



International Postgraduate Students’ Perceptions of Learning Difficulties and Their Impact on Academic Performance in British Universities

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the perceived academic differences encountered by Asian postgraduate students studying in British universities and their impacts on the students’ academic achievements. To achieve this aim, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five postgraduate students of diverse Asian background studying at a prominent British university. The results indicate that the assessment, teaching and learning methodologies, and communication systems are perceived as the major areas of differences. Consequently, the perceived differences lead to challenges adapting to the demanding requirements of critical academic writing, using specialized language for disciplinary communications, and embracing independent study patterns. The findings also highlight some positive outcomes associated with the experience of studying within a Western education system, as reported by the learners. The implications of this study are significant for British universities as they underscore the importance of recognizing the underlying challenges faced by international students while studying in the UK.

Keywords: Academic Literacies, British Universities, Postgraduate Level, Asian Students

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Introduction

International students are actively involved in numerous academic activities including reading scholarly literature, participating in seminars, and producing written assignments, as part of their higher education experience at host universities. Some of these activities might considerably differ from the academic practices they are accustomed to in their home institutions. Lea and Street (1998) have coined the term *academic literacies* to describe its set of communicative practices, which specifically pertain to the communicative norms within a particular academic discipline (Wenger, 1998). It is important to distinguish this concept of academic literacies from the conventional understanding of literacy. The former concept fundamentally refers to culturally influenced modes of communication (Gee, 2015), while the latter traditionally pertains to the universal ability to read and write (Ong & Hartley, 2012). In the context of this study, the term *academic literacies* has been used to characterise the distinctive ways in which British academic institutions convey disciplinary knowledge.

Acquiring academic literacies requires students to accumulate a multi-faceted understanding, encompassing contextual knowledge of effective communication, declarative knowledge of the subject matter intended for communication, and procedural knowledge of the methods of communication (Green, 2020). Lea (1999) argues that the degree of mastery of disciplinary academic literacies significantly influences students' overall success in their learning endeavours. In British universities, the prescribed academic literacies for postgraduate students have been delineated with reference to the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP) Can Do Framework. This framework was developed based on comprehensive research that involved interviews with lecturers who teach international students across various British universities (BALEAP, 2021). The BALEAP Framework identifies that several key domains of necessary skills for postgraduate students to excel in British universities are discerned within each overarching areas comprising writing, speaking, reading, and listening. These domains encompass academic context (involving students' employment of cognitive and metacognitive strategies to align with academic conventions), academic discourse (encompassing students' adeptness of employing disciplinary language), discipline related (entailing discipline specific methods of knowledge construction and communication), and practical skills (pertaining to specific skills pertinent to postgraduate studies) (BALEAP, 2021).

The framework reflects the ideological positions commonly associated with the Western education system, which encourages critical thinking, the questioning of teachers' viewpoints, students' autonomy in learning and active participation in classroom discussions (Hofstede, 2001). Moreover, the Western education system emphasizes an individualistic approach to learning, emphasizing self-directed study. In contrast, the Eastern system of education promotes a collectivistic approach to learning, emphasizing the importance of interdependence among group members (Hofstede, 2001; Yeung & Kashima, 2012). This underscores a considerable pedagogic contrast between the educational contexts of the East and the West (Holliday, 2016). It is therefore crucial to be culturally sensitive to students' backgrounds and their responses to ensure effective education in cross-cultural settings (Lea & Street, 1998).

Impacts of encountering British academic practices on Asian students' academic performances

There is a paucity of research that collectively examines Asian students from the South, East, and Southeast Asia with regard to the effects of encountering the academic literacies of British universities on their academic performance. Therefore, we have chosen to concentrate on a particular geographical region within Asia as opposed to a specific Asian country in order to gain a broad understanding of pertinent issues in that particular area. Upon conducting a thorough review of the existing literature on this topic, we identified several academic challenges as the primary consequences of Asian students grappling with the academic practises of British university. These challenges are subsequently discussed below.

Attaining high academic performance in a British university necessitates a proficient command of academic writing skills, as postgraduate-level assessment predominantly relies on the submission of intricate written assignments (Jones, 1999). The complexity in writing refers to the application of critical thinking, adherence to a specific essay structure, and meticulous use of references. A body of research has revealed that, in a general sense, many Asian students are not formally taught the structure of academic writing including the formulation of arguments substantiated by reference (Bird, 2017; Campbell & Li, 2008; Shaheen, 2016). Additionally, they may not be accustomed to composing critical essays employing diverse structural essays (Bird, 2017; Campbell & Li, 2008; Shaheen, 2016). Consequently, Asian students' previous academic experiences, limited exposure to the concept of critical thinking, restricted comprehension of academic task requirements, and received feedback from instructors might negatively influence their conceptualisation and writing process (Durkin, 2008; Shaheen, 2016). Moreover, the Asian assessment system is predominantly centred on examinations, where students are not necessarily expected to incorporate research-based evidence into their responses but are rather evaluated based on their ability to recall course materials (Adhikari, 2018). As a result, when Asian students engage in writing assignments within the British university context, incorporating critical analysis, referencing, and adhering to prescribed academic structure, they often encounter difficulties in meeting the demands of academic literacies, resulting in less-than-satisfactory performance.

Meeting the English language proficiency requirement while enrolling in Western universities does not necessarily serve as a reliable predictor of students' academic success. This is because possessing proficiency in the English language alone does not guarantee their ability to effectively navigate the academic communication system within Western universities (Jenkins & Wingate, 2015). Numerous scholars have also corroborated the notion that international students' lack of proficiency in using English contextually leads to various academic challenges (Andrade, 2006; Sawir et al., 2012; Sherry et al., 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Empirical research demonstrates that Asian students, whose prior academic backgrounds did not emphasise the use of English for communicative purposes and academic interactions, encounter major hurdles when they are suddenly confronted with a heightened emphasis on communicative writing through assignments and verbal communication during seminar discussions. This abrupt shift poses a substantial obstacle to their academic performance.

Research studies (Bakar, 2015; Frambach et al., 2014) that focus on the learning patterns of Asian students in British universities revealed that the academic accomplishments of Asian students are influenced by the requirement of independent-learning practises. This style of education, rooted in Western individualism, encompasses activities such as frequent peer interaction, collaborative teamwork, self-directed discussions, problem-solving, and critical analysis. Given their previous experience of a teacher-dependent learning approach, while “learning is fed” to them, Asian students initially find it challenging to the autonomous mode of study (Bakar, 2015, p. 23). Moreover, within the Western educational context, teachers often assume the role of learning facilitators, encouraging students to take charge of their own learning. Asian students may initially perceive this shift as a challenge at the beginning due to their prior experience of viewing teachers in a “guru-like role of absolute authority and knowledge” (Durkin, 2008, p.17). However, over time, students gradually come to appreciate the equitable relationship between teachers and students in the process of constructing knowledge (Campbell & Li, 2008). Consequently, they evolve into autonomous learners and become accustomed to the dialogic learning system.

Conversely, some studies have documented the positive effects of engaging with the academic practises of British universities on the academic achievements of Asian students. Wu and Hammond (2011) contend that even though Asian students tend to encounter various challenges while studying abroad, they often express high levels of satisfaction with their academic experience. This satisfaction arises from the quality of higher education they receive and the recognition of their skills development throughout their university studies. Bird (2017) postulates that students gradually overcome the initial mental disorientation and start to appreciate their educational experience, finding it rewarding in terms of enhancing their critical thinking abilities, communication skills, and capacity for self-directed learning.

The existing body of research related to the academic experiences of Asian students in British universities has primarily adopted a narrow focus. Previous studies have either concentrated solely on students from a particular Asian country (Durkin, 2008; McMahan, 2011) or have examined specific facets, such as students’ academic adjustment challenges or the influence of academic-cultural disparities (Shaheen, 2016; Wu & Hammond, 2011). Consequently, to address this research gap comprehensively, the current study aims to provide a holistic examination. It will encompass Asian postgraduate students originating from South, East, and Southeast Asia, delving into the academic differences they encounter within British universities and assessing the consequences of these perceived academic distinctions on their academic performance.

This study sought to address the following research questions:

1. How do postgraduate students perceive the distinction in academic literacy practices between their home universities and those in the United Kingdom?
2. What is the impact of these variations in academic literacy practices on the academic achievements of postgraduate students in British universities?

Methodology

A qualitative research approach has been adopted in this study as it does not intend to test any pre-fixed variable and target a relatively under-investigated area (Creswell, 2008).

Sampling and participants

In accordance with purposive sampling methods (Merriam, 2002), five Asian students of diverse nationalities i.e., Bangladeshi, Indonesian, Malaysian, and Chinese, pursuing master's degrees in Language Education and Science Education, were selected as research participants. These individuals were all second language (L2) speakers of English, aged 25-26, and studying at a prominent university in the UK for the first time. To protect their privacy, their actual identities were kept confidential. However, to distinguish their contributions to the study, they were identified respectively as Participant A (from Bangladesh), Participant B (from China), Participant C (Malaysia), Participant D (Indonesia), and Participant E (Bangladesh). The choice of a limited number of participants alligns with the nature of qualitative research, which prioritises the collection of in-depth insights from individuals who possess valuable knowledge and experiences (Cohen et al., 2007).

Data generation

A total of five semi-structured interviews were conducted utilising a conventional approach that allowed participants to delve into matters they considered important (Longhurst, 2016). To facilitate these interviews, a set of predetermined questions was prepared, serving as a guide for participants while maintaining the natural flow of the conversation. Additionally, a variety of follow-up questions, probing questions, and prompts were employed to enrich the dialogue (Drever, 2003). These interviews were conducted in person on five separate days, with times mutually agreed upon as convenient by both the interviewer and the participants. Each interview session, characterised by its in-depth extensive nature, lasted, on average, for one hour and 10 minutes. The participants provided their prior consent for audio recording to enable subsequent transcription for the purpose of data analysis.

In addition, a pilot interview was conducted as a replica of the main interviews, following the approach recommended by Drever (2003). The pilot interview was extended over a duration of one hour and 30 minutes. By undertaking an inductive analysis of the transcription of the pilot interview, valuable and substantial insights were acquired. These insights were subsequently integrated into the main study findings. These practise of qualitative piloting, as advocated by Dörnyei (2007), provided a distinct advantage in enriching the overall study results.

Data analysis

This research employed thematic data analysis that leads to thematic categorisation without which qualitative data cannot be explained and compared (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). To attain thematic categorisation, the initial steps involved proofreading the transcripts to ensure accuracy (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Subsequently, data coding was carried out by means of highlighting with different

colours (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The coded phrases from each transcript were then compiled in distinct word files under potential thematic categories within a table. The final step involved the synchronisation of the common themes identified across each transcript by providing them with categorical levels (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Due to the word limit, the transcribed and coded datasets were not included; however, they can be provided upon request.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the identified themes, we employed two distinct approaches: peer checking by involving one of our colleagues and member checking by including one of the research participants in the process (Dörnyei, 2007). As a result of their feedback, three extracts were repositioned under different themes from their original locations. However, for the majority of themes, a consensus was reached (95%) among the inter-coders indicating a high degree of reliability and validity in the coding process (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Findings and discussion

Research question 1

Our research has revealed that Asian students perceive the assessment, teaching and learning method, and communication systems as the major areas of academic differences between the Asian and British universities. Each of these themes is discussed in further detail below.

Differences perceived in assessment system

All five research participants consistently reported notable differences between the British assessment system and that of their home universities. They unanimously emphasised the absence of examinations in the British postgraduate assessment system as the most remarkable contrast (Participant C). According to the participants, their home institutions employed a combination of diverse assessment components, such as class quizzes, presentations, assignments, midterm examinations, and final examinations, with discrete allocation of marks for each. In their previous educational settings, all participants indicated that over 50% of the marks were typically allocated to examinations, while other assessments contributed to the remaining marks. Participant C provides a clear overview of their assessment practises noting that “for assessment, we (Malaysian students) are more to its examination ... like 50% final exam, 20% quiz and 30% for one big assignment.”

Participant B also observed that in her home institution in China, the assessment system comprised two primary components, with a portion dedicated to a “usual performance” accounting for “30% to 40%”, while the “final exam” held a substantial width of “70% to 60%”. She further expressed her preference for the Chinese assessment system, emphasising “I like the assessment system in China because ...if I did not pass the final exam, but my usual performance (formative assessment) is very good...I can pass the class.”

This observation suggests that Asian students tend to be accustomed to assessment systems that prioritise final exams, a trend influenced by their prior academic experience (Badur, 2003). These systems typically incorporate other assessment components that offer opportunities for students to improve their overall grades.

Moreover, postgraduate students in British universities are required to complete an assignment to successfully fulfil the requirements of a module. The assignment preparation process involved multiple stages including generating an initial idea, composing a draft of the assignment, submitting it for feedback, incorporating the feedback received, and ultimately, submitting the revised and final versions of the assignment. As described by Participant E, this process involves the following: “first, we submit the drafts, then we get ... written feedback and ... oral feedback through tutorials that OK ...revise it ...and then again submit the final drafts. It was absolutely a new idea...it was very, very challenging...”

Additionally, when they noticed that the mark of the assignment “will be 100% and it's by essay” (Participant D), they found it threatening to their academic success, as Participant B mentioned that “it’s terrible if it means I just have one chance to pass the exam ...!”

Consequently, they encountered major challenges when it came to writing assignments. Participant D shed light on the reasons for this stating, “ I remember the essay that I wrote (in Indonesian university while doing bachelor degree) is the simple one...argumentative essay ...1000 words or less... we don’t have any deep analysis like what we did in master degree in UK.”

Hence, the postgraduate assessment system in British universities, which places a substantial emphasis on students’ writing abilities, represents a prominent area of divergence and difficulty for Asian students studying in the UK (Jones, 1999).

Differences perceived in teaching and learning

All participants noted substantial differences between the academic practices at the postgraduate level in British universities and those in their home institutions. These differences were characterised by activities, such as assigned pre-readings for seminars. Students were expected to review the readings thoroughly, complete assigned homework prior to attending the seminars, and equip themselves to actively contribute by sharing critical insights into the materials, posing relevant questions, and engaging in discussions with both the tutor and peers. They observed a major shift in the role of tutors, who acted as facilitators rather than authoritative figures who would be fully in charge of teaching everything (Durkin, 2008). Participant E described this process in the following way:

...teacher has prepared the pre-recorded session and provided the classroom materials at the beginning of the classes so that we could read it and consolidate our understanding about some of the facts and prepare some question to ask him or her on the next seminar.

He also added that “70% class time was dominated by the students through their group discussion with the peers or with the teachers.... so, it's absolutely different.”

The former observation aligns with the reading competence specified in the BALEAP framework, emphasizing the critical comprehension of various texts, while the latter corresponds to the speaking competence, emphasising active participation in group discussions (BALEAP; 2021). Additionally, the pedagogical practices that participants found to be highly “communicative” (Participant B), and “collaborative and interactive” (Participant E) are deeply

rooted in the dialogic approach prevalent in Western education (Wu & Hammond, 2011). These practices significantly diverge from their previous academic experiences in their home countries, as compared by Participants C:

Most of the time it's (teaching-learning activities in Asian universities) more to teacher talk... there's no like group work or worksheets that we need to complete (before class) ... we go into the class without knowing anything and expecting the teacher to just spoon feed all the information...

This observation aligns with Bakar's (2015) insight that in the Asian education system, there is a prevalent practice of "feeding" information to students in a way that makes them culturally passive in the process of learning (p. 23). However, the apparent passivity "doesn't mean that they don't understand the lesson, maybe it's just the culture matters here", as Participant D went on saying "because...in my country (Indonesia) we need to...appreciate someone's talking and we are not usually speaking up easily".

This is another significant evidence of Asian students' being influenced by the Eastern educational tradition, where maintaining silence is considered a form of politeness displayed towards both tutors and peers (Juszczak & Kim, 2017), which is an obvious contrast to the Western system of education.

Differences perceived in communication system with teachers

All participants highlighted the distinctive nature and extent of communication with their teachers in British universities compared to their experiences in Asian institutions. In the UK, they perceived the teachers as highly approachable and friendly, fostering an environment of open communication that extended beyond the classroom. They also noted that their teachers were exceptionally welcoming and willing to engage through various communication channels, including e-mail, video-calling platforms like Teams, and mobile communication. Participant D emphasized this accessibility by stating, "we can talk like a friend ... not only about academic... I don't feel any big gap between me as student and the lecturer in UK..."

This phenomenon reflects the underlying dialogic system of Western education, which promotes ongoing communication between teachers and students throughout the learning process (Wu & Hammond, 2011).

Conversely, the participants experienced major communication barriers when it came to interacting with their teachers within the classroom setting in their home countries' universities. This was attributed to the presence of a hierarchical relationship between teachers and students prevalent in Asia (Durkin, 2008). They indicated that opportunities for interaction with teachers beyond the classroom were virtually non-existent. Communication with teachers during class time was often infrequent, and the opportunities to pose questions to teachers were only at the end of a class and also, they were not comfortable to interact with the teachers before all students. Participant D explained the reasons of it very clearly when she said:

In my country, honestly, it's so hard...to communicate (with) my lecturer ... in Indonesia to do the culture, I don't even have a very close relations with all my lectures, specially the older one. Honestly...I feel like I have a gap with my lecturers...

This provides evidence that Asian students are culturally conditioned to be less open and communicative with teachers, which seems to explain their reluctance to communicate in the classroom as opined by Sawir (2005).

Research Question 2

The findings generated in response to the second research question show that as impacts of encountering the different academic practices of British universities, Asian students mainly struggle with the demand of -

- academic writing skills,
- competence in academic language, and
- autonomous study practices.

The findings also acknowledge some positive impacts as perceived by the research participants upon engaging with the Western system of education.

Struggling with the demands of the academic writing skills

All participants recognized that their prior writing experiences were insufficient to excel in the Western educational context. As a result, they encountered difficulties in adapting to the academic writing practices, which had an adverse impact on their academic performance. This finding is consistent with the findings that respond to the first research question that the assessment system of the British universities is the primary area of differences perceived by Asian students due to its significant emphasis on writing. The participants of our study identified several reasons for their challenges in mastering writing skills, including the need to incorporate critical thinking into their writing, engage with scholarly articles, and address assignments with various structures that were unfamiliar to them. Some of their comments provided below seem to illustrate these challenges:

...UK assignment is 3 or 6000 words (which) is too difficult for me... because, I used to write short passages... the second difficulty is reference...actually the teacher in China did not teach ... the use of reference...so it's difficult for me to do this in my first assignment. (Participant B)

My main difficulties are in the writing part... because I'm still familiarizing myself with...citing...Because...in Malaysia...we write assignment... based on our opinions or our understanding...there wasn't any assignment that really involves a lot of critical thinking. (Participant C)

In addition to the challenges mentioned earlier, both Participant D and Participant E emphasized the difficulty of grasping the distinct assignment structures and requirements which were uniquely designed for each module.

...in the first semester, I have three assignments with different structures (in) three different modules, so you know I need to always learn and learn again. Try to understand again. I cannot just take it everything easy because everything is not always similar. (Participant D)

I face struggle in my writing because, I hadn't discovered my writing in that way ...the structure is absolutely difficult...in Bangladesh... if we write an assignment...we just followed the

basic structure of an essay- introduction, the body paragraphs and a conclusion. But here it's kind of different... once I get good marks in one assignment, it doesn't mean that I'm going to do a better job in my next assignment because the next assignment is going to be totally different considering the content, the writing style, the organization... it's very challenging. (Participant E)

The participants' experience confirms the findings of previous research (Bird, 2017; Brown, 2008; Shaheen, 2016) that culturally, Asian students have a different approach to academic writing compared to the Western style. In their traditional examination system, they are accustomed to writing essays in a conventional structure. Besides, in the Confucian tradition, demonstrating a thorough understanding of scholarly work, rather than emphasizing their own viewpoints, is viewed as standard practice (Kingston & Forland, 2008). Furthermore, in pen-and-paper based exam situations, where answers are written instantly within a fixed timeframe, referencing is typically not required. Thus, the use of referencing and critical thinking is not explicitly taught to them (Campbell & Li, 2008), making the British style of assignment writing a barrier to their academic achievements.

Encountering difficulty in meeting the demand for academic language competence

Despite the Asian students join their respective discipline with the required competence in English language, they still struggle with communicating their thoughts in interactive seminars, writing critical assignments, and reading scholarly articles. This difficulty arises from their lack of proficiency in disciplinary language that varies from context to context (Gee, 2015). This finding also confirms the fact that disciplinary language proficiency (in reading, writing, and speaking) might have an impact on their academic achievements in British universities, as highlighted in the following comments from the participants:

I think the language is a problem...because sometimes...I can't articulate my thoughts properly by using the English language...the reading material...was very challenging because ... you get very less time and specially reading those PDFs from expert scholars and researchers you know their language is very sophisticated... (Participant E)

My main difficulties are in the writing part where I've learned a lot on how to cite, how to argue with the resources that I've cited with ... So, I'm still learning and familiarizing myself with the way of academic writing here, because it's very different from my country. (Participant C)

Additionally, in terms of speaking, the previous academic experience appears to have an adverse effect on them as they may not have received training to participate in argumentative classroom discourse or to use the English language for communicative eloquence both in speaking and writing (Andrade, 2006; Sawir et al., 2012; Sherry et al., 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The following comments of the participants resonate the claim:

Actually, in China we do not ...practice (English) speaking except speaking class because there is an environment that most people speak Chinese... my classmates and also my teacher do not speak English...we just speak English in speaking class, so that's maybe a terrible thing for me to speak (English) in class and in group discussion. (Participant B)

English in Indonesia is not focusing on communicative (purposes)...our exam even focusing on reading, listening or even grammar...So we didn't learn English to communicate, to produce something, so it's hard for us to speak up, to even write a lot...But if we have to write something it will take time...to... produce something in a communicative way. (Participant C)

Although the Asian students possess the necessary declarative knowledge of the English language to communicate within the British academic context, it is the lack of procedural knowledge of how to use the language for disciplinary communications that hinders them from achieving satisfactory academic performance (Green, 2020). The findings are also consistent with the previous scholarly findings that lack of proficiency in situated language use is the root of all other academic problems experienced by Asian international students (Andrade 2006; Sawir et al., 2012; Sherry et al., 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Facing challenge in adjusting to the autonomous study practices

The Western form of education promotes autonomy to enable students to take charge of their own learning to emerge as an independent scholar (Smith, 2011). However, when Asian students tend to depend on their teachers and confront such environment for the first time, it seems challenging to them as they cannot adjust to the new expectations overnight (Bakar, 2015). The research participants provided justification for this conviction with some of their comments as given below:

...our professors, they used to address us as their colleagues which was not a case back in my undergrad (in Bangladesh)...I feel...this is something ...I have never experienced before, so when they started...addressing us as their colleagues, it somehow gives you a sense of ...responsibility and also makes you feel like...you are here to learn ...as a student, but also as their colleagues you are here to contribute. (Participant A)

The difficulty (in studying in the UK) is in terms of independency, because in Indonesia, the lecturers like provide everything. So, we need to just check on that. But here in UK we have more freedom...to explore what we want to explore that's where at first, it's kind of hard for me to...study by (oneself)... find out good materials to support my study...to support my essay... (Participant D)

Here we find that it's more collaborative and interactive classes. The teacher not only gives us lecture but also engages to group works and to discuss the ideas, share ideas, ask questions and then learn by ourselves ...so it's a kind of...a self-driving learning that you learn by being autonomous...very much independent to your learning. (Participant E)

The participants' comments indicate that their sense of perceived discomfort in adjusting to the independent way of learning is related to their previous academic culture. This factor seems to make them more inclined to learn under teachers' close guidance instead of favouring the idea of self-learning (Durkin, 2008; Shaheen, 2016).

Positive impacts of encountering the Western system of education

The findings note that although Asian students go through many difficulties due to studying in an unfamiliar academic context, they view their experiences as rewarding due to the development of

crucial skills including academic writing, critical thinking ability, and communication skills. Furthermore, when asked about their satisfaction with higher education experience in the UK, all the participants rated it 7 out of 10 with regard to their higher studies experience in the UK. This shows their high satisfaction with the quality of higher study that they are receiving in British universities. This finding is consistent with the findings of Wu and Hammond (2011), which suggest that despite the academic adjustment difficulties, Asian students appreciate their academic experiences in the UK. Participant A expresses their sense of accomplishment as follows:

My learning experience...was great...was very fulfilling in a way ... because ... at the end of my master's program, I know that I have learned a lot. It might not be in my most preferred way, but my learning was actually great...satisfactory for me... all the assessments we had it was planned in a way that it actually reflected what we have learned throughout the course.

They also highlight that although the group discussions in the seminars initially felt stressful, they gradually transformed into “a good opportunity for the foreign shy students to speak up and...to know...friends and to have deeper discussions with ...friends” (Participant D). Consequently, it can be inferred that the Asian international students value their academic experience in a positive way as they think the academic differences expand their intellectual capacities and communicative skills rather than constraining their learning (Bird, 2017; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Conclusion

Based on postgraduate Asian students' experiences, this qualitative study investigated the areas of academic differences between Asian and British universities and the adverse effects of the academic differences on students' academic achievements. The findings revealed that Asian students perceive major differences in the British assessment methods, teaching and learning approaches, and communication systems compared to universities in their home countries. As a result, they struggle with the Western convention of critical academic writing, communicative use of disciplinary language, and autonomous ways of study which confirm the previous scholarly findings (Andrade, 2006; Bakar, 2015; Bird, 2017; Brown, 2008; Frambach et al., 2014; Sawir et al., 2012; Shaheen, 2016; Sherry et al., 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Moreover, it was also observed that Asian students consider their academic experiences in the UK as rewarding particularly in terms of developing their future research skills which also aligns with the previous research (Bird, 2017; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wu & Hammond, 2011).

The consistency of the findings of this study with the other research underscores the importance of providing substantial support to international students during their academic transition period (Andrade, 2006; Bakar, 2015). The findings suggest that British universities should be culturally sensitive to Asian students taking into account their previous academic experiences and arranging adjustment support system accordingly (Lee & Street, 1998) to make their academic journey in the UK less challenging and more accommodating.

However, the findings of the study are not broadly generalizable as the study focuses only on the postgraduate level students from three parts of Asia- South, East, and Southeast. Moreover,

this study only relies on qualitative data collected from a limited number of participants from one single British university.

To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the postgraduate education experiences of Asian students in the UK, further research should be carried out by including more participants from a wide variety of Asian nationalities' students studying in different British universities. The application of quantitative survey along with semi-structured interviews could also be executed to enhance the reliability and validity of the study findings.

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