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MA in English Language Teaching

**The Vocabulary Problems in the Academic Writing of MA ELT Libyan
Students at Nottingham Trent University.**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the vocabulary problems in the academic writing of MA ELT Libyan students in Nottingham Trent University. For this purpose, two research questions were posed and the answers to these questions were provided and discussed. The data for the study were collected via two questionnaires (preliminary and main questionnaire) and interviews. The present study attempted to elicit information from ten postgraduate students from Misurata (the 7th October) University. They enrolled in the School of Arts and Humanities on the MA in English Language Teaching course.

The findings indicate that those students faced problems in using vocabulary appropriately. These findings agree with the studies of Ibrahim and Nambiar (2011), Al-Khasawneh (2010), Bacha (2002) and Daoud (1998) that Arabic students face problems with vocabulary in academic writing. The main reasons for these problem are related to the Libyan students' learning experience in Libya. This suggests that Libyan teaching is inappropriate at several levels including wrong methods, wrong curriculum and wrong teaching environment. Based on my research, it is proposed that a complete solution to improving the MA ELT students' grasp of academic vocabulary must involve the Libyan education system, the UK institutions and the students themselves. As a first step, additional attention should be given to teaching academic vocabulary to groups like these students, but the main recommendation is to encourage the students' autonomy in language learning (Nation, 2001) and inspire them to take more responsibility for achieving academic success in the host country by improving themselves.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the study

This research project aims to assess the importance of English vocabulary to overseas students studying in the UK higher education sector. The sample studied is limited – Libyan students on an MA course in English Language Teaching at Nottingham Trent University, all of whom have the same language, Arabic, as L1 – but the subject area is of huge importance to a large number of students and to the UK academic sector. In recent years, the number of international students in British universities has grown significantly (English, 1999:18). In the 2009–2010, academic year, there was a total of 280,760 non-EU students in higher education in the UK and also over 125,000 non-UK EU students (UKCISA, n.d.). Statistics compiled by the Higher Education Authorities in Libya indicate that the total number of Libyan students enrolled in postgraduate studies in British universities every year is approximately 3,000. In Nottingham Trent University (NTU), there are 82 Libyan students or 0.3% of the NTU student population (IDV, 2007). Therefore, although it is not possible to generalise the subject of this study to extrapolate to the wider student population and to non-native speakers in the UK education system in general, the principles involved may be of value in looking at students from other cultural backgrounds, speaking other languages as L1 and on other courses of study.

As is the case for students from many other nations, Libyan students keep in mind the view of Silva and Matsuda (2001:xix) that a British university education is internationally recognised and accepted and can open doors to the better future

careers. Furthermore, the experience of studying through the medium of English, which gives the students no option other than total immersion in the English language, gives them the chance to improve meaningfully their English language skills. Despite these benefits, there are many challenges, as expressed by Jones (1999:37): “Entering British tertiary education for the first time can be a daunting experience for many students”. This goes beyond language issues to an academic culture that may be very different from that experienced by the students in the past as well as in their countries. This will be expanded further in the following chapters but it is important to note that, regardless of experience, origin and language ability, on acceptance onto any course the university system expects the same standards and the same capability of expression in academic English for non-native speakers as it does for L1 speakers.

It is certainly the case that students for whom English is not their first language can face significant challenges in the higher education systems of Anglophone nations. This can be a challenge not only for the students but for university systems which are to some degree reliant on the fees paid by “overseas” students. For example, following a series of racially-motivated assaults in Australia in 2009, applications for university places from Indian students fell by 46% (Grove, 2011). Hinkel (2004) identified a number of studies which pointed out the ongoing issues faced in the English-speaking academic world by non-native speakers, even those who had been educated in English to a high level.

Rivers argued that an appropriate vocabulary was a starting point for success in a second language because the higher level functions cannot be used in the second language without the building block of vocabulary (1983 in Nunan, 1998).

Different approaches to teaching and learning vocabulary are discussed further in Chapter 2 but it is important to note that Rivers' approach and others like it have not always held sway. Previous approaches regarded vocabulary as secondary, to be fitted into a framework of syntax as required.

As pointed out by Johnson (2000:176), "Words remain the most important tool the writer has to work with". This is particularly important in the academic world, where essentially all instruction and assessment are carried out through the medium of language. Moreover, "Vocabulary learning is central to language acquisition, whether the language is first, second, or foreign" (Decarrico, 2001:285). Also, "There is general agreement among vocabulary specialists that lexical competence is at the very heart of communicative competence, the ability to communicate successfully and appropriately" (Coady & Huckin, 1997 in Decarrico, 2001:285). Hinkel (2002:264) claims that a far greater range of vocabulary than is needed for successful everyday communication is essential to a student at a Western university. This has been acknowledged in the development of the core "general academic vocabulary" of 836 words not in use in general communication but considered vital to understanding and writing in academic fields and known as the *University Word List (UWL)* (Xue and Nation 1984 in Nation, 1990) and also in the *Academic Word List (AWL)* (see Chapter 2).

Hinkel (2004) identified a number of factors associated with the issues of non-native speakers using English in a higher education context. These included inadequate vocabulary for academic purposes and unfamiliarity with the style of academic writing. Academic style can be considered "dry" but it also has many formal and stylistic elements which would not be encountered in general writing.

The difficulties of both native and non-native speakers with this highly specialised area of language use is a potential area for further study.

In terms of assessment, supervisors assessing students' work identified errors in word selection and use as most important, with errors in logical presentation and organisation and correct use of syntax also seen as significant. These were all more important than issues with the content of academic work (Hinkel, 2004). This reinforces the idea that vocabulary is the initial building block without which non-native speakers (NNS) may struggle to find the correct syntax and, therefore, to present their work in a logical and organised way.

This is supported by the work of Laufer and Nation (1995), who reported that there was a correlation between essay marks and the ratio of core academic vocabulary used, while, in contrast, a lack of vocabulary knowledge obstructed students' ability to explain their ideas in a clear way (Hinkel, 2004). According to Jones (1999), the students themselves also identified the same factors (syntax, choice of lexicon, cohesion) as the source of their difficulties with academic English.

It is, therefore, proposed that the most important factor in achieving success in the use and evaluation of academic writing in English is acquiring an increased academic vocabulary (Hinkel, 2004), especially the core general academic vocabulary expressed in the *AWL*, as will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Paquot points out that:

... a questionnaire survey of almost 5,000 undergraduates showed that students from all 26 departments at Hong Kong Polytechnic University experienced difficulties with writing skills necessary for studying content subjects through the medium of English (Evan and Green, 2006). Almost 50 per cent of the students reported that they encountered difficulties in using appropriate academic style, expressing ideas in correct English and an linking sentences which presented a problem for novice writers. (2010:1)

1.2. The Libyan context

This dissertation will look at the experience of Libyan students in higher education in the UK. Libya is an Arabic-speaking country in the Maghreb region of North Africa, with a land area of 1.8 million square kilometres and a population of about 6.2 million in 2009. It was part of the Ottoman Empire for nine hundred years until the Italians colonised the country between 1911 and 1943, a period which deeply affected education in Libya (Andrews, 2009) but only lasted until the defeat of Italian forces during World War 2. When Italy withdrew, control of the states of Libya was divided up between Britain (Tripolitania and Cyrenaica) and France (Fazzan) until 1969, when Qadhafi took control of the country (Deeb, 2011), until his removal from power in 2011.

Many studies indicate that Arab students of English face problems in writing (Abdul Haq, 1982; Harrison, Prator and Tucker, 1975; Abbad, 1988; Wahba, 1998, in Rabab'ah, 2005:181). Mukattash (1983 in Rabab'ah, 2005:183) points out that Arab students “continue to be unable to express themselves comfortably and

efficiently either when dealing with an academic topic or a common every day topic.” He argues that the major difficulty for students arises from the fact that they cannot use English correctly and appropriately in and out of the classroom when required to do so. Libyan students are a subset of Arabic-speaking students, but their experience also has unique aspects. However, it must be noted that not only are most of the words in the *AWL* of Latin origin and, therefore, unfamiliar to Arab students, but Arab students must also become familiar with a radically different alphabet.

English was an obligatory part of the Libyan school curriculum until 1986. Orafi and Borg (2009: 244) state that “In the 1980s the focus of English language teaching in Libya was on grammar and reading comprehension. Lessons were characterised by oral drills (with a focus on correct grammar and pronunciation), memorisation of vocabulary, and reading aloud. Arabic was widely used in English lessons by teachers and students.” English was withdrawn altogether from the school system between 1986 and 1992 because of the political tensions between Libya and the West. Pupils entering Year 7 in 1986 had had no English language classes before this time and now missed the opportunity to begin learning English, and those who were beginning secondary education at this time had no opportunity to improve upon their existing English. Subsequently, apart from a fortunate few who could afford private language tuition, a whole generation of undergraduates entered higher education in 1992 with hardly any knowledge of English.

Moreover, from 1986 to 1992, teachers of English had no jobs and many took on alternative positions, such as teaching history or geography. However, a

lucrative private market for English language teaching had inadvertently been created, through which public-sector teachers competed for part-time positions to supplement their low earnings. Similarly, school inspectors were obliged to resort to private language teaching, along with other teachers of English. “Consequently, the status of teaching English in Libya deteriorated considerably for almost a decade” (Orafi and Borg, 2009: 244).

In 1999, English regained its status as an international language in Libya because “the negative consequences of this situation were becoming evident (e.g. university graduates had very limited grasp of English)”. Therefore, these graduates were unsuited to participate in many aspects of international trade, communication and education (Orafi and Borg, 2009: 244). In addition to introducing a new English syllabus in 2000 (Orafi and Borg, 2009:245), English teaching was expanded to begin at primary year 5 (age 10) beginning with the 2006/07 school year.

In a further attempt to reverse the damage caused by the lack of English language skills, Libyan universities began collaborations with international education establishments, including those in the Arab world, Europe and Africa and have supported students studying overseas for Masters degrees and PhDs with full scholarships (Al-Gosbi and Khoja, n.d.).

1.2.1 Nottingham Trent University and the MA ELT for Libyan students

Nottingham Trent University is “the first University in the UK to establish a partnership with the 7th October University in Misurata, whereby selected Masters

courses are run and delivered jointly between the two universities” (IDV, 2007). The students participating in this study are ten Libyan students enrolled in the School of Arts and Humanities on the MA in English Language Teaching. They completed the first semester in Libya and then, at the beginning of February they came to the UK to study for the second semester. In the second semester, the course required the students to submit three assignments and one portfolio, which consisted of five tasks. In addition, four students had to resubmit one assignment from the first semester.

1.3 Objectives and research questions

In this study, my purpose was (a) to discover the vocabulary difficulties in academic writing that Libyan MA ELT students faced during their study at Nottingham Trent University and (b) to determine the reasons behind these problems. My focus was on the vocabulary difficulties revealed by the findings of a pre-questionnaire which asked the sample students about their main problems in academic writing.

As a result, the study addressed these research questions:

1. What are the main vocabulary problems faced by MA ETL Libyan students at Nottingham Trent University in their academic writing?
2. What are the main reasons behind these problems?

To achieve the research aims, I designed two questionnaires based on issues identified during the literature review phase of this research project. Both

questionnaires were given to each of the participating students. The survey responses were supported by interviews with students. In my study, I focused on the students.

1.4 Definitions of key terms

In a project about vocabulary and its uses, it is useful to have the terms clearly defined. Webster's Elementary Dictionary (1982 in Johnson, 2000: 163) defines *word* simply as "a sound or combination of sounds that has meaning and is spoken by a human being."

Among the Oxford English Dictionary's definitions of *vocabulary* is, "the range of language of a particular person, class, profession, or the like". Even in this general context, it should be noted that this definition goes beyond simply the words an individual uses. Furthermore, academic vocabulary is defined as those activities that characterise academic work, organise scientific discourse, and build the rhetoric of an academic text (Paquot, 2010:28).

Greene (2001) defines academic writing as "a form of inquiry in which you convey your understanding of the claims people make, the questions they raise, and the conflicts they address." This seems a rather limited definition, based only on the intentions of academic writing but not saying anything about its characteristics – a definition of academic method rather than how it is expressed in language. It has already been noted how academic writing is characterised by a difficult "dry" style and a characteristic vocabulary.

1.5 Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation is divided into four chapters. Chapter One is the introduction. It gives an overview of the subject being investigated, relevant background, describes concepts relevant to the study, such as the definition of vocabulary and academic writing, gives a description of the current situation and introduces the design of the study, the research questions and the study sample.

Chapter Two deals with the theoretical framework and historical background of the subject area and includes detailed discussion of the size of the vocabulary needed both in general use and for a student in higher education. In this chapter, I review some relevant studies on vocabulary teaching and learning. This chapter indicates the vocabulary problems of Arab students in academic writing and to what extent this applies to Libyan students. Chapter Three describes the methodology of the study, including details of the methods for data collection, a description of the context of the study, size of the sample and the selection of the participants. This chapter also clarifies the methods adopted for analysis of the data.

Chapter Four discusses the findings and aims to reveal the main problems facing these Libyan students studying in the UK and the reasons behind their experiences. Also in Chapter Four, the conclusion summarises the discussion from the previous chapters and makes some recommendations, both for areas for further study and for ways in which the teaching and learning experience can be

improved for Libyan students and, potentially, other overseas students and for the higher education community in general.

1.6 Motivation for the research study

One of the reasons for my choosing this area of study is that I believe in the importance of a model of university study which involves a community of students connected with one another through a shared awareness of learning as a dynamic and interactive process involving the whole community, including students, lecturers, administrators and tutors and not as just “a given source of knowledge and regulations determined by a few in authority” (Jones *et al.*, 1999: xvii). Those involved in academic writing do so not as isolated individuals but as members of networks within the academic community, within which they discover shared values, make alliances and work collaboratively and collegiately as well as resisting alternatives with which they do not feel an affinity (Casanave, 2002 in Paltridge, 2004). A learning environment in which there is sharing of experience and ideas is much richer than a one-way transfer of information but it has to assume full participation of the community and this needs a common language – literally, a shared vocabulary.

From my own experience as a teacher, I believe that the teacher’s role can be considered as a bridge of knowledge through which he/she can enable her/his students to overcome their difficulties and reach their learning goals. I believe it is simple to fail a student but the real value of a teacher is to help students to overcome their difficulties. The decision to focus on this research was as a result

of my personal experience as a non-native student. As such, I can recognise the difficulties under discussion and how language issues can undermine the whole student learning experience and general experience in the host country. I agree with Silva, who argues that “the differences between native and non-native speaker student writers, and their writing, need to be acknowledged and addressed if second language students are to receive fair treatment, and an equal chance in academic success” (1997 in Paltridge, 2004:88).

In this study, I will try to discover the main vocabulary problems of Libyan MA ELT students and the reasons behind them. At the end of the study, I draw conclusions regarding what are the most important factors around vocabulary use for Libyan students in the UK and make some recommendations for ways to overcome these problems.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 English vocabulary

2.1.1 Size of the English vocabulary

The definitive size of the English vocabulary is a matter of debate. Schmitt (2000) reviewed a number of estimates from the popular press and presented results ranging from 400,000 up to 2 million words, of which 200,000 are in regular use, although the total would be in the millions if scientific and technical terms were included.

Schmitt attributes the disparity in these results to the different possible definitions of a word, and, as a result, Goulden, Nation, and Read (1990) tried to produce a more reliable estimate by using families of words as the unit of measurement. Therefore, they “counted the number of word families in *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* (1963).” They found about 54,000 families of words (Schmitt, 2000: 3).

No individual can be expected to know this many words. Therefore, Schmitt and McCarthy asked (1997: 16), “What vocabulary does a second language learner need? The answer to this question depends on what the language learner intends to use English for.”

The rest of this chapter will attempt to answer the questions: how many words does a learner need to learn for academic use and what are the barriers to learning, especially for Libyan students?

2.1.2 Size of vocabulary needed

Nation and Waring observe that “If a learner’s goal is to develop a vocabulary similar in size to that of a native speaker, then a vocabulary size of 15,000-20,000 word families is necessary” (1997 in Schmitt, 2000: 143).

Nation also states that, “The most frequent 2,000 words are essential for any real language use, and so are worth the effort required to teach and learn them explicitly” (1995 in Schmitt, 2000: 143). Those who have specific objectives, including university study, need to learn an additional 1,000 frequently used words (Nation, 1990). In another study, Nation (1993: 115) stresses that “Initially, learners’ skill in using the language is heavily dependent on the number of words they know, with around 3,000 word families being a crucial threshold”. This is consistent with the findings of Schmitt, Schmitt and Clapham (2001 in Schmitt, 2005: 64), who, “in a study of 643 university- aged English language students from a wide of countries... found an average English size of 4,594 words”.

I agree with Schmitt (2010), who concludes that a very large number of lexical items is important for learners to have the ability to operate effectively in English. At the same time, he points out that “[they] do not need to achieve native- like vocabulary sizes in order to use English well. A more reasonable goal for these learners is the amount of lexis necessary to enable the various forms of communication in English” (Schmitt, 2010: 9).

Nation & Waring (1997: 16), point out the need for a “general academic vocabulary” for use in university or the senior years of high school, as set out in a list of 836 words known as the *University Word List (UWL)* (Xue and Nation

1984 in Nation, 1990). Schmitt (2010:79) highlights that in 2000, Coxhead created the *Academic Word List (AWL)* of 570 word families, which, together, account for 10% of academic writing: “Thus, the AWL has fewer words than *UWL* but has greater coverage”. Schmitt (2010) and Nation (2006) consider the *AWL* to be the best list of academic vocabulary. The *AWL* is currently the most used in dictionaries (e.g. Major, 2006), vocabulary textbooks (e.g. Schmitt and Schmitt, 2005; Huntley, 2006), and vocabulary tests (e.g. Schmitt *et al*, 2001) and, according to Paquot (2010: 11), “covers at least 8.5 per cent of the running words in academic texts”. In this sense, Schmitt and Zimmerman (2002 in Schmitt, 2010) encourage students to come to university with the knowledge of some members of word families (e.g. noun/ verb/ adjective/ adverb) taken from the *AWL* and, in the opinion of Corson (1997), mastering such vocabulary is critical to the success of students with English as a second language.

2.1.3 Historical Background

The teaching of vocabulary was neglected for many years, with professionals believing that it could be “left to take care of itself” (Decarrico, 2001: 285). Decarrico (2001) further explains that, through the late 1970s and into the 1980s, this orthodoxy was increasingly challenged (e.g. Judd, 1978; McCarthy, 1984; Laufer, 1986) but, as late as 1988, observers such as Carter and McCarthy were noting the results of not paying attention to vocabulary, although, by this time, the neglect of this area of language teaching was being hastily reversed.

This state of affairs had arisen due to the dominance of approaches to language teaching based on dominant American theories of linguistics that had come to the fore in the 1940s–1960s and which included Charles Fries' *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language* (1945). Vocabulary was deliberately kept simple, introducing only those new words necessary to the drilled exercises central to Fries' method (Zimmerman, 1997) while assuming that vocabulary and other elements could be learnt later.

These lexical elements remained secondary to grammar through the 1960s shift to generative or transformational linguistics. In essence, in his seminal works, Chomsky maintained the primacy of grammar but with learning as a process of acquiring rules rather than forming habits (Carter and McCarthy, 1988 in Decarrico, 2001: 286). In 1972, Hymes, a scholar concerned with *communicative competence*, modified Chomsky's model to include increased consideration of socio-linguistic and pragmatic factors. Meaningful communication, including the specific context, was stressed as the role of language. Communicative language teaching emerged, prioritising fluency over accuracy. The main attention of this teaching method was on discourse and vocabulary remained mainly a support to the functional use of language, left to take care of itself (Schmitt, 2000).

More recently, the importance of vocabulary and the theory of vocabulary have come into prominence. As Gu (2003) points out, since the mid-1980s a number of important works have been published in this area. The works listed by Gu include, concerning theory, the works of Carter (1987), Carter and McCarthy (1988), McCarthy (1990) and Nation (1990). In the field of research, important contributions are those of Arnaud and Bejoint (1992), Gass (1987), Meara (1989)

and Nation and Carter (1989), while practical advice has been provided by Gairns and Redman (1986) and McCarthy and O'Dell (1994). Further important work on how vocabulary is acquired was done by authors including Huckin, Hayne, and Coady (1993), Harley (1995), Hatch and Brown (1995), Coady and Huckin (1997), Schmitt and McCarthy (1997), Atkins (1998), Wesche and Paribakht (1999), Read (2000), Schmitt (2000) and Nation (2001).

2.1.4 Teaching and learning vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge is a core component of language skills that enables language use (Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997; Richards & Renandya, 2002). The factors required in order for a learner to 'know' any new word include: its form – how it is spoken (pronounced) and written (spelled); its structure in terms of the root morpheme and how it forms its most frequent derivations and inflections; the syntax and how it is used to construct phrases and sentences; its meanings in multiple contexts, including those that are situation-specific, metaphorical and any additional connotations; relation to other words such as its antonyms and synonyms; and any words commonly used as collocations with the word to be learnt (Laufer, 1997). Taken together, this is the knowledge that native speakers of a language normally have.

However, when a teacher prepares a list of English words for the use of students, he or she must consider not only the frequency and range of application of the words but also a number of other possible factors, such as those given in Richard's list:

- “1. Frequency;
2. Range;
3. Language;
4. Availability and familiarity;
5. Coverage;
6. Regularity;
7. Ease of learning or learning burden.”

(Richards, 1970, in Palmberg, 1992: 105)

According to Schmitt (2000: 4):“Words are not instantaneously acquired, at least not for adult second language learners.” Nation (2003) emphasises that the acquisition of vocabulary cannot be neglected by the teacher and student but must be enhanced by planned and effective teaching. To teach language, including the teaching of vocabulary, it is necessary to understand the different elements of language learning. *Receptive knowledge* is the ability to understand a word when it is encountered, usually when listening or reading. *Productive knowledge* is the ability to spontaneously generate – speak or write – a word when it is required. This goes with an assumption that learners first acquire words receptively and then move to using them productively (Schmitt, 2000). However, there are many other aspects involved in genuinely knowing a word, including those discussed above. All these aspects are part of *word knowledge* and need to be mastered so that the learner can make correct use of a word in any situation she or he can reasonably expect to encounter. These aspects cannot be acquired together or instantaneously, as it is a complex process which must be achieved gradually as

each type of knowledge is built up essentially along its own distinct learning curve (Schmitt, 2000).

Nation took the approach of dividing vocabulary into groups according to frequency of use – high-frequency, low-frequency and specialised vocabulary (1990: 4), with teachers determining which group contained the words necessary to their learners and the teaching methodology required. The instructor could decide to look in detail at a certain word. This can often be done without a context, paying attention to the word rather than a particular usage (Nation, 1990), for example, because of the high frequency of the use and importance of a particular word; its difficulty for learners; its use in a subsequent activity; or because the behaviour of the word is a good example that will assist in mastering related or connected words.

Nation also states that: “Real vocabulary learning comes through use, both receptive use and productive use... meeting words in a variety of contexts and having to use some of them to express new ideas provide the most important opportunities for vocabulary learning” (Nation, 1990: 6). It is not enough simply to set targets for learning new vocabulary. The words must also be learnt, which depends on three things: “(1) the learners’ previous experience of English and their mother tongue, (2) the way in which the word is learned or taught, and (3) the intrinsic difficulty of the word” (Nation, 1990: 33). The first language of the learner influences the capacity to learn vocabulary in the second language; learners whose first language uses a Roman script find it easier to learn English, compared to first language users of a completely different writing system such as Arabic (Nation, 1990).

In addition, research shows that, even in the same school system, it is necessary for those with English as a second language to acquire as many as 1000 ‘additional’ words a year, over and above an existing word gap of two to three thousand words, if they are to keep up with the first-language speakers’ progress (Nation, 1990). Simpson and Randall (2000) think that “developmental students’ inadequate oral and written vocabularies may negatively influence their abilities to excel when giving class presentations and writing essays”. This opinion will be discussed in the next section.

2.2 Vocabulary for academic writing

Ballard and Clanchy (1997 in Paltridge, 2004: 88) stress that foreign students face difficulties in academic writing when they study in English in universities. Scott (1999: 173) states that, in the UK, the written assignment “still constitutes the most important form of assessment on most academic courses”. Nation pointed out that “Learners need to be able to show their knowledge of the field through the use of the specialized vocabulary” (1990: 148). He posed the question, “What should you do when learners do not have English vocabulary to write?” There are a number of reasons for this but the result is that it causes “writing difficulty for foreign language learners” (Lee, 2003). Researchers have determined vocabulary to be one of the most important features of writing quality (e.g. Raimes, 1985; Uzawa and Cumming, 1989; Leki and Carson, 1994; Walters and Wolf, 1996, all cited in Lee, 2003: 538). Moreover, Laufer and Nation (1995: 308) assert that “a well-written composition, among other things, makes effective use of vocabulary.

This need not be reflected in a rich vocabulary, but a well-used rich vocabulary is likely to have a positive effect on the reader.”

Laufer and Nation (1995) discuss the richness of language needed in writing and how it varies with context and with a variety of other factors, including subject awareness and purpose. To assess richness requires the examination of a number of pieces of work by the student. Laufer and Nation suggest that “We can know the degree to which a writer is using varied [depth] and large [breadth] vocabulary. Further, lexical richness looks at the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary use” (1995: 307). Pilar and Llach’s (2011: 64) findings are similar.

Rivers also argued that “The acquisition of an adequate vocabulary is essential for successful second language use because, without an extensive vocabulary, we will be unable to use the structures and functions we may have learned for comprehensible communication” (1983 in Nunan, 1998: 117). Laufer, Elder, Hill and Congdon (2004 in Andrews, 2009: 5) agree that using a word correctly in “free production reflects the highest level of lexical knowledge”.

As Hinkel (2004: 48) points out, “A great deal of research on L2 vocabulary learning carried out in the past several decades points to a direct connection between an improvement in learners’ vocabulary base and range and the quality of their academic writing (Johns, 1981, 1997; Jordan, 1997; Nation, 1990, 2001)”.

2.3 Vocabulary problems of Arab and Libyan students

2.3.1 Libyan students learning English in the UK

According to English (1999: 18), there has been a tremendously rapid increase in the number of overseas students who have come to study in the UK, “which has meant that Institutions are having to deal with a wide range of difficulties encountered by students from vastly different linguistic and cultural backgrounds”. Among these are significant numbers of Libyan students, who can be considered a subset of the population of students with Arabic as L1.

There are two main reasons for Libyan students, as for most overseas students, to choose to study at British universities: “Firstly, they believe that British university education might give them better prospects in their future careers and, secondly, they also hope to dramatically improve their English language ability by studying through the medium of English” (Silva & Matsuda, 2001: xix).

These students will be the main subject of this dissertation. Therefore, the difficulties of vocabulary in academic writing of Libyan students will be discussed further in the next section.

2.3.2 Challenges for Arabic speakers learning English

Many studies indicate that Arab students face problems in writing in English (Bacha, 2002; Rabab’ah, 2005; McMullen, 2009; Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Ibrahim and Nambiar, 2011). Bacha (2002: 161) points out that these problems make it difficult for Arab students to “cope with the institution’s literacy expectations”.

This is perhaps unsurprising, as, in a 1993 survey, Silva reported that second-language students writing in English spent less time on preparation, used fewer words, made more mistakes, had difficulty organising material around objectives and had problems with grammar and lexical variety (cited in Brown, 2001). However, “exposing NNS students to academic text and discourse for many years does not seem to lead to native-like uses of syntactic and lexical features of written text and, by outcome, cognitively advanced information processing” (Hinkel, 2002: 260).

One of these problems is vocabulary (Ibrahim and Nambiar, 2011; Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Bacha, 2002; Daoud, 1998). Vocabulary poses difficulties for most foreign learners of English, no matter what their proficiency levels are. According to Hinkel (2010: 530), “The results of dozens of analyses indicate that even advanced and highly educated L2 writers, such as doctoral students enrolled in universities in English-speaking countries and professionals, have a severely limited lexical and syntactic repertoire, compared to their NS[native speaker] peers.”

I would suggest that the vocabulary problems of Arab learners of English can be grouped into the following categories:

1. Problems in using the appropriate vocabulary;
2. Problems as a result of translation;
3. Problems as a result of:
 - a. mother tongue;
 - b. culture;

4. Problems because of the Latin origin of academic vocabulary;
5. Problems because of the limited English vocabulary of the Libyan students.

Students experience problems in using the appropriate vocabulary (Swan, 1997). This may be a general problem faced by all NNS, as may problems as a result of translation (Banda, 2009). Problems as a result of mother tongue and culture (Swan, 1997) as well as the Latin origin of academic vocabulary (Corson, 1997) may also face non- European speakers of English, and Libyan students face particular problems because of their limited English vocabulary as a result of the ban on English language teaching for many years.

In this study, I use studies concerned with Arabic learners because Khuwaileh and Shoumli (2000) in their article in *Language, Culture and Curriculum* mention that the findings of these papers “can be extended to other learners of English who speak Arabic as a first language and English as a foreign or second language”.

Concerning the first of the problems identified, in his study Daoud (1998: 397) stated that Arab students failed to choose appropriate vocabulary and expressions. The reasons for this problem may lie in the observation of Johnson (2000: 168), who points out that “thousands of common English words have more than one meaning. Johnson, Moe, and Baumann (1983) found 6,530 multiple-meaning words in their corpus of 9,000 words for elementary schools, 72% of the entire corpus.” Moon (1997) considers multi-word items a problem of NNS. Chen (2002 in Mojica, 2010: 26) indicates the problem to be “confusion about the subtle differences among similar words due to insufficient cultural knowledge.”

In addition, Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2000) observed that Arab students tend to assemble their ideas and compose in Arabic before translating them into the second language. Similarly, Khan (2011: 1253) states that Arabs tend to translate into their mother tongue, leading to the problem that “interpreting and learning of lexical items with the help mother-tongue leads to collocationally wrong use of words in the target language”. According to Tahaineh (in Khan, 2010: 81), in the writing of Arab students, “the interference of the mother tongue was statistically significant [and] amounted to (67%) of the total errors.” This may be the reason for Umair’s (2011: 232) report that Arab commentators believed that the second language was not suited to expressing Arabic concepts. Moreover, Abu Rass (1994 in Abu Rass, 2011: 207) stated that “Arab students fail to consider audience in their mind when they write in English... because they usually assume that the reader understands them”.

On the other hand, Meara (1984 in Swan, 1997: 175) concludes that the different preferred techniques for word-storage and handing between Arabic and English “lead to L2 words being stored with completely inappropriate entries”. These factors help account for the observations that “Arab learners of English encounter problems in both speaking and writing [and] most Arab students usually fumble in their writing skills” (Abdul Haq, 1982 in Khan, 2001: 1249).

Another area of possible difficulty for Arab writers is that Arabic-speakers often have difficulty in spelling English words (Bahloul, 2007; Hayes-Harb, 2006), largely owing to the fact that only long vowels are written in Arabic (Thompson and Ružić, 1983 in Andrews, 2009: 28). This is compounded by the fact that “many Arabic-speakers do not use dictionaries for spelling or vocabulary

purposes” (Thompson and Ružić, 1983, in Andrews, 2009: 28). All these problems are associated with the students’ mother tongue (Arabic), as noted by Palmer *et al.* (2008, in Bani- Abdo and Breen, 2010: 40): “the vast differences between English and Arabic... could easily interfere with the learner’s acquisition of English (L2).” Laufer (1997) also stresses that students experience difficulties in learning second language vocabulary if their first language utilises a different system of writing.

Regarding problems related to culture, Ibrahim and Nambiar (2011: 1715) claim that “Arabic students suffer a culture shock.” As Kelly and Moogan (2012) state, the culture shock has a negative influence on the academic performance of the international students. Therefore, it is no surprise that, when learners from Arab countries arrive in the West with the intention of improving their language skills, they have difficulties adjusting to a very different culture and a learning regime that requires them to take a level of responsibility for directing their own education that they are not used to. Unfamiliarity with the teaching style can lead the student to become daunted or bewildered (Ryan, 1997: 185; Jones, 1999). Moreover, Banda (2009) and Scovel (1978 in Agbalizu, 2007) stressed how increased anxiety was a possible cause of impaired academic performance.

Another disadvantage that students with Arabic as L1 may have is that they are unfamiliar with the many words of Latin origin in English, a problem that speakers of Romance languages do not have (Corson, 1997; Thompson and Ružić, 1983 in Andrews, 2009). In particular, almost all the words included in the AWL discussed above have their ultimate origin in Latin (Corson, 1997).

2.3.3 Learning experience of Libyan students

The problem of the limited English vocabulary of Libyan students is due to the history of English teaching in Libya. Up to the 1980s, teaching concentrated on memorising vocabulary and on grammar and reading comprehension, all of which were taught by spoken drills and reading aloud. Then, for political reasons between the Libyan government and the West, English was not taught in schools or universities from the late 1980s until a new curriculum was introduced in 2000 (Orafi and Borg, 2009: 24), causing significant problems for Libyan students. The years-long ban on English language teaching negatively affected the vocabulary of teachers. Abbasian and Khajari (2010: 50) found a correlation between what he termed “lexical attrition” and the amount of time for which teachers were not exposed to the English language, and this lack of exposure to the language was the major cause of such attrition, even in normal circumstances. In addition, Crystal (2003) points out that an ill supported environment and lack of government support decrease the quality teachers’ ability to teach the language.

The result of all these factors, the low skill and qualification levels of teachers (Adeyemo, 2005; McGraner and Saenz, 2009), the traditional methodology employed to teach English in Libya (Orafi and Borg, 2009) and limited exposure to English (Banda, 2009) was a negative effect on the English language skills of students. This problem made difficulties for Libyan students in their academic writing as “limited vocabulary would affect the message which the writer tries to convey.” (Puteh *et al.*, 2010:581).

On the other hand, Andrews (2009: 13) states that “Libyan students have some knowledge of two Latinate languages, French and Italian, therefore, they should be more familiar with academic words and it should be less challenging for them to produce them in free production form.” I disagree with the point made by some authors (e.g. Andrews, 2009; Bani-Abdo and Breen, 2010) who claim that the history of Libya as Italian, French and British colonies may help the Libyan people to acquire the language of those countries. Libya’s colonial experience was relatively short-lived and has been over for a considerable period of time. In recent years, there has been no colonial education system in which young people are expected to acquire these languages, and “language exists only in the brains and mouths and ears and hands and eyes of its users” (Crystal, 2003).

2.4 Causes of Arabic students’ problems in English

Daoud (1998: 393) observes that Arab students’ “overall low writing proficiency is due to lack of experience in this area”. However, there are additional causes for these problems, including, as observed by Fareh (2010: 3602), that most teachers in Arab countries adopt the Grammar Translation method and, “although many of these teachers are BA degree holders, most of them have no teaching certificates that qualify them for teaching. Most of them did not take any course in teaching English as foreign language.” Furthermore, Na'ama (2011: 151) is of the opinion that the problems faced by Arab students in writing and speaking “may be due to the methods of learning and the learning environment, which may be said to be unsuitable for learning a foreign language... [This] has been attributed to various factors: lack of knowledge, English language department curricula, teaching

methodology, lack of the target language environment and the learners' motivation.” Fareh, (2010: 3602) further indicates that teachers in Arab countries use “[the] fragmented approach [which] reduces the communicative competence of learners” and these teachers “believe that language can be better taught as a number of discrete or disconnected rather than integrated skills.” As a result, writing is taught independently of reading (Fareh, 2010: 3603).

El Sadig (2010) and Syed (2003) similarly argued that issues in English language teaching in Arab countries, such as student numbers, available materials, enough qualified teachers and teaching methodologies, have not been addressed and concluded that Arab students suffered problems in communication largely as a result of these outdated educational policies.

In addition, Rabab’ah (2005) pointed out that students were accepted by English language departments, in most of the Arab universities, regardless of proficiency and likelihood of being able to complete the course, despite it being acknowledged that, “educational background is an important factor that influences students’ expectations about writing and, ultimately, their success in writing classes” (Corson, 1997: 56).

2.5 Summary

This chapter has introduced the size of the English language, both in absolute terms and in terms of the size of vocabulary that a learner needs for real-world situations. The historical background to vocabulary teaching was touched on, along with the complex nature of the word knowledge that the learner must be

supported towards attaining, and some of the techniques to achieve this were mentioned. As Cooke (2008) observes, there is a general assumption in the language teaching community that the words which are used most frequently in the situations the learner is likely to encounter are those which should be taught first, however it is also true that there is no single right way to teach vocabulary and no best technique.

In addition, this chapter discussed simultaneously the vocabulary problems of Arab and Libyan students, the effects of these problems on their writing and the reasons behind these problems. According to Pennington and Young (1989, in Al Issa and Sulieman, 2007: 25), “because of limitations of language or cultural inhibitions, ESL [*English second language*] and EFL [*English foreign language*] students may be unable or unwilling to communicate as freely as native speakers would in written or oral forms of faculty evaluation.”

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter sets out the research questions which have been decided based on the findings of the literature review in the previous chapter, along with the methodology adopted to address these questions. Then the reasons for choosing the sampling strategy are set out and the survey questionnaire design is discussed.

3.1 Research questions

This project aims to investigate the relationship between the vocabulary knowledge of Libyan students studying in British universities, its effect on their learning experience and the reasons behind this experience. Therefore, the research aims to look at this issue by answering these two research questions:

1. What are the main vocabulary problems faced by MA ETL Libyan students at Nottingham Trent University in their academic writing?
2. What are the main reasons behind these problems?

It is proposed that these questions are central to the learning experience of a particular group of students (Libyan MA ELT students) in one particular context (Nottingham Trent University). Through the literature survey in Chapter 2, it was established that there are a number of potential issues associated with vocabulary which could affect the experience of these students: as non-native speakers, as

Arab students and as Libyans with a unique experience of education in the English language. Because of the many potential factors affecting students' experience, the primary method of research decided on was a questionnaire survey. The details of the research methodology, the sample size and the design of the survey instruments are considered together with two questionnaires and supporting interviews. They are given in the appendices.

3.2 Research design

As was seen in Chapter 2, the specific vocabulary needs of English second-language students in general have been widely studied, as has the additional language requirement for second language speakers entering further and higher education in British universities (see, for example, Corson, 1997; Nation, 1990, 1993, 2006; Schmitt, 2000, 2005, 2010). However, the literature on native Arabic speakers is more general and speculative, and no studies were found specifically on the experience of Libyan students (see, for example, Bacha, 2002; Rabab'ah, 2005; McMullen, 2009; Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Ibrahim and Nambiar, 2011), although their unique status, due to the status and history of language teaching in Libya, has been noted. Therefore, a study on even a limited sample of Libyan students is a useful contribution to research in this area. There is also plenty of opportunity to expand this research in future to cover the experience of students at all levels of education, at a variety of colleges, universities and other educational establishments, studying a variety of different courses and from more diverse backgrounds in the Arabic-speaking world. This research should therefore be seen as a case study (Saunders *et al.*, 2009), and, as such, the sample of a small group

of students in one particular university and on one particular course should be seen as an advantage, helping to produce more focussed results. It should be remembered, however, that the experience of a student from, for example, the UAE studying engineering at a redbrick university may be very different from the experiences of this group of MA ELT Libyan students.

3.3 Sampling strategy

Because of the constraints of time and resources available for this research project, the sample for this study was drawn from Libyan students known to the researcher. Therefore, participants were all postgraduate students enrolled at Misurata University and studying in the UK at NTU. The sampling strategy can, therefore, be seen as purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Purposive sampling allows a study to reach a large proportion of a limited sampling, in this case the entire sample, providing a “typical case” which further research can build on (Saunders *et al.*, 2009: 232). An alternative strategy would be snowball sampling, using the participants of this study to identify further subjects through their networks of contacts in the education system in the UK and in Libya. This could be the only way for the study to contact a large segment of relevant participants (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). However, owing to the constraints discussed above, and as the population already identified is sufficient for the case study approach discussed above, purposive sampling is considered appropriate to this study.

3.4 Participants

The students forming the sample are non-native English speakers and the mother tongue of all of them is Arabic. At the time of the survey, they were between 20 and 47 years of age. These students were all enrolled in MA ELT classes at NTU for two semesters and one of them is now a teacher in the English department at Misurata University. All of them except one had taken International English Language Testing System (*IELTS*) tests and their scores were between 5.5 and 6.5. This is on a nine-band scale on which 9 represents an “expert user” of the language and where band 5 of the scale represents “modest user” and band 6 represents “competent user” (*IELTS*, n.d.). All students enrolled in these classes have a Bachelor’s degree from a university in Libya; seven of them began studying English as teenagers and three of them started in secondary school (for more details about the Libyan education system see Appendix 2: 85). They have been in the United Kingdom for between 6 and 12 months.

Although the sample size is small, due to the constraints noted above, there are, nevertheless, advantages to this limited survey. Because of the close connection to the researcher, a high response rate was expected and achieved. The participants all have similar English proficiency levels and similar learning experiences in England, simplifying the analysis of the responses. Because of this small sample size, this should be seen as a preliminary case study (*Saunders et al.*, 2009) suggesting areas for further work on the learning experiences of Arab students in general, and Libyan students in particular, in British and other non-Arab universities. This will be discussed further in the Conclusion.

Table 3.1 summarises the backgrounds of the students who participated in this study:

Table 3.1: Students' backgrounds

Pseudonym	Gender	Years learning English	Qualifications
Laila	Female	More than 8 years	BA
Mawada	Female	More than 8 years	BA
Salem	Male	More than 8 years	BA
Khalid	Male	More than 8 years	BA
Rami	Male	More than 8 years	BA
Huda	Female	More than 8 years	BA
Noha	Female	More than 8 years	BA
Ghada	Female	More than 8 years	BA
Osama	Male	More than 8 years	BA
Fadi	Male	More than 8 years	BA

3.5 Questionnaire design

The first question to be decided with regard to the questionnaire design was the method of delivery. The students to be surveyed were based both in the UK and Libya during the time available to complete the survey. The survey, therefore, had to be capable of reaching them wherever they were. In designing the questionnaire, because I wanted the participants to be comfortable, I used mainly *closed questions*, which are quicker and easier to answer as they require minimal writing (Saunders *et al.*, 2009: 374). Detailed questionnaire design was done in a number of stages. First, a large number of questions suggested directly by the

literature review were identified. Most of these questions were designed to respond to specific literature findings, for example, asking about participants' experience or use of the *Academic Word List*, or asking them about the importance of additional vocabulary assistance. The survey questions were then refined in discussion with my supervisor and my colleagues (Saunders *et al.*, 2009: 367) until a draft questionnaire was decided on. At the same time, a preliminary questionnaire was designed to determine the main problems facing the Libyan MA ELT students in their studies in a British university, related to academic writing. This was distributed by hand to seven participants and by email to the remaining three. The pre-questionnaire is included as Appendix A (p. 86). The responses to the preliminary survey were then used to refine the design of the final questionnaire and to focus it more on problems related to vocabulary and on answering the research questions as set out above: that is, to determine in detail the problems related to English vocabulary and to try to discover the underlying reasons for these problems. The final questionnaire is included as Appendix 4 and was distributed as an email attachment to four participants and by hand to six of them.

The questionnaires were followed up with interviews. The original plan was to do all the interviews face-to-face; however, it was not possible to travel to Libya because of the political situation. Therefore, interviews with four participants were carried out remotely, using Skype, and six were interviewed face-to-face.

3.5.1 Preliminary questionnaire

The intention of the preliminary questionnaire (for a copy of the preliminary questionnaire, see appendix 3: 86) was to determine the main problems found by Libyan MA students in their academic writing. It consisted of two sections, the first designed to determine whether the participants perceived that they had problems or not. The second section asked about the problems of the participants in specific areas, as suggested by a number of researchers (e.g. Bacha, 2002; Rabab'ah, 2005; McMullen, 2009; Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Ibrahim and Nambiar, 2011). The participants were asked to rank these in order of importance. The areas were:

Vocabulary problems,

Paraphrasing,

Summarising,

Organisation of ideas,

Spelling,

Grammatical problems.

Participants were also invited to identify any other issues not mentioned in this list. Given the findings of the literature review, it is not surprising that all the students identified vocabulary as their most significant problem, although their rankings of the other issues varied, as will be discussed in Chapter 4. This important feedback confirmed the importance of the research questions identified and led to completion of development of the main survey.

3.5.2 Main questionnaire

The final, main questionnaire (for a copy of the main questionnaire, see appendix 4:88) consisted of 34 questions organised in four parts. Part one asked for some personal and demographic details, for example: age, gender, education. This information is important to establish the properties of the group participating in this case study, especially as, though relatively homogeneous in many ways, the sample is diverse in both gender and age.

Part two asked about the participants' language skills, including first language, additional languages and experience and proficiency in English. Based on the literature review, it was important to establish the first and additional languages of the participants and their amount and level of formal learning in English. This section finished with participants being asked to assess some of the barriers to their use of English and their own confidence and fluency in using English in situations they might be expected to encounter. Overall, this section was designed to assess the participants' underlying language skills, formal training in English and confidence in using English in real-world situations.

Part three of the questionnaire focused on students' specific experiences of learning and using English, both on their course and in their daily life in the UK. In addition, this section included a question on British culture related to students' experience. Students were asked to assess 23 statements about their experiences in Libya and the UK on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The Likert scale was chosen as the most frequently used technique for

rating questions (Saunders *et al.*, 2009) and it is also likely to be a rating system with which the participants are already familiar. Many of these questions asked participants to rate directly factors identified in the literature review as having a direct influence on the learning experience of overseas, particularly Arab students. As one example, Question 20 asks students to rate this statement:

I prefer to compose my essays and projects in my first language, then translate them into English.

This is based on the observation of Khan (2011: 1253), included in Chapter Two, that Arabs tend to translate into their mother tongue, leading to problems of interpretation.

The final questions of this section asked participants to rate the factors which they considered most important in determining their ability to communicate freely in English, and asked about the strategies that participants had undertaken to cope with any vocabulary issues. These questions are placed at the end of the section as they use a different ranking system and separating them out avoids confusion with the Likert scale questions above.

Part four sought to obtain information about the help and assistance that students received or felt they should or could helpfully receive with their English vocabulary. This part consisted of eight statements and, to draw a clear picture about their answers, it asked participants to give examples. To increase the reliability of this assessment of possible help, they were asked to assess both what help they should have received and had not, and what they had actually received. This section was placed last, as the questions needed the most thought and

required the participant to express an opinion, whereas the earlier questions were more straightforward. This is consistent with the advice in Saunders *et al.* (2009).

3.5.3 Interviews

The purpose of the interviews (see appendix 6: 105 which gives the transcription of the interviews) was to follow up the questionnaire and provide additional narrative information to answer the research questions (McDonough and McDonough, 1997). Two forms of one-to-one interview were used, face-to-face and telephone (Skype) interviews. This was necessary because the political situation prevented travel to Libya to conduct face-to-face interviews. Cater (2011) advises using the Skype interview “when participants are located at distance from the researcher and from each other, conducting face-to-face interviews becomes expensive and time-consuming. Without a research grant, the travel time required and financial cost may be an insurmountable barrier. In addition, many participants live busy lives and may only be able to participate if the interviews are broken up over a period of time.” Booth (2008) and Gay *et al.* (2011) consider Skype as a data collection tool and Bryman (2008) agrees with them.

The type of interview used was the semi-structured interview, which is appropriate to the nature of this research as an exploratory study (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). The researcher had a list of issues to be covered, but was able to omit or add questions or change “the order of the questions... depending on the flow of the conversation” (Saunders *et al.*, 2009: 312). Participants were given the chance, in

an informal setting and with minimal prompting, to freely discuss the problems they experienced arising from English vocabulary issues and the reasons behind them and the questions were designed to put them at ease (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). The interviews were audio-recorded as suggested by Wallace (1998) and transcripts made, which are included as Appendices 6-B to 6-K. The interviews are used to provide additional analysis and narrative in the results chapter (Chapter 4).

The semi-structured interviews mostly covered the same general areas as the main questionnaire described above, but there was an additional theme (Kendall, 2008) in which participants were asked to identify additional factors they perceived to have affected their experiences and, in particular, how recent political developments and incidents associated with the Middle East had affected these experiences. This is particularly relevant to this study since, as discussed in Chapter Two, English language learning in Libya had been subject to political influence previously, being for several years removed from school curricula before being reinstated.

3.5.4 Strengths and weaknesses of the questionnaires and interviews

Because participants were in two different locations, several different survey methodologies were used: handout and return surveys, email surveys, face-to-face interviews and Skype interviews. This could potentially introduce bias into the survey results. For the handout and return survey, the presence of a researcher who was known to the participants could influence the responses given, and “any

contamination of respondents' answers will reduce your data's reliability" (Saunders *et al.*, 2009: 363). However, the researcher also had the opportunity to control the environment in which the survey was completed and had complete confidence that the survey was received and understood by the intended participant. For the internet-mediated survey in the form of a questionnaire distributed by email, Witmer *et al.* (1999, in Saunders *et al.* 2009: 364) indicate that "most users read and respond to their own email at their personal computer." As the participants in the remote survey and their circumstances were also known to the researcher, there was very high confidence that the participants would answer their emails themselves. Therefore, although potential bias must be recognised, it should be similar for all questionnaire respondents.

The limited time available was another reason for choosing handouts and internet-mediated questionnaires that could be quickly distributed, completed and returned to the researcher. In addition, the alternative of a postal or take-and-return survey would incur "costs of reproducing the questionnaire, clerical support and entering the data for computer analysis", as well as needing additional time and coordination, all of which made such survey types impractical (Saunders *et al.*, 2009: 366). Therefore, the survey distributed by hand or email was decided to be most practical. In fact, according to some researchers, there are "no differences between the modes of delivery" (Denscombe, 2007: 10), and therefore it was possible that type of delivery would not affect the outcome of the survey. This is supported by the results, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Carrying out some of the interviews remotely has some potential disadvantages, as identified by Saunders *et al.* (2009), including difficulty in

controlling the pace of the interview, issues with note-taking and lack of opportunity to witness non-verbal behaviour. However, the video- conferencing facilities of Skype minimized these issues, and the technology made it possible to complete these interviews where the researcher could not otherwise have done so because of the political situation. Similarly to the situation with the questionnaires, the familiarity of the researcher with the participants was both a possible source of bias and also a moderating factor, preventing the face-to-face interviews from being too different from the remote ones.

3.6 Sample size and response

Questionnaires were distributed to ten students enrolled at Misurata University, five female and five male. These formed the entire remaining intake of the course at the time of the survey. Completed questionnaires were received from all ten of the sample, justifying the sampling strategy, using a limited sample known to the researcher and approached personally and by email. No significant problems, therefore, occurred in the data collection section of this project.

Although this sample is small, it is appropriate for this research as a case study which can be built on in future. In addition, the response rate was 100% for the sample of Libyan students enrolled at the time, so it can clearly be considered a representative study, if of a limited sample. However, it must be noted that caution must be exercised in drawing general conclusions from such a small sample.

3.6.1 Procedure

According to Bryman (2008), and Howitt and Cramer (2008), ethical issues were an important part of this research. Therefore, the participants' permission was obtained before they began (for a sample of a participant's permission, see Appendix 1: 84). Participants were told that the questions had no right or wrong answers and that the purpose was to investigate Libyan students' main problems in academic writing during their study at NTU, as the first step, then to understand the reasons for their problems with English vocabulary as a second step. It was made clear to the participants that the information was being collected for research purposes only, and that no personally identifiable information, such as student ID, name or email address would be collected but only the demographic data needed for analysis of the responses, such as age and gender.

3.6.2 Summary

This chapter has presented an overview of the research questions and methodology of this research study. It has explained how the research questions and literature review informed the research methodology and the design of the research instruments, the preliminary and final questionnaires and the follow-up interviews. The chapter also discussed the study population and the research sample. The following chapter will present the results obtained through these research methods.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

In this study, my purpose was (a) to discover the vocabulary difficulties in academic writing that Libyan MA ELT students faced during their study at Nottingham Trent University, and (b) to determine the reasons behind these problems. My focus was on the vocabulary difficulties revealed by the findings of a pre-questionnaire which asked the sample students about their main problems in academic writing.

As a result, the study addressed these research questions:

1. What are the main vocabulary problems faced by MA ETL Libyan students at Nottingham Trent University in their academic writing?
2. What are the main reasons behind these problems?

The methodology used to address these questions was presented in Chapter 3 and consisted of two questionnaires supported by one-to-one interviews. The results from these techniques are presented below.

4.2 Results: Language background

All respondents had knowledge of exactly two languages, Arabic and English. This contradicts the assertion of Andrews (2009), as reported in Chapter 2, that Libyan students have some familiarity with French and/or Italian, both Romance languages derived from Latin, and his belief that this would give them more familiarity with academic language derived largely from Latin (Corson, 1997).

4.3 Results: English level and training

All ten respondents had studied English as a compulsory subject at secondary school and university. Three of them had also studied English at elementary school. Total time of study was more than eight years for all respondents.

Nine of the ten had taken an IELTS test. All results were in the range 5 to 6.5. the significance of this will be further discussed in the discussion section of this chapter (Section 4.5). However, it is noted here that a score of 6.5 is rated by the IELTS as “probably acceptable” only for “linguistically less demanding academic courses” according to the testing organization (IELTS, 2007:5). For more demanding course such as linguistics, 7.0 is probably acceptable, 7.5 and above is acceptable and all scores of 6.5 and below need further study (IELTS, 2007).

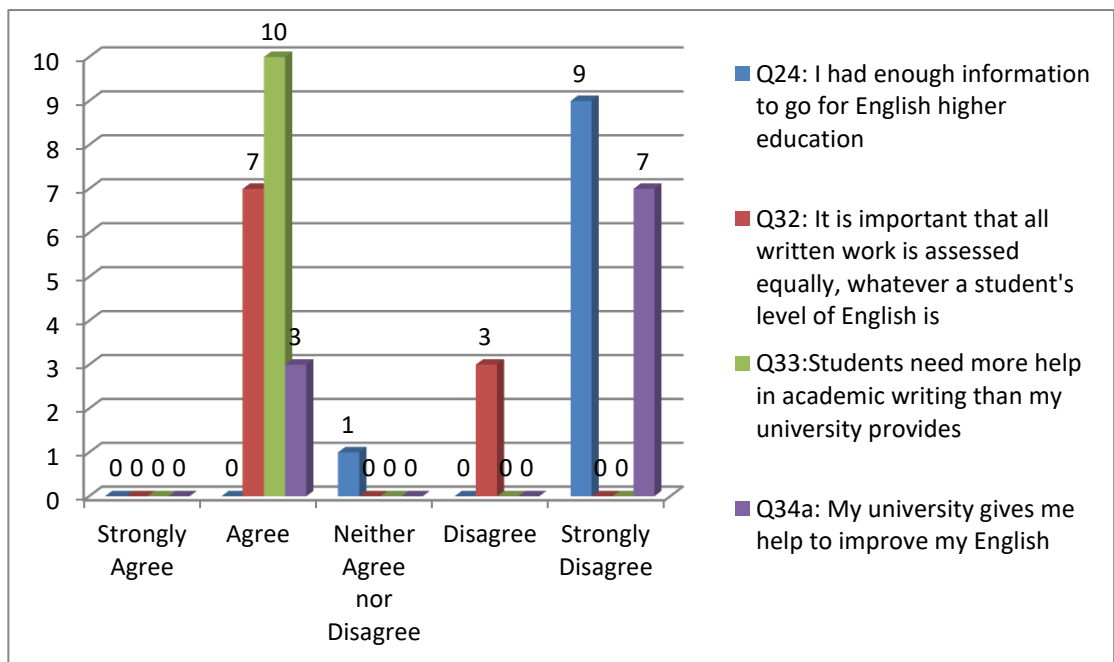
This finding is directly related to the findings on the additional language support offered to students by their university. All ten respondents agreed that “Students need more help in academic writing than my school, university or college provides” (Q33). Seven respondents also strongly disagreed with the statements “My school, college or university gives me help to improve my

English” (Q34a) whereas three respondents chose “agree” for this statement, with one example of the type of help received (Q34b) being “my teacher explains the steps that help me to improve my essay.” None of the respondents had taken a specific course to help them with academic writing in English (Q14) and to the question, “I had enough information... to go for higher education in English medium universities” (Q24), nine respondents strongly disagreed, with just one respondent stating that they neither agreed nor disagreed.

A majority of respondents (seven) agreed that “it is important that all written work is assessed equally, whatever a student’s level of English is”, with three disagreeing with this proposition. Interviewee H (Appendix 6-H:119) stated explicitly that, “*teachers should help the foreign students... they should not behave with us like English students or the native speakers.*”

The responses to these questions are summarised in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Language support



Question 27 asked the respondents to identify from a list of options the factors that make it difficult for them to communicate freely in English. Their choices are as shown in Table 4.1 below, with 1 = most important to 8 = least important, and the responses have been ordered from most important to least important.

Table 4.1: Factors Affecting English Communication

Factor	Average Rating
Teaching methodology in Libya	1.0
English language department curricula	2.0
Lack of the target language environment	3.6
Teaching methodology and assessment in the UK	4.0
Others: Not enough qualified local teachers	5.0
Lack of knowledge	5.7
Lack of available materials	6.9
Large student numbers	8.0
Your motivation	8.8

As can be seen, the respondents identified as the top three factors issues related to their learning experience in Libya. This suggests that Libyan teaching is inappropriate at several levels including wrong methods, wrong curricula and wrong teaching environment. However, it is clear that these highly-rated criteria are also some of the ones that can most easily be put right, and factors such as individual motivation, student numbers and available materials, which are potentially harder to resolve, were rated as relatively unimportant. It is, therefore,

possible to improve this situation by adopting more appropriate teaching methods, which can be done through programmes such as the one the respondents are enrolled in at Nottingham Trent University.

When asked in interviews about the teaching approach in Libya, nine of the ten respondents mentioned *Grammar Translation method* as either the main or only approach with the tenth describing the instructors as “*using very traditional way*” (Interviewee N, Appendix6-H:119).

In response to Q11, “What do you think is the most difficult aspect in learning new words?”, all respondents selected “Using words appropriately”. This suggests that the students are less concerned with acquiring vocabulary and more concerned with learning to apply it appropriately in academic work.

4.4 Results: General and cultural experience

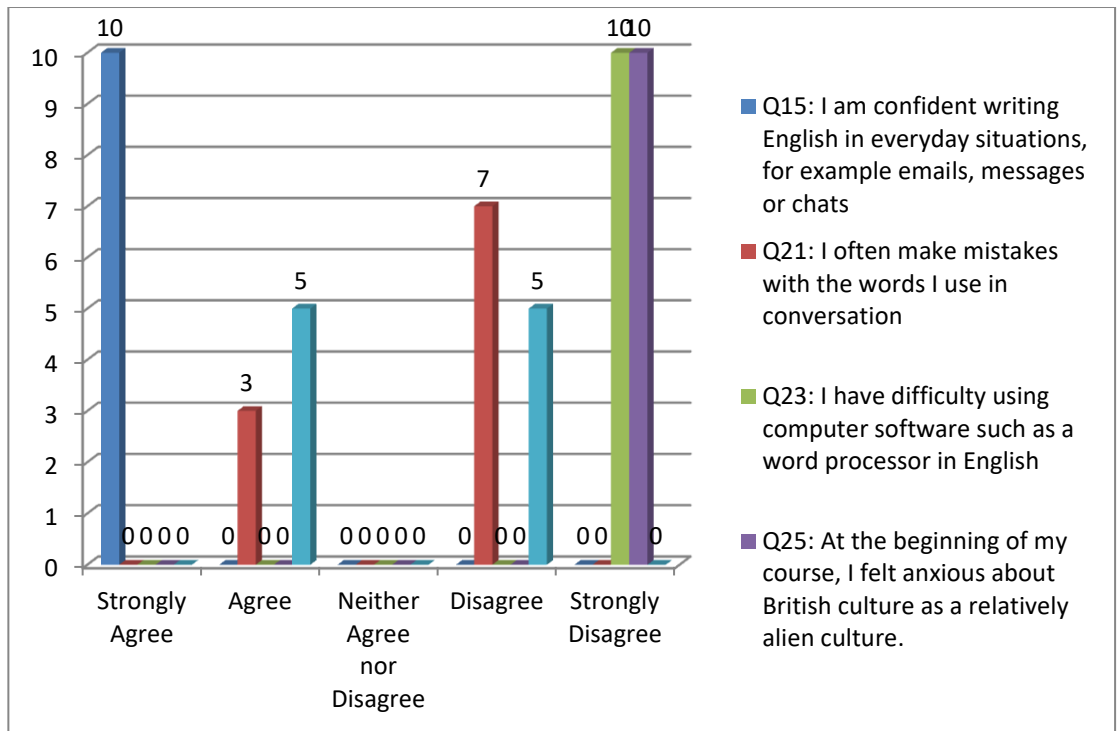
This section of the results presentation will aggregate responses to several questions related to the respondents’ experience of their general ability to communicate in English and how they relate to cultural factors. The relevant questions are given in Table 4.2 below, with the results presented as the arithmetic mean of the responses collected from all respondents, rated from 1 – Strongly Disagree to 5 – Strongly Agree. That is, a mean rating of 5.0 would indicate that the whole sample Strongly Agree with the statement.

Table 4.2: General communication ability

	Statement	Rating
Q15	I am confident writing English in everyday situations, for example emails, messages or chats	5 (Strongly Agree)
Q21	I often make mistakes with the words I use in conversation	2.6 (Disagree/ Neither Agree nor Disagree)
Q23	I have difficulty using computer software such as a word processor in English	1 (Strongly Disagree)
Q25	At the beginning of my course, I felt anxious about British culture as a relatively alien culture.	1 (Strongly Disagree)
Q31	It was difficult to adapt to the teaching style in my university in the UK	4 (Agree)

Figure 4.2 shows the distribution of the responses:

Figure 4.2: General communication ability



It is clear that the sample completing the questionnaire were on the whole comfortable with their experience in the UK and with the general use of English. Some tendency to make mistakes in conversational English is to be expected, and the only significant cultural issue which affected the sample was the teaching style in the University, reflecting a different teaching culture from that experienced in their home country, Libya.

4.5 Results: Vocabulary-related factors

The results sections above have mainly presented the background issues of the sample population. This section aims to address the principal research question:

What are the main vocabulary problems faced by MA ETL Libyan students at Nottingham Trent University in their academic writing?

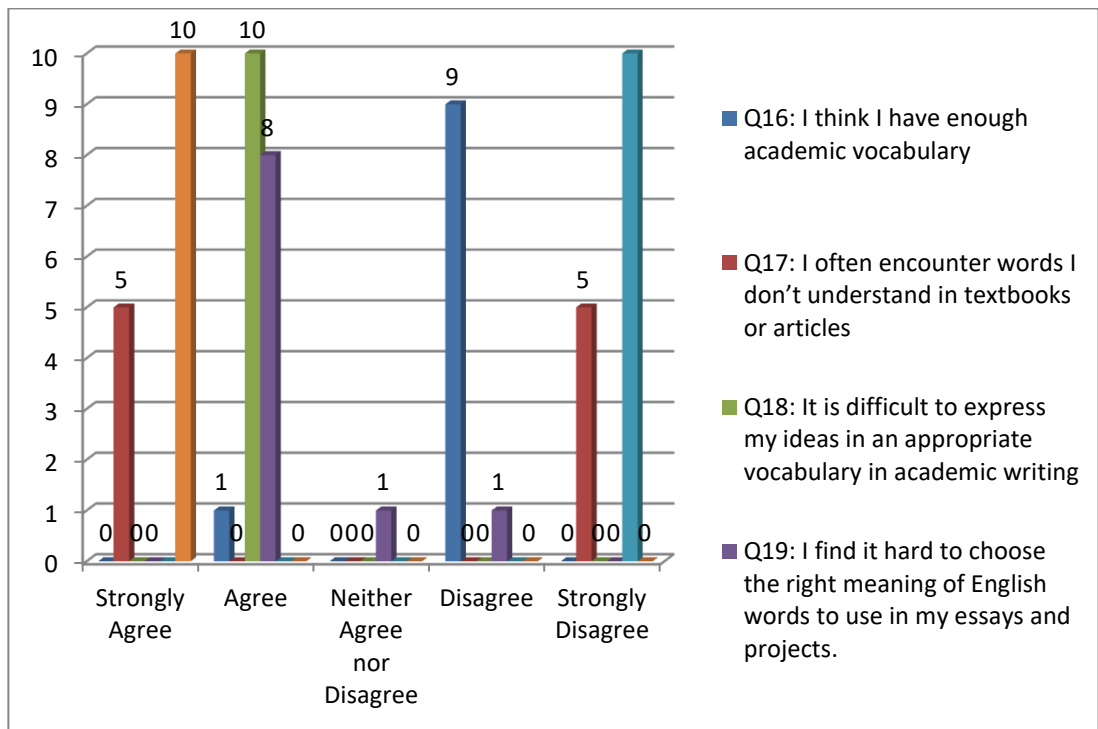
Therefore, the questionnaire asked a number of questions that were directly related to students' perceptions of vocabulary issues in their learning experience. These are set out in Table 4.2 below, along with a numerical rating of the average of the respondents' ratings (as in Section 4.3 above).

Table 4.3: Vocabulary-related factors

	Statement	Rating
Q16	I think I have enough academic vocabulary	2.2
Q17	I often encounter words I don't understand in textbooks or articles	4.5
Q18	It is difficult to express my ideas in an appropriate vocabulary in academic writing	4.0
Q19	I find it hard to choose the right meaning of English words to use in my essays and projects.	3.7
Q20	I prefer to compose my essays and projects in my first language and then translate them into English.	1.0
Q26	I believe that my experience of how written English was taught in Libya affects negatively my performance on my course.	5.0

Figure 4.3 shows the distribution of the responses:

Figure 4.3 Vocabulary-related factors



This set of results gives a picture of students who have significant difficulties with the knowledge and selection of English vocabulary. However, the fact that they all compose in English rather than translating from Arabic suggests that they are confident with general English (as shown in the section above) but less comfortable with “academic” English. This also appears to contradict assertions in Chapter 2 that Arabic-speaking students were uncomfortable writing in English and preferred to compose in Arabic and then translate (Khuwaileh & Shoumali 2000, in Abu Rass, 2011; Khan, 2011; Tahaine, in Khan, 2011).

Questions 28 to 30 asked respondents to rate a number of factors related to their response to issues related to vocabulary as either always, sometimes or never. In Table 4.4 and Figure 4.3 below, all the responses are summarised.

Table 4.4: Responses to vocabulary issues

		Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Q28	When I come across a word I don't understand, I consult a dictionary.	0	0	1	9
Q29	When I come across a word I don't understand, I ask a friend or a colleague.	0	9	1	0
Q30	When I come across a word I don't understand, I ask a teacher, lecturer or supervisor.	0	0	1	9

Figure 4.4: Responses to vocabulary issues



These questionnaire responses suggest that the respondents do not use a dictionary extensively. However, this is contradicted by some of the interview responses:

... sometimes I just pick up the dictionary and just pick up words without knowing if it is academic (Interviewee L, Appendix 6-B: 105).

... I depend on my dictionary all the time (Interviewee M, Appendix 6-C: 108).

... I depend on my dictionaries, internet that is (Interviewee S, Appendix 6-D: 111).

... sometimes I check my dictionary (Interviewee H, Appendix 6-G: 117).

This suggests that respondents are using a dictionary not to check for word meaning but as a more general vocabulary resource: also, they find internet dictionaries including translation (Arab/English) dictionaries more valuable than

“traditional” dictionaries. Nevertheless, this reinforces that respondents are rather haphazard in checking their vocabulary knowledge. This is reinforced in the next section.

4.5.1 Student vocabulary strategies

In the interviews, the respondents were asked about the specific strategies they used to improve their English vocabulary. The responses are set out in Table 4.5 below, noting that the total is greater than ten as those with strategies for vocabulary learning may use more than one technique.

Table 4.5

No strategy	2
Academic reading	4
Making vocabulary lists	2
Memorising word lists	2
Consulting a dictionary	4

In addition, one interviewee mentioned that to improve their vocabulary they would “*listen to English music, watch films or English programmes*” (Interviewee H, Appendix 6-G: 117), indicating the importance of cultural and informal routes of vocabulary learning. The overall picture is of a fairly haphazard and informal approach to acquiring new vocabulary. The statement of one interviewee

epitomises this: “*I prefer to learn vocabulary randomly I mean without planning*” (Interviewee H, Appendix 6-G: 117).

4.5.2 Academic word lists

In the questionnaire, only one of the respondents indicated that they used vocabulary from an academic list, the *Academic Word List*. However, in the interview the respondent admitted “*when I said yes I [mean] I try to use it*” (Interviewee N, Appendix 6-H: 119). The other interviewees were generally unaware of the existence of such word lists or the importance of a specific “academic” vocabulary. This may also affect the response to Question 13, “Do you think the Latin origin of most academic vocabulary makes difficulties for you?” – to which all respondents answered “No”. As noted in Chapter 2, the majority of the words in the AWL are of Latin origin. If students are not aware of this vocabulary, its origin is not relevant. Generally, the attitude to such word lists is summed up by Interviewee O (Appendix 6-J: 124):

... during my academic study I did not need a specific kind of vocabulary [or] such lists that are mentioned because I usually collect my vocabulary from other resources so I do not depend on specific lists.

Another interviewee recognised the importance of academic vocabulary without connecting this specifically to the AWL: “*I was not able to write ... a good assignment I mean I used ordinary words which [the University] do not accept.*” (Interviewee M, Appendix 6-C: 108).

4.5.3 Learning experience

Opinions on their learning experience, which in every case was at Nottingham Trent University, ranged from neutral (2) to positive (8), with interviewees repeating comments like “*a good experience*”, “*interesting and useful*”, “*a very good experience I have learnt a lot*”. However, some interviewees restated how their lack of vocabulary had hindered their learning experience:

My teacher was worried about my academic vocabulary... I try to improve... but my problem [is] I cannot find the right word. (Interviewee G, Appendix 6-I: 122)

Libya did not give us academic vocabulary so... I was not able to write... a good assignment. (Interviewee M, Appendix 6- C: 108)

4.6 Discussion

Research Question 1 in this study started with an assumption, justified in Chapter 3 (methodology), that Libyan students in a UK university would have problems with vocabulary. The answers of the participants justify this assumption with regard to academic writing, in agreement with the claims of Ibrahim and Nambiar (2011), Al-Khasawneh (2010), Bacha (2002) and Daoud (1998) that Arabic students face problems with vocabulary in academic writing.

The reasons for this appear to be relatively simple. Typically, those learning a language will tend to use simpler vocabulary where a competent native language speaker could be expected to use more specialist language (Schmitt, 2000). This can be summarised by the interviewee quoted in Section 4.4.2:

I was not able to write ... a good assignment I mean I used ordinary words which [the University] do not accept. (Interviewee M)

In other words, students who are comfortable with English in normal social situations and their everyday lives still have problems in the use of academic vocabulary. This is consistent with the assertion of Pilar and Llach (2011: 50) that “Vocabulary knowledge is central for the writing activity, and moreover, vocabulary is considered a criterion for assessing writing.” In order to be able to write good essays and academic papers and to contribute fully in class, students require a wide, effective vocabulary, therefore to achieve this the best approach is to increase the size of their vocabulary and to recycle and elaborate students’ receptive vocabulary to make it productive (Simpson & Randall, 2000; Schmitt, 2000). Similarly, Paquot (2010) observes that academic vocabulary is likely to be problematic for native as well as non-native speakers. Therefore, the rest of this chapter will look at the aspects of vocabulary acquisition that are specific to the sample population of Arab-speaking Libyan students studying on an MA course in the UK. It will then look at responses to these issues, at some general issues revealed by this research and will finally provide some recommendations and opportunities for further research.

4.6.1 Libyan education system

As seen in Section 4.2, the main reason behind vocabulary problems, according to the students, is the teaching methodology in Libya. All of them believed the teaching methodology in Libya was the main factor in their problems. As revealed

in the interviews, the vast majority of Libyan teachers use the *Grammar-Translation method*. The students believed that this had not equipped them for their current course of study, even though all but three of the sample of ten had studied English as a compulsory subject since elementary school (for more information on the Libyan education system, see Appendix 3: 86).

4.6.2 Language support in the UK

Although, as seen above, the respondents are generally satisfied with their learning experience in the UK, nevertheless, their host institution, in this case Nottingham Trent University, provides limited support. The students agreed that the learning environment was very different from students' previous experience (see Section 4.3), but the respondents identified no specific additional support such as academic writing classes and all agreed that "Students need more help in academic writing than my school, university or college provides" (Q33) (see Section 4.1). As Kelly and Moogan (2012: 37) state, "overseas students are often weaker performers or more demanding students but higher education institutions need to recognise their needs and help them in adapting to the higher education system by managing such diversity". It is critical for a positive student experience in a diverse environment that learners are given appropriate support by the institution (Kelly and Moogan, 2012).

Also putting this into perspective are the relatively low *IELTS* scores of the respondents. It is important to ask, if a UK educational establishment accepts students onto a course with language scores which according to the testing

institute indicate that they need “further study”, with whom does the responsibility lie to ensure that students have access to and undertake this further study? This will be discussed further in the Recommendations below.

4.7 Responses to vocabulary issues

4.7.1 Libyan education system

This study has not looked in detail at the failings of English education in Libya. However, the fact that in Section 4.2 the highest rated factors related to students’ ability to communicate freely in English were all associated with teaching methods in Libya indicates how important this factor is. This was reinforced by interview responses which stressed the weakness of the *Grammar Translation method* used widely in Libya.

These responses are consistent with the findings of Al-Khasawneh (2010) that students associated their issues related to expressing themselves in English with poor English teaching in their country of origin. Although the students surveyed here claimed to be well-motivated, their educational background may have been influenced by Libya’s relative cultural isolation and the lack of English teaching for several years, as discussed in earlier chapters. The students here had been educated in English from an early age, but the lack of public education in the language may well have affected their teachers. The participants’ responses are certainly consistent with poor teaching practices which include the type of teaching, too much use of Arabic including in written exercises, lack of English

expertise among teachers and lack of practice in writing in English (Al-Khasawneh, 2010).

4.7.2 UK higher education system

As indicated above in Section 4.5.2, there are also issues for Libyan students entering UK higher education. These include HE institutions accepting students with an acknowledged need to improve their language skills without giving them formal additional language instruction and a failure, revealed in the questionnaire and interviews, to introduce concepts such as the *AWL*, even though this is acknowledged to be essential vocabulary for students to have their work taken seriously in an academic environment – “*I used ordinary words which [the University] do not accept.*” (Interviewee M, see Section 4.4.2). Except for one student, the respondents did not use any academic vocabulary lists and several were completely unaware of them, although Nation & Waring (1997), Schmitt (2010) and Nation (2006) all encourage students to use these lists, especially the *AWL*.

This is consistent with the work of Ibrahim and Nambiar, who found that overseas students had difficulty in academic writing for projects, and the reasons for this included the different learning environment and also the higher degree of autonomy required in the UK (Ibrahim and Nambiar, 2011). This higher autonomy is also perhaps reflected in the finding that students did not look to their teachers or supervisors for help with vocabulary. As Kelly and Moogan suggest, “tutors need to be more explicit, provide assessment guidance, disseminate

documentation, encourage more reading in advance, incorporate student-centred activities and develop cross-cultural skills” (2012: 40). It is clear from their interview responses that, in spite of their positive experience in the UK, the students surveyed did not have adequate, structured support and guidance for them to get the most out of their studies.

However, perhaps a greater issue with academic support is that students did not receive support in the form of courses on writing, specifically academic writing. As well as an ideal way to introduce some of the issues above such as the AWL and what is required for academic writing in the UK environment, it is acknowledged that adapting to academic writing is an issue for L1 as well as L2 users. Therefore, such a course could be seen as assisting all students on a “level playing field”. Writing needs to be taught, and this teaching should encourage students to use new specialist and academic vocabulary (Lee and Muncie, 2006) and this could include basing exercises partly around word lists such as the AWL.

4.7.3 Individual student response

As well as the responsibility for the higher education establishment to provide adequate support, it is also necessary for students to take responsibility for their own structured learning of vocabulary. In this study, although the respondents all recognised the importance of vocabulary to their academic success, they were unsystematic in their approach to improving their vocabulary. Although several used reading and making and memorising word lists to improve vocabulary, simply to encourage students to read and hope that they will learn essential items

of vocabulary is inefficient and possibly inadequate as the words they need may not be encountered often enough for students to understand their importance and either learn them informally or add them to their own list of identified important vocabulary (Hinkel, 2004). Therefore, reading needs to be directed and this must be related to the findings above: students need to be aware of tools such as the *AWL* and its significance so that they can look out appropriate academic material and interpret and learn from the “academic” language it contains. Reading is important, but there is no evidence that even long-term exposure of students to academic literature over a number of years leads to them acquiring skills in the use of syntax and lexical features which are similar to those of native native speakers, and this will inevitably affect their academic progression (Hinkel, 2002).

4.8 Miscellaneous issues

The literature review in Chapter Two revealed a number of potential factors related to vocabulary issues that were tested in the course of the questionnaire and interviews. The results of the survey for these factors are summarised here. However, it must be remembered that the survey sample is very limited. As with all the results reported here, the findings cannot be generalised without further work.

No students faced problems as a result of reliance on translation, as a result of cultural problems or because of the Latin origin of academic vocabulary. No student said that he/she suffered a culture shock, but at the same time the students

thought that they were not adequately prepared for study in higher education in English medium universities before they came to the UK. For example, one student reported that she had only a general idea about the content of available modules so she chose them without any planning (Appendix 6- I: 122).

Another point that should be mentioned is that all students know only Arabic as L1 and English as L2 and the idea that Libyan students know Italian and French languages (see for example Andrews, 2009; Bani-Abdo and Breen, 2010) appears to be untrue. Andrews (2009: 13) says specifically that “Libyan students have some knowledge of two Latinate languages, French and Italian, therefore, they should be more familiar with academic words and it should be less challenging for them to produce them in free production form.” This claim is not supported, and further work is required to determine if this is a recent change in Libya.

4.9 Summary and recommendations

This chapter has shown that, as expected, Libyan students in UK higher education do have problems with vocabulary for academic purposes. The difficulties they experience can be summarised in the response to Question 11 of the questionnaire as “using words appropriately”. This is more serious than it first appears as this lack of ability to express ideas in academic terms can lead to difficulties in being able to adequately express themselves in English. According to Silva (see Section 2.2), non-native speakers of English spent less time on preparation, used fewer

words, made more mistakes, had difficulty organizing material around objectives and had problems with grammar and lexical variety (cited in Brown, 2001).

It is clear from the discussion above that a complete solution to improving the students' grasp of vocabulary must involve the Libyan education system, the UK institutions and the students themselves. Although it is really beyond the scope of this study, the Libyan education system must adopt more appropriate language methods. For this, I support the recommendations of Fareh:

1. "Only qualified teachers should be allowed to teach. Teachers must have a teaching certificate in addition to their qualification in the English language and its literature.
2. Teaching activities need to be learner-centered rather than teacher-centered.
3. Creating environments that are conducive to learning.
4. Using teaching techniques that integrate language skills rather than teaching them discretely.
5. Writing textbooks and preparing teaching materials that are culturally relevant and that meet the needs and interests of learners."

(2010: 3604).

It would also be very helpful for students intending to study in the UK or in other countries to be better prepared for the academic environment which they can expect to encounter. This is difficult to do on a widespread basis, however the re-

entry of overseas-educated teachers to the Libyan education system will help. Another possibility is the use of cultural training classes, which may be appropriate for students moving between higher education institutions rather than entering higher education for the first time in the host country. Making use of visiting academics would be helpful in this. Such classes would also give an opportunity to introduce academic writing as a discipline and concepts such as “academic vocabulary”, including word lists such as the Academic Word List. Even if this vocabulary does not yet have its academic context, it can still be useful. If learners are expected to study abroad in the near future, the approach of having them learn academic vocabulary out of context can be effective (Nation, 1990).

This approach of introducing the culture and vocabulary before the student reaches the host country would give the new student an important introduction before leaving their country of origin. International students need to become familiar with the culture and expectations of UK academic study and of their host institution. This will allow them to integrate more easily and will help them to establish a feeling of acceptance and belonging in UK education (Kelly and Moogan, 2012). This needs to happen either before leaving for the host nation or within a short time of arriving.

The host institutions need to give ongoing support to non-native speaking students. They should especially recognise this as an obligation if they accept students with IELTS scores lower than that considered “acceptable” for the level of the course. Vocabulary learning will need to be on-going throughout the period of study. There are many ways in which students can acquire the required

vocabulary, and teachers need to engage in a dialogue with students, discussing vocabulary, encouraging novel word use, explaining, discussing and negotiating reasons for academic vocabulary use and supporting and reinforcing students in their use of more and more precise academic vocabulary (Lee & Muncie, 2006). It is recognised that teaching vocabulary in the second language will improve students' receptive and productive abilities and give them a vital way to expand their knowledge of vocabulary and syntax, essential to both reading and writing academic papers (Hinkel, 2004).

Even with support, students need to recognize that they will need to actively seek out and learn academic vocabulary, and this needs more effort and persistence than learning standard vocabulary through everyday activities (Hinkel, 2004). This is reinforced by Schmitt (2010: 8), who states that "it can no longer be assumed that an adequate lexis will simply be 'picked up' from exposure to language tasks focusing either on communication alone". Acquiring an adequate vocabulary requires both explicit instruction and for the student to be exposed, largely through reading widely, to a large quantity of text in the second language (Laufer, 2005; Schmitt, 2008).

The picture of effective vocabulary acquisition is one of continued interaction between the student and a higher education institution which is aware of their needs. Teachers and supervisors can, with little additional burden, hand out word lists, with the *AWL* as a good starting point. The supervisor then needs to be aware when these words come up in activities and exercises, and perhaps bring attention to their use in written assignments (Hinkel, 2004). Identifying the use of academic vocabulary in this way will give students a sense of progress and help motivate

them in the tedious work that Nation (2001: 23) called “the learning burden.” This process must be systematic and progressive. Vocabulary needs to be learned in context, organised thematically, the use of words in relevant academic texts needs to be consciously noted and this process must be organised so that more straightforward vocabulary is learned before more difficult vocabulary is encountered (Hinkel, 2004). This process is also progressive in that the more academic words are known, the greater is the capacity of the student to learn new ones (Hinkel, 2004).

4.10 Conclusion

Based on a limited, exploratory survey using questionnaire and interview techniques, this chapter has highlighted a number of significant issues with vocabulary use for Libyan students in higher education in the UK and the reasons for them and has made recommendations for improving the situation. Acting on such recommendations is in the interest of the students, the host institution and the country of origin. The country of origin – in this case Libya – will benefit from improved cultural and economic links and better education for current and future generations of students. The host institution will benefit from increased academic performance and lower levels of drop-out and failure. The students will benefit from a more structured learning experience, a greater ability to participate fully academically and improved academic achievement. Some effort is needed from all three groups, but this is not prohibitive and is offset by the benefits. Students given more assistance with vocabulary learning can be expected to pass through

their course more smoothly and, it is suggested, will take more responsibility for directing their own learning and may make less demands on support services. Students can be expected to become much more motivated to learn vocabulary and improve their work if teachers explain to them the necessity of persistence and effort and the results that can be achieved from these (Hinkel, 2004). In Libya, improved teaching methods, according to the recommendations of Fareh, above, are required. However, the main recommendation is not that more teaching and learning effort needs to be provided, but that it needs to be better directed. I think the main recommendation is to support and encourage the students' autonomy in language learning. "No matter what teacher does or what course book presents, ultimately it is the learner who does the learning. The more learners are aware of how learning is best carried out, the better learning is likely to be." (Nation, 2001: 394).

4.11 Limitations and recommendations for further study

This study must be considered as a preliminary study and as a case study of a particular group of students in one particular institution. Because of the limited sample, the results should not be generalised, but they do indicate further work that can be done in the area.

In particular, it would be useful to expand the survey to include:

Students on a variety of courses at a variety of higher education institutions, including those on undergraduate and postgraduate courses and studying for varied qualifications, which could include humanities, business and engineering. The experiences of these different groups may be markedly different from the sample in this survey.

Include student populations from other Arab-speaking countries.

Include students studying in other overseas countries (e.g. US, mainland Europe, China).

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APPENDIX 1

A sample letter of consent

Amel Lusta

MA in English Language Teaching
Nottingham Trent University

Dear Participant

Letter of Information

I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting as part of my MA degree in English Language Teaching at Nottingham Trent University under the supervision of *Christine McCall*.

My title of my study is *The vocabulary problems in academic writing that face MA ELT Libyan students at Nottingham Trent University*.

The aim of my research is to (a) *to discover the vocabulary difficulties in academic writing that Libyan MA ELT students faced during their study at Nottingham Trent University* and (b) *to determine the reasons behind these problems*.

The research methods I am using are *two questionnaires and an interview*.

My data will only be used for academic research purposes. Your identity will be protected and your name will not appear in the study.

Would you please indicate your agreement to participate by signing the letter of consent below and returning it to me by email. If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you.

Amel Lusta

AMEL

amelalosta1111@yahoo.com

Letter of Consent

I agree to take part in the research study described above. I understand that the research will be presented as part of an MA dissertation.

I understand that any information I provide may be used in the study, but that my name will not appear and that every effort will be made to protect my identity.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I can choose not to participate or to withdraw at any time. If I decide to withdraw, I agree to inform the researcher personally.

Name of Participant: Amna Al-mangoush

webmanager95@yahoo.com

Signature of Participant:

Amna

Date: 12/09/2011.

APPENDIX 2

The Libyan education system

Pre-school Age5-7	Non-compulsory In Libya , there are some public – funded pre-school for children.
Primary school Age 7-15 (the preparatory school was the old name of the last three years from primary school .The official name is primary but people still use the old name).	Compulsory Children between ages 7-15 must complete full –time education. Libyan curriculum is adapted like the Singaporean curriculum. The subjects are Arabic, English, Science History, Geography, Mathematics, Art ,Physical and Religious Education fourth year of primary school .From there are examinations for children .In the ninth year , General People 's Committee for Education (Ministry) give the final . Examinations for the General Certificate of Primary Education.
Secondary school Age 15-18	Compulsory. There are 6 kinds of secondary school which specialize to study a special specialization (e.g. Arabic language , English language , Science , ...etc).In the first and second half of secondary school , teachers give students examinations but in the third year exams are held by the General people's Committee The final examinations are GCSE's
Further Education College	Non-compulsory. After four or three years of studying, students take License or Bachelor's Degree.
University	There are a master's degree and a doctoral degree. They have the same system of British one.

APPENDIX 3

MA ELT dissertation on the Academic Writing Problems of Libyan MA ELT students

Pre-questionnaire

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your answers will be used of part of a [complete details of project] and it is hoped that this will help to improve how second language speakers of English are supported in the UK academic environment.

No personally identifiable information will be collected in this survey, and all the information you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence.

1- Do you have academic writing problems? Tick.

●Yes.()

●No.()

2- What are the problems you face in carrying out the writing tasks?

(Number the problems according to their importance for you).

●Vocabulary Problems.()

●Paraphrasing.()

●Summarizing. ()

●Organization of ideas.()

● Spelling.()

●Referencing.()

●Grammatical Problems:

Number the Grammatical problems according to their importance for

you

a-Prepositions.()

b-Articles.()

c-Tenses.()

d-Word order.()

●Any others?

Thank you. You have reached the end of the questionnaire.

APPENDIX 4

The main questionnaire

Dissertation Research Project- Amel Lusta

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your answers will be used of part of a [complete details of project] and it is hoped that this will help to improve how second language speakers of English are supported in the UK academic environment.

No personally identifiable information will be collected in this survey, and all the information you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Part 1: About you

Q1. How old are you? Tick the one which applies.

Under 25	
25–30	
30-35	
35-40	
Over 40	

Q2. Are you Male or Female? Tick the one which applies.

Male	
Female	

Q3. How long have you lived or stayed in the UK? Tick the one which applies.

Less than a year	
1 year	
2 years	
3 years	
4 or more years	

Q4. What is the HIGHEST education qualification you have received, and what was the subject?

Qualification:

.....

Subject:

.....

Q5a. Are you currently studying on a course in the UK, at any level?

Yes	
No	

**Q5b. If you answered YES to Q5a, what is the level of your current course?
(Tick ✓ the one that applies)**

'A' level or equivalent	
Undergraduate degree e.g. Ba, BSc	
Masters e.g. MA, MSc	
PhD	

Part 2: Your languages

Q6a. How many languages do you speak (however fluently)? Tick:

One (your first language)	
Two	
Three	
Four or more	

Q6b. List the languages you speak (up to 4):

Language 1:

.....

Language 2:

.....

Language 3:

.....

Language 4:

.....

Q7a. Apart from your first language, do you think that any other language you speak has helped with your English skills?

Yes	
No	

Q7b. If Yes, which one?

Language:

.....

Q8a. Do you have any qualification, certificate or any tests in English as a Foreign Language?

Yes	
No	

Q8b. If Yes, what level? Write it below.

Level of qualification:

.....

Q8c. If a test, what were the test and your result?

The test:

.....

Score:

.....

Part 2: Your languages (continued)

Q9. How long have you been studying English? Tick.

Less than a year	
1–2 years	
3–4 years	
5–6 years	
7–8 years	
More than 8 years	

Q10. Was English a compulsory subject at:

Primary school?	
Elementary school?	
Secondary school?	
University?	
Others? _____	

Q11. What do you think is the most difficult aspect in learning new word items?

Spelling words	
Remembering words	
Using words appropriately	
Other difficulties	

If you choose other difficulties, write them here:

Q12a. Do you use vocabulary from any academic list in your writing?

Yes	
No	

Q12b. If yes, which one:

The University Word List (UWL).	
The Academic Word List (AWL).	
Others _____	

Q13. Do think the Latin origin of most academic vocabulary makes difficulties for you?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q14. Have you taken a specific writing course before?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please look at the following statements. Tick the box to indicate whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree with each statement.

Q15. I am confident writing English in everyday situations, for example emails, messages or chats.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree
nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Q16. I think I have enough academic vocabulary.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree
nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Part 3: Your experience of learning and using English

Please answer all the questions that apply to you. Leave the others blank.

Please look at the following statements. Tick the box to indicate whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree with each statement.

Q17. I often encounter words I don't understand in textbooks or articles.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q18. It is difficult to express my ideas in an appropriate vocabulary in academic writing.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q19. I find it hard to choose the right meaning of English words to use in my essays and projects.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q20. I prefer to compose my essays and projects in my first language, then translate them into English.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q21. I often make mistakes with the words I use in conversation.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q22. I often make mistakes with the words I use in essays.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree
nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Q23. I have difficulty using computer software such as a word processor in English.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree
nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Q24. I had enough information required to go for higher education in English medium universities before I came to the UK.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree
nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Q25. At the beginning of my course, I felt anxious about British culture as a relatively alien culture.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree
nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Q26. I believe that my experience of how written English was taught in Libya affects negatively my performance on my course.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree
nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Q27. I think the factors that make it difficult to communicate freely in the target language (English) are:

(Number the factors according to their impertinences).

Lack of knowledge	
English language department curricula in Libya	
Teaching methodology in Libya	
Lack of the target language environment	
Your motivation	
Large student numbers in Libya	
Lack of available materials	
Teaching methodology and assessment in the UK.	
Not enough qualified local teachers	
Others. -----	

Part 3: Your experience of learning and using English (cont).

Please look at the following statements and indicate how often you act in the way suggested:

Q28. When I come across a word I don't understand, I consult a dictionary.

Always

Often

Sometimes

Never

Q29. When I come across a word I don't understand, I ask a friend or colleague.

Always

Often

Sometimes

Never

Q30. When I come across a word I don't understand, I ask a teacher, lecturer or supervisor.

Always

Often

Sometimes

Never

Part 4: Help and assistance you receive

Please answer all the questions that apply to you. Leave the others blank.

Please look at the following statements. Tick the box to indicate whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree with each statement.

Q31. It was difficult to adapt to the teaching style in my university in the UK.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q32. It is important that all written work is assessed equally, whatever a student's level of English is.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q33a. Students need more help in academic writing than my school, university or college provides.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q33b. Give examples of the kind of help you personally have not received:

Examples:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q34a. My school, college or university gives me help to improve my English.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree
nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Q34b. Give examples of the kind of help you personally have received:

Examples:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you. You have reached the end of the questionnaire.

APPENDIX 5

The results of the questionnaire

Figure 1: Vocabulary-related factors

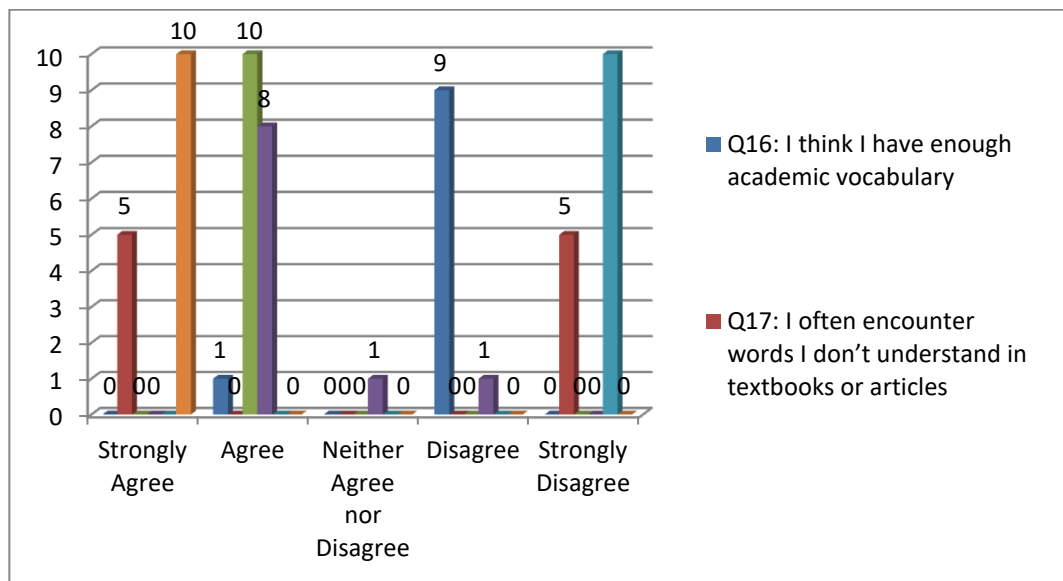


Figure 2: General communication ability

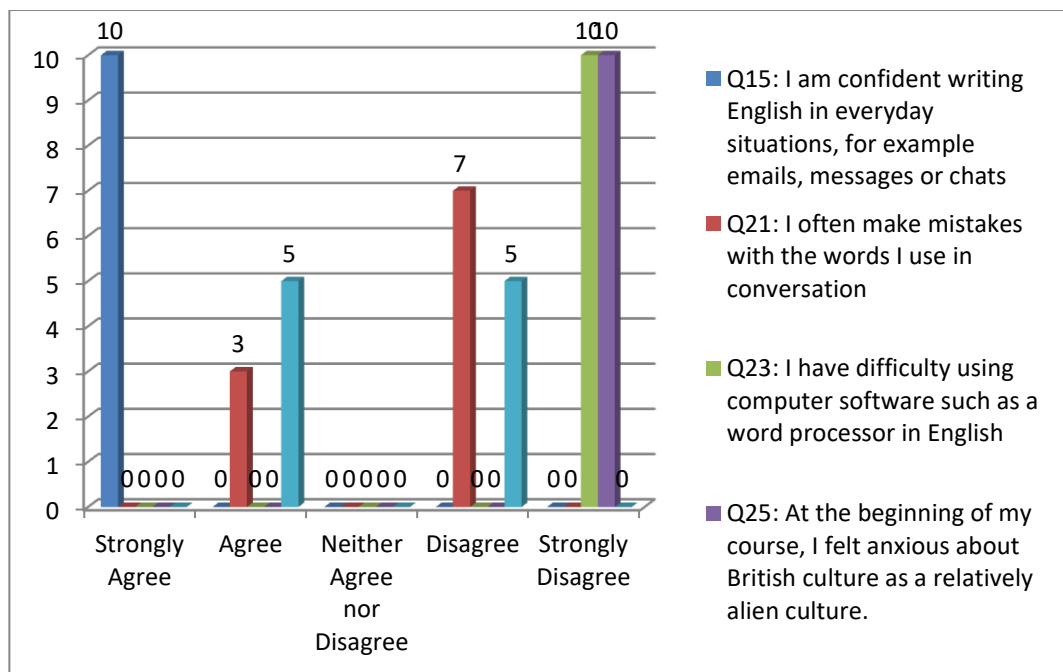


Figure 3: Responses to vocabulary issues

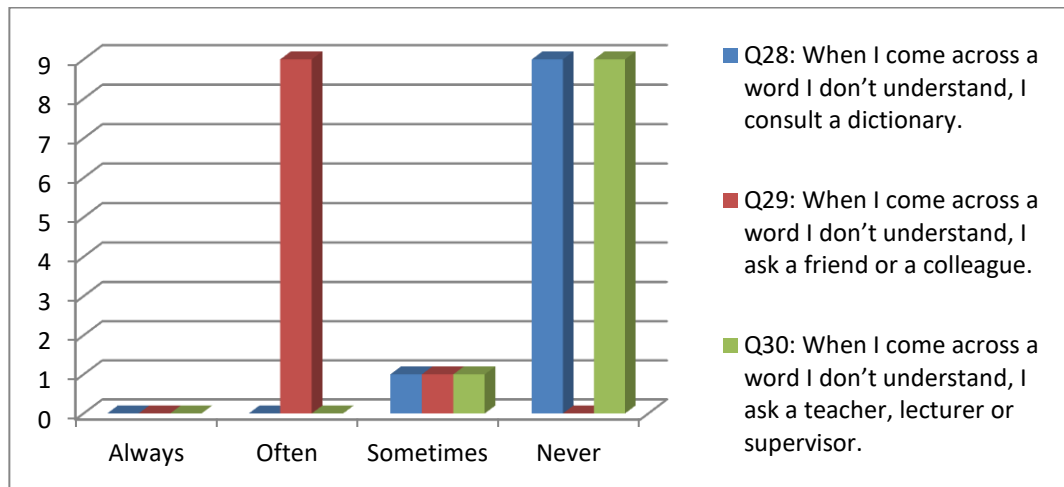
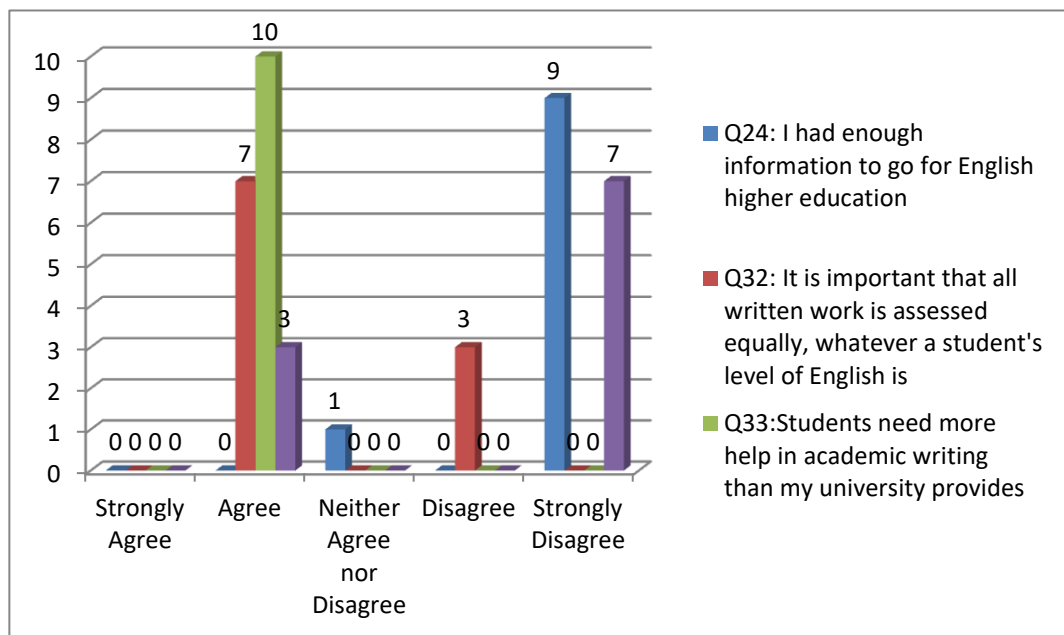


Figure 4: Language support



APPENDIX 6-A

The questions of the interview

Q1. When you learn a new word, do you learn all aspects of word knowledge? For example; written form, collocation,..etc.

Q2. Do you use any strategies to improve your vocabulary?

Q3. In the questionnaire, you said that the most difficult aspect in learning new word items is using words appropriately. Do not you face any difficulties with other aspects? For example: spelling of words, remembering..etc.

Q4. In the questionnaire, you said you do not use any academic vocabulary lists. Why?

Q5. During your study in Libya, which approach had your teachers used for teachings English?

Q6. Tell me your opinion about your experience in Nottingham Trent University, about the assignments, about the teachers, about the methodology.

APPENDIX 6-B

The interviews

Interview NO.1

Interviewer: the researcher Amel (A).

Interviewee: the student Laila (L).

Place of the interview: Boots Library.

A: Hello.

L: Hello.

A: Q1. When you learn a new word, do you learn all aspects of word knowledge?

For example; written form, collocation, ..etc.

L: I just learn the exact word which I find it in the text.

A: Q2. Do you use any strategies to improve your vocabulary?

L: Ammm. When I was in the collage, yes but after that when I started MA I did not use that.

A: Ammm. In the questionnaire..

L: But sometimes I pick up the dictionary and just pick up words without knowing if it is academic or...

A: not!

L: yea.

A: In the questionnaire, you said that the most difficult aspect in learning new word items is using words appropriately. Do not you face any difficulties with other aspects? For example: spelling, remembering..

L: really, no.

A: OK. In the questionnaire, you said you do not use any academic vocabulary lists. Why?

L: Because aaah I did not need it for my previous study and I do not know about it until I came here to Nottingham Trent University and the teachers tell us about it so I did not use to use academic vocabulary list. I just use my own words.

A: OK. During your study in Libya, which approach had your teachers used for teachings English?

L: ammmm. Depends like in preparatory school and in secondary school they used Grammar translation method like they give me give us a word and its meaning without knowing how to use it..

A: In Arabic?

L: yea, the meaning in Arabic, But in the university..ahhh they give us if we found a word difficult for sometimes we look it for ourselves in the dictionary and we can ask the teacher for that he translated it English in English.

A: Do you studied the vocabulary as a subject as an individual subject in the university?

L: No.

A: Ahhh give me your opinion about your experience in Nottingham Trent University, about the assignments, about the teachers, about the methodology.

L: Amm, actually in the first it was a little bit difficult but then after that it became not ... more clear for us and we get use for that but in general it is a bit little difficult because even sometimes I cannot express my ideas in the right way.

A: Any comments?

L: No.

A: Thank you dear.

APPENDIX 6-C

Interview NO.2

Interviewer: the researcher Amel (A).

Interviewee: the student Mawada (M).

Place of the interview: Dice Building.

A: Hello.

M: Hi.

A: How are you?

M: Fine and you?

A: ok, I want to make interview for my dissertation. Thank you for your help.

M: Thank you. You are welcome.

A: Q1. When you learn a new word, do you learn all aspects of word knowledge?
For example; written form, collocation,..etc.

M: usually I try when I learn a new word I am keen to learn all these aspects of word knowledge as you have just said the written form, the spelling, the meaning, the use yea because when ahh what is the use of learning the word without I know all about I mean when for example I learn a word I feel I have to learn its use when to put it when to use it and so on.

A: Q2. Do you use any strategies to improve your vocabulary?

M: OK. The strategies... no I do not think so. I depend on my dictionary all the time I mean I use it when I want to check a word and when I want that when I feel I want to learn a new word actually so not the type of student use I mean a certain type of strategies to learn new vocabulary, no.

A: another question...in the questionnaire, you said that the most difficult aspect in learning new word items is using words correctly. Do not you face any difficulties with other aspects? For example: spelling, remembering..

M: Because I use the computer in writing, I do not have any problems with spelling. You know, it is easy to check spelling.

A: ah. In the questionnaire, you said you do not use any academic vocabulary lists. Why?

M: Why because in my country in Libya they did not teach us vocabulary words actually the academic vocabulary so that is why I do not use them because I do not know them I do not learn them actually.

A: What about here?

M: Here. Yes, I find s.. I think I have. My teachers require, ask to use academic vocabulary in the assignments and now in my dissertation so I mean actually they gave my teachers gave us the academic vocabulary lists yes I try to use them.

A: During your study in Libya, which approach had your teachers used for teachings English?

M: The approach use in Libya is Grammar translation method actually. This is how they are teaching, how they learnt it.

A: Last question, give me your opinion about your experience in Nottingham Trent University, about the assignments, about the teachers, about the methodology teaching.

M: Well, it has been very interesting and useful experience. I learnt a lot from my teachers my classmates as well. I learnt a lot about how teach English, how to deal with maybe not young learners but to deal with students in general how to make

them love the subject and interactive with the teacher and concern the assignment, it was very difficult for me to write assignment because as I just said it is all related to vocabulary because in Libya did not give us academic vocabulary so I couldn't I was not able to write I mean a good assignment I mean I used ordinary words which they do not accept.

A: Any other comments?

M: Because your... I mean dissertation about vocabulary, I think vocabulary is very important. Why? Because all we speak vocabulary words I mean speak if I mean there are adjective, adverbs, prepositions. Something, they are preposition. We as students must learn all these aspects of word knowledge so we can use them fully and correctly.

A: Thank you very much.

M: Thank you very much.

APPENDIX 6-D

Interview NO.3

Interviewer: the researcher Amel (A).

Interviewee: the student Salem (S).

Place of the interview: Boots Library.

A: Hello.

S: Hello.

A: How are you?

S: fine, thanks.

A: I will ask you some questions about your study in Nottingham Trent University.

S:OK.

A: Q1. When you learn a new word, do you learn all aspects of word knowledge? For example; written form, collocation,..etc.

S: Usually, what I first learn the meaning of the word in Arabic and how to spell it these things I learn about new vocabulary then sometimes I learn collocations or other meanings of the word but the main things we first the meaning in Arabic and the spelling.

A: Q2. Do you use any strategies to improve your vocabulary?

S: Well. Yes, I do. Sometimes, I read some passages to extensive reading for improving vocabulary and sometimes write new vocabulary in a list and learn try to memorise then use them after.

A: In the questionnaire, you said that you do not use any academic vocabulary lists. Why?

S: Well, actually I do not have enough idea about the academic lists or teachers told about it first I arrived here but I would not been informed how to use it, or is it useful or not in my study. I know it's should be useful but I do not have a skill to use them. So I depend on my dictionaries, internet that is it.

A: Do you have any problems with spelling or remembering words?

S: No.

A: OK. During your study in Libya, which approach had your teachers used for teachings English?

S: Well, mainly it somehow different from secondary school to university but mainly teachers used Grammar translation method. They depend on translation and memorise vocabulary. The staff just studies for the exam for pass.

A: Last a question, give me your opinion about your experience in Nottingham Trent University, about the assignments, about the teachers, about the methodology..

S: Really a good experience and although some other external things effect on our study, situation in home country Libya. Amm teachers are really helpful and assignments are really objective although they are bit intensive we sometimes we weekly have more than one assignment, that is it.

A: Any other comments?

S: No. nothing.

A: Thank you.

S: Welcome.

APPENDIX 6-E

Interview NO.4

Interviewer: the researcher Amel (A).

Interviewee: the student Khalid (K).

Place of the interview: Boots Library.

A: Hello.

K: Hello.

A: Thank you to agree to make this interview with you for my dissertation.

K: you are welcome.

A: Can we start?

K: Yes, go ahead.

A: OK. Q1. When you learn a new word, do you learn all aspects of word knowledge? For example; written form, collocation,..etc.

K: Yes, I usually do that I try to memorize all kinds of forms: noun, verb, adjective collocation, verb phrases, everything. I just learn the exact word which I find it in the text.

A: Q2. Do you use any strategies to improve your vocabulary?

K: Ammm. The only strategies I used I like memorizing vocabulary by reading when I read a lot I come cross a lot of words so I stop to memorize it incidentally.

A: What about spelling?

K: I use my computer to find the correct spelling.

A: OK. In the questionnaire, you said you do not use any academic vocabulary lists. Why?

K: Because I take my vocabulary from reading. I start reading academic books. I can get a lot of words that are already on the list so I do not have to go to the list I just do academic reading so I am improving my academic vocabulary well.

A: OK. During your study in Libya, which approach had your teachers used for teachings English?

K: Most teachers in Libya used Grammar translation approach. My teachers used the same thing.

A: Last question, give me your opinion about your experience in Nottingham Trent University, about the assignments, the teachers, about the methodology..

K: Well, study at Nottingham Trent University was a big change form we are used to because we use to the teachers in Libya use to teach using Grammar translation approach like already said but here in Nottingham is like using communicative approach and we felt a big difference between the way we studied English and the way professors at Nottingham Trent University teach students I find it very useful. I found it very useful.

A: What about the assignments?

K: The assignments. Well, as I said we not use such a kind of assessment. We use the memorize what we study textbooks then we go to the exams that is it but we saw here in Nottingham was totally different from we use so we find it difficult to get it

A: Any other comments?

K: No, thank you.

A: Thank you very much.

K: you are welcome.

APPENDIX 6-F

Interview NO.5

Interviewer: the researcher Amel (A).

Interviewee: the student Rami (R).

This interview is by Skype.

A: Hello.

R: Hello.

A: How are you?

R: Fine.

A: Thank you for your help for my dissertation.

R: welcome.

A: Are you ready?

R: Yes.

A: OK. Q1. When you learn a new word, do you learn all aspects of word knowledge? For example; written form, collocation, the meaning...etc.

R: I think I focus on meaning and spelling and I sometimes on the word family such as suffix, for example; continue, continues something like this. A little of the focus on grammar it depends and spelling and meaning that is it.

A: Q2. Do you use any strategies to improve your vocabulary?

R: I sometime use to learn five words a day then after a week I repeat the words that I have learned last week and so on. The only strategies I have.

A: Do you use any academic lists?

R: No.

A: Why not use academic vocabulary list?

R: Sometimes, I used it because academic vocabulary as normal vocabulary. For example I use to learn some words but I do not mind if those academic vocabulary or not.

A: OK. During your study in Libya, which approach had your teachers used for teachings English?

R: Most of them use Grammar Translation.

A: Las..

R: I think most of them use Grammar Translation.

A: Last question, give me your opinion about your experience in Nottingham Trent University, about the assignments, about the teachers, about the methodology teaching..

R: I think the methodology is different from the methodology used in Libya that the methodology in Nottingham Trent is more effective than one in Libya. Also, the assignments realize us how to write how to put your opinions on papers but in Libya we do not realize us how to write. I mean in Libya there is no focus on write as academic writing for example even.. even in university, there is no focus or real focus on writing . One focus on grammar on sometimes the vocabulary and on writing and speaking there is no focus on writing I found that the focus on writing for NTU. Also, we got a lot of vocabulary when we were in Nottingham Trent so I found it interesting experience a lot.

A: OK. Thank you very much.

APPENDIX 6-G

Interview NO.6

Interviewer: the researcher Amel (A).

Interviewee: the student Huda (H).

This interview is by the Skype.

A: Hello.

H: Hello.

A: Thank you for your agreeing to make this interview with you.

H: Not at all.

A: Are you ready?

H: yes, of course. I am ready.

A: Q1. When you learn a new word, do you learn all aspects of word knowledge?

For example; written form, collocation,..etc.

H: Ammmm, sometimes I do this some aspects of the word knowledge like the spelling ammm, just I want actually I know the collocation but in general I want to check the spelling of the word in my dictionary.

A: Q2. Do you use any strategies to improve your vocabulary?

H: Ahhhh, yes. Ammmm, sometimes I check my dictionary, I listen to music English music, watch films or English programmes.

A: OK. In the questionnaire, you said you do not use any academic vocabulary lists. Why not?

H: Aaah, maybe because I am not use I mean in Libya in general as Libyan students do not use these academic vocabulary lists and the similarly and for me I

prefer to learn vocabulary randomly I mean without planning. This is my personality.

A: Q4. During your study in Libya, which approach had your teachers used for teachings English?

H: Hello!

A: Can you hear me?

H: No, can you repeat the question please?

A: Yes, during your study in Libya, which approach had your teachers used for teachings English?

H: Unfortunately, My teachers have used Grammar Translation method.

A: OK. Last question, tell me your opinion about your experience in Nottingham Trent University, about the assignments, about the teachers, about the methodology teaching..

H: Amm, for me I think the methodology teaching is high for us. It is a new methodology for Libyan students but it is OK. Ahhh, about the assignments, I think they are OK. As well but sometimes I think students I mean the students can choose the title of the assignment or details of the assignments will be better.

A: Any other comments?

H: Ahhh, about teachers. I think teachers should help the foreign students who non-native speakers should help us more. I mean , they should not behave with us like English students or the native speakers. They should be their attention more and more about this point.

A: Thank you very much.

H: That is all right

APPENDIX 6-H

Interview NO.7

Interviewer: the researcher Amel (A).

Interviewee: Noha (N).

This interview is by Skype.

A: Hello.

N: Hello.

A: How are you?

N: I am fine, thanks... thank you.

A: Thank you for your help.

N: No problem. You are welcome.

A: We will start: Q1. When you learn a new word, do you learn all aspects of word knowledge? For example; written form, collocation,..etc.

N: actually not exactly just it depends and I when I learn a word I do not mean that learning all the aspects, no.

A: Q2. Do you use any strategies to improve your vocabulary?

N: Ammm. Yes, sometimes I write new vocabulary I read. Sometime, I write it when I talk and try to use it in the context. This is only not only the most I mean common way I use.

A: In the questionnaire, you said that you use the academic vocabulary lists. How do you know about it?

N: Yea...

A: yea. How do you know about it?

N: Ahh, how do you know? I know about it when I start doing my MA I have learn academic lists vocabulary and this is.. Now as a teacher, I try my best to use very academic word to help me in my teaching and to improve my students' level English but.... when I said yes I use I try to use it but before starting doing MA I have not learnt I have not thought about it.

A: Do you think using academic vocabulary lists improve your academic writing?

N: Yes, sure improve it a lot because when say academic writing it means that you use academic style, academic word, academic vocabulary academic.... so everything should be academic, this why I have I try to do I try to use very academic word and academic way in my writing and my speech.

A: OK. During your study in Libya, which approach had your teachers used for teachings English?

N: In Libya?

A: yea.

N: Ammmm. Actually in secondary or in university, what's what is level you're talking about?

A: In general.

N: General, general way or the approach they are using very traditional way it means teachers teach in the classroom and students learn and listen what teachers say and very very traditional but in university it just like that but teachers try to improve the autonomy in the classroom but the most in the common way students sit and listen what teachers say very traditional way teachers do not give any commutative way sorry students should be autonomy.

A: Tell me your opinion about your experience in Nottingham Trent University, about the assignments, about the teachers, about the methodology..

N: The study?

A: yea.

N: My experience in MA study, It is very very a good experience I have learnt a lot. It was completely different what I have learnt in Libya and it was very..it improved my level a lot. I had learnt how to be autonomy as a learner and how to make my students antonym by my teaching I have learn about set of kinds of teaching methods and how to can autonomy and now I start teaching in English department in Musirata I have learnt something in my mind and I try to teach in commutative approach and sometimes it difficult not like in Nottingham Trent University context because it is different context that is why but it was a very good experience I have learnt about I feel good and now I try to do my best to use what I have learnt in Nottingham Trent University in MA to do it in my country in Libya.

A : Any other comments?

N:I have many to say about it I have many things but this is the most common what I said .

A: Thank you.

N: Welcome, good luck.

APPENDIX 6-I

Interview NO.8

Interviewer: the researcher Amel (A).

Interviewee: Ghada (G).

This interview is by skype.

A: Hello.

G: Hi.

A: How are you?

G: fine.

A: Are you ready?

G: yes.

A: Q1. When you learn a new word, do you learn all aspects of word knowledge?

For example; written form, collocation,..etc.

G:No, really. I learn just the meaning in Arabic and the spelling that is it.

A: Q2. Do you use any strategies to improve your vocabulary?

G: I try to memorize a lot of vocabulary to use them.

A: In the questionnaire, you said that the most difficult aspect in learning new word items is using words. Do not you face any difficulties with other aspects?

For example: spelling, remembering..

G: Depends, because when I am writing by computer, I didn't...do not find any difficulties with spelling.

A: OK. In the questionnaire, you told me that you do not use any academic vocabulary lists. Why not?

G: Because I do not know about them.

A: Q4. During your study in Libya, which approach had your teachers used for teachings English?

G: In Libya, the most common method is Grammar Translation.

A: Q5. give me your opinion about your experience in Nottingham Trent University, about the assignments, about the teachers, about the methodology teaching.

G: It is useful but at the same time I face problems in my vocabulary. My teacher was worried about my academic vocabulary..i try to improve them but my problem I cannot find the right word. Another thing, we have just general idea about modules so I choose them without any planning.

A: Thank you.

APPENDIX 6-J

Interview NO.9

Interviewer: the researcher Amel (A).

Interviewee: Osama (O).

Place of the interview: Costa Coffee.

A: Hello.

O: Hello.

A: OK. We will start now. Q1. When you learn a new word, do you learn all aspects of word knowledge? For example; written form, collocation,..etc.

O: It depends on word that I learn but usually I focus on pronunciation and meaning and to master that is all. Is that clear?

A: yea. OK. Q2. Do you use any strategies to improve your vocabulary?

O: Ammm. Not any specific strategies but I usually read sometimes I read some essays or...they are related to my .. feel that I want usually I use reading to improve my vocabulary.

A: Do you remember all words that you learn and their spelling?

O: Most of them.

A: OK. In the questionnaire, you said that you do not use any academic vocabulary lists. Why not?

O: I did not say I did not use any academic vocabulary but I said I not use any academic vocabulary lists.

A: Yea, yea...I mean that.

O: Yea, during my academic study I did not need a specific kind of vocabulary of...I mean such lists that are mentioned because I usually collect my vocabulary from other resources so I do not depend on specific lists.

A: Q4. During your study in Libya, which approach had your teachers used for teachings English?

O: Usually, Grammar Translation method that they what most use.

A: OK. Last question, tell me your opinion about your experience in Nottingham Trent University, about the assignments, about the teachers, about the methodology..

O: Sorry, what's the last one?

A: tell me..

O: Just the last one.

A: About the methodology teaching in Nottingham Trent University?

O: Generally, it was a good experience and I experience a lot of new things which most of them were really professional ahhh the way the teachers taught us lots of methods. The general notes, the way that they treated each other in the class as teachers and students that was completely a new good experience.

A: What about the assignments?

O: What about what sorry?

A: Essays and the assignments.

O: Say it again, please.

A: I ask you about the assignments in Nottingham Trent University.. academic writing?

O: The assignments?

A: Yea.

O: The assignments, they were too many and we sometimes were told to do more than one in weekend ahh... comparison with time we benefited from most of them. The assignments varied from one to another, they are professional. That is it.

A: Any other comments?

O: Well, thank you very much.

A: Thank you, thank you.

APPENDIX 6-K

Interview NO.10

Interviewer: the researcher Amel (A).

Interviewee: Fadi (F).

Place of the interview: Costa coffee.

A: Hello.

F: Hello.

A: Q1. When you learn a new word, do you learn all aspects of word knowledge?
For example; written form, collocation,..etc.

F: Sometimes, not all the time. You know, I look for the meaning in Arabic. This is the most important for me.

A: What about other aspects?

F: It is difficult to know all aspects of every word I learn so really usually I do not check them.

A: Q2. Do you use any strategies to improve your vocabulary?

F: Ammm. Yes. I use the dictionary. This is my one...I mean only strategies.

A: Amm. In the questionnaire..

F: Sometimes, I make a list of new words and try to memorize them.

A: Can you remember all of them with their spelling?

F: Yes.

A: OK. In the questionnaire, you said you do not use any academic vocabulary lists. Why?

F: Because aaah no teacher told us about it even in our essays I did not hear anybody I mean teacher mentioned those lists.

A: OK. During your study in Libya, which approach had your teachers used for teachings English?

F: I think most teachers used Grammar translation method. It is a common way...method.

A: OK. Last one, tell me your opinion about your experience in Nottingham Trent University: about the assignments, about the teachers, about the methodology..

F: Actually, at the beginning it was a little difficult but then the experience became more interesting and useful amm the assignments I mean the essays.. I want to say they were different from which we had in Libya. I heard about the portfolio just in Nottingham Trent University.

A: Any other comments?

F: No, thank you.

A: Thank you.