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# AN ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE IN BRITISH HIGHER EDUCATION

Halina Harvey

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield  
in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of MA by Research

June 2014

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an analysis of the learning experiences of international students in British higher education. The aim is to evaluate students' perceptions of the similarities and differences between home and UK learning cultures. The findings are analysed in order to inform teaching and learning practice. There is a particular focus on the transitional stage of learning and how adaptation/acclimatisation occurs within individuals. The literature suggests that the personal experiences of people moving from one country to another can be complex. Models of adaptation and the influence of second language learning are assessed. Data from interviews with twelve students studying on Business courses was collected. Each student's individual experience was analysed through methods guided by narrative inquiry. This method seeks to gain a deep understanding of individual lived experiences through narrative. Narratives have been created based upon the interview transcripts. Further to this, a content analysis was undertaken, using the research questions as a framework. The main outcomes and findings show that international students find the initial stage of studying in the UK causes anxiety in terms of using English as a foreign language. This anxiety can affect academic confidence. International students also find instructional language difficult to engage with. They have less guided learning hours in the UK than at home, therefore independent study can pose a new challenge. Students suggest that the British curriculum lacks international focus. It is recommended that international students would benefit from targeted linguistic and academic skills support at the transitional stage of learning. Also UK institutions should deliver inclusive teaching and learning where internationalisation informs the whole curriculum.

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## **1. Introduction and Context**

This research is borne out of the significant rise in international student recruitment to British higher education institutions (HEIs). There have been consequent changes to class groups and an impact on teaching and learning matters. These changes prompted the researcher to investigate how the new dynamics could influence curriculum and teaching practice. There have been significant drivers for change within the higher education (HE) sector in recent times. Institutions are required to adapt to these drivers whilst maintaining classroom satisfaction for individual students. As international student recruitment has developed, it is anticipated that there will be a need to consult and address the needs of this particular group of learners. An overview of the literature provides a picture of a very diverse group of learners with equally diverse needs. Narrative Inquiry offers a method of investigation which attempts to delve into the lived experience of individuals. In this study it is used to probe the personal experiences of twelve international students for whom English is a second or subsequent language. The aim is to analyse narrative in order to gain insights into how travelling to a new country and using a new language for study can affect an individual. It is anticipated that the findings will produce deeper understandings of individual student needs. Following this it is also anticipated that key themes from the findings could be employed for future teaching and learning in terms of the international student cohort.

### **1.1 International Student Recruitment in UK Higher Education**

Following the first Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI 1) in 1999, later followed by PMI 2, (2006), a strategic plan was launched to develop the number of international students undertaking programmes of study in the UK. A specific aim of the initiative was to attract an additional 70,000 international students to British HEIs by 2011 and to double the number of countries which send more than 10,000 students per year to the UK (DTZ, 2011). The exponential increase in the international student cohort, within the sector, has instigated evaluations of teaching practice in universities. Current pedagogies in relation to the teaching and learning experiences of international students, in particular those who use English as a second or subsequent language (ESL) are also being evaluated.

According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in the academic year 2011–12 the number of non-UK domicile students rose by 1.6%. In total, British universities hosted 132,550 European Union (EU) students and 302,680 students from countries outside the EU (435,230 in total). 62% of the non-EU domiciled students came from Asia, in particular China, where there was a 16.9% increase on the year 2010-11 (HESA, 2013). Overall, non-UK domiciled students accounted for 17.4% of all students. The United Kingdom Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) shows that 36% studied Business and Administrative Studies which is the most attractive subject area (UKCISA, 2013). Some universities have very high ratios of non-UK domiciled students to home. The London School of Economics has 67%. The Universities of Manchester, Edinburgh and Warwick sit around the 30% mark (UKCISA, 2013). The University of

Huddersfield has 2777 international students, including post-graduate researchers. The Business School, hosted 1661 non-EU and 376 EU domiciled students in the academic year 2012 -13, showing its popularity to be in line with the national data. International student numbers have risen dramatically in the Business School over a very short time.

## 1.2 The University of Huddersfield

The University has been awarded the Queen's Award for International Trade in recognition of its successful international recruitment strategy and activities to date. This is a prestigious award which will promote marketing of courses. The Business School is mentioned in its contribution to achievement. The University is also recognised through the International student Barometer. In 2011 respondents chose Huddersfield as the most popular university for international students.

The University is in the process of putting a new strategy map into operation. There are ambitious targets for developing internationalisation across all Schools and departments. Predictions for international student recruitment continue to present opportunities and to test current university operations. The British Council is a key organisation in terms of understanding international student mobility. In their *Vision 2020* report (2004) Böhm et al. look at the potential scenarios which international student mobility could bring to British HE, these will be influenced by demographic movement, and market competition. They suggest that there will be a demand for 850,000 international students by 2020. There are many factors which can impact upon mobility. The report suggests that universities should continuously invest in their marketing as the sector undergoes rapid change. The authors state:

The global opportunities available will attract many new players, public and private, international and national, with innovative and varied alliances and partnerships and new approaches to delivery employing a range of technological solutions. (Böhm et al., 2004, p.8)

The UK HE sector is facing unprecedented pressures in terms of globalisation and internationalisation. Böhm et al. highlight five fundamental strategic issues which will affect growth and development. Quality is first; they ask if the UK can maintain quality with such rapid expansion? The second is global competition as mentioned above. Thirdly, capacity building is seen as important. This is both of a physical and human nature. Can institutions respond to competition? Finally, but still very relevant, diversity and transnational provision. With these factors prescient in the scenario ahead, the sector may well need to look at strategic planning from a new standpoint, perhaps one with internationalisation at the heart of processes, operations, teaching and learning. This study is contextualised within the global drivers which affect the sector as a whole and the localised situation of classroom pedagogy. The two are interlinked through government policy and the modern phenomenon of globalisation. One method of addressing the key issue of quality is to investigate how UK institutions can deliver responsive academic

programmes to international students and how those programmes can scaffold and deliver achievement at an individual level.

### **1.3 The Business School**

In September 2012 the Business School increased student numbers through the addition of the Department of Logistics and Hospitality Management. This has also brought in new subject areas. The department has a substantial international student cohort which is predicted to rise. Courses such as, BA Events Management are taught in a trans-national context with a partner institution in Shanghai. Students studying on this programme are offered the opportunity to come to Huddersfield for years 2 and/or 3 of the degree. Lecturers from Huddersfield routinely travel to Shanghai to teach. Many students join the Business School at non-standard way points along the undergraduate degree programme time-line. Initially this was prevalent with the top-up degrees which are offered across the School. Here students are accredited with the prior learning from their home country for year 1 and 2 but then go on to year 3 to complete an honours programme. Educationally this can be challenging as they may be studying in the UK for the first time and often need to complete a dissertation in order to achieve. This is similar to the post-graduate (PG) taught programmes where students also have to write substantive texts in order to complete the course. The Business School PG taught programmes are almost completely populated by overseas and EU students. The School is currently developing its PG programmes with new courses such as MSc Business Economics and MSc Financial Economics. The aim is to recruit from markets such as Central and Eastern Europe, China, South Asia, East Asia, the Middle East and Sub - Saharan Africa. Courses often expand and contract quickly with new intakes changing each year. This can cause operational and pedagogical challenges.

In 2009 the Business School Learning Development Group (LDG) was established. This emanated from the Academic Skills Unit which had two full-time lecturers offering non-subject specific support to students across the school. The researcher was recruited to support non-native students of English (NNES). The terms of reference provide the context for the LDG:

- To provide a focus to support the teaching and learning developments across the School
- To provide a central resource within the School to support academic and administrative staff with learning innovations
- To provide students with direct and indirect support for the development of their academic skills required for varying levels of programmes in the School
- To provide students with direct and indirect support for the development of their English language skills including English for Academic Purposes (EAP)
- To provide a central staff resource within the School for the development of technology supported learning
- To provide a central staff resource for the submission of funding bids, external and internal

- To provide a central repository and focus for funded project outcomes and/or teaching and learning innovation

This provision has grown. In 2012 -13 two additional EAP tutors were employed. A further 5 tutors and a manager have been recruited to deliver an embedded International Student Support programme.

### **1.4 Motivation for the Study**

Investigating the experiences of international students in British HE is important for a number of reasons. For the researcher they are important on a strategic, professional and personal level. Personally, I was brought up in a bi-lingual household; my father came to the UK during the Second World War. The issues of language and migration are ones that I have grappled with personally. My father came from Poland. The history of Poland during the war is well documented. I grew up with the Polish diaspora. I understand what it is to leave your home country and come to a new place to live. I too have lived and studied abroad. My son is currently studying Chinese in Beijing, as part of his undergraduate degree. This mirrors the lives of the students who come to the UK to study and has provided me with me a heightened personal awareness of what some of our students may experience.

On a professional level I have taught English as a second or subsequent language for 14 years. I began my teacher training in a Further Education college, at the time when many asylum seekers were coming to the UK from the Sandgatte camp in Calais. This was a baptism of fire in teaching terms. The students were often troubled and confused. They came to the UK from war-torn countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. This was challenging teaching but a very stimulating experience. It was obvious that, at times, personal circumstances impeded learning. However, I realised that creating an inclusive environment, where learning was the key focus, could improve students' sense of well-being. I also taught in many community centres, schools and Mosques. These classes were usually single-sex classes for settled communities. Classes were 2.5 hours long. I got to know my students very well. No chalk and talk. Student engagement was the prime focus at all times. My role was to make language learning relevant and accessible to the students. On a linguistic level I was working in new territory. Many students had low levels of literacy in their mother tongue, so I had to employ some very creative classroom methods in order to raise to achievement. Students were not streamed by level, so differentiation in the classroom and lesson planning became very important. The key to success was to understand, as far as practically possible, what the student learning needs were. In language teaching and learning, needs can be highly differentiated, especially with regard to the four skills. This is dealt with in depth in the literature review.

I was recruited to the University of Huddersfield Business School in 2006. My role was to support the new influx of (mainly) European students on top-up degree courses. I began to instigate diagnostic assessment for non-native speakers of English and develop courses to teach language skills. As I did this, it became apparent that there was a much wider need for an integrated language and skills approach to teaching international students. At the time the Academic Skills tutors with whom I worked were rather detached from the courses in the Business School. As a team we have worked very hard to integrate the skills agenda (language included) into Business Courses. At the same time, international student numbers have grown extremely quickly. In 2009 the Learning Development Group (LDG) was created. This changed the direction of our focus away from purely student facing, to both staff and student. Now we work with course teams across the school supporting curriculum development, delivering learning technologies and teaching at all levels in all subjects.

For LDG lecturers, our main work is seeing individual students for tutorials to support them in their learning. This has given me a solid overview of what is taught in modules across the school and of the expectations of students. Meeting international students on a one-to-one basis every day and talking to them about how they approach, undertake and complete their studies has stimulated my interest in their teaching and learning experiences. Hence, my motivation for undertaking this research. This individual take on the international experience has to be situated within the context of international student recruitment. It is anticipated that there may be some tensions between the individual and strategic.

## **1.5 Aims, Objectives and Research Questions**

This study seeks to address the following aim, objectives and research questions:

### **Aim**

An evaluation of international student perceptions in order to inform teaching and learning practice during the transitional stage of learning.

### **Objectives**

- Develop an understanding of the main themes associated with transition to UK HE within a single context
- Analyse student texts in order to develop an overview of perceived differences in teaching between home and the UK
- Analyse student texts in order to develop an overview of perceived differences in learning between home and the UK

- Create an initial understanding of the transformative nature of study abroad for Business School international students
- Investigate ways in which findings from student (data) writing can inform future practice

### **Research Questions**

How do international students engage with the challenges of a new learning environment?

How do international students describe the differences between prior learning cultures and a new environment?

Do international students anticipate the challenges posed by a new learning environment?

Do international students present as confident in language and skills at the point of entry?

Is the transitional experience transformative in nature?

How can answers to the above effect teaching and learning practice?

## **2. Literature Review**

For the purposes of this study an international student is one who has come to the UK to study in the higher education sector and is a non-native speaker of English (NNES). A review of the literature concerning international students' learning experiences in British HE involves an analysis of a wide range of texts. These come from the areas of pedagogy for University teaching, Language and Linguistics as well as Sociology. Government strategy and regulations can also be the subject of scrutiny. The breadth of literature reflects how diverse and complicated the subject is. Higher education institutional practice in teaching, learning and assessment is culturally specific and possesses integral norms. The relationship with these norms and the international student experience will be analysed here. The complexity of the issue is also reflected in the scope of conceptual frameworks which can be used to analyse learning needs. These will be discussed, alongside the significant themes of adaptation, acculturation and second language acquisition (SLA).

### **2.1 Learning Cultures**

The UK HE sector attracts international students to a deeply established university system which has developed over centuries. The British Council (2014) promotes studying in the UK through a variety of perceived benefits including: internationally recognised qualifications, world-ranking institutions, research and publications, English language acquisition and teaching and study methodologies. Research by The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills found that international alumni reported a range of benefits from their British educational experience, including: career enhancement, English language proficiency as well as cosmopolitanism and intercultural sensitivity Mellors-Bourne et al. (2013). Some negative perceptions were also reported, which were mainly about the gap between expectation and experience. Students who retrospectively perceive educational benefits from studying in the UK will, at some point, have had to make adjustments to the new teaching and learning methodologies. Montgomery and McDowell (2009) suggest that these methodologies may be derived from, "...cultural and linguistic imperialism that assumes there is an intrinsic superiority to Western education" (p. 456). Kelly and Moogan (2012) suggest that British HEIs have an expectation that the implicit, expected, conventions of British HE will be easily accessed by international students. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) provides guidance for the international student journey. Overarching principle 1: An inclusive environment is cited below.

Institutions should seek to provide an inclusive environment where the needs of international students are considered and met alongside those of other students in an integrated and embedded way. (QAA, 2012, p.5)

In addition to this overarching principle of inclusivity the QAA clarifies its understanding further in The UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality, it states:

Promoting equality involves treating everyone with equal dignity and worth, irrespective of the group or groups to which they belong, while also raising aspirations and supporting achievement for people with diverse requirements, entitlements and backgrounds. An inclusive environment for learning anticipates the varied requirements of learners, for example because of a declared disability, specific cultural background, location, or age, and aims to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. Higher education providers, staff and students all have a role in and responsibility for promoting equality. (QAA 2013 p. 4)

As can be seen above, British HEIs are recruiting international students on the basis of reputation and associated benefits. Whilst they are also coming into criticism for the cultural behaviours associated with a post-colonial society and academic sector. The QAA offers guidance for HEIs but the implementation of this guidance may be problematic in the case of surging numbers of new international students. This review of the literature aims to investigate how some of the aspirations for inclusivity above can be appropriately implemented through recognition of the detailed international student experience.

## **2.2 Transition**

The point of transition for international students from home to host country has been well documented (Beasley and Pearson, 1999); (Volet, 1999); (Hussey and Smith, 2010). Notions of shift of person and place (Gustafson, 2001); (Kim, 2008) delineate the international student experience. Notions of deficit, in terms of academic conduct and achievement as noted in Vandermensbrugge (2003) and Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006) have dominated much of the writings. Recently, focus has moved towards developing inclusive academic environments. Critics of current practice advocate a move from using the dominant (or target) culture's constructs as the definitive model. Trahar (2011) suggests that western constructs should be informed by the international student experience. However international students may face an array of new forms of assessment and teaching strategies. For students, course assessment and delivery necessitates swift adjustment to British HE cultural norms.

The work of Biggs (1998); Volet (1999) and Cadman (2000) and have centred upon the transnational experiences of students from Confucian heritage cultures (CHC) studying in Western dominated teaching environments. Useful insights can be made here in terms of providing international student support. However distinctions should not necessarily be made in terms of cultural norms in order to inform pedagogical practice (Montgomery, 2010). Janette Ryan states clearly that, "International students should be considered as individuals: assumptions cannot be made because someone belongs to a particular cultural group" (Ryan, 2000, p.2). In the UK the CHC student has played a significant part in new entrant cohorts. However, nationals from China and other associated countries do not provide the full picture. For many years HE lecturers have worked with settled communities in the UK. This came to the fore during the Widening Participation agenda, instigated by then Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett in 2000. In his speech to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in February that year he was reported to say, "The system must now evolve greater diversity, so that there is effective

responsiveness from the local through to the global” (Thompson, 2000). Classes in British HE now often consist of diverse cohorts without a monolingual second language. Students present with a range of prior English language experiences from an ever expanding range of countries. Classes often include: monolingual home students; home students with a community language experience; European students with long exposure to English as a second language; international students who were previously taught in the English medium; as well as international students who have learned English as a second or subsequent language outside of their normal studies

It may not be the case that standard teaching practice in UK HE addresses the multifarious nature of international students’ prior learning experiences. The constraints of modular assessment and tight teaching schedules can leave little room for flexibility within the curriculum. Induction for home and international students is standardised and often based upon the assumption that students are acquainted with British educational norms. Lea (2004) points out that an academic literacies model can benefit students through not accepting that they are, “...acculturated unproblematically into the academic culture,” (p.741). She also states that the “power dimensions” (p.744) of dominant literacy practices should be acknowledged and that, participants should have the opportunity to engage as active contributors to knowledge creation. Evaluations of student writing relate directly to this. International students often require academic support during the transitional stage of learning. The literature describes the diversity and dynamism of the international experience and suggests that there are many hurdles for international students to negotiate before becoming fully cognoscente with UK academic norms. However, students often do not have the luxury of time in which to slowly familiarise themselves with these norms. Therefore early intervention and support is important. Lillyman and Bennet (2014) state that with targeted support the learning experience can be positive and detract from the negativity which can be associated with swift adjustment.

### **2.3 Adaptation and Acculturation**

For an international student the impact of moving from home to host culture cannot be underestimated. The panoptic nature of their experiences has implications on many levels for each individual. David Block has traced the concept of second language identities through investigations in a variety of contexts. These include the adult migrant context and study abroad (SA). Block looks at the history of identities in second language learning research. He shows that recent studies have broadened the aspect of the research, which previously focused primarily upon the individual/cognitive experience. He describes how the field has moved towards finding links with the social and psychological influences (shapers) of the language learning process. He argues that it is the experience of the adult migrant which provides the epitome of a life changing experience, where an individual’s identity is challenged the most. This is due to the fact that adult migrants find themselves in a new culture, having to function in a new language, without recourse to their traditional support systems. Their previous cultural, historical and linguistic points of reference no longer apply. Despite this, migrants are expected to function at a similar level as they had at home.

Whilst negotiating these sudden changes, they are also expected to acquire knowledge of the current culture's framework in order to function proficiently. Block describes this process as one of "...reconstruction and repositioning" (Block, 2010, p.75). The affective side to this process cannot be ignored. Block continues by saying, "In effect, the sustained immersion in a new cultural and linguistic milieu seemingly cannot but impact on the individual's sense of self" (Block, 2010, p.109).

When discussing the study abroad context, Block remarks that the main body of literature comes from the USA, however regard is given to the European context. The US experience in SA is long served and wide-ranging. He notes the increase in the SA experience world-wide and suggests that it differs from the adult migrant experience, in that it is essentially temporary or time limited. However there are cross-over points. The study abroad student is one who aims to take their language learning to a higher level through a new lived experience. This is closer to the adult migrant experience, where individuals find themselves negotiating the shift from home to host country and consequently reconstructing and repositioning themselves. Block comments on variety within the SA phenomenon which reflects UK HE today. He says, "...the SA context is indeed varied: as varied as the different nationalities enrolled on SA programmes and as varied as the countries receiving them" (p.185). This underlines the diversity of UK international student cohorts and the dynamism of movement between home and host countries.

## **2.4 Models of Adaptation**

The concept of culture shock is inherent in the migrant experience and international students are not disassociated from this. Students may be staying in the UK for a shorter time than other migrants. They are, however, required to incorporate new academic practices and lifestyle changes into their private and public lives with sudden vigour. Models of culture shock and adaptation lend themselves to inform our understanding of the phenomenon. In Ward et al. (2001) Bochner's (1982) model suggests cultural contact for groups may have different outcomes. The psychology of intercultural contact is tabulated. The extreme being genocide. Integration is located at the opposite end of the spectrum. He provides examples of each contact outcome as can be seen below.

Table 2.2 Outcomes of cultural contact at the group level

<i>Contact outcomes</i>	<i>Between groups in the same society Examples</i>	<i>Between different societies Examples</i>
Genocide of original inhabitants by outsiders	—	Australian Aborigines in Tasmania American Indians
Genocide of newcomers by insiders	Nazi Germany	—
Assimilation of out-groups by in-group	Migrants in 'melting pot' societies	Diffusion of Western innovations 'Cocacolonisation'
Segregation of out-groups by in-group	USA before Second World War South Africa Imperial India	White Australia immigration policy
Self-segregation of outgroup	Tribal lands Enclaves in Alaska, the US South-west, Australian Centre	East Germany during Cold War Mainland China during Cultural Revolution
Integration	Emerging pluralistic societies such as Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii	Emerging transnational institutions such as the United Nations, the East-West Centre and 'third cultures'

This study finds itself within the contact outcome of integration. The UK is an established pluralistic society where integration is generally viewed as a positive aspect of society. However, questions on racial and ethnic integration have come to the fore in the UK in recent times, particularly following the events of the 9/11 bombings in New York. In general, the UK is perceived as progressive in terms of social cohesion but there are still areas of concern which need to be addressed. These wider social realities set the scene for the international student experience.

Pedersen's (1994) work provides further evaluations of adaptation to new cultures. His study centres on 70 students travelling around the world. He investigates the critical incidents which the students experienced during their transnational travels. They are measured using the stage theory of culture shock, based upon Oberg's work in the 1960s. The stage theory suggests that culture shock has subtle dimensions through which an individual must pass in order to adapt. They are; initial contact, this is perceived to be quite positive, eliciting excited interest in the new culture but where the individual retains his or her 'home' identity. The second stage is one where the individual becomes overwhelmed by the new culture. Pedersen says that, "The individual typically experiences self-blame and a sense of personal inadequacy for any difficulties encountered." (p.3). The third stage sees transition and coping ability beginning to awaken. Although feelings of anger and resentment may still be present. Stage four is a levelling out of stage three, with further ability to function in the new environment becoming apparent. Pederson describes stage five thus: "The fifth stage is described as reciprocal interdependence, where the person has ideally achieved biculturality, or has become fluently comfortable in both the old and new cultures." (p.3) He goes on to state that controversy exists as to whether this stage is actually fully achievable. He found that participants did not necessarily follow the staged progression which is described above. He

concluded that culture shock manifests itself as an intrapersonal phenomenon where self-awareness and self-criticism come into play. The students perceived a keen sense of loss of control during critical incidents; however this resulted in learning experiences, positive in some cases, negative in others. Finally he states that culture shock is 'multidimensional' and has inherent 'dynamic variables', which hark back to Block's comments on variety.

The stage theory appears to suggest that a sense of completion comes to individuals at stage five, where they have moved through a process of cultural transition and transformation. As stated before, Pederson questions that this can actually happen in totality. In his 1997 article entitled *Immigration, Acculturation and, Adaptation*, John Berry asks some of the profound questions which relate to the experience individuals are confronted with when they move across cultures and seek to exist in new environments. He asks:

What happens to individuals, who have developed in one cultural context, when they attempt to live in a new cultural context? If culture is such a powerful shaper of behaviour, do individuals continue to act in the new setting as they did in the previous one, do they change their behavioural repertoire to be more appropriate in the new setting, or is there some complex pattern of continuity and change in how people go about their lives in the new society? (Berry, 1997, p.6)

The potential responses to these questions are, without doubt, complex. In the context of British HE the complexities lie not only in the individual experience but in that of the diverse nature of the international student cohort. Berry's questions deserve analysis. He distinguishes between acculturation (or adaptation) as propounded by Graves, where we see groups of people adapting to the norms of a new society and *psychological* acculturation which pertains to changes and adaptations made on an *individual* level. He points out that, within groups there are inflections of the level of individual participation. This is an important point. Berry's distinctions overwrite some of the areas of the literature where international students were seen as a homogenous group. He formulates a picture of diversity. This distinction is integral to meeting the learning needs of international students. In terms of the culture (in this case of this study, the culture of higher education) Berry suggests that a practice of *mutual accommodation* is put forward:

This strategy requires non-dominant groups to adopt the basic values of the larger society, while at the same time the dominant group must be prepared to adapt national institutions (e.g. education, health, labour) to better meet the needs of all groups now living together in the plural society. (Berry, 1997, p.11)

He proposes a model for acculturation research which can be seen below.

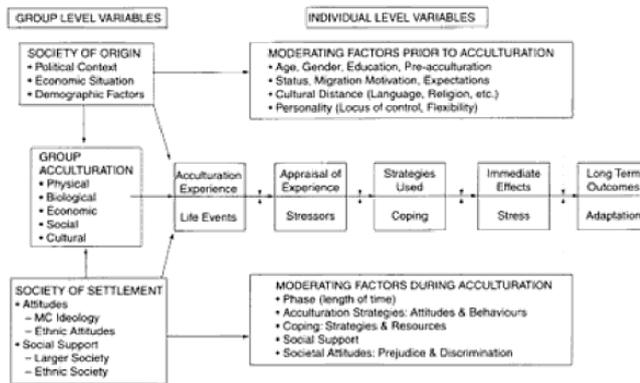


Figure 4.1 Stress and coping framework for acculturation research (from J.H. Berry (1997). Immigration, acculturation and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46, 1–30. Reprinted by permission of the International Association of Applied Psychology.)

The model includes the drivers and significant phenomena which affect the process of transition into new societies. The number of variables at group and individual level provide a basis for investigations. The central part of the model stratifies the period of adjustment. It shows that adaptation to new cultures is a process which requires time and is affected by a number of variables. Berry says that all variables should be considered when undertaking acculturation research. Unlike a staged process, this model looks more closely at the particular nature of the experience. It is suggested that, the relationship with an individual's personal resources could help or hinder eventual adaptation outcomes. Berry continues to say that acculturation is often linked to positive adaptation. He suggests this is the most successful outcome, marginalisation being the least successful. As far as mutual accommodation is concerned, Berry suggests that there are probably 'costs' on both sides. To the dominant culture; costs associated with structural and institutional changes from traditional norms. For the acculturating group it is anticipated that there will be some loss in terms of hereditary culture. This may not transfer easily and be forfeited or dissipated in the new society.

Brown and Holloway's (2008) ethnographic study centres on the initial stage of adjustment to British HE. They note that a nervous state of mind can be a common factor. Their interview transcripts produced familiarly recurring vocabulary. Students described themselves as *scared, frightened, unsure, nervous, anxious and uncertain*. These descriptions perhaps belie the notion that the initial stage of acculturation is exciting and stimulating. Students also reported feeling lonely, becoming ill and missing home. Brown and Holloway suggest that the participants seemed to go through a period of stress at the beginning of the study abroad period. They do acknowledge that students were interested in their new living environment. Brown and Holloway match this experience more closely to phase two of the culture shock process.

Sliwa and Grandy (2006) take a very different approach to investigating the adaptation process. They review the models above, but choose to reject them in favour of Baudrillard's concept of simulacra and simulation. In his overview of Baudrillard's work, Douglas Kellner (2009) states that, to Baudrillard:

...postmodern societies are organized around simulation and the play of images and signs denoting a situation in which codes, models, and signs are the organizing principles of the new social order where simulation rules. (p.20)

This is a new lens through which to look the experiential reality of transition. Sliwa and Grandy refer to research in the field of management studies. They describe how Baudrillard's ideas have been used to, "...challenge truths and unsettle assumptions." (p.12) Baudrillard's notions of simulation and hyper-reality certainly do challenge some of the aforementioned models of adaptation and acculturation. Alternative view points, and in this case research methodologies, can indeed provide new perspectives on established thoughts, ideas and principles. Given that the international student experience is so varied and diverse, it is useful to assess alternative strategies of investigation. Their consequent findings can add to the myriad of facets which pertain to a study of this subject. Sliwa and Grandy investigated the experiences of Chinese students studying in a British university Business School. They state that existing theoretical perspectives on second culture contact provide a restricted view of the subject's experience, in that they *problematise* the circumstances. They suggest these models, "... present cultures as definable, distinct, and measurable entities that can be acquired." Sliwa and Grandy (2006, p.20). They go on to say:

As a result of our critical look at the theories of acculturation, we have come to believe that they fail to fully capture the complexity of cultural experiences as revealed by the individuals in this study. (p.20)

Their particular study shows that some students may be unwilling to structurally adapt their sensibilities or thought processes in order to acculturate.

Gu et al. (2010) attempted to assess the international student experience based upon the broader context. A two-year study investigating transition in terms of students' personal development and acculturation, suggests that the adaptation process is not as linear as is sometimes believed. They perceive it as a, "complex set of shifting associations between language mastery, social interaction, personal development and academic outcomes" (p.7).

It would appear that models and theories of the acculturation/adaptation process are evolving and developing. As research expands, it also appears to respond to the dynamics of the phenomenon of internationalisation of higher education. Reviews of some of the fundamental precepts from scholars such as Baudrillard and Bochner have led to new forms of critical enquiry. Contrasting views of the nature of the lived experience have emerged. Again one can only turn to the multitude of constituent components which form the phenomenon and suggest that they are reflected in the broader sweep of academic enquiry.

## 2.5 Language

For international students studying in British HE, English language competence is key to successful completion and achievement in assessment. NNEST engagement with the *target* culture language has been scrutinised within many contexts. There is an extensive range of skills which must be employed to achieve at university. The key skills of language: speaking, listening, reading and writing, are fundamental. However, skills such as note-making, collaboration, reflexivity, criticality and presentation techniques also contribute to achievement. Development of these skills alongside continued language acquisition can pose challenges to students. In *Second Language Acquisition, 1: Portraits of the L2 User* (2002), contributors provide profiles of second language (L2) learners. Again these are diverse in nature. In Chapter 11 Pavlenko discusses the sociopsychological approaches to L2 learning and use. Here the crux of the matter is discussed. International students have achieved L2 competence as evidenced by their entry qualifications. However it is the usage in the UK that creates both stimuli for learning and challenges to language confidence. Pavlenko looks at social factors which affect language learning and usage, referring to models proposed by Schumann and Gardner. Schumann suggests that integration into the target language group affects the extent to which the second language is acquired. Gardner's work involved theories on motivation and language acquisition in education. Pavlenko quotes him as saying that the learning process in educational environments is one where the, "symbolic elements of a different ethnolinguistic community" are acquired (p.280). Consequently learners re-evaluate their self-image and self-identification. This resonates with Block's reconstruction and repositioning. Further discussion postulates criticisms of sociopsychological approaches. Pavlenko remarks that studies are often undertaken with "...monolingual and monocultural bias" (p.279). It is suggested that some research is viewed through the target language and culture only. She also states that assumptions were made about the extent to which L2 users aspire to acculturate. Pavlenko's stance is that L2 users' "subject positions" (p.285), relate directly to their ability to function in the target language. Non-linguistic factors, race, gender and class, for example, could impede progress. The majority of the studies which have been referred to here focus on the adult migrant experience but can have some bearing on the student sojourn.

## 2.6 Skills and Competencies

In teaching practice, issues in SLA in terms of the four skills have been identified by a variety of scholars. Despite the predominance of writing as a tool for assessment, international students are expected to employ many skills in order to complete their course and module assessments. Their individual competency levels may well impact upon performance outcomes. Student entry requirements for language are clearly set out by HEIs and the United Kingdom Border Agency, Tier 4 entry criteria (UKBA, 2011). Students undertaking writing tasks set in UK universities present with a range of prior learning experiences. Students may have been tested using multiple choice questions in their mother tongue and therefore have prior knowledge of the method however they

may not have experienced the same method in an English medium educational setting. Language usage comes into play. The prior learning experiences are myriad. Connections and (dis)-connections with the teaching, learning and assessment do not necessarily follow clear lines of association. Comments on entry qualifications, particularly the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), produce findings on the limitations of the assessed writing and reading tasks. Moore and Morton (2005) compared data from the IELTS corpus and a corpus of university assignments. They concluded that the academic literacy which characterises writing in the IELTS syllabus differs significantly to that of the academic literacy required for university assessment.

The IELTS format is described as:-

- writing as a spontaneous activity;
- writing as opinion-giving;
- evidence as anecdote, experience;
- writing as hortation (Should X be done?);
- real world phenomena as proper subject of writing;
- writing as an activity separate from reading.

(Moore and Morton, 2005 p.63)

They go on to say that, “These features are certainly at odds with the nature of first year university assessment tasks” (Moore and Morton, 2005 p.64). They also highlight a significant difference with regard to reading. IELTS assessment tasks portray reading as an activity disconnected from writing. This compares unfavourably with university tasks, where writing is described as, “... an activity intimately related to processes of reading.” (Moore and Morton 2005, p 65). Taylor et al. (2006) champion the use of Explicit Reading Strategy Training (ERST) as an intervention. ERST could possibly ameliorate the skills gap between past language reading tasks and those which are inherently connected with a subject being taught at university. Bruce (2008) criticises language teaching, indicating that it can be limited in content through emphasising linguistic attributes such as lexis, grammar and syntax to the exclusion of the wider discursive skills which students will need for assessment. Bruce describes this as, discourse competence.

## **2.7 Contextualisation of Learning**

Contextualisation of language learning has been promoted as a positive and comprehensive form of writing education, Lea (2000); Scott (2000). Hyland (2007) offers a solution in genre pedagogies. He rejects teaching of what is described as “disembodied grammars” (p.148) and suggests students will better understand writing instruction if they perceive a relational connection with texts. Therefore teaching writing in UK HE should focus on incorporated, contextualised, texts which relate to module assessment. Hyland says teachers of English for Academic Purposes should identify texts from the “target situations” (p.152) which students will participate in, i.e. subject texts, not generic. The aim of delivering language learning through context is to demystify the implicit instructions which L2 users may not be aware of. Roehr and Genem-Gutierrez (2009) and Ellis (2008) look at implicitness and explicitness in language and how it can affect proficiency. Roehr and Genem-Gutierrez studied metalinguistic knowledge and how it informed successful task

completion in L2. They found that understanding of meta language can form a "...stepping stone towards L2 proficiency." (p.92). For international students the meta language which is used in every-day UK teaching is very important. Students are required to negotiate instructional language as well as content information within the target language. At the same time they will be making the personal and cultural adjustments which have been discussed previously.

L2 Listening is a skill is integral to proficiency. Listening comprehension has developmental impact upon academic performance through lectures and classroom situations. This passive skill informs the productive skill of speaking. However 'passive' can be misnomer. Teaching students to be active listeners will enable them to become more competent (and consequently confident) speakers of English. Again context is relevant to listening development, Vandergift (2004) reviews the literature on L2 listening research and comments that context can "help or hinder comprehension". (p.17). Adding that, there is responsibility on teachers to intercede where listening strategies are concerned. He suggests that this could better enable students to come to terms with meaning. The power relationship between teacher and student is commented on. It is suggested that the aforementioned strategies should help students mediate the status of their interlocutors. Cross (2010) states that consciousness raising of the importance of listening skills, particularly at the metacognitive level, can improve learner autonomy. These comments derive mainly from language learning environments. Students should benefit from employing strategies in a new academic context. Vandergift advocates explicit teaching of listening skills in order to function in a variety of environments. However other researchers comment that investigating listening is far from simple due to the "covert nature of listening comprehension" (Santos et al., 2008, p.112). Listening in the academic context can differ greatly from social situations. Field (2011) agrees that listening is difficult to investigate, deeming it an "inaccessible" skill and laments that little is known about how students use listening processes in academic lectures. The transferability of listening comprehension tasks from the language learning environment to the subject context at university is questioned. Despite the possible hindrances stated above the importance of listening cannot be underestimated in terms of working in the L2 academic environment.

## **2.8 Learner Autonomy**

Much is written about learner autonomy, in particular, in association with learning styles and strategies. Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) is often referred to in discussions on language learning and curriculum development (Ehrman et al., 2003). Oxford groups strategies in six categories: cognitive, metacognitive, memory – related, compensatory, affective and social. This framework delivers a clear outline of learner behaviour, drawing together the general elements which apply to L2 acquisition. Ehrman et al. (2003) suggest that lecturers should have an affinity with students' learning styles and that this would promote best classroom practice. Reflection is encouraged within learners but also within teaching staff. They state, "Self-knowledge can be as important for teachers as it is for students" (Ehrman et al., p.324). If cohorts

change from mainly domestic native speakers to predominately non-native speakers from around the world then it is anticipated that teaching and learning matters may come under review. Pattison and Robson (2013), referring to Robson's earlier work with Turner in 2008, discuss intercultural learning. They reiterate the need for expectations to be made explicit and for this to promote reflective practice within the learner. In large organisations such as HEIs, curriculum design and delivery may be slow to respond to dynamic change (O'Neil and McMahon, 2005). In an investigation into teaching in the English medium in Hong Kong, Flowerdew and Miller (1996) suggested that both students and lecturers engage in cross-cultural training in order to mitigate culture clashes. They say that the emphasis should be on teacher practice; that lecturers should acknowledge the various "roles" (p.136) which may exist within professional practice. Lamb (2008) agrees and advocates practitioner enquiry, stating that learner and teacher autonomy are linked.

Broadening out from specific teaching practice, current strategic plans and academic interest are turning towards internationalisation of the curriculum (IoC). This is in response to how international British HEIs have become through the effects of globalisation. There is a growing consensus that institutional change can facilitate improved learning environments for all and that internationalisation does not relate exclusively to international students. It is thought that home students will also benefit from a global perspective encouraged through curriculum design. Although this study centres on students, it must be acknowledged that many academics working in UK universities are not British citizens and are often NNES themselves. They too contribute to the diverse nature of HEIs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A review of university websites sees IoC promoted in many locations. University College London's (UCL) Teaching and Learning Portal states:

Learning strategies need to be developed and shared that recognise the importance of cultural differences and encourage full participation from all students, linking the academic, sociocultural, economic and political rationales behind internationalisation. (UCL, 2013)

This institutional level change is being advocated in emerging literature, (Leask, 2001); (Caruana, 2011). Robson (2011) states that internationalisation has the potential to be transformative in nature for HEIs. There are suggestions that developing the vision of internationalisation may not have parity in other contexts, such as developing nations (Maringe and Foskett, 2010); (Leask et al., 2013). In the UK organisations such as the Higher Education Academy and Oxford Brookes' Centre for International Curriculum Inquiry and Networking are giving voice to IoC concepts and implementation.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

In order to review the literature for this research it has been necessary to explore extensive areas of teaching and learning. L2 acquisition and other established pedagogical concepts come into play, such as learning styles and learner autonomy. There is interplay between international students, lecturers, home students and other social and organisational functions. The impact of second language learning theory and practice provides essential information for understanding the

learning development of international students. The change and acculturation process is fundamental to deeper understanding. Finally we see developments in institutions themselves. IoC is a key phenomenon in British higher education at the moment. It reflects the rapid process of globalisation which has affected education, trade and politics in recent years.

For international students we see a complicated scenario of learning theory and practice which alternatively reflect and influence the individual experience. The notions of change and the developmental issues which arise from the study abroad experience bring forth intense discussion in the academic literature. Studies from the areas of linguistics Vandergift (2004); Hulstijn (2007) and Ellis (2008), Counselling and guidance (Brown and Holloway, 2008), Psychology, (Ward et al., 2001) and pedagogy have been pertinent to the discussion as a whole. As is the culture of British HE. A substantial amount of literature is based on teaching practice and linguistic analysis. Within this area many methods of enquiry exist. It is not possible to review them all here or question the validity of all cases. As Norris and Ortega (2006) put it, language teaching and learning research is, "complex and vast" (p.4). However it is evident that studies in second language learning theories have potential to influence the wider context, particularly curriculum design. Language aside, the affective facet to the international student experience is profoundly connected to academic success as can be seen in the models of adaptation described above (Pederson, 1994); (Berry, 1997). The investigations into the adult migrant experience come out of essential human life stories. These can have a profound impact on an individual's emotional and psychological progress. Understanding how some of these critical incidences influence human activity can lead us to derive some important perspectives in teaching and learning practice.

### 3. Methodology

There is much debate which centres upon the philosophical bases for sociological research as well as methods for collecting and analysing data in the Social Sciences. These are wide-ranging and often perspective-led. Hammersley (2004) commented that within the qualitative research community the "...situation is so fragmented as to be quite bewildering" (p.25). In his discussion on the history of sociological research he comments on the Chicago school, from the 1920s, where methods such as case study and statistics were regarded as complementary and both were employed. This mixed method design has been more recently expounded by Tashakkori and Teddie (2003). The value of research methodologies relates directly to the critical enquiry which is being undertaken. It can be useful to assess as many methodologies as possible in the initial stages of research planning. Finding good method 'fit' can have an impact upon research findings. Creating an alignment from the overall aim through to the eventual findings and discussion by way of the methodology is proposed as best practice (Hammersley, 2008); (Punch, 2006).

Overarching methodologies, quantitative and qualitative can progress empirical research and affect the development of approaches and conceptualisation of methods. The debate concerning the relative values of either methodology will continue to be discussed in the academic community. However it is incumbent upon the researcher to form a critical appraisal of methods in order to carry out the specific research task in hand. Miller and Brewer (2003) describe quantitative research as the, "...numerical measurement of specific aspects of phenomena" (p.192). Here statistical data is integral to investigation. Whichever method is chosen to carry out a research project there is significant importance focussed upon its validity. Newman et al. (2003) say that, 'establishing validity is even more consequential as methodological choices expand' (p.167). Integral validity and subject/method fit have a significant influence upon choices of methodology for research purposes and methods of enquiry. Ruane (2005) describes qualitative data as "evidence presented in words, pictures or some other narrative form that best captures the research subject's genuine experiences and understanding" (p12). This again supports the concept that the fit can provide more suitable epistemological groundings within the context of the research questions. The notion of induction is closely associated with qualitative research where theory can be derived from empirical data. This was propounded in particular by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s. These researchers aimed to combine the positive elements of qualitative and quantitative methods where coding of qualitative data was analysed in a two-step process. Firstly the coding gave rise to a data set for analysis and then the original data was scanned for themes using a memo technique (Walker and Myrick, 2006). Grounded theory emerged from this practice. This study uses the influences of the coding techniques from interview data combined with further influences from Narrative Inquiry methods.

### 3.1 Research Context, Validity and Limitations

The context of the research environment is highly relevant and provides elements of potential subjectivity. It must be acknowledged that the researcher could stand very close to the data where individual experiences are analysed. Much of the dispassionate nature of analysis may be removed by the situational reality of the researcher. Elements of power relationships between student and teacher cannot be ignored (Hofstede, 2001) and of linguistic competencies. These exist either at the student/teacher level (particularly relevant at the interview stage) and at the student level, where greater linguistic competence may enable more eloquent reflection. Contextualisation of research is examined by Evered and Reis Louis in their work in the field of organisational science. They look at the alternative benefits of 'Inquiry from the Inside' and 'Inquiry from the outside' in their 1981 article they state that:

Context refers to the complex fabric of local culture, people, resources, purposes, earlier events, and future expectations that constitute the time-and-space background of the immediate and particular situation. (p.390)

This has some significance to the situation at hand, both in terms of the context of the research and the fundamental enquiry itself. The local culture which the students are expected to engage with has a profound bearing upon their potential responses to research questions. Further elements stated here such as "purposes" and "earlier events/future expectations" are deeply significant at the transitional stage of learning but also relate directly to the research method.

Evered and Reis Louis have modelled the two aspects of inquiry in the figure below.

Dimension of Difference	MODE OF INQUIRY	
	From the Outside	From the Inside
Researcher's relationship to setting	Detachment, neutrality	↔ "Being there," immersion
Validation basis	Measurement and logic	↔ Experiential
Researcher's role	Onlooker	↔ Actor
Source of categories	A priori	↔ Interactively emergent
Aim of inquiry	Universality and generalizability	↔ Situational relevance
Type of knowledge acquired	Universal, nomothetic: theoria	↔ Particular, idiographic: praxis
Nature of data and meaning	Factual, context free	↔ Interpreted, contextually embedded

**Figure 2**  
**Differences Between the Two Modes of Inquiry**

Here we see the contextualisation of inquiry and the span of indicators which relate to a context free method at one end, to a contextually embedded method at the opposite end. It is probably fair to accept that within this research the teacher/researcher is contextually embedded, however she has some elements of objectivity in that her role within the organisation is not that of a student. This does not free her from the constructs of the organisation nor does it categorise her as an 'onlooker'. Her situational relevance is aligned directly to the research however she is not immersed in the student experience.

There are elements of ethical discussion which relate to both qualitative and quantitative research. The fundamental precept of research not causing harm to subjects is given, although Ruane (2005) acknowledges that prediction of cause of harm can sometimes be difficult before the research task is undertaken. This research has been subject to the Business School Ethics Committee approval process for post-graduate research. The researcher gained informed consent from participants. When emails were sent requesting participation a full explanation was given for the reasons for the research and how it would be carried out. Students then signed a consent form which was explained to each participant. Privacy will be respected through anonymising responses at the dissemination stage; this too was made clear to the students.

A number of limitations apply to this research. The Business School environment may not reflect other learning environments across the British HE sector. Nor would the sample of students

engaging with the research necessarily faithfully reflect other international student groups studying in the UK. Entry requirements for international students vary across the HE sector, therefore the profile of a University of Huddersfield student may differ from that of a student studying in another institution in terms of prior academic achievement and linguistic ability. This research centres on NNES. There are a number of international students who are native speakers of English and are not represented in the sample. The sample was limited through access to participants. The researcher's contact with international students is derived from teaching practice. So, contact was limited to those who had voluntarily taken up LDG support. Within this group the research was reliant upon students' willingness to partake in the interview process.

### 3.2 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry (NI) has been developing as a method of qualitative data analysis over the past 20 years. Previously used in the research of Health and Social Care, it seeks to give voice to those who are involved in the inquiry. It aims to deliver meaning through textual development and distinguishes itself as manifestly insightful. In order to reach the objectives of this research, in particular the analysis of students' texts, NI offers a method of inquiry which can give voice to the international student experience. It also offers opportunities to deliver a nuanced understanding of the individual experience which then can be analysed thematically to address the research questions.

NI moves away from positivist standpoints and looks to the premises found in literature, language and society, producing meaningful method in order to form knowledge creation. In epistemological terms it can attract criticism due to the significant involvement the researcher has in forming the narrative. Despite its detractors it has become an established analytical tool which has been used effectively in other research areas such as Sociology, Education and Health Science.

Goodley (2004, p.97) describes the approach as having the following characteristics:

- *Idiographic not nomothetic* – interested in the private, individual and subjective nature of life rather than the public, general, objective;
- *Hermeneutic not positivist* – preoccupied with capturing the meanings of a culture/person rather than measuring the observable aspects of a culture/person;
- *qualitative not quantitative* – focused on the wordy nature of the world rather than its numerical representation;
- *specificity not generalisation* – amenable to the specific description and explanation of a few people rather the representative generalities of a wider population;
- *authenticity not validity* – engaged with authentic meanings of a story and its narrator rather than devising measures that measure what they purport to measure;
- *language as creative not descriptive* - recognises the constructive effects of language rather than language as a transparent medium for describing the world.

Elliot (2005, p.6) adds these descriptors:

1. An interest in people's lived experience and an appreciation of the temporal nature of that experience

2. A desire to empower research participants and allow them to contribute to determining what are the most salient themes in an area of research.
3. An interest in process and change over time.
4. An interest in the self and representations of the self
5. An awareness that the researcher him -or herself is also a narrator.

These outlines of the approach portray a profound sense of person within the method. It gives authority to individuals through sensitivity to their lives and treats them as credible narrators of experience. Savin-Bden and Van Niekerk (2007) reiterate the understanding of lived experience by stating that, "The idea of narrative inquiry is that stories are collected as a means of understanding experience as lived and told" (p.459). They also discuss NI in relations to other methods of inquiry and state that "reflexivity, interpretivism and representation {are} primary features of the approach" (p.460).

It is at the point of representation that the researcher has the acute challenge. Narratives can be born out of written biographical texts, field notes, interviews and other written and oral texts. Here ethical questions do arise. Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) stipulate that the researcher takes responsibility for the relevance to the data. This narrative building is a skilful and creative process which requires reflexivity on the part of the researcher. He or she must probe the text in terms of themes, lexis, syntax and form. This can be done in a variety of ways. In the case of this study deep listening techniques were used to elicit stories based upon interview recordings. Reissman (2008) says that, "Narrative analysts interrogate intention and language" (p.11). In response to criticism of NI, Reissman also points out that the stories are not fictional, they are constructed from data collected by a careful, considered, process, which aims to persuade the audience that the narrative is "...plausible, reasonable and convincing" (p.191). Reissman's work is located within NI centring upon people suffering from chronic illness and other life-changing events. She refers to these as "biographical disruptions". One could argue that moving abroad and studying in a new context could be seen as a biographical disruption. Reissman refers to changes that individuals have not planned or foreseen. Studying and living abroad is a planned activity however it can be disruptive in nature.

In constructing narratives the researcher is undoubtedly guided by the rhetorical functions and conventions available to them. Atkinson, in Seale, (2004) commentating on ethnographic transcriptions says that these "Exert a powerful influence on the representations of informants' or other social actors' own words" (p.390). It is indeed the case that the narrator will be bound by the language in which they function. Atkinson describes the narrative work of Oscar Lewis who attempted to inject some authenticity into his narrative. This was based upon research into the lived experiences of people in tenement slums. Lewis tried to represent the vernacular language the participants used in the written text. Atkinson argues that however one chooses to represent the spoken form; one is still constrained by one's own linguistic, knowledge, precepts and ability.

### 3.3 Data Collection

In the case of this research, qualitative data collection appears to provide the most relevant fit. The aim is to analyse experience of British HE through the perceptions of international students. Interviews as a method of data collection have the potential to provide the researcher with thick descriptions, (Geertz, 1993). This also fits with the essential elements of NI where we aim to investigate students' texts, reiterating Savin-Bden and Van Niekerk's (2007) concept of, *understanding experience as lived and told*. Brinkmann (2013) suggests that conversations are part of human nature, in that we are linguistic beings and that our natural state of inquiry is through conversation. He says that interviews are a *refined* method of conversation which provide, "...a mode of knowing and a fundamental ontology of persons" (p.3). Given that the participants in this research have a range of linguistic ability and the aim is to gain insights into personal experience, interviews provide an appropriate forum for gathering data where the researcher can delve more deeply into the international student experience. (DiCicco, Bloom, and Crabtree, 2006); (Saldana, 2011)

In the Business School, international students undertake a language appraisal (LA) at the beginning of the teaching period for the first year of entry for. This is not necessarily the first year of an undergraduate course. Some students are able to enrol as direct entrants to years 2 and 3 through accredited prior learning. The intention of the interview was to engage students in reflecting upon their original LA texts in order to analyse the nature of transition at the significant stages of learning in UK HE. The narrative inquiry (NI) method aims to provide a full and rich explanation of the individual, personal accounts which are gained through interviews. Elliott (2005, p.4) says that "...narrative can perhaps be understood as a device which facilitates empathy since it provides a form of communication in which an individual can externalise his or her feelings and indicate which elements of those experiences are most significant."

In this study, students were chosen to form a purposeful sample (Savenye and Robinson, 2005) of those who had previously completed the language appraisal. These were new entrant students beginning the academic year 2011/12 in the University of Huddersfield Business School. Students accessed the appraisal through a resource in the Business School VLE (Unilearn). The aim of the appraisal was to assess students' writing on a formative basis before they began working on summative assessment tasks. The appraisal consisted of a set of 14 questions linked to a Likert scale which aimed to ascertain students' confidence in the four language skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. Although students are mainly assessed through writing on their modules the other skills play an important part in accessing information in terms of listening in lectures and taking part in class discussion. The second part of the appraisal consisted of a short writing task. In order to elicit a text from each student they were asked to visit the Prepare for Success website and complete the task as outlined below.

*The website 'Prepare for Success' has been created for international students studying in*

*UK universities. It has a lot of useful information. Take a look at at least **two** of the units which relate to academic study by clicking here <http://www.prepareforsuccess.org.uk/>.*

*As you can see there can be significant differences between how you have learned in the past and the studying you will do in the Business School. Write about 150 words on this subject. Include information about your past learning experiences and describe the significant areas of change for you. How will you deal with the transition? What has 'Prepare for Success' taught you?*

Prepare for Success is an on-line resource created by UKCISA and the University of Southampton funded by PMI 1&2. It is aimed at international students who are new to studying in the UK, whose first language is not English and who have an IELTS equivalent level of between 5.5 and 7.5. This reflects the entry level requirement for Business School students. The resource aims to help students orientate themselves around the different aspects of UK academic life and the skills needed for effective study. Evaluations have been positive in terms of British HEIs. According to Watson (2011) around ninety HEIs are using it for transition with student users from over 209 countries. Visits to the site have grown dramatically since its inception in 2008. Hyland (2006) states that principled teaching is delivered through, "...the individual teacher's construction of personal, context-specific frameworks which allow him or her to select and combine compatible procedures and materials in systematic ways for a local context" (p.89). Hence Prepare for Success was chosen for this purpose. Students generally respond well to the content and engage with the subject matter through the ability to be able to access information in and outside the classroom.

Creating an understanding of student experience is fundamental to the tenants of student centred learning within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching. The international student experience requires researchers and practitioners to widen the net of investigation. In order to analyse learning needs, it is necessary to develop a clear cognisance of students' ability at entry level and of their goals for learning within their modules and courses. Hyland (2006) suggests the use of the model propounded by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) for needs analysis highlighting the necessity for "Present situation analysis" and "Target situation analysis." In terms of this research the questionnaire used for initial language appraisal sought out the students 'present situation' in relation to ESP and the transition to the British learning environment. The data from this appraisal provides the researcher with valuable student perceptions at the early stage of learning. Students were asked to give information relating to first and subsequent language learning, subjective analysis of skills ability in English and to carry out the writing task above.

In the academic year 2011/12, 47 students from across the Business School completed the language appraisal. The writing task was used for diagnostic assessment. Students received individual feedback and in-class support based upon their performance in this task. This was part of the Business School Learning Development Group, English for Academic Purposes provision. In order to address the aims of this study, semi-structured interviews were developed. The twelve students who took part in the interview process were determined by those who had already

completed the writing task and agreed to participate in an interview. The author aimed to get a representative sample of non-native speakers from the School's international student cohort. Of the 47 students who took the LA, those who had regular tutorials with the LDG were approached to take part in interviews. 12 students agreed to participate, 6 Chinese and 6 from a variety of European countries. (See list below). In terms of mother-tongue this sample represents native speakers of the following languages

<b>Language</b>	<b>Number of Speakers</b>
Chinese (Mandarin)	6
French	2
German	1
Polish	2
Romanian	1

This sample does not represent any other wider-world languages apart from Chinese (Mandarin) such as Arabic. Interviews were carried out in the period March – April 2012. At this time the students who had completed the language appraisal at the beginning of the academic year were approaching the end of their taught classes. The interviews centred on a theme of reflection upon the academic year. At the beginning of each interview the student was asked to read their writing from the language appraisal. They were then asked to comment on their texts in terms of the significance and relevance to learning to date, as well as language progress. This initiated the reflective process and aimed to elucidate as deep a response as possible. A timeline was created in order to advance the idea of transition and transformation. The timeline took the form of printed cards which prompted the students to reflect upon the critical stages of the academic year. The levels of speaking and listening competence among the participants varied greatly, hence prompt cards were used. (Appendix 2) These depicted images of emotions which supported vocabulary use and expressions of emotive language. This method of eliciting language is standard practice within EFL teaching contexts. A series of open questions were used to elicit information regarding the student's learning experiences. Following that students were asked to review the timeline in terms of their perceptions of themselves as an individual. The interviews were recorded and transcribed faithfully with all hesitations and utterances included.

In order to create the narratives formed from the recordings of the interviews a process of deep listening was undertaken. This involved listening to the text in order to correct any errors in the transcriptions and to listen for general speaking levels. Secondly the researcher listened to the audio files whilst reading the corrected transcription so as to begin to understand the flow of the

oral narrative. Finally the process involved listening and writing narrative simultaneously. This included reviewing each part of the audio text and employing the narrative techniques described below.

### **3.4 Narrative Inquiry for Data Analysis**

The chosen method, which is informed by previous narrative research, aims to provide a student voice from the data collected in the interview process. This has been done through the creation of narrative texts. Textual data from interviews was analysed in order to address the aims of the research. The creation of a narrative text relies on creative craftsmanship of words and syntax to produce a credible, engaging final product. The purpose of using this method was to give voice to the student experience. Had the oral text been coded or quantified at this stage, the perceived outcome would be of a reduced text. This may not have delivered meaning and insight in the way that a story can. The aim was to deliver a personal and accessible product which shows emotion and nuance. It is important to employ rhetorical tools which enhance the text but at the same time remain faithful to the original. It is at this point that we must acknowledge the notion of inquiry from the inside (Evered & Louis, 1981). The researcher is part of the process, and in the case of narrative, brings to bear language that is constructed by their own linguistic heritage. Atkinson's' (2004) review of narrative from ethnographic studies suggests that using first person narration can be a powerful strategy saying that "...the resulting text can have the appearance of a vivid and privileged reconstruction of the speaker's experience" (p.390). In the case of this research first person narratives were constructed. This was done in order to represent the individual students' reflections and to deliver a method of communication through which the reader could come to identify with the lived experience.

Each narrative is written in relation to the original LA text which is clearly set out at the top of the page. Here the reader is able to focus on the student's written language level at the point of entry to the University. The narratives are written as accounts of reflection on the LA and continue into the text taken from the interview data. No attempt was made to incorporate direct speech into the texts or to interpret accent. The author uses Standard English to represent the oral texts. The register is informal. The vocabulary in the texts is very close to the original recordings and many words and phrases are represented quite faithfully. However correct grammar structures were implemented in order for the text to be coherent. Keeping the written version close to the spoken version communicates the student's ability in discourse terms. Through comparison of each narrative one can see which students had the more able skill set. This is also represented in the length of the narrative; students with more ability were able to give fuller answers with more nuance and broader vocabularies. In order to communicate lower levels, quite simple sentence structures were used whereas with more able students the researcher was able to employ more complex syntactical structures. Varied verb tenses and time phrases are used to negotiate time in

order to portray the student looking back on the LA text and communicating their prior learning experiences.

The images which were employed to elicit emotive language have played a part in the narratives. It was often difficult to grasp a sense of feeling from the student. For the weaker speakers, they would often associate one word with the whole experience and continue to use that word, even though the researcher could sense that there was a more nuanced range of emotions present. The researcher could sometimes sense the frustration of the participant through their non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication has been addressed in the narratives. During the interview cycle the researcher was aware of both verbal and non-verbal communication. This is a skill that language teachers develop through training and expertise particularly in teaching speaking and listening techniques. Facial expressions along with hand and eye movements helped to augment the interviewer's understanding of the spoken word. The utterances or paralinguistic mechanisms, such as 'hmm', or 'er' were documented in the audio transcripts. Where language is not easily transmuted, second language learners can rely on these noises as holding mechanisms for their interlocutors. They allow time for vocabulary recall whilst still showing engagement with the speaking task. This is true for native speakers too but can be exaggerated in NNEs. Where language was particularly weak these utterances make up a significant part of the audio recording. When the researcher found that this was becoming a barrier to self-expression the prompt cards were employed.

Each narrative follows a similar sequencing structure as they are based upon the timeline used in the interviews. However as the questions allowed for free responses, students did not always maintain the chronological order suggested by the timeline. This is reflected in the audio files and subsequent narratives. The researcher asked each participant to reflect upon themselves as learners and individuals; this gave rise to more personal reflections and responses which showed the learner in the context of their new lives in the UK.

### **3.5 Content Analysis**

A content analysis of all of the narratives has been undertaken in order to draw out the significant themes. These were then mapped to the original aim, objectives and research questions for coding purposes. This is described by Lieblich et al. (1998) as a method of creating a vision of, "... the content universe in certain groups of people or cultures" (p.114). This is particularly pertinent for students who travel from home to host countries, as they transfer their personal narratives from one culture to another. Through transition they become part of a new identifiable culture: that of the international student in the UK. However their relationship with home is not severed completely, it is part of the content universe in which their narratives exist. Krippendorff (2013), in discussing content analysis, also talks about the "ante-cedent and consequent conditions" (p.83) in which the texts appear. These concepts are addressed in the coding scheme which has been formulated

from the research questions as listed below. They were colour coded to enable textual analysis and then tabulated. Emergent themes were then identified and narrative examples of the analyses are laid out in the findings.

### **3.6 Coding Scheme**

Engage with Challenges

Describe Differences

Anticipate Challenges

Language Confidence at Point of Entry

Transitional Experience

Transformative Experience

There were three emergent themes from the narratives which were identified and analysed, they are: Tutor's Practice, Emotional Responses to Change and Transition and Technology.

## 4. Narratives and Findings

### 4.1 Example Narratives

Below are two examples of the narratives which have been derived from the interview data. They have been selected due to the significant differences in the students' voice and experience. The rest of the narratives can be found in Appendix 1. The students' relationship with their language assessment writing is evident. The findings which follow come out of the content analysis of the texts. The aim is to produce meaningful insights into the narratives. The themes suggested by the research questions have been used as sub-headings in order to group ideas and findings. A theory-related analysis will follow in the next chapter.

I found out that in British Universities the teaching style is a lot different than in schools that I went to in Poland. Teaching style here is a lot more informal and tutors are a lot more friendly and helpful. They are not only there to pass their knowledge to us but also to become friends with us and to make the studies enjoyable. I didn't know whether it was a good step for me to start Higher Education at my age because I wasn't sure that I would fit in. I was wrong. Everybody is so nice and I am part of them and they don't think of me as someone older and less reliable but they think of me as their inspiration to pursue their dreams no matter what age you are. Prepare for Success told me everything that I might want to know as a new student.

#### ***Student F: Writing from Language Appraisal***

Reading this now, towards the end of my first year of classes on Business Studies, I think what I wrote was true, even more than true. I wouldn't change anything but I would add some things. Coming here to study, I had no idea what to expect. I had assumed that the teaching would be the same as I had had in the past in Poland. I was shocked to find out how different it actually was. From the moment I was offered a place at university I was dying to get here. I was so excited when the first day came around and like a child who had really enjoyed their first day at school I couldn't wait to get back the following day. However I did have some natural worries. I was concerned that my age would affect how I got on. I was also nervous about working in English, although I have studied and even taught English in the past, this was a whole new experience. I soon realised that things are great here. There is excellent access to the university facilities and excellent communication with tutors and colleagues. It's lovely being able to study here.

When it came to the modules they were mainly OK but I'm a language and literature person so I find statistics difficult, and I had an assessment with stats in it. This was new for me. I had to work harder for that module than I thought. I had to ask for a lot of advice and explanation for this module, so it stood out as difficult for me. I think I've got it now. It would have been difficult if I'd been doing it in Polish. It's the figures that I find hard. Overall though the first term went very quickly. I had an excellent time and got a good test result at the end.

I was motivated to come to University because I had studied English previously. I have been living and working in England for a few years but I realised that I wasn't progressing much. I was just using conversational English in day to day life. I felt as though my vocabulary was becoming limited and even slipping backwards. Studying here has meant that I have developed an academic vocabulary. Doing Professional English has helped me with this. We are taught synonyms, changing simple words for academic words. They teach us to do presentations and write essays. I really like the tutor for that module, he seemed to glow with his knowledge of the English language. As a consequence I am more confident now and I have a much wider vocabulary.

As far as Business Studies in concerned I am glad I chose it as a subject. I was worried about doing accounting but I've come to enjoy it. As I say, numbers are a challenge for me but I didn't want to study something I'd already done like language and literature, so I went for something completely different. People who know me are surprised that I opted to study business; they think it's not me. I set myself a challenge.

There are differences between studying here and in Poland. There the timetable is full, so working part time is almost impossible. Here you have about 12 hours a week of classes, in Poland it might be more like 40. I think there's a lot of irrelevant stuff taught in Poland, it's difficult to specialise. Also there is a border between tutors and students. Tutors see themselves as being superior to students. We have to behave in a deferential manner to tutors even when we disagree with them. They would have been angry if we challenged them, certainly that was what it was like when I was studying, I don't know if things have changed recently. There we were mainly assessed through final exams. So you could work really hard during the year but if things went bad on exam day it could ruin your chances of success. Here we have assessment throughout the year, so you have a better chance of achievement. There's a lot more multiple choice tests here too, it would just be exam essay questions at home, I like the different types of assessment. Here we have to use lots of sources in our writing and prove which sources we have used through referencing. This wasn't such a big thing in Poland. I really like the technology we have here. It's a while since I studied in Poland so I don't know if they have so much there. Unilearn is particularly useful. It is my window on the university, I use it every day. I don't think I had any idea how different studying here would be from Poland.

I have noticed that lots of international students are very weak in the English language. I watch them in class and they are nervous of writing anything in case they make a mistake. They probably need more support. They don't seem to have a grip on the grammar. Generally we are required to read a lot for our course here but no one checks if you don't. I think we would be more motivated to read if we had more checks.

It's my opinion that a lot of students come from Poland without thinking about the reality. They seem to think it will be easy, it's not. They get money through student loans, so they think they will be better off than at home. They need to realise that their level of English should be good in all four

skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. Even if they have been good at English in Poland it's very different when you get here and work with native speakers. If people ask me if it's easy studying here I tell them that it isn't and they are often surprised. Quite a few Poles came here for economic reasons 5 or 6 years ago. Now because of the recession they have lost their jobs, so they come to university for something to do. They were confident because they could communicate at work but that is very different from communication in education, especially higher education, so they come across difficulties.

Education does change you. On day one here a lot of the younger students thought I was a teacher because I am mature. They looked to me for guidance, particularly the younger Poles. They tended to use me as an interpreter. After a while I broke away from them. I didn't want to just mix with Poles and supporting them was taking me away from my own work. This whole situation was new for me too, so I had to be strict and concentrate on what I needed to do for my studies. When it came to our group presentation I had to tell the Poles that I didn't want to work with them, I wanted a cosmopolitan group. Breaking away meant that I worked with other colleagues on the course. I have got to know Chinese people and they are lovely, also others from all over Europe. There are benefits from having a cosmopolitan student group. I have learnt about countries such as Africa from other students. For years foreign travel was almost impossible from Poland. We didn't meet people from abroad. Here I have met people from Iraq, India, all over. I think that has made me a much more tolerant person than I was before. I believed Poland was for Poles, England was for the English etc. I wasn't a global person, now I am. I can understand other cultures better and respect them more.

I think that I am a different person now. Last week I met my ex-colleagues from work they said I seemed to be a different person too. I'm happier now. This experience has helped me to understand my children better too. Before I was a strict mum who often nagged about sitting down and doing homework. Now I realise that intelligent people can work at their own pace. That might not be two hours per night from 6 to 8, it might be very different working patterns.

I'm not a person who looks backwards. I'm happy in England. I have lived in Holland too but I'm settled here with my family. I suppose if a really great opportunity came up elsewhere I would consider it. I love working with people, so I have been thinking about a career in Human Resources following my degree. I'm good at explaining things to people. I told the people I used to work with that I'd go back as a HR manager in the future. That's quite a difference from the unskilled work I did there in the past. I'm looking forward to what the future holds.

Now, I already read some learning experiences from winner of Business Studies.

Firstly, I see that a lot of people are afraid of speaking English. The cause is English is not our first language. The most of international students want to speak frequently, but they are afraid of making mistake in English. I personally think that we should be not afraid. Everybody makes mistakes, so we should have courage to correct it.

The next, some students don not understand what are teachers saying in the classes, so, it bring on more and more problem will be happened. I have to say that we should solve problems in good time. We can talk about the question with friends or teachers. Do not be shy.

### ***Student J: Writing from Language Appraisal***

In my language appraisal last year I wrote that a lot of people are afraid of speaking English because it's not our first language. People are afraid of making mistakes. That was in September last year and now in March I am still afraid. Both in and outside class. I am less afraid now but it was very hard at the beginning. I was scared. It is a little better now but still scary. When I first came here I was very afraid, I didn't understand a word the teacher said. I had done an international foundation year in China but not all of the teaching was in English. After about a month here I think I felt better, less afraid, but it is difficult to remember how I felt then. I went home at the end of the first term and began to feel that I preferred being in England and I felt more relaxed when I came back for term 2. Generally I feel quite calm about being here now.

For me the major difference between here and China is the language. I was at school in China and now I am at university in England. I had a lot of friends in China and I could chat to them about stuff I like. Here if I want to talk about stuff I have to correct myself, grammar and pronunciation, I worry about what I'm saying. I'm a bit shy and afraid.

I don't think that there is much difference between the teaching in China and England but I think university is more relaxed here. I would like to have more help to get over my fears of speaking English. Of the language skills I find reading the easiest and haven't had any problems reading for my course. My grades this year have been in the 40s and I got a 65, writing isn't too hard, speaking and listening is hard for me.

If I had to give advice to another Chinese student coming to study here, I'd say that people are nice, that English will improve and that he will have to learn on his own here. The course isn't difficult compared to China. In China we have to do so much maths. Here you can use a calculator, there you have do the working out yourself. I've enjoyed doing modules in Accounting and Markets and Government. I hadn't studied Business before and I have enjoyed it. We have more classroom study time in China. When I got my first coursework, I couldn't understand the question, the vocabulary was difficult, I had to look up most of the words. Even then it was difficult to understand the sentences, the real meaning. I have another international student friend, not Chinese but his English is better than mine, so he explained what I had to do.

I have made friends here. I live with two other Chinese students in a student house. Before I lived at school, there the teachers were in control. I'm more free here. I'm getting nervous now that the exams, final coursework and presentations are coming up. Before I thought it was more relaxed here but now I feel that I have a lot to do. I would like to travel around the world and then go home to China. I don't have any definite plans for the future; I'm only in the first year of my degree.

I said that I didn't think that there is much difference between teaching here and China but there is something. In China students are close to the teachers and they give them a lot of attention. Here I have to work more on my own. That's a big difference. At first I didn't like it but now I'm getting used to it. I try to manage my time with a timetable that I have written but it is easy to get distracted by friends and socialising. I haven't got a revision timetable I've just got the exam timetable given to me by the Business School.

My parents sent me to England to study. I'm glad that I came here.

#### **4.2 Findings: Engage with Challenges**

The methods in which students engage with the academic challenges they encounter in their study abroad experiences are varied. They describe that emotionally they can feel daunted in reacting to challenges and nervous about how to proceed. This could be due to the speed of change which they are dealing with. However, student responses show a range of strategies which are employed in order to negotiate British assessment methods. The main strategy is extensive reading, which is positive in that it enables them to develop subject knowledge as well as language structures. B states,

*"For the first assessment in term 1 I prepared by reading lots. I found it difficult to understand what the teachers said to me in class, so I would read and read to find out what I wanted to know."*

Extensive reading is advocated by all tutors and the LDG. It is presumed that although the students suggest that they read 'extensively' this may be voiced as a comparison to the range and depth of reading which they undertook previously in English. Albeit the students who said that they used reading as a strategy reported that it gave good results in assessment. Some students engaged well with the LDG and felt able to ask advice from tutors. As LDG support is not compulsory this is another pro-active method of engagement. Others mention Summon as a tool for negotiating reading and research. Since the University Computing and Library Service introduced Summon in July 2010, it has become the focus for internet-based research. It superseded MetaLib and is significantly easier to navigate and more intuitive to use than its predecessor. It holds 2,166,893 eBooks alone and gives access to many electronic journals and other Business resources. This means that students often find themselves with a broad range of results from searches and consequently have to filter them. This can be challenging when working in a second language. LDG tutors, as well as library staff often give tutorials on searching using Summon. The use of

technology in learning is covered in a separate section as it is a significant theme which has transpired from this study.

Students are often given the opportunity to submit draft texts for written assessment. Anecdotally subject tutors suggest that these opportunities are not grasped to full potential. In these findings students state that submitting a draft and using the feedback helped them to error correct and develop a better understanding of the assessment requirements. Previous LDG research has shown that international students find the range of assessments in British HE to be far wider than at home. This can be challenging in that international students are required not only to complete the task but understand the method for the first time, this is particularly true for direct entrants into years 2 and 3. Students in year 1 often receive support in carrying out assessment tasks at university but if they begin the course further on they will have missed some of this essential scaffolding. Although students did undertake the strategies presented here, the narratives suggest that despite their efforts to engage they had lingering uncertainties with regard to new assessment methods.

A clear message as reported by a couple of students and upheld by others is the use of British examples in describing business scenarios. This is fully described later. Time management, study and class time are significant themes which will also be dealt with later in this chapter. However they arise here as a strategy for engaging with challenges. Students state that they find the time outside the classroom difficult to manage in study terms and that they need to plan their time in order not to get distracted by social activities. E says he can't study at home and gets distracted and J says, "*I try to manage my time with a timetable that I have written but it is easy to get distracted by friends and socialising.*"

Further strategies which students describe are; target-setting, self-correcting English grammar, reviewing learning outside of the classroom and looking at pass marks for assessment and analysing where improvements could be made. These would all be advocated by tutors as good practice. The journey the students describe when coming to these methods is what is interesting.

*E: "I tried to correct my English as I wrote the assignment. When I came back for term 2 I felt that I understood what was expected of me. So you have to read a lot and work out what to read, not just use given text books. In France I'd use 2 or 3 books for an essay here it would be more like 20."*

*F: "I find statistics difficult, and I had an assessment with stats in it. This was new for me. I had to work harder for that module than I thought. I had to ask for a lot of advice and explanation for this module, so it stood out as difficult for me. I think I've got it now."*

*H: "You have to find the most efficient way to find the relevant information. I use Summon to find journal articles."*

### 4.3 Findings: Describe Differences

A variety of themes have emerged from the analysis of the students' descriptions of differences between home and the UK. Time spent in class in the home environment versus the time spent studying independently in the UK predominates. The six Chinese students describe very controlled learning environments where they had previously lived in school. They studied all day in class and then had homework sessions where a teacher was present. This is how L describes it:

*"We used to get up at 6 and do independent learning for 2 hours. This was mainly spent doing English. Proper lessons started at 8 and finished at 1. Then a break for 2 hours but even then there was work to do. We finished proper lessons at 5 but we were back in the classroom at 6 to do independent learning until 10 p.m. Even after that students still had homework to finish."*

It would seem that this lifestyle would be closer to a British boarding school scenario compared to that of a regular undergraduate's life in the UK. Some students comment on how their previous teachers would be in close contact with their parents, keeping them informed of the student's performance. The power relationship with teachers is also discussed. One person says this about learning in China.

*"Between here and China the main difference in learning is that there we do what our teachers tell us to do. We wait for instructions and we carry them out. In the UK we work in groups more and think around the questions we are set. We try to get a wider knowledge of the subject. Here we have Unilearn and Summon. At home we just buy the recommended books from the bookstore. Previously, in school, I had lessons from 7 am all day and then evening study until 9 or 10 pm. We had a two hour lunch break and an hour for the evening meal. Here I have 14 hours per week, much less. I am expected to work on my own when I'm not in class."*

Students also mention that they are expected to communicate with tutors more independently here than at home i.e. via email. Another area that is considered to be different is the concept of challenging teaching staff and assumptions. There seems to be a contra-indication with many of the previous learning styles where this is concerned. The notion of criticality comes to the fore here and we sense that students go through a process of seeing a difference, identifying the nature of difference and then developing strategies to engage.

The European students also describe much more class contact time at home. Hence the theme of independent study emerges as a substantial subject for discussion in the narratives as is seen above. Students from China and Europe describe very guided learning environments as well as directed reading and writing activities. Many say that they were given reading texts and that they were rewarded for reproducing text-book answers to questions. In the UK, of course, they are penalised for this activity. A consequence of this difference is that they are propelled into independent research which can be unfamiliar territory. This compounded with the wide range of

electronic resources available appears to be particularly challenging. Following this some comments are made on Harvard referencing and Turnitin.

Assessment is a key theme. It is often suggested that exams and in-class tests were the main forms of assessment at home. So, the variety of assessments encountered here is new and can be methodologically difficult. In practice students often ask for examples of reports or essays for UK assessment. The LDG has done a lot of work in this area, both through creating on-line resources and delivering group teaching centred upon assessment.

Outside of the university adjustments to everyday life are commented on. Living away from the home/school situation is key. This would be true for home students but for international students this is compounded by living in a new country. So, managing domestic life is described in some detail. There appears to be a certain amount of pride in overcoming domestic problems such as being able to find an engineer to mend a broken washing machine or working out how to work an electricity pre-payment metre. When living in a new country these domestic problems can sometimes seem, insurmountable. The transformative nature of these new experiences is set out below.

#### **4.4 Findings: Anticipate Challenges**

In relation to coming to study in the UK and having a prior understanding of what is expected of them, students generally report surprise and shock at how imposing the challenge seems to be. They often comment that they had some reasoned prior expectations but that the reality went far beyond what they anticipated. They suggest that the experience tested them a great deal. They portray a sense of innocence of the potential differences between living and studying at home and in the UK. Some state that they assumed that teaching and learning would be the same as at home and are confused and surprised at the extent of the changes. Language comes into play here. Students who were previously content with their language capability suddenly sense that they needed to up-skill in short time. This speed of language development was generally not anticipated. This relates to previous language learning experience. The majority of these students will have learnt English as a second language as a discreet subject. Here the pressure comes from studying a Business subject through the English medium. As they are not on language courses, it is incumbent upon them to take control of their language learning. It is probably this challenge which is felt the most intensively here.

Of the six students, two spoke directly about cultural pre-conceptions of British people and the UK. These were not totally positive. H says that she thought northern Europeans were 'cold and unfriendly' and that is a common perception in her country. Also, for some, an underlying presumption that support for academic study would be unforthcoming. It is pleasant to reveal that overall it was mainly felt that this was unfounded. In summation the narratives describe an experience where students are overwhelmed by the suddenness of the challenges they

encountered on arrival and that they had no expectation of the intensity of the experience both culturally and linguistically. This is borne out by G. who had been living and working in the UK for some years before beginning her degree. She says that she assumed that higher education here would mirror that of Poland. She quickly realised that she was.” ...shocked to find out how different it was.”

#### **4.5 Findings: Language Confidence at Point of Entry**

Although language was not the main focus of the interview process it presented itself as a dominating outcome of the narratives. Without doubt the review of the LA at the beginning of each interview precipitated this. In the main students reported significant trepidation and anxiety around listening comprehension and interlocution with native speakers. The prompt cards used to elicit responses in interview had an image of a character expressing fear. This image was repeatedly identified as relevant to their state of emotion when describing having to speak English on arrival at the University. Students also reported that they could often understand single words or phrases but contextualised meaning eluded them. One suspects that their reflections provide quite clear retrospective acknowledgment of low levels of English at the point of entry. However these students will have all met the language entry requirements for the course. It is felt that students are commenting on proficiency levels. Despite having achieved the relevant qualifications to study in the UK, the sudden realisation that they will have to function completely in the English medium creates anxiety. This takes time to overcome and we see in the ‘Engaging with Challenges’ section how this is undertaken. These feelings of anxiety should not be underestimated when analysing student engagement. The narratives portray a very real sense of trepidation. Student C says he, “*didn't have one word to say*” and another comments, “*On the first day here I didn't understand half of what the teachers said.*”<sup>2</sup>

Some students comment that they did not feel that their entry qualifications prepared them for the language experience they would have in UK HE. L says that “*Lots of Chinese students have studied English and got their IELTS scores but they don't realise how different that sort of learning is compared to academic writing in university in England*” G says that she doesn't think that the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) prepared her for learning in the UK.

#### **4.6 Findings: Transitional Experience**

The lived experience of transition has been described by the students in depth. Much emotive language is used and reflection appears to be deep seated and profound. There seems to be a clear cognisance of personal distance travelled. This is particularly true for linguistic ability, moving from perceived deficient levels to language competency. The focus here is on listening comprehension. B says, “*I'd say that in the first two months I went from understanding nothing to about 70% of what is said.*” Students show how they are able to be self-critical in language terms. In teaching, it is common to work with students who lack insight into personal language

development. It is assumed here that the students used the LA text to benchmark themselves at the point of entry and so were able to produce quite in-depth recognition of language progress.

The library is a resource which is commented on widely: how it differs from the home facilities and how students come to use it effectively through usage. There are many comments on the idea of critical thinking as it is framed in a western context. It could be said that there appears to be an 'awakening' to this new way of reading and writing. K says "*If I read a definition in a book I often think that it is right because that person is knowledgeable about the subject, more knowledgeable than me, but my tutor says I must form my own opinions from my reading.*" Alongside this is the major (and recurring) theme of independent learning. Students describe how they moved from their previously controlled learning environments to the less structured environment here.

Assessment is also significant in the change process. Submission deadlines, assessment methods, grades, all play a part in their path to coming to terms with differences. The consequent process of making personal accommodations in order to achieve in the new context is clear to see. They show how they use a variety of strategies to engage with new assessment methods. The experience of teaching and learning in general is approached in the same manner. However in some cases students describe how they implemented strategies but were not always successful.

Outside of the educational environment, the theme of becoming an independent person living away from home predominates. This is illuminated below.

#### **4.7 Findings: Transformative Experience**

The nature of change and transformation is of particular interest to this study. The narratives show recognition of significant personal change both with regard to study and general life experiences. Students comment on the broad range of skills they have acquired. As above, they note their deep reflections on progress within the four skills of language. They also discuss their ability to implement each skill effectively in comparison to the beginning of the study period. They show an awareness of the time required for linguistic competencies to improve. Awareness of the necessity of engaging with new methods in order to achieve at university is also highlighted.

Transformation through newly acquired life skills is commented on emphatically by the majority of participants. Some narratives discuss the multiculturalism which exists in the UK and the international mix in the Business School. In the main students say that this multi-ethnic experience can have a positive influence on the individual. F says, "*Here I have met people from Iraq, India, all over. I think that has made me a much more tolerant person than I was before. [...] I wasn't a global person, now I am. I can understand other cultures better and respect them more.*" F describes this transformative experience in a profound way. H says, "*We've worked in groups with people from other cultures and we can understand each other.*" This theme was transparent in the text and fed into the students' future ambitions. They comment that having a wider world view will hold them in

good stead for their careers. I says, *“I think this course will help me get a good job and enable me to talk to people better. It will help me whether I work in China or wherever I go in the world.”* Many discuss travelling further in the future. They also describe taking home or employing their newly acquired skills for career development as can be seen from the quotations below:

*“I want to do a masters in Marketing and Advertising. French companies are looking for people with language skills who are willing to travel. I can see a future for me.”*

*“I can see different management styles here. I’ve learnt about motivating staff and other new ideas. I’ll teach them to my dad!”*

*“I told the people I used to work with that I’d go back as a HR manager in the future. That’s quite a difference from the unskilled work I did there in the past. I’m looking forward to what the future holds.”*

The narratives often chronicle a sense of achievement from taking control of a new life experience. As C states, *“I feel I can handle life and study here now. I can ask the tutor and classmates questions much better than at the beginning. This is a real improvement for me.”* L puts it like this: *“At home I could behave like a child. Here I have to be an adult but that’s the reality. Now at the end of the year I feel confident.”*

Students seem to have embraced the wider experiences available to them and suggest a sense of empowerment which comes from the process. They also describe a situation where they have moved from a position of lack of understanding of expectations to understanding and being able to engage and fulfil them. There is a general sense of developed self-confidence and they seem to appreciate that teaching and learning methods have an effect on the whole person not just academic success. Overall there is an appreciation of progress and potential continued value in new skills and abilities, and a general agreement that Business is a good subject to study.

#### **4.8 Findings: Tutors’ Practice**

Many comments were made on the practice of lecturers in the Business School both generally and of individuals. Dissertation supervision was well received. In the narratives students showed their trepidation in undertaking a dissertation and the role of the supervisor is significant here. A says his supervisor went beyond what he would have expected in terms support; he was appreciative of the guidance on offer. There is a consensus that lecturers have a genuine interest in students' welfare. 6 students describe how the tutors guided them individually and enabled them to gain an understanding of the requirements for the course. Another positive realisation is that UK tutors are willing to accommodate NNEs in the class, in that they are willing to listen to responses to questions in perhaps less than fluent English and are patient in giving explanations. The library

staff also elicit positive comments. The library is a significant resource and students comment that the wealth of resources can be overwhelming at first. Early, supportive guidance is recognised in the texts.

An important issue appears to centre on examples used in the classroom. Students describe tutors usage of examples from all areas of life, not simply business. The implicit suggestion here is that international students lack awareness due to not having lived in the UK for long. Maybe also not making enough effort to understand wider British society or being aware of current affairs. In terms of Business, students say that UK companies are often used as examples in teaching, they go on to freely admit that they don't have the required background knowledge. This necessitates further research. International students feel at a disadvantage in the classroom as home students can readily comment on the examples. These findings are borne out in the researcher's own tutorial experience with international students. When working on assessment questions and criteria it is often incumbent upon the tutor to explain background information to the student so that they can find a point of reference to begin their research. A recent example of this was on a masters programme where students were asked to explore the financial governance of institutions in the public sector. This proved to be problematic on a variety of levels. Firstly many of the students studying this module came from developing countries which are currently establishing the type of public infrastructure the UK has. Others come from societies where information on public funding is not available and therefore expectations of analysis are limited. Given these overarching issues, language and cultural barriers begin to occur. As these societal norms are so different from home culture there may be a lack of linguistic phrases in order to make parallel comparisons. This task did indeed require many students to undertake significant research into the basic tenets of UK society. In itself this is not necessarily negative given that the students are studying towards a British qualification. However where large cohorts of international students are present on modules it is may be that for future practice the cultural elements of the context are explained explicitly within lectures and seminars.

#### **4.9 Findings: Emotional Responses to Change and Transition**

The main sense from the narratives in describing emotional responses is that of initial fear and trepidation. Students display anxiety, stress and nervousness. These feelings relate to the whole environment. The sentiments are particularly profound at the point of transition as described above, where students have a sudden lack of confidence in their own ability to function linguistically. Two typical comments are: *"I was very anxious about coming here especially about the language."* and *"I am less afraid now but it was very hard at the beginning."*

Students suggest that they were frustrated. They describe how they have to monitor themselves and be very self-aware when speaking in order not to make errors. Although native speakers may consider this to be natural and have experienced this anxiety when speaking a foreign language, it is a symptom of lack of confidence. More confident individuals tend to accept that errors are made

but focus on their ability to communicate without worrying about technical difficulties. However, for some, the anxiety associated with language proficiency continues.

*J: "I wrote that a lot of people are afraid of speaking English because it's not our first language. People are afraid of making mistakes. That was in September last year and now in March I am still afraid. Both in and outside class."*

The interviews for this study were conducted at the end of term 2 so there were quite a few comments on the exams which would follow the Easter break:

*J: "I was scared. It is a little better now but still scary I'm getting nervous now that the exams I've always felt that I'm better at exams than coursework but I'm a bit stressed because I've got 5 exams coming up."*

A couple of students describe how they overcame some of the fears stated above.

*E: "I really had to integrate myself, put myself out there. I wasn't intimidated; I made sure I got to know people."*

*"I felt energised and ready to take on the challenge of learning in the UK."*

Through using the timeline in the interview students reflected on the return to the UK at the beginning of term 2. This period elicited some quite emotive language L says;

*"Coming back to Huddersfield after the holiday [...] 1 was hard and stressful. I had had a complete break and suddenly I had to do 2 or 3 assignments and I had to get back into the mind-set."*

However K looks back on that time and has a more positive outlook.

*"When I started term 2 I thought that it was no good panicking about the assessments so I tried to focus. There was no point in feeling afraid of bad marks."*

Confidence building and maturity (aligned with independence) is the main source of emotive language which comes under the theme of transformation. Students reflect upon higher levels of confidence, increased maturity, self-awareness and autonomy. As this students put it: *'I'm more free here. I'm glad that I came here.'*

#### **4.10 Findings: Technology**

The use of learning technologies in British HE had developed exponentially over the last 10 years. The narratives include many comments on how learning technologies are used compared to at home. These usually suggest that the UK is more progressive in terms of usage. Mostly there is an element of surprise at the extent to which learning technologies are included in everyday university

life, Summon, Unilearn and email all play significant parts here. One student says that there was a lot of technology to get used to. The extent to which technology figures as a communicative and teaching tool cannot be underestimated. In practice many students have not had the developmental IT experiences which would be seen among home students. This can put international students at a disadvantage if not addressed by campus support. One student comments:

*“Some of the IT was a problem and I got some bad grades.”*

However the majority of the comments are positive but still contrastive.

*“Unilearn is particularly useful. It is my window on the university, I use it every day.”*

*“There is hardly any technology in education in Poland. Here it’s very good Unilearn has lots of notes from lectures, I can access them all the time, I don’t have to rely on paper notes which might get lost. I can prepare from home in advance using the module information and revise again later.”*

*“We have on-line assistance here. We don’t have that in China. The library was old fashioned, no on-line catalogue or anything.”*

It is clear that the technology has had an impact on the international student experience. This is a theme which has emerged from the narratives and is supported by previous research in the LDG. There are a variety of reasons for students’ lack of previous exposure to learning technologies, not least financial. It is incumbent upon UK providers to support the use of learning technologies and to give fair access to all. In essence this can mean training in basic usage for software such as Microsoft Word.

The findings here portray a deeply mixed set of experiences which appear to have profound impact upon individuals’ lives. The spectrum of learning experiences is very broad. Students show engagement with the changes and the challenges which they come across in the UK. Their comparisons with home are to be expected. These are used to shed light on their new lives. At times these focus on the very particular, as we see in the domestic examples. At other times there are broad brush comments on differences. Language is commented upon with vigour and intensity but it can be seen that language is part of the whole mix. It does not sit in isolation. However it is often the crux of matter when describing difficulty and consequent anxiety. A profound sense of self-awareness comes through the stories told. Students show their sense of self-development both emotionally and scholastically. They describe the learning journey with openness and honesty. One senses that there has been a considerable change for each person. It cannot be said that each experience was completely positive. Where students have described experiences which are less positive they have said that they are due to circumstances in their personal lives. Personal

existence cannot be divorced from the academic existence and must acknowledge that each affects the other.

The narratives show that students made links between academic success and the implementation of strategies to succeed. Trial and error is acknowledged. Students show that they can employ flexibility and use retrospective information to guide them in the future. The majority have deemed the transitional period as difficult, this appears to be steeped in the speed of change which occurs. Confidence levels seem to depreciate and fear creeps in. However, recovery and positivity resurface as students review the academic year overall. Most comments on the future appear to be optimistic. Students tend to show ambition and adventurousness when describing their plans for the coming years.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusions**

This chapter provides an overview of the key findings linked to the research questions with regard to the literature. The review of the literature suggested a myriad of influences on the study abroad experience. How students react to these influences and how they cope with the consequences of moving from home to another country to study are reasonably well documented in the narratives. However, it must be acknowledged that these 'snapshots' may not relate in full to the breadth and depth of the lived experience which the literature suggests. The impact of the limitations of this research must be considered here. The findings may be constrained, in that the participants are all Business students. As entry requirements differ from institution to institution, so relevance to other student groups may not always be transferable. This is particularly relevant in terms of language skills and the research context as noted in 5.4. However there do appear to be some commonalities. Many of the themes suggested by other investigators into the movement of people from one culture to are reasonably described by the findings taken from the narrative texts.

### **5.1 How do international students engage with the challenges of a new learning environment?**

Students have been reflective in the manner in which they have described how they engaged with some of the challenges which are presented to them. Their autonomy in terms of time-management and organisational behaviour have emerged from the findings. Students describe reading as a distinct strategy for engagement. The use of Explicit Reading Strategy Training (ERST), as an intervention was advocated by Taylor et al. (2006). It is suggested that explicit teaching of skills could reduce the skills gap between the UK learning environment and the home learning environment.

The issue which arises around autonomy comes out of the differences between home and host learning cultures. Through the narratives we see students dealing with the time-management to various degrees of success. It appears that developing independent learning skills requires support and direction. The literature suggests academic staff have a role to play in the function of autonomy. UK learning culture centres on independent learning from school through to University. However the narratives show large margins of difference between contact hours in the UK and contact hours previously experienced. Students describe how they are easily distracted at home whilst trying to work and are surprised that there is so little time spent in the classroom. Support services such as the Learning Development Group have traditionally been used to enable students to approach their work independently. However if universities are delivering learning to substantial numbers of students who have not previously experienced UK teaching methods, some element of "mutual accommodation" (Berry, 1997) should be expected. University lecturers may have to make adjustments in terms of supporting independent learning (Eherman et al., 2003). This may mean more directed learning for students or new methods of delivery through VLEs. O'Neil and McMahon (2005) point out that curriculum design and delivery for HEIs may be slow to respond to

the new dynamics. However drivers for performance outcomes such as the National Student Survey and the International Student Barometer influence both recruitment and strategic behaviour. Hence the pressure to respond to improving the student experience may be more immediate than the literature suggests.

## **5.2 How do international students describe the differences between prior learning cultures and a new environment?**

The narratives outline many differences between prior and new learning cultures which are laid out in the previous chapter. Two significant findings were the comments upon tutor's practice and the subject of technology. Overall, it would appear that teaching practice in UK HE is generally well received by international students. However the students do offer suggestions for change of practice. They highlight the perceived need for the use of more international examples to be used in Business teaching, suggesting the curriculum is Western-centric (Montgomery and McDowell, 2009). Much of the current literature is arguing for changes in teaching practice. Lea (2004), Trahar (2011) and others propose that institutions use the type of experiences documented here to inform curriculum development and classroom practice. Internationalisation of the curriculum (IOC) features as a potential solution to this issue. IoC is proposing an international focus to all teaching and learning, so that the whole student cohort (home and international) gain a wider - world experience in university classrooms. There is a call for some of the long-established fundamentals of the UK curriculum to change in order to accommodate the new global focus which HE is encountering (Leask, 2001; 2013); (Carunana, 2011).

In the case of technology, this reflects UK HEIs' adoption of learning technologies into the curriculum. The narratives create an awareness of the lower levels of adoption in other countries. Again this can pose challenges to students. Using technology for social reasons differs greatly from using it for educational reasons. There are also linguistic challenges associated with vocabulary. Awareness of this skills gap presents institutions with the opportunity to negotiate the gap through explicit skills teaching.

## **5.3 Do international students anticipate the challenges posed by a new learning environment?**

From the narratives there is an overwhelming sense that students do not anticipate the challenges posed by a new learning environment. This would indicate that HEIs have some work to do in terms of orientation prior to arrival in the UK. There are obvious resources issues associated with this. Also, students who had had some prior knowledge of the UK stated that they did not expect the differences to be so broad. Students comment on the range of new learning tasks which they have to confront. Lea, (2004) states that it is important to acknowledge that international students may have acculturation problems. A key unanticipated challenge which students refer to is the variety of assessment methods in the UK. As stated previously this presents both methodological

and linguistic challenges. The students call for greater clarity when assessment is set. Without an analysis of assessment tasks it is difficult to state whether these calls are fully necessary. However it is evident that students lack confidence in their approach to assessment. As was suggested in the literature review there may not be clear lines of association with prior learning experiences. More and Moreton (2005) stated categorically that university assessment methods differ significantly from language testing such as IELTS. This is supported in the narratives. Hyland (2007) criticised language teaching, suggesting it was isolationist and proposed the incorporation of contextualised texts when delivering language education. The point made by Ellis and Genenm-Gutierrez (2009) around meta-linguistic information is important here. Students seem to often suggest that it is not so much the 'what' i.e. the content of an essay or report but often the 'how'. For example; what format should the text be written in? How do referencing and criticality work? It may be the case, that in British HE, these constructs and implicit instructions are given as norms and there is no expectation that they should be explained explicitly, Kelly and Moogan (2012). However if student achievement levels begin to decline as a result of this issue, then it is incumbent upon the institution to review practice in order to accommodate the need for instructional guidance.

#### **5.4 Do international students present as confident in language and skills at the point of entry?**

The narratives around English language competence and usage provide a useful perspective on how language interacts with the other competencies. Firstly, the descriptions of anxiety and trepidation when students find themselves immersed in an English speaking institution, give rise to some possible concerns. The fact that students suffer these levels of anxiety are probably negative in terms of educational development at the crucial stage of transition. However, the fact that this study has given some clear insights into these anxieties may be useful for future developments in teaching and learning. Institutions will need to take account of the affective side of the language needs of international students. The earlier citation from Block (2010), where he describes migrants as having to, "...function in a new language, without recourse to their traditional support systems" is particularly pertinent here. The work by Brown and Holloway in 2008 also showed students manifesting signs of stress at the beginning of the SA period. Given that the interviews were done at the end of the teaching period, the vivid retrospective descriptions of how students felt when they first arrived give a sense of profound lived experiences

The findings show how students find the interaction between language level ability and their programmes of study created intrapersonal tensions. It is suggested that it is in employing language in the new context which is challenging. However we also see how students gainfully employ language in order to achieve. Reading and listening are highlighted here. We also see the development of learner autonomy through self-motivation and application. Pavlenko (2002) assessed these issues and stated that learners re-evaluate themselves. This appears to be the case in the majority of the narratives. Pavlenko also suggests that studies are often made with a

“monolingual and monocultural bias” (p.279). This is a criticism which could be aimed at this study. It was indeed undertaken within an English language context in a British university. The students were not interviewed in their mother tongue. It could be that some of the findings could have differed had mother tongue been employed. However there are obvious resource issues associated with using more than one language for research which were beyond the limits of this study. Acknowledgment was made of the contextualisation of this research in relation to Evered and Reis Louis (1981).

### **5.5 Is the transitional experience transformative in nature?**

Transition is described in depth throughout the narratives and we see language use and personal adjustment becoming a distinct focus of the transformative experience. Much of the literature centres on transition and notions of adaptation to new cultures. Pederson (1994) and Berry (1997) are particularly cited through their work on both culture shock and intercultural adjustment. The student participants in this study produce an image of shock and surprise at the expectations they have to fulfil in the UK learning environment. They note that they are tested both intellectually and emotionally. One feels the sense of confusion and consequent lack of confidence. Pederson noted how his students engaged with critical incidents they encountered whilst travelling around the world and stated that the outcomes were positive for some negative for others. Using the stage theory of culture shock, he notes that it produces a phenomenon where self-awareness and self-criticism are heightened within the individual. This appears to be corroborated within the narratives. Students seem to question themselves intensely at the beginning of the SA period. This study has not employed the stage theory of culture shock as a measure for adaptation, so it cannot be deemed to completely describe how these participants adapted to the new culture. However Pederson's findings do appear to reflect how the students describe themselves in the narratives and analysis.

Berry (1997) suggested a further model for adaptation. The *Stress and Coping Framework for Acculturation Research* proposed a broader sphere of influences upon individuals. He suggested that people react on an individual level to the challenges of acculturation and adaptation. In the narratives, we see a range of responses to the adaptation process. Each story holds unique detail and reflections. Many of the comments on transformation centre on how internationalised the students have become themselves. There are some very positive statements on integration with other learners from all over the world. Pattison and Robson (2013) in interviews with international Counselling students found it was noticeable that students had increased self-awareness and an awareness of other cultures. In this study it was particularly interesting that one student distanced herself from her fellow home country students in order to acculturate better. Commonalities exist on the idea of transition, however the individual reactions are interesting to observe. Block (2010) notes that there is a large amount of variety within the SA experience and this variety is evident in the range of narratives. It is this range of experiences which may present a deeper challenge to teaching and learning.

## **5.6 How can answers to the above affect teaching and learning practice?**

The perceived differences between teaching and learning at home and in the UK are described extensively in the findings. It is suggested that there are a number of areas which could be adapted and respond to the outcomes of the research. The explicit teaching of skills, both language and academic skills could support the transitional stage of learning. Instructional language and new assessment methods should also be clarified. There is a call for support for independent study. The narratives show the difference between contact hours in the UK and contact hours previously experienced. University lecturers may have to make adjustments in terms of supporting independent learning. This may mean more directed learning for students or new methods of delivery through VLEs. As Lillyman and Bennet, (2014) suggested, planning and targeted support may well improve the international student experience. Elements of reflexivity in lecturers' professional practice may need to be instigated (Flowerdew and Miller, 1996); (Lamb, 2008), if institutions are to be able to fulfil the demands of the QQA principles for inclusivity. This notion of inclusivity may well challenge the Western-centric methodologies which are criticised by Montgomery and McDowell (2009). There is a broad discussion on the current constructs of teaching and learning which international students enter into in the UK. This is noted widely in the literature (Biggs, 1998); (Volet, 1999); (Cadman, 2000); (Ryan, 2000) and (Trahar, 2011). Pavlenko questions research methodologies as well as teaching practice. Robson (2011) suggests that internationalisation can be transformative in nature for HEIs but that academic staff be challenged in terms of change and change management. So, although it is suggested that teaching and learning practice should develop towards a more international focus, institutions should resource change effectively.

## 6. Key Outcomes and Recommendations

Overall these outcomes could be employed to enable a move towards more culturally sensitive curriculum design in the future. The findings show how students develop on an individual level through the coping strategies they use to progress through their study period, Again these insights could be used to develop broader support structures and across institutions.

### 6.1 Key Outcomes

- International students often lose linguistic confidence at the beginning of their course of study and linguistic anxiety can affect academic performance
- International students find the range of challenges presented to them during the transitional stage of learning demanding; engagement with these challenges occurs through a range of personal resources and support from University staff and systems
- Instructional or meta language can be inaccessible for international students
- Students experience a wider variety of assessments and learning technologies in the UK
- International students find the UK HE curriculum lacks international focus
- Class contact time is generally less in the UK than in home institutions, so managing self-directed study time can be a new challenge
- International students communicate more directly with teaching staff in the UK than at home and appreciate UK lecturers' positive behaviour
- Models of adaptation and acculturation do not always follow the individual lived experience,
- Study abroad experiences can be transformative in nature

### 6.2 Recommendations

- International students could benefit from targeted linguistic and skills support during the transitional stage of learning and beyond
- Institutions should provide accessible, explicit, descriptions and explanations of expectations of teaching, learning, assessment and independent study in UK HE
- UK institutions should aim to deliver inclusive teaching and learning where internationalisation informs the whole curriculum. This will involve strategic awareness.
- Both lecturers and students in British institutions should aim to develop cross-cultural awareness

The literature suggests that HE institutions have and still do, support the notion that international students are a homogenous group. The narratives give a pretty clear picture of each student as an individual with individual needs. It may be the case that British universities should take this idea of global awareness further and instigate deeper inter-cultural relations from the student to student level all the way through to the institutional level as supported by Flowerdew and Miller (1996) and

the IoC agenda. Delivering inclusivity, as stated by the QAA, whilst responding to the dynamics of global change, may well incur significant shifts in terms of teaching delivery. The UK Quality code asks institutions to anticipate the varied requirements of learners. It may be that the findings in this study could enable ways to achieve that in terms of learning development.

In the introduction to this work Böhm et al. (2004) are quoted in order to underline the fact that the British HE sector is facing unprecedented pressures in terms of the global nature of education. They state that there will be new approaches to teaching and learning as well as (to date) unforeseen innovations which will create world-wide competition. This is the market within which institutions such as the University of Huddersfield sit. Senior management teams across the UK are presented with the challenge of creating a balance between the needs of: students, teaching, learning, curriculum design, research and the working environment for staff and support services. The British Council and organisations such as UKCISA aim to support British education across the globe through a variety of methods. However each institution has to develop strategies which will be sustainable in the new world order. These over-arching pressures may not seem directly relevant to this study. However the wider issues are highlighted by the number of international students which have been recruited to the UK in the last few years. Their well-being and the academic integrity which institutions rely upon are all part of the sustainable mix which will form the future development of institutions.

## 7. Reflection

### 7.1 Research Approach

From the beginning of conceptualising what I wanted to do in terms of research I was clear that I would utilise the LA. These texts provide insights into how students engage with the initial transitory period of study in the UK. They are brief and aim to give a snapshot of student writing ability before formal assessment. The immediacy of the texts is very important to the reflexivity which they produce. They do indeed provide a snapshot of writing but also of experience in terms of initial observations of British HE and differences between home and UK study. These observations are what I attempted to bring out in interview and for students to compare their initial thoughts, feelings and experiences with those during the prolonged period of study. Hence the timing of the interviews was very important; they were set towards the end of the module teaching period.

In planning the structure of the interview I was conscious of the importance of eliciting thoughts and reflections. So I created a time line which mapped the important points in the academic year, this was critical in enabling students to comment on both the emotional part of their learning journey as well as the critical incidents of assessment submission. A good example of this are the comments on returning to university at the beginning of term 2. Often students return home at Christmas. They speak their native language for a prolonged period for the first time since beginning the academic year. This gives them a fresh perspective on what it means to be living and learning in the UK and working in English. The crux here is that they have had the chance to explain their experiences to family and friends. Hooking into this period of reflection was important for the interviews.

When considering data analysis I initially thought I would use NVivo to code the data. However it was slightly unreliable in terms of access. I then considered Wordsmith Gold, (a lexical analysis software). Having trialled it with the narratives I found that the word frequency analysis didn't really help to produce anything interesting from the texts. I have had success with Wordsmith-type tools before. They are simple and effective but can be reductive.

When first reading about Narrative Inquiry I was dubious about writing in the first person. I listened to the audio script of one of the students who had better spoken English than some of the others and edited the transcript. I found it progressed relatively well. It was a creative and literary challenge which I enjoyed. The second narrative was from the weakest speaker from the interviews. This was much harder to write. The pictures came in really useful in this interview. She focussed on the word 'afraid' and her fear of speaking; English became the theme of the narrative. The word count for this story is about a third of the length of the first student's story. Overall it has been the listening that has been both the greatest challenge and pleasure in this type of data analysis. My bilingual background has helped my awareness of second language learning, in particular the awareness of listening as an important skill. This exercise has brought into play many

competencies; listening for general meaning, listening for language structures, inferences from audio texts and listening for specific responses.

## **7.2 Context of the Research**

In March 2012 I went to the British Council conference in London 'Going Global 2012'. The experience was fascinating. Most delegates were from overseas government institutions relating to HE or International Officers from British universities. There was a sense of chasing the latest market opportunities. The key note speaker was Homi K. Bhaba. His main theme was post-colonial reality and moving towards a global responsibility of collaboration. In the sessions I attended, there was a general contrast between the ethical stances of some of the speakers and the obvious marketisation of HE. It was hard to see how the marketisation of international education was going to deal with some of the ethical issues which arise through its very being. Many of these issues were related to colonialism and the post-colonial reality. I attended two presentations where the international student market was analysed. The first dealt with the China. This made very close links with the economics of that country and the effect upon HE & tertiary education. The second was an analysis by the British Council and UNESCO of future global markets. Here the analysts admitted that some of the data could be questionable due to the time lag involved in data collection, however it was generally felt that up until 2020 the market will grow but most of the big countries expect population decline after that date and that will affect expansion. An interesting statistic was that by 2020 four countries will account for 50% of tertiary education: - India, China, US & Indonesia.

Analysing the micro environment of Business School international students and juxtaposing that with the macro environment brought up some very interesting questions. Although this was a trans-national conference looking at wider issues, I was aware of the very direct connections with our students' experiences and the strategic plans of the University of Huddersfield.

## **7.3 Future Research**

This research offers the potential for many avenues of future research. It may be useful to explore the lived experience of transition and adaptation through a deeper study which is more ethnographic in nature. The researcher could spend time with students as an observer in classrooms and during independent study time. Narrative Inquiry could again be used as a method however data collection may vary. There is also the potential to investigate the lived experience in a longitudinal study which follows students through from enrolment to graduation. Moving on from that, the transformative nature of study abroad provides another area of investigation. It would be particularly interesting to look into the cultural capital students get from the SA experience. This could focus on employment and academic potential or linguistic development. Finally the literature on employing language skills within the context of university learning suggests that the research on listening is sparse. There is capacity to contribute to the knowledge in this area through both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Narratives

The teaching style of the Business School is in some ways total different to my university in Germany. This already begins with the timetable. I had a very strict timetable in Germany, more than the double of lectures as here in Britain. I think this is related to the different basic of the courses. I studied engineering part of logistics in Germany and here in the UK, I am studying more the business part. This does not mean I have more free time because the reading amount is much bigger.

Another new aspect for me is the importance of making notes during the lecture. In my former studies I also made notes, but they never were so important for the preparing of the lectures as the sheets and the script of my professors. So I have to take care to make notes as much as possible from now on again.

Finally, I want to point out the role of the tutor. I did not have a tutor in Germany. I think, it was because my former university is relatively small and so I also had no problems to ask questions to my professors. But after I have experienced this great idea, I think in look back, it would have been easier in some situations, if I had had a tutor in Germany, too.

#### ***Student A: Writing from Language Appraisal***

I have been looking at this now as it comes to the end of the second term and I am thinking about the end of my time at the University of Huddersfield. Like I said, things are different here and I think I made a pretty good guess at that in my language appraisal. But, I have changed a lot since coming here on both a study level and a personal level. I came from doing Engineering in a small university in Germany to studying European Business, final year top-up course, in a large Business School in England. That is an obvious change, coming from a very technical background where we were in laboratories quite a lot to being in classroom most of the time here. Also the timetable changes, we have a lot less time in the classroom here. As far as learning is concerned, in Germany I was given a lot of information from teachers' handouts. Here I have to get the information from books myself. A lot of reading in a foreign language. I have to do my own research, in Germany I was in class or the lab most of the time.

On my first day here I didn't think about learning, more about becoming familiar with this new place. It was so much bigger than where I'd been before. I was shocked but it wasn't a bad feeling. I had a lot to deal with: making new friends and beginning to socialise. Learning was something I concentrated on after that. After a bit I began to settle in and then I got my first assessment, which I had to plan. This was hard but interesting too. The main academic challenge here has been writing a dissertation, which I hadn't done in Germany. I wasn't familiar with the work pattern. It was an experience to learn what to have to do to complete it and I had a good supervisor who guided me well. That was a huge advantage. He seemed to go beyond what the minimum was to help me and I appreciated it.

The end of the first term was stressful. Suddenly I had my dissertation to think about and plan and lots of other assessments to work on. Then going home at the end was happy and sad. I'd got used to living away from home for the first time and I'd made good friends. Before I lived at home whilst studying. But I was still happy to see my family. Then coming back again felt very much that I had lots to do. I had a week without lessons but I just worked really hard. I am very aware of how much there is to do. I have to force myself to have a break from work. Looking back I did not appreciate just how much work I would have to do here, I really thought it would be easier than this. The whole experience has been good though and I think it will help me with my further studies

in Germany. I can see both sides, British and German. I have learned how to do research here and I have the practical learning from Germany. I think this is a good combination.

In both countries I have had quite small classes so I think that our relationships with our tutors are the same in the UK and Germany. When we had to do an assessment in Germany we weren't given word counts, as long as we completed the task it was OK. Referencing is totally different here, partly because I was studying another subject at home. I used to use footnotes not the Harvard system. In-text referencing was totally new to me. It took me time to get to grips with it all. If I hadn't had some support from the Learning Development Group with the first assignment with all of that I would have had problems.

I can't complain about teaching here. I could always ask tutors questions, my supervisor has been great and the LDG concept of being able to drop-in and get help is good too. The LDG support with Professional English was about the right balance for me.

In my opinion Prepare for Success is all skills what we have, every skills what we learn. We preparing for success now. Why? Because we are studying at Univeristity, we grow up our interest, skills. We should learn logic thinking, analyzing, making projects our ideas.

Prepare to success is expertise to implement our ideas in best way what it is the best. We are preparing every day, for example when we are learnig another languages, meeting new people, viewing new innovation, learnig for something which we don't know before.

My preparation to success is learnig everything about beekeeping. When I live in Poland with my parents we had small bee farm,, but when I come to England I saw new methods, equipiment which I didn't see in Poland. I join to beekeeping association in Leeds and people there are very interesing what methods we are using in Poland, everytime I say that we are using old technologies with my father and that they don't need this here... But! This people aren't interesing if this methods is bad, because they want know which technologies we use.

So Prepare to Success is not only making everything very good it is ascertaining every methods and summing up what is good or bad idea. We should know every side of our interests and learnig in theory and practic the best solution with us.

People in England learn me that I should be open for every solution it doesn't matter if is good or bad, because preparing to success is viewing every aspects not only this what interesing us.

### ***Student B: Writing from Language Appraisal***

What I wrote in the language appraisal in September is still true, we are improving our skills all the time. I have learnt a lot of things here: how to develop a business, how to communicate with people and how to do presentations. In Professional English I have learned academic vocabulary, academic writing is very important. Doing Professional English may not have made me speak better but it has improved my confidence a lot. At the beginning when I was too nervous to speak to people in shops but now I feel able to do that. I do think that I can express myself better now.

On my first day here I was scared, I couldn't understand anything. Most of my English had been learnt from books. I had done a lot of writing and grammar but I couldn't hold a conversation. I recognised some words but couldn't make sense of them. Now after 2 terms I understand 90% of what is said. For the first assessment in term 1 I prepared by reading lots. I found it difficult to understand what the teachers said to me in class, so I would read and read to find out what I wanted to know. This was hard too because I had to translate so much of the text before I could understand. It worked though, because I got a good mark. I got all the detail from reading, information from lessons is only part of what you need to get a good mark. I like working for the tests we had in Accounting and Economics. I realise now how much vocabulary I have learned. I don't have to translate nearly as much as I did in those first weeks.

When I went home for the Christmas holidays I told my Mum that it's not too difficult studying in England. I think she thought it would have been very hard for me but by then my listening had improved so much that it really did seem much easier. I'd say that in the first two months I went from understanding nothing to about 70% of what is said. I had stopped reading so much because I was able to understand more in class. It became easier.

When I came back in January, I found it hard to adjust. I'd had a rest and couldn't get back into the swing of working hard. We had a lot of assessments to do then, lots of writing and reading for the essays. I wasn't feeling too well but I got through it. I was worried about missing class. In Poland nobody cares if you don't attend here the teachers seem interested in your welfare.

I think there has been a huge change since I started here. I've got loads of notes from lessons because I can understand so much more in the lectures. I use my notes at home and look up the things I don't understand. Before I was getting most of my knowledge from books now I'm getting it from my lessons. Professional English has helped me with my note-making. Initially I was writing in English and Polish but when I went back to the notes I couldn't understand what I had written! The tutors told us to write key words and use mind-maps for note-making. It's been very helpful.

When I compare England and Poland in terms of studying, I think that here the subjects are more focussed. In Economics in Poland all the topics were mixed up. Here we have just done supply and demand and now we are moving on to the UK economy. In Poland I found it confusing when looking back on my work. I feel that here I have learnt the important parts of the subject. In Poland I felt that I knew a lot but had learned nothing. However, in Poland I feel that some teaching is better, particularly Maths. They are very good at explaining and giving examples. We go up to the board and do exercises. Here we have a lot of theory. In Poland it's more practical.

I haven't been to university in Poland but my sister is studying there. She says it's impersonal. If you wrote an email to a tutor you might not even get an answer. Here tutors are contactable. There is hardly any technology in education in Poland. Here it's very good. I can see announcements about classes on Unilearn and my Unimail. Unilearn has lots of notes from lectures, I can access them all the time, I don't have to rely on paper notes which might get lost. I can prepare from home in advance using the module information and revise again later. Assessment is different here too. In Poland it was just tests and exams. Here we have essays, coursework, portfolios etc. It was difficult to find your way round these new assessments. I had to submit a few drafts to my tutor before getting it right. There were quite a few corrections to be made each time.

If someone was coming here from Poland to start studying now the best thing they could do is read a lot, particularly newspapers. In every lesson teachers refer to examples of current UK economic affairs. You have to keep up to date. They expect that you to know what is going on and if you don't it can be very confusing. They also use examples from all over the world especially from China at the moment. Their economy is growing and I have learnt a lot about it. The teachers seem to have a very broad knowledge and give examples from all areas of life, not just the economy.

Personally if I think back to day one here I was scared and confused. I was disorientated. I had come from an old education building in Poland to a brand new one here and there was lots of technology to get used to. I found it hard at the beginning because I would ask a question but wasn't able to understand the answer. I didn't speak to any other Polish people then. I could tell that people were friendly though. After a while I felt better. I found the library. I like working there. Again it was confusing at first with the card scanner and there were books and computers, I just wasn't sure what to do. The staff helped me to find my way round. I've met some nice other students in there as well who have been willing to help me with my work. Everyone is friendly and interested in each other's studies. At the end of the first term I felt better because my marks were good, I hadn't failed anything. It was a huge achievement for me after feeling that my English was so weak. Getting good marks motivates you to work harder in the future. Now I have to do my first presentation, that's scary. I've only been assessed through writing up until now.

Speaking English has been the biggest improvement for me since coming here. I was really very scared at the beginning. I'm not now. I know that my speaking is still weak but my confidence has grown so that I feel able to take part in conversations. At the beginning I would never have asked questions when I didn't understand something. I would have been nervous that I'd say something wrong and people would laugh at me. Now I just ask. I realise that teachers are patient when they don't understand what I am saying so I feel more secure when I'm speaking. It's the best it's ever been for me language wise.

I had lived away from home in Poland but I have had to make some big adjustments living here. The food has been one big change. If I want to get ingredients for Polish food it can be difficult. Everyday life is quite different here. In my rented house we have an electricity meter, my electricity got cut off because I hadn't topped it up. I was sat in the dark not knowing what to do.

This country is so culturally mixed, very different from Poland. It can be intimidating if you are not used to it. To see a non-European person in Poland is a big deal, very uncommon. People will comment on it, not like here. I've seen people get off a bus in Poland because there has been a foreigner on it. I had become disillusioned with Poland and Polish people. Poles complain a lot but don't do anything to change their lives. I feel that there is more potential here.

Again doing Professional English has helped me. It has taught me about British culture as well as academic writing. Of course the Business School is very mixed too. Learning about different cultures is good. I have learnt a bit of German in the past and I've been able to practice my speaking with the German students here. I've learnt about Chinese culture from the students too. I'd like to go to China. I have heard so much about it from studying here. I'm not interested in going home. I'm young, I can still adapt to new cultures, I think that will be harder later in life. When I first came I wasn't sure if I really wanted to do it. I'm sure it was the right thing now. I've enjoyed studying Accounting and I think that this is skill that I can take anywhere in the world.

When I have just arrived in the university of Huddersfield which make me so exciting because this is a completely different cultural atmosphere of the new place and very beautiful. However, accepting the new learning methods is very hard for me.

First of all, the language environment have totally changed. For instance, i can communicate fluently with classmates to discuss and complete the works in the past. However, I am afraid to talk to my new classmates at present because my English is poor especially the speaking skill. So i think i will pay more attention to improve my speaking skill.

Secondly, my vocabulary is not enough which make me confuse by reading and

Thirdly, I don't know the local business such as some famous brand and market size ,etc. That will be very against me to understand some examples and answer the questions. That's all.

### ***Student C: Writing from Language Appraisal***

Looking at the Language Appraisal now I think just how poor my speaking was at the beginning. The local accent was hard to understand. When people talked to each other it was difficult to catch what they were saying. Back in China I thought I was OK but not when I arrived here. I had a shock. Reading was hard because I had to look up a lot of words and it took me a long time. Writing was probably the best skill in English.

I only knew one person when I arrived, a classmate from China. In China I did an international Foundation Year in Business subjects. I lived at school. Home was too far to travel to every day but I went back at the weekends. It was supposed to be taught in English but in truth it was probably 50% Chinese. The teachers were from the US or UK but they often spoke Chinese. In China we have lessons from 8-5 everyday and then self-study for 2 hours in the evening. Here there's lots of free time in comparison. My tutor in China would be in regular contact with my parents, reporting on my progress. Here we have to communicate with the tutors by email and make our own arrangements to meet them. It's not as easy.

After a term I was getting nervous about studying here. Some of the IT was a problem and I got some bad grades. So at the beginning of term 2 I set myself some goals to improve. I had told my parents about my grades and how much spare time I have here. They realised that I was playing on the computer or doing other things instead of studying, so the encouraged me to set goals. They said that I had come here to study, so I should study!

I feel I can handle life and study here now. I can ask the tutor and classmates questions much better than at the beginning. This is a real improvement for me. Professional English has been useful, it's a bit like my foundation teaching but I've learnt about British culture in that class. There are some big differences in learning here compared to China. There we work on our own. Here we work in a group and do presentations. We wouldn't do that in China. We had lots of short written exams or class tests. We were in college six full days a week and there'd be a test every day. My foundation teacher told me about learning here. She said to ask questions and to get involved in class, but when I got here I couldn't. Just too hard to do at first.

In class, the tutors used examples from British businesses but I had no idea what they were talking about at first. I don't think Chinese people do in general. We need more information about British business before we begin to work on examples. Also there's loads of vocabulary to pick up because it's a whole new area of information. The teacher would talk about the size of the market or systems. They might use a famous example in the UK and assume that we knew what it was. Then they would ask us to have a group discussion but I couldn't contribute because I lacked the basic knowledge. It was frustrating. Often I didn't have one word to say. My Chinese friends felt the same.

When I first came here I was confused and afraid. After about a month I felt happy and I was looking forward to the future. But then at the end of the first term I got those low grades and split up with my girlfriend so it was a bad time. By the beginning of term 2 I'd calmed down a bit. Now I am more independent, I can take care of myself. This is definitely a big change. I can deal with lots of practical things like cooking and paying the rent. I'd really have liked to have some help from the Business School about living here; I don't think we got that. I would have liked some support with accommodation. In class I have met people from other countries like France and India. We talk teach other and go out together in the evenings. Also when the teacher asks us questions in class the students will use examples from their countries to explain things, so we get to know about business in other parts of the world.

Coming here has given me English language skills and the ability to talk to strangers easily. My parents wanted me to come here to study and to learn about foreign business styles. They have a seafood export company. We trade with other countries mostly in English although we export to Japan and Brazil a lot. English is the common language. The business is quite big with about 5000 employees. When I've finished here my parents want me to help manage the company. I can see different management styles here. I've learnt about motivating staff and other new ideas. I'll teach them to my dad!

I received my past education in China. I started to study in University of Huddersfield only two weeks ago but have deeply felt the difference between the two education systems. In China, the main teaching method in school is through lectures. Usually teachers talk from the beginning to the end of lecture, explain every knowledge in details and leave a large amount of homework to students after class. It is important for students to take notes throughout the lectures as they need them to review what they have learned and pass the examinations at the end of each term. Examination is the main way Chinese schools use to assess their students. I have noticed in UK there're more types of teaching methods e.g. lectures, seminars and activities. A lot of discussions are held during the classes. Teachers don't really feed students with loads of knowledge but give them methods or directions to find the knowledge themselves. Examination is not the only way to assess students. The assessment seems to emphasize more on students' research ability. I think both teaching modes have advantage and disadvantage. The Chinese mode is better for students to build up solid knowledge base while the British mode is better for students to develop self-learning ability and creativity.

#### ***Student D: Writing from Language Appraisal***

As I said in this appraisal I can really see the differences between here and China. The main thing that has changed for me since writing this is how my research ability has improved. Critical and reflective thinking weren't part of what we did in China, here there is much more emphasis on both and you can challenge the teacher in a way that you couldn't in China. I'm more critical now when I look at questions or problems. I suppose we did do critical thinking but it wasn't discussed by teachers in China. There we were given questions and expected to look up the answers in books. Here I would use other sources like journals for my answers. I'd use a range of sources. I think in China they really were looking for a text book answers. We could use the exact words from the books without paraphrasing or anything. We wouldn't have been criticised for doing that as we are here. Studying for an MSc here is not like that at all. Also we have different sorts of assessments here, in China it's just exams. We are expected to reproduce very tight, text book answers in those exams. If my answer is written almost exactly the same as another student that would be fine, here I'd be accused of plagiarism.

In the appraisal I wrote about how teachers teach in a style that is just them talking and students making notes. No interaction with students. But now, on reflection, I think that good teachers use similar methods in both China and the UK. Yes, most teachers in China do use the talking method but the better teachers introduce other methods into the class. A good teacher will control the lesson very well, the timing, discussion, introducing the topic etc. That is true in both countries.

Looking back to my first day, I didn't have much of an idea of how to study here. I wasn't clear about the modules and the ways of learning. I was a little afraid. I was worried that I wouldn't be able to handle the new situation and not sure if I'd pass in the end. Not confident. After a while you get more experienced and begin to understand how the teachers introduce information in the modules. You get used to the expectations of the teachers and what you should be doing between lectures. You begin to get a grip on how to handle your studies. I became more familiar with the library and independent research. I feel that I got a lot of support at the beginning of my studies here. My tutor showed me how to work best. I was ploughing through long text books and it was taking me ages to read every word because I thought that this was the only way to learn. The teacher said that I needn't do that, that I could look for the key information and read that. The library staff were very supportive too. We have on-line assistance here. We don't have that in China. I finished my first degree in China a few years ago. I studied English. Back then and when I was at school we certainly didn't have so much technology to help us. The library was old fashioned, no on-line catalogue or anything. By the end of the first term I had found my confidence. I felt able to study here, not like when I first arrived.

Over the Christmas holidays I stayed here to work instead of going home. We had a lot of assignments. I was pleased to come back in term 2 and start new modules. The challenge now is the dissertation. I am quite nervous about that, this is our last term. We have a lot of other

assignments too. I'm going to have to manage my time well; lots of the deadlines are close together. The dissertation seems to be a very formal piece of work with the research and proposal etc. Both the structure and content are daunting. I'm worried about not doing it correctly; I'm not really sure what the standard is for this work. We have done Research Methods which introduced the methodology which helped. It's easy to read about it but more difficult to do.

Overall the main difference between here and China is that there is much more emphasis on self-learning. Nobody pushes you here. In China you have strict teachers watching over you, making sure you do your work. That's not true here. If you waste time you waste time. In China we had much more class contact time compared to here. At undergraduate we would have 2 hours per day per subject. The teachers were with us all the time and close to us. I'd prefer it if tutors here had more contact with students. If you want to learn it's up to you to control yourself. Obviously I realised that there would be differences here compared to China but I didn't have a clear idea about the reality. The significant difference is working in another language. Not just a difference but difficulties in understanding and communication. At the beginning I was worried that this would let me down. I even bought a voice recorder to record all my lectures but actually I never used it. I found I could understand most of what the teacher said in the class. I was pleasantly surprised. I'm probably better at speaking and listening than writing. I find writing takes me longer to do. I have to work on my sentence structure; I don't want to sound childish when I write. I try to create a proper academic style but this takes time. It is difficult, I need to increase my vocabulary, I realise that my vocabulary is rather limited and this hold me back in writing. Although it would have been nice to have some language support whilst doing the MSc, I realise that it takes a long time to become proficient in another language because of my first degree. I think that the timescale is probably a bit short.

If I had to advise someone else coming here to study, I'd say that language skills are very important. I notice that some of the other Chinese students aren't very good at English. They don't understand lectures; it seems to me a waste of time. They should really try to prepare themselves for the level of English that they will have to use when they get here. They should try to find out about the differences between studying here and China before they come. Maybe the University could help them to do this? I worked in the UK before coming to university so I knew a bit about how things worked. Other Chinese come here straight from home, they are suddenly in a completely different environment and I think that they have problems understanding the tutors. In China the idea is that western countries have a more advanced education system. That attracts people here. They think that they will get up-to-date knowledge. I think that we don't have a great system in China. People copy each other's work and it seems to be OK but to me it's a kind of fraud! Having said that there are a lot of good universities in China but sometimes people just want to come abroad to get new experiences and get a different perspective on life. Of course there is the language aspect too, they will learn the language much quicker if they come here rather than studying it at home.

Personally I think that I have changed because I have learned a lot here. I was excited to return to studying again after finishing my first degree and looking forward to studying Business rather than language. The whole experience has given me confidence. I think, yes, I can do this! I have got a lot out of team work, I understand how important it is to cooperate with others and learn about other people. Group discussion happens all the time here in class. It is the sort of experience that I believe has improved me as a person. Another good thing is that we can ask all sorts of questions to the teacher in class. You wouldn't do that in China, we'd just respond to questions. There's a more friendly atmosphere in class here. Sometimes though this isn't a great thing. I see teachers asking international students questions that they can't answer because their English isn't very good. It would be better if those students had time to talk outside the class. Otherwise the class seems inefficient. It is difficult for teachers to accommodate the different levels of English that international students have.

Studies in France are very different than in England. First of all in France they don't teach in English so that the first difficulty for me. Secondly, I didn't use to do lecture and obviously I need to adapt my way of working. I try to go in front of each classroom to be concentrate and that help me a lot. In addition, the major difference between France and UK learning is the number of hours of class, here we have less hour because it's personal work, your reading and your assessments marks will reflect the capability to work alone.

To deal with the transition, I think, we have to get involved at 100% in university and every activity proposed. Be open minded and to adapt our work for the appraisals. To my mind, change don't scare me, the only thing I'm afraid of is to don't understand correctly what teachers want from me. But if I know, I will struggle to cope with.

### ***Student E: Writing from Language Appraisal***

Looking back now I think that I have learnt to cope with a lot of the issues which I wrote about in the language appraisal. One of the main differences between my study here and in France is the number of classroom hours. This term I've only got 8 hours per week, even less than last term. I only have to come into the Business School on Mondays and Fridays. It's difficult to motivate yourself on the other days if you have nothing to get up for. You only feel motivated if you have to go out to work or have a deadline to meet. I have tried to motivate myself by coming into college every day to work in the library. I know that there is a lot to do, especially for my dissertation. I can't work at home. I get distracted by my flatmates or Playstation.

I also said that I was worried about my level of English but I think that my comprehension has improved a lot. On the first day here I didn't understand half of what the teachers said. The groups are much bigger here than in my old college in Paris. Sometimes there are maybe 300 students in a lecture. The module teachers might not even know your name. After a while I felt better. I went to the LDG and asked lots of questions. There were other students in the same situation as me, so we could help each other. Over the first month these things helped me. I was still a bit confused but things had definitely improved compared to the first day.

By the end of the first term, when I went home, I felt good. I really thought my English had improved. I had handed in my first assessment. I was used to my time table and lectures, my teachers and how they spoke, especially their accents. And I had made friends. I was happy to go back home having done all of this in a term. When I came back after the holidays I got my first assignment grade and I got 75%! I was very happy to have got one of the best marks in the group but I had spent an awfully long time on that piece of work. As I said before, I went to the LDG to ask about the correct way to do things, especially about referencing. I was afraid of being accused of plagiarism. In France this wasn't such a big issue. There's no Turnitin. Referencing was the hardest part of getting things right. Also, I tried to correct my English as I wrote the assignment. When I came back for term 2 I felt that I understood what was expected of me. Overall I have had good marks this year. Now I'm beginning to feel a bit stressed about my dissertation but that's probably normal.

Thinking about home and here the real difference is the class time. Here, this term, I have 8 hours per week there it was 8 hours per day! I was in a group of 40 people in Paris, the teachers knew us well. I did a 2-year diploma in International Trade in a public lycée. It was much more intense. They monitored our attendance and told our parents if we missed class. I'd prefer it if they did that here too. We had set homework every night even after 8 hours of studying in the day. We also had class tests every week. There were a lot of oral assessments which I had to prepare for. I'm only just doing my first presentation here now. I'm nervous about it, of course, but I have had a lot of practice and I'm generally quite good at them. I'm not sure that the teacher has really explained what is expected of us though. In France there is a lot more guidance about how to complete assessments. It is very detailed. Here you are given a one sentence question and told to discuss it

in 2500 words. So you have to read a lot and work out what to read, not just use given text books. In France I'd use 2 or 3 books for an essay here it would be more like 20.

Looking back at my English skills, I was quite good at speaking when I came but my accent has improved massively. Reading what I wrote in September I can see the errors. Writing is the skill that has improved the most. For the first month I immersed myself in English books to get used to working in the language. Gradually you begin to recognise words and identify them as you go along. The business subjects that I have taken here seem quite broad, I'm not sure how much real business ability I will have when I leave. In France I had a work placement; I had to write business letters and had very formal presentations to make. It was more practice based.

I came here to experience life abroad. I could have gone to Business School in France but I like to challenge myself. I think I'm going to stay on and do a Masters. It would take 2 years in France but it's only a year here. If I had to advise someone who was coming to the UK to study now I'd say read as much English as you can. Make English friends; don't just stay with other French people. Try to be open and use the help you can get. So don't be afraid to go to the LDG, they are here to help. Ask teachers for help, they are very open to questions. No-one will judge you, it's OK to find help if you need it. Finally don't be lazy. As I've said, because the timetable is very open it can be hard to motivate yourself to attend but it's important that you do.

I like the fact that this is a School that has a lot of different cultures in it. I am working on my presentation with a Chinese girl at the moment. We get on well but it does have its difficulties. You have to get to know other people's cultures in order to work with them. Students do tend to stay in groups with others from their own countries, that's a shame, but if you play sport or socialise outside Uni you'll get to know people.

First and foremost I have developed my English language here in a way that I could not have done at home. I have been doing an Events Management module which has given me a lot of practical skills and taught me to work independently. My academic writing and writing in English has really improved a lot too. On my first day here I was completely alone. Most kids on my course come from colleges which have a partnership with the Business School, so groups came from Nantes in France or a Czech University; they had friends from their own colleges at home when they arrived. I really had to integrate myself, put myself out there. I wasn't intimidated; I made sure I got to know people. After a few weeks I'd made a small group of friends who I go to the gym and socialise with. That made me feel better. Even though this is a big university the Business School isn't too big so you get to know people. Also, as we have to work independently it's not a bad thing that we aren't together all the time like in France. Overall I am happy here. When I went home for the Christmas holidays I was pleased to come back to Huddersfield and speak English again. Now I'm not going home for Easter, I'll stay here through to the summer term. Coming here has made me grow up and be independent. I look after myself and manage my time. I can see that I am becoming an adult. I don't have my parents to push me, I have to stand on my own two feet. I plan my time much better now than I ever did before.

I want to do a masters in Marketing and Advertising. French companies are looking for people with language skills who are willing to travel. I can see a future for me. Also I have made some good contacts here which could be useful for the future. I like this town and this university. Paris is very crowded, this is a smaller place where people are friendly, I have enjoyed being here.

I'm learning English since twelve years. I get the chance to have English native teachers. I remember, I had one teacher who was born in Scotland, and who has a very hard accent even she spoke in French. And I have one teacher who came from the west of England, and who didn't have a difficult accent for understanding. But as you probably know, French people have many difficulties with English. I never understand why (perhaps because of the history ?). During my studies, I had the chance to communicate with an American class for one year. We communicated by letters. I had also the opportunity to come in England with my class to visit Oxford University, Bath, London...Our teachers wanted that we learned English thanks to communication.

And it's almost the same thing here. Teachers want that we work in small group, that we debate with our neighbour about a subject, they make powerpoints (so I can read and understand if the teacher speak to fast).

The most difficult thing is speed. Some teachers speak too fast, but it's not their fault. In fact, my teachers in France adapt the speed for us. But I'm confident, I met people, I'll join some sport's clubs...And I really hope that I will improve in English.

### ***Student G: Writing from Language Appraisal***

Looking at this now I realise how simplistic my writing was back in September, I've made some basic mistakes. I can see that it's not clear because I'm not using conjunctions properly. I wrote about how quickly people speak here. I have got used to this now, there is still the odd word which I can't follow but I can usually get the main idea. I took me time to settle in and begin to understand what I needed to understand.

I've had quite a difficult year. When I arrived my luggage got lost somehow, all my paper work was in there and I didn't get it back for 2 months! I was really stressed and wasn't sure who to talk to about this problem. It was very confusing. Then I began classes and the speed of the teachers' talking was too quick for me. I sort of understood the first 10 minutes of a class and then the rest was a blur. It was just too difficult to listen to a whole class in English. The use of PowerPoint did help, I could read and follow a bit, overall though it was very difficult. After a few weeks we began to get our coursework set. Again that was hard. In France if a teacher asks me to analyse something, I know what he means. Here, they want something else, more criticality perhaps. My first assessment wasn't very good. I did a presentation and I made a lot of mistakes.

As time went on things improved. I could follow the classes except for one where a teacher had a very strong accent and I couldn't understand what he said. I began to understand more in class and became familiar with the library. Assignments are still problematic for me even at this end of the year. I'm not really sure about how academic writing and skills work over here; teachers seem to want us to be very direct in our writing. In France we can probably be less focussed. The referencing is completely different here too. I haven't quite got to grips with the system and I'm nervous about the up-coming exams. In France my assessments were more practical, not so many long essays or reports. I got some help from the LDG on how to write assignments but I'd like to see examples in class of what a report or an essay is. In France it's the same format throughout. It's hard to visualise what is required without an example.

When new students come I would suggest they go to the LDG for information and to ask tutors for help too. The English language is really important. I don't think the TOEIC test prepared me for learning at university in the UK. There is a lot to adjust to. I don't like the public universities in France. The resources aren't good. Here we have Unilearn, there's no VLE at home. Communication with tutors is old fashioned there. The electronic resources here mean that you can learn in different ways. You can look at websites and find out course information, you can also email the tutors and get a quick response.

I came here because I wanted to experience something new and I can't do a Masters in Human Resources Management in France. I'd like to do that when I've finished my degree. However I really did not think about how different studying would be here. It would be nice to make contact with foreign students who are already studying before you arrive. I would have liked to ask them questions about their experiences.

In class it can be hard to integrate. The home students work in groups and seem to understand everything but then the foreign students are together in another group and it's harder for us to work as well as the home students. I think we could all be mixed up, it would be better. Reading in class can be difficult. Sometimes I translate things incorrectly, but when I'm working alone in the library, I can take my time and understand better. I use Summon but it's difficult too.

Personally I believe that I have developed a better sense of responsibility since being here. That's not to say that I wasn't responsible before but I had my family to share things with. I do think I am more mature. This is the first time I have lived away from home. My mother died a few years ago and I went through a bad period then. Recently some of those problems have come back. I felt quite depressed in December and I went back to France to see the doctor. I missed some college. I felt bad for being absent but the tutors are understanding and have given me extensions for my assignments. That has been re-assuring. I really like the tutors here.

Studying abroad gives you the benefit of improving your language skills and French companies will think that this is a positive point on my CV. In the future I'd like to work in the Middle East, I can speak Urdu and Hindi and there are a lot of migrant workers there who I can communicate with. Otherwise I can use French in countries such as Switzerland or Luxembourg. It makes me more employable.

Learning needs time and efforts. Coming to UK was a real challenge for me. New country, new people, new way of study, that's what makes the difficult part of my staying here. The way I learned in school is very different from what I am going to do in Business School. Teachers were more severe concerning giving information in class and homework. We were taught more theory so we could not experience in practice what we've learned. Teachers were giving us almost of information and they frequently controlled us, while here is another educational system. Lecturers use more interactive activities and give real and concrete examples from the real life. These things capture your attention and make you memorize better the new lesson.

I start to get used to the new environment and I enjoy it. This new society, mentality, way of living makes me more open to new changes in my life. From "Prepare for Success" I have learned that for all international students it is difficult to get used to new environment and this difference of cultures and ways of study is a real challenge for all. We also should manage our time efficiently in order to reach a higher level of knowledge and improve or learn new useful skills.

I am glad I have this opportunity to study here so I am ready to do everything is requested from me as a student. To succeed it really needs hard work and openness for changes that are coming forward.

### ***Student H: Writing from Language Appraisal***

When I look back at my life at school in Romania I can see so many differences between here and there. In the language appraisal I wrote about what a challenge it is to come to the UK and study. New country, new people, new ways to study. In Romania there was a lot of theory to learn and we were controlled by our teachers. Here it is more practical and there are more activities in class. Even at an early stage, I began to realise that this was a more open way of studying and learning. I felt energised and ready to take on the challenge of learning in the UK.

When I first arrived I was nervous, especially about the English. I had planned to go to university in France but I changed my mind. I didn't really think it was possible for me to come to the UK. I began to focus on English so that I was ready. When I got here I realised that people speak very different English from what I was taught. The accent was new to me, I think that really I had only heard a US accent before. Luckily I have a friend who is in her second year and she helped me out. In class I was pleasantly surprised that the tutors seemed to understand us international students and that reassured me. They were sympathetic to us and understood that we didn't have perfect English. They explained things patiently. I was also nervous about how the schedule was going to work and what books I should get but everyone was friendly and explained what I needed to know. I felt able to ask questions or email the tutors.

When it came to the first assessment my main concern was still the language but we were going to English classes on the Professional English module which helped. I was surprised to have to write 2500 words for an assignment. I'd never written so much! Neither in English or my own language. Even though 2500 seemed a lot at I soon realised that that was how much was needed to cover the topic. Tutors gave us guidance on what to include and we had to cover all the points so it made sense. I think the way we learn here is useful. I don't have to learn everything by heart. Here we have lessons over 2-3 days a week but in Romania there would be classes every day. We'd be given lots of information but I'm not sure if it is all really useful. Here you have to choose what to read. We do the research and come to our own conclusions. I think this is a better way of remembering things, through evaluation and research. In Romania we had to learn a lot by heart. The teaching differed and some teachers had the traditional style but some taught more in the style we have here.

At the end of the first term I was excited about going home. I went back to see my classmates and tutors, it was then that I realised how much my English had improved. Then, whilst I was at home, I thought, oh, I've forgotten all my English but when I came back to Huddersfield it was OK. I felt

better and more relaxed from having a break at home. Some students had told us that term 2 was stressful because we had a lot more assessments but I was cool and thought I'll work it out one way or another. It's best to take things step by step and not worry about the future too much.

Now that we are at the end of the teaching terms I look back and think that things have improved. I've learnt new skills. We've worked in groups with people from other cultures and we can understand each other. I've developed my research and language skills, but language could still improve. I've learned how to manage a lot of reading through scanning texts. In one module we have to work in a group to create a business. We are responsible for the tasks and we have to use our creativity to make it work. I don't think it is like that at home. It would be more theoretical not practical. In class we have had case studies, about Tesco and Sainsbury's, the international students didn't know about these companies. The UK students could answer the questions but we had nothing to say, we didn't know enough. I had to research these companies to help me get through.

My research skills have definitely improved. We get a deadline for our assignments and we have to get a lot of information to write the answers. You have to find the most efficient way to find the relevant information. Also you can't just use one source you have to use a lot of sources. Here you can use the library and the internet and ask tutors. I use Summon to find journal articles. You can go to the library for books but journal articles are harder to find, so this is helping me to do the assignment I'm working on now. I haven't been to university in Romania but I don't think that they have a system like the VLE where everyone can log on themselves. For timetables in Romania, they would be put on a board on the wall for you to read; here we can get them electronically.

I came to the UK to study because of the reputation of British education and I have friends who have come here too. Before I had a stereotypical view of what British people or people from northern countries were like. I thought that they would be cold and unfriendly, that no-one would help me or tell me anything I needed to know. Again, I was pleasantly surprised at how friendly people are. Back home the stereotype still exists. I know that it's not true because I have had the opportunity to come and experience the culture. Now I think I prefer it. If someone was coming here from Romania now I'd encourage them to be as open as possible. Also to work on their research and IT skills before they come.

Being here has meant that I have lived away from my family for the first time. I was anxious about how I would manage but now I think now that it's better to be independent. At first I had to think how to manage my time between studying and looking after myself but this has worked out quite well. I'm a more relaxed person now. I have learnt how to sort out practical problems for myself, say if the washing machine breaks down, I could call someone to mend it. Before my parents did everything for me. I have made a lot of friends, if I went home I think I'd have less friends there than here now. Coming abroad has given me skills in problem solving, decision making and teamwork. I understand people better. From my course I've learnt about thinking strategically, I've enjoyed the course. I have to choose my options for next year now. I have been surprised how much support this university gives students, not just academic but support through student services for feeling homesick for example. Also how there is religious tolerance which I don't think there would be in my country. I think people in Romania have complexes. Since we joined the EU things have changed but there is still a way to go. I can see how diverse this culture is by studying here.

This is a new language and subject for me to study, of course it is difficult. I cannot understand the teacher clearly and there are many problems for me. Before the Huddersfield University, last year I studied in NCUK international Foundation Year I learn more knowledge about how to study from Chinese class to English and others. We had assignment and many skills like English University and we surfed on the Internet and read books to get the informations. We talked each other as a group. The best way for me to study is read books first and then surf on the Internet and get the informations which I want. And make more friends also is a good way to improve, we can talk together and help with each other.

### ***Student 1: Writing from Language Appraisal***

Even though I had been taught in English in my International Foundation Year (IFY) in China, I had no idea what was going on when I began my lessons here. I didn't understand the teachers clearly. I understood the words which were said but I didn't understand the instructions we were given. I didn't know how to carry them out. After a while my confidence grew. I met some English people and talked to them, we helped each other. Also I got to know the lifestyle that we have here.

At the end of the first term we had two assessments. For one I got a grade of 37%. I was not pleased with myself, I felt I could do better. I realised that I needed to read more and get a better basic knowledge of the subject. I also thought that I should ask the teachers for more advice. After the Christmas holidays I came back but I wasn't motivated. I had had a break from learning, although I didn't go home I was away from the university. I knew the exams would be coming up. I knew I had to work and borrowed a lot of books, but I didn't read many of them! Now, towards the end of term 2 I feel better. I work with my group and we help each other. There are people from other countries but not from China, we speak English. I study in the library and I ask my teacher the questions I need to ask.

Between here and China the main difference in learning is that there we do what our teachers tell us to do. We wait for instructions and we carry them out. In the UK we work in groups more and think around the questions we are set. We try to get a wider knowledge of the subject. Here we have Unilearn and Summon. At home we just buy the recommended books from the bookstore. Previously, in school, I had lessons from 7 am all day and then evening study until 9 or 10 pm. We had a two hour lunch break and an hour for the evening meal. Here I have 14 hours per week, much less. I am expected to work on my own when I'm not in class. Going to the library gives me a bit of structure. The two systems are very different. I think I'd like a mixture of both for my learning. Too much of either style of working isn't particularly good for me. I need more lessons than we get here but I also would like to have had more free study time in China.

From the IFY I had a bit of an idea of what it would be like here but not enough. I'm not sure if I feel able to advise people coming to study in the UK. Everyone's experience is different. It would be a good idea to get here a couple of months before the course starts though. Just to get a feel of the place and meet a few people. I would tell people to read more books, that's important and don't be afraid to ask questions. As far as I'm concerned there's no difference between good teachers here and in China. The only criticism I have is that sometimes in China teachers don't seem able to expand on answers to questions from students. They think they have given the answer and that is the end of the matter.

I am still only 18. I lived in student accommodation during the IFY, I had friends there. At the beginning here I felt sad without any friends. I couldn't talk to people, I was shy but people were friendly. After a while I felt better. I became more interested in my subject as time went on. By the end of the first term I was very happy overall. I was enjoying life and the subject. I missed my family back home a bit but my friends here are like a family abroad. I don't think I have changed much, I just feel more comfortable now.

I'm in the first year of Accountancy. I'd like to travel in the future. Maybe go to Canada. I've heard it's nice, big with a small population. I think this course will help me get a good job and enable me to talk to people better. It will help me whether I work in China or wherever I go in the world. I've

learnt a lot from working with the other international students. I would like to travel around and learn lots of languages.

The "Prepare for Success" website shows that I need change in my university life. The first thing is time management. We need to manage the time for preparing the academic essay, presentation and exam. Also, it's very important for study independently. Using time management can save more times for studying. Secondly, We need to avoid plagiarism when we are writing assignment. As business student, the Harvard Reference System is really useful. Thirdly, Critical thinking is a big challenge. The university encourage student to be a independently one so student need to have their own opinion. When they are reading materials, they should think critically and cannot agree everything at the begining.

Those three things are very different form my high school which do not care much about the plagiarism and critical thinking. In my high school, tutors help student manage their time for studying but university's not.

Finally, as a international student, I think I should give myself more confidence to speaking and listening not only in lectures/tutorials but also in daily communication.

Coping with these changes will the first step for success which is the "Prepare for Success" website inspring me.

#### ***Student K: Writing from Language Appraisal***

Looking at this now, I was correct about organising my time whilst studying in the UK. In China our teachers sorted out our timetables for us. I boarded at high school all week and went home at the weekends. That's what we do. I studied all day especially towards my final exams. We were in class form 9 -7.30 each day and were told what to read and write. In the evening we'd have homework, we'd still be in class with a teacher who could help us if needs be. Chinese teachers think homework is very important. Now I don't know how I did all those hours. Here there is more free time when we should be studying but aren't in class. If you don't organise your time it means that you probably won't do very well. When I first got here I thought that I had to work towards my assessments & manage my time for that. Now I realise that I have to read more generally around the subjects to get higher marks. Time management is about organising yourself for the whole of university life.

I have realised that critical thinking is the main difference between my study here and in China. Early on I got a 'C' for an essay. The tutor said that there was a lack of critical thinking. I know that it means not to just agree with authors but to look at what they are saying and comparing other writers, but it is hard. I could do with an example. In China we were mainly assessed through exams. I didn't have any essays for assessment, most of my exams were about maths or science. So I had to do calculations not write text. I did study politics and history but we didn't have to compare sources in our writing, we just had to remember facts about the subject.

On the first day here I was afraid but I knew that I had time to learn and understand how to go about things, especially as I'm in the first year of a 3 year course. I had that first essay and realised how I had to think about criticality. Over the first term I managed my time as best I could but if I got a low grade on a piece of work I would think it was because I wasn't organised enough. I'd get a bit panicky before a deadline date. If I got a good grade I put it down to luck. Even though I'm studying Business, not something like History, there is still a lot to read and loads of studying to do.

This second term, I have had a lot of assessments and from the start I thought that I could do better this time. I was determined to spend more time studying. I'm still getting used to the differences between here and China and think about it a lot. Critical thinking continues to be difficult. If I read a definition in a book I often think that it is right because that person is knowledgeable about the subject, more knowledgeable than me, but my tutor says I must form my own opinions from my reading.

Before I came to England I didn't think studying would be very difficult and so I opted to do a degree here. There seems to be a perception in China that studying Business is easier than other subjects but I would say that's not true. When I started I thought my English really wasn't very good. I have found writing hard. Speaking and listening you can improve by listening to the BBC or asking teachers to explain in class. It is harder to see your own mistakes in writing and it would be nice to have more error correction to help us improve. If another student was coming to study here now I'd tell them about the culture and how different and difficult university is. Before arriving I was worried about being a single girl here on my own but this is a safe country, I'd re-assure students about that.

All those hours spent at high school in China were about getting a place at university. There were lots of exams to get through. So when I eventually arrived I felt good about finally starting a new life. I wanted to improve my English and experience a more international environment. It's quite a challenge for a young person. It was exciting. However when I realised how hard this course is, some of that excitement went away. When I started term 2 I thought that it was no good panicking about the assessments so I tried to focus. There was no point in feeling afraid of bad marks, I had to think of ways to get the work done properly. I calmed down and applied myself. I think I have grown up here. In China if I had a problem with my studies my parents were there to help, they would get me extra tuition. Here I have to cope on my own that is true for studying and everyday life.

I'm a young person and I would like to travel. I don't think I'll go back to China too quickly. I'd like to do a Masters, I'm not sure if I'd get in on one at home. I'd like to go to Canada, I've heard that it is a beautiful country with a nice lifestyle and a good education system.

I used to study Hospitality Management in School of Applied Sciences, which required most industry and practice knowledges. Thus industrial presentations and practice projects have occupied the majority of the past studies. By contrast, from the learning experience in Business School so far, the difficulty of time management has been found due to comprehensive reading resources and prepared seminars. Practice will be useful to allocate the time accurately.

Moreover, critical thinking is another challenge while doing reading and writing. According to Prepare for Success, critical skill is a developable and significant skill that students need. It requires skill of examining topics, evaluating idea, make and find intensive arguments as well as summarise a option with evidence. Again "people learning while they doing things", also it is important to use the support from academic development department, especially for oversea students.

### ***Student L: Writing from Language Appraisal***

When I saw this piece of writing again all the mistakes stood out and I began to correct it. It made me think how much things have changed. Doing the Language Appraisal helped me to understand where I was going wrong. I knew that my writing wasn't very strong. I realised that I really needed to work on grammar. When I write essays the structure is fine but grammar is still not as good as it could be. I've done quite well this year. The highest mark I got was 90%. I still feel that I have a way to go with writing and I think that my tutors have ignored some errors because I'm not a native speaker. However I can see that because I made an effort I've had good marks.

Getting help with academic skills has helped. I can see that I have improved in comparison to other students. We were given the University Guide to Referencing in class and I practiced using it for my essays. Chinese education has an effect on learning. Lots of Chinese students have studied English and got their IELTS scores but they don't realise how different that sort of learning is compared to academic writing in university in England. They don't realise that they have to keep putting effort into their academic writing; they think they already have these skills, not that it is something that takes time to improve.

I transferred here from the School of Applied Sciences. I was excited about that because Business is what I want to do. But, I found it stressful too because the writing in that school is just reports. They can be long (5000 words) but it is mainly about our work placements. A sort of learning log. There wasn't so much research. Once I got here I realised that I had to collect a lot more information for my work. That means reading more. In the Business School the most important change is criticality, it has touched all my work in the final year. When you get given your first assignment you aren't sure what to do with it. The lecture slides don't tell you that much really. As I had been coming to Academic Skills classes I knew who to ask for help, I don't think there is as much help in Applied Sciences. It's important for students to ask for help. I have been doing Professional English but that is different from academic skills lessons, it's more like English IELTS lessons. At the end of the first term I went home to see my family. I was so proud to get 90%, it was great to share that with my parents.

It was my parents who got me to come here, I didn't want to come. They thought coming here would shape me as a better student. At high school, in China, I wasn't very ambitious and I was skipping class. I came to the UK in 2006 because that was when it became easier for Chinese people to come and study here. More importantly I've got a couple of friends over here so my parents felt better about sending me to the UK. When I arrived I was surprised how nice it was. Places like China and Hong Kong are very crowded. At first I was in Manchester, that's busy, but still quiet compared to China. Also I was away from the family and free! In China I was staying at school all week. Living and studying. In China it depends on what level of marks you get which school you go to. I got high marks so I went to a top school. Basically the higher level of the school the tighter the control of study. It was very pressured. We used to get up at 6 and do independent learning for 2 hours. This was mainly spent doing English. Proper lessons started at 8 and finished at 1. Then a break for 2 hours but even then there was work to do. We finished proper lessons at 5

but we were back in the classroom at 6 to do independent learning until 10 p.m. Even after that students still had homework to finish. I think that the girls were more hard-working than the boys and by the final year most of us got about 3 hours sleep per night. It was pressured and students became depressed. Lots of people board because they live quite a distance from school. I lived close to school but my parents wanted me to work hard, so I boarded.

Coming back to Huddersfield after the holiday at the end of term 1 was hard and stressful. I had had a complete break and suddenly I had to do 2 or 3 assignments and I had to get back into the mindset. At home I could behave like a child. Here I have to be an adult but that's the reality. Now at the end of the year I feel confident. I've always felt that I'm better at exams than coursework but I'm a bit stressed because I've got 5 exams coming up and I have to plan my revision. In other years I've had time off at Easter and gone away but this year I'm going to stay at home and work. Now I feel I have a balance between the Chinese way and the British way of studying. New students coming from China must see how relaxed it is here, they tend to get too relaxed and don't work hard enough. Independent study in China isn't really independent, its homework time with your classmates. Here you are doing independent research.

In China we just receive information in class from the teacher. We can ask questions but we don't much because of the traditional and conservative culture. We have to respect the teacher. People feel ashamed to ask questions in public because it might show how little they have understood. On the other hand if I ask a difficult question and the teacher struggles to answer it, it might be embarrassing for him or her, and that would have a negative impact on me. English teachers should explain to new Chinese students that they are free to ask questions. Even though I haven't been to university in China my friends have and they seem to copy and paste from the internet for their work. It's bad for students. Teachers aren't keen to see their references there. That's no good for me; I can't do anything now without giving references. (21.31)

I can see how much I've been influenced by the UK culture. People around me say I'm so Western. Chinese students really stick together and they need to step out of their comfort zones. The language doesn't help. If there could be a group to help them to communicate or get in touch with English speakers that would be good. My class is mixed and I have enjoyed meeting people from Europe. I know students who are UK born but not ethnically British. I realise now that in some other cultures they are as strict if not stricter than the Chinese.

If I was going to advise another girl coming here from China to study, I'd say don't worry too much before you arrive, the teachers easy to contact and the resources are good. I was very anxious about coming here especially about the language. I would say to her when she gets here she needs to be active, to step out of her comfort zone. Don't wait for people to speak to you get out there and speak to people yourself.

Thinking back to my first day at the University I was afraid and frustrated. In the other school I felt that the teachers treated the home students differently from the international students. Now I feel much more mature. I can solve problems associated with my life or study. I am keen to learn. I like to reach out to people. If I could I'd get some work experience over here but that might be difficult because of the economy. I'll probably go back to China, I've started to apply for jobs online. I'd like to go back to my region in China to be closer to my family. My mother is a doctor and my father is part of the family business but he doesn't expect me to join it because I'm a girl. I think that there are a lot of advantages for my future career from what I have learned here. The language is the obvious one. I can see how innovative the culture is here and China is still developing but western culture is impacting on China. Chinese employers are looking for innovative people. I think a Chinese employer would look to me to mediate between other countries, but the ability to do that also gives me influence in my own country and organisations I will work in.

Appendix 2. Images

