eisenberg (2009, p. 14) call “finding context” any easier for the novice researchers. There is a plethora of information available online on any given topic, but there is no real tool to assist researchers to sift through this information. Moreover, the Internet is a relatively recent development in the Pacific - the Pacific nation of Tokelau established Internet connections only in 2002 (Asia Pacific Network Information Centre 2004). With sparsely distributed population across the Pacific, and with geographical barriers contributing to what Campbell (2009, p. 94) calls “islandness” (or insularity)

and remoteness, not all Pacific Islanders have the same level of exposure to the Internet. These varying degrees of familiarity may lead to further complications for these students when using the Internet to gather information. They may find the Internet a useful way of dealing with their inability to maintain consistency and coherence in essays (Koya 2005).

There are several implications from the observations made at the University of the South Pacific. First of all, a number of participants still need further assistance with conducting research and referencing. Since a large number of students said that they are expected to undertake a considerable amount of research and referencing in their courses, those who need further assistance may not be able to cope with their future assignments with ease because of being disadvantaged. This idea of students' inability to cope with the requirements of universities was also raised by Halliday (1983), who commented that the moment Pacific students enter a university where the medium of communication and instruction is English, some are already at a disadvantage. Moreover, while no major disparities between students from different cultures were observed, in some cases, more Polynesian and Micronesian participants than others expressed lower levels of confidence.

The progress of these students, together with those who may show signs of not coping, could be constantly checked during the course so that adequate intervention is offered when needed. A post-course program addressing these issues could be developed to help those who still needed such assistance. A case can be established for offering further assistance in the area of research and referencing. This important EAP skill is not taught extensively in secondary schools, and 14 weeks of EAP at university is insufficient to cover all EAP skills. As such, a number of students may feel that their research and referencing skills are inadequate. In academia, students are expected to

engage in a significant amount of research, and present their findings in essays, reports and oral presentations. Thus, not having the essential knowledge on how to conduct research and referencing would have negative effects on these students' assignments.

One of the recurring themes in the interviews with teachers was that those students who often lag behind in their studies are those who lack appropriate motivation and therefore have attendance problems. Teacher 9, for instance, said she often has a few students in class who would be absent from class at least once a week. These students would also often have difficulty submitting assessment tasks on time. The research process is often taught in stages in this course, beginning with the identification of research goals and culminating in the collection and evaluation of information. Essentially, an EAP class typically provides practice and useful advice in each of the stages. If a student misses a class where a research process stage is explained, then this student will face problems with later stages that build on previous ones. A vicious circle is created that can possibly lead to failure. This, however, does not necessarily indicate shortcomings in language abilities, but rather a failure to maintain attendance.

#### **6.2.4 Reading skills**

Most participants were optimistic about their reading skills both at the beginning and towards the end of the course. They demonstrated through their responses to questionnaire 2 items on reading that the course had helped them gain confidence in this important skill. However, there were pockets of participants who expressed some reservations. Towards the end of the course, 9 out of the 12 Micronesians and 7 of the 13 Polynesian participants still lacked confidence in their reading skills. This is an important finding, because if these students are not self-assured about their reading skills, and considering that some 69% had earlier suggested that they would be doing an extensive amount of reading in their future courses, then they would be severely

disadvantaged from attaining their full potential in their university studies. It can also be argued, however, that anxiety about reading abilities are widespread and the responses of the participants could potentially be naïve. Several writers from different cultural contexts, such as Brantmeier's (2005) and Sellers' (2000) studies of Spanish university students, Çetinkaya's (2011) case study on Turkish students, and Tsai and Li's (2012) and Wu's (2011) Taiwanese studies, have discussed reading anxieties among English language learners, highlighting that such anxieties are common and teachers need to be aware of this. However, Brantmeier (2005) noted that speaking in L2 classrooms causes more anxiety than reading. While these writers' studies were not based on Pacific students, their findings are arguably applicable in Pacific contexts.

Another possible explanation for the decline in confidence levels could be attributed to students' lack of knowledge of their own reading abilities prior to the course. What this means is that these students may not have comprehended that their reading skills were inadequate for academic level study. However, during the course, they would have gradually realised this and would have thus expressed lower levels of confidence. This realisation can, in fact, be seen as a positive development whereby towards the end of the course, learners were aware of their lack of academic reading skills. This would then potentially pave the way to do something about it.

Nonetheless, in order to assist these students, a post-course reading assistance program could be developed where reading skills are specifically addressed. A number of universities in the US, for instance, have reading programs installed within faculties, and which are designed to assist all learners irrespective of their linguistic background in improving their reading abilities in the discipline they are studying. One such reading program, called the 'Directed Reading Program' (DRP), is used extensively at the University of Connecticut's Department of Mathematics. The DRP is designed to pair

undergraduate students with postgraduate students who operate as mentors (University of Connecticut, 2013). These programs are divided into various streams, with each stream focussing on a specialised area in Mathematics (for example, algebra, set theory and so on). Each stream has a number of specific reading texts that paired-students work through. According to the DRP website (para. 4)

Each mentee meets weekly with his/her mentor for about an hour. The details of these meetings are left up to the mentee/mentor pairs; they might include presentations by the mentee, informal lecturing by the mentor, general discussion, questions about exercises, etc. In addition to the meetings, the mentee is expected to work independently for at least four hours each week. At the end of the semester, each student gives a 15-20 minute presentation on a topic they have studied. This presentation is to be *widely accessible* and is meant to be introductory rather than a time to "show off" with highly technical material: it is far better to give a survey of several interesting theorems than one detailed proof.

While the directed reading program, such as the one described above, does not form a major thrust of this thesis, it is nonetheless presented as an example of a program that can be potentially developed at the University of the South Pacific to assist the students. The mentee/mentor pairs could belong to the same ethnic group so that communication between the two would be easier.

The UU114 course uses Rose's (2005) reading program that is best delivered over a period of time. This program, which operates quite differently from the DRP, takes readers through a series of stages where particular emphasis is put on vocabulary and comprehension. The program, which is embedded in the USP's EAP course, allows students to work through a selected reading text in a number of stages. Owing to the fact

that Rose's program is a time-consuming exercise, the EAP course introduces the students to David Rose's method and then expects students to utilise this in other readings that they do. Ideally, this program will best be delivered in a post-EAP reading program where there are fewer time constraints, rather than in a 14-week course where a number of other skills are being developed concurrently.

### **6.2.5 Writing skills**

The development of writing skills among L2 learners of English has been of much interest to researchers for a considerable time (Jordon 1997). Bacha (2002, p. 164) acknowledges that academic institutions accord significance to writing not only because most university tasks require it, but also because "the writing process helps to develop ... cognitive skills". This is important because it then allows students to analyse, synthesise, make inferences and so on, and develop as intellectuals. In the Pacific, the development of writing skills is of great importance because, traditionally, writing skills have been lacking in Pasifika cultural contexts. Dickie (2003) notes that research into the literacy abilities of Pasifika background students reveals that these students do not achieve in literacy as well as their peers in New Zealand tertiary institutions. Moreover, Mara and Marsters (2009, p. 20) in promoting the need for mentoring programs for Pasifika students, allude to "much needed assistance [that Pacific students need] with their academic writing skills". In a study conducted at the University of the South Pacific, Green and Sameer (2007) discovered that the development of writing skills was seen as paramount by most faculties at the university, and as a result, a new writing-focussed EAP course was developed at USP.

In their interviews, teachers emphasised the importance of feedback, both written and oral. All teachers felt that their students needed as much feedback as possible to get them to improve on their academic English skills. However, the amount

of feedback and the medium varied. While teacher 4 gave “personalised attention” to those students who were particularly weak in writing, teacher 6 preferred to have group consultations with students who had similar problems in writing. This allowed her to focus on problem areas in more detail, and at the same time make students aware that there were other students in the class who faced similar problems in writing. Teacher 9 devoted a significant amount of attention to students’ drafts, and tended to give more feedback on the first two assignments and then “eased off” with her comments in later assignments. She believes that while students need as much help as possible in identifying errors, they should also not be made to rely on the teacher to do this all the time.

The area of formative feedback in writing has attracted a number of researchers (Wingate 2010; Walker 2009; Weaver 2006). While some findings have been negative, such as feedback comments found to be unhelpful by students (Walker 2009; Weaver 2006), Wingate (2010, p. 530) warns that student motivation is important if feedback is to work. She found that when her participants “utilised their feedback comments”, they “improved in the areas previously criticised, and did not receive the same criticisms again”. This implies that when feedback from teachers is targeted, and students are motivated to utilize this feedback, then positive results can be achieved.

However, towards the end of the course, there were still some students who did not have high confidence in their writing skills, suggesting that these students needed further assistance with developing their writing skills. One cultural group that expressed lower confidence in writing than other groups was the Polynesian group, where 4 out of 13 students indicated having low confidence in writing skills. A significant number of Micronesians (5 out of 12) were only moderately confident. These findings are significant because most assessment tasks at the University of the South Pacific require

students to produce written responses (Green & Sameer 2007). Even though the course had a heavy focus on writing skills, there were still some students (11% in total, which included 4 of the 13 Polynesians) whose writing confidence had not increased greatly. At this stage, it can be postulated that these groups of students may need particular attention, and that appropriate intervention programs could be designed to help raise the students' confidence in writing skills. A study exploring the writing needs of individual cultural groups in the Pacific is yet to be published. The current study, therefore, paves the way for a larger-scale study of various cultural groups to enable a better understanding of the differences among the cultural groups.

Furthermore, the study results reveal that participants gained greater confidence in the pragmatic aspects of written communication, and less so in the conceptual aspects. A greater percentage of participants indicated requiring more assistance with paragraphing and developing ideas than with meeting the word limits of the essay. This implies that perhaps classroom activities should focus on developing the conceptual aspects of written communication. Wan (2014) suggests that ESL students' conceptualisation of ideas in writing can be greatly enhanced by a "metaphor-oriented intervention" (p. 66) where students are asked to evaluate their beliefs about writing over a period of time by using metaphors. Wan goes on further to suggest that by using this strategy, teachers can "train students to think critically about their writing practices" (p. 67).

Another significant outcome of the USP study about writing skills is the declaration by a significant number of students of not having to write either or both of essays or reports in their other courses. Despite students needing neither of these, the EAP course still teaches them these text types. Ferris (2001) describes the contrasting viewpoints of Horowitz (1986), who claimed that EAP curriculum should focus on



developing the academic skills which the students will find more useful in their university disciplines, and Spack (1988), who suggests that most EAP teachers do not have the required knowledge to deal with discipline specificities. Ferris (2001, p. 300) notes that there is widespread adherence to Horowitz's (1986) notion, however most EAP courses continue to teach general EAP skills. If students know that they are learning about something that they may not find useful in future, then this may adversely affect their motivation to study. Future research could investigate the motivation level of these students, especially if they are learning something that they may not need in their other courses.

#### **6.2.6 Vocabulary skills**

The results from the study reveal that while most students were not confident about their level of vocabulary, most also mentioned that they had acquired some useful discipline-specific vocabulary during the course. In the beginning of the course, slightly more than half the participants (52%) suggested that they needed an extensive amount of help to get them to use appropriate vocabulary. Of these, at least 24 out of 42 Melanesians (59%), and 7 out of 13 Polynesians (54%) stated needing a considerable amount of assistance with vocabulary development. Towards the end of the course, a large number (38%) still needed further assistance with this, implying that a significant number of learners were not highly confident of their vocabulary knowledge. While there was only negligible change among Polynesians, 16 out of 42, that is, 38 per cent of the Melanesians indicated needing more help with building their academic vocabulary. However, in their responses to another questionnaire item, most learners across the four cultural groups suggested that the course had helped them develop discipline-specific vocabulary, as a large number of respondents (46%) felt that they needed little if any help with this. So while the participants of the survey had learnt a

number of useful terms specific to their field of study, their ability to utilise these expressions still needed some further development. The development of discipline-specific vocabulary may have been influenced largely by the fact that whilst studying EAP, the students were also concurrently studying their discipline courses. The EAP course outline (2012) revealed that the course did not have a deliberate focus on teaching discipline-specific vocabulary. Most participants (38% in total) also felt that their skills were sufficient in inferring the meaning of words from context. Of these, 9 (out of 13) were Indo-Fijians.

While most of the results in this section of the data have revealed a positive picture, perhaps it is also important to note that not every participant felt positively about their vocabulary expertise towards the end of the course. This is an important observation because learners need to be able to use appropriate words to express precise meanings, and to be able to understand texts, if they are progress smoothly in their academic life. In the 1980s, Krashen (1989) had argued that linguistic knowledge can only be acquired if the learner focuses on the message that is being conveyed, and that this can only take place in authentic language use. He maintained that focusing on form did not result in acquisition but in learning. According to Krashen (1981, p. 1) language acquisition requires “meaningful interaction in the target language” in naturalistic settings. The focus is more on the comprehension and not on grammar or the mechanics of language. Language learning, on the other hand, is fostered by “error correction and the presentation of explicit rules” (p.2). In short, language acquisition is learning a language through natural immersion while language learning involves direct instruction, especially on what is grammatically correct and what is not. Since then, some researchers (Ellis 2008; Elgort & Nation 2010) have suggested that in terms of vocabulary development in L2, natural acquisition is insufficient, and that “deliberate

learning provides an efficient and convenient way of memorizing vocabulary” (Elgort 2011, p. 368). In an EAP program like the one offered at the University of the South Pacific, vocabulary development (especially academic vocabulary) should play an important role.

There is also a case for teaching discipline-specific vocabulary. Hyland (2002) notes that writing tasks in university courses are discipline-specific, and North (2005, p. 518) highlights that in university learning settings, “communication skills may be context-specific”. Furthermore, Nguyen et al. (2012) discovered that after incorporating discipline-specific vocabulary in their instructions, their Economics students’ subject-related vocabulary expanded by 13% in a short period of time. Given this benefit, perhaps it would be beneficial to include the teaching of vocabulary specific to students’ disciplines of study. On the contrary, each subject has its specialised vocabulary and this may present problems for a generic EAP course.

### **6.2.7 Grammar skills**

The survey results revealed that about half of the students (51% in total) indicated that their grammar skills had improved through the course and as a result they felt more confident of their grammar skills, with students from at least two cultural groups (Melanesian and Indo-Fijian) indicating higher levels of grammar preparedness than other groups. This improvement may actually be a product of the feedback that the teachers gave to their students, although the multi-lingual situation in Fiji does allow for a wider access to the English language outside classroom settings. All the teachers said in their interview that they provide comments on students’ grammatical correctness, although the types and amount of comments varied from teacher to teacher. In terms of the four cultural groups, there were no major discrepancies, although a slightly larger proportion of Indo-Fijian (7 out of 13) and Melanesian (24 out of 42) participants

expressed higher levels of preparedness than the others. This indicates that these groups of students may be less likely to face grammar problems after the EAP course, and that those from Polynesia and Micronesia may require grammar workshops to help them gain confidence.

Students who do not speak English as their first language often have problems with English grammar, even at university. Baik and Greig (2009) highlight the plight of university teachers whose NNS students often demonstrate insufficient grammatical skills. They point out that “many of them [ESL students at university] struggle to meet the demands of their mainstream university courses” (p. 401), and this “can cause considerable frustration for academic teaching staff”. At the University of the South Pacific, the English for Academic Purposes course does not focus extensively on grammar (UU114 Course Outline 2012). Its main aim is to teach students skills that would help them to read effectively by utilising reading strategies such as skimming, scanning and active reading and respond to university assignments and other requirements. It is generally understood that students who come into EAP programs have had general English classes prior to entry that would have focused on grammar skills. In the Pacific, this initial grounding is provided in primary and secondary schools and thus USP’s EAP course does not have specific lessons on it.

Nonetheless, it is clear from the results of this survey that most students who enrol in the EAP course at the University of the South Pacific believe that their EAP classes will have a grammar focus which will improve their skills in this area. Such beliefs are not uncommon. Zhou (2009) explored learner beliefs pertaining to grammar and vocabulary in EAP writing, and one of her discoveries was that her participants had some unachievable goals (such as writing essays free of grammar errors). Thus, she calls for teachers to listen to the “voices” of their students to raise their awareness of

what is attainable and what is not. According to Simon and Taverniers (2011), there is now a general agreement in academia that it is important to understand what learners' beliefs are because this is often suggestive of the strategies that learners use, which, in turn, has a direct correlation with the acquisition of the target language.

### **6.2.8 Listening skills**

Questions about listening to lectures and taking down useful notes attracted mostly positive responses from the participants of this survey. Most believed that their listening skills were relatively satisfactory and that with the help of the course, they could improve this skill further. The only area where a large number of participants responded negatively was in regard to understanding different accents. Most students (62% in total) felt initially that unfamiliar accents were difficult for them and that they needed more help with this. During the course, the views of these students shifted positively slightly, however, a majority (41%) still felt that they were not that confident with unfamiliar accents. Most of these participants were Micronesians (5 out of 12) and Polynesians (10 out of 13). The less exposure one has to different accents, the more problems with understanding foreign accents will be faced. Moreover, students from more isolated and less technologically connected islands would have the most problems. The accent of lecturers causing problems for students is not specific to the University of the South Pacific. In fact, universities often have teachers who are natives of other countries, and as such, may speak the language of instruction with an accent with which the local students may not be familiar. This may cause several hurdles for the students. At the University of Iowa, Professor of educational psychology, Tom Rocklin, encourages lecturers and teachers to be mindful of their students' inability to comprehend due to the teachers' accents (University of Iowa 1999). He highlights several strategies for his teachers: using visual aids, speaking slowly, always facing the

students when talking, and most importantly, acknowledging to the students that the teacher's accent may be an issue. These strategies may help students deal with the unfamiliar accent of a teacher.

In her PhD dissertation on the listening needs of University of the South Pacific's distance EAP students, Chand (2007) notes that the course did not provide enough listening opportunities for the students and that there was no needs analysis undertaken to identify the real listening needs of the EAP students (p. 229). She recommends that there should be more authentic opportunities, such as live interaction (such as face-to-face classes) between teachers and students. Chand has indeed raised some important concerns. Firstly, it is imperative that course designers are aware of what their potential students' listening needs are, and based on this, they should then design a course that seeks to meet the needs of the students. When materials are selected randomly on an ad hoc basis, the learners may be severely disadvantaged. This may happen when teachers select published resources for in-class use where these resources may not necessarily be applicable to the local context. At the same time, there may be no published authentic listening materials with a local context that can be used in the course. However, the mixing of people from various islands and their subsequent exposure to a variety of accents and Englishes, is likely to enhance their comprehension of a wider variety of styles, registers and the like. However, the more diverse the student body is, the more important and complex this becomes.

### **6.2.9 Speaking skills**

Oral skills are important in university life for two main reasons. Firstly, in most courses, oral presentations are assessed and therefore have a bearing on how successful the students will be in the course and eventually in their program of study. Also, students are expected to participate in tutorial discussions where their ability to identify

arguments and present them convincingly to their audience may lead to the general formation of opinions of their intellect by their tutors and other students. However, many ESL learners experience difficulty speaking in class. A number of researchers (Leki 2001; Liu 2001; Morita 2004) have concluded that many ESL students in university content classrooms have “feelings of inadequacy and frustration while participating in oral classroom activities such as whole-class discussions and formal oral presentations” (Kim 2006, p. 480).

The results of the USP survey generally reveal that the participants held high expectations from the course, anticipating that their speaking skills would benefit from the course. While 47% respondents suggested that the course had indeed helped them improve their oral presentation skills, a relatively large number (30%, or 24 out of 80) still called for more assistance in improving this academic skill. The results of this part of the survey also indicate that two groups of participants, Polynesians and Micronesians, may need extra support as a significant number of these participants identified having low levels of confidence with certain aspects of their speaking skills: 7 out of 13 Polynesians and 4 out of 12 Micronesians reported towards the end of the course that they had very little or no confidence in delivering oral presentations. Furthermore, the difference in the proportions between Polynesians and Micronesians is quite significant, with more Polynesians having lower levels of confidence than Micronesians.

A special monitoring program in the course, leading to appropriate intervention, may provide valuable assistance to these groups of participants. Together with this, it is perhaps also useful to bear in mind the pedagogical implications presented by Kim (2006). He suggests that the oral communication tasks in an EAP class should be similar to the tasks that students will be expected to engage in their university content classes.

He also advocates that ESL students need to understand the importance of oral presentations and discussions in content classes. Further discussion on the relevance of EAP courses to students' future needs is presented in section 6.6.

### **6.3 Students' perceptions of the course**

One of the recurring themes in the results is the students' belief that their English language skills, in general, would improve during the EAP course. English language skills relate to the use of appropriate vocabulary and the ability to write using correct grammar. More advanced learners of English also learn about the production of complex grammatical structures such as using passives and writing complex sentences, demonstrating their knowledge of relative and subordinate clauses in English. In the interview, teacher 6 highlighted that her students often were not able to produce complex grammar accurately. This posed a dilemma for her because there was no space in the course structure to focus on the development of grammar skills. While a number of respondents hoped to improve their writing skills during the course, a large majority also assumed that the course would improve their English grammar skills. It is apparent that these students feel that the course has the responsibility to help them become better in their English language skills, and there was no ownership of this on the part of the students. This lack of personal responsibility may indicate a significant issue: are they independent learners?

In their interviews, most teachers noted that they have often had to 'spoon feed' students to get them to understand concepts, and to coerce them into submitting assignments and completing tests by constantly reminding them of the repercussions, and by imposing penalties for non-compliance. One of the implications of this coercion by teachers is that it would make the students less independent, and may make them become more reliant on their teachers to complete tasks in future. This idea was also



explored by Hansen-Strait (1993) whose study involved students from Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Tahiti, and Hawaii, as well as some Asian countries. They used Witkin and Goodenough's (1977) field dependent/independent theory, and found that South Pacific students, in particular females, were generally more field dependent (Hansen-Strait 1993). According to Witkin and Goodenough (1977), such people tend to rely on other people for their sense of identity. However, there is a case for providing younger adult Pacific students with some level of coercion. Mara and Marsters (2009), for instance, imply that Pacific students are vulnerable owing to their linguistic abilities. Having used their mother tongue for most of their lives, these students may not have adequate skills to tackle academic English texts at university level. Halliday (1983) further points out that western academic cultures are not the same as what Pacific students are exposed to prior to joining universities, and therefore they will face challenges when they join such institutions where western ideologies are practised. In other studies, Light (2001), and Campbell and Campbell (1997) have reiterated that mentoring programs benefit all groups of learners no matter what level they are at.

A further possible explanation for the assumption that the course will improve students' English language skills can be attributed to the students' English language competence. While for most USP students, English is a second language, for others it may be a third or fourth language. The level of exposure in their countries varies considerably. For example, in Kiribati, the native language is used most of the time, whilst in Tonga and Samoa, English may only be used in a limited number of domains. Having insufficient practice in the language could have detrimental effects on the language competence. Furthermore, Halliday (1983) remarks that Pacific EAP students have the additional challenge of communicating complex ideas in a language that they

are not familiar with, and are expected to use a level of language that they do not have much exposure to in their discourse communities.

These perceptions could be dangerous for they can lead to passive learning where the teacher is expected to supply all the information necessary to allow a student to pass the course – a clear example of what Witkin and Goodenough (1977) call field dependence. Academia is more about developing as an intellectual, and formulating and constructing ideas as we become exposed to new knowledge. This is a skill that needs to be developed and nurtured from as early as possible. A passive learner would inevitably deflect any ownership of learning to the teacher (or the course). In doing so, s/he is no longer directly responsible for his/her learning. Moreover, with an increase in globalisation trends, and with opportunities outside the Pacific for Pacific Islanders, the need to be able to use English well gains further importance. Not only are these students in competition with other Pacific students in their quest to enhance their life-opportunities, but they are also competing with international non-Pacific students.

#### **6.4 Developing critical thinking**

The interviews with teachers revealed that most students from all cultural groups often displayed lack of critical thinking skills. As such, the development of critical thinking is essential, especially in the Pacific context. This is because such skills often tend to be ignored due to cultural constraints. Papoutsaki and Sharp (2005) highlight that critical thinking and problem solving are seldom taught in Pacific schools. Moreover, McLaughlin (1996) observes, perhaps controversially, that most Pacific languages do not have the appropriate vocabulary that would enable questioning and critical thinking. Thus, it is essential that at universities, teachers should encourage their students to develop this skill. Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) provides teachers with

ideas on how critical thinking can be encouraged in the classroom by focussing on the higher order skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

In their interviews, all teachers pointed out that their students generally lacked the skills to think critically. The teachers rightly believe that this skill is of significant value if students were to achieve a better rate of success in their future study subjects at the University. Teacher 5 also re-iterated that to become a better individual beyond the walls of the University, the development of critical thinking is essential. However, the ideas of Papoutsaki and Sharp (2005) and McLaughlin (1996) seem to imply that the educational upbringing in Pacific societies coupled with the linguistic restrictions disadvantage Pacific Islanders into enhancing the development of their critical thinking skills. The question is, can educators instil the values of being critical in young pupils when culturally they are being unconsciously taught to not question the authority, and therefore the ideas of those older than you? Positive results can be achieved if Biggs and Tang's (2007) principles of constructive alignment, where all assessment tasks and teaching methods and content are linked to the learning outcomes, were to be employed. Moreover, teachers should include classroom activities that are aligned with the outcomes to help achieve them.

However, cultural and educational antecedents were not the only barriers to thinking critically. Papoutsaki and Sharp (2005) found that another reason why their students did not participate in much questioning was because of their perceived lack of knowledge on the subject constrained them from asking questions of substance. Their students did not possess a sound knowledge of the discussion topic and therefore generally remained quiet. This assertion of Papoutsaki and Sharp presents a dilemma for teachers by raising the question 'should teachers assume that their students lack a general ability to think critically?'. In order to deal with this, perhaps it is imperative

that teachers provide as much information, and in a variety of forms, on the topics they use in their classes so that their students are able to argue without hesitation. Alternatively, teachers could draw from students' experiences and expand on those to enable more discussion. Given the fact that the EAP teacher participants had suggested strong reservations about their students' ability to think critically, in light of Papoutsaki and Sharp's (2005) assertion, further research on factors preventing critical thinking among Pacific people is encouraged.

## **6.5 The need for intervention classes**

This study has recommended on several occasions the need to have support classes for those students (from all cultural groups) whose progress at university may be affected. This intervention support should, therefore, be needs based and not dependent entirely on ethnicity. Intervention classes are organised for those students who are identified by their teachers as needing extra support in the subject they are studying. Reed et al. (2009) refer to these students as "low-achieving students" and distinguish them from students with learning disabilities who have dysfunctional cognition and information processing systems. Such classes target those who may be at the risk of failing in the subject, and as such the main aims of the intervention classes are to improve students' retention rates and grades (Bailey & Karp 2003). This is achieved by improving academic skills and critical thinking (Reed, Kinder & Farnum 2007). Reed et al. (2009), who studied students with learning disabilities, also suggest that other outcomes may include helping students achieve "academic self-efficacy" (p. 385) and increase their "resourcefulness". They note that these students performed better after participating in their intervention program. In another study, Baik and Greig (2009) describe the results that emerged from discipline-specific intervention. They note that "students who participated regularly in the tutorial program performed markedly better

in European Architecture than students who failed to attend regularly” (p. 411). Thus, these studies lend important support for the need to have intervention classes that would enable disadvantaged students to be better able to deal with language issues in their academic studies. In the absence of such intervention programs, most Pacific students – irrespective of which cultural group they belong to - are severely disadvantaged especially if they are to receive education based on western ideologies that do not relate entirely to their traditional and cultural experiences.

Following Halliday’s (1983) comment on the disadvantageous status of Pacific students linguistically, it is thus imperative that extra support be provided to those EAP students who have may have difficulty with academic English even after completing the EAP course. Baik and Greig (2009) also note that most ESL students who achieve minimum English language requirements in order to gain admission into a university’s degree program, need support classes to allow them to meet the linguistic demands of academia. The writers highlight that “most Australian universities have responded by offering a range of language and academic support programs” (p. 411). Therefore, such programs could also be developed at the University of the South Pacific to provide continued level of linguistic support to assist the students in their educational pursuits. However, at the same time, these students should be encouraged to develop self-efficacy that will enable them to become autonomous to deal with linguistic issues they may face in future.

## **6.6 Critical differences**

Given the fact that the University of the South Pacific serves 12 countries in the region, with a wide variety of cultural and linguistic diversity among students of this institution, it would be naïve to treat all Pacific Islanders as being a homogenous group. Amid such vast diversity, one cannot but wonder about the implications of this on

education, among other contexts. This section of the chapter is primarily concerned with the critical differences that exist between students from the 12 South Pacific nations, and that would also have pedagogical implications. The discussion will address three different, but inter-related notions: diversity of culture, multitude of languages spoken, and the varying levels of exposure to the English language.

### **6.6.1 Cultural diversity**

In an attempt to encourage a deeper appreciation of what cultural pluralism in a classroom entails, Kramsch (2008, p. 390) postulates that

it is primarily about the transcultural circulation of values across borders, the negotiation of identities, the inversions, even inventions of meaning, often concealed by a common illusion of effective communication.

Each cultural group may have certain characteristics that would be unique. Pacific Islanders, due to their common ancestry, have several commonalities with respect to their languages and cultures. For example, Nabobo (2001) points out that competition is not encouraged in traditional Pacific societies, and that children are asked to talk only when they are required to. These cultural influences often persist to their higher studies and beyond, and play an important role in the shaping of the Pacific Islander identity. Some writers have questioned the influence and relevance of Pacific education systems (in schools and universities) towards the formation of this Pacific identity. Thaman (2012, p. 5), for instance, believes that “Pacific cultural values and ideals are often devalued and discouraged because they tend to conflict with the values that the school is trying to promote.” As such, young Pacific Islanders are faced with a tension between maintaining their cultural heritage or drifting towards replacing these with western ideologies and norms.

The differences between Pacific societies lie mostly in their traditional festivals and rituals. For instance, in Fijian societies, kava (a ceremonial drink) is drunk while seated on the ground or floor, whereas in Vanuatu, one can remain standing while drinking kava. This ceremonial drink only exists in Melanesian and Polynesian countries, and Micronesians do not have this as part of their culture. Technically, if a Ni-Vanuatu student were to attend a Fijian kava session, s/he would display offensive behaviour if they drank their kava standing up.

Thus, when these individuals with a mix of shared and unique cultural heritage are put in a classroom, Kramsch's (2008) proposition makes much sense. In such classrooms, learners expose similar cultural traits and at the same time engage in behaviour that may be new to those who do not share their cultures. From a pedagogical point of view, this mixed-classroom has several implications. In the first instance, learners are able to learn about each other's cultures and, as a result, contribute to their own understanding of the wider world. Moreover, during class discussions on topics of common interest (such as implications of 'islandness' and "remoteness"), teachers can draw on the experiences of this mixed group of students that would enhance the quality of the lesson.

However, there can be some challenges for teachers such as being culturally aware of the sensitive issues of individual groups, connecting all groups of learners through classroom activities that do not favour certain groups, and being aware of any conflict between groups that may contribute to classroom dynamics. Teacher 9, for instance, highlighted in her interview that there were times when she felt that she lacked enough cultural knowledge to understand her students better, and that she often wondered how much her students knew about each other's cultures. In light of similar arguments to these, Richards et al. (2006, p. 4) insist on having a "culturally responsive

pedagogy” which essentially aims to provide effective teaching and learning in a “culturally supported, learner-centred context, whereby the strengths students bring to school [or university] are identified, nurtured, and utilised to promote student achievement”. Howard (2012, p. 1) adds that such pedagogy also incorporates “knowledge from students’ cultural background into the instructional strategies and course content” with the primary goal of creating

learning environments that allow students to utilize cultural elements, capital cultural, and other recognizable knowledge that they are familiar with to learn new content and information in order to enhance their schooling experience and academic success.

Thaman (2008) writes that the inclusion of Pacific values in school curriculum will greatly enhance the learning opportunities of Pacific students. She believes that quite often schools de-value and undermine such notions because they are not in line with the western ideologies that are globally dominant and embedded in Pacific education systems. Other Pacific thinkers have also expressed similar sentiments (Nabobo-Baba 2006; Taufe’ulungaki 2002; Bakalevu 1999). While having culturally responsive pedagogy may be challenging, it does hold promise for culturally diverse classrooms as being ‘fluent’ in both cultures would be beneficial.

### **6.6.2 Multitude of languages spoken**

Another factor that contributes to the differences between the groups of EAP learners at the USP is the relatively large number of languages that are spoken by them. While most Micronesians and Polynesians speak at least two languages (their mother tongue and English), most Melanesians have a much broader linguistic repertoire. Mugler and Lynch (1996, p. 5) note that Melanesia has an “exceptionally high language density” with almost 170 distinct languages spoken in this region. However, within the



University of the South Pacific community, English is not the only lingua franca. Speakers of Melanesian languages also speak a variety of Melanesian pidgin that is understood by Ni-Vanuatu and Solomon Island students, and those from Fiji may also use either Fiji Hindi or Bauan to communicate (Mugler & Lynch 1996). Tamata (1996) notes that some people may also code-switch between languages to be understood better.

Furthermore, language provides the medium to express thoughts. Scarino (2010) suggests that language is “understood as a social practice” (p. 326) where participants share their own “life-worlds and trajectories of experiences”. This practice allows the sharing of knowledge, in academic settings as elsewhere. Scarino’s language as a “social practice” in an academic environment offers a perspective on the construction of knowledge as perceived by individuals who have different linguistic and cultural influences. These individuals’ contributions to academic discussions, for instance, would potentially reflect the influences of their culture and language. Religion, for instance, is an important aspect of Pacific societies, and the Bible, seen as the word of God, is of paramount importance. Therefore, in an essay discussing the arguments for and against same-sex marriages or on abortion may involve quotations from the Bible. In most cases, it would be expected that students would argue against same-sex marriages and abortion, as culturally, both notions tend to be viewed unfavourably in Pasifika cultures. Similarly, when discussing notions of cultural importance, such as ‘bulubulu’ (meaning the process of reconciliation in Fijian), an explanation of the concept may not be offered. This could be because it is expected that people will know what the term means and encompasses.

If the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Carroll 1956; Kay & Kempton 1984; Boroditsky 2011) was to be re-visited (see a discussion of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis in Chapter 2), then the idea that language influences the way humans think seems relevant here.

Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf postulated this theory after they discovered linguistic features among a group of Native American languages that they believed forced the speakers to think differently (Tohidian 2008). Over the years, however, this view has received much criticism that subsequently led to a weaker assumption that languages influence (not force) thoughts. In a more recent discussion of this longstanding linguistic theory, Perlovsky (2009) points out that Franklin et al.'s (2008) experiments showed that language affects thinking, and that Perlovsky's own study demonstrates that the emotional contents of language have a higher influence on culture. Bearing these discussions in mind, and the multilingual and multicultural environment at the USP in Fiji, it is only logical to assume that the linguistic repertoire of individual groups of learners would produce varying levels of thinking. From a teaching point of view, such linguistic richness in the classroom, combined with the theory that linguistic difference contributes to differences in thoughts, would give rise to challenges. The teacher constantly needs to avoid putting all the students in a single box, and at the same time, being open to the argument that while some languages may potentially inhibit thinking others may not. However, the alternative view is that having different languages in the classroom is a potential resource for the teacher.

### **6.6.3 Varying levels of exposure to the English language**

Language educators and researchers argue that the amount of exposure that a learner has to the target language is critical in the learning of that language (Ranta & Meckelborg 2013, p. 1). Acquiring a language in its natural environment, usually referred to as “naturalistic settings” (Ellis 2008, p. 12), is beneficial because, as Lightbown and Spada (2006) suggest, the intake is both adequate and of a wide variety. Unfortunately, such naturalistic settings are not available in English in the Pacific communities because of the widespread practice of other Austronesian languages. The

language of communication at home, for instance, is in most cases, rarely English. Moreover, primary school education is mostly delivered in a vernacular language (or a variety of Melanesian Pidgin in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands). When communicating with classmates or fellow workers, Pacific Islanders generally use a common vernacular. English is an imposed language, largely because of colonization and global influences.

In questionnaire 1, the 80 student participants were asked about their use of English language at home, at school, with friends and at the workplace. At home, the dominant language used was the first language (76 out of 80 participants indicated this). In Micronesia and Melanesia, the first language was reported used the most at the workplace, and a significant use of the English language at school was only reported in high school in both regions of the Pacific. Students from Kiribati indicated that English was barely used even at the secondary school level.

These variations in the use and exposure to the English language contribute immensely to the diversity that is found among the students at the University of the South Pacific. While some countries, such as Fiji and the Cook Islands, use English extensively, others such as Kiribati and Nauru have fairly limited, to almost non-existent use of the English language. In terms of media, radio stations and television broadcasters use a common vernacular as well as English. Thus, Pacific students cannot rely on natural learning of English to the same extent that an ESL learner in Australia, for example, can.

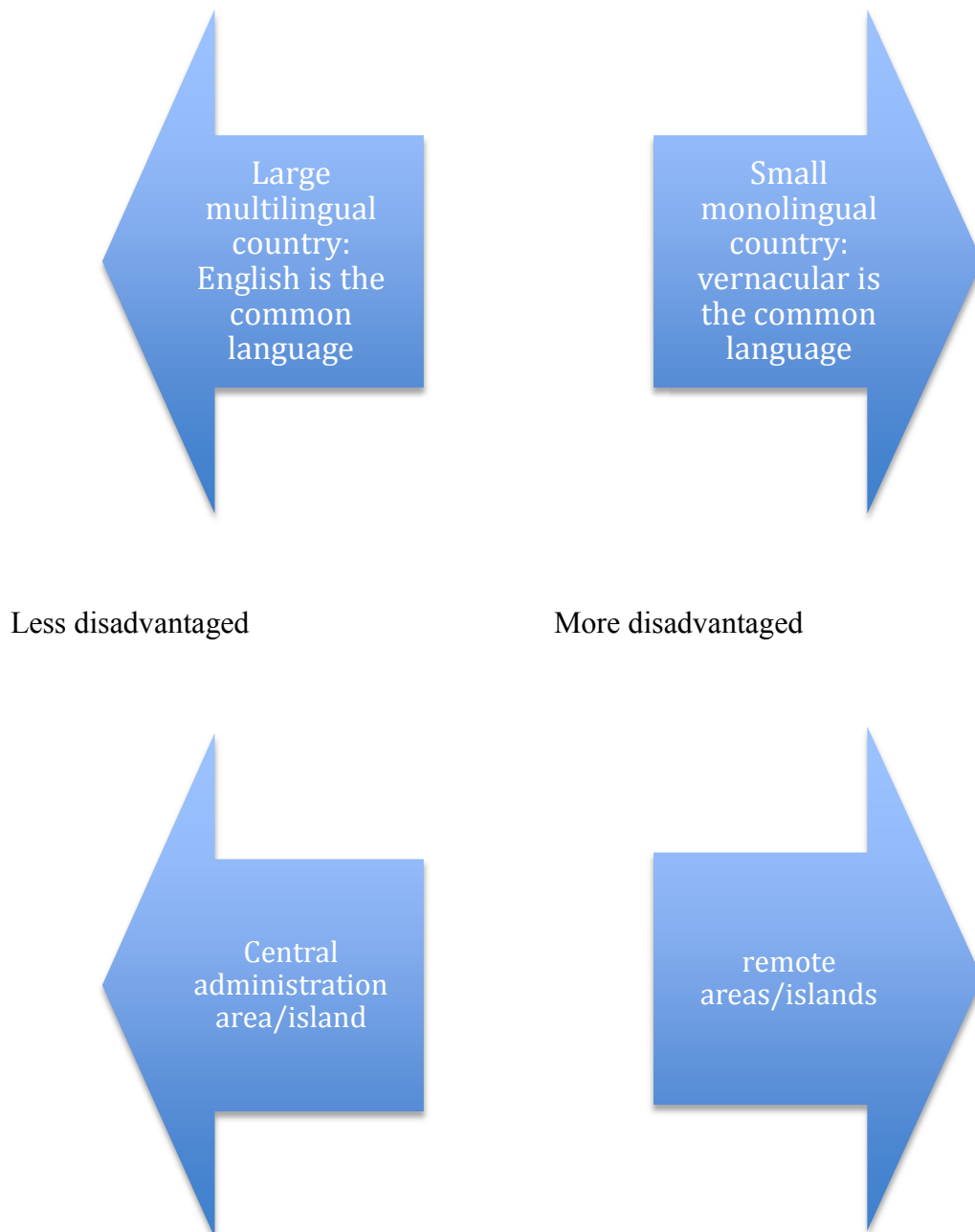
What is more, the amount of exposure to the English language across the Pacific varies. Fiji's multilingual and multicultural situation allows for more usage of the English language. In Fiji, English is indeed an important lingua franca. However, in multilingual Melanesia, the situation is different, because the Melanesian Pidgin

(Bislama in Vanuatu and Pijin in the Solomon Islands) is a common lingua franca. In Micronesia and Polynesia, the indigenous language is used more often than English (Mugler & Lynch 1996; Mugler & Benton 2010). Anecdotal evidence suggests that local English language teachers in Kiribati often use the Kiribati language to teach.

Therefore, there is an obvious difference in the type of English that Pacific communities speak, and also in the amount of exposure to the English language that individual nationalities receive. What makes it even more complicated is that the level of exposure to English may also vary within and between countries. To illustrate, the Internet is a common medium in cities and more urban areas, whereas in rural communities and isolated/remote islands/areas, inadequacy or absence of network reception may inhibit access. Also, tourism is prominent in certain areas of a country only, and as such any language exposure this industry may provide will be spatially differentiated. Moreover, those in Fiji will have more exposure to the English language than those who live in most other Pacific countries. Being technologically more advanced and with a far greater population size, Fiji's urban population is able to have access to the Internet and a variety of news media in English; there are at least two regular newspapers that are in English. In addition, with English as a common lingua franca in Fiji among some 10 different languages, the population is incidentally exposed to the English language much more than in other Pacific countries. In Figure 6.2, I propose two dimensions of disadvantage for Pacific Islanders when learning (in) English.

Figure 6.2

*Dimensions of Disadvantage*



A student from a large multilingual country where English is a predominant lingua franca will not be as seriously disadvantaged at learning in English as someone

who is from a small monolingual country where only the vernacular is spoken and used. Moreover, within individual countries, students who have spent most of their time living in the capital city or on the main island, or near a tourist destination where the English language would have penetrated more into the daily activities of the individuals, would be far less disadvantaged than those who would be from remote areas or islands furthest from the main islands where the exposure to the English language may be minimal. Those who are from remote places in mainly monolingual non-English speaking country would, therefore, be ‘double-disadvantaged’. Students who live on remote atolls in Kiribati could potentially fall into this category. While these cases are the extremes, most Pacific Island students would fall along two continua, as outlined in Figure 6.2. As such, the EAP teacher at the University of the South Pacific is expected to deal with a class with mixed levels of English language skills. From a pedagogical perspective, this is indeed challenging. It is this diversity among the student population at the USP that teacher 5 finds somewhat challenging for her. She iterated that with students from 12 different nations where different languages are spoken, coupled with the varying levels of English exposure in these countries, posed several challenges for the teachers. She said that it was impossible to assume that all students could “fit one box”. Teacher 9 reported, “there is so much that we don’t know about these students. For instance, how much of the language have they been exposed to in their own countries, what do they know already about certain topics and so on”.

## **6.7 Relevance of EAP courses to students’ future needs**

An issue that has emerged from the data, and from the discussions is the continuity and transference of knowledge and skills learned/acquired in EAP classes to other university courses. It would also be apt to add another future context: the workplace. When asked how many essays students are expected to write in their other

university courses, 26% of respondents expressed that they were not required to write essays at all, with a further 14% stating that they were expected to write very few essays only. In a survey of ESL students in the US, Leki and Carson (1997) found that there was a mismatch between what students learned in their EAP writing classes and what these students were expected to produce in their subsequent university courses. For the University of the South Pacific students, the text types they are required to engage in have all emerged from western discourses. Essentially, the extent to which these students have been exposed to, or shielded from, such discourses, will affect their ability to engage with them. Leki and Carson (1997) found that of all the EAP writing topics they looked at, 52% were of a personal nature (for example, writing about personal experiences) while in academic content classes, this accounted for only 7% (p. 40) of the content. The authors concluded that the issue of transferability (of writing skills) is “more urgent for NNS [non-native speakers]”.

This indicates that EAP courses should be developed in consultation with academic discipline experts to be able to avoid mismatches highlighted by Leki and Carson. In another study, Kim (2006) – discussed earlier – dwelt on the importance of ensuring that oral communication tasks in ESL classes should be in line with the types of tasks that the students will be expected to participate in in their discourse communities. Leki and Carson (1997) offered three reasons why the writing genres that students are taught in EAP classes are different from what they are expected to produce in other university courses. Firstly, the writing of essays is flexible since “any content can be appropriate as subject matter for writing” (p. 61). Another reason is that in an EAP class, teachers may not share the discipline-specific knowledge that students have. Therefore, “having no independent access to what the writer knows, the writing teacher is in no position to help the writer express that knowledge accurately” (p. 61). The third

reason the authors give is that writing skills that are acquired by students are transferable to any genre. What this means is that students will “absorb some sort of underlying academic writing skill and transfer it to their writing for other classes” (p. 61).

In response to the arguments presented against the mismatch between what students learn in EAP classes and what they are expected to produce in their other classes, the EAP discipline saw the development, and subsequent popularisation in the 1980s, of another division of EAP – English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) (Coffey 1984; Blue 1988). According to this discipline, EAP learners are classed according to their discipline of study and are presented with EAP tasks that are more suited to their learning goals and that are relevant to their fields of study. Jordon (2009, p. 5) provides a definition of what ESAP entails:

Subject-specific English is the language needed for a particular academic subject, e.g. economics, together with its disciplinary culture. It includes the language structure, vocabulary, the particular skills needed for the subject, and the appropriate academic conventions.

In 2008, the University of the South Pacific responded to the demands of the Business Faculty by trialling an ESAP course called “LL116 English for Business Purposes”. The students in the course wrote fewer essays and concentrated more on writing reports more suited to the business environment, and responded to various case studies (which is what they were required to engage in in their business studies program). This course is no longer offered by the USP.

In short, it is important for course developers to think about the extent to which and ways in which the students will benefit from their courses and how relevant the



knowledge and skills acquired from such courses will transfer to students' future contexts. EAP courses' primary goal is to prepare students to respond to the English language requirements in their subsequent academic courses. While in most cases, this goal may be fulfilled, there are also occasions when students are introduced to skills that would have little relevance in the future. While the area of discipline-specific EAP programs may have its pitfalls, such as lack of expertise in discipline-specific content (Spack 1988), there are some useful benefits, as discussed above.

## **6.8 Implications of current practices**

In this study, an issue relating to current practices has emerged. The first one is the acknowledgment by at least one teacher that there was no time to wait for some of the learners to catch up with course content. The reason given for this was that the course had a "full syllabus" (teacher 9) and there was time pressure to cover this and at the same time allow for students to practise the structures taught in class (teacher 1). Given the fact that the EAP course is generic and the selection of students is not based on any placement tests, one would expect a variety of skill levels of students put together in a class. For instance, in a single class of learners there could be someone who is an IELTS 8 and another student who may be an IELTS 5. A person who gets an overall score of 8 in IELTS "has fully operational command of the language" while someone who gets a 5 "has partial command of the language ... [and] is likely to make many mistakes" (IELTS 2013). A mixed-levels class would naturally be challenging for any teacher, and when one is faced with a "full syllabus" to teach/complete within a given timeframe, the challenges intensify.

## **6.9 Conclusion: Filling the gap and contributing to existing literature**

While many writers have focussed on needs analysis studies in EAP (such as Lambert 2010; Chaudron et al. 2005; Eslami 2010; Bacha & Bahous 2008; Liyanage & Birch 2001; and Green & Agosti 2011), only a small number of these studies has focussed on the South Pacific region (Deverell, 1989; Khan & Mugler, 2001; Chand, 2007; Green & Sameer, 2007). None have, however, focussed on the differences between students from different cultural groups, which is the focus of this thesis.

Deverell's (1989) study identified the relationship between entry-level English proficiency test scores and these students' subsequent pass rates in a foundation English course at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. While the results of this study may have some merits today, the study was nonetheless conducted over three decades ago. Khan and Mugler (2001) studied the transitional issues associated with high school students in Fiji who proceeded to do the EAP course in their first year of studies. Chand's (2007) dissertation is perhaps the most important work to date in terms of studying the needs of university level EAP students in a Pacific context. However, her focus was on listening skills only. Green and Sameer (2007) report a small-scale study identifying the needs of EAP students in order to design a more appropriate course for these students.

The current study was thus proposed for a number of reasons. Firstly, the literature review revealed that EAP needs analysis studies in the South Pacific region are scarce, and as such the extent of knowledge on this important area is limited. This needs contributes to the existing literature by offering another perspective; none of the earlier studies adopted a cultural perspective. It is essential to incorporate a cultural dimension because it allows for the demarcation of needs based on cultural

requirements and differences. The Pacific region has a rich cultural heritage, and being linguistically diverse makes it an even more attractive area for research.

Another theme that consistently emerged in the findings is the existence of a university culture that is different to the prior experiences of Pacific students. This culture is governed by a number of intertwined factors such as academic demands, westernised notions of knowledge and how this knowledge is presented, the utilisation of critical thinking skills and so on. The USP students, like other university students, have to adapt to this new culture and learn to conform to its requirements. This in itself is an additional challenge for the students.

This study has highlighted some significant points that would aid teachers, curriculum developers, and educationists among others to gain a deeper understanding of the South Pacific region. This understanding, it is hoped, will lead to the creation and development of more appropriate course content to meet the specific needs of Pacific students. It should be noted, however, that while the study provides some evidence for cultural differences in terms of learning needs and expectations of Pacific students in the EAP context, these findings should be treated cautiously when making any applications or extrapolations. This is because, as Hansen-Strait (2003, p. 95) argues,

cultural differences are never absolute. They are generally expressed as group tendencies towards a particular characteristic or behaviour. No matter how much culture influences learning, these influences will be expressed in unique ways in each individual.

Having discussed the findings that have emerged from the study, the next chapter will present conclusions, recommendations and implications for future research.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations**

### **7.1 Introduction**

In education, cultural (and linguistic) diversity is an uncommon phenomenon. Gearon et al. (2009, p. 3) suggest that this diversity brings with it the need to acknowledge that there may be “problems involved in educating large numbers of students who do not speak the dominant language” of the host nation. Perhaps Smythe and Toohey’s (2009) support for the inclusion of culturally responsive pedagogy, which they emphasise, is the inclusion of students’ “home literacies and cultures into the school curriculum” (p. 272) is worth considering. However, as Sleeter (2010) stresses, there is very little research that helps explain how this pedagogy impacts on students’ learning. What is needed is more research to understand how cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom can impact on students’ learning in the classroom, including ways of using it as a resource. One such area of research is needs analysis that may be carried out using tools such as questionnaires and interviews to identify what content and method of delivery should be incorporated in a subject (or course) intended for teaching a richly diverse group of learners. In a course such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), a needs analysis should be conducted routinely to identify what the students would need to learn in order to be able to respond to the academic requirements imposed by university studies. EAP courses, over the years, have become larger in terms of student numbers. This growth has also seen the participation of a diverse range of learners. At the University of the South Pacific’s main campus in Fiji, this diversity is not subtle, with students from 12 different nations, speaking a sum total of 200, mostly Austronesian, languages.

The current study sought to identify cultural differences among a select group of students enrolled in the EAP course at the University of the South Pacific in Semester 1

of 2012, with a view to determining how their needs might be better understood and met. To guide the research premises, the following questions informed the scope of the project:

1. What critical differences exist among USP students studying EAP in the face-to-face mode in terms of their linguistic, cultural and other backgrounds?
2. Given the varieties, to what extent and how does the course in its current form meet the needs of the students?
3. What implications does this have for the design and implementation of this course?

This concluding chapter is organised in the following manner. The first section presents and discusses the main findings of the study. These findings have been presented in more depth in chapters 4 and 5, and discussed in chapter 6. This conclusion sets out to identify the significance of the research in terms of building/constructing knowledge in the area of needs analysis in education. The next section will discuss the implications of the findings, in terms of practice, understanding, ideas and theory. Following this, the limitations of the research, and how these may have a bearing on the study itself, will be presented and discussed. Finally, the chapter makes some recommendations with particular implications for students, teachers and the institution under study, but which also carry implications for other, similar circumstances.

## **7.2 Discussion of the main findings**

“There is so much that we don’t know about these students. For instance, how much of the language have they been exposed to in their own countries, what do they know already about certain topics and so on” (Teacher 9).

The students' self-report in the questionnaires did not reveal any major differences between the cultural groups in terms of confidence levels in various EAP skills. However, there were some peculiarities in terms of cultural groups. The results of this study suggest a number of conclusions. Firstly, students from all cultural groups in the study tended to enter the EAP course with unrealistically optimistic expectations about completing assessment tasks and attending classes. When asked to comment about their confidence levels, participants of this study tended to furnish higher initial ratings. Towards the end of the course, such perceptions of high confidence in areas such as meeting all the assessment requirements on time and attending classes changed, with a significant number of students switching to moderate to lower levels of confidence. This was observed particularly with the Melanesian, Micronesian and the Polynesian groups. In comparison with the other groups, a significant number of Polynesians found meeting the demands of the assessment tasks very difficult.

A number of explanations is possible here. In the first instance, these students may have been less aware of what the course demands were before they enrolled in the course. Another explanation for this could be that, in terms of the assessment tasks, students may not have felt confident as a result of lack of preparation for these tasks. The kinds, levels and regularity of support provided by teachers would also potentially have an impact on the confidence levels. A further possible explanation could relate to cultural demands put on students. Nabobo (2001), for instance, advises that Pacific cultural events often take precedence over other, non-culturally binding activities, and so devoting time towards study requirements would not be prioritised if cultural events require students' participation.

It was observed that while a significant number of participants in each cultural group had doubts about their confidence levels in using researched information (most

reporting moderate levels of confidence), the Micronesian group had a tendency to ask for more help in researching and using the information in their work. Towards the end of the course, 22% of all the participants were still not confident with these skills. As reported earlier (see Khan & Mugler 2001), there is a paucity of research and referencing skills being taught in pre-tertiary institutions in the Pacific, and this may contribute to plagiarism among students at the University of the South Pacific. All the teachers who took part in the study observed that plagiarism was a major problem, with teacher 1 saying that it was a problem “across the board”. 72% of the student participants indicated that they had a lot of confidence in the course (UU114) teaching them about referencing and conducting research. This high confidence could help explain why plagiarism was a problem. With indications of insufficient input from their secondary school teachers about synthesising information from sources, and using these in arguments (Bacchus 2000; Phan & Deo 2008; Tavola 1991), it may be that these students are unaware of what plagiarism entails.

This again connects to the idea of students having ‘romantic’ notions of university life. My study confirms that a significant number of participating students had high expectations from the course in terms of honing their research and referencing skills. What makes teaching Pacific students not to plagiarise even more challenging is that in such high power distance cultures, authority is not questioned (Croxford 2001; Frank & Toland 2002), and this may contribute to plagiarism. If a notion is written in a book, for instance, then for most Pacific people, this notion cannot be contested. Furthermore, researching on the Internet can be quite challenging for students (Head & Eisenberg 2009) who are exposed to a wide variety of information, and may potentially have difficulty sifting through the information.

Another conclusion reached is that a significant number of the Micronesian (9 out of 12) and Polynesian (7 out of 13) students expressed having less confidence than students from other cultural groups in their reading abilities towards the end of the course, suggesting that these groups of learners need more attention than others. Such low confidence among these students may be a symptom of low ability or perceived low ability in reading, and as such needs to be addressed to enhance learning. However, a number of international research studies confirm that such anxieties about reading skills tend to be common among students regardless of ethno-cultural background (Cetinkaya 2011; Sellers 2000; Tsai & Li 2012; Wu 2011). Despite a significant number of Micronesians and Polynesians stating lower confidence (than Indo-Fijians and Melanesians), a large proportion of the student participants did suggest that they had gained confidence in their reading skills during the course. This higher confidence among Indo-Fijians and Melanesians is in contrast with what international researchers have discovered about reading anxieties. At this stage, it can be speculated that the reading program may have had a positive impact on these students. It cannot, however, be gauged how aware these students were of their reading skills prior to enrolling in the course.

Also, a significant proportion of the small number of Micronesian students (66%) needed further help in gaining confidence in writing skills. A total of 34 out of 65 students (52%) had indicated low confidence. Indo-Fijian students (59% or 8 out of 13 students) also had low levels of confidence. The teachers also made some distinctions among a number of the cultural groups in terms of students' writing abilities. Indigenous Fijian, Solomon Islander and Ni-Vanuatu students were highlighted as generally having good grammar skills and being able to write better than most other students. I-Kiribati students were identified as needing most attention with this EAP



skill, especially with grammatical accuracy. This correlated with the low confidence ratings among Micronesians (Kiribati belongs to this group). Students from Tokelau and Tuvalu were also identified as potentially having problems in writing syntactically accurate sentences. Those from Nauru were seen as having better writing skills among the Micronesian group.

The EAP course (UU114) at the University of the South Pacific aims to enhance the writing skills of Pasifika students because it was identified as an important skill to have (Green & Sameer 2007). A number of other writers (Mara & Marsters 2009; Dickie 2003) have concluded that Pasifika students need assistance with improving academic writing skills. This study offers evidence to support this conclusion in the sense that there are some students who do not have high confidence in their writing skills: the Micronesian and Indo-Fijian participants in particular had low levels of confidence, and so these groups of students would benefit from more assistance. Furthermore, in helping these participants gain confidence, the role of teacher feedback is important. The teachers in my study used various techniques of providing feedback: teacher 4 gave “personalised attention”, teacher 6 had group sessions based on students having similar types of problems in essays and teacher 9 gave attention to students’ drafts. The use of all these strategies suggests that for Pasifika students, working with them closely is essential. Another revelation in the findings was that some writing genres are irrelevant to students’ future needs. For instance, science students do not need to learn about writing essays, as their science courses do not need them to produce this genre. Horowitz (1986) complains that generic EAP programs often teach writing genres that may be irrelevant to students’ needs.

Another important supposition is that while generally Indo-Fijians, Melanesians and Polynesians were highly confident about being familiar with vocabulary relevant to

their fields of study, a significant number of Micronesians did not have high confidence. In their interviews, a number of teachers had said that students from Micronesia, and especially those from Kiribati, tend to be weaker in English language skills. Vocabulary development is essential since it allows one to communicate more precisely, and at the same time, helps build confidence in the language. Most students in the study favoured discipline-specific vocabulary acquisition, and EAP curricula should allow their students to increase their vocabulary bank. 46% of the students who took part in the study had higher levels of confidence in their knowledge of lexical resources specific to the subject discipline related to their degrees. However, it should also be noted that the EAP course was undertaken concurrently with the students' majors (such as economics or accounting). It may be that these courses had an impact on the students' knowledge of the lexicon pertinent to their individual disciplines. Since there is support for teaching discipline-specific vocabulary in EAP courses in the literature (Hyland 2002; North 2005; Nguyen et al. 2012), this area should be given prominence in course design. However, there may be resource and cost-related issues arising.

Furthermore, none of the Micronesian participants were highly confident about writing grammatically correct sentences in English towards the end of the course, although more than half the student participants felt that their grammar skills in English had improved as a result of studying EAP. In terms of cultural groups, 24 out of 42 Melanesians and 7 out of 13 Indo-Fijians indicated that doing the EAP course had improved their grammar skills. A significant number of Micronesians (67%) and Polynesians (44%) were moderately confident about their grammar skills towards the end of the course, while most Indo-Fijian students (58%) and a relatively significant number of Melanesian participants (36%) had higher levels of confidence. Teachers had emphasised in their interviews that while they did their best to provide as much

feedback as possible in relation to grammar errors that their students made, it was not possible to include grammar lessons in class. Teacher feedback varied, from individual attention to group consultations. This may have potentially impacted positively on students' grammatical accuracy. There was also an expectation on the part of the students, that the course would help them improve their grammar skills. This may be because the word "English" in an educational setting in the Pacific implies the study of the language (and hence, grammar teaching would be an implicit part of this). Zhou (2009) poses an important question: do students set themselves unachievable goals, and therefore expect too much from the EAP courses?

Additionally, in comparison with other cultural groups, a significant number of Polynesian participants expressed lack of confidence in being able to understand lecturers who have unfamiliar accents. In the study, towards the end of the course, 5 out of 12 Micronesians and 10 out of 13 Polynesians said that they needed a significant amount of help in understanding different accents. Most Indo-Fijian students had higher confidence in this skill, while the Melanesian students did not show any striking tendency. For an institution such as the University of the South Pacific where most lecturers' accents would be unfamiliar to students from outside Fiji, listening opportunities in an EAP course should aim to familiarise students with the varying accents of the lecturers and tutors at the university. For instance, while most students from Fiji are familiar with Indo-Fijian speakers of English, those from Samoa may have trouble understanding this particular accent, as they would not be familiar with it. Incorporating listening opportunities where students listen to unfamiliar accents may help improve the students' listening skills. Chand (2007) calls for authentic listening opportunities in EAP courses. These could include recordings of lectures in other

faculties such as business or science, and used in EAP classes as listening and note-taking practice.

Also, a significant number of students want more opportunities to speak, and improve their oral presentation skills in EAP classes. At least 30% of the UU114 students who took part in the survey wanted further assistance with speaking skills towards the end of the course. Of these, 7 out of 13 were Polynesians who either had very little confidence or none at all. Most Indo-Fijians and Melanesians had moderate levels of confidence. The Micronesian students did not show any specific tendency. Several writers have concluded that many students often have anxieties when it comes to participating in whole-class discussions (Leki 2001; Liu 2001; Morita 2004). It may be that the UU114 students share such anxieties.

Another significant conclusion is that there is a general lack of critical thinking among students from all cultural backgrounds. All the teachers interviewed confirmed this, highlighting that students' essays and oral presentations often displayed flaws in conception, which they related to a general lack of critical thinking among students from all cultures. When asked if this was attributable to different cultural groups, all teachers observed that the problem was found in all groups, although one teacher did comment that critical thinking was particularly lacking in I-Kiribati students' essays. This lack of awareness on the part of the students could be attributed to critical thinking being seldom taught in Pacific schools (Papoutsaki & Sharp 2005), further evidenced by a general lack of vocabulary across Pacific languages to enable questioning and critical thinking (McLaughlin 1996). However, these situations alone may not be the only contributors of fallacious arguments in students' work. Papoutsaki and Sharp (2005) suggest that lack of knowledge on the subject under discussion may lead to the inhibition of critical thinking.

As a result, this study supports Hansen-Strait's (1993) assertion that most Pacific students are what Witkin and Goodenough (1977) called 'field dependent'. These are people who rely on others to form their own sense of identity. In the case of University of the South Pacific students, at least two teachers said that these students rely on the teacher and are not independent (teachers 1 and 4). Furthermore, the teachers did not identify any single cultural group as being outstanding, but that there was a general lack of being independent among all cultural groups.

In their seminal work on the discussion of field dependent and field independent cognitive styles of learning, Witkin and Goodenough (1977, p. 7) asserted that one of the contributors to individual differences in people's performance is whether a task is seen as "part of a field as discrete from the surrounding field as a whole" or this part of the field is "embedded in the field". Those who see tasks as being "embedded in the field" are called 'field dependent' learners and hence may only be able to work under the guidance of others. In her survey, Hansen-Strait (1993) discovered that South Pacific students tend to be 'field dependent' and so may not have advanced analytical skills. This observation may potentially help explain why teachers 1 and 4 said that most students, irrespective of cultural groups, lack independence. For an EAP teacher and curriculum designer for the South Pacific, this piece of information is crucial, because it defines an important characteristic of the learners. Such information would be valuable when planning lessons.

Another important point resulting from this study, and from others, is that there is diversity of several kinds at the University of the South Pacific. There are differences in terms of cultural values that are upheld in individual societies, and that are not supported by western ideologies adopted in university curricula. Thaman (2012, p. 5) goes on to suggest that Pacific cultural values are often in conflict with school values, to

the point that the former may be “devalued/discouraged” in academic domains. Several Pacific scholars have, therefore, called for culturally responsive pedagogy (Thaman 2008; Nabobo-Baba 2006; Taufe’ulungaki 2002; Bakalevu 1999). Second, there are also differences contributed by the realities of ‘remoteness’ and ‘islandness’ (Campbell 2009), and by the presence of a multitude of languages in individual countries, which contributes to wider gaps for some than others. Bearing these differences in mind, I have suggested a set of continua to measure dimensions and extent of disadvantage for Pacific students in an English-medium university. This scale is presented as Figure 6.2 in the Discussion Chapter (Chapter 6). This set of continua can be used to gauge students’ disadvantage based on where they have spent most of their time, and on the amount of exposure they have had of the English language. This information can then be used in a variety of ways. Firstly, it is a potentially useful tool for a teacher who needs to know how much assistance a student would need with learning English. Armed with this information, the teacher can then develop a teaching plan.

Most of the conclusions above seem to suggest mentoring programs that would help students continue to refine their academic skills after their EAP course. A number of students in the study suggested that the course had helped them improve their academic English skills. However, in most cases, towards the end of the course significant numbers of students reported having low levels of confidence in various academic English skills. With these low levels, if students are allowed to move on to their university studies, then their performance in their academic subjects such as Accounting and Economics could be compromised. Other writers have supported the offering of mentoring or intervention classes to assist these groups of students (Light 2001; Campbell & Campbell 2000). Mara and Marsters (2009) are of the opinion that most Pasifika students would need such types of assistance to allow them to be

successful in their academic endeavours. However, bearing the scale of disadvantage in mind, it would be sensible to suggest that a one-size-fits-all curriculum may not be suitable. For example, Kiribati has 32 islands and atolls that extend over a large area in the South Pacific - 3900km from east to west, and 2700km from north to south (Government of Kiribati 2014). This vastness would have implications on the English language needs of students from various parts of this diaspora.

Overall, the general picture that the results seem to create is that the more sophisticated a student is in their usage of the English language, the more chances of them making quicker progress in the EAP course. With the use of and exposure to the English language in the 12 Pacific nations being of varying degrees, the lack of English language skills would potentially perpetuate, or even exacerbate the differences between the various cultural groups. Those who possess adequate English language skills prior to the course will continue to derive benefits from the course, while those who lack this knowledge may continue to languish.

### **7.3 Limitations of the research**

This study into the needs assessment of EAP students at the University of the South Pacific aims to make a useful contribution by adding new knowledge to existing literature. The research focussed on the ideas and beliefs of real students and teachers, and therefore is a real representation of EAP in the South Pacific. The combined theories of needs analysis, linguistics, constructivism and symbolic interactionism have been used to gather and analyse data to produce and analyse meaningful results. However, there are a number of limitations of this study.

Primarily, the focus group of the study is the EAP students at the University of the South Pacific, enrolled in semester 1 of 2012, and the teachers who were responsible for teaching this cohort. This in itself sets boundaries for the implications arising from

the study. Bearing in mind the theory of constructivism and how knowledge is always under-construction by means of symbolic interactionism, the ideologies governing the teaching principles of the teachers, and those of the students enrolled in the course after this cohort, would essentially be different. For instance, the nine teachers who took part in the study had the opportunity through the interviews to reflect on the course, their students and their pedagogical practices. This reflection may have led to possible changes in how they subsequently taught the course. In later semesters, these teachers could have potentially changed some of their teaching techniques and ways of dealing with students from a range of cultural backgrounds in a single classroom. Thus, a replication of this study undertaken in a later semester may well yield a different set of results.

Moreover, the cultural groups represented in the study include most of the South Pacific island nations only. These groups are restricted to twelve countries: Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Tokelau, Niue, Marshall Islands and Tuvalu. Within Fiji, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, there are many different cultural groups – only some of which were included in the study sample. For instance, “nearly 70 different languages are spoken in the Solomon Islands” (Mugler & Lynch 1996, p. 6). This indicates that there are potentially nearly 70 cultural groups in the Solomon Islands, and my study did not include all cultural groups; the results and implications arising are restricted to the cultural groups that were investigated. However, the results could potentially be generalized, since there are a number of recurring themes. It should be highlighted though that the cultural groups cannot be stereotyped or profiled based on the results of this study. Further research may either support or not the differences between cultural groups highlighted in this



study. If culturally critical differences do emerge, then responsible pedagogy will be sensitive and responsive to these differences.

A third limiting factor is the number of participants involved in the study. Nine EAP teachers and eighty EAP students took part. The eighty students comprised 13 Indo-Fijians, 12 Micronesians, 42 Melanesians and 13 Polynesians. There were 38 males and 42 females. While these numbers helped ascertain student beliefs on the EAP course, the difficulties they faced, and the levels of confidence they had with various academic English skills, a larger number of participants would have perhaps permitted a more reliable picture of the EAP needs of these students to emerge. However, these figures are a call to action for the University of the South Pacific (and perhaps beyond). Further research with larger numbers, and which may confirm or otherwise these figures, is suggested.

#### **7.4 Contributions of this thesis**

This thesis makes contributions to existing literature in three fundamental ways. Firstly, the thesis contributes new knowledge by identifying the differences, in terms of EAP needs, both between Melanesian, Polynesian, Micronesian and Indo-Fijian students who participated in the study, as well as within each group – the idiosyncratic differences. At a broader level, these differences can be matched with universal similarities. The study confirms that although there may be certain problems in learning EAP that are common to all groups, there is a need to be aware of the differences between these groups of students. The continua of disadvantage that was constructed bearing in mind the results of this study could be used as a guideline to identify which groups of students may need extra assistance to successfully complete an EAP course, and a university qualification.

Furthermore, by exploring a university course and interacting with informants to understand the needs of a group of EAP students, this thesis supports the use of the theory of constructivism, which stipulates that knowledge is constructed by interacting with the stakeholders. Von Glaserfeld (in Akyel & Ozek 2010) suggests that knowledge is created as a result of constructive activity that is performed by individuals. Akyel and Ozek (2010) also suggest that a constructivist approach sees learners bringing with them their emotions and pre-existing knowledge that is modified by means of what Williams and Burden (1997) call active involvement of language learners. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) suggested that an individual uses language to construct knowledge by sharing information with others and then mentally processing the information. In both cases, language is the key medium.

This thesis has implications for EAP pedagogy as well. It stresses the importance of needs analysis, and the role of learner beliefs in identifying learner needs. It supports what other studies have concluded that a multitude of sources should be utilised to extract information for needs assessment. My study used questionnaires to identify confidence levels of students in the beginning and towards the end of the course on various EAP skills. It also used interview as the main method of drawing ideas from teachers. Document analysis was a third method used to supplement the needs analysis. This thesis supports what Grier (2005, p. 6) wrote in an attempt to assimilate needs analysis with curriculum development:

In order to develop curricula of quality, developers must have valid information on which to base their curricular decisions. The various methods of needs assessment are valuable tools that provide curriculum developers with this information. By incorporating needs assessments in

their curricular decisions, curriculum developers can select options that benefit both the learners and society.

By using such tools, the critical differences between learners of different cultural backgrounds can be determined, and the curricula can then be attuned towards meeting the needs of these students.

## **7.5 Recommendations for course revision**

This investigation into the EAP needs of a group of University of South Pacific students has identified a number of suggestions that would be useful for teachers and EAP curriculum designers in general. These recommendations have been divided into themes that were used to analyse data in Chapter 4.

### **Study management**

In order to help students deal with study management problems such as attending classes and submitting assignments on time, this study recommends that universities should encourage autonomy among students by assuming an advisory role in the first year of learning. This can be supplemented by having support classes to enhance success at university.

### **Assessment requirements**

University students generally believe that all assessment tasks can be handled easily. However, this study confirms that this initial belief is shattered when students experience the anxieties associated with assessment. Thus, this study recommends that students should be warned against such perceptions right at the outset, and that special sessions be held on plagiarism to inform the students about this important academic problem.

## **Academic research skills**

The Internet is a relatively new research tool in the Pacific, and students generally are ill-equipped at sifting through the plethora of information available online. This study therefore recommends that post-EAP support in referencing and research be provided.

## **Reading skills**

A number of students reported towards the end of the course that they had low confidence in their reading skills. While such anxieties about reading are widespread (Brantmeier 2005; Sellers 2000; Çetinkya 2011; Tsai & Li 2012; Wu 2011), it is essential that the low confidence reported by students be addressed. This study recommends that a post-course reading support class be offered to those students who may not have high confidence in reading. One such class is offered by University of Connecticut (2013) and is called “Directed Reading Program”. Rose’s (2005) ‘Reading to learn – learning to read’ program, which is currently part of the EAP curriculum at the USP, should also be offered in the post-course support class for reading.

## **Writing skills**

It was revealed that the Micronesian and Polynesian students generally had lower confidence in their writing skills than others towards the end of the course. This study recommends that special intervention programs are needed for these students during the course. These programs could be designed to focus on the writing skills in which the students demonstrate difficulties. The diagnostic writing test results, and the first essay that students write in week 4 (UU114 Course Outline 2012) would provide crucial information in terms of the writing needs of these students, although this alone should not be used to ascertain their needs. More tailored support, as opposed to focussing on what is essential and common to all groups, is suggested.

## **Vocabulary skills**

Concerns were raised by a significant number of students from all groups (38%) in the study regarding more assistance with vocabulary development. There is support for teaching discipline-specific lexical resources (e.g. Nguyen et al. 2012). This study recommends that the EAP course should incorporate discipline-specific vocabulary in the generic EAP classes. One way of doing this would be to assign vocabulary-recording projects where students compile a list of important words in their academic fields. Another strategy would be to give students authentic assignments where they engage with materials that are relevant to what they are studying at university (Wiggins 1998), and in the process learn vocabulary that is specific to their discipline.

## **Grammar skills**

A large number of students indicated that teacher feedback on grammatical accuracy helped them gain confidence in their grammar skills. This study thus recommends that this practice be pursued. There were, however, a significant number of students who retained low confidence in their grammar skills towards the end of the course. On-going grammar workshops would benefit these students.

## **Listening skills**

A number of students, especially Polynesians, had low confidence in understanding speakers with unfamiliar accents. This study recommends that authentic listening tasks be incorporated in the course. Collaborating with other university teachers and recording authentic lectures for students to listen to and take notes from later can help to achieve this. Those students who have access to Internet facilities could also utilise the listening resources guided by the teachers.

## **Speaking skills**

Polynesian and Micronesian participants reported having lower confidence ratings than other cultural groups with oral presentations. This study recommends that intervention during the course is needed to boost the oral presentation skills of these students. Also, in line with Kim (2006), it is recommended that speaking tasks should be similar to the tasks the students are expected to engage in in other courses. Tasks involving practising negotiation skills and defending (or refuting) arguments should be included in the course.

## **General recommendation**

At the University of the South Pacific, the EAP course is offered in-sessional which means that apart from studying academic English, the students are enrolled in at least three other courses relevant to their degree. While this allows students to practise their EAP skills in other courses that they are studying concurrently, and to be also exposed to academic English, it adds to the pressures of time management. A pre-sessional EAP course, on the other hand, would release this pressure of time. This study recommends that a pre-sessional EAP course offering be considered. This course can be offered in the students' own countries.

Additionally, currently, the UU114 course administers a diagnostic writing test in week 1 of the course. This is done to ascertain the writing needs of the students. While teachers may use their teaching experience about students from the 12 countries to make sense of the diagnostic writing results, this study recommends that the cultural backgrounds of the students should be an important lens through which the needs of the students are identified.

Finally, Wette's (2011, p. 60) "learner-centred" curriculum is recommended. The EAP division at the University of the South Pacific, and indeed at any other

university, could incorporate a curriculum framework that identifies “learning outcomes for accountability and assessment purposes but [leaves] ... decisions about content, tasks and materials for teachers and learners to negotiate” (Murray & Christison cited by Wette, 2011, p. 60).

## **7.6 Recommendations for future research**

This study has endeavoured to identify the needs of the diverse groups of students at the University of the South Pacific. With a small sample size explored, the results have limitations. The following areas of future research would contribute to and enhance the existing knowledge about the Pacific communities and their educational needs.

In the first instance, this study has explored learner beliefs on several academic English topics. In doing so, the study set out to underscore the importance of listening to learners’ voices in curriculum design. The EAP course revision that was administered in 2006 at the University of the South Pacific and reported by Green and Sameer (2007) did not include the opinions of the students. According to Simon and Taverniers (2011), most academics consider that learners’ beliefs should be studied, since these would help researchers understand the learning strategies that learners prefer. They assert there is evidence suggesting that there is a connection between learner beliefs and the learning strategies they use, and the acquisition of the target language. When teachers understand the language learning strategies used by their students, then they can steer their lessons in such a way that learner strategies are enhanced. Eventually, this would have a positive effect on the learning of the target language. Therefore, this study recommends that in future course revisions, the views of the learners should be taken into consideration. Also, further studies related to learner beliefs in the ESL context should

be conducted in the Pacific to potentially identify the preferred learning styles of Pacific students.

Secondly, the University of the South Pacific, with students from 12 different countries speaking a sum total of some 200 languages, presents a useful milieu for multi-cultural and multi-lingual research. While the study focussed on needs assessment in the EAP context, there is room for further research on the value of ‘in-country immersion’ as a teacher of academic skills. This means that by being in a country, students who bring with them their own knowledge on academic skills would benefit by sharing this knowledge with other students. The study has revealed that while larger cultural groups in classrooms generally tend to work together, other smaller groups work with people from other cultural backgrounds. In doing so, do these students learn about academic conventions and practices from each other? This immersion may possibly expose students to academic practices within the university community, and therefore is a prospective research focus.

Further contact with students would also yield more rich data. This can be achieved by asking student participants to keep journals, and by conducting focus group interviews with them. This would allow a future researcher to strengthen and enrich the findings by having an intensive look at student responses.

Another area of further study is the motivation level of students who study generic EAP courses. A significant number of students in my study did not see the relevance of some of the writing genres that were taught in the EAP course. For instance, a number of students wanted to learn about writing scientific laboratory reports as expected by their science lecturers. How does their perception of irrelevance affect Pasifika students’ motivation to study EAP?



As an extension to the previous recommendation, this study supports the implementation of an English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) course to cater for the large numbers of business, accounting, economics and science students. There is significant support for ESAP in the literature (such as Shing, Sim & Bahrani 2013), and perhaps to research into the setting up of ESAP at the University of the South Pacific.

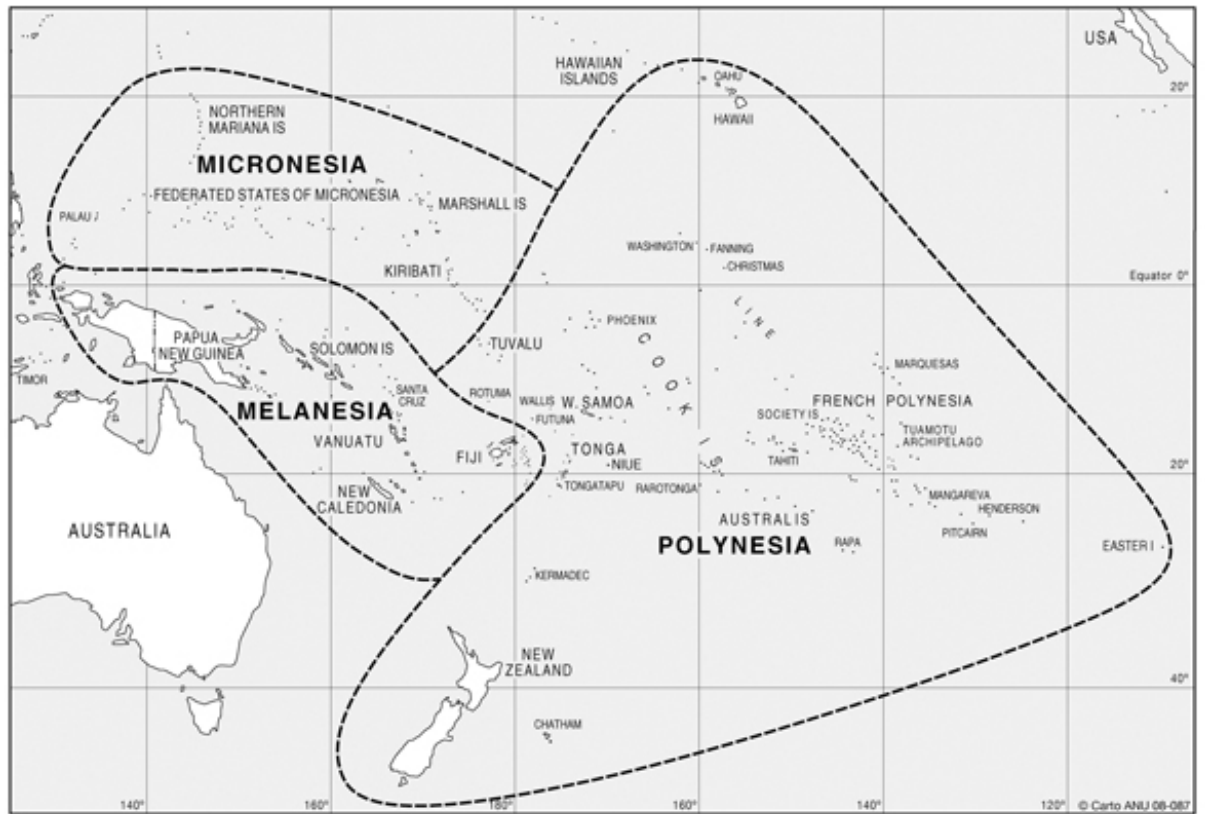
## **7.7 A final word**

The University of the South Pacific offers a truly multicultural and a multilingual study environment. It is a researcher's haven, particularly if one is interested in studying how a diverse group of individuals interact on a daily basis and construct knowledge. This study is an attempt to fill in the void that exists in the literature in the area of needs assessment in the EAP context. The need to understand the key differences that learners of EAP from different cultural backgrounds is vital because these students will eventually be competing in a global market, so the stakes are high. This thesis does not aim to evaluate the English for Academic Purposes course offered at the USP, but rather share ideas about how complex the cultural and linguistic environment is and how this complexity might impact on the students, teachers and the course in general.



## **Appendices**

**Appendix A: A map of the South Pacific indicating ethno-linguistic groups**



(Australian National University Cartographic Services, in Tryon 2009, p. 38)

## Appendix B: Student Questionnaire 1

### Student Questionnaire 1

Mohammed Sameer  
PhD Candidate – UTS, Sydney, Australia

*The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information about the background of the sample student population and to identify from the sample their expectations of the course and what their needs are.*

#### Section 1: Demographic Information

1. Age Group [ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ]:	<input type="checkbox"/> <18 <input type="checkbox"/> 18 – 25 <input type="checkbox"/> 26 – 40 <input type="checkbox"/> 41+	2. Gender [ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ]:	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
3. Program of Study: (e.g. B.A.)			
4. Major area(s) of study: (e.g. Chemistry)			
5. Student status [ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ]:	<input type="checkbox"/> Full-time student <input type="checkbox"/> Part-time student		
6. What work do you do (if applicable)?			
7. What is your ethnicity?			
8. Which country have you spent most of your life in?			
9. What is your first language?			

#### Section 2: Your use of language(s)

Mark your responses by putting a tick [] in the appropriate box.

10. What language(s) do you use <b>most</b> when communicating with:			
a. your family?	<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> First Language	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
b. your friends at the University?	<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> First Language	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
c. your lecturers and tutors at the University?	<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> First Language	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
d. your colleagues at work (if applicable)?	<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> First Language	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
e. your supervisors/managers at work (if applicable)?	<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> First Language	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
11. What language did your teachers use <b>most</b> to teach when you were:			
a. in primary school (years 1 to 3)	<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> First Language	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
b. in primary school (years 4 to 6)	<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> First Language	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
c. in secondary/high school	<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> First Language	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)



## Student Questionnaire 1

Mohammed Sameer  
PhD Candidate – UTS, Sydney, Australia

16. Which of the following end goals do you think you will achieve by the end of the course? Circle **one** number only.

1 = not confident about this

5 = very confident

a. write grammatically correct sentences in English.	1	2	3	4	5
b. write academic essays without difficulty.	1	2	3	4	5
c. deliver oral presentations with confidence.	1	2	3	4	5
d. read academic materials (books, journals) with ease.	1	2	3	4	5
e. do in-text citations and bibliography entries confidently.	1	2	3	4	5
f. listen to lectures and take down useful notes.	1	2	3	4	5

17. Do you have any other goals that you think you will achieve by the end of the course? *For example: write lab reports confidently; use English outside university comfortably*


### Section 4: Your other courses

18. The following questions relate to your other courses. Circle **one** number only.

1 = none

5 = a great deal

a. How many essays do you have to write in your other courses?	1	2	3	4	5
b. How much academic reading are you expected to do in your other courses?	1	2	3	4	5
c. How many oral presentations are you expected to deliver in your other courses?	1	2	3	4	5
d. How much report writing will you do in your other courses?	1	2	3	4	5
e. How much library research will you need to do in your other courses?	1	2	3	4	5
f. How much referencing work will you do in your other courses?	1	2	3	4	5

This is the end of this questionnaire. Thanks for your time.







## Appendix D: Teacher Interview Schedule

### Teacher Interview Schedule: Semi-Structured

Mohammed Sameer  
PhD Candidate – UTS, Sydney, Australia

The purpose of this interview is to identify from the EAP teachers the needs of their students.

1. How long have you been teaching EAP?
2. What are the most difficult challenges that you often face in your teaching schedule? How do you deal with these challenges?
3. What do you think are the greatest needs of your EAP students?
4. Which of these needs are most important to address in your opinion? Why?
5. What problems do your students face in EAP and how do you solve them?
6. Are there groups of students who have specific needs? What are these needs?

This is the end of interview. Thanks for your time.

## Appendix E: Information about UU114

The following excerpts about the course have been taken from the course materials for UU114. The UU114 course outline identifies the following aims and learning outcomes of the course:

Course aims:

The course aims to assist students in:

- producing good quality academic writing in a range of text types;
- developing a range of reading skills across written and visual texts;
- developing speaking techniques that hold listeners' attention and impart information clearly;
- carrying out research activities effectively.

(UU114 Course Outline 2012, p. 1)

Learning outcomes:

By the end of the course, the students should be able to:

- produce researched essays in the argument, discussion, causal analysis and compare & contrast modes;
- write structured formal reports;
- demonstrate good reading skills across written and visual texts;
- demonstrate confidence in sharing knowledge verbally; and
- carry out research effectively, and present information accurately to their audience.

(UU114 Course Outline 2012, p. 1)

The face-to-face continuous assessment schedule for the course was as follows in 2012:

Assignment / Task	Weighting	Description
Argument or discussion essay	15%	Students could either write an essay where they discussed their opinion on a topic, or discussed two different viewpoints on a topic.
Research report	15%	Students wrote a report based on a set of terms of reference. They had to design a short study where they explored a problem faced by a community of their choice. Questionnaires were used mostly to gather data.
Oral presentation	15%	Students were given a choice to deliver an oral presentation (not longer than 15 minutes) on either their argument/discussion essay or the report that they wrote.
Mid-semester test	9%	The test was divided into two tasks. Students read a text and wrote a critique of no more than 300 words. This involved summarising the text and evaluating the arguments. The second task required students to use the

		given input material to produce a reference list.
Attendance and participation	6%	Students were awarded marks for attending classes and participating in discussions. These marks were based on teacher's discretion.
Total	60%	In order to pass the continuous assessment component of the course, students had to get a minimum score of 24 out of 60.

(UU114 Course Outline 2012, p. 2)

### The 15-Steps Writing Plan

After a needs analysis of UU114 students in 2006 (the course was called LL114 then), Green (2006) developed a 15-step writing plan where students were taught academic writing skills. In 2012, the course taught this plan in the first four weeks of the course. The following is a brief summary of what the 15 steps are (Green & Sameer 2007; Green 2006).

Steps	What they are referred to as	What they mean
Step 1	CLD analysis	Using the essay topic, students identify the content, limiting and the direction words.
Step 2	Recognise the issue	Students write the issue that they want to explore with respect to the topic.
Step 3	Turn the issue into a question	The issue statement is turned into a question.
Step 4	Brainstorm ideas on the question	Using the topic and the issue, students generate ideas to use in the essay.
Step 5	Order the ideas and categorise	The ideas are grouped into categories (such as 'environmental problems').
Step 6	Decide order of the paragraphs (and create an outline of ideas)	Students make decisions about the order in which their category of ideas (arrived at in step 5) should be presented in the essay.
Step 7	Write the thesis statement	A thesis statement is written which identifies the categories of ideas used.
Step 8	Plan the essay thoroughly	A draft plan is created.
Step 9	Design topic sentences for each paragraph	Students write topic sentences using the following structure: topic + comment.
Step 10	Outline body paragraphs based on SEXI	Students develop body paragraphs using a paragraph pattern taught in class: S – statement (topic sentence) E – explanation X – example I - implication
Step 11	Cohesion	Various cohesive features are discussed and students learn to use the appropriate ones to connect the ideas in their essays.

Step 12	Write the introduction and the conclusion	Students write the introduction and the conclusion following given structures.
Step 13	Editing	Peer editing is encouraged.
Step 14	Bibliography	Students learn to compile a reference list using the Harvard system.
Step 15	Abstract	Students learn to write a summary of the main ideas in their essays.

Appendix F: Information and Consent letters (student and teacher-participants)



*INFORMATION LETTER*

**Meeting the English language needs of English for Academic Purposes students  
at the University of the South Pacific**

Dear student of UU114

My name is Mohammed Sameer and I am a student at the University of Technology, Sydney.

I am conducting research into the English language needs of English for Academic Purposes students at USP and would welcome your assistance. It aims to identify the input that cultural differences have towards these needs. It is hoped that upon completion of this research, your EAP needs will be better identified and future changes to courses at the University will reflect this. The research would involve filling in a questionnaire and should take no more than 10 minutes of your time.

If you are interested in participating, I would be glad if you would contact me either directly or through your teacher. My contact details are given below.

You are under no obligation to participate in this research. Your input in this research will be treated in confidence.

Yours sincerely,

Mohammed Sameer  
Australia Contact Details:  
Level 8, Building 10, UTS, Sydney, NSW 2000, Australia  
Phone: +61 (2) 95145285  
Email: mohammed.sameer@student.uts.edu.au

Fiji Contact Details:  
c/- Dr Rajni Chand (Course Coordinator – UU114)  
Division Head – English for Academic Purposes  
School of Language, Arts and Media, Faculty of Arts and Law  
Laucala Campus  
Phone: (+679) 3232412

Research Supervisor: Dr John Buchanan, P O Box 222, Lindfield, NSW 2070, Australia.  
Ph: +61 2 9514 5285 Email: John.Buchanan@uts.edu.au

**NOTE:**

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (ph: +61 2 9514 9615 [Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au](mailto:Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au)). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.



UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY

CONSENT FORM - STUDENT RESEARCH

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in the research project "Meeting the needs of English for Academic Purposes students at the University of the South Pacific" being conducted by Mohammed Sameer (UTS, +61 2 9514 5285) of the University of Technology, Sydney for his PhD in Education.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to identify cultural differences that may contribute to the learning of English for use in Universities.

I understand that my participation in this research will involve discussing my views on my needs, especially on the way English is taught and also on what I am taught in my classes. This activity will also require some 10 minutes of my time.

I am aware that I can contact Mohammed Sameer (mohammed.sameer@student.uts.edu.au) or his supervisor Dr John Buchanan (john.buchanan@uts.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the research. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this research project at any time I wish, without consequences, and without giving a reason.

I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way and that my input will be treated as confidential information.

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (participant)

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (researcher or delegate)

As part of the study, the investigator may also access your examination scripts. Any information retrieved from this document will not be associated with your name. Please indicate below if you are willing (or not) to grant the investigator access to your examination scripts.

- I am happy to have my examination script for the course UU114 be made available to the investigator of this research.
- I am not happy to have my examination script for the course UU114 be made available to the investigator of this research.

**NOTE:**  
This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (ph: +61 2 9514 9615, Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au) and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.



UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY

CONSENT FORM - STAFF

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in the research project "Meeting the needs of English for Academic Purposes students at the University of the South Pacific" being conducted by Mohammed Sameer (UTS, +61 2 9514 5285) of the University of Technology, Sydney for his PhD in Education.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to identify cultural differences that may contribute to the learning of English for use in Universities.

I understand that my participation in this research will involve discussing my views on the teaching and learning of English for Academic Purposes, particularly on the way the course at the USP is run. This activity will also require some 30 minutes of my time.

I am aware that I can contact Mohammed Sameer (mohammed.sameer@student.uts.edu.au) or his supervisor Dr John Buchanan (john.buchanan@uts.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the research. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this research project at any time I wish, without consequences, and without giving a reason.

I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way and that my input will be treated as confidential information..

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
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