International student adjustment in Irish universities: Language-related challenges and the role of EAP

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Abstract

The present study explores the role of language in non-native English speaking (NNES) international students' adaptation in Irish universities, as well as the role of EAP in-sessional programmes in adaptation. This is achieved by a thorough examination of the language-related challenges faced by NNES international students across the three adjustment domains – academic, sociocultural and psychological – together with the views of EAP students on an EAP in-sessional programme. The research is divided into two phases, both consisting of a convergent parallel design (i.e., QUAN + QUAL). These are connected through an exploratory sequential design, in which the qualitative component of Phase I leads to Phase II. Phase I aimed to identify the language-related challenges faced by NNES international students in Irish universities, and includes a large-scale questionnaire directed towards NNES international students in the nine public universities on the island of Ireland (n=330) as well as a first set of interviews directed towards NNES international students taking part in an EAP in-sessional programme at an Irish university (n=24). Results from Phase I identified language-related challenges across the three adjustment domains. These include challenges relating to academic reading, writing, speaking and listening skills pertinent to the academic domain; challenges relating to basic needs, social skills, adaptation to college, and cultural empathy and relatedness regarding the sociocultural domain; and lastly, challenges relating to stress, anxiety, and sadness and depression included in the psychological domain. Phase II aimed at identifying the role of EAP in-sessional programmes in student adaptation based on students' views, and involved a needs analysis questionnaire directed towards EAP in-sessional students at an Irish university (n=34), and a second set of interviews (i.e., follow-up interview). Results from this phase indicated that EAP programmes may contribute to students' adaptation by following a practical approach, the use of authentic materials that allowed them to put academic skills into practice and receiving individual feedback from EAP tutors.

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CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
DASS	Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EMI	English as a medium of instruction
Erasmus	European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
HE	Higher education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEIs	Higher education institutions
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IaH	Internationalisation at Home
ICOS	Irish Council for International Students
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ISQ	International Students' Questionnaire
NA	Needs Analysis
NNES	Non-native English-speaking
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SCAS-R	Revised Sociocultural Adaptation Scale
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
THE	Times Higher Education
USI	Union of Students in Ireland

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1.   Background to the Study

Internationalisation has become a cornerstone of higher education in the 21st century. During the past three decades, the increasing phenomenon of internationalisation of higher education (HE) has moved from haphazard and sporadic student mobility practices to the wide range of strategies and practices implemented by governments and institutions as a response to globalisation (see Altbach et al., 2009). Although internationalisation of higher education has been associated with positive aspects, including cooperation and quality assurance in education; globalisation in higher education has been associated with economic competition and education as a business (van Vught et al., 2002). This observation does not underestimate the undeniable position that the economic factor occupies in the internationalisation of higher education, which has been considered to operate according to 'business principles and the profit motive' (Ding & Bruce, 2017, p. 2). By way of illustration, in the Irish context, the international education sector was expected to generate over €2bn per annum by 2020 (Department of Education and Skills, 2016). Consequently, universities around the world have faced pressure to internationalise their practices as a consequence of the economic benefits associated with student mobility, as well as to compete with other universities in order to attract international students.

Anglophone countries have dominated internationalisation practices for three decades, which has been partly attributed to the role of English as a global language or lingua franca, and, as a result, the predominant language of academia (see Jenkins, 2013). Data from UNESCO (2019) show that the US, UK, China, Canada and Australia –in that order– are the top destination countries when it comes to attracting international students. This statistic reveals two major trends: the still present dominance of anglophone countries, and the increase in the number of international students studying in non-anglophone countries that provide education through English as a medium of instruction (EMI). The 'Englishisation' of higher education has resulted in the increase of non-English speaking countries worldwide providing education through EMI, as a way to compete with internationalisation practices in the leading anglophone countries. In the case of EMI, this Englishisation is considered as a double-edged sword that can be perceived as either a

threat or opportunity for higher education institutions. While the shift to EMI practices has the potential to increase inward mobility and reduce the 'brain drain' of non-English speaking countries, it poses a risk for anglophone universities to lose international students to countries offering EMI provision (Earls, 2016).

Ireland's HE internationalisation has benefitted from a steady growth during the last two decades, rising from two million in revenue in 1999 to five million in 2016 (OECD, 2018). Research on the factors that entice international students to pursue their studies in Ireland determines 'Ireland as an English-speaking country' as a major incentive (Education in Ireland, 2013, p. 10). Nevertheless, as it has been identified in other contexts (see Galloway et al., 2017), this trend might decline as a result of the increase of EMI practices in outer and expanding-circle countries [1]. Along these lines, Irish internationalisation strategies rely on educational quality and student support as the two core domains to compete for international students with countries where EMI is implemented (Department of Education and Skills, 2011).

Recent research on student adjustment and adaptation (see Schartner & Young, 2016; Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Zhang & Goodson, 2011) has identified three adjustment domains that impact the international student experience – academic adjustment, sociocultural adjustment and psychological adjustment – in which language has been found not only to be a major predictor of student adaptation, but also a common area of difficulty affecting the three adjustment domains (see for example Zhou & Zhang, 2014; Sato & Hodge, 2009; Mori, 2000; Robertson et al., 2000). In this context, international student's adaptation plays a crucial role in the internationalisation process, since institutions are more likely to attract international students by providing educational quality and student support, and therefore, ensuring international student success and adaptation.

In the Irish HE context, although the English language has been recognised as a main incentive to attract students, it continues to be considered as the biggest adaptation challenge by international students attending Irish HEIs (ICOS, 2012a; ICOS, 2012b; Marr & Carey, 2012; Harris-Byrne, 2017). This raises the issue of university language entry requirements not being adequate (see for example Edwards & Ran, 2006), which results in

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[1] In Kachru's (1985) 'Three Circles of English' model, the Outer Circle represents countries where English is an official language for historical reasons, but it is not the L1 (e.g. India, Nigeria); while the Expanding Circle represents countries where English is used as a lingua franca (e.g. China, non-Anglophone Europe).

the reliance on EAP in-sessional programmes as the way to meet students' linguistic needs. In this context, identifying the language-related challenges that non-native English speaking (NNES) international students face and the EAP-related aspects that contribute to adaptation may be considered as the first steps to provide students with the appropriate language support; and consequently, ensuring that students achieve successful academic performance and are provided with a high-quality educational experience.

1.2. Research Aims and Questions

It has been stated above that language is a major determining factor in NNES international students' adaptation, yet up until now there has been a siloed approach to investigating the role of language on adaptation. Previous research considering language as a predictor for adaptation tends to either include language among other factors, therefore failing to provide a thorough account of the role of language on adaptation (see for example Wang & Hannes, 2013; Alsahafi & Shin, 2017); or focus on a single language-related aspect such as academic writing (see for example Mehar Singh, 2017). Moreover, despite the emphasis and value attributed to internationalisation in higher education worldwide, this topic has received relatively little attention in Ireland as highlighted in the recent study conducted by Clarke et al. (2018). This current study aims to address these gaps in the literature by identifying specific language factors affecting adjustment across the three adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural and psychological adjustment) in the Irish HE context. In order to achieve this aim, the first research question and its three sub-questions are as follows:

RQ1. What are the language-related challenges that NNES students face in Irish universities?
   1a. What are the language-related academic challenges?
   1b. What are the language-related sociocultural challenges?
   1c. What are the language-related psychological challenges?

Previous research has revealed that certain demographic factors such as students' level of study or previous cross-cultural experience may affect international students' adjustment (see for example Kim, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1999); and has identified language as a common predictor for the three adjustment domains. These matters will be explored in

more detail in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.2.4). Thus, the second aim is to determine the relationships between both demographic factors and adjustment, and adjustment domains. For this purpose, a second research question was formulated:

RQ2. What relationships may exist between the studied variables (i.e., adjustment domains and demographic factors)?

> 2a. What are the relationships between adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural and psychological)?
>
> 2b. What demographic factors might impact the adjustment process?

As mentioned in the previous section, EAP programmes have been regarded as the main language support provided by universities for students for whom English is not the first language. In consequence, this study also aims to explore what aspects might facilitate NNES international students' adjustment in EAP support programmes offered by university during the academic year. This aim is achieved by considering the third and final research question:

RQ3. Do EAP in-sessional programmes help NNES students overcome the language-related challenges they face in Irish universities? If so, how?

> 3a. What aspects of EAP in-sessional programmes may contribute to students' adaptation?
>
> 3b. What are the students' impressions of the EAP in-sessional programme?

1.3.   Methodological Approach

In order to answer the research questions presented in Section 1.2, a mixed-methods approach was adopted. The methodology chosen combines quantitative research methods (i.e., large-scale questionnaire and needs analysis questionnaire) and qualitative research (i.e., semi-structured interviews). The research is divided into two phases, both consisting of a convergent parallel design that combines a quantitative instrument and a qualitative instrument. Phase I includes the large-scale questionnaire directed towards graduate and postgraduate NNES international students in the nine public universities on the island of Ireland (i.e. Dublin City University, NUI Galway, NUI Maynooth, Trinity College Dublin, University College Cork, University College Dublin, University of Limerick, Queen's

University Belfast, and University of Ulster); and a first set of interviews focusing on a group of NNES students taking part in a EAP in-sessional programme at one university, with the intention of addressing the first two research questions. Phase II involves a needs analysis questionnaire directed towards students taking part in the EAP in-sessional programme studied, and a second set of interviews conducted with the same students that took part in the first interview, with the purpose of exploring the third research question.

1.4. Research Motivation and Value

As a past Erasmus and NNES student, completing my BA (Hons) English Studies in Northern Ireland posed language-related challenges that I did not anticipate, given that I majored in English and my degree was taught through the medium of English back in Spain. However, I did not realise the extent of NNES international students' challenges until I took my MSc in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The considerable number of international students attending this master's degree raised my awareness of issues relating to NNES learners, and provided me with a close sight of the challenges experienced by NNES international students such as difficulties understanding lectures or writing academic texts. At the present, being an EAP teacher in in-sessional and pre-sessional programmes has allowed me to view the issue from the teacher's perspective, as well as to be involved in EAP practices that aim to provide the student with the necessary academic language skills to succeed in their studies.

By exploring this subject, this study expands the research on NNES international students in Irish HEIs and provides a comprehensive and in-depth investigation of the language factors affecting NNES students' adjustment across the three adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural and psychological). This might result in a comprehensive framework that allows to identify the language-related challenges faced by NNES international students, which may serve as a basis for investigating the role of language on adaptation outside the Irish HE context. The identification of challenges and EAP aspects that contribute to student adaptation could also enhance needs analysis processes and, therefore, be used to inform curriculum design and teaching practices in programmes aimed at improving NNES international students' language adjustment. In the same way, the methods used and data gathered in this research could be applied to inform policy; including institutional and national higher education internationalisation strategies.

1.5.   Thesis Structure

The overall structure of the thesis takes the form of eight chapters, and follows the traditional thesis structure in which the literature review is followed by methodology, results, discussion and conclusion. Therefore, while Chapter 1 has provided an introduction to the study, the following three chapters (Chapter 2, 3 and 4) are devoted to reviewing the literature. Chapter 2 focuses on the phenomenon of the internationalisation of higher education. It begins by framing the broad concept of internationalisation of higher education and moves to exploring internationalisation in the Irish higher education context, as well as providing a comprehensive overview of international students in Irish universities. Chapter 3 presents a review of the literature on adjustment issues faced by international students by first providing a synopsis of the research on international students' acculturation, and then focusing on the role of language in international student adaptation. Chapter 4 explores the role of EAP in an internationalised higher education, the different approaches to EAP research, and the position of EAP in the Irish higher education context.

Chapter 5 describes and justifies the research methodology, providing an extended overview of the research process. This chapter includes the research aims and questions, methodological approach, research and instrument design, a detailed description of the sampling and data collection procedure, and an overview of the data analysis process. Attention is paid throughout to reliability and validity of the study, as well as ethical considerations.

In chapters 6 and 7 the results are displayed according to the two phases in which the study was conducted, each consisting of quantitative findings gathered from the surveys, and qualitative findings from the interviews. Results are discussed in Chapter 8. In this chapter the main findings are presented with reference to findings from existing literature, and is structured following the order of the three research questions addressed in this study.

Lastly, Chapter 9 begins by providing a succinct summary of the main findings of the study. This is followed by the theoretical and methodological contributions of the study, as well as its limitations. The chapter concludes by presenting recommendations for practice and further research, before providing some final remarks.

CHAPTER 2: Internationalisation of Higher Education in Ireland

2.1.   Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a foundation of knowledge on the internationalisation of higher education in Ireland. It begins by defining the concept of internationalisation of higher education, including its dimensions and rationales, as well as its scope (Section 2.2). Following this, the next section narrows the scope by focusing on the phenomenon of internationalisation of Irish higher education, exploring the phenomenon at the supranational, national and institutional level (Section 2.3). Lastly, the remainder of the chapter focuses on international students attending Irish universities by providing an overview of their characteristics, the impact of international students in Ireland, the students' motivations for choosing Ireland as their study destination, and the challenges facing international students in Irish universities (Section 2.4).

2.2.   Internationalisation of Higher Education: Framing the Concept

2.2.1. Internationalisation of higher education

In a world led by global trade and international networks, the higher education sector attains an eminent position attributable to its impact on the sociocultural and economic development of a country (Silman et al., 2019). For the past three decades, the internationalisation of higher education (HE) has become a topic of increasing interest among researchers and policy makers, being placed at the core of most Irish governmental and institutional strategies (see for example DES, 2016). Indeed, this phenomenon is believed to constitute an intrinsic element to the concept of university as an institution. Yet in 1950, Brown pondered the 'universality of knowledge' of universities, considering such institutions as international and universal from their origins (as cited in Knight & de Wit 1995, p. 6). More recently, scholars such as Altbach (1998), Richardson (1999), and Cañón Pinto (2005) supported Brown's statement, basing their contributions on the standardised organisational model that emerged with the foundation of the European university in medieval times, which gathered students and professors from all around Europe using Latin as the lingua franca; and its worldwide influence on the posteriorly established universities. Conversely, this idea had been disregarded by others such as

Neave (1997) and Scott (1998) who branded it as a myth, based on the impossibility of the existence of internationalisation as preceding the creation of the nation-states during the 16th and 17th centuries, which represents the exact antithesis to Brown's concept.

At the present time, the internationalisation of HE is largely seen as a product of society's globalisation and the response of HE to this economically driven social change. Knight (2008) describes globalisation as a modifier of society and internationalisation as a modifier of HE. Thus, it might be claimed that just as globalisation is a constantly changing process, so is internationalisation. The link between these two concepts has led to an endless debate that still calls for clarification. Both concepts, although indubitably sharing a reciprocal relationship, are extensively contemplated as two different phenomena. While globalisation is seen as the 'uncontrollable' fact that models society, internationalisation is shaped by governmental and institutional actions (Altbach et al., 2009). This distinction, however, becomes more difficult to draw when economic drivers come into play. Globalisation in HE has been commonly associated with the negative concepts of competition and the tradability of education, whereas internationalisation has been associated with collaboration and quality in education (van Vught et al., 2002). As Brandenburg and de Wit (2011, p. 2) expound, 'internationalisation is claimed to be the last stand for humanistic ideas against the world of pure economic benefits allegedly represented by the term globalisation', which does not exclude the irrefutable role that the economic factor plays in HE, and which will be further discussed in the coming sections.

The term internationalisation was first used in the field of education in the late 1980s, becoming the name assigned to the phenomenon that was previously referred to as 'international cooperation, understanding or peace' during the 1960s. It was then defined as 'international education' in 1974 (Martínez de Morentin de Goñi, 2004), and continued giving rise to new terms such as cross-border education, transnational or borderless education (Knight, 2015). Undoubtedly, the connotations attached to the concept of internationalisation at that time were only a shadow of what it evokes nowadays. The idea of internationalisation has evolved from a small number of isolated and unrelated activities involving only a few privileged people, to the mass phenomenon that entails the vast range of activities, policies and practices that are incessantly flourishing at the time of writing (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011).

In this way, the internationalisation of the HE sector is contemplated as an intricate and ceaselessly evolving concept, which according to the most widely accepted definition, consists of the integration of an 'international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education' (Knight, 2008, p. 11). In other words, internationalisation comprises all those activities that contribute to a more comprehensive HE system. Knight's (2008) definition might be labelled as vague or incomplete, but it is specifically that general character that makes it the most popularly-used of definitions. Although there have been several attempts to create an alternative definition, Knight's definition continues to be the most accepted due to its inclusivity and application to different times, spaces and contexts. In an attempt to make this definition more precise, de Wit et al. (2015, p. 3) expanded Knight's description by adding 'in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make meaningful contribution to society'. Therefore, clarifying the purpose of internationalisation, by highlighting its role in society through the delivery of high-quality education and research. Nevertheless, even though those are the most prevalent objectives of internationalisation in different contexts nowadays, the definition may elude important aspects of internationalisation, as it fails to sufficiently take into account the complexity and diversity of today's international education contexts. As Knight (2008) suggests, the concept of internationalisation should be constantly redefined due to its ceaselessly evolving nature. It is, therefore, hardly possible to enclose such a dynamic concept in a static definition.

2.2.2. Dimensions of internationalisation

The most conventional distinction in the international dimension of HE is grounded on the location in which the process takes place, 'at home' or 'abroad'. This classification was first suggested by Crowther et al. (2000, p. 6), which extensively defined the concept of internationalisation at home as 'any internationally related activity with the exception of outbound student and staff mobility', as opposed to the long-established notion of internationalisation abroad. Such distinction is considered to be a response to the problem raised by Nilsson (1999), who exposed the limitations that internationalisation abroad posed, after observing the low rate of students taking part in mobility programmes in Europe. Nilsson (1999) proposed a new concept of internationalisation that involved the vast number of students not willing to and/or not able to leave their home institution to

study abroad, resulting in the conception of internationalisation at home. Until that time, all forms of internationalisation had focused on student and staff mobility and their recruitment, and failed to address the learning and teaching experiences of those involved in the internationalisation process. For this reason, Crowther et al. (2000) put in a great deal of effort into describing the role of internationalisation at home in shaping the curriculum and fostering cultural exchange.

As the notion of internationalisation evolves, it brings along new concepts and pursuits, some of which are complicated to include in the above-mentioned categorisation. Activities related to relatively newly established concepts such as transnational education (TNE)[2], that take place abroad but are provided by home institutions or vice versa, pose a problem for the traditional location-based taxonomy (Beelen & Jones, 2015). Some scholars such as Beelen and Jones (2015) or de Wit (2016a) consider them as being under the term Internationalisation at Home (IaH). However, others such as Georghiou and Larédo (2015) opt for an update of the at home and abroad classification by adding a third dimension denominated 'international opening', which includes all those activities whose primary purpose is to 'enhance student experience and/or to access resources that are abroad' (ibid., p. 2). This lack of consensus points out the deficiencies of such classification and proves the shifting and evolving character of internationalisation, which might be calling for a newer and updated categorisation capable of encompassing the emerging forms or dimensions of internationalisation.

2.2.3. Rationales for internationalisation

Traditionally, the literature on the topic has identified four rationales for the main areas that are widely affected by the internationalisation of HE: economic, socio-cultural, academic and political (Knight & de Wit, 1995). Once again, the rapid evolution of internationalisation has shaped these four rationales over the years, and has established new categories. Nevertheless, this classification has been considered as a valuable way of identifying and describing rationales, and it is still widely used by researchers (Knight, 2015). Most recently, Knight (2015) discusses internationalisation rationales from the

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[2] Transnational education is defined by the UNESCO as 'all types of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based.' (Council of Europe, 2002)

different levels at which the process of internationalisation takes place: the individual, institutional, national and regional level.

At the individual level, worldview development, career enhancement, intercultural and international understanding and international network development are considered as main rationales (ibid.). According to the International Student Survey (ISS) from Quacquarelli Symonds (2016) 'What matters to IS?', prospective international students situate career enhancement as the top reason for studying abroad. This level is increasingly tied to the concept of global citizenship and the movement towards IaH. Internationalisation at the individual level, including host and international individuals, should be oriented towards creating global citizens (Dvir & Yemini, 2017). Research exploring domestic students' views on international students (see Dunne, 2009; Jourdini, 2012; Schreiber, 2011; Ward, 2001) agree on cross-cultural enrichment and awareness as main benefits accruing from the presence of international students.

Institutional level rationales would include: international branding and profile; student and staff development; strategic alliances; knowledge production; and income generation. As the HE system has consistently moved towards a more competitive and marketised approach, reputation and branding have become crucial institutional rationales (Brown, 2015a), which have been reflected in the positive impact of university rankings on increasing international student numbers. International branding together with income generation, however, have been considered as major risks for institutions in terms of quality of education (Knight, 2015). Institutional policies might focus on marketisation as a way of attracting students and income, leaving aside the goal of providing high-quality education, which might be grounded on the influence of reputation in international students' choice (see Brown and Carasso, 2014).

Government and other organisations at the national level enumerate human resources, better access to education, commercial trade, nation building, sociocultural development and diplomacy as their main reasons for internationalisation (Knight, 2015). These are reflected in their policies and vary substantially from country to country. In Europe, this variance is less dramatic due to the cooperation among European nations, and the establishment of common objectives present in European strategies such as the Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission, 2017).

Lastly, the regional level has gained particular importance during the last decade, especially in European HE due to the efforts of the Europeanisation policies, which have been considered as a model of international collaboration in internationalisation for other countries (de Wit & Hunter, 2014). Knight (2015) identifies four main rationales at this level: alignment of national systems, regional identity, geo-political alliances and regional competitiveness. The IAU 4th Global Survey (Egron-Polak & Hudson, 2014) collected the views on internationalisation of HEIs throughout the world, including expected benefits of internationalisation. Results on expected benefits of internationalisation were found to differ among regions. For example, in Europe the most important benefit reported by HEIs was improved quality of teaching and learning, while in Asia Pacific and North America the top ranked expected benefit was increased international awareness and deeper engagement with global issues by students. This highlights two of the points already raised in previous sections: the differences between contexts, and the increased emphasis on quality from the European side.

As de Wit (2016b) pointed out, an analysis of the different levels in which internationalisation is developed is crucial not only for the development of strategies but also for the evaluation of the existing strategies. Thus, a review of the current approaches at the different levels in Ireland will provide an extended view of the internationalisation of HE in the Irish context.

2.2.4. What makes higher education international?

Despite agreement amidst scholars and practitioners in the field of HE on the lack of a definite formula that leads to effective internationalisation, the endeavours to establish standards together with the efforts for measuring internationalisation began in its early days, according to de Wit 'it needs to have parameters if it is to be assessed' (de Wit, 2002, p. 115). These endeavours still persist nowadays, contradicting the idea of internationalisation as the constantly evolving concept that adapts to the individuality of each institution (Knight, 2014).

The concept of world-class higher education emerged as a result of the increased global competitiveness among HEIs, which have largely relied on international rankings as predictors of quality (Kirby & Eby, 2015). Rankings were developed in America in the 1980s by journalists, but did not spread internationally until the early 2000s with the creation of

the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), which marked 'the era of global rankings' (Marope et al., 2013). Due to the growing relevance of internationalisation and its power as an indicator of global quality education, later rankings, including the other two that conform the 'big three' Times Higher Education (THE) and QS World University Rankings, have included internationalisation factors among their indicators. This gave room to benchmarking tools specifically designed to measure internationalisation such as the THE's 'The World's Most International Universities', and the QS Stars. The effects of these rankings in shaping internationalisation policies have been proven. However, they have also been highly criticised since they are considered as incompletely looking at certain indicators. Also, it is claimed that their results are built on quantitative elements that are arbitrarily weighted, and therefore, fail to measure the quality of such internationalisation (de Wit, 2016b).

The U.S. higher education approach to internationalisation considers 'comprehensive internationalisation' as its motto. The term is defined as 'a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education' (Hudzik, 2011, p. 6). With this in mind, the American Council on Education (ACE) designed a model for comprehensive internationalisation that identifies six key dimensions for an effective internationalisation: articulated institutional commitment; administrative leadership, structure and staffing; curriculum, co-curriculum, and learning outcomes; faculty policies and practices; student mobility; and collaboration and partnerships (American Council on Education, n.d.). In the European context, as quality assurance has been regarded as the main objective in internationalisation policies, there have been innumerable attempts to develop an instrument to evaluate internationalisation, including the Internationalisation Strategies Advisory Service (ISAS) of the International Association of Universities (IAU, 2015), and ECA's Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation, which not only provides institutions with an insight into their internationalisation practices, but also contributes to their reputation and branding. With the movement towards IaH and the raised concern of HEIs to become more internationalised, the latest projects focus on the development of resources and self-assessing tools encouraging IaH practices. An example would be the ongoing Approaches and Tools for Internationalisation at Home (ATIAH) project, which

aims to improve the quality of European HE through the development of tools that can be used by HEIs to review and improve IaH practices (ATIAH, n.d.).

2.3. Internationalisation of Irish Higher Education

2.3.1. Origins and development

Although the majority of European countries saw an increase in the number of international students and international activities during the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, mainly as a result of the Joint Study Programme launched in 1976, Ireland did not experience a significant rise until the late 1980s onwards. Until the mid-1960s, Irish higher education was characterised as being an 'elite system' restricted to a privileged minority of the upper-middle class (see Walsh, 2014). The educational reform introduced by the government of Seán Lemass in the 1960s[3], influenced by the human capital theory brought by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), marked a turning point in the history of HE in Ireland (Walsh, 2011). This idea of investment in human capital, seen as essential for economic growth, situated higher education as a key driver for economy, and resulted in an increased access to higher education and the expansion of enrolments in tertiary institutions (Walsh, 2014). In this context, the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) started its service by providing voluntary support to the very limited number of international students on the island, that at that time were mostly medical and engineering undergraduates from African mission-related mobility practices (Cox, 1996). During the next two decades, the proportion of international students remained low with some students coming from Asia and Africa and neighbouring Britain, with very few Europeans, and short-term students from North America (ibid.). Whilst in the Republic of Ireland, this shortage of foreign students compared to other European countries was the result of 'highly selective entry, high tuition fees and lack of former colonial ties' (Cox, 1996, p. 95); in Northern Ireland, those decades were marked by the 'Troubles'[4], which lasted until 1998 and resulted in few foreign students coming to Northern Ireland and a large number of domestic students going abroad (Daly, 2016).

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[3] Seán Lemass was Taoiseach of Ireland from 1959 to 1966. During his time as leader of Ireland his government introduced educational reforms regarding the development of post-primary and higher technical education (for more information on Irish educational policy during Lemass's government see Fleming and Harford, 2014)

[4] 'The Troubles' refers to the violent sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland between Protestant unionists and Roman Catholic nationalists from 1968 to 1998 (Wallenfeldt, 2020).

In the mid 1980s, the European Commission formulated a research and development policy with the purpose of competing with the United States, that had recently lost its dominance as the leading world power and had been replaced by Japan (de Wit & Merkx, 2012). Thus, the European Commission incentivised the collaboration for curriculum development, mobility programmes and education-industry partnerships among governments, and introduced the European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus) (ibid.). The Erasmus scheme not only contributed to the highest rise in internationalisation up to that point, but also established some standards and influenced governments and institutions in their policies, that until that time were characterised for being 'overwhelmingly voluntarist, unorganised and individual' (Neave, 1992, p. 15). HEIs in Ireland, north and south, have participated in the Erasmus programme since its foundation in 1987, which resulted in a significant rise in the number of international students coming from European countries. However, Ireland was still situated at the bottom of the European Community in terms of international students' numbers, with only a 4% of international students in 1988-1989. This was an incentive in the creation of a small number of Bilateral Aid Fellowships and the establishment of the Programme for Economic and Social Progress that aimed to set Ireland as an 'International Education Centre' (Callan & Steele, 1991). To date, the Erasmus programme is by far the greatest exchange programme, allowing more than 60,000 Irish students and faculty members to study and work in 32 European countries, as well as receiving over 100,000 European students (HEA, 2017).

European HE in the 2000s was marked by the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999 by the higher education representatives of 29 countries, including Ireland and the United Kingdom. The declaration aimed to establish a cooperative European system of higher education capable of competing internationally, with regards to internationalisation-focused activities such as mobility schemes and curriculum development, among its key objectives (European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, 1999). In Ireland, the Bologna Process did not suppose a radical reform, but reaffirmed the right direction of the existing national policies in both, north and south, since their objectives were already largely 'Bologna compliant' (Mernagh, 2010; Robertson, 2010); and established the basis for successive internationalisation policies, including Ireland's International Education Strategy 2010-2015 'Investing in Global Relationships', and Northern Ireland's 'Graduating

to Success' strategy in 2012 (see DES 2010; Department for Employment and Learning, 2012).

2.3.2. Internationalisation at the supranational level

In a dramatically expanding international HE panorama, Europe's efforts for assuring its status over the emerging competitors such as China or India, rely on its reformed internationalisation policies with focus on preeminent practices abroad and at home. Through the flagship initiative 'Youth on the move', the Europe 2020 strategy intends to enhance internationalisation practices and high-quality education as well as increase student and trainee mobility and employability opportunities (European Commission, 2010). More recently, the renewed agenda for higher education adopted by the European Commission in May 2017 reiterates the promotion of 'international cooperation, exchange and mobility to boost quality' as one of its main objectives, and places emphasis on 'internationalisation at home' support (European Commission, 2017, p. 11). The EU counts on Erasmus + in education and training, and Horizon 2020 in research, as fundamental instruments to achieve these policy priorities. The Erasmus+ programme, established in 2014, unifies all the EU existent programmes in Ireland, and pursues to improve key competences and skills, as well as partnerships between education and employment from a centralised-Europe perspective. It is estimated that the Erasmus+ programme will provide funding for around 135,000 students and staff exchanges outside the EU and 2 million exchanges within the EU by 2020 (European Commission, 2018). In the Irish context, statistics for the academic year 2015/2016 showed a total of 3,173 outgoing students and 262 faculty members, and 7,579 incoming students and 707 faculty members (HEA, 2017, p. 3), which reflects the dominance of inward mobility in Irish HEIs.

The newly released Horizon 2020 programme also plays a crucial role in the Europe 2020 strategy, as it is considered as the 'largest EU research and innovation programme ever' and aims at raising the level of excellence in science, and positioning European universities and companies as world competitors (Enterprise Ireland, n.d.). Through H2020, the island pursues to attract over a €1.2b in funding for research and innovation (ibid.). Moreover, Ireland, north and south, actively participates in the Jean Monnet programme, which intends to promote excellence in teaching and research in the field of EU studies, and foster the dialogue between the academic world and policy-makers. There are currently two Jean

Monnet Centres of excellence in the island, Queen's University Belfast and the University of Limerick.

2.3.3. Internationalisation at the national level

In the Republic of Ireland, the International Education Strategy for Ireland 2016-2020, which is grounded on the principles of the 2010-2015 Strategy, seeks to ensure an internationalised education system that creates global citizens, and becomes a market leader nation in higher education through the rise in the number of inbound international students and eminent researchers; the provision of international competitive skills and experience as well as mobility opportunities for Irish students; and the construction of global networks to attract funding and achieve social and economic outcomes (Department of Education and Skills, 2016). The strategy establishes four strategic priorities:

- o 'A supportive national framework', in order to ensure a consensual internationalisation strategy through cohesion and collaboration by all the stakeholders at the national level.
- o 'Internationally-oriented, globally competitive HEIs', which involves a strategic development responsive to national and regional needs; a funding model; the provision of on-campus accommodation for international students; student recruitment and mobility of students, researchers and staff; the internationalisation of the curriculum, the provision of transnational higher education, and an international student experience for domestic students.
- o 'Sustainable growth in the English Language Training (ELT) sector', supported by a growth in specialised programmes (for academic or business purposes), and a more coordinated ELT sector.
- o 'Succeeding abroad' comprises the enhancement of pivotal international partnerships, and the promotion of Ireland as 'centre for human capital development' (DES, 2016, p. 37).

It is worth noticing that the strategy makes explicit reference to the importance of a 'whole-of-island' approach to promoting internationalisation as beneficial for both jurisdictions (DES, 2016, p. 40). This collaborative approach becomes even more significant when considering the possible negative effects that might emerge from Brexit on the international student flow to Northern Ireland.

In addition to this strategy, an International Education Mark (IEM) was proposed with the purpose of ensuring the quality of the international practices of those HEIs authorised to its use, and contributing to the international reputation of Ireland (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2013). HEIs under this mark need to be compliant with the Code of Practice designed by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), that establishes the criteria for providing a well-rounded international education for overseas students and trainees (QQI, 2015). Nevertheless, the IEM has not been introduced as of September 2020.

In its efforts to establish international networks and acquire global significance, Ireland has signed agreements with non-EU countries including Russia, Bolivia, Brazil, USA, India, Japan, China and Israel. It also encourages internationalisation through scholarships directed towards inbound mobility (e.g. Government of Ireland Scholarship), outbound mobility (e.g. International Scholarship Opportunities), and North-South mobility (e.g. Universities Ireland Scholarship) (HEA, 2016).

Even though there has been a notable improvement in the internationalisation of the higher education system in Northern Ireland during the last decade, its international student market still lags behind those of its neighbours, including the Republic of Ireland and other parts of the UK, with only a 4.4% of international enrolments. This can be attributed to the troublesome political history that has since impacted the number of incoming international students (see Section 2.3.1). Thus, the first Northern Irish higher education strategy, Graduating to Success, devotes a section to internationalisation in which states its willingness to establish a solid higher education system built on strong reputation and international competitiveness (DEL, 2015). This strategy calls for a review of the current institutional strategies by 2020, and the HEIs commitment to improve their international performance through:

o The attraction of more students, researchers and staff from abroad as a way to enhance economic outcomes, such as trade links and foreign investment; and social diversity in Northern Irish campuses.

o The encouragement of more home students to participate in mobility programmes in an attempt to enhance their study abroad experience and career prospectus.

o The boost of overseas institutional partnerships as a measure to increment commercial opportunities. (DEL, 2015)

Ireland, north and south, took part in the exchange programme Science without Borders (SwB) or Ciência sem Fronteiras (CsF), funded by the Brazilian government since 2011, which was aimed at undergraduate and postgraduate students and researchers with the objective of developing science and technology, innovation and competitiveness. The island hosted over 1000 Brazilian students a year. However, funding for the SwB programme faced cuts since late-2015, and was officially cancelled in 2017 as a consequence of economic and political changes in Brazil (see ICEF, 2017).

When comparing both policies, the Northern Irish approach seems to be anchored to a more traditional form of internationalisation that focuses mostly on mobility and relies on the individual role of institutions for its delivery, while Republic of Ireland policies seem to adapt to the current European trends, emphasising internationalisation at home (IaH) and internationalisation of the curriculum (IoC)[5], as well as a cohesive national policy, as crucial for success. There is, therefore, a need for Northern Ireland to develop a more extensive and up to date policy that contributes to a nationally cooperative higher education system, and accommodates current internationalisation goals.

2.3.4. Internationalisation at the institutional level

All of the nine universities included in this study are present in the top 300 of The World's Most International Universities 2021, with Queen's University Belfast and Trinity College Dublin leading in positions 21 and 41 respectively (Times Higher Education, 2020). The data from this ranking are obtained from the international outcome pillar of the THE World University Rankings, which is calculated by measuring universities proportions of international students and international staff, international co-authorship, and international reputation (ibid.).

A comparative analysis of the individual internationalisation strategic plans adopted by the seven universities in the Republic of Ireland (i.e. Trinity College Dublin, Dublin City University, University College Dublin, University College Cork, Maynooth University, University of Limerick, and NUI Galway) and the two universities in Northern Ireland (Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University) determines three common goals:

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[5] Internationalisation of the curriculum has been defined by Leask (2009, p. 209) as 'the incorporation of an international and intercultural dimension into the content of the curriculum as well as the teaching and learning arrangements and support services of a programme of study'.

attracting a larger number of international students, increasing mobility and partnerships, and improving international reputation (see Dublin City University, 2017; Maynooth University, 2018; NUI Galway, 2015; Queen's University Belfast, 2016, Trinity College Dublin, 2014; University College Cork, 2017; University College Dublin, 2016; University of Limerick, 2015; Ulster University, 2016). These three goals are certainly in line with the metrics used by the THE World University Rankings international outlook area, which includes proportion of international students and staff as well as international collaboration. This similarity between universities internationalisation strategies goals and the THE ranking metrics might reflect the impact of these kind of rankings on institutional strategies, as these rankings might serve to increase the university reputation, and therefore, attract international students.

However, as discussed previously (see Section 2.2.4), internationalisation cannot be measured only by taking into account quantitative metrics, and quality should be considered as crucial to assure a real internationalisation. Of the nine strategies examined, only two address the importance of needs and satisfaction of inbound international students (see Maynooth University, 2018; University of Limerick, 2015). In addition, a mention of an internationalised curriculum is frequent in these strategies, but in most cases there is no explanation of how this curriculum is internationalised, or fail to show an understanding of the concept by considering an internationalised curriculum that that includes certain 'internationalised degrees' such as BA World Languages and BA International (see University College Cork, 2017). This issue was also observed in the study by Clarke et al. (2018), in which surveyed institutions acknowledged the lack of clarity regarding learning outcomes, curricular provision and pedagogy. Thus, internationalisation might remain as a falsely interpreted concept by institutions, and their internationalisation efforts are in many instances economically driven.

More recently, the Irish Universities Association' charter – *Ireland's future talent: A charter for Irish universities* – has been signed by the seven HEA-funded universities in the Republic of Ireland. The charter details a set of common commitments that not only acknowledge the importance of increasing international students' numbers, but also the broader benefits of internationalisation, such as outward student mobility and internationalisation of the curriculum. In addition, the charter recognises the importance of addressing

international student challenges, including accommodation, student services, and immigration policy (Irish Universities Association, 2018).

After exploring the phenomenon of internationalisation of Irish higher education at the supranational, national and institutional levels, the next section focuses on international students attending Irish universities, including their characteristics, impact, motivations and interests, as well as the challenges they face.

2.4. International Students in Irish Universities

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of students travelling abroad for the purposes of enhancing their education through an international perspective. It is now estimated that there are over 5 million international students enrolled in higher level institutions worldwide (OECD, 2015). Although Ireland has not always been considered as an important destination for international students in higher education, for the last 15 years the percentage growth rates in international student numbers in Ireland have been similar to, or in some cases higher, than those experienced by the main destination countries for international students (i.e., US, UK, Australia, Germany, France, China and Japan). Northern Ireland has also seen an increase in EU and non-EU students during the past years (see HESA, 2019), in spite of the predicted decrease of EU students as a result of the Brexit referendum in 2016 (see Highman, 2017). According to Education Ireland (2010), it is estimated that there are approximately 26,000 international students from 159 different countries studying in Irish higher education institutions (HEIs) at present, of which over 40% are non-native speakers of English.

2.4.1. Characteristics and figures

According to the data from the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for the academic year 2017/2018, the total number of international students enrolled in full-time and part-time undergraduate and postgraduate courses in universities on the island of Ireland equates to over 24,000 students (see Table 1), which constitutes 14% of the overall student body. The Republic of Ireland attracts students from over 150 nationalities, of which 43% of full-time undergraduate students come from Asia, followed by 30% from North America, 20% from Europe, and 7% from other countries (HEA, 2019). International students in Northern Ireland come from 76

different countries, over 60% of them come from Asia, with China the top country of origin, constituting over 30%. This is followed by 14% of international students from Europe and 9% from North America (HESA, 2019). The table presented below (Table 1) provides a more detailed view of the data concerning the number of international students studying in Ireland. This table has been designed according to the information extracted from the statistics produced by the HEA (2019) for universities in the Republic of Ireland, and HESA (2019) for data on the universities in Northern Ireland.

Table 1. *Number of international enrolments by university in 2017/2018 (HEA, 2019; HESA, 2019)* [6]

International Students in 2017/18 by University

University College Dublin	4,386
NUI Galway	2,991
Trinity College Dublin	2,967
Queen's University Belfast	2,865
University College Cork	2,421
Dublin City University	1,678
University of Limerick	1,519
University of Ulster	770
Maynooth University	769
Total	**20,366**

It is worth noting that these numbers do not reflect the total of international students on the island of Ireland, as it focuses on public universities, excluding HEA-funded colleges, Institutes of Technology (IoTs) and privately-funded HEIs, as well as English Language Training (ELT) students, who are becoming the largest group of international students (DES, 2016).

To date there is no set of data that gathers complete information on international students on the island. The annual report by Education in Ireland (2012), which was discontinued in 2012, is the most extensive dataset to date, since it solely focused on international students in Ireland, including data not only on HEA-funded HEIs, but also on private HEIs, and recorded valuable data on international activities such as distance learning and transnational education. The Eurostudent Survey V (HEA, 2016) also provided detailed and

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[6] These numbers exclude students from the ROI studying in Northern Ireland, and students from the UK studying in Ireland.

extensive data on international students, including the fact that international students are more satisfied with their academic life and less satisfied with their social life than domestic students, or that Ireland registers one of the highest age profiles in Europe, as 53% of international students are over 30 years of age. At present, the HEA (see HEA, 2019) provides data on international enrolments in HE from the academic year 2017/2018. Data on international enrolments includes information on course level, field of study, mode and institute. For the academic year 2017/2018 the figures can be summarised as follows:

- o International students constitute 14% of the overall student population.
- o Nearly 60% of international students are enrolled in undergraduate courses. The remaining 40% are enrolled in master's and PhD programmes.
- o The majority of international students are enrolled in full-time education, constituting 93% of the international enrolments.
- o Arts and humanities, Business, administration and law, and Health and welfare are the three main field choices for undergraduate and postgraduate international students.

In Ireland, north and south, the number of incoming students exceeds that of outgoing students. As an illustration, in the Republic of Ireland, the statistics presented in the Erasmus+ 2015 to 2017 overview (see HEA, 2017), showed a total of 3,137 outgoing students and 7,579 incoming students, which reflects the dominance of inward mobility in Irish HEIs. However, governments are trying to change this trend through the outward mobility encouragement reflected in the latest educational policies, such as 'Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026' in the Republic of Ireland, and 'Graduating to Success' in Northern Ireland, emphasising the importance of graduates with foreign language skills on the country's economy[7].

2.4.2. The impact of international students

The impact of international students in a nation or institution has been largely addressed from the economic perspective due to its measurable nature. It is estimated that tertiary international students on the island of Ireland generate a total annual income of

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[7] The encouragement of foreign languages in education in recent policies is seen as key for Ireland's economic development, as it provides a bridge to competing effectively in foreign markets, as well as ensuring foreign direct investment (see DES, 2017, p.7).

approximately €386m in the Republic of Ireland (INDECON, 2019)[8] and £170m in Northern Ireland (HEPI & Kaplan International, 2018)[9]. These figures include both tuition fees and off-campus expenditure, not only contributing greatly to the economy of the higher education sector, but also to the island as a whole. However, there are other less visible or 'hidden' benefits that international students bring along, and that are less easily quantified.

The literature on internationalisation, although less extensive, also identifies international students' contribution to the academic and sociocultural dimensions. The presence of international students in the classroom and the internationalisation efforts have an impact on the teaching and learning processes. As a consequence, faculty are encouraged to adapt their teaching methodology and even the curriculum to reach this international audience (Ensari & Miller, 2006). Although studying with students whose L1 is not English might be perceived by domestic students as having a negative impact on their learning (see Migration Advisory Committee, 2018), domestic students are the most reportedly benefitted from their cross-national interactions, as those interactions enhance their intercultural awareness, as well as cognitive and behavioural skills (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013; Lee et al., 2012). In this way, contributing to the development of global citizenship as pursued by institutional and governmental policies (see Section 2.3). In addition, international students can be viewed as potential 'informal ambassadors' by institutions, contributing to the promotion of the institution and the country, and acting as a cornerstone in the networking process (Scottish Government, 2018). It is not surprising that there is growing consensus over the impact on the off-campus community (ibid.), however, this area has not been fully explored yet.

2.4.3. Motivations and interests: Why Ireland?

Taking into account the factors that international students regard as important when choosing a university may be crucial for those institutions interested in attracting inbound students. According to the worldwide survey by Hobsons (2014), the top five priorities for international students when selecting a university abroad are: quality of education; international recognition of qualifications; country's attitude to international students; safety; and ease of getting a visa. Irish HEIs' international prospectus present reputation,

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[8] Data estimated for the 2017/2018 academic year.
[9] Data estimated for the 2015/2016 academic year. Data for the 2017/2018 academic year could not be found.

employability, quality of education and life in Ireland as main attractors for international students to choose to study on the island. The ICOS (2013) Student Forum report and the study by Clarke et al. (2018) identified the driving forces that move international students to complete their studies in Ireland. The results determined six major incentives:

o Ireland as an English-speaking country. In a globalised world in which English maintains its status as lingua franca, receiving instruction in English and living in an English-speaking community offers access to wider educational and career spheres.

o Geographical location. International students (mostly non-EU) regard it as an occasion to explore nearby European countries during their stay. Ireland, as part of the EU, provides students with the opportunity to travel freely within the EEA countries.

o Recommendations. Some students reported to have based their decision on family and friends' recommendations that have previously spent a period of time on the island.

o Reputation. International students were influenced by international rankings and Ireland's status in their choice.

o Employability. Many students felt that an Irish qualification would be highly recognised globally, and would lead to more opportunities to find a job.

o Programme design and funding. The diversity of degree options, their duration, and scholarships offered were also present among the students' motivations.

2.4.4. Challenges for international students in Ireland

Although Ireland has ranked number one in Europe for international student satisfaction (Raileanu, 2015), international students in Irish HEIs still encounter a series of challenges that negatively impact their experience. Identifying such issues may be regarded as the most plausible first step to address those, in order to provide a satisfactory experience for students, and as a result, leading to an increase in the number of inbound students and a more effective internationalisation. Thus, a review of the results extracted from the literature examining the challenges that international students face when studying at Irish universities, may serve as the cornerstone for the development of future research on the topic. In an effort to explore the key issues affecting international students attending Irish HEIs, the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) carried out a series of International Student Forums (see ICOS, 2012a; ICOS, 2012b;

ICOS, 2013; ICOS, 2017; ICOS, 2018). A synthesis of the findings drawn from the reports resulting from the International Student Forums held by ICOS and USI, as well as the study commissioned by the HEA (Clarke et al., 2018) identifies the most recurrent challenges facing international students in Irish HEIs:

o Pre-arrival information and orientation. Students reported a diverse range of challenges associated with the insufficient information provided by institutions pre- and post-arrival, which made their experience more stressful. The students' suggestions included more detailed pre-arrival information and a more comprehensive orientation programme, covering all the aspects of student life and facilitating their integration process (i.e., academic, accommodation, health, shopping, transportation, etc.) (ICOS, 2012a; ICOS, 2012b; ICOS, 2013).

o Accommodation. Issues with accommodation in large cities such as Dublin have been largely reported over the decades and persist to this day. The on- and off-campus property deficit and its cost leads students to live in unsafe areas and creates other problems (e.g., racial discrimination, fraud, etc). Students believe that they would benefit from more accommodation assistance provided by the institutions (ICOS, 2013; Clarke et al., 2018).

o Social inclusion. Even though Irish people are described as 'warm and friendly' by international students, they feel that it is rather difficult to establish a 'solid' relationship with Irish nationals and often find themselves socialising with co-nationals or other international students. Their suggestions include the encouragement of interaction in lectures through more discussion based and group work activities, and more integrative distribution of students in on-campus accommodation (ICOS, 2012a; ICOS, 2012b; ICOS, 2013; ICOS, 2017; Clarke et al., 2018).

o Expenses. Ireland's living and education costs are usually higher than those in their countries of origin. It is suggested that institutions facilitate the payment of high non-EU fees in instalments, and provide employment opportunities (ICOS, 2013; Clarke et al., 2018).

o Student visa. Students experienced difficulties in the visa application process, reporting long waiting times, re-entry visa issues and high costs (ICOS, 2012b; ICOS, 2013).

- o Language. Language challenges are commonly related to the different Irish accents and the speed. They have been reported in the academic sphere, with difficulty to follow lectures and complete workload as main issues; as well as in the social dimension, affecting their ability to build relationships with home students and perform everyday tasks (e.g., asking for directions). Suggestions involve the provision of language support courses by the institutions and the efforts of the lecturers to adapt to their needs (ICOS, 2012a; ICOS, 2012b; ICOS, 2013; ICOS, 2017; ICOS, 2018, Clarke et al., 2018).

It is worth noting that language has been consistently highlighted as one of the key challenges facing international students in all the reports resulting from the International Student Forums conducted by ICOS and USI, as well as the recent report by Clarke et al. (2018). Therefore, it can be assumed that language poses a key challenge for academic and social adjustment of international students attending Irish HEIs. This topic will be further explored in the following chapter.

2.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter has identified the phenomenon of internationalisation of higher education as an intricate and dynamic concept that should be constantly redefined due to its evolving nature. It is generally assumed that the internationalisation of higher education involves all those practices that contribute to a more comprehensive HE system, through the delivery of high-quality education and research. Internationalisation of HE has traditionally been classified into two dimensions relating to where the process takes place – at home or abroad-, however, as the concept evolves, new concepts that do not occur at home or abroad such as transnational education or e-learning emerge, suggests the need for a new categorisation. The internationalisation of HE has to contribute to development at four different levels: individual, institutional, national and regional. It contributes to individual development, such as career enhancement or intercultural understanding; institutional development such as student and staff development or income generation; national development, including human resources or sociocultural development; and regional development, such as regional competitiveness of the EU.

In the Irish context, efforts have been made at the institutional, national and supranational level through the establishment of internationalisation strategies and policy that guide

internationalisation practices. The number of international students in Irish HEIs has consistently increased during the past three decades, bringing not only economic, but also sociocultural benefits to the country. Lastly, the pivotal role of language in the internationalisation of Irish HE has been observed in the review of the literature, since it has been identified as the one of the primary reasons for international students to choose to study on the island of Ireland, but also as a persistent challenge facing international students in Irish universities.

CHAPTER 3: Adjustment Issues Faced by International Students

3.1. Chapter Introduction

This chapter is divided into two main sections. Section 3.2 examines previous research on international students' acculturation, by firstly, establishing the differences between the concepts of acculturation, adaptation and adjustment; and secondly, by exploring the literature on international student acculturation. Section 3.3 focuses on the role of language on international student adaptation. This is done by examining the role of language across three adaptation domains – academic, sociocultural, and psychological adaptation – as well as the language-related challenges facing NNES international students within each adaptation domain.

3.2. Research on International Students' Adjustment

3.2.1. Acculturation, adaptation and adjustment

Before discussing intercultural contact, it is imperative to establish the definition and differences among the most recurrent terms in the literature– acculturation, adaptation and adjustment. While reviewing the literature, it has been noticed that most of the work in this area fails to determine the meaning of these core concepts, and the terms are used interchangeably leading to confusion. This diverse usage of terms is frequently attributed to the multiple definitions and theories that have arisen over time and across different disciplines. Thus, this section focuses on defining these key terms by considering the different meanings attributed to them over time and across different disciplines.

Although the concept of acculturation has been studied from multiple perspectives, a comparison of the definitions provided in the three main disciplines–sociology, psychology and anthropology, concur in describing acculturation as the process of change resulting from cross-cultural contact. The literature often stresses the difference between acculturation and assimilation, with the latter being considered by some as an outcome or stage of acculturation (Redfield et al., 1936; Berry, 1997), or a process that positions one culture over the other, disregarding its reciprocity (Teske & Nelson, 1974; Berry et al., 2011).

Adjustment has been also considered as a stage of the acculturation process in the early models of acculturation (Lysgaard, 1955), yet more contemporary theories conceive adjustment as the process of achieving 'the fit'; and distinguish different domains such as sociocultural and psychological (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Adjustment and adaptation are largely used interchangeably, with the subtle difference that adjustment has been associated with individual changes in the psychological domain, while adaptation is seen as a long-term modification or outcome, and it is normally related to the sociocultural domain (Kotthoff & Spencer-Oatey, 2007). Castro (2003) compares the acculturation and adjustment processes, and draws a line between concepts by stating that acculturation is used to describe changes, and adaptation is instead linked to outcomes. In accordance with Castro's differentiation, in this thesis the term 'adjustment' will be used to refer to the process of adjusting to the new setting, while the term 'adaptation' will be used to refer to the final outcome resulting from a successful adjustment process.

It is also worth mentioning the differences between culture shock and acculturation, as these terms will be referred to in the following sections. Culture shock and acculturation have also been largely used as synonyms, however, due to the negative connotations of the term 'shock', culture shock has been regarded as the negative impact of cross-cultural contact, and has been gradually replaced by other more neutral terms such as 'acculturative stress' (see Berry, 2006) to refer to the negative outcomes of acculturation.

3.2.2. Early perspectives on adjustment

The phenomenon of cross-cultural adaptation has been broadly studied since the 1930s, in which the concept of acculturation was introduced by anthropologists who reflected on the changes resulting from the contact among cultures, affecting one or both groups (Redfield et al., 1936). As a consequence of growth of student mobility after the Second World War, research on international students began to flourish in a systematic fashion during the late 1950s and early 1960s, mainly in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Researchers began to consider international students as a separate group of cross-cultural travellers due to their particular purpose and sojourning nature, and explored a wide variety of topics including academic achievement, adjustment and attitudes among others (Spencer & Ruth, 1970). The psychological perspectives in the 1950s changed the approach to the study of acculturation, moving from a group-based

phenomenon to be considered from anthropological and sociological perspectives, to both an individual and group phenomenon (Graves, 1967). This was reflected in how the concept became defined as 'the process by which an individual or group from culture A learns how to take on the values, behaviours, norms and lifestyle of culture B' (Leininger, 1970, p. 56).

International students are considered as one of the most studied groups of cross-cultural travellers. This is due to their great accessibility as participants in general, and the possibility of access to a longitudinal type of research, which has been considered as the most suitable method in the study of acculturation, since it is a process that occurs over time (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). It is widely agreed that during the early decades, research on the adjustment of student sojourners focused on their social and psychological issues, and was strongly influenced by clinical approaches that considered acculturation as a mental illness (Milhouse & Asante, 2001; Ward et al., 2001). In this context, Oberg (1954, p. 1), introduced the concept of 'culture shock' and defined it as 'an occupational disease of people who have been suddenly transplanted abroad'. This concept of culture shock grew along 'the curves of adjustment' theories in an attempt to frame the process of acculturation, identifying different stages of the acculturation process, that would follow a curve pattern[10] (Lysgaard, 1955; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). This culture shock theory was and is still considered as a seminal work for the subsequent literature on the topic, including research on international students, which has also been largely consistent with its principles (Zhou et al., 2008). The intensive review of the early studies presented by Ward et al. (2001) identifies cultural distance; the patterns of acculturation; changes in self-construal; and the nature and determinants of acculturation as the major topics explored.

3.2.3. Acculturation as a learning experience and the ABC model

By the early 1980s, the clinical conception of acculturation discussed in Section 3.2.2 was displaced by a new perspective that contemplated sojourning as a learning experience, and therefore, regarded the notion of positive action from both, sojourners and host members,

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[10] These 'curves of adjustment' theories include the U-Curve model for adjustment introduced by Lysgaard (1955), according to which the adjustment process follows a U pattern that involves four stages, namely 'honeymoon', 'culture shock', 'adjustment' and 'mastery'; and the W-Curve model of Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), according to which the adjustment process would follow a W pattern and would include five stages – 'honeymoon', ' culture shock', 'initial adjustment', 'mental isolation' and 'acceptance and integration'.

as a facilitator of the adjustment process, as opposed to the previous static inclination (Bochner, 1982; Kilneberg, 1982). In this more recent context, the term culture shock has been criticised due to its implicit focus on the negative outcomes of acculturation. Instead, it has been reconceptualised by acknowledging also the positive aspects of the process, as well as by conceiving 'shock' as the stress arising from the lack of the pertinent skills and knowledge during the adjustment process (Bochner, 2003; Kim, 2001).

Although scholars such as Schartner and Young (2016) agree on the arduousness of synthesising the vast amount of research on student sojourners, the contemporary literature highlights three major theoretical perspectives on acculturation. These relate to stress and coping theories, which have focused on the quality and quantity of interactions, as well as social support and the psychological well-being; culture learning theories, that look at the cultural aspect of the patterns and outcomes of relationships; and social identification theories, which explore the perceptions of international and domestic students (Ward, 2001; Zhou et al., 2008).

Since early theories of acculturation emerged, there have been many attempts to predict, conceptualise and systematise the process of acculturation into different frameworks and models. Berry (1976) made a significant contribution to the field by identifying a set of variables and their relationships, addressing the ecological, cultural and behavioural domains from a bidirectional perspective, which has contributed greatly to the development of further research and theories. On the basis of Berry's model, Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001) developed what might be considered as the most comprehensive acculturation framework to date. Ward et al. (2001) critically analysed the three theoretical approaches to acculturation outlined above and proposed a model of the acculturation process that integrates these three perspectives. This model has been largely referred to as the ABC model, as it comprises (a) affective– provided by the stress and coping framework, (b) behavioural– drawn from culture learning theories, and (c) cognitive– derived from the social identification perspective responses. Another central contribution to the acculturation theories made by Ward and colleagues is the distinction between psychological and sociocultural domains, which although interrelated, must be considered separately due to their empirical differences, including theoretical foundations, predictors, and patterns of variation (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). This division is also supported by recent research in the Irish HE context, that considers this

distinction as necessary to understand the adjustment process of international students (O'Reilly et al., 2010).

Ward et al. (2001, p. 42) define psychological adjustment as the 'feelings of well-being or satisfaction during cross-cultural transitions', and therefore, it is grounded in the stress and coping framework. Research on international students has identified proficiency in the language of the host country, social support and connectedness, and individual characteristics as major predictors of psychological adaptation (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2007). The most reported psychological outcomes arising from difficulties associated with adaptation include stress, anxiety, depression and psychosomatic problems (Han et al., 2013; Sa et al., 1993). On the other hand, sociocultural adaptation is defined as 'the ability to fit in', and it is better understood from a culture learning and social identification framework (Ward et al., 2001, p. 42). A review of the literature reveals that international students' sociocultural adaptation depends mainly on language proficiency, cultural distance, length of stay in the country, and individual characteristics (Pedersen, 2010; Wang & Sun, 2009). In terms of variation patterns, sociocultural adaptation has been observed to improve quickly during the early stages and then stabilise; while psychological adaptation problems seem to be more prominent during the first months, and then follow an inconsistent pattern (see for example Wang et al., 2012), contradicting the curve theories proposed in the early research.

3.2.4. Towards a more specific approach for international students

In their acculturative framework, Ward et al. (2001) determine the two broad domains of adaptation common to all migrant groups (i.e., sociocultural and psychological), however, as it has been already mentioned, student sojourners present distinct characteristics and intentions. In order to succeed academically, students need to become familiar with the new education environment, including institution and discipline specific demands such as regulations, practices and academic discourse and conventions. Academic achievement is the foremost purpose of international students' mobility, and therefore, academic adaptation must be considered in order to comprehend their particular acculturation process.

Research on international student adaptation has largely relied on a bidimensional framework, arising from the sociological and psychological perspectives reviewed in the previous section, and hence, disregarding the specific nature of the educational domain (see Yusoff & Chelliah, 2010). For example, O'Reilly et al. (2015) in a recent study of American students in the Irish Higher Education context, base their research on Ward and colleagues' work, and stress the significance of addressing academic adjustment. However, they still regard it as an embedded factor in the sociocultural (academic satisfaction and colleague stress) and psychological (academic stress) domains. During the last decade, a more educationally led approach has arisen, paying special attention to the academic needs of student sojourners, and consequently considering academic adaptation as an independent area of students' acculturation. The burgeoning research on academic adaptation has established language proficiency and cultural differences in the education system (study techniques, test taking, classroom instruction) as the two core variables influencing international students' academic adjustment (see Andrade, 2006; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Araujo, 2011; Mukminin & McMahon, 2013; Wong, 2004).

Academic adaptation, whereas it can be regarded as the most relevant domain when examining student adjustment, must not be considered as the sole and ultimate adaptation issue affecting student sojourners. As Edwards & Ran (2006, p. vi) claim, 'academic issues cannot be seen in isolation from other aspects of the student experience'. Some recent studies have established the link between academic and sociocultural adaptation, but still fail to include the psychological dimension or address it as being embedded in the other domains (Chen & Chen, 2009; Hawkes, 2014; Alsahafi & Seong-Chul Shin, 2017). Notwithstanding, a new area of research regards academic adaptation as the third major domain in the study of students' acculturation, and advocates for a more comprehensive framework as pivotal to understand the international students' acculturation process (Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Schartner & Young, 2016; Zhang & Goodson, 2011).

In this context, Schartner and Young (2016) address the lack of a comprehensive framework for international students and propose a three-dimensional model grounded on contemporary theory and empirical research. Schartner and Young's conceptual model of international student adjustment and adaptation represents a comprehensive contribution to the student sojourner literature, and provides the basis for further theoretical and empirical research. This model not only examines the three domains individually and

illustrates their interrelation, but also incorporates pre-sojourn and in-sojourn factors that contribute to the adjustment process (see Figure 1).
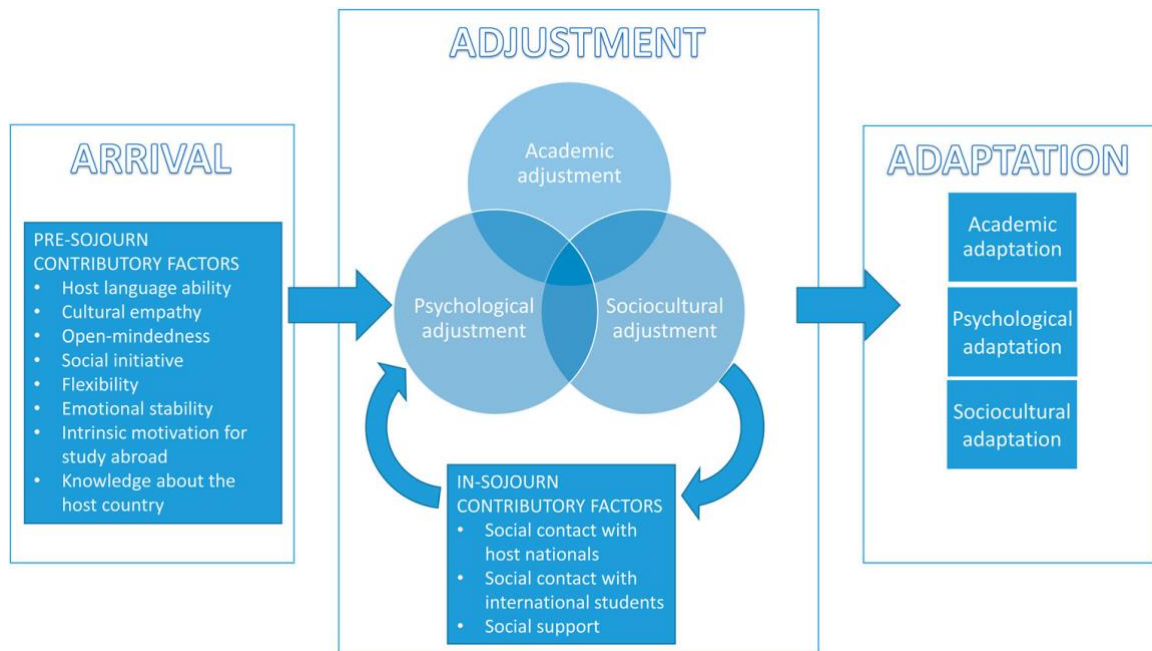
Figure 1. *A Conceptual Model of International Student Adjustment and Adaptation (Schartner & Young, 2016, p. 374)*

This model, however, presents international student acculturation as a three-stage linear process (i.e., arrival, adjustment, and adaptation), echoing the early theories on adjustment that postulate a predictive model of adjustment consisting of a number of phases (i.e., the curve of adjustment theories by Lysgaard, 1955 and Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963), which have been widely criticised and dismissed by scholars such as Ward et al. (2001) and Furnham (2001). Therefore, this model proposed by Schartner and Young (2016) contradicts the more recent empirical evidence by failing to represent the degree of variability of acculturation phases between individuals and between adjustment domains (see for example Wang et al., 2012), as well as by overlooking the fact that the adjustment process does not necessarily lead to students' successful adaptation (see for example Dorsett, 2017).

Moreover, Schartner and Young's model does not include the complete set of contributory demographic factors that have been found to affect the adjustment process; it only considers social contact and support as in-sojourn contributory factors. For example, length of residence in the host country has been proved to have an impact on students' adaptation, as students experience higher levels of psychological distress and sociocultural

adjustment difficulties during the first months (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006), as well as academic adaptation difficulties (Bayley et al., 2002). In the same way, previous cross-cultural experience has also been considered as a significant predictor of adaptation (see Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Students' level of study has also been found to have an effect on students' experiences during the adjustment process. Kim (2018) observed that the adjustment experiences of undergraduate students differ from those of graduate students due to programme levels and academic requirements. In addition, in Schartner and Young's model, in-sojourn contributory factors are presented as being affected by sociocultural adjustment, and affecting psychological adjustment, as if those were purely social; therefore, failing to represent the existent reciprocity between in-sojourn contributory factors and the three adjustment domains. Therefore, although this model can be considered as the most comprehensive framework to date, and provides a solid base for research in international student adjustment and adaptation, it could be developed further as the research in this area expands.

3.3. The Role of Language on International Students' Adjustment

Language is certainly the most reported challenge in research on international student adaptation by both, students (Wang & Hannes, 2013; Alsahafi & Seong-Chul Shin, 2017) and faculty members (Trice, 2003; Bretag et al., 2002; Bayley et al., 2002). In their study, Ryan and Carroll (2006) found that linguistic issues such as native speakers' accents and idiomatic expressions may also pose a difficulty for international students who are native speakers of the host language, not to mention the difficulty that language might pose to non-native speakers of the host language. The majority of studies in this area are based on English-speaking universities, and conclude that English language proficiency plays a key role in the adjustment process and remains a major area of unsolved problems (Zhou & Zhang, 2014; Sato & Hodge, 2009; Mori, 2000; Robertson et al.,2000). In the Irish tertiary education context, although the improvement of English language skills is one of the main drivers of international students' choice (see Section 1.2.4), the English language continues to be considered as their biggest adaptation challenge (ICOS, 2012b; ICOS, 2012a; ICOS, 2017; ICOS, 2018; Harris-Byrne, 2017; Lewthwaite, 1996; Robertson et al., 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Communication is regarded as central to intercultural adaptation, since it is 'the necessary vehicle without which adaptation cannot take place' (Kim, 2005, p. 379). Thus, language proficiency is positively correlated with adjustment and vice versa. For example, Messner and Liu (1995), Stoynoff (1997), and Senyshyn et al. (2000) studied the relationship between TOEFL scores and adjustment, stating that the students with higher TOEFL scores had more positive experiences and felt more satisfied with their sojourning experience in general. In the same way, research on the reasons for international student attrition identified language proficiency as one of the main determinants (Warner, 2006). It is therefore assumed that host language proficiency constitutes a major adaptation predictor common to the three adjustment domains. Studies analysing the relationship between language competence and adaptation have revealed that higher level of English proficiency leads to better academic performance in an English-speaking institutional environment (Zhang & Brunton, 2007; Poyrazli et al.,2001; Stoynoff, 1997), as well as better psychological and sociocultural adjustment (Zhang & Goodson, 2011).

3.3.1. Language and academic adjustment

Research on acculturative stressors positions language as the main factor affecting international students' academic success (Barrat & Huba, 1994; Lewthwaite, 1996; Robertson et al., 2000; Trahar, 2014; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Studies exploring students' and lecturers' perspectives point to language as the biggest challenge influencing the teaching and learning processes (see for example Schartner, 2016; Yanyin & Yinan, 2010; Brown, 2008); therefore, exposing its leading role in the academic adaptation domain. The literature on academic adaptation identifies challenges related to the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, and although needs might differ between disciplines and levels, these four aspects of language are intertwined and equally necessary for all tertiary level students. The majority of results drawn from the literature mention these aspects broadly and either fail to explore specific issues or focus on one or two skills disregarding the others, except for studies such as those conducted by Evans and Green (2007), or Mehar Singh (2014) that encompass these four skills and a diversity of sub-skills. As an example, scholars such as Phakiti & Li (2011), Alghail and Mahfoodh (2016) consider reading and writing as the two pillars of academic adjustment, while others sustain the dominant role of listening and speaking as communication-based (Huang, 2005; Robertson et al., 2000). Thus, a review of the literature will provide a wider view by both,

encompassing the different language aspects, and identifying the particular recurrent challenges within each skill.

Strong writing skills are necessary for academic success. Academic writing constitutes an area of particular difficulty since it is an essential skill required in a wide range of assessment methods used in higher education including essays, dissertations or exams. Recent research on academic adaptation issues for international students recognises academic writing as their major concern (Eunjeong, 2016; Evans & Morrison, 2011; Wu, 2011). Participants reveal challenges related to the style and structure of academic writing, such as problems differentiating between formal and colloquial language (Miller, 2014), and difficulties structuring and organising assignments (Eunjeong, 2016). Difficulties concerning writing lengthy texts have also been highlighted in related studies, in which students expose taking longer time to complete assignments compared to their native peers (Miller, 2014), as well as concerns about making grammar mistakes and not having enough time to complete their assignments (Sandekian et al., 2015).

Academic writing also involves getting familiar with academic conventions of the host institution. Students often report difficulties understanding the concept of plagiarism and the technique of referencing, as well as expressing their own voice, which may be attributed to the difference in orientation towards intellectual property in their home country (Harris & Chonaill, 2016; Holmes, 2004; Mehar Singh, 2016; Phakiti & Li, 2011; Braxley, 2005). In their study at an Irish IoT, Harris & Ní Chonaill (2016) surveyed lecturers pointed at grammatical issues, sentence and paragraph construction and plagiarism as main language issues concerning students from migrant backgrounds. These findings are consistent with Novera's research in which grammatical and syntactical mistakes are associated with the influence of L1 structures and conventions (Novera, 2004), and supports the concept of prior language experience having an impact on coping academic requirements exposed by Sawir (2005). This difference in academic conventions between institutions has also been associated with difficulties writing critically (see for example Shaheen, 2016; Ravichandran et al., 2017; Samanhudi & Linse, 2019). This has been attributed to a lack of critical thinking skills in written assignments, which often results in dissatisfaction from faculty members and a negative impact on the students' ability to perform successfully (see Kelley, 2008; Lillis & Turner, 2001).

Like writing, reading has also been reported as a substantial challenge in relation to the difficulty of coping with the workload (Novera, 2004; Mendelson, 2002; Wang & Hannes, 2013). Students who are non-native speakers of the host language are considered to be in a disadvantaged position when it comes to fulfilling reading tasks. Studies by Durkin (2004), Goodman (1976) and Reid et al. (1998) agree on the fact that reading academic material takes non-native students more time if compared to domestic students or native speakers. This issue is commonly attributed to the necessity of reading multiple times in order to understand the text fully, as well as the unfamiliarity with academic and discipline-specific terminology (Wang & Hannes, 2014; Hirano, 2015; Lin & Yi, 1997). Students often regard themselves as 'slow readers', and consider the workload to be excessive and unachievable (Lin & Yi, 1997). This challenge may not only affect academic adaptation, but also is considered as a stress predictor, and presents a strong connection with sociocultural adjustment, as students consider that the workload has a direct effect on their time to socialise (Gautam et al., 2016).

In terms of listening and comprehension difficulties the literature considers this skill as the least challenging of the four skills, however, students often position understanding lectures as the foremost challenge (Kuo, 2011; Medved et al., 2013; Wang & Hannes, 2013). These difficulties have been commonly associated with students' limited vocabulary, as well as lecturers' accents and rates of speech (ibid.). The use of idiomatic styles, humour and culture-specific references have been also mentioned among students' difficulties to understand lectures (Holmes, 2004; Sandekian et al., 2015), which establishes the link between academic adaptation challenges and sociocultural adaptation. In the listening area, the approach towards student challenges has lately focused on the importance of raising awareness among lecturers and the suggestion of the pertinent techniques or arrangements in and outside the classroom in order to adapt to the needs of the students (Huang, 2005; Medved et al., 2013). In the Irish context, in the study carried out by Harris and Ní Chonaill (2016), lecturers assert being conscious of the presence of non-native speakers in their classes and adapting their speech and material accordingly in their attempt to diminish possible listening-related challenges, yet students' perspectives on listening comprehension are not addressed. One of Sandekian et al. (2015) participants reported feelings of depression arising from difficulties understanding classmates and teachers during classroom discussions, attributable to rate of speech, use of vocabulary

and idiomatic expressions. Although less investigated, understanding classmates may also be a source of adaptation issues. In her extensive research based on the Academic Literacies Questionnaire (ALQ), Mehar Singh (2016) identifies understanding classmates accents and identifying differing views or ideas as the two dominant listening challenges. This corroborates the work of Scandrett (2011) in the UK context, who found that issues understanding other classmates affect classroom interaction and group work activities.

Lack of proficiency in speaking skills has been also confirmed as a stressor that prevents NNS students from actively engaging in classroom practices, and therefore, affects their academic adaptation. Difficulties related to speaking up in class, giving oral presentations, and participating in group discussions have been reported throughout the literature (Gartman, 2016; Mahfoodh, 2014; Miller, 2014; Novera, 2004). Students frequently point at their self-perceived low level of English and their fear of making mistakes as principal causes of their passive role in class (Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Sawir (2005) observed that 'fixation' on mistake avoidance affected not only participants' speaking skills development, but also listening. This passive role might be negatively interpreted by teachers as lack of discussion skills (see Holmes, 2004), or even as a lack of critical thinking skills and/or poor language proficiency (Robertson et al., 2000). Students' lack of confidence in speaking skills appears as a recurrent theme in the literature and becomes more explicit in the presence of native speakers, including both, classmates and teachers (Lewthwaite, 1996; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Robertson et al., 2000; Senyshyn et al., 2000). The incapability to communicate confidently with members of the host culture leads to less sociocultural adaptation as well as feelings of loneliness and homesickness (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). In addition, research on teacher-student interaction has studied the role of communication in students' achievement, establishing a link between good working relationships and academic success (Lin, 2012; Tsai, 2017).

3.3.2. Language and sociocultural adjustment

As with the other dimensions, the mere fact of living abroad does not guarantee students' sociocultural adaptation. Language, as an essential means of communication, plays a central role in the sociocultural adjustment process. Accordingly, language proficiency and communicative competence have been firmly established as core components of effective intercultural interaction, which, in turn, plays a crucial role in the sociocultural adaptation

construct (Searle & Ward, 1990). Although language has been identified as a predictor of sociocultural adjustment from the early studies (e.g., Kim, 1988; Ward & Kennedy, 1999), research on the impact of language proficiency on sociocultural adaptation appears to be largely inconclusive. This is mainly due to the variety of approaches used and the contradiction in results (Gareis et al., 2011); as well as the lack of explicitness in the relationship between linguistic proficiency and students' self-perceptions throughout their academic sojourn (Wright & Schartner, 2013).

In an attempt to systematise the measurement of social adjustment, studies on international students' sociocultural adaptation have largely relied on questionnaires and interviews as data gathering tools. Searle and Ward (1990) were the first to devise a sociocultural adjustment scale (SCAS) for the study of sociocultural factors affecting international students, which was based on previous literature on international students and the models provided by Furnham and Bochner (1982) and Argyle and colleagues in their studies of social situation competence (see Argyle, 1969; Argyle, Furnham, & Graham, 1981; Bryant & Trower, 1974). In the results of these studies, language appears as a predictor of sociocultural adaptation; however, it is regarded as embedded in other factors and the results fail to provide specific data regarding linguistic challenges. Contrarily, in her recent meta-analysis of the literature using SCAS, Wilson (2013a) highlighted the centrality of language proficiency within the sociocultural adaptation construct and proposed a Revised Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS-R) that regards language proficiency as a separate subscale, therefore, disregarding the interrelation among predictors.

Research exploring the social challenges of international students has established a relationship between the linguistic competence in sociocultural adaptation and academic success (Sam, 2001; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Andrade, 2006; Kao & Gansneder, 1995). By way of illustration, Yeh and Inose's (2003) survey contemplated the study of social support satisfaction, social connectedness and English language as separate predictors of acculturative stress, and identified the interconnectedness between the students' ability to interact in social situations and a higher performance in the academic setting. Since academic success is the primary objective of international students sojourn, studies in this area have identified language-related challenges affecting students' adaptation to the educational setting. Gautam et al. (2016) associate the longer time needed to complete academic work by international students, if compared to domestic students, with lower

levels of English proficiency. This correlation has been shown to have a negative effect on students' sociocultural adaptation, since longer time needed to cope with the academic workload as a result of limited language proficiency results in isolation and diminished social interaction (Chen, 1996; Erichsen & Bollinger, 2011). Communication is not only regarded as key to building relationships with faculty and peers (Sawir, 2005), but also as fundamental for the students' understanding of the culture and conventions of their academic institution (Braine, 2002) which can negatively affect students' inclusiveness in the university. For example, Sherry et al. (2010) found that students did not feel included in the university community as a consequence of a lack of communication skills.

Language has been widely reported by international students as one of the greatest barriers to social engagement in and outside the academic setting (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Ward & Masgoret, 2004; Sherry et al., 2010). Although international students' relationships with host nationals have been proved to be the most beneficial to their adjustment (Kim, 2001; Trice, 2004; Li & Gasser, 2005; Hendrickson et al., 2011), it is however the type of friendship network that international students report having more problems with. Several studies identify international students' difficulties and willingness to establish host national networks (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Sherry et al., 2010; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002), as well as the factors that influence this trend. Poor command of the host language, perceived social discrimination and domestic students' lack of interest are the most frequently reported deterrents to establish host national relationships (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Yamazaki et al., 1997). The findings of studies by Gartman's (2016) and Sherry et al. (2010) reflect the concerns international students have for fitting in socially in the academic setting. The recommendations of these two studies were predominantly focused on activities that involved communication with domestic students mainly as a way to improve language, social links, and better understanding of the host culture (Gartman, 2016; Sherry et al., 2010), highlighting both the importance of communication and language on sociocultural adaptation and the need for connections between domestic and international students. The difficulty of establishing host national relationships has been also linked to self-perceived language competence and the lack of self-confidence in language skills (Gartman, 2016; Telbis et al., 2014; Dao et al., 2007; Karuppan & Barari, 2011). International students report feeling intimidated when talking with native speakers (Gartman, 2016; Sherry et al., 2010), and tend to find social

support in conationals that share the same language (Alsahafi & Shin, 2017) or other international students that face the same challenges as sojourners (Woolf, 2007). Kim (2001) analyses the differences in adaptation support between different networks, and claims that while conational and international networks provide short-term support, they are detrimental for a long-term intercultural adaptation partly due to its effect on language acquisition as pointed out by Maundeni (2001).

Language competence is not limited to adaptation to the academic setting. In order to function in their new environment, students must be able to perform daily tasks in which communication with host nationals is required. Studies such as those carried out by Schutz and Richards (2003) or Cao et al. (2016) identify language as a barrier to deal with daily tasks outside the university setting. In their recent paper, Alsahafi and Shin (2017) highlight the importance of acquiring social language as crucial for both, adaptation inside and outside the classroom. Students report difficulties understanding local accents and slang, as well as problems communicating outside the academic setting as hindrances to adaptation (Gautam et al., 2016; Sherry et al., 2010). One of Gautam and colleagues' participants said 'The language is an all-day challenge for me outside university. Inside the campus people try to understand you. But outside the campus, no. That limits me to go out. I cannot express my feelings.' (Gautam et al., 2016, p.515).

International students' proficiency in the host language is crucial for understanding the culture and locals' worldview (Kim, 1988; Yeh & Inose, 2003). As it has been already mentioned, communication with host nationals is intrinsically correlated with cultural adaptation, in the same way that difficulties in communication with host nationals may create cultural distance (Berry, 1997). This cultural distance has been also found to be a result of NNES international students difficulty understanding or following host culture communicative conventions such as appropriateness and politeness when communicating with host nationals (Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Harrison & Peacock, 2013) and exchanging small talk (Volet & Tan-Quigley, 1999). Students have also reported difficulties understanding jokes and humour as a barrier when forming new friendships (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Zhang, 2016). One of Zhang's respondents said '[...] I felt like an idiot. I only understood parts of their conversations. I felt lost when they were making jokes and became tired of asking for an explanation' (Zhang, 2016, p. 184).

3.3.3. Language and psychological adjustment

The interrelation between language and psychological adaptation has been reported to a lesser extent than the other two dimensions, likely due to the less visible nature of psychological challenges and the presentation of psychological symptoms as a result of language affecting the other domains. Some studies, such as the one conducted by Ozer (2015), contradict the relationship between language and psychological adaptation, based on the results that showed language proficiency as a significant predictor of sociocultural adaptation but not psychological. On the contrary, the existing literature has documented a higher predisposition among international students to experience more psychological problems than domestic students, and point to language difficulties as one of the most challenging issues, establishing the link between language and psychological adaptation, which becomes stronger with the interrelation among domains (Mori, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003). As it has been discussed in previous sections, low language proficiency has a negative effect on the sociocultural and academic adjustment processes, which in turn, may lead to feelings of inferiority, confusion or isolation (Chen, 1999). Early work by Ebbin and Blankship (1986) and Svarney (1989) shows the correlation between social isolation and alienation, and feelings of stress and depression.

As in the sociocultural domain, psychological adaptation has been largely measured with the help of standard questionnaires assessing psychological well-being such as the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) (Zhang, Hong, Takeuchi, & Mossakowski, 2012) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Cetinkaya-Yildiz, Cakir, & Kondakci, 2011) that consider language as an independent variable. Symptoms related to stress, anxiety and depression are the three most widely reported (Han et al., 2013; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993; Sa et al, 2013). Yeh and Inose (2003) results show that a lack of host language competency is a significant predictor of psychological stress. Stress together with feelings of frustration and fear have been related to the inability to communicate or express emotions and feelings (Gautam et al., 2016).

Students' self-concept, which can be associated with the concept of self-confidence affecting the sociocultural adaptation construct, plays a critical role in students' psychological well-being. Students who are more self-critical about their language skills and are afraid of making mistakes are more likely to experience severe depression (Gartman,

2016; Rice, Choi, Zhang, Morero & Anderson, 2012). Moreover, self-concept of language proficiency is strongly associated with motivation and attitude, in which students' low self-perception would result in a negative attitude, bringing along the stress symptoms associated with it (Desa et al., 2012). In her study, Walker (2014) analyses the impact of the assessment results associated with academic reading with regard to self-concept, and highlights the impact of negative self-views on international students' learning experiences. Anxiety linked to language barriers has also been associated with students' lack of confidence in their ability to express themselves in the host language (Valenzuela et al., 2015). This lack of self-confidence in language skills and the resulting anxiety have been shown to negatively affect the academic adjustment process, since it is linked with poor participation in the classroom, lack of concentration, and decreased willingness and motivation to attend to class and participate in other activities (Valenzuela et al., 2015; Gregersen, 2003).

3.4. Preliminary Model to Study the Impact of Language on International Student Adjustment

Based on the review of the literature presented in the previous sections (see Section 3.3), this section provides a succinct summary of the main points identified regarding the impact of language on international student adjustment, as well as the resulting visual representation of the conceptual model informing this research (see Figure 2 below).

As seen in Section 3.3, language has been identified not only as the main adjustment challenge for international students, but also as a common factor affecting the three adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological). A synthesis of previous studies on international student adjustment has identified a number of areas impacted by language-related challenges in each of the adjustment domains (see Sections 3.3.1 - 3.3.3). Language-related difficulty areas within the academic adjustment domain include: reading, writing, speaking, and listening; areas within the sociocultural adjustment domain relate to: basic needs, social skills, adaptation to college, and cultural empathy and relatedness; while areas within the psychological adjustment domains include: stress, anxiety and depression[11]. In addition, certain in-sojourn and pre-sojourn factors such as previous cross-cultural experience and students' level of study have been proven to have

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[11] For a full description of language-related difficulty areas per domain and pertaining sources, refer to Table 2 on page 61.

an impact on the adjustment process of international students. These key conclusions drawn from the literature review have been represented in the conceptual model underpinning this study:
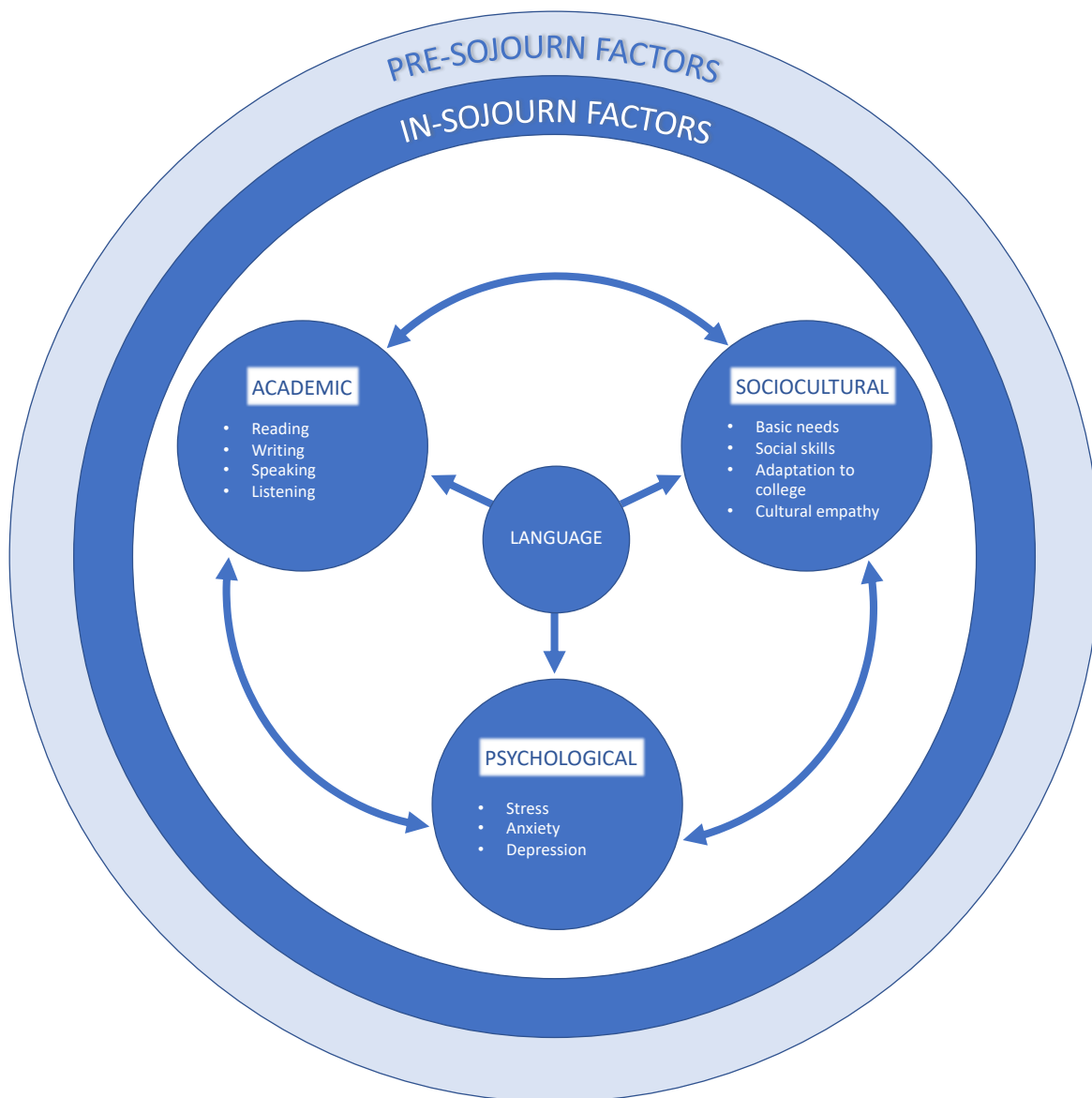
Figure 2. *Preliminary Conceptual Model to Study the Impact of Language on Student Adjustment*

3.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter began by defining the key terms used when discussing acculturation. The terms adaptation and adjustment have been used interchangeably in previous literature. However, in accordance with recent research on the topic (see for example Schartner and Young, 2016), throughout this thesis the term 'adjustment' is used to refer to the process of adjusting to the new setting, and the term 'adaptation' to the outcome resulting from that process. Subsequently, the chapter went on to review the different approaches to acculturation. Moving from the traditional approaches in which acculturation was seen from a clinical perspective, to the modern approaches that regard it as a learning experience. Scholars' attempts to conceptualise the process of acculturation into a model or framework, have led to the differentiation between psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation by Ward et al. (2001). This bidimensional model was considered by Schartner and Young (2016) in their focus on international student adaptation, who added a third dimension crucial to understand the process of acculturation in this particular group of sojourners – academic adaptation.

The second part of the chapter has focused on the role of language on international student adaptation. Language has been regarded not only as the most widely reported challenge in research on international student adaptation, but also a common factor in the three adaptation domains pertaining to international student acculturation – academic, sociocultural and psychological adaptation. Thus, this review of the literature explored the language-related challenges facing NNES international students for each adaptation domain, which resulted in a preliminary model to study the impact of language on student adjustment that will inform the study. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the role of language on the three adaptation domains will be further examined in this study, by identifying and analysing the language-related challenges facing NNES international students in the Irish HE context.

CHAPTER 4: EAP and International Student Adjustment

4.1. Chapter Introduction

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section (i.e., Section 4.2) begins by providing a brief overview of the origins and development of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) as a specific field of English language teaching. Then, it moves to explore the role and status of EAP in higher education; and finishes by discussing the transferability of the skills acquired through EAP programmes as opposed to courses preparing students for international English language examinations such as IELTS. The second section (i.e., Section 4.3) is concerned with the approaches taken to research in the field of EAP and focuses on the important role of needs analysis in EAP. Lastly, the third section (i.e., Section 4.4) explores the status of EAP in the Irish higher education context, as well as the presence of EAP programmes in Irish universities.

4.2. Internationalisation and EAP

4.2.1. EAP as an expanding global phenomenon

Branching out from the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the concept of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) originated in the mid-1970s as a result of the increase in the number of international students pursuing tertiary education in English-medium institutions, predominantly universities. The consequent demand for context-specific linguistic skills in the academic setting helped to define the distinctive character of EAP within the field of ESP, and therefore, establishing the line between the three broad areas of ESP– English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (de Chazal, 2014).

During the first two decades, most EAP activity was limited to universities in countries in which English is the first language, including the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the UK and Ireland. However, the internationalisation of education together with the economic globalisation and the increase in population mobility had a crucial role in the rapidly expanding phenomenon of English Medium Instruction (EMI) from the 1990s (de Chazal,

2014). This trend resulted in the establishment of EAP departments and universities worldwide, mainly in European countries such as France, Sweden and Spain, the Middle East, South America, Central and South-East Asia (see Macaro et al., 2018), which laid the foundation for the current global presence of EAP.

At present, the increasing international focus in higher education and the established status of English as the academic lingua franca place the EAP sector in a favourable position. Although English-speaking countries maintain their prominence as destinations that offer high quality English-medium instruction, the competitiveness for attracting international students has resulted in an increase in the offer of EMI courses and disciplines around the world, and their consequent increase of international inbound students, especially along Europe and the Asia Pacific region (Rao, 2018). This growth of EMI has entailed a greater focus on the extent to which students are prepared for the challenges of academic study in English. In this context, research in EMI widely identifies EAP provision as the most suitable means to provide linguistic support at tertiary level, which not only reaffirms its effectiveness but also favours its expansion. As an example of this broadening, in his recent research in the Chinese context, Rao (2018) observes a move from general teaching English as a foreign language to EAP approaches.

This increasingly English-focused education has drawn criticism among the defendants of an 'academic Englishes' position, bringing back to the conception of English as 'Tyrannosaurus' in the academic setting referred to by Swales (1997, p. 374). The traditional EAP instructional approach that relies heavily on native-speaker models and a Western paradigm has been challenged by arguments supporting the idea of different 'academic Englishes' (Canagarajah, 2006; Flowerdew, 2008) and the idea of 'academic literacies' (Lillis & Curry, 2010; Lea & Street, 1998) which is based on a social practice approach that includes the concepts of identity and culture. Thus, it seems that EAP practices are moving towards a more flexible and heterogeneous notion of EAP instruction that supports accommodative pedagogies and leads to a more inclusive or internationalised conception of academic English.

4.2.2. The role of EAP in HE: International student support service or academic discipline?

Given the inarguable role of language proficiency in students' academic success and linguistic challenges reportedly stated as the main drawback for student adaptation, it is not a coincidence that EAP has been regarded by universities as a primary solution to students' language issues. It is important to note that EAP not only involves the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, but also incorporates skills necessary for the university setting such as critical thinking, study skills, as well as the development of culture-specific skills (de Chazal, 2014). This encompassing approach explains why EAP serves as a more suitable tool to support students' adjustment over other ELT or language support practices.

In accordance with the context at the time, the field of EAP was initially aimed at providing language support to international students that were pursuing their studies in English-speaking institutions. EAP was firstly defined in a paper by the English Teaching Information Centre (1975, as cited in Jordan, 1997, p. 1) as the 'communication skills in English which are required for study purposes in formal education systems'. This definition reflects the intention of differentiating EAP from ESP in the early stages of the EAP field, and manifests the initial purpose of helping students to function correctly in the academic setting, mostly in inner-circle countries. The conception has evolved accordingly to the development in English-medium education discussed in the previous section, and has led to a more comprehensive definition that acknowledges the participation of international staff and research members in mobility practices. For example, the widely supported definition provided by Flowerdew and Peacock (2001, p. 8) considers EAP as 'the teaching of English with the specific aim of helping learners to study, conduct research or teach in that language'.

With the development of the field, EAP has moved from an instruction-based discipline to a largely research-informed field (see Section 4.3). This initial instruction-based approach has placed EAP in a marginalised position that continues being regarded by institutions as a non-credit bearing support service, and whose practitioners are hired as temporary tutors or teaching fellows (see for example Gurney, 2015). Based on its research-oriented quality and the regulation and recognition provided by established organisations such as the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP), scholars

position themselves against the support service conception and argue that EAP should be recognised as a self-governing academic field of study (see Hyland & Shaw, 2016; Ding & Bruce, 2017).

Although the argument for making EAP a self-standing academic discipline has been substantially supported by scholars such as Hyland and Shaw (2016) and Ding and Bruce (2017), the ancillary nature of EAP cannot be ignored. EAP programmes are generally established to ameliorate non-English native speakers as well as native speakers' adjustment (Hyland, 2006). This brings back Bourdieu's renowned statement that academic language is 'no one's mother tongue' (Bourdieu et al., 1996, p.8), and should be learned by all the students independently of their English language proficiency. Thus, EAP should move towards being recognised as an indispensable discipline that equips students with the necessary skills to navigate the academic setting, as supported by Agosti and Green (2011) or Dunworth (2013).

4.2.3. Appropriateness of international tests as measures of academic English proficiency

In order to gain access to English medium universities, international students whose first language is not English are required to demonstrate a minimum level of English language. The most common certification worldwide is the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Most universities require an average IELTS score on the four skills ranging from 6.0 to 7.0 depending on level and discipline, or an equivalent examination such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), and Cambridge examinations.

Based on the assumption that language proficiency is a predictor of academic success, a number of studies have examined the predictive validity of IELTS concluding that IELTS scores are significantly correlated to academic performance (see for example Feast, 2002; Erfani & Mardan, 2017; Schoepp, 2018). However, the adequacy of these tests as measures of academic English proficiency has been questioned by research on students' learning difficulties that shows that holding these qualifications does not necessarily prepare students for dealing with the academic demands of tertiary education (see Rochecouste et al., 2010; Mehar Singh, 2016). This lack of adequacy is often attributed to the lack of transferability between the skills or tasks in international examinations and the skills

needed at university. For example, Sabet and Babaei (2017) compared IELTS listening with academic listening and found little resemblance between them, including the lack of multiplicity in engagement with different topics and sources in IELTS, as opposed to the familiarity with different sources and varieties of English that students are expected to develop in the academic setting. In the same way, Moore and Morton (2005) compared academic writing with IELTS writing task 2 – which entails writing a 250-word formal essay – and concluded that IELTS presents a non-academic genre that does not represent the type of writing needed for university.

Contrarily, EAP is characterised by including authentic tasks and materials exposing the students to the challenges that may experience during their studies (Hyland & Shaw, 2016), and therefore, it can be considered a more effective way of facilitating student adaptation. These differences in tasks and purpose between EAP and IELTS pose an issue in pre-sessional EAP programmes aimed at raising students' IELTS score. For this reason, Moore and Morton (2005) propose treating EAP and IELTS as separate programmes. Moreover, in their study Edwards and Ran (2006, p. 9) consider IELTS scores as 'an imperfect measure of student's ability to cope with the demands of university level courses' and recommend that individual universities design their own tests, setting as an example the Test of English for Educational Purposes (TEEP) used by the University of Reading that claims to assess the skills needed for successful university study. Although this independent testing may be beneficial for students' preparation for a specific institution, including institution-specific culture and regulations, some standardisation is also needed in order to qualify for recognition outside that particular university, as students normally apply to different institutions.

4.3. EAP as a Research-Based Discipline

4.3.1. Main approaches to EAP research

From its emergence in the 1960s, EAP has been influenced by diverse theories and research on linguistics and education. The first decade was marked by the scientific method. Language was seen as something universal and translatable, which could be analysed from a syntactic and lexical perspective completely decontextualized from actual language use. This perspective was known as register analysis and reflected the contrast with the

previous literary approaches, in an attempt to accentuate the differences between literary and academic types of texts (see Swales, 2001). By the end of the 1960s, a more complex classification of language varieties was introduced with the work of Crystal and Davy (1969) on language style, which foresaw the importance of studying texts in their contexts and marked developments in the following decade.

As opposed to the transparent and neutral conception of language during the 1960s, the 1970s were influenced by Halliday's (1961) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach, which regards language as functionally driven, and therefore, its analysis must consider sociocultural and ideological contexts (Coffin & Donohue, 2012). This contextualisation led to the analysis of oral discourses occurring in different professional and academic settings such as the Candlin et al. (1976) study of non-native doctors' discourse in hospitals, that will serve to inform EAP and ESP materials in that domain. Thus, the next two decades were influenced by discourse analysis and rhetorical modelling, which recognised the communicative purpose of language and prompted more multidisciplinary approaches and influences.

The introduction of the concept of genre in EAP at the beginning of the 1980s in the UK context by Swales (1981) had a significant impact on EAP practices and materials, that not only regarded the communicative purpose of the text, but also the audience to which it is directed (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001). In this way, research on genre analysis identified different academic genres depending on their purpose (e.g., research article, conference abstract, MA thesis, etc.). It also identified the different parts of a specific genres, providing structures such as the introduction-method-results-discussion (IMRD) for scientific papers, or the Creating a Research Space (CaRS) that served as a model for article introductions (see Swales, 1990). Similarly, in North America, the second-language composition approach aims to provide students with the ability to write to meet institutional standards (see De Chazal, 2014). In the same way as genre analysis, American second-language composition prescribes a set structure and patterns, and have been largely regarded as 'accommodationist' approaches that fail to encourage students' critical and creative skills (see Hyland & Shaw, 2016).

Towards the end of the 1990s, scholars such as Pennycook, Benesh, Lea and Street started to question the historically and socially constructed norms of academic English, and move

towards a focus on the individual characteristics of the learner (see Pennycook, 1997; Benesh, 1993, 1996; Lea & Street, 1998). These scholars introduce the two main approaches that will characterise the research and practices during the 2000s – Critical EAP (CEAP) and Academic Literacies (Ac Lits). Although these two approaches emerged from different perspectives, Lillis and Tuck (2016) rely on their common critical and analytical principles as future directions for EAP research (for key convergences between Ac Lits and CEAP see Lillis & Tuck, 2016). This questionable and contestable nature is also key to what Macallister (2016) defines as a 'second wave' of CEAP that will consider the needs of students in a certain context, and therefore will treat EAP as a local practice that points towards a needs analysis approach.

4.3.2. Needs analysis in EAP

EAP has been considered a needs-driven discipline since its origins (see Ding & Bruce, 2017); however, it was not until the late 1970s that a systematic approach to analysing the needs of students was suggested. Munby (1978) introduced Target Situation Analysis (TSA), a model of Needs Analysis (NA) which aims at identifying learners' language requirements, and although this approach has been disregarded for being 'inflexible, complex and time-consuming' (West, 1994, p.2) it has served as the basis for later theories. Together with TSA, Present Situation Analysis (PSA) represent the two main approaches to NA. PSA emerged shortly after TSA, introduced by Richterich and Chancerel (1980). PSA aimed to analyse students' language at the beginning of the course, as well as their sociocultural context, which reflects the movement towards contextualisation discussed in the previous section (see Section 4.3.1). The third major contribution to NA is what Hutchinson and Waters (1987) named Learning Situation Analysis (LSA), which emphasises the 'felt' learning needs of students or 'wants' of students and encompasses the three major types of analysis in their necessities (i.e., TSA), lacks (i.e., PSA) and wants (i.e., LSA) model. Thus, NA has developed as the cornerstone of EAP moving from an unstructured and individual practice to a variety of theories and frameworks that aim to establish all the aspects of a course, including material selection, teaching and learning approaches and assessment. It is however important to note that NA is not a static process, and as the course develops, evaluation of the NA should be conducted to assure a successful EAP course (see Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001). Another crucial aspect of NA, which is usually disregarded, is the time and research skills required from practitioners to conduct it in a precise way. As

Hyland (2006, p.74) identifies, 'EAP courses rarely provide enough time to meet all identified needs, nor adequate time to collect and analyse needs data, which means that teachers typically write their courses on the basis of incomplete information' which accentuates the benefits of researchers and practitioners' collaboration. Therefore, NA has been regarded as an essential tool that serves for both collecting information on students' needs and views, and developing curricula and improving language learning and teaching practices in the field of EAP (Upton, 2012).

4.4. EAP in Irish Higher Education

4.4.1. The status of EAP in Irish higher education

Despite the fact that EAP practices have been taking place in Ireland for five decades, little effort has been made to assure a systematic and integrated approach to the field at both, the governmental and institutional levels. In an increasingly competitive higher education context, national and European strategies contemplate the preeminent position of Ireland as one of only two member states in the European Union in which English is an official language, as a result of Brexit recent referendum, which according to O'Brien (2017, p. 15) 'may lead to an increase in inward mobility and partnership requests'. Nevertheless, Ireland's advantageous position has been lately threatened by the growth in EMI institutions, as mentioned in Section 4.2.1, and hence, Irish HEIs need to assure a competitive high-quality education. Integration and support have been contemplated in national strategies, in which language support relies mostly on EAP and pathway programmes[12] as the way to meet students' linguistic needs (DES, 2011; DES, 2016). The significance of language support is also included in the QQI Code of Practice according to which institutions 'shall offer support to international learners with English as a second language within the learning environment' (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2015, p. 11). However, when looking at English language support in national strategies EAP, ESP and pathway programmes are considered as a main growth area in the private English Language Training (ELT) sector, and from an economic point of view (see DES, 2011; DES, 2016). An illustrative example of this economic emphasis can be seen in the future aspirations included in the national strategy 'Irish Educated Globally Connected: An International

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[12] Pathway programmes are one-year preparatory courses for international students aimed to provide them with the skills they need to enter a bachelor's or master's degree programme (see for example UCD, n.d.)

Education Strategy for Ireland, 2016-2020', which call for the coordination between the ELT and HE sectors 'in order to be able to sell Ireland as a destination to international students' (DES, 2016, p. 34). Thus, English language support is left to the discretion of individual institutions without any established requirements, guidelines or coordination.

4.4.2. EAP programmes in Irish universities

At present, all Irish universities offer English language programmes mainly devoted to both, facilitating international students' access to university such as International English Language Testing System (IELTS) programmes, pre-sessional EAP programmes and English Language Pathway programmes; as well as easing students' academic experience through pre-sessional and in-sessional EAP programmes (see for example English for Academic Purposes Support Programme, 2018; English Language Courses in UCD, 2018). Yet, English language continues to be considered as the biggest adaptation challenge by international students attending Irish HEIs (ICOS, 2012b; ICOS, 2012a; Marr & Carey, 2012; Harris-Byrne, 2017). Considering that there is a lack of research in language support programmes in Irish universities, Ní Chonaill (2014) conducted a small-scale study based on phone interviews which collected the views of 27 Irish HEIs on language support and identified some of the possible reasons behind the underachievement of non-native speakers of English. These include the lack of uniformity in entry requirements and the inadequacy of international tests, lack of funding for language support and the lack of expertise among EAP teachers. Although this study can shed some light on the topic, there is still need for extensive research in this area that could inform future policy and practices regarding language support in Irish HEIs.

4.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter has first described the relatively recent emergence and development of EAP as a consequence of the increase in the number of NNES international students studying in English-medium institutions. The chapter has shown that EAP has moved from an English-focused education that relies heavily on native-speaker models and a Western paradigm, to a more inclusive or internationalised notion of EAP that supports accommodative pedagogies, leading to a more inclusive or internationalised conception of academic English. EAP has also moved from being an instruction-based

discipline to an increasingly research-informed field, which is helping it to move from a support service to a self-standing academic discipline. The fact that research has questioned the adequacy of international tests to measure minimum language entry requirements for NNES international students has also been raised, positioning EAP programmes as the most appropriate solution to provide the students with the necessary skills to cope with academic tasks at tertiary level. Secondly, the chapter has explored different theories and approaches that have influenced research on EAP, and how it seems to be moving towards a focus on individual needs of students. It has focused on the role of needs in EAP, which is seen as an essential element to ensure the success of EAP programmes. Finally, the chapter has concentrated on the status of EAP in the Irish HE context. It has been observed that national internationalisation strategies recognise the importance of language support for NNES international students as a way to assure a competitive high-quality education. However, although all the universities on the island count on their EAP programmes, this type of support lacks coordination and specification at national level, as it is left at the discretion of individual institutions (see DES, 2016). This chapter concludes the review of the literature, and accordingly, the next chapter moves to present the methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER 5: Methodology

5.1. Chapter Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the research methodology and design used in this project, including its limitations and strategies adopted in order to minimise the impact of any unexpected obstacle. The chapter begins by presenting the research aims and questions followed by the methodology approach, as well as the two phases through which the study was conducted, including research and instrument design. This research adopted a mixed method design, in which quantitative data from questionnaires and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews are combined as the sources of data collection in both phases. The methodological framework is followed by a summary of the ethical considerations required when conducting the research, as well as a description of the sampling and data collection processes. Finally, the last section explains the methods used to analyse the data collected.

5.2. Research Aims and Questions

The purpose of this research was to determine the language-related challenges that non-native English students experience at Irish universities, as well as the aspects that may help overcome these challenges in an in-sessional EAP programme. It was stated previously (see Section 3.3) that language is a major determining factor in NNES students' adjustment, yet there is a lack of research that provides a comprehensive treatment of this issue. This study, therefore, aimed to address this gap in the literature by identifying specific language factors affecting adjustment at the three adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural and psychological adjustment). Recent research has revealed an interrelation between adjustment domains, as well as the fact that certain demographic characteristics may have an effect on international students' adjustment (see Section 3.2.4). Accordingly, the second research aim was to determine the relationships among adjustment domains, and the relationship between demographic variables and adjustment. Lastly, as argued in Section 4.2, EAP programmes have been regarded as the main tool to equip NNES international students with the necessary skills to deal with academic tasks at university. In consequence, the third aim of this study was to explore what EAP-related aspects might help overcome

the language-related challenges faced by NNES students in Irish universities. More specifically, the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1. What are the language-related challenges that NNES students face in Irish universities?

    1a. What are the language-related academic challenges?

    1b. What are the language-related sociocultural challenges?

    1c. What are the language-related psychological challenges?

RQ2. What relationships may exist between the studied variables (i.e., adjustment domains and demographic factors)?

    2a. What are the relationships between adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural and psychological)?

    2b. What demographic factors might impact the adjustment process?

RQ3. Do EAP in-sessional programmes help NNES students overcome the language-related challenges they face in Irish universities? If so, how?

    3a. What aspects of EAP in-sessional programmes may contribute to students' adaptation?

    3b. What are the students' impressions of the EAP in-sessional programme?

By exploring these issues, this study provides an in-depth investigation of the language factor in NNES students' adjustment in the Irish HE context, which might result in a comprehensive framework that could be adapted to identify the language-related challenges of NNES students in different contexts. The identification of challenges and EAP beneficial practices could also complement needs analysis processes and, therefore, be used to inform curriculum design and teaching practices in programmes aimed at improving NNES international students' language adjustment. Additionally, the data resulting from this study provides an opportunity to explore the language-related links between the adjustment domains – academic, sociocultural and psychological. As seen in Section 3.3, although relationships among domains were observed in previous studies, it seems that there is not a comprehensive and reliable approach to date that establishes and justifies those links.

5.3. Methodological Approach

This study combined quantitative and qualitative methodological tools, resulting in a mixed methods approach. As opposed to the qualitative versus quantitative purist debate that claims the incompatibility of mixing methods (Howe, 1988), this study supports the growing use of mixed methods among Social Science researchers under the 'fundamental principle of mixed research' (Johnson & Christensen, 2013). According to this principle, the combination of methods provides the advantages or 'strengths' of both paradigms and 'non-overlapping weaknesses', that is, the weaknesses from one method will be counterbalanced by the strengths of the other method (ibid.).

This approach was informed by a pragmatist worldview, which has been largely considered as the 'optimal worldview or paradigm for mixed methods research' (see Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 91). Pragmatism supports the combination of a positivist approach informed by the belief that there is an objective reality that can be measured through quantitative methods that aim to establish generalisations; and an interpretivist approach informed by the belief that there is a multiple reality and each individual has their own unique interpretation of the world that can be measured subjectively through qualitative methods (Feilzer, 2010; Morgan, 2007; Pansiri, 2005). Pragmatism was then deemed as the most appropriate approach in this context, since the positivist approach allowed the researcher to identify challenges common to NNES international students as a group of sojourners that share certain characteristics and, as a consequence, experience the same challenges; while the interpretivist approach regards NNES international students as individuals with their own unique interpretations and experiences.

This approach allowed the researcher to gather large-scale numerical data that provided trends, attitudes or opinions that are representative of the total population, while at the same time providing a detailed description and insight into the phenomenon studied. For example, results from the International Students' Questionnaire provided objective data on the most commonly reported challenges experienced by NNES international students in Irish universities, while the subjective data resulting from the interviews provided the reasons why those challenges were commonly reported. Thus, statistical data resulting from the quantitative instruments (i.e., International Students' Questionnaire and Needs Analysis Survey) could identify trends that could be generalised to the entire population

and might be extrapolated to a population with similar characteristics; and subjective data from the interviews explored and added meaning to the numeric data.

Moreover, this pragmatic approach enabled the researcher to choose data analysis techniques based on 'what works', and combine an inductive approach typical of positivist approaches when analysing the questionnaires, and a more deductive approach typical of interpretivist approaches when analysing the interviews (see Section 5.9). Thus, prioritising the provision of an answer to the research questions over the philosophical worldview or the method itself (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In this way, this study integrates multiple methods of data collection and analysis, chosen to combine a range of approaches in order to fully understand the problem and provide a comprehensive answer to the research questions.

The use of different methods also offered multiple interpretations that not only might corroborate results, but it might reveal findings that could be neglected by the use of a single research method (Rossman & Wilson, 1985). However, it is important to note that the use of mixed methods led to higher costs and a greater amount of time to collect, process and analyse two different types of data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This is noteworthy here because the researcher did not have access to additional funding or assistance with data collection and analysis. Furthermore, the researcher was required to have an in-depth knowledge of both approaches, developed by self-training on the use of different software analysis tools.

5.4. Population and Research Context Overview

The study population included both NNES international students at Irish universities, in order to collect generalisable data to identify the language-related challenges that international students face in Irish universities and their relationships; and NNES international students taking an EAP in-sessional course at one Irish university, that allowed an in-depth investigation of the challenges, relationships between challenges, and the role of the EAP in-sessional programme, on student adaptation.

The research involved NNES international students registered at the nine public universities on the island of Ireland during the academic year 2017/2018 (i.e., Dublin City University, NUI Galway, NUI Maynooth, Trinity College Dublin, University College Cork, University

College Dublin, University of Limerick, Queen's University Belfast, and University of Ulster). As introduced in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4.1), there were a total of 20,366 international students registered in Irish public universities during 2017/2018, including undergraduates and postgraduates, of which 9,924 come from countries in which English is not an official language (see Section 5.8).

The other population group included international students taking part in an EAP in-sessional programme at a particular Irish university during the academic year 2017/2018. The in-sessional programme was opened to all NNES students registered at the university, and the classes combined students from all levels and disciplines. The programme aims to equip NNES students with the necessary skills to succeed in their course of study. It runs for 12 weeks during both terms and sessions take place on a weekly basis for two hours in the evening. Modules offered during the first term (i.e., from September to December) focus on general English for Academic Purposes skills, including Oral Fluency and Academic Writing; while modules offered during the second term (i.e., from January to April) include discipline-specific modules – English for Business, English for Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and English for Science, Engineering and Health Sciences.

5.5. Researcher's Positionality

As mentioned in Section 5.3, this study combined both an objective-positivist and a subjective-interpretivist perspective typical of a pragmatist approach. While trying to maintain objectivity when approaching the qualitative component of the study (see for example the systematic approach taken when analysing findings in Section 5.9.3 below), the qualitative research process is inevitably subjective and impacted by the researcher's personal background, experiences, and believes (Berger, 2013; Marsh & Furlong, 2017). Therefore, addressing researcher's positionality provides an understanding, from both the researcher and the reader's perspective, of how those individual factors impact the research process, resulting in an increase in research transparency and credibility (Hellawell, 2007; Cutcliffe, 2003).

In this study, researcher's positionality significantly influenced the selection of the topic under investigation, as well as research subjects and context. Being an NNES international student studying at a Northern Irish university during the last year of my bachelor's degree made me consider the language-related challenges that not only I, but other NNES

international students might be facing when studying at Irish universities. This was strengthened when I took my master's degree, in which the vast majority of my classmates were NNES international students who also experienced language-related challenges such as difficulty understanding lectures or writing academic essays, despite the fact that they had majored in English Language and met the language entry requirements to access the course. These experiences led to my interest in conducting research to identify the language-related challenges common to NNES international students in Irish universities, that would inform researchers and practitioners in order to facilitate students' adjustment, and thus, to ensure a successful sojourning experience.

As when selecting the topic under investigation and the research participants and context, positionality also had a significant impact on other stages of the research process, including data collection and data analysis. Traditionally, researcher's positionality has been seen from a dichotomous insider/outsider perspective. However, this dichotomy has been widely criticised by the idea of the in-betweener, as individuals present different identities and often see themselves as both insiders and outsiders, or as shifting combinations of both perspectives when conducting a piece of research (Bridges, 2017; Crossley et al., 2016). Although being an insider led me to conduct this research (i.e., being a NNES international student at an Irish university), during the research process I was also placed in an outsider position at times as a result of being both a researcher who adopts an objective perspective, and an EAP in-sessional teacher who can see students' challenges from an outsider's lens.

This in-betweener position combines the advantages and disadvantages of being an outsider and an insider. During the qualitative data collection process, being perceived by the participants as an insider – a NNES international student like them – benefited me as participants are commonly more open to share their views and experiences when the researcher is perceived as a member of the group (De Tona, 2006). However, this insider perception may also pose a limitation as participants might presume that I am aware of their views and experiences and, consequently, leave things unsaid (Berger, 2013; Hellawell, 2007). Additionally, being an insider allowed me to ask relevant probing and follow-up questions during the interviews as a result of my familiarity with the topic (Berger, 2013). Nevertheless, it is worth considering that this familiarity with the topic might lead to these questions to be biased by my own experiences (Brannick & Coghlan,

2007; Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). At the same time, the power relationship between researcher and participants and my white European ethnic origin might have positioned me in an outsider role, which could affect participants' responses during the interviews (Berger, 2013). On the one hand, being perceived as an outsider was beneficial, as some participants would explain their experiences and views in detail as if I had no insight into their challenges; while on the other hand, a small number of participants seemed reluctant to share their language challenges at the beginning of the interview, before I could build rapport with them.

When analysing data obtained from the interviews, a thematic analysis approach based on descriptive phenomenology was chosen as a way of identifying patterns in a systematic and objective way (see Section 5.9.3). However, my experience and background knowledge on the topic as a NNES international student and EAP teacher might be inevitably biased towards interpretation of findings, and I might be perceived by some as advocate of either or both groups (i.e., NNES international students and/or EAP teachers), rather than as researcher (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). It is important, therefore, having approached the research from an objective or outsider perspective, in order to allow the participants to tell their stories and not lead them in certain directions so they can provide data that was unexpected to the researcher when analysing the data (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009); while approaching data analysis from a subjective or insider perspective facilitated the interpretation of findings due to the familiarity with the topic under study and the understanding of the context (Fleming, 2018).

5.6. Research and Instrument Design

The study comprised two phases, and combined two convergent designs (i.e., QUAN + QUAL), which correspond to the two phases of the study. These two phases are connected through an exploratory sequential design (i.e., QUAL -> QUAN + QUAL) formed by the qualitative component of Phase I that leads to the quantitative and qualitative components of Phase II (see Figure 2 below).
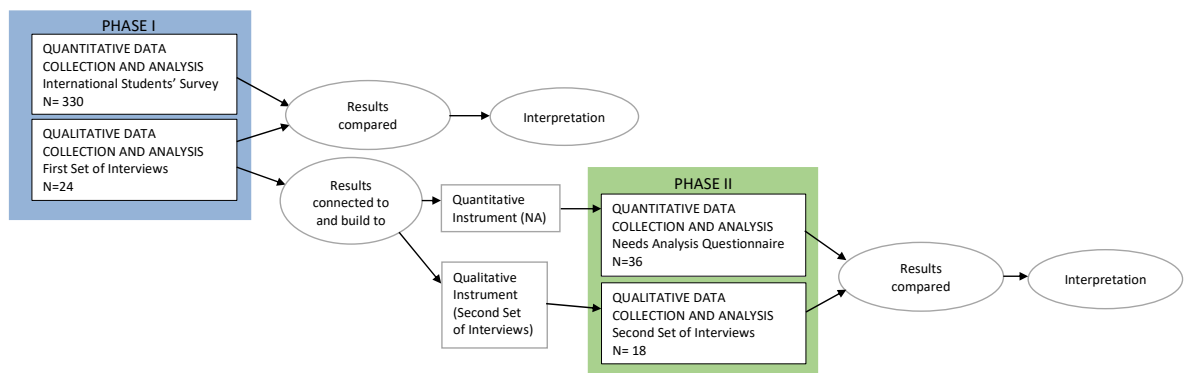
Figure 3. *Research design and instruments*

The use of convergent parallel designs in Phases I and II was deemed the most appropriate way of gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges experienced by NNES international students and their views on EAP practices. It also enabled the completion of the data collection process in a limited period of time (i.e., one academic year), as it facilitated the concurrent collection of data. In addition, the embedded exploratory sequential design relies on exploratory results – in this case, results from the first set of interviews– and allowed the development of new instruments (i.e., Needs Analysis questionnaire and interview guide for the second set of interviews), which served to assess the generalizability of the results from the first set of interviews. This also allowed exploration of the aspects of the EAP programme studied that might lead to the improvement of the language-related challenges reported in Phase I. These two phases, their research design and instruments are discussed in detail in Sections 5.6.1 and 5.6.2 below.

5.6.1. Phase I design

Phase I of the research aimed at identifying the language-related challenges of non- native English speaking (NNES) international students in Irish universities and the possible relationships between the studied variables, including the relationships among the three adjustment domains and the relationships between demographic factors and adjustment. Therefore, this phase intended to answer RQ1: What are the language-related challenges that NNES students face in Irish universities?; and RQ2: What relationships may exist between the studied variables (i.e., adjustment domains and demographic factors)?

As outlined in the previous section, this phase combined quantitative (i.e., International Students' Questionnaire) and qualitative (i.e., first set of interviews) techniques, resulting in one of the most common approaches to mixed methods, the convergent design (see Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This design was chosen given its purpose of achieving 'a complete understanding of the research problem' through the comparison of quantitative and qualitative results (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018, p. 125). The data resulting from the questionnaire and from the first set of interviews was analysed separately, and then compared, which is referred to by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), as the parallel-databases variant of convergent design. The quantitative data identified trends and provided a general understanding of the challenges experienced by NNES international students in Irish universities, while the qualitative data explored those challenges identified in the quantitative data in depth and added meaning to the statistical data. This design, therefore, served not only to compare different types of data in order to acquire comprehensive knowledge concerning the research question, but also as a method of corroboration and validation that includes the strengths of both approaches.

Nevertheless, the convergent design also presented limitations. These included the difficulty of comparing various kinds of data obtained from the different research tools, such as the comparison between numerical data obtained from the International Students' Questionnaire (ISQ) and the non-numeric data obtained from the interviews; as well as the difficulty combining data obtained from different sample sizes – ISQ (n=330) and first set of interviews (n=24) (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). However, different sample sizes were used with the intention to compare results from both methods in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon studied. In this way, a large sample allowed the researcher to identify general trends such as the challenges faced by NNES students, and a small sample allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of those trends. In addition, the data disparity limitation was overcome by addressing the same concepts in both instruments, since the ISQ and interviews were both designed based on the adjustment domains and language-related difficulty areas identified in the review of the literature (see Table 2 below).

Table 2. *Adjustment domains and language-related difficulty areas*

Adjustment Domains	Language-related Difficulty Areas	Sample Sources
Academic Adjustment	Reading	Novera (2004), Mendelson (2002), Wang and Hannes (2013)
	Writing	Eunjeong (2016), Evans and Morrison (2011), Wu (2011)
	Speaking	Gartman (2016), Mahfoodh (2014), Miller (2014), Novera (2004)
	Listening	Kuo (2011), Medved et al. (2013), Wang and Hannes (2013)
Sociocultural Adjustment	Basic needs	Schutz and Richards (2003), Cao et al. (2016)
	Social skills	Sherry et al. (2010), Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002), Rajapaksa and Dundes (2002)
	Adaptation to college	Braine (2002), Gautam et al. (2016)
	Cultural empathy and relatedness	Gautam et al. (2016), Sherry et al. (2010), Zhang (2016)
Psychological Adjustment	Stress	Yeh and Inose (2003), Desa (2012)
	Anxiety	Valenzuela et al. (2015), Gregersen (2003)
	Depression	Gartman (2016), Rice et al. (2012)

5.6.1.1 International Students' Questionnaire

The questionnaire was constructed using an online survey tool (i.e., Google Forms). This type of instrument was chosen based on its accessibility and coverage, given the amplitude of the sample size, since according to Schilling (2013, p. 99) it affords 'maximal geographic coverage with minimal time, effort and expense'. In addition to efficiency in time, effort and expense, online questionnaires are also excellent instruments for data processing and analysis, since online survey tools automatically provide frequency tables and allow the direct importation of data to analysis software such as SPSS.

The questionnaire was divided into sections in order to provide a clear structure that facilitates its completion (see Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). This organisation was content-based and included four sections: demographic information, academic language-related

challenges, sociocultural language-related challenges and other language-related challenges[13] (see Appendix A).

The first section consisted of seven factual questions composed of seven drop-down items. The purpose of this section was to cover respondents' background and demographic information: institution, level of study, field of study, length in the country, length in an English-speaking country before coming to Ireland/Northern Ireland, country of origin, and certified level of English. This identified independent variables that were relevant for the analysis and interpretation of the data collected. For example, the question 'What is your field of study?' could be used to compare the degree of adjustment challenges experienced by students depending on their level of study. The demographic data resulting from the International Students' Questionnaire are presented in this chapter (see Section 5.8.3).

The next three sections of the questionnaire corresponded to the three adjustment domains explored in this study (i.e., academic, sociocultural and psychological) and their corresponding subdomains or areas of language-related difficulty identified in the review of the literature, as presented in Table 2 above. Items included in these sections were developed following a five-point Likert scaling system, as this type of device allows the collection of flexible responses in the form of numerical data that can be analysed statistically (see Cohen et al., 2007). Notwithstanding, the use of a Likert scale also poses limitations such as the tendency to avoid extremes or to choose a mid-point in odd number scales, or its closed-ended character, which was addressed by including an optional 'comments' category at the end of each of these three sections. This optional 'comments' question was included with the purpose of providing the respondents with the opportunity of expressing their individual views and covering topics that might be missed in the closed-ended items, as suggested by Cohen et al. (2007).

In sections two and three of the questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate the degree of difficulty or ease they experience in each of the areas, with 1 being 'extremely difficult' and 5 'extremely easy'; while in section four participants were asked to rate how often they experience the challenges specified in each item, with 1 being 'always' and 5 being 'never'. Thus, the second section of the questionnaire was devoted to the analysis of

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[13] The word 'other' was used to refer to 'psychological language-related challenges' as advised during the piloting of the questionnaire, as a way to avoid the negative implications that the word 'psychological' may pose (for more information on questionnaire piloting, see page 69).

academic language-related challenges, and it in turn, contains items addressing the four academic areas of difficulty (i.e., reading, writing, speaking and listening). The items in this section have emerged from the comparison between the language adjustment domains and difficulty areas identified in the literature, as well as an adaptation of the list of academic difficulty variables identified by Xu (1991) in his study of the impact of international students' language proficiency on their perceived academic difficulties (see Figure 3). This figure shows the factor analysis conducted by Xu (1991) in order to determine which of the 38 items studied represent each dimension (i.e., speaking, listening, reading and writing). In this way, the high scores on each factor (i.e., those marked with an asterisk) show the academic difficulty variables associated with each dimension.

TABLE 3. Factor Loading Matrix (Varimax Rotation)

Academic Difficulty Variables	Factor 1 Speaking Difficulties	Factor 2 Listening Difficulties	Factor 3 Reading Difficulties	Factor 4 Writing Difficulties
Read unfamiliar texts	.233	.143	.546*	.168
Read critically	.238	.218	.497*	.295
Read quickly	.259	.236	.532*	.156
Read carefully	.134	.327	.723*	.231
Read for specific info.	.135	.297	.713*	.197
Read essay tests	.242	.225	.497*	.223
Read specialized paper	.168	.323	.618*	.243
Do library research	.245	.261	.636*	.317
Read statistical info.	.048	.318	.373	.392
Write lab reports	.123	.148	.172	.642*
Write technical reports	.106	.142	.211	.690*
Write theoretical paper	.462	.154	.329	.479*
Write abstracts/summaries	.363	.158	.372	.454*
Write lengthy paper	.518	.175	.276	.530*
Write research proposals	.300	.128	.225	.633*
Write short answers and essays	.127	.420	.386	.419*
Critique research studies	.388	.254	.234	.545*
Write for publications	.418	.000	.036	.442*
Write research reports	.437	.160	.312	.606*
Describe/interpret charts/graphs	.109	.376	.282	.485*
Synthesize multiple sources info.	.323	.313	.400	.410*
Participate in discussions	.620*	.359	.365	.106
Lead class discussions	.726*	.234	.254	.090
Communicate with prof(s).	.442*	.401	.373	.184
Communicate without agency	.458*	.274	.215	.216
Give oral presentations	.663*	.349	.228	.163
Present class lectures	.754*	.142	.140	.167
Provide arguments	.618*	.363	.279	.219
Clarify opinions	.531*	.475	.234	.227
Express reasoning	.556*	.534	.240	.193
Present papers at conf(s).	.589*	.091	.038	.399
Argue a position in class	.666*	.367	.173	.247
Take notes from lectures	.237	.605*	.359	.261
Understand theory	.190	.647*	.266	.322
Comprehend interactions in class	.330	.683*	.252	.143
Understand spoken descriptions	.321	.734*	.268	.126
Understand class discussion	.246	.776*	.279	.136
Understand extended speech	.344	.643*	.284	.114

Figure 4. *Academic difficulty variables established by Xu (1991)*

Xu's (1991) study may be considered as possibly the only study that has focused on the impact of English proficiency on international students' academic performance by means of quantitative data analysis. This quantitative approach resulted in the development of a model based on four composite variables (i.e., reading, writing, speaking and listening), which coincide with the four academic difficulty areas identified in the review of the literature in this study. Thus, for the development of the ISQ, Xu's (1991) variables were organised into the four language skills according to the results of the multivariate regression presented in Figure 3, and these were then compared with the language-related

academic challenges identified in the review of the literature (see Section 3.3.1), which resulted in the questionnaire items presented in the table below (see Table 3).

Table 3. Language-related academic adjustment items

Academic Language-related Difficulty Areas	Items
Reading	Reading critically
	Reading quickly
	Reading specialised papers
	Reading for specific information
Writing	Structuring essays/dissertations
	Summarising/synthesising
	Writing in an academic style
	Taking written exams
Speaking	Participating in class discussions
	Communicating with lecturers
	Communicating with classmates
	Giving oral presentations
Listening	Taking notes in lectures
	Understanding lectures/class discussions
	Understanding the accent and/or pronunciation
	Understanding colloquial and idiomatic language
	Understanding technical vocabulary

The third section deals with the sociocultural challenges that NNES international students may face regarding language. The items were based on the SCAS-R items proposed by Wilson (2013a) (see Figure 4), and its comparison with the language-related sociocultural challenges identified in the review of the literature (see Section 3.3.2).

SCAS-R
Revised Sociocultural Adaptation Scale

Living in a different culture often involves learning new skills and behaviours. Thinking about life in [*country*], please rate your competence at each the following behaviours (1 = Not at all competent; 5 = Extremely competent).

		1 Not at all competent				5 Extremely competent
1.	Building and maintaining relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Managing my academic/work responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Interacting at social events.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Maintaining my hobbies and interests.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Adapting to the noise level in my neighbourhood.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's gestures and facial expressions.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Working effectively with other students/work colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Obtaining community services I require.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Adapting to the population density.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Understanding and speaking [*host language*].	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Varying the rate of my speaking in a culturally appropriate manner.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Gaining feedback from other students/work colleagues to help improve my performance.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Attending or participating in community activities.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Finding my way around.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Interacting with members of the opposite sex.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Expressing my ideas to other students/work colleagues in a culturally appropriate manner.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Dealing with the bureaucracy.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Adapting to the pace of life.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Reading and writing [*host language*].	1	2	3	4	5
21.	Changing my behaviour to suit social norms, rules, attitudes, beliefs, and customs.	1	2	3	4	5

Figure 5. Revised SCAS by Wilson (2013a)

In contrast to Wilson's scale, in which host language proficiency is treated as a separate subscale (see items 10 and 20 in Figure 4 above), this study regards language as an embedded factor in the items based on the language-related factors identified in the literature. The analysis of the literature (see Section 3.3.2) identified four subscales in which language is a factor affecting adjustment (i.e., basic needs, social skills, adaptation to college and cultural empathy and relatedness), which have been adopted from the

factors proposed by Ward and Kennedy (1999), and subsequently defined by Wilson (2011). A breakdown of the items included in each subscale can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Language-related sociocultural adjustment items

Sociocultural Language-related Difficulty Areas	Items
Basic needs	Using the transport system
	Going shopping
	Dealing with bureaucracy (visa, Erasmus agreements…)
	Ordering at coffee shops/restaurants
Social skills	Making friends who are native English speakers
	Making yourself understood
	Interacting at social events/community activities
	Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions
Adaptation to college	Coping with the academic workload
	Working effectively with other students
	Dealing with supervisors/lecturers
	Understanding policies and regulations at university
Cultural empathy and relatedness	Understanding jokes and humour
	Understanding the local language/accent
	Changing your manner of speaking to suit social norms
	Understanding the locals' worldview

The fourth section was intended to analyse language-related psychological challenges. As in the two previous sections, a comparison between the challenges identified in the review of the literature, and different scales commonly used in psychological adjustment research – e.g. Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS), or Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) – determined the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS) as the most suitable existing questionnaire for this study (see Figure 5 below). This is because the three negative emotional states measured in the DASS (i.e., depression, anxiety and stress) correspond to the language-related psychological challenges identified in the review of the literature (i.e., Section 3.3.3); and therefore, was deemed the most appropriate method to collect data on those three negative emotional states.

DASS Name: _____ Date: _____

Please read each statement and circle a number 0, 1, 2 or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you *over the past week*. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement.

The rating scale is as follows:

0 Did not apply to me at all
1 Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time
2 Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time
3 Applied to me very much, or most of the time

1	I found myself getting upset by quite trivial things	0	1	2	3
2	I was aware of dryness of my mouth	0	1	2	3
3	I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all	0	1	2	3
4	I experienced breathing difficulty (eg, excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)	0	1	2	3
5	I just couldn't seem to get going	0	1	2	3
6	I tended to over-react to situations	0	1	2	3
7	I had a feeling of shakiness (eg, legs going to give way)	0	1	2	3
8	I found it difficult to relax	0	1	2	3
9	I found myself in situations that made me so anxious I was most relieved when they ended	0	1	2	3
10	I felt that I had nothing to look forward to	0	1	2	3
11	I found myself getting upset rather easily	0	1	2	3
12	I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy	0	1	2	3
13	I felt sad and depressed	0	1	2	3
14	I found myself getting impatient when I was delayed in any way (eg, elevators, traffic lights, being kept waiting)	0	1	2	3
15	I had a feeling of faintness	0	1	2	3
16	I felt that I had lost interest in just about everything	0	1	2	3
17	I felt I wasn't worth much as a person	0	1	2	3
18	I felt that I was rather touchy	0	1	2	3
19	I perspired noticeably (eg, hands sweaty) in the absence of high temperatures or physical exertion	0	1	2	3
20	I felt scared without any good reason	0	1	2	3
21	I felt that life wasn't worthwhile	0	1	2	3

Reminder of rating scale:

0 Did not apply to me at all
1 Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time
2 Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time
3 Applied to me very much, or most of the time

22	I found it hard to wind down	0	1	2	3
23	I had difficulty in swallowing	0	1	2	3
24	I couldn't seem to get any enjoyment out of the things I did	0	1	2	3
25	I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (eg, sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)	0	1	2	3
26	I felt down-hearted and blue	0	1	2	3
27	I found that I was very irritable	0	1	2	3
28	I felt I was close to panic	0	1	2	3
29	I found it hard to calm down after something upset me	0	1	2	3
30	I feared that I would be "thrown" by some trivial but unfamiliar task	0	1	2	3
31	I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything	0	1	2	3
32	I found it difficult to tolerate interruptions to what I was doing	0	1	2	3
33	I was in a state of nervous tension	0	1	2	3
34	I felt I was pretty worthless	0	1	2	3
35	I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing	0	1	2	3
36	I felt terrified	0	1	2	3
37	I could see nothing in the future to be hopeful about	0	1	2	3
38	I felt that life was meaningless	0	1	2	3
39	I found myself getting agitated	0	1	2	3
40	I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself	0	1	2	3
41	I experienced trembling (eg, in the hands)	0	1	2	3
42	I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things	0	1	2	3

Please turn the page ☞

Figure 6. *DASS by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995)*

In order to adapt the DASS to the language context and to make it explicit, the question 'When communicating in English, how often do you…' was used in this section. However, as it was still challenging to determine if those items are solely language related, the open-ended comment question at the end of the section provided participants with the opportunity to further explain if they experienced these negative emotional states in other non-language-related contexts. It is also worth noting that the highly sensitive character of these items might be reflected in higher nonresponse rates or larger measurement error in responses, compare to questions on academic or sociocultural topics (Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). However, for the purpose of avoiding nonresponse, the 'required' option in Google Forms was applied to all items in the ISQ, which requires the respondent to provide an answer in order to submit the questionnaire, in case they miss an item. Regarding the measurement error limitation, this was minimised by anonymising the questionnaire, as well as placing sensitive questions at the end in order to prevent respondents from feeling uncomfortable and withdrawing at early stages of the questionnaire (see Reis & Judd, 2000). Once again, each subdomain was predicted by four items (see Table 5).

Table 5. Language-related psychological adjustment items

Psychological Language-related Difficulty Areas	Items
Stress	Find it difficult to relax
	Find yourself getting upset
	Find yourself getting impatient
	Find it difficult to tolerate interruptions
Anxiety	Experience dryness of mouth
	Get so nervous that you forget things/words that you know
	Find yourself in situations that made you so anxious that you were relieved when they ended
	Feel your heart pounding
Depression	Feel sad and depressed
	Feel that you have lost interest or motivation
	Feel like a failure
	Feel frustrated

Although the items included in the international students' questionnaire have been adopted from previously established and validated survey instruments, those items were modified, as explained in previous paragraphs, in order to make them specific to analyse the language-challenges. Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) highlight the importance of piloting the questionnaire for a specific population even if items are adopted from existing instruments. The first draft of the questionnaire was piloted at the beginning of the academic year 2017/2018 in a class of Research Methods that included NNES international students at an Irish university, which provided substantial feedback attributable to the knowledge on questionnaire design acquired in the Research Methods course. As a result, the four main sections of the questionnaire were divided into the subcategories mentioned above in order to reduce the size of the blocks of questions and, therefore, make it more user-friendly and maintain the motivation of participants (see Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). In addition, the title of the fourth section was changed from 'psychological language-related challenges' to 'other language related challenges' as a way to avoid the negative implications that the word 'psychological' may pose. The questionnaire was piloted a second time with the same class of Research Methods. This second piloting resulted in the

removal of items that were found irrelevant and the addition of items that emerged as a result of the open-ended questions included at the end of each section. Thus, 'writing for publications' was replaced with 'taking written exams', and the items 'understanding technical vocabulary' and 'feel frustrated' were added. In addition, bracketed examples were removed, and question wording was modified slightly in order to keep language simple and questions short. As a result, 'understanding extended speech (e.g., lecturers, class discussions)' was reworded as 'understanding lectures and class discussions', and 'dealing with people in authority (e.g., research supervisor, lecturers)' was reworded as 'dealing with supervisors and/or lecturers'.

5.6.1.2 First set of Interviews

The purpose of the first interview was to identify the language-related challenges faced by NNES international students attending an in-sessional EAP programme at a particular Irish university, as well as their views on English language support at university. Interviewing was chosen as the most appropriate inquiry method, given that it allows the researcher to gain insights into the academic and social experiences of the individuals involved, and is seen as the most accurate method to understand the issues students might experience during their sojourning (see Seidman, 2006). In order to help guide the collection of data and conduct semi-structured interviews, an interview guide (see Appendix B) was carefully planned based on the areas of difficulty identified in the literature. Using semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to adapt the structure of the interview according to the emergent needs of the interviewing process (Lodico et al., 2010); therefore, allowing to explore the pertinent themes, as well as new themes that could arise from the interviews. Thus, the interview guide integrates the major themes used in the questionnaire (i.e., three adjustment domains), and was designed around three main sections: a) background information, b) challenges, and c) language support. The 'background information' section allowed the study of relationships between demographic variables and language-related challenges identified in the 'challenges' section. These were compared with the results from the quantitative element of this phase (i.e., International Students' Questionnaire) with the purpose of answering RQ2b: What demographic factors might impact the adjustment process?. The 'language support' section served to collect data relating to the in-sessional EAP programme that informed Phase II of the research. This was done by

asking questions regarding reasons for taking the EAP programme and students' expectations, that were later compared with the answers provided in the follow-up interview (i.e., Phase II interview).

The interview guide consisted of a range of open questions, that combined direct questions (e.g. How long have you been living in Ireland for?) and indirect questions (e.g. What are the most significant language-related challenges that you currently experience?), which according to Tuckman and Harper (2012, p. 245) would lead to 'frank and open responses', and could provide extra data that might be neglected by the researcher when designing the question list. As with every research instrument, interviews present their limitations, which included the considerable amount of time involved in the collection and transcription processes, as well as the low response rate, especially on follow-up interviews, given that out of a total of 24 participants in the first set of interviews only 18 participated in the follow-up interview (see Section 5.8 for further information on sampling and data collection).

5.6.2. Phase II design

While Phase I aimed at identifying the challenges that NNES students face at universities on the entire island and, therefore, at providing a general picture of those; Phase II focused on specific challenges at the research institution, and intended to answer RQ3: Do EAP in-sessional programmes help NNES students overcome the language-related challenges they face in Irish universities? If so, how?. Results from the qualitative component of Phase I (i.e., first set of interviews) informed the two research instruments of Phase II (i.e., Needs Analysis Questionnaire and second set of interviews detailed in the sections below). This was done through a preliminary data analysis of the first set of interviews that identified: a) general themes used to generate questions in the NA questionnaire (e.g. question on the suitability of IELTS to prepare students for the reality of the university experience); and b) participant-specific themes that were used to design participant-specific questions in the follow-up or second set of interviews, relating to the challenges faced by each individual in order to assess their perspectives on the possible changes experienced during the EAP programme. In this way, results from the first set of interviews informed the NA questionnaire and the second set of interviews, resulting in an exploratory sequential

design in which the collection and analysis of qualitative data in Phase I builds to a convergent design (i.e., Phase II)

5.6.2.1 Needs Analysis Questionnaire

As explored in Section 4.3.2, needs analysis has been considered as a valuable and useful tool to collect information on students' language needs and perceptions, and has been widely used for curriculum development and the improvement of language learning and teaching in the field of EAP (Upton, 2012). Following a preliminary analysis of the first set of interviews, the NA questionnaire (see Appendix C) aimed at gathering information related to the following themes:

Theme 1: Academic skills for university (i.e., Q1. 'In your studies at university, how important are the following skills?'; Q2. 'What skills would you like to improve through the EAP Programme?'; and Q3. 'What skills are emphasised the most during the EAP classes?')

Theme 2: Pre-university preparation (i.e., Q4 'To what extent has IELTS prepared you for the reality of the university experience?'; and Q5 'Do you think that taking an EAP course before the start of the course (e.g., during the summer months) would have been more beneficial for you experience at university?')

Theme 3: Students' preferences for the EAP programme (i.e., Q6. 'What do you expect from an EAP tutor?', Q7. 'What style of class do you think would benefit your learning experience?', Q8. 'What kind of materials would you prefer to use during your EAP classes?')

Results from the first set of interviews identified different student needs depending on the level and field of study, accordingly the demographic section of the NA Questionnaire included those two items. The following items consisted of a 5-point Likert scale question on students' linguistic needs at the institution (i.e., Q1), and a multiple-choice question on expectations regarding academic skills (i.e., Q2), both designed according to the academic items identified in Table 3. These two items were followed by 5 open-ended items (i.e., Q3-Q8). Despite the limitations posed by the use of this kind of non-numeric items in quantitative research (see Section 5.8), an open-ended format was considered as the most appropriate for two reasons. Firstly, the open-ended format can provide answers that have not been addressed previously; and secondly, the range of possible answers was unknown

at the time of designing the questionnaire as opposed to the previous items – Q1 and Q2 – (Dörnyei, 2003).

If compared to the Phase I quantitative method sample size (n=330) and its generalising purpose (i.e., obtain data that could be representative of NNES students in Irish universities), in Phase II a quantitative approach including open-ended items seemed a more appropriate choice, as it allowed the researcher to capture more specific data and provide a more extensive account of the findings from the first set of interviews that were not explored in the International Students' Questionnaire. Thus, the NA Questionnaire serves not only as a way of inquiry, but also as a way of corroboration for some of the themes emerging from the first set of interviews (e.g., students' perspectives on IELTS, or EAP tutors); as well as those from the second set of interviews, since the convergent design allowed for results to be compared.

5.6.2.2 Second set of Interviews

The second round of interviews followed up the data elicited from the first interview and also followed a semi-structured format. The purpose of the follow-up interview was to analyse changes over time in relation to the language difficulties reported by each student, as well as to explore the aspects that helped NNES students overcome the challenges identified in the first interview. For this reason, the first interview took place at the beginning of the EAP programme, and the second one at the end. In the same manner as in the first interview, a list of questions was designed in order to guide the interview (see Appendix B). Although the list of questions follows the same pattern for all the participants, each interview was designed individually, and integrated specific themes for each participant from the previous interview. Thus, the second and final interview concentrates on the improvement or not of each student's language-related challenges, as well as their views on the EAP programme they had just completed. Consequently, it revolves around two broad topics: a) aspects that contribute to NNES students' adjustment, and b) students' impressions of the EAP in-sessional programme.

5.6.3. Overview of research design

Table 6 presents an overview of the instruments, aims and research questions addressed in the study. This table then gives a clearer picture of the research design by providing a summary of the main features of the study.

Table 6. *Overview of the research design*

Phase	Instruments	Aims	Research questions addressed
Phase I	International Students' Questionnaire	Gather demographic information. Identify language-related challenges faced by NNES students at Irish universities. Explore relationships between studied variables (i.e., demographics and adjustment domains)	RQ1. What are the language-related challenges that NNES students face in Irish universities? 1a. What are the language-related academic challenges? 1b. What are the language-related sociocultural challenges? 1c. What are the language-related psychological challenges?
	First Set of Interviews	Identify language-related challenges faced by NNES students at the research institution. Explore students' views on the EAP programme studied. Gather further explanatory data to corroborate and explain findings from the International Students' Questionnaire.	RQ2. What relationships may exist between the studied variables (i.e., adjustment domains and demographic factors)? 2a. What are the relationships between adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological)? 2b. What demographic factors might impact the adjustment process?
Phase II	Needs Analysis Questionnaire	Identify EAP-related aspects that contribute to NNES students' adaptation. Gather further quantitative data to corroborate findings from the first set of interviews. Gather information on students' impressions of the EAP in-sessional programme.	RQ3. Do EAP in-sessional programmes help NNES students overcome the language-related challenges they face in Irish universities? If so, how? 3a. What aspects of EAP in-sessional programmes may contribute to students' adaptation? 3b. What are the students' impressions of the EAP in-sessional programme?
	Second Set of Interviews	Analyse changes over time and explore EAP-related aspects that contribute to NNES international students' adaptation. Gather further qualitative data to explain and corroborate findings from the NA Questionnaire.	

5.7. Ethical Considerations

Social research involving human subjects requires prior ethical approval in order to ensure benefit and reduce risk of harm. This research explored the attitudes and language difficulties experienced by NNS students, and therefore involved personal data that at times could be considered as potentially sensitive. Thus, ethical approval was sought as an essential requirement of the School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences (SLSCS) in January 2017 and was resubmitted in March 2017 following minor changes. Approval was granted from April 2017 until September 2018, which ensured that the sampling and recruitment phases were completed within the approved timeframe.

The SLSCS regards minimisation of risk, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity and data protection as key concepts in research ethics (see SLSCS, 2018). Although this research did not pose a high level of risk to participants, it might cause discomfort or embarrassment regarding students' attitudes and experiences during the interviews, as well as inconvenience due to personal time dedicated to the interviews. In order to minimise any potential adverse outcomes, participants were provided with a description of the study including benefits and any potential risks as well as their right to withdraw at any stage of the research project without any negative consequences. In the case of NA questionnaire and interviews, the principle of informed consent was applied as a requirement to guarantee voluntary participation in the study by means of a Participant Information Leaflet (PIL) (see Appendix D), which was distributed three days prior to the Informed Consent Form (ICF) (see Appendix E) in order to allow potential participants to reflect on the information and make an informed judgement before signing the ICF. Following best practice guidelines specified by SLSCS (2018), the researcher read through the PIL with potential participants; and both, the PIL and ICF were written using appropriate language considering that the study was directed towards non-native speakers of English. In addition, interview slots were assigned by means of an online calendar tool (i.e., Doodle), which allowed the participants to select a suitable time and date, and therefore minimised the possible inconvenience resulting from personal time taken for the interviews.

The PIL and ICF also served to assure interview and NA questionnaire participants of confidentiality and anonymity and to inform of the future uses of data and its storage. The anonymity of data obtained from the online questionnaire was maintained by configuring

the survey instrument (i.e., Google Forms) to not collect IP addresses or email addresses. Interview participants were reminded to avoid real names of people and places prior to the interview, and interview transcripts were made available to each participant on request, providing the opportunity to delete any wording that might be perceived as identifying. Their identity was also safeguarded at the commencement of the study by allocation of a code number (i.e., S1, S2, S…), which was used in subsequent stored data records. In addition, audio recordings and the coding key were stored in a separate encrypted device for a short period of time and were deleted after transcripts were typed. Data, including hardcopies and digital data, was securely stored at all times. While fully anonymised hardcopy records were stored in a secure locked cabinet in the researcher's office, digital data were stored in electronic form using password protected files in the researcher's own individual encrypted and password-protected computer. Hardcopy records will be destroyed by the research supervisor and digital data will be deleted by the researcher after a period of five years after completion of the PhD in compliance with the SLSCS research ethics guidelines (see SLSCS, 2018).

5.8. Sampling and Data Collection

5.8.1. International students' questionnaire

The online questionnaire was directed at NNES students, both undergraduate and postgraduate students, enrolled full-time and part-time in any of the nine universities in Ireland during the academic year 2017/2018. This included the seven universities in the Republic of Ireland– Dublin City University, NUI Galway, NUI Maynooth, Trinity College Dublin, University College Cork, University College Dublin and University of Limerick; as well as the two universities in Northern Ireland – Queen's University Belfast and University of Ulster.

Following these criteria, the sampling frame was obtained from HEA and HESA records on enrolments by domiciliary and institution for the academic year 2017/2018 (see HEA, 2019; HESA, 2019), from which the target population was calculated by excluding those students from countries in which English holds official recognition according to the World Population Review (2019). Thus, the estimated target population equates to a total of 9,924 students from countries in which English is not an official language, and that were registered in an Irish university during the academic year 2017/2018. It is worth noting the fact that a

student coming from a NNES country does not necessarily imply that the given student is a NNES, which may pose a threat to the sample representativeness. Therefore, in order to ensure the eligibility of respondents, the screening question 'Are you a non-native English speaker?' was placed at the beginning of the survey.

Although proportional quota sampling would be the ideal sampling technique considering that it would provide a proportional sample of each university studied, the limitations faced when accessing the sample and the non-compulsory character of the online survey, point at self-selection sampling as the most appropriate sampling technique for this research instrument. In addition, given that the main purpose of the survey was to gain greater insight into the adjustment challenges experienced by NNES international students by looking at it from all angles, maximum variation sampling was applied when selecting the target population. This sampling technique allowed the researcher to explore the whole range of possible responses among participants presenting different characteristics (e.g., language proficiency, level of study, field of study, etc.), and find patterns that may lead to assumptions (Dörnyei, 2007).

The International Student Offices of the nine universities were contacted via email in October 2017, in order to gain access to the sample population. The email consisted of a letter seeking access and a request for distribution of the questionnaire either via email, social networks, newsletter or any other means. Some of the International Student Offices sent a bulk email to all the international students registered for the academic year 2017/2018. However, some other International Student Offices did not agree on the distribution of any kind of material on behalf of outside parties, which will be reflected later when examining the response rate of each university (see Section 5.8.3 Participant Overview). In order to get access to those international students that were not contacted by their university, the researcher sought participation on social media through a post in the international students' university groups, as well as distribution by bodies dealing with international students such as ICOS and USI. Answers were collected over a period of two months, from October 2017 to November 2017.

5.8.2. Interviews and needs analysis questionnaire

The interviews and needs analysis survey looked at a reduced sample with the aim of providing a more precise description of the language needs of NNES international students and their views on an EAP in-sessional programme in one particular university. Given that the in-sessional course examined in this study is divided into two separate semesters, and each semester involves new registrations, the total number of registered students was regarded separately. There was a total of 90 registered students in the first term and a total of 49 registered students in the second term for the academic year 2017/2018. It is important to note that 21 of the students registered for both terms, and two of the registered EAP students in the first term and four of those registered in the second term were excluded from the target population as they did not meet the selection criteria, since they were not students but university staff or research fellows. Therefore, resulting in a target population of 112 students (i.e., 88 students registered in Term 1 and 24 students registered in Term 2).

The EAP programme considered in this study was chosen based on convenience sampling, given that the researcher had professional links with EAP tutors and the programme director at the time. Additionally, self-selection sampling was chosen as the sampling technique for NA Questionnaire and interviews. While self-selection sampling facilitates the recruitment of participants, it is worth noting that representativeness might be affected by self-selection bias. Thus, participants that chose to take part are interested in the study and therefore are less likely to withdraw, but at the same time, that interest might show an inherent bias. For example, students of disciplines related to applied linguistics might have an interest in the research methods used in this study in order to apply those in their own studies.

Firstly, the EAP programme director was contacted via email in order to request permission from EAP tutors for the researcher to distribute the PIL during the five first minutes of the EAP class at the beginning of each term during the academic year 2017/2018. Tutors' consent was given and the PIL was distributed and read through with students. As explained in the previous section (see Section 5.7), students' consent was sought by means of an ICF distributed three days after, in which students willing to participate could provide their email address in order to be contacted for the interviews.

The first set of interviews was conducted at the beginning of each term, while the second set of interviews or follow-up interviews, were conducted at the end of each term (i.e., September 2017 and January 2018 in the first term, and January 2018 and May 2018 in the second term) Each interview lasted between approximately 20 and 30 minutes and was conducted in one of the group-work rooms provided by the university, as a measure to ensure the appropriateness of the interview setting. The length of the interviews was decided based on the notion that interviews that are too long or too short impact the quality of data (see Axinn & Pearce, 2006). For example, it has been agreed that interviews should not exceed 90 minutes in order to minimise respondent fatigue and to not interfere with other commitments, but at the same time, the researcher should allow enough time to collect the necessary data. For this purpose, a pilot interview was conducted and a period of approximately 30 minutes was deemed appropriate considering the number of sections and questions of the interview schedule.

Data from the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using intelligent verbatim transcription as a way of making data more accessible, since it provides an easy-to-read transcript by deleting any redundant information, fillers or nonverbal communication (Hadley, 2017). This type of transcription was chosen given that the focus of the research relies on the content of the interview rather than an in-depth knowledge of participant communication. That is, the researcher was interested in what students might say in relation to their perspectives on language challenges and EAP support programmes, rather than how that was said.

In the case of the NA questionnaire, the completion and return of the questionnaire during the first half of the term entailed consent from participants (see SLSCS, 2018). The NA Questionnaire was completed at home and then left in a lodgement box at the exit to the classroom, which was collected by the EAP tutors and kept in the university's office. Of a total of 88 eligible participants registered in the in-sessional EAP programme for the academic year 2017/2018, a total of 34 EAP students returned the NA Questionnaire and 24 participated in the first set of interviews (i.e., 18 students at the beginning of the first term, and 6 at the beginning of the second term) and 18 participated in the second set of interviews or follow-up interviews (i.e., 14 students at the end of the first term, and 4 students at the end of the second term). These numbers reflect what can be considered as the two most daunting challenges faced during the data collection process: low-response

rate and attrition. The low-response rate limitation was found when recruiting participants for both, interviews and NA Questionnaire. A measure to reduce this limitation and get more participants was to repeat the data collection process during both terms. This limitation might be related to the low numbers in the students taking part in the EAP programme studied, as well as the voluntary character of the research. It is crucial noting that as data were collected at different times (i.e., at the beginning and end of each term), factors such as the time living in Ireland and the time studying at university in Ireland might impact the results on student adjustment, and therefore, this needed to be considered when analysing the data. On the other hand, attrition was a limitation emerging from the longitudinal character of the study, which led to a lower number of participants for the second set of interviews. Measures to increase follow-up rates were taken, including multiple contact attempts, as well as flexibility in dates, times and venues.

Table 7 below summarises the main characteristics of the sampling and data collection processes explained in the previous sections, including instruments, timing of data collection and number of participants:

Table 7. Population and number of participants per phase

Phase	Instrument/ Timing	Population	Number of participants
Phase I	International Students' Questionnaire / October-November 2017	9,924 students from NNES countries studying at Irish universities	330 students
	First set of interviews / October 2017 for Term 1 January 2018 for Term 2	112 EAP students at an Irish university (88 students Term 1 and 24 students Term 2)	24 students (18 students from Term 1 + 6 students from Term 2)
Phase II	Needs Analysis Questionnaire / November 2017 for Term 1 February 2018 for Term 2	112 EAP students at an Irish university (88 students Term 1 and 24 students Term 2)	34 students (26 students from Term 1 + 8 students from Term 2)
	Second set of interviews / January 2018 for Term 1 April 2018 for Term 2	112 EAP students at an Irish university (88 students Term 1 and 24 students Term 2)	18 students (14 students from Term 1 + 4 students from Term 2)

5.8.3. Participant overview

This section complements the previous sections (i.e., Section 5.8.1 and Section 5.8.2) by providing an outline of some of the participants' characteristics that might have an impact on the findings. Considering that the target population and the demographic information collected varies depending on the instrument used, this section presents participants' demographic characteristics by instrument:

5.8.3.1 International Students' Questionnaire

Starting first with university, the sampling issue raised in previous sections regarding access becomes evident in the table below (see Table 8). The higher response rate in some of the institutions corresponds to those universities that distributed the questionnaire among their international students via email (i.e., Universities 2, 4 and 5)

Table 8. Participant overview- Number and percentage of participants per university

University	Number and percentage of participants
University 1	n= 8 (2.4%)
University 2	n= 63 (19.1%)
University 3	n= 40 (12.1%)
University 4	n= 75 (22.7%)
University 5	n= 64 (19.4%)
University 6	n= 15 (4.5%)
University 7	n= 29 (8.8%)
University 8	n= 16 (4.8%)
University 9	n= 20 (6.1%)

In terms of level of study, the majority of surveyed students were completing their undergraduate and master's studies, conforming 41.5% and 38.2% of the total sample respectively (see Table 9 below). PhD students represent just above 18% of the respondents, and foundation students are the least represented group with only a 1.5% of the sample.

Table 9. *Participant overview- Number and percentage of participants per level of study*

Level of study	Number and percentage of participants
Undergraduate	n= 137 (41.5%)
Master	n= 126 (38.2%)
PhD	n= 62 (18.8%)
Foundation	n= 5 (1.5%)

Field of study was also included, showing a higher representation of students of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences with over the 50% of participants, followed by Engineering, Maths and Science with 35.5%, and finally, 13.3% of students of Health Sciences (see Table 10).

Table 10. *Participant overview- Number and percentage of participants per field of study*

Field of study	Number and percentage of participants
Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences	n= 169 (51.2%)
Health Sciences	n= 44 (13.3%)
Engineering, Maths and Science	n= 117 (35.5%)

The majority of participants (i.e., 67.3%) were living in Ireland for a period between 0 and 1 year (see Table 11). Therefore, it can be inferred that most of the students came to Ireland with the purpose of studying and this was their first academic year at an Irish university.

Table 11. *Participant overview- Number and percentage of participants per length of residence in Ireland*

Length in Ireland	Number and percentage of participants
0-1 year	n= 222 (67.3%)
1-3 years	n= 61 (18.5%)
>3 years	n= 47 (14.2%)

Previous experience living in an English-speaking country was also a factor to consider, given that it might have an effect on sociocultural and psychological adjustment, as well as language proficiency. For the vast majority of participants this was the first time living in an English-speaking country (i.e., 79.4%), while only above 5% of the students lived in an English-speaking country for more than 3 years before coming to Ireland (see Table 12).

Table 12. Participant overview- Number and percentage of participants per length of residence in an English-speaking country

Previous residence in an ES country	Number and percentage of participants
No	n= 262 (79.4%)
0-1 year	n= 41 (12.4%)
1-3 years	n= 8 (2.4%)
>3 years	n= 19 (5.8%)

As this study focuses on language challenges, certified level of English was another factor to consider. This allows to draw conclusions on the relationship between English level and adjustment difficulties, as well as the appropriateness of official English tests as entry criteria for university. Most of the students present a high level of certified English, with over 40% with a level equivalent to C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and almost 30% with a level equivalent to C2 of the CEFR (see Table 13).

Table 13. Participant overview- Number and percentage of participants per certified level of English

Certified level of English	Number and percentage of participants
None	n= 26 (7.9%)
A2 (KET / IELTS 3 / TOEIC 246-380 / TOEFL 40-56)	n= 5 (1.5%)
B1 (PET / IELTS 3.5-4.5 / TOEIC 381-540 / TOEFL 57-86)	n= 4 (1.2%)
B2 (FCE / IELTS 5-6 / TOEIC 541-700 / TOEFL 87-109)	n= 67 (20.3%)
C1 (CAE / IELTS 6.5-7 / TOEIC 701-910 / TOEFL 110-120)	n= 138 (41.8%)
C2 (CPE / IELTS 7.5+ / TOEIC 910+ / TOEFL 120+)	n= 90 (27.3%)

5.8.3.2 Interviews

Given the smaller sample in interviews compared to the International Students' Questionnaire, demographic characteristics could be summarised in a single table including level and field of study, country of origin, length of residence in Ireland, length of residence in an English-speaking country before coming to Ireland and certified level of English (see Table 14 below). The sample is composed of mostly master's students (i.e., 58.3%) of which

50% were studying courses related to the teaching of English language, which might be related to the self-selection bias mentioned in Section 5.8.2, as their interest in taking part might be due to their relation with the field of study. Over 40% of participants were originally from China. In relation to the length of stay in Ireland, over the 80% of participants arrived that academic year, and therefore it was reported as 0-1 year. In addition, over the 60% never lived in an English-speaking country before arriving in Ireland. The participants present a high certified level of English, with 37.5% holding qualifications matching the C1-C2 levels of the CEFR, and 37.5% holding a B2, which is the minimum required to enter a master's degree at universities in Ireland.

Table 14. *Participant overview- Interviews*

	Level and field of study	Country of origin	Length in Ireland	Previous residence in an ES country	Certified level of English
S1	MPhil in English Language Teaching	China	0-1 year	1-3 years	C1
S2	MPhil in English Language Teaching	Greece	0-1 year	0-1 year	C2
S3	Master Management in Education	Russia	0-1 year	0-1 year	C2
S4*	Master in Business	China	0-1 year	No	C1
S5	MPhil in English Language Teaching	China	0-1 year	No	C1
S6	MPhil in English Language Teaching	China	0-1 year	0-1 year	C1
S7	PhD Applied Linguistics	Romania	3+ years	No	B2
S8	Master in Computer Sciences	France	0-1 year	3+ years	C2
S9	BA History	France	0-1 year	No	None
S10	MPhil in English Language Teaching	China	0-1 year	0-1 year	B2
S11	Master in Chinese Studies	China	0-1 year	No	B2
S12*	Master in Business	Brazil	0-1 year	0-1 year	B2
S13*	Master in Entrepreneurship	China	0-1 year	No	B2
S14	MPhil in English Language Teaching	China	0-1 year	No	C1
S15	BA Occupational Therapy	China	3+ years	No	None
S16	MPhil in English Language Teaching	Ukraine	3+ years	No	None

S17	PhD Psychology	Syria	0-1 year	No	B2
S18	Foundation Programme	Lithuania	3+ years	No	None
S19	Master Law	Ukraine	0-1 year	No	C1
S20	BA English Studies	Germany	0-1 year	3+ years	None
S21	PhD Pharmacy	Brazil	0-1 year	0-1 year	None
S22*	BSc Business and Economics	Japan	0-1 year	0-1 year	B2
S23*	PhD Philosophy	China	0-1 year	No	B2
S24*	PhD Finances	Iran	0-1 year	No	B2

* students who did not take part in the second interview.

5.8.3.3 Needs Analysis Questionnaire

The demographic items of the NA Questionnaire only included level and field of study, as the main purpose was to collect data related to students' perspectives on the EAP programme studied rather than making inferences related to demographic characteristics. Level and field of study were considered as needs and expectations might vary according to those factors. For example, a PhD student's needs might relate to writing a thesis rather than understanding lectures or taking notes, as it might be the case for an undergraduate student. Once again, the majority of participants were master's students (55.9%) and the field of study Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (79.4%) (see Table 15).

Table 15. Participant overview- NA Questionnaire

		Number of participants and percentage
Level of study	Undergraduate	n= 10 (29.4%)
	Master	n= 19 (55.9%)
	PhD	n= 4 (11.8%)
	Foundation	n= 1 (2.9%)
Field of study	Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences	n= 27 (79.4%)
	Health Sciences	n= 2 (5.9%)
	Engineering, Maths and Science	n= 5 (14.7%)

5.9. Data Analysis

5.9.1. International students' questionnaire data analysis

Firstly, responses collected in Google Forms were downloaded in comma-separated values format by default, and saved in an Excel file format in order to avoid possible data loss as well as to allow the coding of categorical responses and naming of variables before transferring the data into IBM SPSS Statistics V25.0. Once the data was imported to SPSS, response codes were labelled in order to assure appropriate interpretations as well as labelling of tables and graphs. A data screening procedure was also conducted as a measure to avoid errors that could affect the reliability and validity of results (Pallant, 2016). It is worth noting that SPSS was chosen based on its proven high productivity, data presentation, time saving and user-friendly characteristics when compared to other questionnaire analysis tools (see Conolly, 2007). Questionnaire analysis was performed in a four-step process: a) descriptive statistics; b) one-way nonparametric analysis; c) path model; and d) open-ended questions analysis.

Descriptive statistics were used to present the characteristics of the sample studied, as well as to identify those challenges significantly affecting students' adjustment. Therefore, the categorical variables included in the demographic section of the questionnaire were analysed using frequencies, as it allowed the researcher to present the number of cases in each category (George & Mallery, 2019). These were obtained by using the SPSS Frequencies command, which displays percentages and frequency (see Section 6.2.1). Alternatively, continuous variables included in the adjustment sections were analysed using the SPSS Descriptives command, since it provides a summary of the most reported challenges (Pallant, 2016). The analysis was performed in 3 stages, which correspond with the three adjustment domains included in this study (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological), given the large number of variables. This procedure included mean, median and standard deviation for each variable, and distributions will be represented using bar charts in the results chapter.

A one-way analysis technique was used to study the possible relationship between demographic variables and the different dependent variables included in the adjustment domains, as it allows the distribution between a continuous variable (i.e., challenges) and

a categorical variable (i.e., demographic variables) to be examined. This allowed the researcher to respond to RQ2b: What demographic factors might impact the adjustment process?. For this purpose, and given that the data collected were not normally distributed, the Nonparametric Tests function in SPSS was deemed most appropriate, as it compares distributions using the independent samples Kruskal-Wallis test between three or more groups. This was appropriate given that the majority of questionnaire demographic variables include three or more groups (e.g., the demographic variable 'level of study' includes four groups: undergraduate, master's, PhD, and foundation programme). Kruskal-Wallis, however, does not provide effect size, and therefore pairwise comparisons needed to be performed using the Dunn test with Bonferroni error correction in order to determine the effect size of two specific groups (Hinton et al., 2014). This technique enabled the researcher to compare distributions automatically and identify which variables are significantly different (i.e., $p< .05$) by looking at the 'Adj. Sig.' column. In addition, this post-hoc method also displays the mean rank for each group, which showed which groups experience higher or lower difficulty. Therefore, it was possible to identify the challenges most commonly reported by students in relation to the demographic variables.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was chosen as the analysis technique in this study, in order to determine the validity of the International Students' Questionnaire, and to examine the relationship among domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological); and therefore, respond to RQ2a: What are the relationships between adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological)?. This was appropriate given that SEM is a multivariate statistical technique used to analyse structural relationships between observed variables (i.e., questionnaire items) and latent variables (i.e., adjustment domains and subdomains identified in the literature); and therefore, it allowed the researcher to assess the factor fit or construct validity of the hypothesised model (Hoyle, 1995). More specifically, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used as a tool to examine the relationship between observed and latent variables, as well as the correlation between latent variables (Khine, 2013). This tool allowed latent variables or adjustment domains to be measured through observed variables or questionnaire items, as well as to test the fit of the hypothesised model. SPSS Amos V25 was the SEM software used to run the CFA, since it is considered a powerful tool that allows equations to be represented by drawing

path diagrams, and therefore focuses on conceptual aspects instead of mathematical representations (Brown, 2015b).

The model was specified and developed according to the language-related challenges and domains identified in the literature review and discussed in Section 5.3. It consisted in a multi-dimensional model including: a) the three adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural and psychological) as second-order factors; b) the identified subdomains (e.g., reading, writing, etc.) as first-order factors; and c) Likert-type questionnaire items as observed variables (see Figure 6). Thus, the higher order CFA structure identified in Figure 8 comprises an analysis of covariation between the second-order factors (i.e., three language adjustment domains), which is explained by their regression on the first-order factors (i.e., difficulty areas), and these in turn, are measured by their regression on the observable variables (i.e., questionnaire items). In addition, in order to assure analysis reliability, a random measurement error was added to the observed variables and a residual factor was associated to the first-order factors.
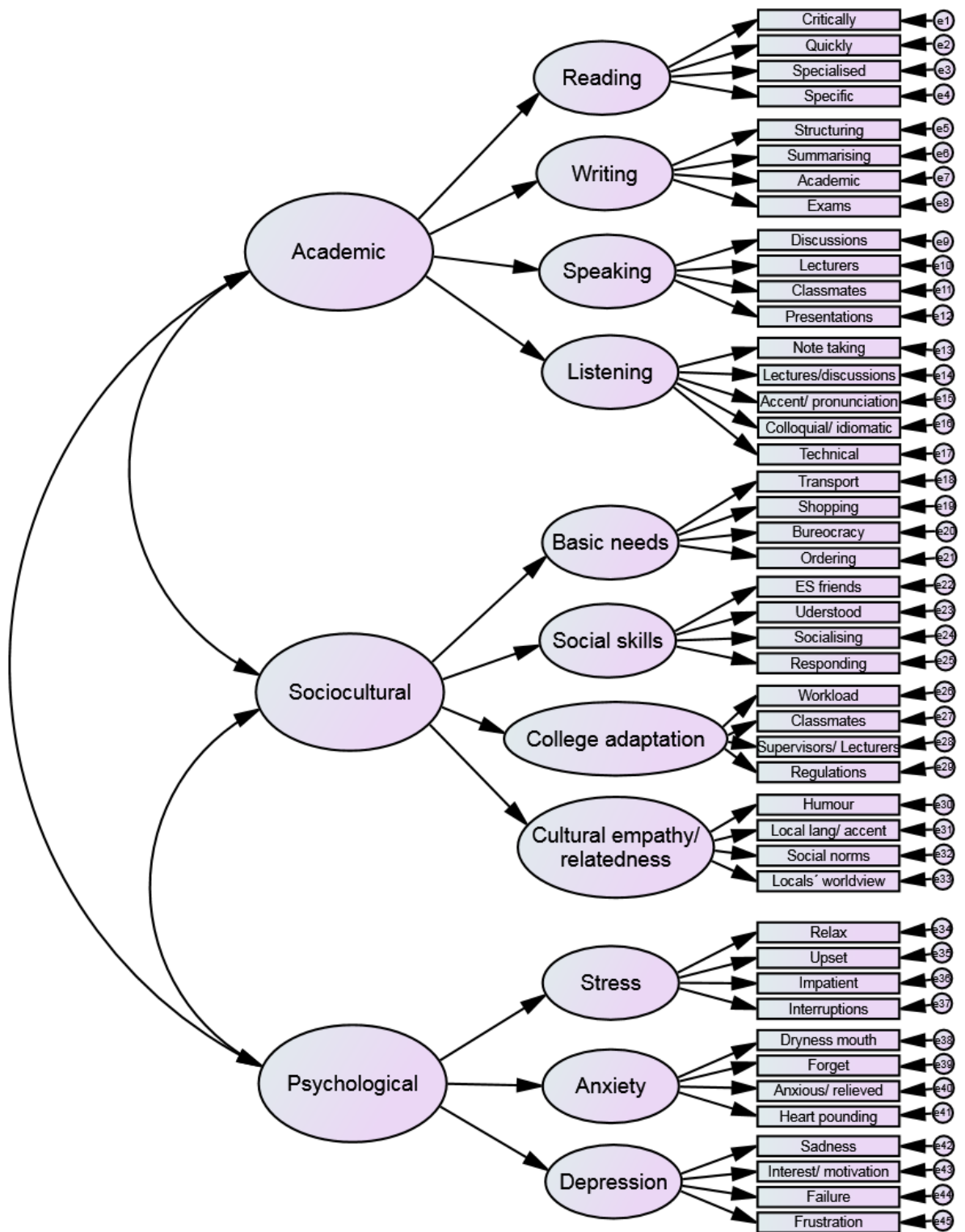
Figure 7. *Hypothesised higher-order model of factorial structure on SPSS Amos*

Note. Rectangles represent observed variables. Ellipses represent latent variables. Single-headed arrows represent causal relationships between variables (i.e., regression). Double-headed arrows represent covariance between variables. Small circles labelled with the letter 'e' represent error values.

Values were imported from the Excel sheet that was previously coded and screened as part of the descriptive analysis, and were added to their corresponding variables in the path model. The model fit was then evaluated by using the SPSS Amos Analysis Properties function and looking at standardised estimates, residual moments and modification indices. This provides both a visual representation of the regression and covariance weight, and a text output including indices for the four fit statistics that according to Kline (2015) should be used to report model fit. These include: a) The model chi-square, in order to assess overall fit; b) Comparative Fit Index (CFI), which compares the hypothesised model with a null model; c) Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), which assesses the standard variation of the residuals; and d) Root Mean Square Residual (RMR), which calculates the square-root of the difference between sample covariance matrix and hypothesised model residuals (ibid.). After the model fit was evaluated, the hypothesised model was rebuilt by examining the Modification Indices for Covariances and Regressions and eliminating and adding paths until model fit was achieved (i.e., model fit indices met the cut-off for good fit). The model was then respecified and reported, and will be presented and discussed in the Results and Discussion chapters.

Finally, open-ended questions (i.e., 'comments' question at the end of each section) were analysed manually, given the reduced number of responses (i.e., nine for the 'academic challenges' section, nine for the 'sociocultural challenges' section, and eight for the 'other challenges' section), which might be related to the optional character of the open-ended question. Thus, responses were manually coded using description-focus coding, as it allowed the identification and summary description of topics included (see Saldaña, 2013), and grouped into categories[14]. The coding was conducted using Microsoft Word by adapting the steps for manual coding described by Adu (2019, p.119): 1) Choose the appropriate coding strategy (i.e., descriptive coding); 2) Create codes using the selected strategy; 3) Compile codes and tally code frequencies. Results from the open-ended items are presented in the next chapter at the end of each challenge section – academic, sociocultural and psychological challenges (see Section 6.1.1).

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[14] Codebook for the optional 'comments' question including list of codes and descriptors can be found in Appendix F.

5.9.2. Needs analysis questionnaire data analysis

Responses from the NA questionnaire were collected using pen-and-paper, and therefore, data had to be manually entered into Microsoft Excel in order to prepare it for analysis. Given that the questionnaire included various types of items (i.e., multiple choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended), different analysis techniques and software were used. Firstly, quantitative data including Likert-type and multiple-choice items (i.e., Q1 and Q2) were imported from Excel into SPSS. Q1 consisted of 16 Likert-type items and was analysed using the 'descriptive statistics' function in SPSS Statistics. Firstly, the normality of distribution was assessed for each of the 16 items in order to decide which descriptive statistics were appropriate to report. This was done by using the 'Explore' command in SPSS, which allowed assessing the normality of the distribution both numerically (i.e., Shapiro-Wilk Test) and graphically (i.e., Histograms). The significance level of the Shapiro-Wilk Test was lower than 0.05 for all the items, indicating a non-normal distribution (see Field, 2009). The examination of the histograms showed that scores were negatively skewed with the frequent scores clustered at the higher end (ibid.). Given that the data were skewed, the non-parametric descriptive statistics including the median and the Inter-Quartile Range were considered as the most appropriate to report the results (Pallant, 2013).

As for Q1, Q2 included 16 items based on the academic skills identified by Xu (1991) and summarised in Table 3. Q2 was a yes/no type of question, since the purpose of the question was to identify which skills the students would like to focus on, and was analysed using SPSS Statistics. For this question, frequencies, including count and percentage were used to rank the skills from most commonly to least commonly reported, given that this question includes categorical binary variables with only two possible outcomes (see Field, 2009).

Open-ended items (i.e., Q3-Q8) were analysed using the 'Text Analytics' package in IBM SPSS Modeler 18.2, as it allowed the quantification of short open-ended responses, automating the process of converting qualitative responses into quantitatively measurable data (Creswell, 2013). IBM SPSS Modeler Text Analytics uses linguistic technologies and Natural Language Processing to extract key concepts and group these into categories. In this way, automating the creation of categories and, therefore, increasing the reliability of the results by ensuring consistent categorisation (IBM, 2019).

First, a stream had to be created by connecting the 'Excel' node – given that the data was entered in an Excel file –, the 'Type' node, and the 'Text mining' node. The stream was then run for each question, automatically identifying and categorising the most recurrent concepts. After this, categories were manually refined by analysing the content included in each category, in order to ensure the accuracy of the categorisation. The refining process involved minor adjustments including removing concepts that were misclassified or adding concepts that were missed, and slightly modifying category names. For example, the category named 'university' in Q4 was renamed as 'not for university', in order to better reflect the meaning of the category, since it referred to IELTS as not preparing students for university. When satisfied with the categories, results from the IBM SPSS Modeler Text Analytics workbench including document summary, selection percentage and count were summarised and presented in tables in Chapter 6 (see Section 6.3).

5.9.3. Interview data analysis

Interview data analysis was performed with the help of a qualitative data analysis software (QDAS), given its ability to manage large amounts of data, to organise and represent data and codes, as well as to analyse data in a systematic way. After exploring the different QDAS available, QDA Miner Lite was chosen due to its analytical functions, since it combines statistical and visualisation tools that allow a suited identification of patterns; as well as its availability and ease of use, as it can be downloaded from the provider's website and there is a great range of manuals and videos available on the Internet.

Interviews were analysed following a thematic analysis approach based on descriptive phenomenology, as its purpose is to identify recurrent topics or themes that represent participants' experience (see Braun & Clarke, 2013; Adu, 2019). Although thematic analysis has not been considered as a methodology in its own right due to its multiple approaches and lack of specific set of procedures, it has been increasingly recognised as a distinctive method that provides in-depth explanation to specific research questions by identifying, analysing and reporting patterns in a systematic manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is, in fact, this flexible and versatile character what makes thematic analysis the most suitable method for the analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted in this study, as it allowed the combination of different approaches in order to answer the different research questions. For instance, a thematic analysis helped identify the common challenges reported by NNES international students during the first set of interviews (i.e., RQ1), using

a hybrid approach that included deductive and inductive coding approaches; and the aspects present in EAP programmes that contribute to student adjustment during the second set of interviews (i.e., RQ3), using an inductive coding approach (see sections 5.9.3.1 and 5.9.3.2 below).

5.9.3.1 First Interview Coding

The first interview coding involved a hybrid approach that entailed a two-cycle coding procedure consisting of: a) a deductive approach, that allowed the organisation of statements into the main research constructs (i.e., First cycle coding); and b) an inductive approach, in order to find emergent codes and themes, as well as to reanalyse and reshape the hypothesised model according to the findings (i.e., Second cycle coding). This hybrid approach was chosen since the language-related adjustment domains identified in the literature review provided a priori codes that might fail to identify emerging codes not included in previous studies. Therefore, while the deductive approach allowed the analysis of student challenges according to the three adjustment domains explored in the International Students' Questionnaire; the inductive approach enabled the analysis of new themes emerging from the interview data.

In the first cycle of analysis, interview transcripts were imported to QDA Miner Lite, and participants were assigned to cases (i.e., S1, S2, S…). Before starting to explore the data, attribute coding was completed by adding the demographic data of each participant in the 'Variables' section. This included level of study, field of study, length of residence in Ireland, country of origin, and certified level of English. Subsequently, interview questions, including those based on the language-related adjustment domains identified in the literature were labelled as 'anchor codes or categories' and added to the list of codes as first and second order codes (see Figure 7). Finally, codes were assigned to the corresponding text segments (see Adu, 2019, p.196).
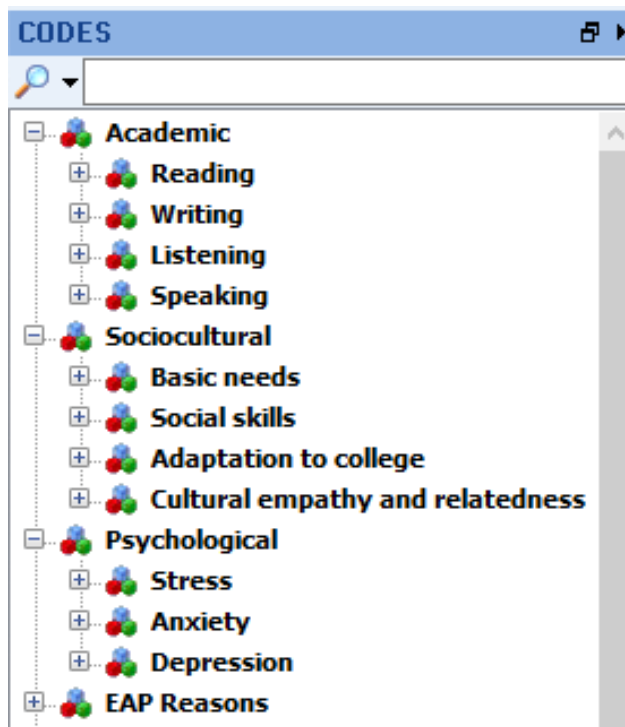
Figure 8. *First interview initial categorisation in QDA Miner Lite*

This process is also known as template analysis (see University of Huddersfield, 2019), structural coding (Namey et al., 2008) or provisional coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which not only provided a base for the initial coding process, but also speeded up the coding process and matched research constructs, since those categories match the ones explored in the International Students' Questionnaire (see Section 5.6.1). In addition, descriptive coding was used in order to identify different subcodes in each of the a priori established codes, by summarising in a word or short phrase the main idea of a determined text segment (see Wolcott, 1994). Thus, resulting in an eclectic coding process (i.e., attribute coding, structural coding, and descriptive coding) that helped to generate initial codes, facilitated by the use of QDAS and that was crucial for the posterior analysis.

The purpose of the second cycle was to redefine the initial codes and modify those previously established based on the literature review. For this reason, an inductive approach was adopted, allowing the development of new codes and interpretations based on raw data from the interviews. The coding process involved two second cycle coding methods: focused coding, which consisted of looking for recurrent topics without any preconceived category in mind; and elaborative coding, which elaborates on the first cycle coding methods, as well as on the categories established during the focused coding process. Thus, whereas focused coding enables the discovery of new topics that were not

considered in the previous coding process and avoids possible bias posed by the themes identified and predetermined by the literature review, elaborative coding helps corroborate the findings from the previous coding processes by comparing themes and reanalysing the data resulting from the first cycle coding (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The table below (see Table 16) presents the comparison of first cycle and second cycle codes[15].

Table 16. *First interview - First and second cycle codes*

Categories		First cycle codes	Second cycle codes
Academic	Reading	Critically	Critically
		Quickly	Quickly
		Specialised papers	Specialised texts
		Specific information	Specific information
	Writing	Structuring essays/dissertations	Structuring essays/dissertations
		Summarising/synthesising	Summarising/synthesising
		Academic style	Academic style
		Exams	Use of language
	Speaking	Class discussions	Class discussions
		Lecturers	Classmates/lecturers
		Classmates	Preciseness/naturalness
		Oral presentations	Oral presentations
	Listening	Taking notes	Taking notes
		Lectures/class discussions	Lecturers/class discussions
		Accent/pronunciation	Accent/rate of speech
		Colloquial/idiomatic language	Colloquial/idiomatic language
		Technical vocabulary	Technical vocabulary
Sociocultural	Basic needs	Transport system	Transport system
		Shopping	Shopping
		Bureaucracy	Daily vocabulary
		Coffee shops/restaurants	Coffee shops/restaurants
	Social skills	Native English speakers	Native English speakers
		Making yourself understood	Making yourself understood
		Interacting at social events	Interacting in social activities
		Interpreting and responding to emotions	Expressing feelings and emotions
	Adaptation to college	Academic workload	Academic workload
		Working with other students	Working with other students
		Dealing with supervisors/lecturers	Engaging with supervisors/lecturers
		Policies and regulations	Academic regulations

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[15] Codebook for the first set of interviews including list of codes and descriptors can be found in Appendix G.

	Cultural empathy and relatedness	Jokes and humour	Jokes and humour
		Local language/accent	Local language/accent
		Manner of speaking	Manner of speaking
		Locals' worldview	Locals' worldview
Psychological	Stress	Difficulty to relax	Difficulty to relax
		Getting upset	Getting upset
		Frustration	Frustration
		Getting impatient	
		Tolerate interruptions	
	Anxiety	Dryness of mouth	Palpitations
		Nervousness forget words	Blushing
		Situations relieved	Sweating
		Heart pounding	
	Depression	Sad and depressed	Sad and/or depressed
		Loss of motivation	Loss of motivation
		Failure	Failure
			Insecurity and lack of self-confidence
Reasons for taking EAP classes			Writing skills
			Oral fluency
			Exposure
			Reading skills
			Critical thinking
			Presentation skills
			Socialise
Other			IELTS
			Pre-sessional EAP
			EAP tutor feedback
			Lesson practicality

In addition, in order to explore the relationships among adjustment domains, therefore addressing RQ2a: What are the relationships between adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological)?, concept mapping was used as it allowed the researcher to better understand the interconnections between themes and subthemes by presenting them in a visual format (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This was done following the six-step method suggested by Adu (2019, p.181): 1) review characteristics of themes; 2) explore potential relationships among themes; 3) compare the proposed relationships with empirical indicators for confirmation; 4) write statements that depict the relationships discovered; 5) choose an appropriate tool to visualise the relationships; 6) design a diagram to present the findings. CmapTools version 6.04 was used to represent the relationships among adjustment domains in a concept map. Results from the map along with a description of the relationships are presented in Chapter 6 (see Section 6.3.4).

5.9.3.2 Second Interview Coding

Data coding of the second set of interviews involved a 'bottom-up' or inductive approach that allowed the identification of emergent codes in order to address RQ3: Do EAP in-sessional programmes help NNES students overcome the language-related challenges they face in Irish universities? If so, how?. As with the first set of interviews, interview transcripts were imported to QDA Miner Lite, and attribute coding was performed by assigning demographic variables to each participant's transcript (see Adu, 2019). After that, interview questions were labelled as anchor codes or categories (see Figure 8 below); therefore, using structural coding that allowed the researcher to identify data relevant to the study research questions (see Saldaña, 2016; Namey et al., 2008).
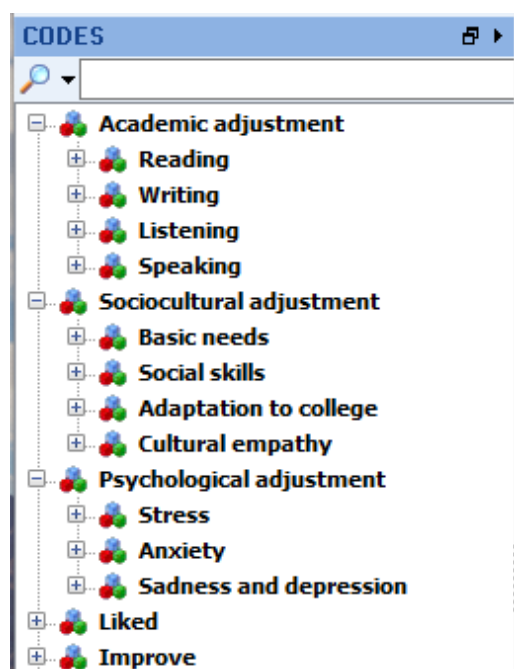
Figure 9. *Second interview initial categorisation in QDA Miner Lite*

Descriptive coding was then conducted by summarising in a word or short phrase the topic emerging from the empirical data (see Saldaña, 2013), which provided an outline of the content included in each category. Categories or anchor codes and codes resulting from the coding process are illustrated in Table 17[16].

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[16] Codebook for the second set of interviews including list of codes and descriptors can be found in Appendix H.

Table 17. Second interview codes.

Categories	Codes
Academic adjustment	Partner/friends native speakers
	Reading techniques
	Academic writing skills
	Familiarity/practice
	EAP tutor feedback
	Preparation
	Communicate difficulties
Sociocultural adjustment	Exposure to English
	Group work
	Social activities
	Familiarisation with academic practices
	Expressing difficulties in social contexts
	Humour
Psychological adjustment	Familiarity with lectures/supervisors
	Action plan
	Understanding academic practices
	Familiarity with classmates
Liked	Language exposure
	Materials
	Feedback
	Activities
	Tutor
	Environment
	Make friends
	Small groups
Improve	Level of English
	More practice/feedback
	Field of study
	Native speakers
	Timetable
	More academic
	More advertisement/awareness

Once the coding process was finalised, themes were identified at the manifest level, as the purpose was that of identifying directly observable information that describes the experiences of NNES international students (see Boyatzis, 1998). Themes were then refined, and results were analysed by using QDA Miner Lite 'Coding Frequency' function, which displayed results in a table including codes, their descriptions, counts (i.e., frequency), and number of cases (i.e., participants) associated to those codes. These results, including themes, number of cases, and percentage of cases, are summarised and presented in Section 7.3.

It is worth emphasising that the analysis of the interview data was an iterative process that involved continuous shift between the various stages of the data analysis process. For both

sets of interviews, data familiarisation started during the interview and transcription processes, and was also done by reading several times through the data before starting the analysis. Analytic memos were written on paper during data analysis about the participants and phenomenon under investigation. For example: MEMO 20 (S9) 'Classmates use slang, and the participant does not understand them. This can be linked to the need for raising awareness among domestic students. In addition, comments on the codes and their relationships were added to coded segments in QDA Miner Lite as a way to record the reflexive process.

5.10. Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the mixed-methods design employed with the purpose of identifying language-related challenges and EAP programme aspects that can contribute to the adjustment of NNES international students at Irish universities, as well as the relationships among adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological), and among demographic variables and adjustment. Quantitative methods were utilised in order to analyse data obtained from the two quantitative research tools (i.e., ISQ and NA Questionnaire). The process involved the application of statistical analysis using SPSS Statistics, Structural Equation Modelling using SPSS Amos, and text analysis using SPSS Text Analytics. Qualitative methods, involving thematic analysis with the help of QDA Miner Lite and CmapTools, were used in order to analyse the two sets of semi-structured interviews. The rationale for using this complex approach was discussed, as well as the choice of instruments and their combination. The sampling and data collection processes have been complemented by an overview of the participants which provided a summary of the main demographic factors that might impact the findings reported in the two subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 6: Results From Phase I

6.1. Chapter Introduction

Chapter 5 identified the methodology and methods employed to empirically examine the research propositions. The next two chapters present the results of the data collected. These results were analysed in two different phases (i.e., Phase I and Phase II), which correspond to the two result chapters. This chapter is, then, devoted to present the results from Phase I of the study, and is divided into two main sections, that correspond to the two research instruments used in this phase. Section 6.2 describes the findings from the International Students' Questionnaire, while Section 6.3 presents the data from the first set of interviews.

6.2. Phase I: Findings From the International Students' Questionnaire

This section will present the quantitative results from the 330 students from the nine public universities on the island of Ireland who completed the questionnaire. Firstly, descriptive statistics are presented in order to report the adjustment challenges most commonly faced by the students. Second, the results from the one-way analysis are presented to show the relationship between students' demographic characteristics and the challenges that they experience. These are followed by the results from the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) that examined how the challenges explored in the questionnaire relate to the three adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological), that is, to test whether the questionnaire items measure the three adjustment domains (i.e., latent variables). Finally, the reliability and validity of the questionnaire are discussed in the last section.

6.2.1. Descriptive statistics: Language-related challenges

Descriptive statistics, more specifically frequencies, were used to identify the adjustment challenges reported by the students, and therefore provide an answer to RQ1: What are the language-related challenges that NNES students face in Irish universities?. In order to facilitate interpretation, the results are firstly presented using stacked bar charts grouped by subdomain (e.g., reading, writing, listening, and speaking for the academic domain).

These show the level of difficulty reported by students in relation to each questionnaire item. Then, clustered column charts grouped by domain are used to compare the most reported challenges in each domain (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment). Lastly, another clustered column chart synthesises the mean percentages of all subdomains and the three domains, allowing the comparison between data from all the three domains and their respective subdomains.

6.2.1.1 Academic Challenges

As described previously in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.6.1), academic challenges relate to the four language-related difficulty areas: reading, writing, speaking and listening. These were measured by four to five questionnaire items each. What follows is a summary of the descriptive results for each language-related difficulty area and their corresponding items, showing percent and count in stacked bar charts.

Reading

The figure below illustrates the frequencies of the level of difficulty reported by students for each item related to reading (see Figure 10). 'Neutral' and 'easy' or 'extremely easy' were the categories most commonly reported, however, focusing on the difficulties, *reading quickly* and *reading specialised papers* were found more difficult than *reading critically* and *reading for specific information*.
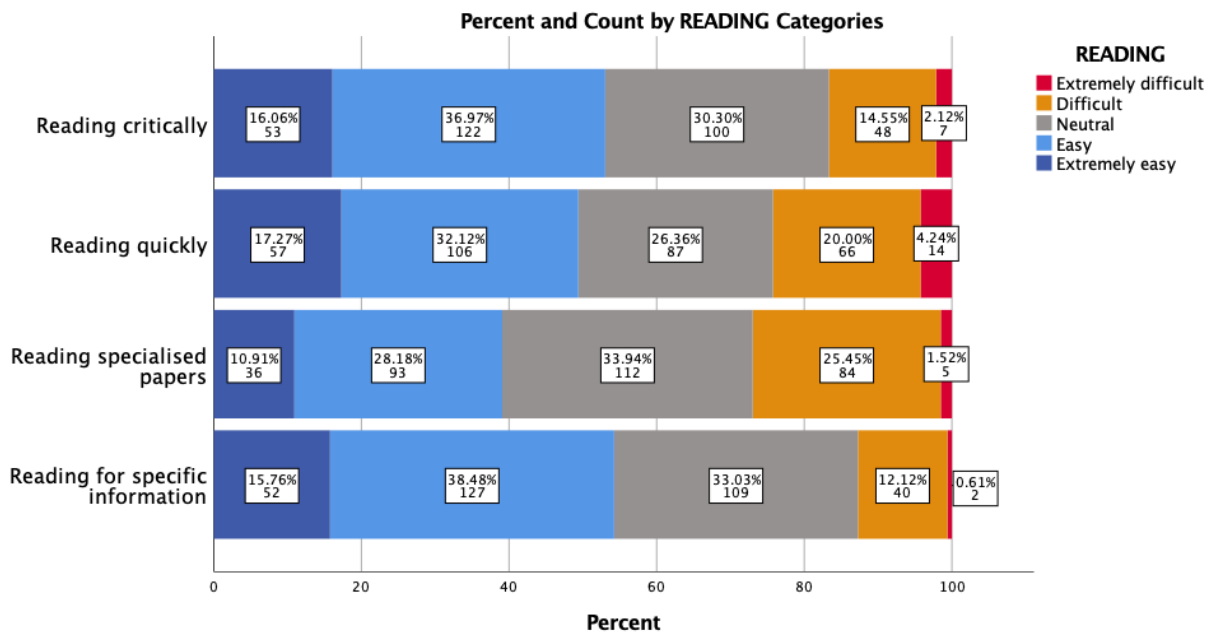
Figure 10. Reading frequencies

When combining the two Likert type items that represent difficulty (i.e., 'extremely difficult' and 'difficult'), a higher percentage of students reported some difficulty in *reading specialised papers* (26.97%) compared to *reading quickly* (24.24%). However, a higher percentage of students considered *reading quickly* as 'extremely difficult'. *Reading specialised papers* is considered the most difficult task regarding reading with 26.97% of students regarding it as 'difficult' or 'extremely difficult', followed by *reading quickly* (24.24%), *reading critically* (16.67%), and lastly, *reading for specific information* (12.73%). It can also be noted that a high percentage of participants responded that they did not experience difficulty related to reading skills.

Writing

Figure 11 below presents frequencies for the level of difficulty experienced by students concerning writing skills. Students report the highest difficulty in *writing in an academic style*, with 47.57% reporting it as 'difficult' (31.52%) or 'extremely difficult' (9.09%). This is followed by 37.88% of students reporting difficulty in *structuring essays/dissertations*, 29.7% in *taking written exams*, and 25.76% in *summarising and synthesising*.
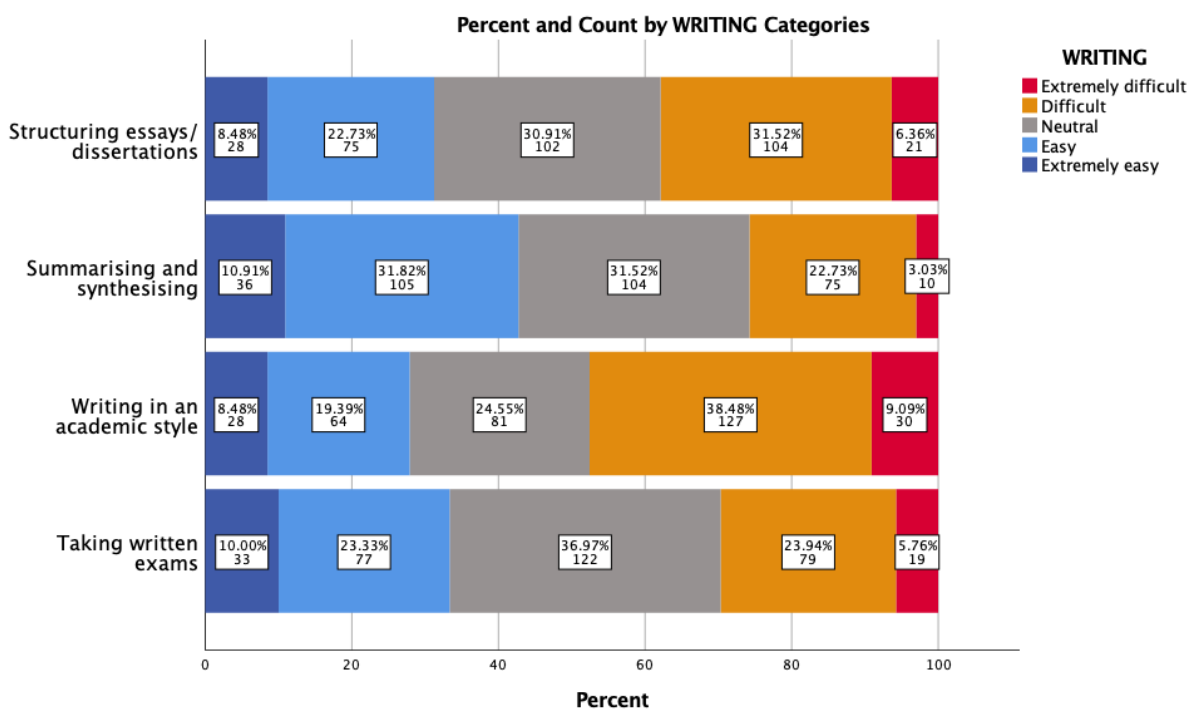
Figure 11. *Writing frequencies*

Listening

Frequencies for items concerning listening skills are displayed in Figure 12 below:
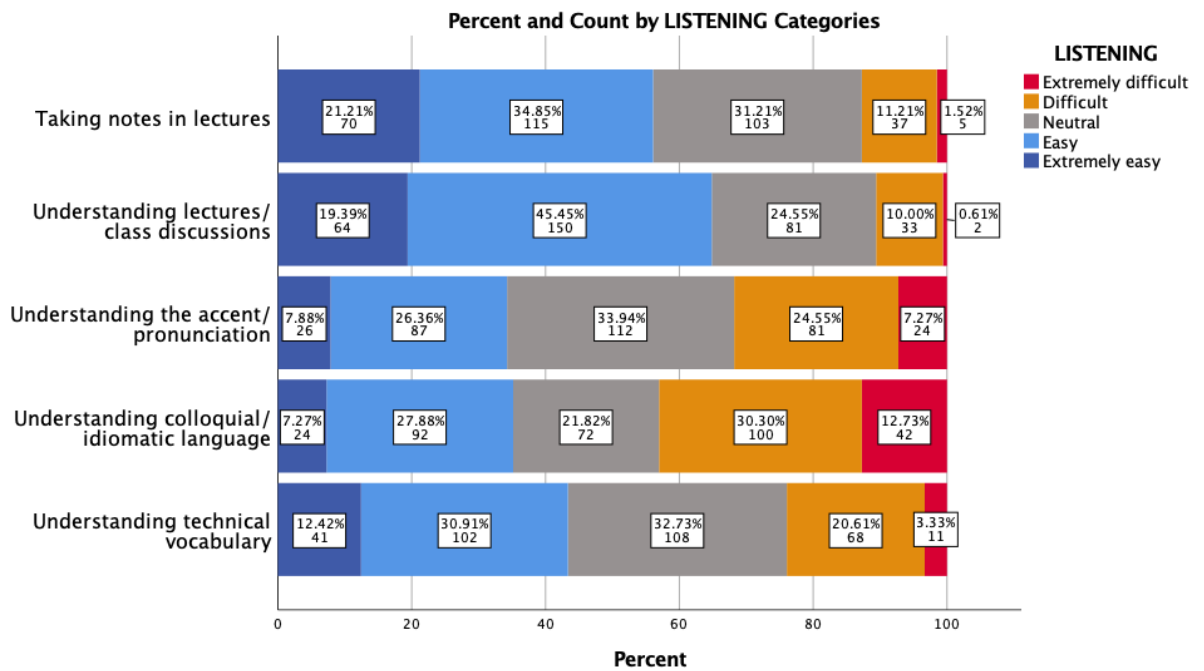
Figure 12. Listening frequencies

As it can be seen from the figure, students reported the highest difficulty in *understanding colloquial and idiomatic language*; followed by 31.82% of students finding some difficulty in *understanding the accent and/or pronunciation*. A total of 23.94% of the students reported *understanding technical vocabulary* as 'difficult' or 'extremely difficult'. *Taking notes in lectures* and *understanding lectures/class discussions* show low levels of difficulty, with only a total of 12.73% and 10.61% of the students indicating difficulty in those skills respectively.

Speaking

Results on the degree of difficulty reported by students related to speaking skills are illustrated in Figure 13. *Participating in class discussions* and *giving oral presentations* were regarded as more difficult than *communicating with lecturers* and *communicating with classmates*.

Percent and Count by SPEAKING Categories
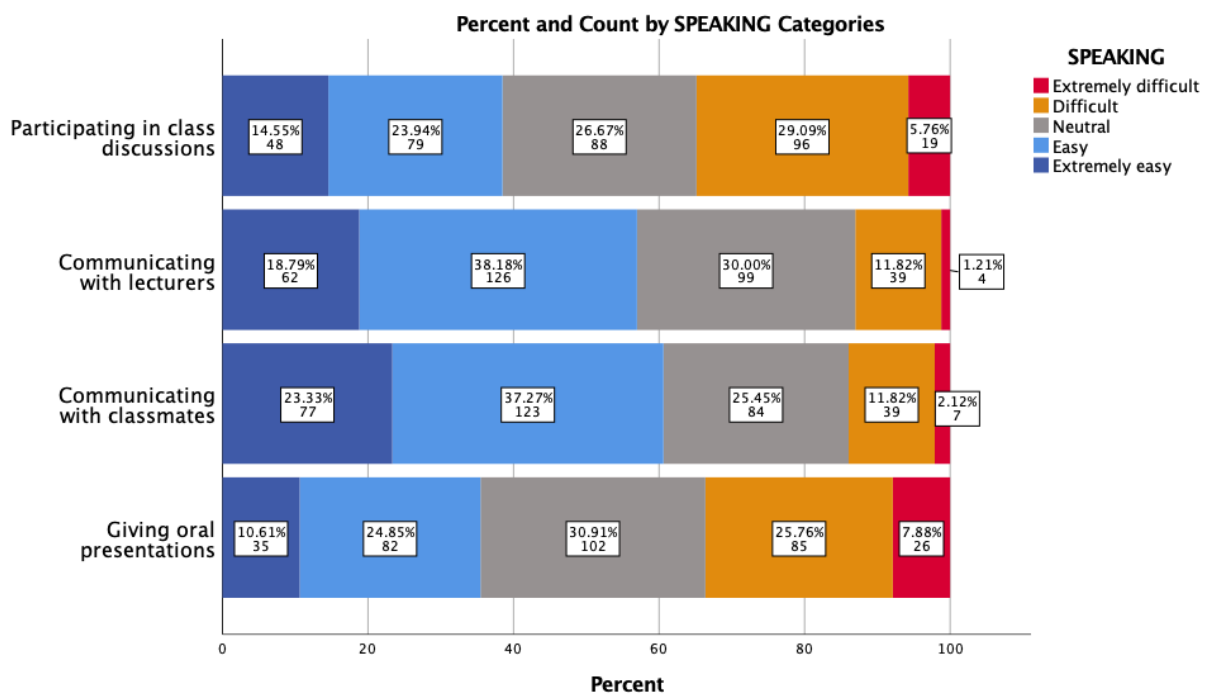
Figure 13. Speaking frequencies

In addition, over 30% of the students considered *participating in class discussions* and *giving oral presentations* as 'difficult' or 'extremely difficult', compared to just above 13% of students who reported some degree of difficulty in *communicating with lecturers* and *communicating with classmates*.

Comments on academic challenges

Results from the 'comments' open-ended question included at the end of the 'academic language-related challenges' section of the ISQ were manually analysed following a descriptive approach (see Section 5.9.1). Nine out of the 330 respondents answered this optional question. Results are summarised in Table 18 below and presented in the following paragraphs:

Table 18. *Themes and subthemes emerging from the analysis of the 'comments' question under academic challenges*

Themes	Subthemes	Cases
Difficulties understanding spoken English in the academic setting	Difficulty understanding due to accent	4
	Difficulty understanding due to speed	3
	Difficulty understanding due to colloquialisms	1
Writing as the most challenging skill	Writing academic texts	1
	Paraphrasing	1
More time needed to complete academic tasks	Complete exams	1
	Participate in class discussions	1
Other (see below)	Exams not used as assessment	1

Respondents highlighted the **difficulty understanding spoken English in the academic setting** as a consequence of difficulties understanding accents, the use of colloquialisms, and the rate of speech of lecturers and classmates. For example, respondent 150 answered:

> Though I come from a city which was once a British colony and every student must learn English from a very young age, I still found it very difficult to understand my classmates because of their heavy accents and the fast speed. (R150)

Writing was described **as the most challenging academic skill** by some respondents, including writing academic texts in general, and paraphrasing. This is illustrated in the answer provided by respondent 52: '[…] Paraphrasing is the most difficult task for me.' (R52)

Respondent 95 also mentioned **more time needed to complete academic tasks** compared to native English speakers, such as completing exams and participating in class discussions:

> I need more time as native speakers to formulate my ideas in writing at the exam or when I participate in class discussions. I afraid because of that I cannot show a real level of knowledge I have acquired. (R95)

Lastly, one respondent reported that **exams were not used as assessment** in their course, and as a result they responded 'neutral':

> I have never sat a written exam in my current course (my course doesn't include any, it's evaluated on the basis of written assignments)- I answered "neutral" in the question regarding this issue. (R190)

6.2.1.2 Sociocultural Challenges

After presenting the descriptive statistics for the academic domain, this section moves on to present the results from the sociocultural domain. The following subsections are arranged according to the four sociocultural difficulty areas relating to language outlined in the methodology chapter (see Table 4, Chapter 5). These include basic needs, social skills, adaptation to college, and cultural empathy and relatedness. As in the previous section, results from the questionnaire items are grouped in stacked bar charts by corresponding difficulty area, including count and percentage of the students' level of difficulty in each item.

Basic needs

Basic needs was the first subdomain identified among the sociocultural adjustment factors and it is composed of four items: *using the transport system, going shopping, dealing with bureaucracy,* and *ordering at coffee shops/restaurants*. Results from this subdomain are presented in Figure 14:
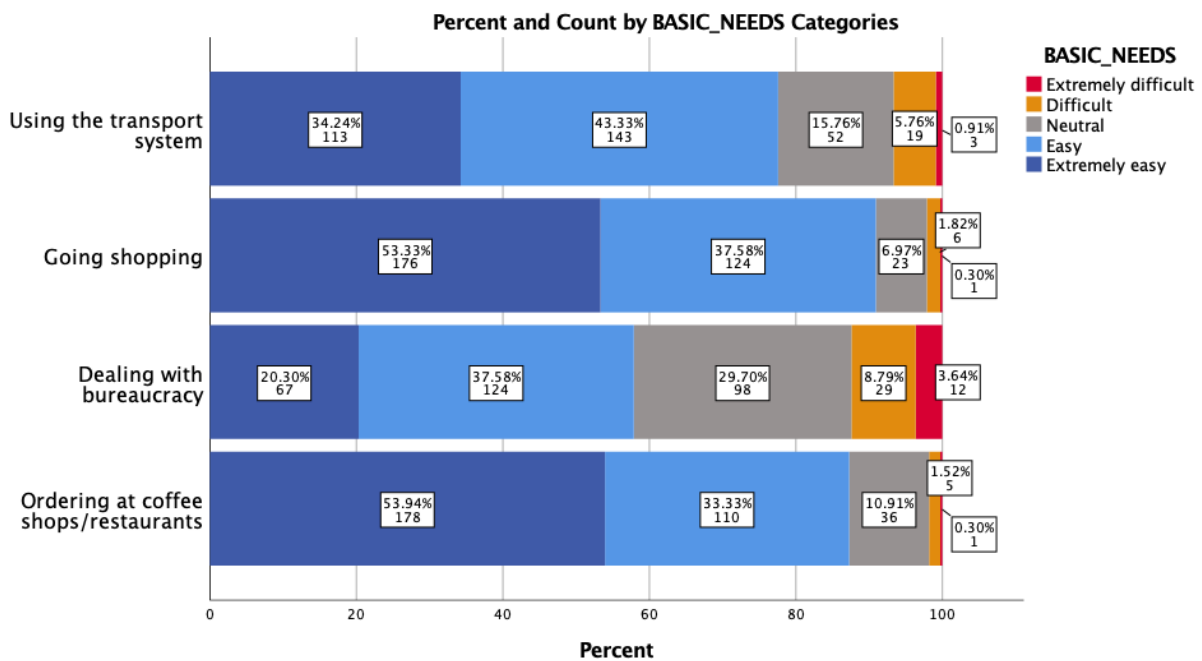
Figure 14. Basic needs frequencies

This figure indicates that in general students did not report experiencing challenges in skills related to basic needs, given the predominance of the categories 'easy' and 'extremely easy' as well as the low percentages of the categories 'difficult' and 'extremely difficult'. Regarding this subdomain, *dealing with bureaucracy* appeared to present the most challenge, with the highest percentage of students considering this to be 'difficult' or

'extremely difficult', with 12.43%; while 6.67% of the students reported difficulty *using the transport system*, 2.12% *going shopping* and 1.82% *ordering at coffee shops or restaurants*.

Social skills

Areas explored in social skills included *making friends who are native English speakers*, *making yourself understood*, *interacting at social events/community activities*, and *accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions*. Figure 15 below illustrates the level of difficulty reported for each social skills item:

Percent and Count by SOCIAL_SKILLS Categories
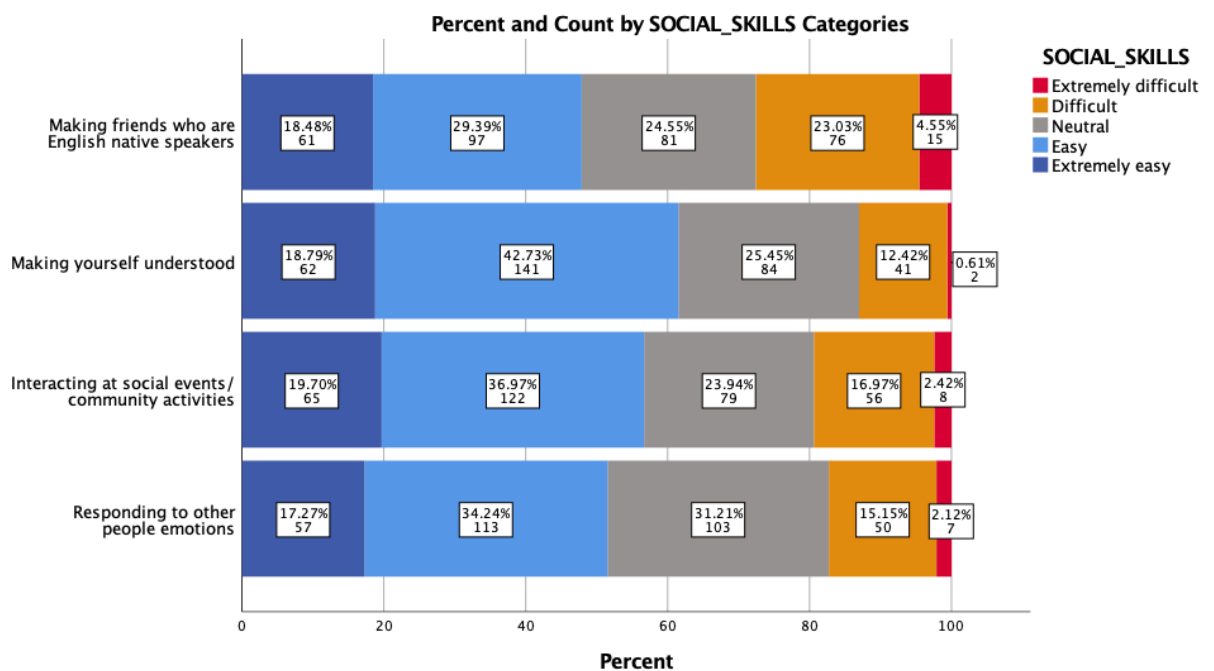
Figure 15. Social skills frequencies

In this subdomain, the highest percentage of responses including 'difficult' and 'extremely difficult' corresponds to *making friends who are native English speakers*, with a total of 27.58%. This is followed by 19.39% of the students reporting difficulty at *interacting at social events or community activities*, 17.27% at *accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions, and* 13.03% at *making yourself understood.*

Adaptation to college

Frequencies for the adaptation to college subdomain are summarised in Figure 16 below. This subdomain includes *coping with the academic workload*, *working effectively with other students*, *dealing with lecturers or supervisors*, and *understanding policies and regulations at university*.
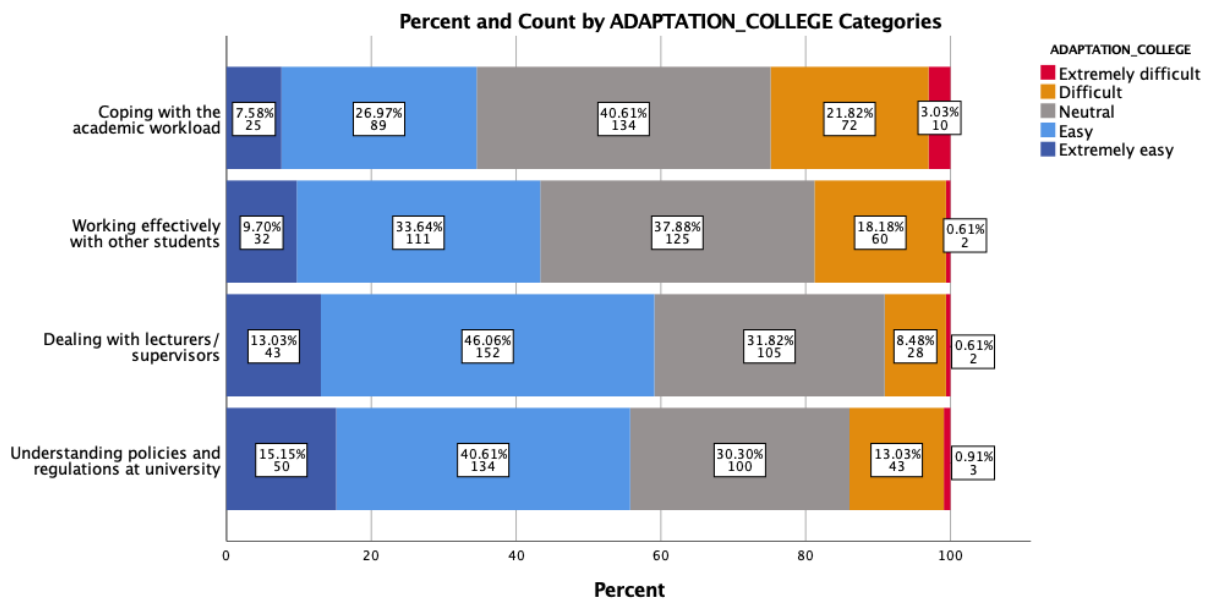
Figure 16. Adaptation to college frequencies

As can be seen from the figure above, students reported higher difficulty in *coping with the academic workload* and *working effectively with other students*, with 24.85% and 18.79% finding those 'difficult' or 'extremely difficult'. *Understanding policies and regulations at university* and *dealing with lecturers or supervisors* were found to be less difficult with a total of 13.94% and 9.09% of the students reporting them as 'difficult' or 'extremely difficult'.

Cultural empathy and relatedness

Figure 17 below presents the frequencies for the subdomain of cultural empathy and relatedness. This subdomain consists of four items: *understanding jokes and humour*, *understanding the local language/accent*, *changing your manner of speaking to suit social norms*, and *understanding the locals' worldview*.

Percent and Count by CULTURAL_EMPATHY Categories
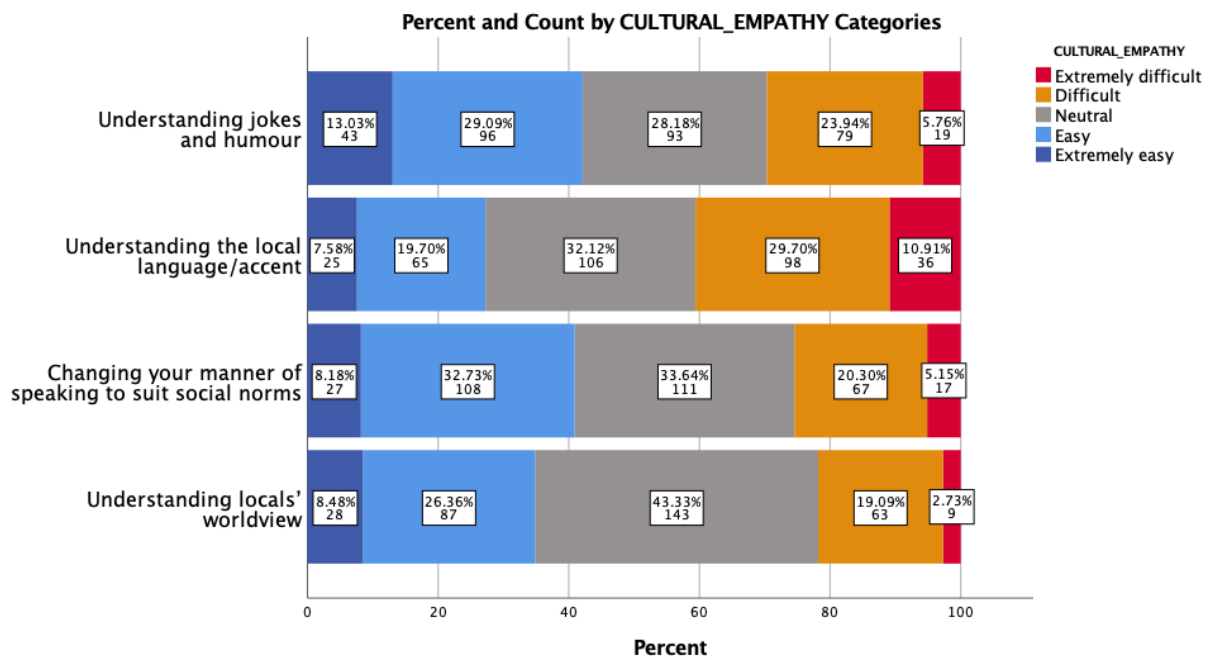
Figure 17. Cultural empathy and relatedness frequencies

As shown in the figure, *understanding the local language or accent* is the item with the highest percentage of 'difficult' or 'extremely difficult' responses, with a total of 40.61% of the students reporting difficulty. This is followed by 29.7% of the students reporting difficulty in *understanding jokes and humour*, and 25.45% and 21.82% reporting difficulty in *changing your manner of speaking to suit social norms* and *understanding locals' worldview* respectively.

Comments on sociocultural challenges

Results from the optional 'comments' open-ended question regarding sociocultural challenges included nine responses. Table 19 below provides a summary of the themes that emerged from the analysis of these comments:

Table 19. *Themes and subthemes emerging from the analysis of the 'comments' question regarding sociocultural challenges*

Themes	Subthemes	Cases
Cultural differences impact communication	Understanding local jokes	1
	Cultural differences	1
	Directness of expression	1
Difficulties expressing themselves	Difficulties expressing eloquently	1
	Difficulties finding the right word	1
Classmates' attitude impact communication	Impatience	1
	Lived abroad	1
Understanding spoken English in social settings	Relationship with native English speakers	1
	Difficulties understanding due to accent	1

In their answers, respondents made reference to **cultural differences having an impact on communication** in the social setting. These included difficulties understanding local jokes, differences in culture and the way of thinking reflected in language, as well as differences regarding directness of expression. For example, respondent 95 answered:

> [...] They have their own cultural references and use language nuances. Foreigners must be more direct while expressing themselves to be sure that our request is understood correctly. Yes is yes, no is no. Natives, especially the UK and Ireland, often use an indirect way of conveying information so foreigners direct way of expressing may shock them. (R95)

Respondents also expressed **difficulties expressing themselves,** including difficulties expressing in an eloquent manner and difficulties finding the right word, as impacting on their social adjustment. Respondent 318 answered:

> I speak rather slowly and I sometimes I have hard time to find the right words, so I can imagine how some natives might find conversation with me a bit unpleasant. (R318)

Different **attitudes of classmates** were also mentioned in the comments as impacting communication. Respondent 115 alluded to the impatience or friendliness of some classmates impacting communication, while respondent 95 suggested that those classmates who have lived abroad are easier to communicate with:

> [...] The peers can be mean and impatient sometimes when I did something wrong in English while some others have friendly attitude. (R115)

> [...] I can feel that those who lived abroad have developed a global way of communicating which allow them to easily connect with other foreigners [...] (R95)

Lastly, two topics were mentioned related to the **understanding of spoken English in social settings**. While respondent 195 commented on the positive impact of having a relationship

with a native English speaker on every-day communication, respondent 151 made reference to the difficulty understanding the Northern Irish accent:

> It should be noted that I am in a relationship with an English native speaker which has improved my grasp of every-day English drastically. (R195)

> For me, communicating with others in English isn't that difficult, except in Northern Ireland, I found their accent very difficult to understand. (R151)

6.2.1.3 Psychological challenges

In this section the results from the descriptive statistics dealing with the psychological domain are presented. As in the previous two sections, this section is organised around the psychological difficulty areas relating to language described in Section 5.6.1. Difficulty areas relating to language in the psychological domain included stress, anxiety and depression. Count and percentage results for each questionnaire item are presented in a stacked bar chart for each of the difficulty areas, allowing the comparison between items within the same difficulty area.

Stress

Symptoms associated with stress that students felt were a result of language-related challenges were explored by considering the following situations when communicating in English: *find it difficult to relax*, *find yourself getting upset*, *find yourself getting impatient*, and *find it difficult to tolerate interruptions*. Frequency results for those are summarised in Figure 18 below.

Percent and Count by STRESS Categories
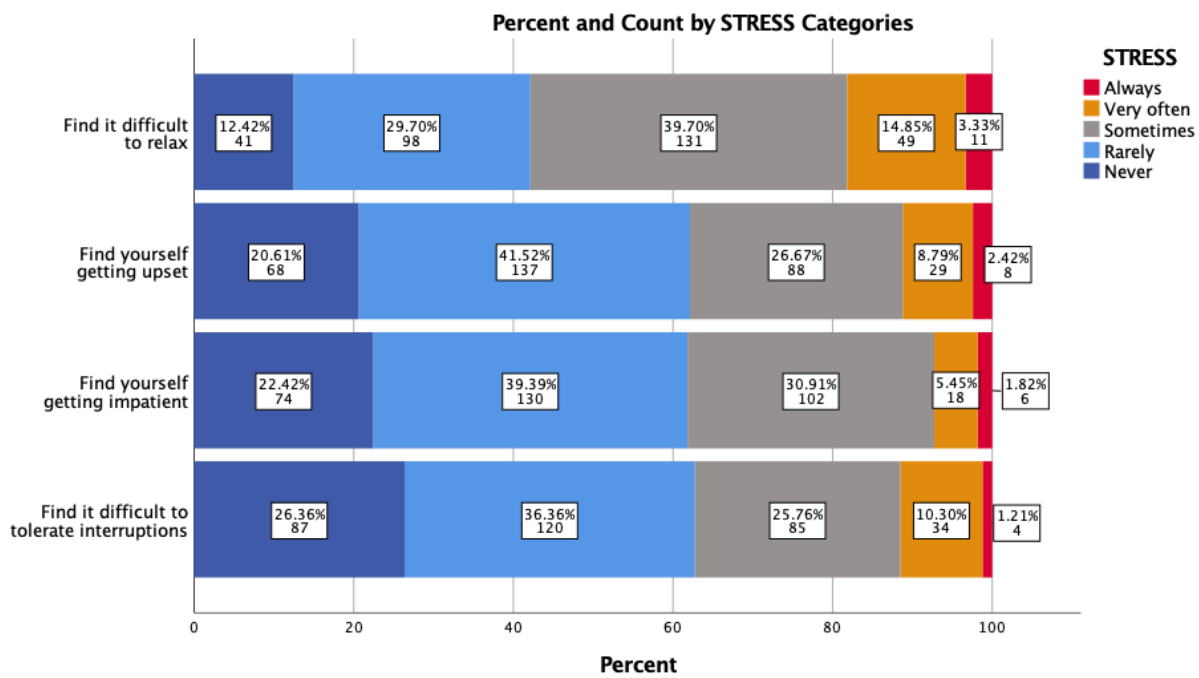
Figure 18. Stress frequencies

As it can be seen in Figure 18, percentages are generally low for the categories 'always' and 'very often' in this subdomain. *Find it difficult to relax* was the item that students reported as the most challenging, since 18.18% of responses include experiencing this difficulty 'always' or 'very often'. This is followed by *find it difficult to tolerate interruptions* and *find yourself getting upset*, with 11.51% and 11.21% of the students respectively reporting experiencing those 'always' or 'very often'. Lastly, only 7.27% of the students reported *finding themselves getting impatient* when communicating in English 'always' or 'very often'.

Anxiety

Symptoms associated with anxiety that students felt were a result of language-related challenges are illustrated in Figure 19. These include *experience dryness of mouth*, *getting so nervous that you forget things/words that you know*, *find yourself in situations that made you so anxious that you were relieved when they ended*, and *feel your heart pounding*.

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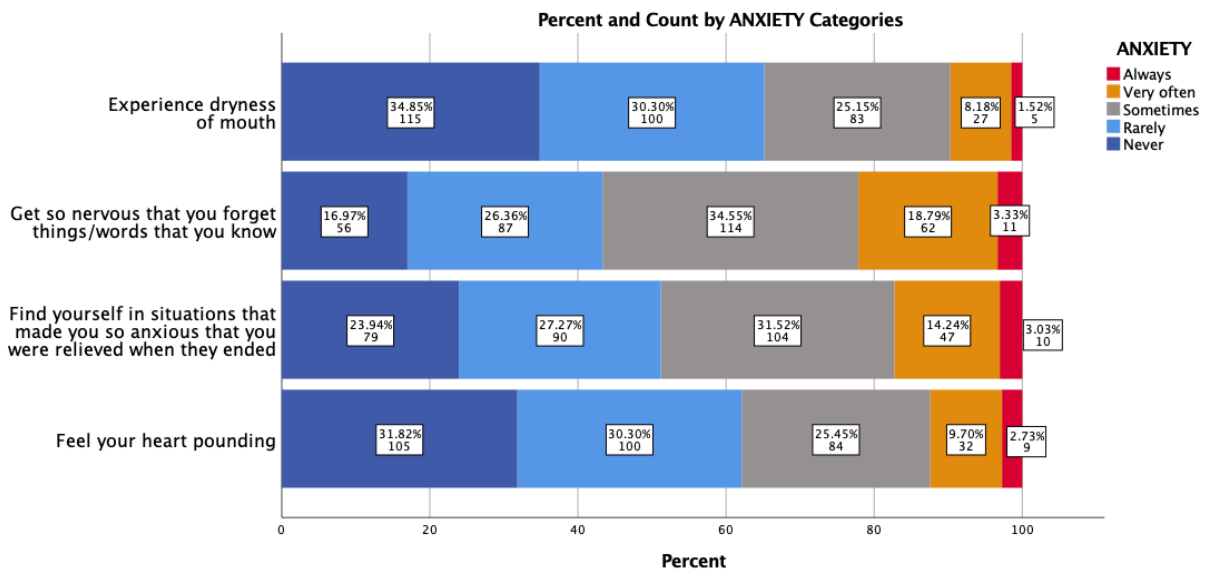
Figure 19. *Anxiety frequencies*

Figure 19 indicates that *getting so nervous that you forget things or words that you know* was the difficulty most highly reported by the students in this subdomain, as 22.12% of the students answered 'always' or 'very often'. 17.27% and 12.43% of the students stated *finding themselves in situations that made them so anxious that you were relieved when they ended* and *feeling their heart pounding* when communicating in English 'always' or 'very often' respectively. *Experience dryness of mouth* was the difficulty least reported, with only a 9.7% of the students experiencing dryness of mouth when communicating in English 'always' or 'very often'.

Depression

The third subdomain included in psychological challenges is depression. Symptoms associated with depression that students felt were a result of language-related challenges were measured by four items, namely *feeling sad and depressed*, *feel that you have lost interest or motivation*, *feel like a failure*, and *feel frustrated*.
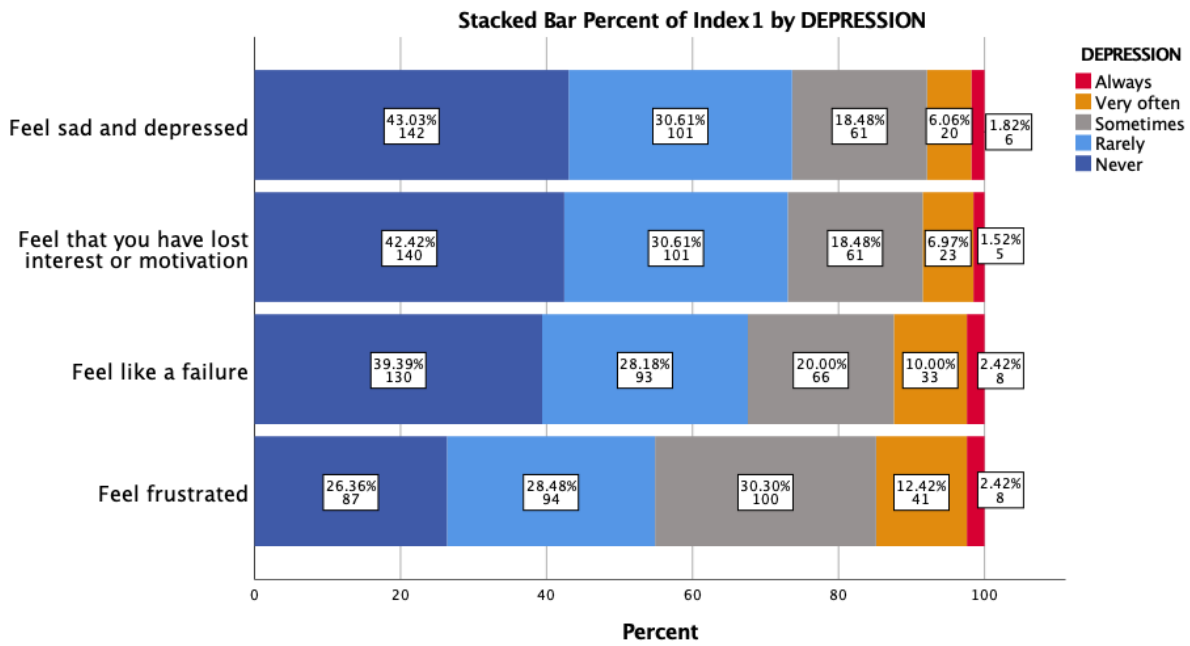
Figure 20. Depression frequencies

By looking at the frequencies presented in Figure 20, it can be deduced that students *feel like a failure*, and *feel frustrated* more frequently than *feel sad and depressed*, or *feel that you have lost interest or motivation*. A total of 14.48% of the students reported *feeling frustrated* when communicating in English 'always' or 'very often', and 12.42% reported *feeling like a failure*. 8.49% of the students reported that they *feel that have lost interest of motivation* and 7.88% reported that they *feel sad and depressed* 'always' or 'very often' when communicating in English.

Comments on psychological challenges

Results from the answers provided by the eight respondents who completed the optional open-ended question included at the end of the 'Other challenges' section in the ISQ are summarised in Table 20:

Table 20. *Themes and subthemes emerging from the analysis of the 'comments' question regarding psychological challenges*

Themes	Subthemes	Cases
Frustration due to difficulty expressing themselves	Convey meaning	1
	Limited vocabulary	2
	Limited time to find the right words when speaking	1
Anxiety affecting communication and participation in the academic setting	Large lectures and group discussions	1
	Communicate with other students	1
Responses regarding psychological aspects linked to presentations	Presentations	2

Feelings of **frustration due to difficulty expressing themselves** was expressed in the open-ended questions. This was related to difficulty conveying the exact meaning, a limited vocabulary in English compared to their first language, and the limited time to find the right words when speaking. For example, respondent 289 answered:

> It's always frustrating to be able to express oneself correctly when talking to people (not the time to think about the words). (R289)

Anxiety was mentioned as **affecting communication and participation in the academic setting**. Respondents alluded to anxiety as having a negative impact on their communication with other students, as well as during large lectures and group discussions. This is illustrated in the answer provided by respondent 75:

> Lot of the reasons behind the answers given stem from anxiety that I frequently encounter in large lectures and group discussions. (R75)

Some respondents highlighted the fact that the **responses they provided regarding psychological aspects were linked to presentations**. For instance, R298 added the comment that: 'This section answers are during a presentation'.

6.2.1.4 Summary of Reported Challenges per Domain

In order to summarise the data presented in the figures above, as well as to facilitate comparison between subdomains as a way of identifying the most commonly reported challenges in each domain, clustered column charts were developed for each domain (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological). For this purpose, percentages from the 'extremely difficult' and 'difficult' categories were combined for the academic and sociocultural domains, and 'always' and 'very often' for the psychological domain. Figures

21-23 below present a summary of all percentages per item, as well as the mean percentage for each subdomain.

Figure 21 below includes percentages of questionnaire items and the mean percentages of the combined categories 'extremely difficult' and 'difficult' per academic subdomain:

Percentage of reported difficulty and mean percentage by academic subdomain
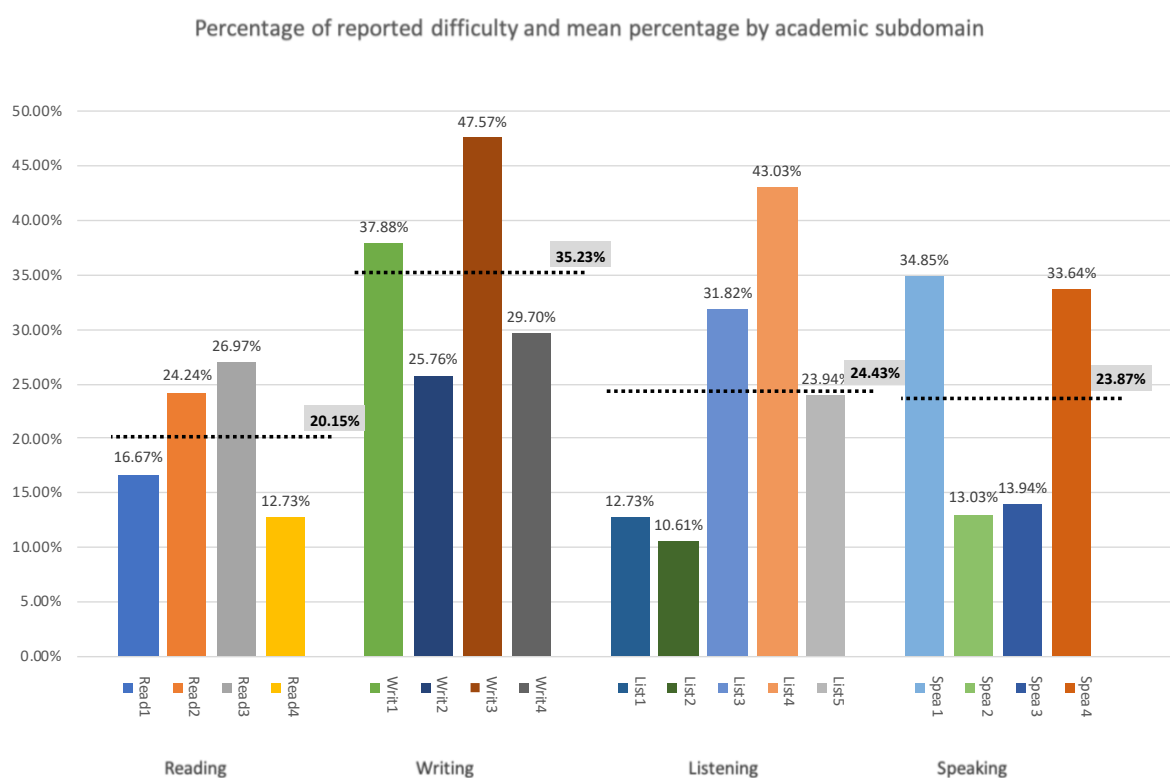
Figure 21. Summary of academic challenges

Note. Read1= Reading critically; Read2= Reading quickly; Read3= Reading specialised papers; Read4= Reading for specific information; Writ1= Structuring essays/dissertations; Writ2= Summarising/synthesising; Writ3= Writing in an academic style; Writ4= Taking written exams; List1= Taking notes in lectures; List2= Understanding lectures/class discussions; List3= Understanding the accent and/or pronunciation; List4= Understanding colloquial and idiomatic language; List5= Understanding technical vocabulary; Spea1= Participating in class discussions; Spea2= Communicating with lecturers; Spea3= Communicating with classmates; Spea4= Giving oral presentations.

As it can be seen from Figure 21, *writing in an academic style* (i.e., Writ3) and *understanding colloquial and idiomatic language* (i.e., List4) are the items in which higher difficulty was reported, while *understanding lectures/ class discussions* (i.e., List2), *taking notes in lectures* (i.e., List1) and *reading for specific information* (i.e., Read4) show the

lowest percentage of difficulty. Overall, students report experiencing the greatest difficulty in writing with a mean of over 35%, and the least challenging subdomain was reading with a mean of just over 20% of the students finding it 'extremely difficult' or 'difficult'.

A summary of the sociocultural challenges is presented in Figure 22 below. This includes four clusters of columns, one for each subdomain; as well as a dotted line representing the mean percentage of each cluster.
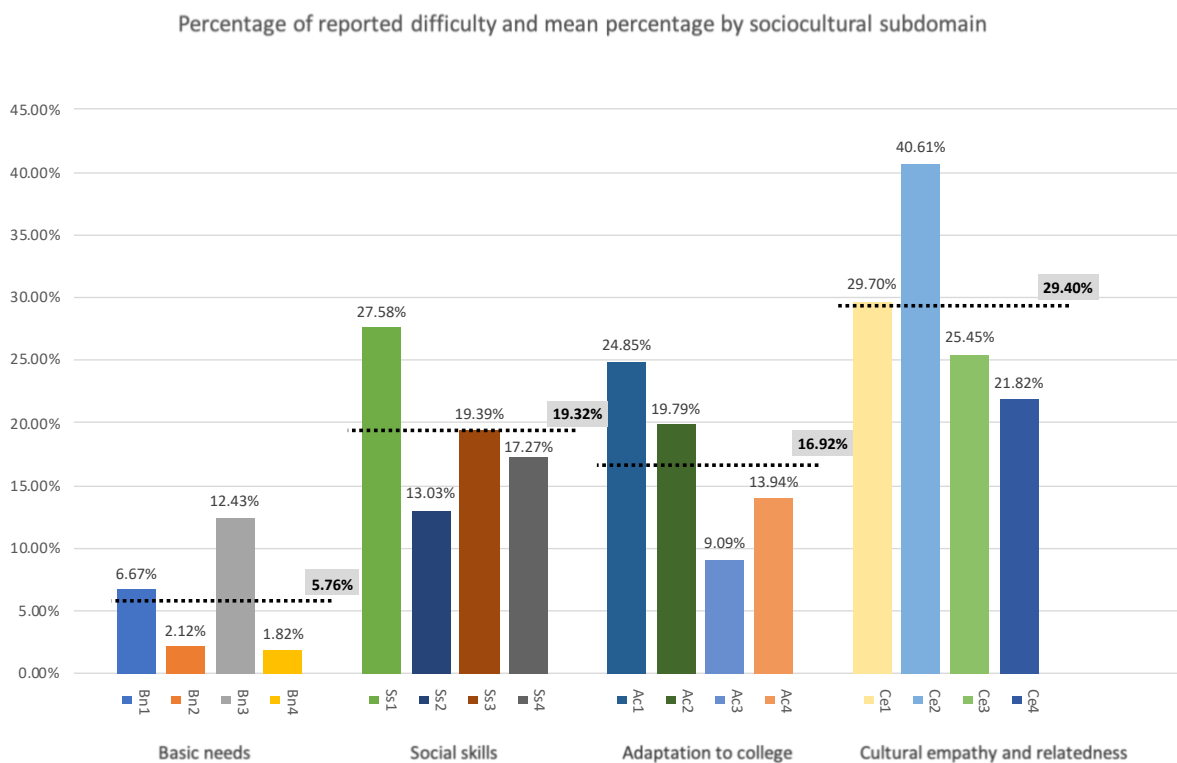
Figure 22. *Summary of sociocultural challenges*

Note. Bn1= Using the transport system; Bn2= Going shopping; Bn3= Dealing with bureaucracy; Bn4= Ordering at coffee shops/restaurants; Ss1= Making friends who are native English speakers; Ss2= Making yourself understood; Ss3= Interacting at social events/community activities; Ss4= Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions; Ac1= Coping with the academic workload; Ac2= Working effectively with other students; Ac3= Dealing with supervisors/lecturers; Ac4= Understanding policies and regulations at university; Ce1= Understanding jokes and humour; Ce2= Understanding the local language/accent; Ce3= Changing your manner of speaking to suit social norms; Ce4= Understanding the locals' worldview.

From the figure above it can be seen that students report higher degree of difficulty in the cultural empathy and relatedness subdomain, with a mean of 29.40% of the students responding 'extremely difficult' or 'difficult'. In particular, *understanding the local*

language/accent (i.e., Ce2) is significantly higher than the rest of items. On the contrary, basic needs is the subdomain that presents the lowest percentages, with a mean of just 5.76%; and extremely low percentages in *ordering at coffee shops/restaurants* (i.e., Bn4) and *going shopping* (i.e., Bn2).

The following cluster column chart (see Figure 23) provides a summary of the percentage of students that responded 'always' or 'very often' in each item, and the mean percentage for each subdomain of psychological challenges (i.e., stress, anxiety, and depression).
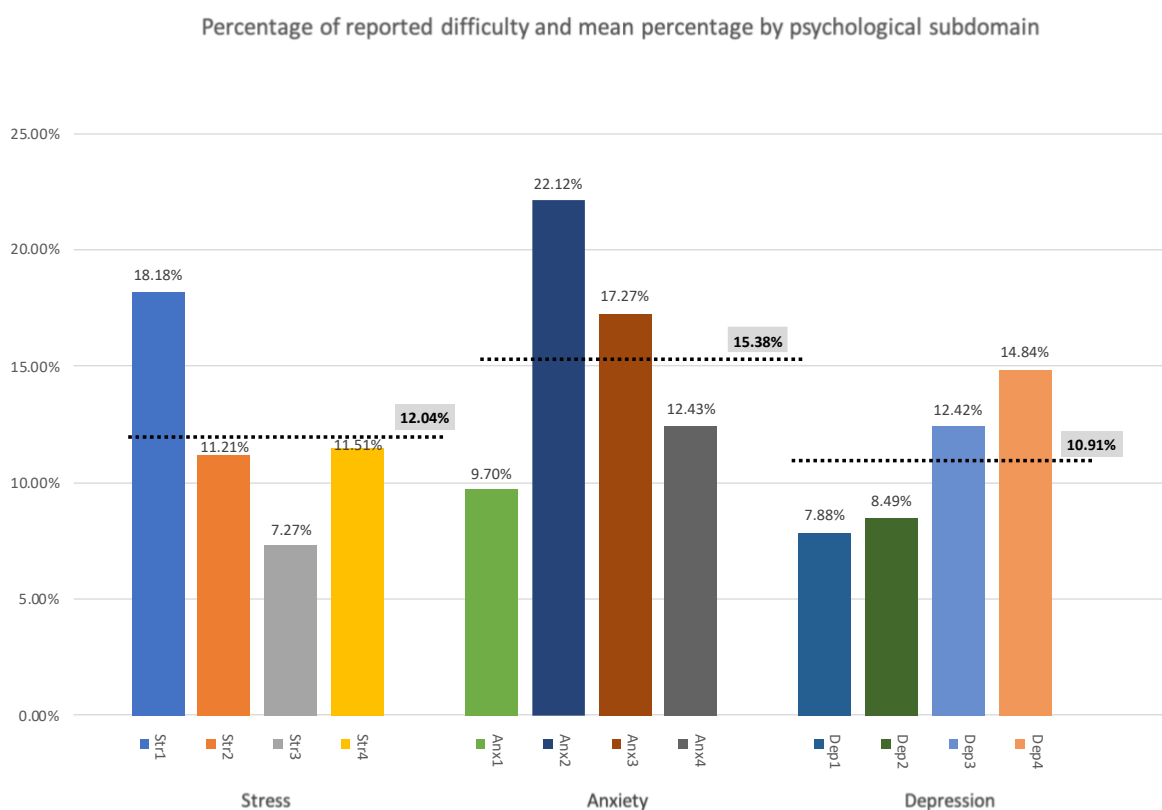
Figure 23. *Summary of psychological challenges*

Note. Str1= Find it difficult to relax; Str2= Find yourself getting upset; Str3= Find yourself getting impatient; Str4= Find it difficult to tolerate interruptions; Anx1= Experience dryness of mouth; Anx2= Get so nervous that you forget things/words that you know; Anx3= Find yourself in situations that made you so anxious that you were relieved when they ended; Anx4= Feel your heart pounding; Dep1= Feel sad and depressed; Dep2= Feel that you have lost interest or motivation; Dep3= Feel like a failure; Dep4= Feel frustrated.

Although there is less apparent difference between mean percentages in this subdomain, with less than 5% points between subdomains, anxiety shows the highest percentage. On average, 15.38% of the students reported experiencing difficulties related to anxiety

'always' or 'very often' when communicating in English. The items *get so nervous that you forget things/words that you know* (i.e., Anx2) and *find it difficult to relax* (i.e., Str1) recorded the highest percentages, 22.12% and 18.18% respectively; while *find yourself getting impatient* (i.e., Str3) and *feel sad and depressed* (i.e., Dep1) present the lowest, only 7.27% and 7.88% respectively.

Mean percentages across the three domains were also calculated and are synthesised in Figure 24 below in order to draw comparisons. In that regard, mean percentages from the 'extremely difficult' and 'difficult' categories for the academic and sociocultural domains, and 'always' and 'very often' for the psychological presented in the paragraphs above were combined and the mean percentage per each domain was calculated in Excel.
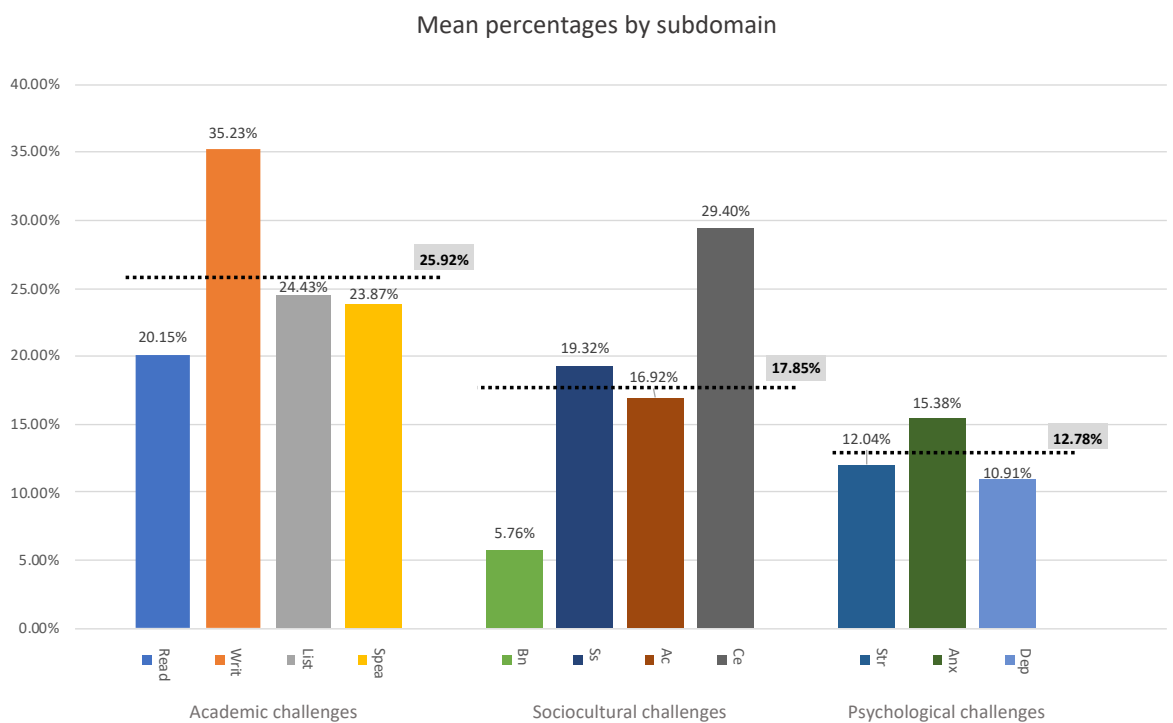
Figure 24. Summary of mean percentages by subdomain

Note. Read= Reading; Writ= Writing; List= Listening; Spea= Speaking; Bn= Basic needs; Ss= Social skills; Ac= Adaptation to college; Ce= Cultural empathy and relatedness; Str= Stress; Anx= Anxiety; Dep= Depression.

What is noticeable about the data in this figure is that the academic domain presents a higher mean percentage when compared to the other two domains, with a mean of 25.92%; while the psychological domain presents the lowest mean percentage, with a value of 12.78%. Thus, it can be concluded that in general students reported a higher degree of

difficulty relating to language in the academic domain and lower degree of difficulty in the psychological domain.

These findings will be compared with the results from the first set of interviews presented in the next section (see Section 6.3), and will be discussed in Chapter 8 (see Section 8.2). What follows is the one-way analysis of the ISQ that was used to study the possible relationship between demographic variables and the different dependent variables included in the adjustment domains.

6.2.2. One-way analysis of the ISQ: Relationships between demographic variables and language-related challenges

As explained in the methodology chapter, a one-way analysis test was used to study the relationships between demographic variables and the challenges explored in the questionnaire, in order to respond to RQ2b: What demographic factors might impact the adjustment process?. For this purpose, Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test was run in SPSS in order to determine if there are statistically significant differences between the groups included in each demographic variable – level of study, field of study, length of residence in Ireland, length of residence in an English-speaking country before coming to Ireland, and certified level of English. This was followed by the Dunn-Bonferroni post-hoc method, that allows for pairwise comparison in order to determine which specific groups are statistically different (see Section 5.9.1). Given the amount of data obtained from testing the 45 Likert-type questionnaire items for each demographic variable, what follows is a synthesis of the rejected null hypothesis (i.e., distributions with significance lower than .05) resulting from the Kruskal-Wallis test, and the pairwise comparisons by demographic characteristic. Results for each demographic variable are synthesised in written and tabular form in the following subsections by focusing on the adjusted significance values in order to determine which of the group comparisons are statistically different (i.e., p < .05); and the mean rank of each group, which shows which groups reported higher difficulty.

6.2.2.1 Level of study

The distribution of some responses to questionnaire items proved to be different across categories of level of study. The Kruskal-Wallis test provided evidence of a difference between the distribution of at least one pair of groups of level of study in *reading specialised papers*, *understanding lectures/class discussions*, *accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions*, *understanding the locals' worldview*, and *feel sad and depressed*. The table below (see Table 21) provides a summary of the post hoc pairwise comparisons, including the significant differences (p < .05) between groups marked in yellow; as well as the mean rank for each group, which shows which groups reported higher or lower difficulty.

Table 21. Summary of pairwise comparisons results for level of study

Items in which the null hypothesis was rejected (p <.05)	Adjusted significance						Mean rank			
	Und-Mas	Und-PhD	Und-FPr	Mas-PhD	Mas-FPr	PhD-FPr	PhD	Mas	Und	FPr
Reading specialised papers	1.000	.001	.665	.011	.463	.034	125.53	169.63	176.94	243.40
Understanding lectures/class discussions	1.000	1.000	.033	1.000	.049	.014	150.64	169.67	164.29	277.80
Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions	.028	.000	.431	.235	1.000	1.000	201.88	172.60	140.68	215.70
Understanding the locals' worldview	.002	.000	.597	.755	1.000	1.000	199.13	177.72	137.59	205.20
Feel sad and depressed	1.000	.016	1.000	.150	1.000	1.000	194.73	163.53	153.38	184.90

Note. The yellow shading indicates statistically significant difference between groups (i.e., p< .05) Und= undergraduate students; Mas= master's students; PhD= PhD students; FPr= Foundation Programme students

Regarding the questionnaire item *reading specialised papers*, there was very strong evidence (p=.001) of a difference between PhD students and the other three groups (i.e., Mas, Und, and FPr). The lower mean rank of PhD students (125.53) compared to master's students (169.63), Undergraduate students (176.94), and Foundation Programme students (243.40) shows that PhD students experience less difficulty than the other groups in reading specialised papers.

The distribution of *understanding lectures/ class discussions* has also proved to be different across groups of Level of study (p=.020). Table 21 illustrates this difference, with the

Foundation Programme group reporting that they experienced a higher level of difficulty in understanding lectures or class discussions than the other three groups.

There was very strong evidence (p=.000) of a difference between the mean ranks of at least one pair of groups regarding *accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions*. Examination of pairwise comparisons, showed that the undergraduate group is significantly different from PhD and masters, presenting a lower mean rank and therefore, reporting experiencing lower difficulty in this item.

Evidence of difference between the distribution of *understanding the locals' worldview* across categories of Level of study was also confirmed. Differences between undergraduate students and PhD and master's students emerged from the pairwise comparison. From comparison of mean ranks, undergraduate students showed lower difficulty in understanding the locals' worldview than the other two groups.

Finally, differences between distributions were also found between groups regarding the questionnaire item *feel sad and depressed*. As presented in Table 21, there is strong evidence of a difference between PhD students and undergraduate students (p=.016) in relation to this item. The mean rank for PhD student group is higher than the undergraduate group (i.e., 194.73 and 153.38 respectively), which translates into more frequent feelings of sadness and depression when communicating in English among PhD students than undergraduate students.

6.2.2.2 Field of Study

Differences between categories of field of study, including Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Health Sciences, and Engineering, Maths and Science were also explored using pairwise comparisons. Pairwise comparisons for questionnaire items in which the null hypothesis was rejected, and therefore, show differences between distributions are shown in Table 22 below:

Table 22. Summary of pairwise comparisons results for field of study

Items in which the null hypothesis was rejected (p <.05)	Adjusted significance			Mean rank		
	AHSS-HS	AHSS-EMS	HS-EMS	AHSS	HS	EMS
Structuring essays/dissertations	.681	.032	1.000	152.98	171.75	181.24
Writing in an academic style	.250	.019	1.000	151.24	178.05	181.38
Communicating with lecturers	1.000	.047	.451	155.68	158.99	182.13
Giving oral presentations	.410	.162	.019	161.02	137.76	182.40
Making yourself understood	1.000	.010	.698	152.44	165.35	184.42
Interacting at social events/ community activities	.547	.019	1.000	152.07	172.76	182.17
Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions	.971	.029	1.000	153.34	168.64	181.88
Understanding jokes and humour	1.000	.036	.908	154.11	165.28	182.06
Feel sad and depressed	.933	.020	1.000	153.06	168.44	182.37
Feel that you have lost interest or motivation	.965	.005	.692	151.38	166.47	185.53

Note. The yellow shading indicates statistically significant difference between groups (i.e., p< .05)
AHSS= Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; HS= Health Sciences; EMS= Engineering, Maths and Science

Table 22 shows that there was statistically significant difference between Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and Engineering, Maths and Science students regarding *structuring essays or dissertations* (p= .034) and *writing in an academic style* (p= .015). Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences students reported a lower level of difficulty when *structuring essays or dissertations* and *writing in an academic style* than Engineering, Maths and Science students.

Differences were also found between Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and Engineering, Maths and Science students when considering distributions regarding *communicating with lecturers* (p=.047). Engineering, Maths and Science mean ranks were higher than the other two groups, indicating that this group reported experiencing more difficulty when *communicating with lecturers* compared to Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences students.

The distribution of the questionnaire item *giving oral presentations* is not the same between categories of field of study. There is a difference in distribution between Engineering, Maths and Science students and Health Sciences students (p=.019), with

Engineering, Maths and Sciences students reporting a higher degree of difficulty in this area compared to Health Sciences students.

As shown in the results presented in Table 22, the differences between groups show that Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences students experience lower levels of difficulty when *making themselves understood*, *interacting at social events*, *accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions*, as well as *understanding jokes and humour* compared to Engineering, Maths and Science students.

In addition, differences between the distribution among the categories of field of study regarding the questionnaire items *feel sad and depressed* and *feel that you have lost interest or motivation* were observed. Once again, Engineering, Maths and Science students reported experiencing more frequently feelings of sadness or depression or *loss of interest or motivation* when communicating in English compared to students of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

Overall, statistically significant differences were found particularly between Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences students and Engineering, Maths and Science students (see yellow shading in Table 22). When comparing mean ranks, Engineering, Maths and Science students generally reported a higher level of difficulty compared to the other two groups, while Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences students reported lower difficulty.

6.2.2.3 Length of Residence in Ireland

Differences were found across the groups of length of residence in Ireland mostly regarding sociocultural adjustment questionnaire items. Pairwise comparisons for these items are synthesised in Table 23:

Table 23. Summary of pairwise comparisons results for length of residence in Ireland

Items in which the null hypothesis was rejected (p <.05)	Adjusted significance			Mean rank		
	0-1y – 1-3y	0-1y – >3y	1-3y – >3y	0-1y	1-3y	>3y
Using the transport system	.030	.000	.465	179.87	146.67	122.05
Going shopping	.160	.031	1.000	174.89	151.13	139.81
Dealing with bureaucracy	1.000	.000	.017	176.36	164.41	115.62
Making friends who are native English speakers	1.000	.015	.015	161.02	137.76	182.40
Interacting at social events/ community activities	.187	.114	.006	165.28	189.98	134.76
Understanding policies and regulations at university	.039	1.000	.061	160.69	193.14	152.35
Understanding jokes and humour	.023	1.000	.019	160.84	196.37	147.47
Understanding the local language/ accent	.766	.022	.006	168.36	183.50	128.65
Changing your manner of speaking to suit social norms	.793	.109	.031	167.15	181.90	136.41
Understanding the locals' worldview	.014	.242	.001	162.27	199.21	136.99
Feel like a failure	.055	1.000	.034	161.71	192.75	148.02

Note. The yellow shading indicates statistically significant difference between groups (i.e., p< .05) 0-1y= students who had lived in Ireland for less than a year; 1-3y= students who had lived in Ireland between one and three years; >3y= students who had lived in Ireland for more than three years.

As expected, students who had lived in Ireland for more than three years reported less difficulty *using the transport system* (122.05). Significant differences in distribution for this questionnaire item are shown between students who had lived in Ireland for less than a year (i.e., 0-1y) and students who had lived in Ireland for more than three years (i.e., >3y). However, no significant difference was found between students who had lived in Ireland between one and three years (i.e., 1-3y) and students who had lived in Ireland for more than three years (i.e., >3y).

There is also a difference between categories in the distribution of the questionnaire item *going shopping*. As it can be seen in Table 23, there is a significant difference between students who had lived in Ireland for more than three years and those who had lived in Ireland for less than a year (p=.031).

Differences in distribution between students who had lived in Ireland for more than 3 years and the other two groups were also found for the questionnaire items *dealing with bureaucracy* and *making friends who are native English speakers*. However, no significant

differences were found between students who had lived in Ireland for less than a year and students who had lived in Ireland between one and three years.

Regarding the questionnaire item *interacting at social events/community activities*, significant difference was found only between students who had lived in Ireland during one to three years and those who had lived in Ireland for more than three years (p=.006). Students who had lived in Ireland for one to three years reported higher levels of difficulty in this item, with a mean rank of 189.98.

Regarding the item *understanding policies and regulations at university*, groups 0-1y and 1-3y are significantly different from each other (p=.039), but there is no difference in distribution between the other two groups. Students who had lived in Ireland between one and three years reported higher difficulty *understanding policies and regulations at university* (i.e., 193.14) than those who had lived in Ireland for less than a year (i.e., 160.69).

There are statistically significant differences in distribution between 1-3y, and 0-1y or >3y concerning the questionnaire item *understanding jokes and humour*. Students who had lived in Ireland between one and three years reported experiencing higher difficulty *understanding jokes and humour* than the other two groups, with a mean rank of 196.37. However, no statistically significant differences were found between students who had lived in Ireland for less than a year and those who had lived in Ireland for more than three years.

Once again, differences in distribution between students who had lived in Ireland for more than three years and the other two groups can be seen in Table 23 regarding the questionnaire item *understanding the local language or accent*. Students who lived in Ireland for a period of over 3 years reported experiencing less difficulty in this item with a mean rank of 128.65, compared to the other two groups.

The distribution of the item *changing your manner of speaking to suit social norms* is significantly different between students that lived in Ireland for one to three years and those that lived in Ireland over three years. Table 23 shows that students who had lived in Ireland for over three years reported lower difficulty, with a mean rank of 136.41.

It can also be observed from Table 23, that the questionnaire item *feel like a failure* when communicating in English was more commonly reported by students that lived in Ireland

for one to three years than the other two groups, with a mean rank of 192.75. However, when looking at pairwise comparisons, a significant difference was found only between students that lived in Ireland for over three years and those that lived in Ireland for one to three years (p=.034).

If comparing mean ranks, Table 23 shows that students who had lived in Ireland for over three years generally report less difficulty dealing with these sociocultural items in which the null hypothesis was rejected than students who had lived in Ireland for less than a year and those who had lived in Ireland between one and three years.

6.2.2.4 Length of Residence in an English-speaking Country Before Coming to Ireland

Differences were also found across categories of length of residence in an English-speaking country before coming to Ireland. The results of the pairwise comparisons for the questionnaire items in which the null hypothesis was rejected are synthesised in Table 24 and described in the paragraphs that follow:

Table 24. Summary of pairwise comparisons results for length of residence in an English-speaking country before coming to Ireland

Items in which the null hypothesis was rejected (p <.05)	Adjusted significance						Mean rank			
	No-0-1y	No-1-3y	No->3y	0-1y – 1-3y	0-1y - >3y	1-3y - >3y	No	0-1y	1-3y	>3y
Reading specialised papers	1.000	1.000	.012	1.000	.204	.766	171.20	158.00	162.94	104.16
Reading for specific information	.983	1.000	.008	1.000	.349	1.000	172.66	151.49	149.06	103.87
Taking written exams	.669	.941	.003	1.000	.281	1.000	173.99	149.50	127.44	98.97
Participating in class discussions	1.000	.750	.002	1.000	.045	1.000	172.73	161.48	121.81	92.92
Changing your manner of speaking to suit social norms	1.000	.057	.026	.150	.163	1.000	171.87	165.94	86.75	109.89
Find yourself getting upset	.577	1.000	.032	1.000	1.000	1.000	173.07	147.78	132.75	113.18

Note. The yellow shading indicates statistically significant difference between groups (i.e., p< .05) No= students who had never lived in an English-speaking country before coming to Ireland; 0-1y= students who had lived in an English-speaking country for less than a year before coming to Ireland; 1-3y= students who had lived in an English-speaking country between one and three years before coming to Ireland; >3y= students who had lived in an English-speaking country for more than three years before coming to Ireland.

Table 24 shows differences in the distribution across categories between students who had lived in an English-speaking country for over three years before coming to Ireland (i.e., >3y) and students who had never lived in an English-speaking country before coming to Ireland (i.e., No) in all the questionnaire items in which the null hypothesis was rejected (see adjusted significance results marked in yellow). It is worth noting that four out of the six items in which statistically significant differences were found relate to academic adjustment challenges.

When comparing mean ranks, students who had never lived in an English-speaking country before coming to Ireland reported a much higher level of difficulty in all the items in which differences were found than those who had lived in an English-speaking country for over three years before coming to Ireland.

6.2.2.5 Certified Level of English

The results from the Kruskal-Wallis test proved that the distribution of the majority of the questionnaire items was significantly different across categories of certified level of English, excluding the questionnaire items: *using the transport system, going shopping, dealing with bureaucracy, ordering at coffee shops/restaurants,* and *find it difficult to tolerate interruptions*. The remaining items showed evidence of statistically significant difference between mean ranks of at least one pair of groups. A summary of the results of the pairwise comparisons for these items is presented in Table 25 below. While the other demographic variables included between three and four groups, certified level of English included six groups (i.e., None, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) resulting in a larger amount of data. Therefore, in contrast with the previous tables summarising pairwise comparisons (i.e., tables 21-24), this table only includes the adjusted significance and mean rank of those groups in which statistically significant differences were found, and yellow shadowing was not necessary.

Table 25. *Summary of pairwise comparisons results for certified level of English.*

Items in which the null hypothesis was rejected (p <.05)	Adjusted significance			Mean rank			
	B2-C2	C2-C1	C2-B1	B1	B2	C1	C2
Reading critically	.003	.000			181.89	189.29	126.64
Reading quickly	.000	.000			204.04	183.22	115.41
Reading specialised papers	.001	.000			190.91	184.18	131.10
Reading for specific information	.000	.000			196.28	187.28	118.68
Structuring essays/ dissertations	.004	.000			182.95	183.24	128.81
Summarising/ synthesising	.014	.001			182.39	182.50	133.46
Writing in an academic style	.000	.000			189.92	183.70	125.57
Taking written exams	.000	.000			188.75	181.62	125.25
Participating in class discussions	.000	.000			192.65	182.69	126.04
Communicating with lecturers	.002	.000			186.10	183.96	129.11
Communicating with classmates	.016	.000			177.19	184.81	129.00
Giving oral presentations	.000	.000			191.51	182.04	129.31
Taking notes in lectures	.016				188.04		139.86
Understanding lectures/ class discussions	.000	.000			198.04	179.20	126.44
Understanding the accent and/or pronunciation	.006	.007			186.22	177.39	134.02
Understanding colloquial and idiomatic language	.000	.000			181.86	190.51	119.88
Understanding technical vocabulary	.002	.002			188.87	179.82	132.13
Making friends who are native English speakers	.000	.002			195.04	176.09	128.42
Making yourself understood	.000	.000			201.92	177.21	122.93
Interacting at social events/ community activities	.000	.000	.005	294.50	187.84	177.87	126.25
Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions	.000	.000			188.25	179.21	123.95
Coping with the academic workload		.001				186.29	137.08
Working effectively with other students	.000	.000			188.30	186.36	127.40
Dealing with supervisors/ lecturers	.027	.014			182.69	177.84	137.91
Understanding policies and regulations at university		.032				177.26	139.57
Understanding jokes and humour	.000	.000			199.72	180.76	118.13
Understanding the local language/ accent	.000	.000			190.22	180.35	125.64
Changing your manner of speaking to suit social norms	.015	.000			176.57	186.61	128.07
Understanding the locals' worldview		.001				182.66	133.68
Find it difficult to relax	.000	.000			189.65	185.48	117.83

Find yourself getting upset	.000	.001	196.70	179.25	128.91
Find yourself getting impatient	.041	.009	181.14	179.47	137.41
Experience dryness of mouth	.047	.026	182.21	177.40	138.75
Get so nervous that you forget things/ words that you know	.000	.000	191.38	179.40	127.32
Find yourself in situations that made you so anxious that you were relieved when they ended	.047	.002	178.92	182.89	134.99
Feel your heart pounding	.050	.000	177.01	185.89	133.61
Feel sad and depressed	.036	.023	181.71	176.26	137.79
Feel that you have lost interest or motivation	.004	.006	187.06	177.93	134.58
Feel like a failure	.002	.000	184.49	181.93	129.11
Feel frustrated	.000	.011	201.77	173.82	131.74

Note. B1= students with a certified level of English equivalent to B1 of the CEFR; B2= students with a certified level of English equivalent to B2 of the CEFR; C1= students with a certified level of English equivalent to C1 of the CEFR; C2= students with a certified level of English equivalent to C2 of the CEFR.

When analysing pairwise comparisons for each item, differences are generally found between the three higher levels of English (i.e., B2, C1 and C2), but not among the three lower levels (i.e., B1, A2, None). In general, students with a higher certified level of English reported less difficulty than those with a lower certified level of English, since mean ranks for the C2 group were lower for all the items in which the null hypothesis was rejected.

6.2.3. Confirmatory factor analysis: Model evaluation

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to examine the extent of the relationships (or lack thereof) between observed and latent variables, and therefore, to determine if the hypothesised factor structure is consistent with the data, that is, to assess model fit. Thus, this analysis responds to RQ2a: What are the relationships between adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological)?.

A higher-order model was hypothesised based on previous empirical evidence and theory in the methodology chapter (see Section 5.9.1). The model consists of three second-order latent variables corresponding to the three adjustment domains considered in this study (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological) which, in turn, encompass a total of 11 first-order latent variables corresponding to the language-related difficulty areas identified for each domain (e.g., Reading, Writing, etc.), and 45 observed variables (i.e., questionnaire

items). Correlations were specified between the three second-order latent variables in the measurement model – academic, sociocultural and psychological – based on the three-dimensional model of international student adjustment and adaptation proposed by Schartner and Young (2016) (see Section 3.2.4). The constructs and items included in these three second-order latent variables are based on established scales: a) the academic construct is based on the list of academic difficulty variables identified by Xu (1991); b) the sociocultural construct was adapted from the SCAS-R (Wilson, 2013a); and c) the psychological construct is based on the DASS.

The hypothesised model was designed and run in SPSS AMOS 25. The output is presented in Figure 25 below, showing standardised parameter estimates including factor loadings, factor variances, and indicator errors.
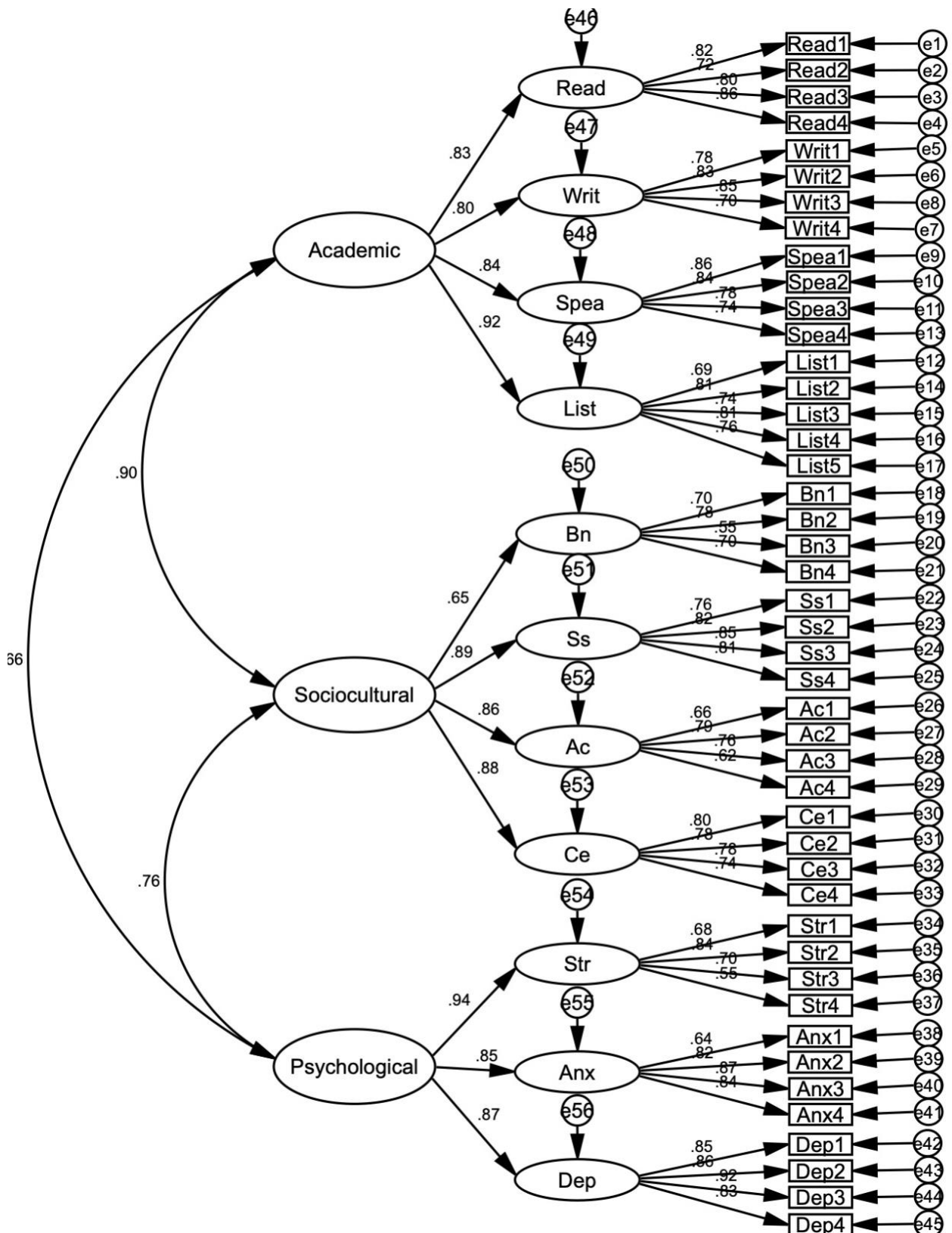
Figure 25*. Hypothesised model in SPSS Amos*
Note. Rectangles represent observed variables. Ellipses represent latent variables. Single-headed arrows represent causal relationships between variables (i.e., regression). Double-headed arrows represent correlation between variables. Small circles labelled with the letter 'e' represent error values. Read= Reading; Writ= Writing; Spea= Speaking; List= Listening; Bn= Basic needs; Ss= Social skills; Ac= Adaptation to college; Ce= Cultural empathy and relatedness; Str= Stress; Anx= Anxiety; Dep= Depression; Read1= Reading critically; Read2= Reading quickly; Read3= Reading specialised

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papers; Read4= Reading for specific information; Writ1= Structuring essays/dissertations; Writ2= Summarising/synthesising; Writ3= Writing in an academic style; Writ4= Taking written exams; Spea1= Participating in class discussions; Spea2= Communicating with lecturers; Spea3= Communicating with classmates; Spea4= Giving oral presentations; List1= Taking notes in lectures; List2= Understanding lectures/class discussions; List3= Understanding the accent and/or pronunciation; List4= Understanding colloquial and idiomatic language; List5= Understanding technical vocabulary; Bn1= Using the transport system; Bn2= Going shopping; Bn3= Dealing with bureaucracy; Bn4= Ordering at coffee shops/restaurants; Ss1= Making friends who are native English speakers; Ss2= Making yourself understood; Ss3= Interacting at social events/community activities; Ss4= Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions; Ac1= Coping with the academic workload; Ac2= Working effectively with other students; Ac3= Dealing with supervisors/lecturers; Ac4= Understanding policies and regulations at university; Ce1= Understanding jokes and humour; Ce2= Understanding the local language/accent; Ce3= Changing your manner of speaking to suit social norms; Ce4= Understanding the locals' worldview; Str1= Find it difficult to relax; Str2= Find yourself getting upset; Str3= Find yourself getting impatient; Str4= Find it difficult to tolerate interruptions; Anx1= Experience dryness of mouth; Anx2= Get so nervous that you forget things/words that you know; Anx3= Find yourself in situations that made you so anxious that you were relieved when they ended; Anx4= Feel your heart pounding; Dep1= Feel sad and depressed; Dep2= Feel that you have lost interest or motivation; Dep3= Feel like a failure; Dep4= Feel frustrated.

Although AMOS provides several fit indices and there is no consensus among methodologists on which indices should be reported, scholars such as Kline (2015) and Brown (2015b) distinguish between three categories of fit– namely absolute fit, comparative fit, and parsimony correction– and recommend using at least one goodness-of-fit index per category. Following Kline's (2015) recommendations, the model Chi-Square/df (X^2/df) and Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) were used to measure absolute fit; the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was used to measure comparative fit.; and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was used to assess parsimony correction. Results of the fit indices and their corresponding cut-off values for good fit are summarised in Table 26 below:

Table 26. *Summary of fit indices.*

Name of category	Fit Indices	Hypothesised model	1st restructuring (removing Bn3, Str4 and Ac4)	2nd restructuring (removing List4)
Absolute fit	X^2/DF (1-3)	2.205	2.239	2.159
	SRMR (≤.08)	.0625	.0636	.0644
Comparative fit	CFI ≥ .90)	.889	.897	.904
Parsimony correction	RMSEA (≤.06)	.061	.061	.059

Note. X^2/DF= Chi-square/Degrees of Freedom; SRMR= Standardized Root Mean Square Residual; CFI= Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; Str4= Find it

difficult to tolerate interruptions; Ac4= Understanding policies and regulations at university; List4= Understanding colloquial and idiomatic language.

As shown in Table 26, the fit indices for the hypothesised model did not meet the cut-off criteria, which suggested that the model needed to be modified. For this purpose, the model was firstly explored visually in order to identify possible areas of strain. When looking at the significance of the directional paths of the hypothesised model (see Figure 25 above), it can be noticed that Bn3 (i.e., Dealing with bureaucracy), Str4 (i.e., Find it difficult to tolerate interruptions), and Ac4 (i.e., Understanding policies and regulations at university) present factor loadings below .60, which according to Garson (2013) can be considered as 'weak', and therefore, do not measure the construct that they are supposed to measure. These were deleted one-by-one and goodness-of-fit indices were checked every time in order to make sure that their deletion was necessary to improve fitness.

Although removing Bn3, Str4 and Ac4 improved the model fitness, fitness indices values did not meet the required criteria to be deemed acceptable (see first restructuring column in Table 26 above). Modification indices were then checked in order to identify high covariances between items at the same level (i.e., values above 15), and therefore, to identify redundancy between items that can cause fitness problems (Brown, 2015b). High covariances were identified between e16 and several errors, and for this reason List4 (i.e., Understanding colloquial and idiomatic language) was removed. The model was run for a third time, and model fit was achieved as shown in Table 26 above (see second restructuring column), resulting in the final model illustrated in Figure 26:
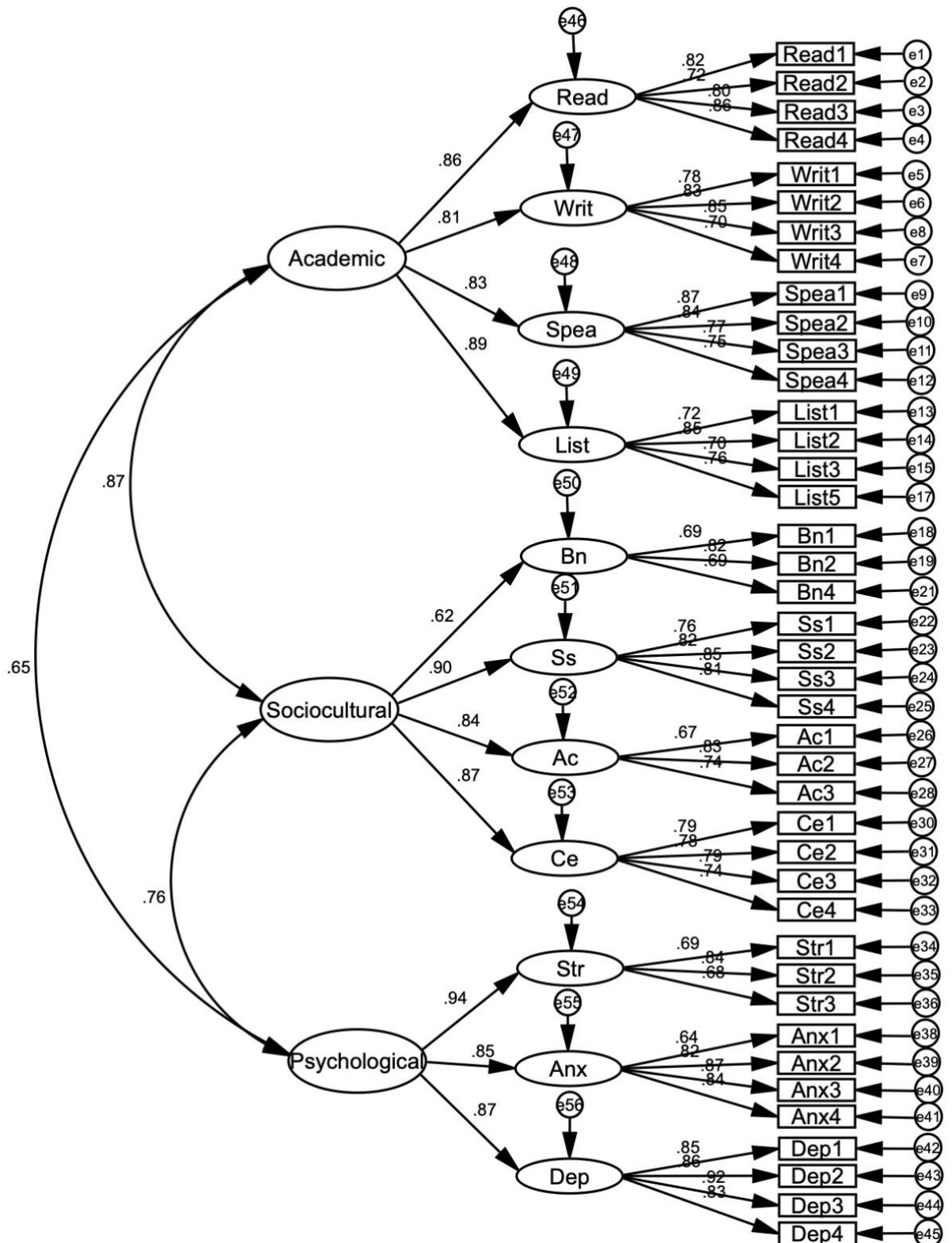
Figure 26. *Final model in SPSS Amos*

Note. Read= Reading; Writ= Writing; Spea= Speaking; List= Listening; Bn= Basic needs; Ss= Social skills; Ac= Adaptation to college; Ce= Cultural empathy and relatedness; Str= Stress; Anx= Anxiety; Dep= Depression; Read1= Reading critically; Read2= Reading quickly; Read3= Reading specialised papers; Read4= Reading for specific information; Writ1= Structuring essays/dissertations; Writ2= Summarising/synthesising; Writ3= Writing in an academic style; Writ4= Taking written exams; Spea1= Participating in class discussions; Spea2= Communicating with lecturers; Spea3=

Communicating with classmates; Spea4= Giving oral presentations; List1= Taking notes in lectures; List2= Understanding lectures/class discussions; List3= Understanding the accent and/or pronunciation; List4= Understanding colloquial and idiomatic language; List5= Understanding technical vocabulary; Bn1= Using the transport system; Bn2= Going shopping; Bn3= Dealing with bureaucracy; Bn4= Ordering at coffee shops/restaurants; Ss1= Making friends who are native English speakers; Ss2= Making yourself understood; Ss3= Interacting at social events/community activities; Ss4= Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions; Ac1= Coping with the academic workload; Ac2= Working effectively with other students; Ac3= Dealing with supervisors/lecturers; Ac4= Understanding policies and regulations at university; Ce1= Understanding jokes and humour; Ce2= Understanding the local language/accent; Ce3= Changing your manner of speaking to suit social norms; Ce4= Understanding the locals' worldview; Str1= Find it difficult to relax; Str2= Find yourself getting upset; Str3= Find yourself getting impatient; Str4= Find it difficult to tolerate interruptions; Anx1= Experience dryness of mouth; Anx2= Get so nervous that you forget things/words that you know; Anx3= Find yourself in situations that made you so anxious that you were relieved when they ended; Anx4= Feel your heart pounding; Dep1= Feel sad and depressed; Dep2= Feel that you have lost interest or motivation; Dep3= Feel like a failure; Dep4= Feel frustrated.

6.2.4. Reliability and validity

As mentioned in Chapter 5, testing validity and reliability of a measurement model is crucial to determine if constructs (i.e., first and second-order latent variables) measure what they are supposed to measure, as well as to test how reliable is the measurement model in measuring the intended latent constructs. While the previous section focused on model fit, that is, the construct validity of the questionnaire; this section provides a more in-depth analysis of the reliability and validity of the quantitative instrument used in Phase I (i.e., ISQ).

6.2.4.1 Reliability

In order to determine the reliability of the ISQ, the three commonly used methods for assessing the reliability of a measurement model in CFA were used, namely internal consistency, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) (Kline, 2015). Internal consistency of the scale was assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha using SPSS, while CR and AVE were calculated by combining SPSS AMOS output and Excel.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, being considered as acceptable a reliability of .70 or higher (see Field, 2009). As presented in Figure 27 below, the overall Cronbach's alpha of the ISQ items was .965 which shows high overall reliability. In addition, when inspecting the item-total statistics output, which presents the value that Cronbach's alpha

would have if each particular item was deleted from the scale, it showed that none of the items would increase reliability if deleted.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.965	.965	45

Figure 27. Cronbach's alpha of all ISQ items

However, as noted in Chapter 5, Cronbach's alpha does not measure whether the indicators depend on a single factor. Thus, separate reliability analyses for all subdomains of the ISQ were also run in order to analyse if the items accurately measure the corresponding latent variable. Results from these analyses including factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, CR and AVE are presented in Table 27:

Table 27. Factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) of the measurement model.

Construct	Item	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Reading	Read1	.82	.871	.872	.641
	Read2	.72			
	Read3	.80			
	Read4	.86			
Writing	Writ1	.78	.865	.856	.627
	Writ2	.83			
	Writ3	.85			
	Writ4	.70			
Listening	List1	.72	.870	.837	.577
	List2	.85			
	List3	.70			
	List4	Deleted			
	List5	.76			
Speaking	Spea1	.87	.878	.875	.653
	Spea2	.84			
	Spea3	.77			
	Spea4	.75			

Basic needs	Bn1	.69	.763	.843	.541
	Bn2	.82			
	Bn3	Deleted			
	Bn4	.69			
Social skills	Ss1	.76	.881	.874	.657
	Ss2	.82			
	Ss3	.85			
	Ss4	.81			
Adaptation to college	Ac1	.67	.786	.824	.561
	Ac2	.83			
	Ac3	.74			
	Ac4	Deleted			
Cultural empathy and relatedness	Ce1	.79	.857	.849	.603
	Ce2	.78			
	Ce3	.79			
	Ce4	.74			
Stress	Str1	.69	.772	.798	.549
	Str2	.84			
	Str3	.68			
	Str4	Deleted			
Anxiety	Anx1	.64	.870	.859	.633
	Anx2	.82			
	Anx3	.87			
	Anx4	.84			
Depression	Dep1	.85	.921	.916	.748
	Dep2	.86			
	Dep3	.92			
	Dep4	.83			

Note. Read1= Reading critically; Read2= Reading quickly; Read3= Reading specialised papers; Read4= Reading for specific information; Writ1= Structuring essays/dissertations; Writ2= Summarising/synthesising; Writ3= Writing in an academic style; Writ4= Taking written exams; Spea1= Participating in class discussions; Spea2= Communicating with lecturers; Spea3= Communicating with classmates; Spea4= Giving oral presentations; List1= Taking notes in lectures; List2= Understanding lectures/class discussions; List3= Understanding the accent and/or pronunciation; List4= Understanding colloquial and idiomatic language; List5= Understanding technical vocabulary; Bn1= Using the transport system; Bn2= Going shopping; Bn3= Dealing with bureaucracy; Bn4= Ordering at coffee shops/restaurants; Ss1= Making friends who are native English speakers; Ss2= Making yourself understood; Ss3= Interacting at social events/community activities; Ss4= Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions; Ac1= Coping

with the academic workload; Ac2= Working effectively with other students; Ac3= Dealing with supervisors/lecturers; Ac4= Understanding policies and regulations at university; Ce1= Understanding jokes and humour; Ce2= Understanding the local language/accent; Ce3= Changing your manner of speaking to suit social norms; Ce4= Understanding the locals' worldview; Str1= Find it difficult to relax; Str2= Find yourself getting upset; Str3= Find yourself getting impatient; Str4= Find it difficult to tolerate interruptions; Anx1= Experience dryness of mouth; Anx2= Get so nervous that you forget things/words that you know; Anx3= Find yourself in situations that made you so anxious that you were relieved when they ended; Anx4= Feel your heart pounding; Dep1= Feel sad and depressed; Dep2= Feel that you have lost interest or motivation; Dep3= Feel like a failure; Dep4= Feel frustrated.

As shown in Table 27, the lowest α coefficient was .763, which is still included in the acceptable range (i.e., .70 or higher). Composite reliability was calculated and the CR values for all constructs indicate good composite reliability, as all of them exceed .70, as recommended by Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt (2013). Therefore, it can be determined that the questionnaire items specified in the model accurately measure their respective construct. In addition, the value of AVE for all constructs exceed the threshold value of 0.5, indicating that the ISQ items that should not be related are, in fact, not correlated (see Hair et al., 2013). Accordingly, it can be concluded that the model presents good internal consistency, composite and discriminant reliability.

6.2.4.2 Validity

The validation process was conducted by testing construct, convergent, and discriminant validity (see Kline, 2015). Construct validity was established through the evaluation of model fit, since it is measured using fit indices. As presented in Section 6.2.3 (see Table 26), fit indices achieved the required level after the second model re-structuring, with X^2/DF between 1 to 3 (i.e., 2.159), SRMR lower or equal to .08 (i.e., .0644), CFI higher than .90 (i.e., .904), and RMSEA lower or equal to .06 (i.e., .059).

Convergent validity was also previously calculated, as it is measured through AVE, which was part of the reliability analysis presented in the previous section (see Table 27). Lastly, good discriminant validity was attempted by deleting redundant items, this included List4, Bn3, Ac4 and Str4; as well as by comparing squared correlation between constructs (i.e., Maximum Shared Variance) with the AVE for each second-order construct (see Table 28 below).

Table 28. *Discriminant validity of second-order constructs*

Second-order construct	Academic	Sociocultural	Psychological
Academic	**.723**		
Sociocultural	.751*	**.665**	
Psychological	.425	.579	**.792**

* The squared correlation is greater than the AVE of this construct, showing inadequate discriminant validity.

In this table, AVE values for each second-order construct are presented in the diagonal values in bold (i.e., .723 for Academic, .665 for Sociocultural, and .792 for Psychological), while the other values represent the correlation between the respective constructs (i.e., Academic <-> Sociocultural .751, Academic <-> Psychological .425, and Sociocultural <-> Psychological .579). In order to demonstrate discriminant validity, the AVE of a particular construct needs to be greater than the squared correlation between constructs. As seen in Table 28, AVE was greater than the squared correlation between constructs, except for the squared correlation between Academic and Sociocultural (i.e., .751). This issue could be attributed to the strong link between academic and sociocultural domains explored in the literature, and could be addressed by either deleting problematic items or merging the academic and sociocultural variables into one (see Harrington, 2009). Nevertheless, those two options are not considered in this case, since deleting problematic items could result in a poor model fit or not enough items to measure first order constructs. Another option would be deleting correlations between second-order latent constructs and running three separate models, however, relationships among those have been demonstrated in the previous literature (see Schartner and Young, 2016; Section 3.2.4).

6.3. Phase I: Findings From the First Interview

In this section, the results of the interviews conducted in Phase I will be presented. As presented in Chapter 5, a total of 24 EAP in-sessional students were interviewed at the beginning of each term of the academic year 2017/2018 (i.e., 18 students took part in September 2017, and 6 students took part in January 2018). Data from the interviews were analysed using qualitative data analysis software (i.e., QDA Miner Lite), and it followed a thematic analysis approach that involved a two-cycle hybrid coding process. This coding approach combined a deductive cycle (i.e., First cycle coding) based on the model identified

in the review of the literature (see Section 5.9), and an inductive cycle (i.e., Second cycle coding) that allowed the finding of emergent themes that were not included in the pre-established model. Results from the interviews align with the three domains of adjustment considered in this thesis (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological) and therefore, are presented in relation to those. A table adapted from QDA Miner Lite 'Coding Frequency' results containing number of cases and percentages of the themes and subthemes that emerged from the interviews across each of the adjustment domains is presented at the beginning of each subsection. This is followed by a description of the subthemes illustrated by excerpts from the students' interviews. These results will be later compared with the quantitative results of Phase I presented in the previous section, in order to provide an answer to RQ1: What are the language-related challenges that NNES students face in Irish universities? and RQ2: What relationships may exist between the studied variables (i.e., adjustment domains and demographic factors)?. A summary of the students' reasons for taking the EAP programme, as well as other themes arising from the interviews will be provided at the end of this section. These will be compared with the results from the second set of interviews (see Phase II), in order to address RQ3b: What are the students' impressions of the EAP in-sessional programme?.

6.3.1. Academic challenges

Language-related challenges associated with the academic domain were found to relate to the four academic themes identified in the literature: **reading, writing, listening,** and **speaking.** A number of subthemes were identified after applying the two-cycle hybrid coding involving deductive and inductive analysis (see Section 5.9.3.1). These subthemes are presented in Table 29 below, including number of cases and percentage of cases adapted from the results obtained from the 'Coding Frequency' tool in QDA Miner Lite.

Table 29. *Summary of academic language-related challenges themes and subthemes*

Academic Language-related Challenges Themes	*Subthemes*	*Cases*	*% Cases*
Reading	Reading quickly	15	62.5%
	Reading specialised texts	11	45.8%
	Reading critically	3	12.5%
	Reading for specific information	2	8.3%
Writing	Writing in an academic style	12	50%
	Structuring essays/dissertations	9	37.5%
	Use of language	7	29.2%
	Summarising/synthesising	4	16.7%
Speaking	Participating in class discussions	10	41.7%
	Communicating precisely and naturally	10	41.7%
	Communicating with classmates and lecturers	6	25%
	Giving oral presentations	5	20.8%
Listening	Understanding lectures/class discussions	17	70.8%
	Understanding due to accent/rate of speech	11	45.8%
	Taking notes in lectures	8	33.3%
	Understanding technical vocabulary	6	25%
	Understanding colloquial and idiomatic language	5	20.8%

6.3.1.1 Reading

Recurrent subthemes regarding reading challenges were identified after applying the two-cycle coding. These included **reading quickly, reading specialised texts, reading critically,** and **reading for specific information**. These four subthemes correspond to those identified deductively during the first cycle coding, except for 'reading specialised texts'. As a result of the inductive coding method used in the second cycle coding, the code 'specialised papers' was replaced by 'specialised texts'. This wording was considered more appropriate as the participants reported experiencing difficulties reading different types of specialised texts, not only academic papers.

Students reported difficulties managing their academic reading workload due to the substantial amount of reading required:

> I'm way back behind now, I can't really catch up with all those readings. Every week we have lots of readings to do and we have assignments, every assignment requires many readings, so I just try my best [...] I spend many hours in the reading room studying, but actually I'm not a very efficient person, I'm a slow reader really (S5)

> The teacher requires us to read maybe 40 pages sometimes a day, but it's impossible for me to finish because I read really really slow [...] (S4)

As seen from the above extracts, students often considered themselves as 'slow readers'. This has been found to be partly attributable to difficulties understanding specialised and general academic vocabulary, and a lack of reading strategies:

> Terminology is one of the difficult things, an obstacle for me, because if I don't understand those terminologies I cannot continue with my reading, so I spend a lot of time to get to understand those terminologies (S14)

> Yes, I find it difficult, I spend a lot of time in an article [...] because if for instance I have some unknown words, I need to go back to the dictionary and search for those words and come back, then I don't do that all the times, because I'm thinking maybe I've run out of time so let's go and have the guess of the whole text, you don't need to be aware of everything, because there are too many pages (S2)

Students tend to spend a great amount of time translating and looking for terms in the dictionary, which affects their reading speed, and as a consequence, their ability to deal with the reading workload. As seen in the extract from S2 above, this difficulty is reduced when they develop reading strategies such as skimming, which highlights the students' difficulty to read for specific information. Supporting extracts can be found in the interviews with S18 and S14, who describe their techniques for reading in a more efficient way:

> Actually, I don't use the dictionary anymore when I read. I just realised that it's better to pass this information to your head, and then if you have some question check, or sometimes I have a piece of paper and I just make a list of all words that I don't understand or I'm not sure and then I check all the list, but during the reading process I decided to not do that at all. (S18)

> [...] I find that my reading speed is a little bit faster than before, and I have to distinguish which is important to which is not very important in somebody's article and try to catch the most useful information for me. (S14)

In addition, the difficulty of dealing with the reading workload may be associated with the students' adaptation to the new academic environment, since differences between the Irish education system and their country education systems were expressed:

> [...] and after taking the EAP course, I know how to think critically, that's what I didn't learn in China, every time I read a paper is- oh, great! What you said is right!- but now I can judge them [...] (S5)

> […]when I arrived here I talked to one of my professors and I said that I read a book… and my professor stressed that as a master's student you shouldn't, you can't say that, you must put your opinion […] (S11)

As it can be seen from the two extracts above, these differences among education systems also include difficulties understanding the concept of criticality. Students reported having difficulties applying critical skills when reading, as this was a new concept to them.

6.3.1.2 Writing

Subthemes related to writing difficulties included **writing in an academic style, structuring essays/dissertations, use of language, and summarising/synthesising**. These were identified after conducting the two-cycle coding hybrid process. Codes for these subthemes were identified deductively during the first cycle coding, except for 'use of language' that emerged from the inductive coding method used in the second cycle coding.

In the interview, concerns were expressed about writing in an academic style:

> Yes, I think that's also a big problem for Chinese students, because we're not used to write as academic way, because I think I write in a simple way, it's not academic. (S24)

> […] the academic words, academic writing, I think it's quite different from daily English uses, so I think it's hard for me right now. (S14)

These concerns are significantly related to the use of language. Students indicated experiencing difficulties regarding lack of vocabulary, precision and clarity:

> […] I'm worried about the use of words, I will be the word I understood it's not the one I want to use, because sometimes different words have the same meaning […] (S13)

> Yes, last semester I finished two essays, and my supervisors told me that it was a disaster […] They said there are ambiguous expressions, expressing in a not very clearly. (S23)

Another frequently reported challenge was structure. Students described difficulties understanding the organisation and format of essays and dissertations, with some of them making reference to difficulties regarding coherence and cohesion:

> […] and I find that my essay structure is not very clear, maybe it's because the Chinese thinking is not formally structured in the writing style […] (S15)

> Writing I think it's the most challenging thing for us to change our style, and when we write we just translate […] especially academic writing to establish it in a more logical and a more coherent, so I think that's the biggest challenge for me. (S11)

As it can be noticed from the extract from S11 above, this lack of structure is often related to translation and the application of academic conventions associated with their home culture, with some students expressing the willingness to be more 'native-like':

> […] I think I also have to abandon my Chinese style or thinking pattern, I have to adopt the Western style here, so that's a struggling for me to go back and forth, and try not to be too much of a Chinese when I'm writing English essays. (S10)

S10 above alluded to the differences in education systems as an explanation for this type of challenge. These differences can also be seen in difficulties understanding practices typically associated with Western education, including writing in a critical style and using citations to avoid plagiarism, which in turn, relate to the students' adaptation to the new academic environment. The comment from S3 below illustrates these difficulties:

> […] in Moscow it's different, basically like in every language there's introduction, main body and conclusion, but they want referencing, they want it to be done in the right way, they want critical thinking, like -what the hell is critical thinking?- I still don't understand what is it […] (S3)

Summarising and synthesising academic sources were other writing challenges reported. Students found it difficult to summarise and synthesise the academic literature when writing essays or dissertations:

> Just to summarise all the theories in a very clear and very simple way, also you have to come up with your own ideas, maybe sometimes you need to criticise all those theories, or maybe you just want to agree with them […] I think that's the main challenge for me, how to summarise them in a very logic and very clear way […] (S10)

> Yes, I have difficulties in writing, synthesising my ideas, I have to gather information and then to organise them, and sometimes it's very difficult to organise the information in a coherent way […] (S7)

As illustrated in the excerpts above, the difficulty summarising and synthesising also relates to the concepts of criticality (S10), and structure (S7) that have been mentioned above.

6.3.1.3 Speaking

When asked about academic challenges regarding speaking, students made comments regarding four main subthemes: **communicating precisely and naturally**, **participating in class discussions, communicating with classmates and lecturers,** and **giving oral presentations**. These were identified deductively in the first cycle coding, except for 'communicating precisely and naturally', which emerged from the inductive method used in the second cycle coding process. In addition, the subtheme 'communicating with classmates and lecturers' emerged during the second cycle coding from merging the two

first cycle codes 'classmates' and 'lecturers', as students reported experiencing difficulties communicating with both groups concurrently.

Participants that expressed difficulty in participating in class often take the role of a silent or 'passive student' as a consequence:

> Yes, also I have problems, it's basically when doing the group talking things, like discussion I'm listening more than speak out something. (S6)

Students felt that they had no opportunity to participate in class discussions and group activities, since those classmates who have a higher level of English or are native English speakers normally respond before they have the chance to think of their answer:

> The ones that answer teachers' questions are native speaker or the Indian, that always used English very fast, just like we speak Chinese. (S13)

> Yes, it's a difficulty, it's a challenge because I know some things […] and I didn't want to answer it if I don't have the best sentence, so I want to formulate with the best sentences, but some other students answer before me, so by the time when I think about my sentences, some other students answer before me […] (S9)

Students also reported concerns of not being able to express more precisely or 'native-like' when discussing academic topics:

> […] in German I can be very precise, I know exactly what to say and in English I sometimes feel like a five-year-old. I know people understand me, but I feel like my sentence is not very structured, very elaborate […] (S20)

> […] but in academic sometimes you know the meaning, but you can't express more naturally, as a native speaker, so it's challenging. (S11)

These concerns are also present when giving oral presentations. Students mentioned the difficulty of expressing clearly and spontaneously during presentations, as well as a willingness to make fewer grammatical mistakes. For example, when asked what challenges they faced, S19 said:

> Public speaking, I think, like I would like to become… it's also the part of my objectives because is related to my professional kind of duties, I have to take the floor in front of everyone and spontaneously and clearly express my ideas in English. (S19)

6.3.1.4 Listening

Five broad subthemes related to listening challenges were raised by the students: **understanding lectures and/or class discussions, understanding due to accent and/or rate of speech, taking notes in lectures, understanding technical vocabulary,** and **understanding colloquial and idiomatic language.** These were identified deductively in the first cycle coding. However, during the second cycle coding process, the inductive analysis resulted in the rewording of the code 'accent/pronunciation' as 'accent/rate of speech', given that participants made reference to difficulties understanding due to rate of speech rather than pronunciation.

A common reason amongst students regarding difficulties understanding lectures was the accent and rate of speech. Students indicated that they could not understand their lecturers mainly because they speak too fast and there are a range of accents:

> […] I have lots of trouble, especially with Irish accents, they have different pronunciation and they talk fast, too fast for me to understand […] (S24)

> First of all, I think many of the teachers I have are not native English-speakers, some are German, Italian {…] but I think the most challenging persons are the teachers that are Irish, and sometimes they have accents that I'm not used to […] (S8)

As illustrated in the examples above, a number of students considered Irish lecturers more difficult to understand than lecturers from other nationalities. However, some students also made reference to difficulty understanding other accents. For example, S7 reported difficulties understanding their supervisor:

> At our first meeting I understood from 45 minutes of speaking, I understood from him three words, because maybe it was my difficulty as well, but he has a very strong Chinese accent and it was really difficult, I mean it was really really difficult, I wanted to ask for another supervisor on this basis, because I didn't understand basically what he said. (S7)

The difficulty understanding lecturers was suggested to be related to the students' previous English language learning experience. Students mentioned the differences in accents and rate of speech between their current experience at university and their previous learning experience, making reference to familiarity with what they consider 'standard Englishes' learnt in their countries of origin such as American English or British English, as well as to the fact that having a good mark in the listening part of the IELTS does not reflect their current listening skills:

[…] another thing for the Chinese students is about the speed, we are familiar with IELTS listening, and is not class, is a test […] (S11)

[…] because when I was in China, we all talked, our teachers, they all speak with American accent, I don't know why, but that's the trend in my country, they all speak American accent, and they all teach students to pronounce standard American accent, so for me Irish accent is also difficult to understand. (S4)

Taking notes was another recurrent subtheme found in the interview data that is associated with the difficulty understanding lecturers. Students reported having to make an extra effort and focus their attention on listening to the lecture, as well as not being able to listen to the lecture and take notes at the same time:

[…] I need to be much more attentive to every situation in class, like I think as soon as I stop being concentrated on the teacher, I might not understand everything […] (S8)

[…] for me was very difficult to listen to the lecturer and make notes at the same time […] (S18)

This challenge is also related to the vocabulary used in lectures and the students' familiarity with the topic. Both, the use of colloquialisms and informal language, as well as technical and formal vocabulary were found to affect lecture understanding:

[…] when a teacher uses many phrases, kind of colloquial phrases that I can't really understand, so I will ask my classmates, especially Irish classmates. (S5)

[…] somehow some lectures there were a lot of academic words, vocabulary things, very professional, I never used to never see that word before, so I need to take a lot of time, I mean after class, or pre-class I will preview the slides to check those vocabulary I don't know, the concept I am not familiar with, so that takes a lot of time to do. (S6)

As with the difficulty understanding lecturers, students also mentioned accents, speed and the use of colloquial language as the main reasons for the difficulty understanding classmates:

[..] when it relates to group discussions my peers are all Irish, and they come from different towns, they can come from Cork, Galway, from Northern Ireland, and sometimes I was so lost because they talk to me but it's like not English at all, it's like a complete different language, and I am sitting there like I pretend that I understand but still I'm lost. (S3)

Yes, I am more worried about group work, because I feel my listening is the biggest problem so far, if I don't understand what people are talking about, I can't give the right response, so I am more worried about listen to others […] (S4)

These difficulties understanding classmates and lecturers affect students' participation in class discussions and group work, as shown in the example above. Therefore, listening skills play a key role in the concept of the 'passive student' introduced earlier in the speaking results.

6.3.2. Sociocultural challenges

After conducting the two-cycle hybrid coding process, language-related challenges associated with the sociocultural domain were found to relate to the four broad pre-established themes: **basic needs, social skills, adaptation to college,** and **cultural empathy and relatedness.** Number of cases and percentage for the subthemes calculated in QDA Miner Lite are presented in Table 30 below, and explained in the subsequent subsections.

Table 30. Summary of sociocultural language-related challenges themes and subthemes

Sociocultural Language-related Challenges Themes	Subthemes	Cases	% Cases
Basic needs	Going shopping	5	20.8%
	Using daily vocabulary in other essential tasks	5	20.8%
	Ordering at coffee shops/restaurants	2	8.3%
	Using the transport system	2	8.3%
Social skills	Making friends who are native English speakers	18	75%
	Making yourself understood	14	58.3%
	Expressing feelings and emotions	5	16.7%
	Interacting in social activities	3	12.5%
Adaptation to college	Coping with the academic workload	9	37.5%
	Understanding academic regulations at university	7	29.2%
	Working effectively with other students	6	25%
	Engaging with supervisors/lecturers	6	25%
Cultural empathy and relatedness	Understanding jokes and humour	14	58.3%
	Understanding the locals' worldview	13	54.2%
	Understanding the local language/accent	12	50%
	Changing your manner of speaking to suit social norms	4	16.7%

6.3.2.1 Basic Needs

Challenges regarding basic needs included **difficulties communicating when going shopping**, **ordering at coffee shops or restaurants**, **using the transport system**. These were identified deductively during the first cycle coding. Commenting on this type of challenges, S4 said:

> Well, sometimes if I go to the restaurant I might not understand what the waiter is asking for and when I go to the supermarket. I remember the first day I came here, when I go to the supermarket the cashier asked me- Do you want a bag?- but she spoke too fast, I can't recognise the words […] (S4)

Moreover, the subtheme **using daily vocabulary in other essential tasks** emerged from the inductive coding method used in the second cycle coding process. This involved students' reported difficulty performing other necessary tasks such as communicating with landlords:

> […] for instance, my landlady came and I had to explain something concerning the hot water, I have difficulties when it comes to specific vocabulary […] (S24)

As shown in the extracts above, these challenges were reportedly related to difficulties understanding spoken English mainly due to the rate of speech, as well as difficulties related to a lack of everyday vocabulary.

6.3.2.2 Social Skills

Topics regarding social skills were prominent in the interview data. These can be grouped into four broad subthemes: **making friends who are English speakers**, **interacting at social activities**, **making yourself understood**, and **expressing feelings and emotions**. All these subthemes were identified deductively in the first cycle coding process. However, as a result of the inductive approach taken in the second cycle coding, the wording of the first cycle code 'social events' was modified to 'social activities', since students referred to daily social activities rather than events. In addition, the first cycle code 'interpreting and responding to emotions' was reworded 'expressing feelings and emotions' during the second cycle, given that students made reference to the difficulty in expressing their own feelings and emotions instead of in interpreting or responding to other people's emotions.

Although Irish people are considered as welcoming and friendly in most cases, students reported difficulties making friends with Irish people. For example, S19 said:

It's difficult to make Irish friends, because kind of they are very welcome at the beginning, but afterwards it's difficult to become friends with them […] (S19)

The main two reasons for this difficulty are language and culture. Students find it easier to communicate with people that share the same language and culture, or other international students that are easy to understand and have a similar culture or way of thinking:

[…] because they speak slow, I can understand clearly, and French, they don't speak fast, so my friends basically are people who don't speak fast. (S4)

[…] language is one thing but is about the different cultural background, when we talk we don't have a lot of common topics, but as an example Irish people always like going to the pub to drink, but in my country certain people do that […] so I prefer to have contact with my friends with the same sociocultural background. (S11)

Some interviewees mentioned that Irish people show little interest in becoming friends with international students. This is associated with the difficulty in communication, and the fact that they have their own group of friends and are aware of international students' temporary stay:

[…] I think as we have language barriers, and sometimes maybe they wouldn't communicate with me, sometimes I feel that locals think that it's not easy to communicate with me because I can't express myself fluently and they prefer to communicate with the one who can speak very fluently English, I think they have no judgement but they're just used to the way easier for them. (S13)

[…] nobody can actually stick and trust you, so Irish people on one hand they have their own friends here, but on the other hand they might be not so interested in getting to know somebody and then that somebody goes away. (S2)

As seen in the speaking section above, another common subtheme was the difficulty of making themselves understood. This difficulty applies not just to the academic setting, but also to the students' social skills outside university:

Yeah, of course, because sometimes when I'm talking to friends, and we talk a lot of things, and sometimes I have a great story that I want to share, but I cannot tell in a very good way that they can totally understand what is my point […] (S6)

I have two or three friends from Ireland, that's fine, it's not too bad, it's possible to communicate, but it's hard, it takes some time to explain everything that I want, I cannot find the correct word to explain it either when to say […] (S12)

Students also reported difficulties interacting in social activities. For example, S19 indicated having more difficulty understanding people outside the academic setting than in the academic environment:

[…] when it comes to the academic environment, I think it took me like one month not more, but when it comes to the daily kind of communication, with people I was doing sport, or when I listen to people in environment other than academic environment, I mean the sauna or the pub, it's still like I cannot understand one hundred percent what is being said. (S19)

Talking about this difficulty some students commented on experiencing difficulties when communicating with Irish friends outside university, and as a consequence remaining silent. This has also been found in the speaking section with the figure of the 'passive student' in the academic context:

> I feel that insecurity with Irish friends, let's say when we go out, and I think I have caught myself to stay silent, to remain silent for a while, or maybe for more than a while, because they have started talking about a particular topic that I found my vocabulary to be weak on that particular topic […] (S2)

> […] so actually in China I'm not that kind of person, which is shy or can't speak, but I don't know why in Ireland I became another person, I didn't recognised myself, I think that's why maybe I'm afraid of making mistakes […] (S5)

Difficulty expressing feelings or emotions was another recurrent subtheme in the interview data. For example, S21 said:

> I just remembered that sometimes I don't know how to be friendly in English, or how to celebrate something, to show that I am excited about it, because I did some experiments and I showed my supervisor, she was super excited and I didn't know how to express myself […] (S21)

Consequently, some students reported feeling like a different person when communicating in English:

> […] when I'm speaking English and speaking Chinese, I think I'm two different kind of people. (S6)

> I think that the language of any country it's like some sort of code that creates new personality in you, different personality […] just the fact that you're using this language makes you think differently and perceive things differently, I actually changed a lot since I came to Ireland, and when I speak English now it's a little bit better, but before I felt like the language wasn't connected with my emotions and feelings […] (S18)

6.3.2.3 Adaptation to College

In relation to the theme of adaptation to college, students reported challenges associated with **coping with the workload**, **working effectively with other students**, **communicating with lecturers or supervisors**, and **understanding academic regulations at university**. These subthemes were identified deductively in the first cycle coding process. However, some rewording took place after the inductive analysis in the second cycle. This involved the modification of the first cycle code 'dealing with supervisors/lecturers' to 'engaging with supervisors/lecturers'; and 'policies and regulations' to 'academic regulations', as these terms were considered to represent participants' comments more accurately.

The students' expressed difficulty dealing with the workload. As mentioned in the academic challenges section, this difficulty was mainly linked to the students reading skills, which in turn had an impact on their social life, as they reported spending most of their time in the library or reading rooms trying to cope with the reading workload rather than socialising or doing other activities:

> I think some Chinese students also love parties but not many, so sometimes for example they arrange a party or they do something, arrange another activity, but I would feel that I have a lot of readings to do so I'm always in the library , I don't know if because they are English-native speakers they can study quicker than me, so they have more time to do some activities out of school, but for me I want to go, but I don't want to fail my exams. (S14)

As mentioned in the academic challenges section, difficulties working effectively with classmates were related to group work and classroom discussions. Students often find it difficult to participate in these types of activities due to their lack of English language skills. For example, one student mentioned feeling disappointed for not being able to express themselves and contribute to the group discussion:

> Sometimes disappointed, because I think if it were prepared probably I could help more everybody, or I can explain my ideas and probably can help them learn a little bit more […] (S12)

As a consequence, some students reported feeling excluded in group work or discussions:

> […] one thing happened, I'm kind of not happy about that thing, just because on one course we have group discussions, we have to do a presentation, and the teacher asked us to form groups, we have two Asians in this group, two Chinese to be specific, and then a student just asked us to form a group automatically, I just have a feeling that we are left out […] (S5)

Although students considered that lecturers are generally more patient and listen to them, if compared to their domestic classmates, some students suggested that sometimes lecturers do not adapt to their audience and should be more supportive:

> Yes, I think they don't realise that, I think they just talk naturally, they speak as they speak, I mean they don't think about their accent, I would say maybe if they knew more precisely who are their audience […] (S8)

> […] I went to lecturers and I just told them - I'm an Erasmus student, can you maybe try and help me more?- and they try and help you, but at the same time a lot of them told me – you will not be treated differently than Irish students- and I understand that […] but it is still not my native language and for me English is already really good, but I can see other people who can't even speak and how hard it must be for them […] but in terms of being a bit more supportive, I think all lecturers could try and do a bit more. (S20)

Regarding communication with lecturers, one student mentioned the difference between the role and status of the teacher in Western education and Chinese education, in which the discussion between lecturer and students might be perceived as challenging the lecturer:

[…] when your opinion is different to you professors, and you can't challenge your professor…so I think the most important, you should listen to your professor firstly, and try to follow them, not according to your opinion. (S11)

These differences between education systems are also linked to the difficulty understanding regulations at university, since as mentioned in the writing section, the only difficulty found in the interview data regarding this subtheme was related to the difficulty understanding plagiarism and referencing.

6.3.2.4 Cultural Empathy and Relatedness

Recurrent subthemes relating to the theme of cultural empathy and relatedness included **understanding jokes or humour**, **understanding the locals' worldview**, **understanding the local language and/or accent**, and **difficulties adapting the manner of speaking to suit social norms**. These were identified deductively in the first cycle coding, and no modifications were made after the inductive analysis in the second cycle.

Difficulties understanding jokes and humour was the most frequently reported challenge in this category. Students consider this challenge as an obstacle to socialise or make friends with native speakers of English. For example, S19 stated:

[…] for example, if they are talking a joke, they are laughing but I'm confused what they are laughing about, so I think this might be an obstacle for me to make native English-speaker friends […[(S19)

This challenge is commonly related to the difficulty understanding the locals' worldview due to sociocultural differences, as well as understanding the local language and accents:

No, I don't think people make jokes spontaneously, but no, I don't understand it because of the accent, the accent is a big issue here. (S19)

[…] I have met some Irish people like I mean they're now my friends, like not really real friends, but we can hang out and everything, and they say- you are too serious- and I'm like- I'm not- because I laugh and I joke and everything, but they just don't get it, and I don't get when they joke, that's because language barrier, because different mentality and different things, so that would be number one. (S3)

Differences between sociocultural practices such as the Irish pub culture were also reported as having an impact on sociocultural adaptation. For example, S22 said:

[…] Anyway all girls want to be make a group, but I am thinking even in Japan, I cannot belong to any group, but here I have to belong, but it makes me successful, because like even if there is a cultural difference in the group, but for example Irish people tend to go out to the nightclub a lot, but I don't like it, but like my friends bring me there even I say no, because it's a cultural thing, so I always go there, but it makes me so exhausted. (S22)

Some students indicated that the difficulties understanding local dialects and accents was more noticeable outside the academic setting. The following comment from S10 typifies this challenge:

> […] but when I get out of the class and you went to some community, some neighbourhood, you have to communicate or respond to local people, that's a different story, but I like that because I like different accents of English. (S10)

Finally, from the comments of the students, the fourth identified challenge was the students' difficulty to adapt their manner of speaking to suit social norms. Students pointed at the differences in communicative conventions between cultures as a barrier for social adaptation. As seen in the extracts from S19 and S18 below, some students reported being afraid of being misunderstood and not feeling themselves when using local communicative conventions:

> […] the problem with integration, nobody wanted to invite me spontaneously, it's also because in my country I know the cultural codes, I know how to communicate with people […] (S19)

> […] because you are here and the way you will express if it's connected with your language, like Russian language, it's not acceptable and sometimes in some situations it can be misunderstood, so you have to break yourself and try to play the role like you're one of them, it always feels like you're playing the role, but it's not you. (S18)

Students also made reference to difficulties responding in daily conversations, partly linked to cultural differences regarding language use:

> The first day I came in Dublin, and when I wanted to pay cash in a cashier, and they asked me – how are you doing?- I don't know how to answer the question, I was shocked, in China we don't say these things, and then I get used to it, but still every time people meet you, they will great to you in a quick way, and I can't respond in a quick way, I just have to stop and think what I should say. (S5)

6.3.3. Psychological impact

Although less commonly reported than academic and sociocultural challenges, psychological aspects related to language that affect adjustment were also mentioned during the interviews. These include symptoms associated with **stress, anxiety,** and **sadness or depression** as identified previously in the literature. A number of subthemes were identified after applying the two-cycle hybrid coding involving deductive and inductive analysis. These subthemes are presented in Table 31 below together with their number of cases and percentage of cases resulting from QDA Miner Lite 'Coding Frequency' tool:

Table 31. *Summary of psychological language-related difficulty areas themes and subthemes*

Psychological Language-related Difficulty Areas Themes	Subthemes	Cases	% Cases
Stress	Difficulty to relax and nervousness	11	45.8%
	Frustration	7	29.2%
	Getting upset at themselves	2	8.3%
Anxiety	Palpitations	3	12.5%
	Blushing	2	8.3%
	Sweating	2	8.3%
Sadness and depression	Feel sad and/or depressed	9	37.5%
	Feelings of insecurity and lack of self-confidence	9	37.5%
	Feel like a failure	3	12.5%
	Loss of motivation	2	8.3%

6.3.3.1 Stress

Feelings of stress were the most widely reported by the students. Subthemes related to stress included **difficulty to relax and nervousness, getting upset at themselves,** and **frustration**. These were identified in the first cycle coding, and refined during the second cycle coding. This process involved reducing the five codes identified deductively in the first cycle coding to three codes resulting from the inductive method used in the second cycle, as no supporting extracts were found for the first cycle codes 'getting impatient' and 'tolerate interruptions'.

Students expressed finding it difficult to relax when communicating, mainly in the academic setting. This is commonly associated with the difficulty expressing themselves precisely during class discussions.

> I just feel nervous when I need to speak English, especially in the class, yes, especially in a group discussion […] so every time I'm in group discussion I want to express my ideas but I become very nervous […] (S5)

> […] when I talk to people, especially the professors and the classmates about the… especially discussion in class, in the lecture, I'm kind of nervous and afraid always, nervous and afraid of making mistakes. (S6)

Another commonly reported cause for the students' difficulty to relax was the difficulty dealing with the workload presented in the academic and sociocultural sections above. The following comments from S20 typify this challenge:

> […] but in the beginning, I was like so upset and really stressed out and just very very frustrated, and like angry, and I didn't know how to cope. Maybe when I came here in September and after two weeks of being here I actually wanted to cancel my Erasmus and go back to Germany […] because this is too much work […] (S20)

As seen in the excerpt from student 20 above, these were also linked to feelings of frustration and anger. Students reported getting upset at themselves due to the difficulties dealing with the workload, as well as difficulties making themselves understood. For example, S7 said:

> I'm getting a little bit upset when I cannot find the best word, but this is because most of the time I'm tired, and I feel that my mind doesn't function properly, I feel upset against myself […] (S7)

Feelings of frustration were also widely reported. These not only related to difficulties dealing with the workload or expressing precisely, but also to understanding spoken English and feeling like they are not improving after a certain period of time in Ireland:

> Sometimes I am frustrated. At the beginning I was thinking – I don't think I'm improving at all, and I don't think I am going to improve at all- and that's my concern because people can understand, I can express myself, but I don't want to make mistakes, and be more natural […] (S21)

6.3.3.2 Anxiety

Subthemes related to anxiety found in the interviews included **palpitations, blushing,** and **sweating**. These subthemes emerged from the inductive coding method used second cycle coding process, with the exception of the code 'palpitations' that was originally named 'hear pounding'.

Once again, these symptoms are reportedly more prominent when communicating in the academic setting, rather than in social situations outside university:

> […] I like speaking in daily life, but when I have to talk about any specific academic thing, I feel so nervous so I sweat and my face turns red and sometimes my peers cannot understand what I say so everyone tried to guess, but it makes me so miserable […] (S22)

> Of course, always, it also depends when you are surrounded by normal people when you are on the hiking walk you would be more relaxed, but when it comes to the academic environment, when even you have to take the word during normal exchange in the class, or the conference or something like this, still I have the heart features, it beats very quickly, and yes… the hands which are sweaty. (S19)

As seen in the extract from S19 above, these are commonly related to participating in class discussions and presentations, which might be linked to public speaking anxiety. For example, S2 makes reference to the importance of speaking in front of an audience:

> […] because when you actually have an audience, and especially the professor is inside this audience, you want your sentences to be formed correctly, so yes, I'm actually feeling that heartbeat, I don't know the term for that, but… and I think I'm blushing a little bit, because I'm feeling blood going up, to my upper side of my face […] (S2)

6.3.3.3 Sadness and Depression

The theme of sadness and depression included four recurrent subthemes: **feeling sad and/or depressed, feelings of insecurity and lack of self-confidence, feeling like a failure,** and **loss of motivation**.

Students reported feeling sad and/or depressed as a consequence of not being able to participate in class. This involves not being able to express themselves, and to understand classmates and lecturers:

> […] it makes me so miserable, so like today I had a tutorial in Business and I really try to express my Japanese culture and business style, but it's quite different from Ireland's culture, so they asked me a lot, but I cannot understand, I cannot answer every questions. I think it is not enough to make them understand. (S22)

> […] so it involves lots of discussion and group chats and brainstorming, but she couldn't really understand what other people are talking about, so she felt really depressed, and she's not confident of her speaking either […] (S1)

Some students reported feeling sad or depressed as a consequence of not being able to communicate with people, as they considered that it has a negative impact on their social life:

> I had a lot of difficulties, yes, like the accent was strong, even my mates, international students, they didn't really understand what I was trying to say, because I maybe had a theoretical background, but I was really depressed […] (S19)

Feelings of insecurity and lack of confidence when communicating in English were particularly prominent in the interview data:

> Sometimes I have some misunderstanding or totally not understanding, because especially in professional meetings, I don't think I have enough self-confidence and sometimes because of this disability to speak fluently I don't get involved in the conversations. (S24)

> […] I realised that when I am with native speakers of English I tend to be more insecure, whereas compared to being let's say with international students […] (S2)

This is also linked to the fact that the students are often afraid of making mistakes or being judged, especially when native speakers are present. The students expressed feeling less

confident when communicating with native speakers, including inside and outside the academic environment:

> The problem is that I cannot really give the information back, especially when I am with native speakers… I am surrounded by native speakers, I don't feel myself confident when I have a lot of native speakers around. (S19)

> I feel much more better when I speak with people international students from different country, because then I don't focus on my grammar and spelling […] but when I speak with Irish people for some reason I expect they kind of point on all the mistakes I do […] (S18)

Difficulties participating in the academic setting also led to students reporting feeling like they are failing or feeling disappointed in themselves:

> […] even though I know that sometimes I face failing feelings, I still perseverate, so I try again and again and again, because only when you try you can get to the result. (S19)

> I was disappointed about myself, I want to involve in the discussion, but I think I still need time to fix it. (S13)

A small number of those interviewed suggested that a lack of language skills could lead to loss of motivation. For example, S4 mentioned that at times they did not want to go to class as a result of not understanding lectures, and S22 mentioned that some friends stopped attending classes as a result of not understanding the lectures:

> Yes, sometimes I don't want to go to class, but not all the times, just sometimes […] but I know I have to do this, if I try harder maybe I can understand […] (S4)

> […] some of my friends they used to attend the lecture or tutorial before, but they become not to go to the class, because they feel not nice or difficulty in the discussion […] (S22)

6.3.4. Relationships between domains

Although relationships between adjustment domains have been identified in the previous subsections when exploring the language-related challenges facing NNES international students (i.e., Sections 6.2.1-6.2.3), conceptual mapping was used as it allowed the researcher to analyse and present these relationships in a systematic manner. The analysis was performed following the six-step method recommended by Adu (2019) (see Section 5.9.3), which resulted in a diagram designed using CmapTools that depicts the relationships between domains. The nature of the relationships was determined according to the definitions provided by Dey (1993). In this way, a concurrent relationship between two themes or subthemes was determined if they impact each other; while a causal relationship

was determined if the existence of or changes in one theme or subtheme impacts the emergence or adjustment of another (ibid.).

This analysis enabled the researcher to respond to RQ2a: What are the relationships between adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological)?. Full results from the conceptual map are included in Appendix I. A summary of these results is presented in Table 32, which illustrates key relationships between domains and their empirical indicators:

Table 32. Key relationships between domains

Related domains	Relationship and type	Example empirical indicator
Academic <-> Sociocultural	Reading quickly -> Coping with the workload (Causal relationship)	Before every class our teacher will send many readings for us to do, I always can't finish and I think it is too theoretic and many words I didn't see before[…]. S13
	Reading quickly -> Social skills (Causal relationship)	I have a lot of readings to do so I'm always in the library, I don't know if because they are English-native speakers they can study quicker than me so they have more time to do some activities out of school, but for me, I want to go but I don't want to fail my exams. S14
	Understanding academic regulations -> Reading critically (Causal relationship)	[…] I would like to improve my critical thinking skills as well, because you need that for being academic, isn't it? S7
	Understanding academic regulations -> Writing in an academic style (Causal relationship)	I didn't know how to avoid… I don't know how to say that word, plagiarism […] S5
	Understanding academic regulations -> Structuring essays/dissertations (Causal relationship)	[…] and also Irish directures it's quite different than Japanese directures so in English their obvious word is the one I mention about, but in Japan first the reason comes first, so it'd be tricky for me to change the structure of the essays. S22
	Communicating with classmates and lecturers -> Engaging with supervisors/lecturers (Causal relationship)	I think the most difficult thing is build up my own social network, such as friends or connect with a lecturer or professor, because there must be the language barrier between me and others, so I have been handicapped. […] S22
	Participating in class discussions, Communicating with classmates and lecturers -> Working effectively with other students (Causal relationship)	Yes, also I have problems, it's basically when doing the group talking things, like discussion I'm listening more than speak out something. S6

	Understanding lectures/class discussions -> Working effectively with other students (Causal relationship)	Yeah, I am more worried about group work, because I feel my listening is the biggest problems so far, if I don't understand what people are talking about, I can't keep the right response, so I'm more worried about listen to others, the situation that I have to listen to others and give a response that kind of situation I'm worried. S4
Academic <-> Psychological	Participating in class discussions <-> Stress, Anxiety, Sadness and depression (Concurrent relationship)	I just feel nervous when I need to speak English, especially in the class, yeah, especially in a group discussion […] so every time I'm in group discussion I want to express my ideas but I become very nervous, […] S5
	Giving oral presentations -> Stress, Anxiety (Causal relationship)	[…] now we have one presentation and the teacher recorded for us and I got in the feedback that I was nervous and my hands sweating, yeah I was pretty nervous. S13
	Communicating precisely and naturally -> Stress, Sadness and depression (Causal relationship)	[…] sometimes I'm annoyed because in German I can be very precise, I know exactly what to say and in English I sometimes feel like a five-year-old. I know people understand me, but I just feel like my sentence is not very like structured very elaborate so that's what annoys me sometimes because I'd like to be more precise […] S20
	Understanding lectures/class discussions -> Sadness and depression, Stress (Causal relationship)	Yes, firstly it's a bit of sad, and I spent time studying English and I passed IELTS, I think that I can understand that, so the first thing …. […] I can't understand my professors totally but I will try to understand 80%, and then I'll try to understand 85, … to improve my English. S11
Sociocultural <-> Psychological	Coping with the academic workload -> Stress, Sadness and depression (Causal relationship)	maybe like the first two weeks of university I was like very very stressed like I was crying all the time because I was like how can I manage? I will not be able to do any of this because each teacher gives you like five essays and they tell you to read it until next week […] S20
	Making themselves understood -> Stress, Sadness and depression (Causal relationship)	Yeah, of course 'cause sometimes when I'm talking to people, talking to friends, and we talk a lot of things, and sometimes I have a very like great story that I want to share but I cannot tell in a very good way that they can totally understand what I am… what's my point you know, it's kind of frustrating, […] S6
	Working effectively with other students -> Sadness and depression (Causal relationship)	[…] so it involves lots of discussion and always like group chats and brainstorming, but she couldn't really understand what other people are talking about, so she felt really depressed and she's not confident of her speaking either[…] S1

From the table, it can be seen that although relationships among the three domains were found when analysing the interview data, relationships between the academic and sociocultural domain were more frequent, which highlights the strong relationship among those two domains. These relationships are discussed in more detail in Section 8.3.1.

6.3.5. Demographic considerations

After presenting the language-related challenges identified in the first interview, this subsection will focus on the possible impact of the participants' demographic factors on those challenges. The purpose is to respond to RQ2b: 'What demographic factors might impact the adjustment process?' from a qualitative perspective, as well as to give a fuller picture of emerging issues and diversity among the participant group.

As presented in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.8.3), demographic data was collected during the first interview. As in the ISQ, this included information regarding the participants' level and field of study, country of origin, length of time residing in Ireland, previous residence in an English-speaking country, and certified level of English.

6.3.5.1 Level of Study

Regarding level of study, differences were found between the challenges reported by PhD students and those reported by master's or undergraduate students. While undergraduate students face challenges related to written examinations and understanding lecturers and classmates, PhD students' challenges were mainly associated to writing their thesis and communicating with their supervisors. This is partly due to the differences in course requirements specific to their level of study. The excerpts from S22 and S17 below illustrate these differences:

> I can write an essay in home, but sometimes there are essay type exam, in the exam hall kind of thing, because I cannot use the dictionary for them, so my marks getting worse than other type of essay […] (S22, Undergraduate student)

> I think I don't have experience in academic writing, so and I'm doing a PhD, so the core thing is to write well […] (S17, PhD student)

Another perceived difference in students' challenges associated with the level of study is that master's and undergraduate students report more challenges related to reading and

understanding specialised vocabulary than PhD students. For example, S13 and S17 commented:

> Before every class our teacher will send many readings for us to do, I always can't finish and I think it is too theoretic and many words I didn't see before, and I need first to check it to find out what that means, and then understand the context […] (S13, Master's student)

> […] I'm reading ten papers a day at least, so it's okay with my topic […] (S17, PhD student)

6.3.5.2 Field of Study

The challenge of understanding specialised vocabulary was found to be related to the students' field of study. Although students who studied disciplines related to English language and linguistics (e.g., MPhil in English Language Teaching, BA English Studies) also reported some challenges related to understanding technical terms, students from other disciplines such as Law or Business reported experiencing higher difficulty understanding technical and general vocabulary. For example, S20 and S12 said:

> I study English, so I'm used to reading English text, that's not the problem (S20, BA English Studies)

> I think because I have to learn English, some words I don't know like… it's a specific word that I don't know how to just say, it's specific words from the business, and also from the base language […] (S12, Master in Business)

In addition, students that study disciplines related to English language and linguistics were more precise when identifying and describing language challenges compared to students of other disciplines.

> I think style, definitely style and vocabulary too. Just the overall essay is a bit better now and the words I use, and linking words, how I combine sentences, I think that just became better […] (S20, BA English Studies)

6.3.5.3 Length of Time Residing in Ireland

The students' length of time residing in Ireland was identified as playing an important role in students' adjustment. Students reported facing less difficulties after a certain period of time in Ireland, this period typically ranged from one to six months:

> […] when it comes to the academic environment, I think it took me one month, not more, but when it comes to the daily kind of communication, with people I was doing sport, or when I listen to people in environment other than academic environment, I mean the sauna or in the pub, it's still like I cannot understand one hundred percent what is being said. (S19, 0-1 year)

As seen from the extract above, these difficulties include sociocultural challenges such as responding to their basic needs and social skills, as well as academic challenges, including

understanding lectures. However, it is worth noting that students continue facing academic challenges even if they have lived for a long period of time in Ireland. For example, S15 had lived in Ireland for 20 years and expressed academic difficulties when was asked about the reasons for taking EAP classes:

> I think because in the beginning I found that my academic writing skills are not as good as the other areas, so I started the academic classes just to get the academic writing, formal from non-formal writing is so different […] (S15, >3 years)

When considering the relationship between psychological adjustment and length in Ireland, students report feeling more confident when they perceive an improvement in their language skills:

> I feel happy, because I can see the clear improvement from when I arrived in September, so I feel more confident, I can feel that people understand me more, that I can express my ideas, even my accent has improved. (S19, 0-1 year)

6.3.5.4 Previous Residence in an English-speaking Country

In the same way that students reported facing less difficulties after a period of time in Ireland, students that have lived in an English-speaking country before coming to Ireland reported experiencing fewer challenges than those students who are living in an English-speaking country for the first time. This includes sociocultural challenges that have been identified in Section 6.2.1, such as socialising and understanding the host country culture, as well as basic needs:

> No, I don't think so, I think I'm okay with all the things that you mentioned (re. basic needs), yeah I think I'm okay with that because I've been to Galway before […] (S6, 0-1 year)

> I think because I lived in Northern Ireland for two years and that has helped a lot to understand the local humour, and also have local friends […] (S1, 1-3 years)

6.3.5.5 Country of Origin

Participants from non-European countries expressed differences between communicative cultural conventions as impacting on their social skills. For example, S22 said:

> So, like Japanese people tend to say not directly, so if I feel hungry, maybe some European people say that I am hungry, but we always say– do you know look at some good place to eat?– but they cannot understand what, why I said. (S22, Japan)

A number of interviewees mentioned the tendency for host students to socialise in the pub as a constraint for them to socialise:

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[…] as an example, Irish people always like going to the pub to drink, but in my country certain people do that, so if your friends are Irish friends invite you- would you like to go to the pub?- I think it's strange, they think it's normal […] so I prefer to have contact with my friends with the same socio-cultural background. (S11, China)

6.3.5.6 Certified Level of English

Differences between groups of students by certified level of English were not reflected in the interviews. In fact, students whose certified level of English was equivalent to a C2 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) reported challenges related to language inside and outside the classroom setting:

No, but the professors encourage us to participate in group discussions […] and I wanted to participate but they were so engaged in the conversation with themselves and I just didn't even had the chance to talk. (S3, C2)

I feel that insecurity with Irish friends as well, let's say when we go out, and I think I have caught myself to stay silent […] (S2, C2)

In addition, participants made explicit reference to IELTS and other examinations as not reflecting the level of English. For example, when asked about their certified level of English S4 said:

I did IELTS, my result of IELTS is 7 overall, 7 in listening, 8.5 in reading, 6 in speaking, and 6 in writing. That's my results, but I don't think it reflects my real level of English. (S4, C1)

These findings together with the findings from the one-way analysis of the ISQ presented in the previous section (see Section 6.2.2) will be discussed in Chapter 8 (see Section 8.3.2), in order to address RQ2b: What demographic factors might impact the adjustment process?.

6.3.6. Other EAP-related themes arising from the first interview

As mentioned in the introduction, during this first set of interviews students were asked about the **reasons for taking part in the EAP programme** in order to compare those results with the results from the second set of interviews, and address RQ3b: What are the students' impressions of the EAP in-sessional programme?. Subthemes for this category emerged from the inductive coding method used in the second cycle coding process. Table 33 lists these subthemes and their coding frequency adapted from QDA Miner Lite 'Coding Frequency' tool, in order to identify which are the students' reasons for taking the course that are more prevalent in the data.

Table 33. *Coding frequency for 'EAP reasons'.*

Theme	Subthemes	Cases	% Cases
Reasons for taking the EAP in-sessional programme	Improve writing skills	18	75%
	Improve oral fluency	13	54.2%
	Exposure to English language	12	50%
	Improve reading skills	3	12.5%
	Improve critical thinking skills	3	12.5%
	Improve presentation skills	1	4.2%
	Socialise	1	4.2%

As presented in the table above, seven subthemes emerged from the data. The three most prevalent reasons for taking the EAP classes include improving writing skills, oral fluency, and exposure to English language. The two main reasons (i.e., improve writing skills and oral fluency) might have been influenced by the information that the students received from the courses, given that the titles of the two EAP in-sessional courses offered by the university made reference to 'oral fluency' and 'writing skills'. Exposure to English language was the third reason stated by the students. Students consider attending the EAP classes as a way of practising their English language skills and getting exposed to an exemplary academic English:

> […] it exposes me for four additional hours to an English-speaking person, because teachers speak a lot, secondly still I benefit from some… yeah, they correct me, I'm trying to absorb […] (S19)

> I felt the need of having communications, contact with a good level of English, a high level of let's say standard English, because living here I heard all kinds of English Irish accents, and I wanted to meet the standard, because at some point you don't know anymore which is the correct form and which is wrong, hearing over and over again a wrong form. (S7)

In addition, a small number of those interviewed mentioned improving reading and writing skills, critical thinking skills, presentations skills and socialising as their reasons for taking the EAP course.

Other themes that emerged during the first interview included **pre-university preparation** and **students' preferences for the EAP programme**. These themes and their corresponding coding frequency are presented in Table 34:

Table 34. Coding frequency for other themes arising from the interview

Themes	Subthemes	Cases	% Cases
Pre-university preparation	IELTS skills transferability	5	20.8%
	Pre-sessional as beneficial	3	12.5%
Students' preferences for the EAP programme	Individual feedback from the EAP tutor	5	20.8%
	Lesson practicality	4	16.67%

Some participants expressed their views about pre-university preparation. This theme included the perceived lack of transferability between the skills learned for the IELTS test and those needed for university. For example, when asked about academic challenges student 4 said:

> Yeah, for sure, because even though I got 7 in listening in IELTS, in lectures I still don't understand […]. (S4)

Participants' views on the usefulness of taking part in a pre-sessional EAP course were also expressed during the interviews. One participant commented:

> […] and I think this course before starting university, the month before, could help a lot. (S20).

Regarding students' preferences for the EAP programme, the participants highlighted the value of receiving feedback from the EAP tutor on their writing and speaking, as well as the practicality of the lessons. For example, when asked if they take part in other language support activities at university, student 8 said:

> […] then from the EAP class we can have feedback from the EAP teacher, so whenever we have anything written he will give us feedback […] (S8)

As mentioned in the previous chapter (see Section 5.6.2), preliminary analysis of these themes related to the EAP programme informed the design of the NA Questionnaire and the second set of interviews. These themes are, therefore, explored in more detail in the following chapter when presenting findings from Phase II (i.e., Sections 7.2 and 7.3).

6.4.   Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the results obtained from the quantitative and the qualitative components of Phase I. Firstly, findings from the quantitative tool – International Students' Questionnaire – were described. These involved descriptive statistics, a one-way analysis of the questionnaire, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Descriptive statistics were used to respond to RQ1: What are the language-related challenges that NNES students face in Irish universities?, showing that academic challenges were the most commonly reported by students, with writing being the greatest challenge.

The one-way analysis has identified the differences in challenges between groups according to their demographic characteristics, and therefore has allowed the researcher to address RQ2b: What demographic factors might impact the adjustment process?. This analysis indicated that: challenges reported by PhD students are different to those reported by master's and undergraduate students; Engineering, Maths and Science students reported higher difficulty than Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences students; students who had lived in Ireland for over three years generally reported less difficulty dealing with sociocultural challenges; students who had never lived in an English-speaking country before coming to Ireland reported higher level of difficulty; and students with a higher certified level of English generally reported less difficulty.

CFA was used to assess if the measures of a construct (i.e., ISQ items) were consistent with the researcher's understanding of the nature of the latent constructs (i.e., three domains and their corresponding subdomains). Therefore, allowing to address RQ2a: What are the relationships between adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological)?. The CFA showed that the hypothesised model is consistent with the data and also identified correlation between the adjustment domains, particularly between the academic and sociocultural domains. Finally, reliability and validity of the ISQ were calculated, demonstrating good reliability and validity overall.

The second part of this chapter has been devoted to the presentation of results from the qualitative tool used in Phase I of the study – the first set of interviews. As with the quantitative instrument used in this phase (i.e., ISQ), the aim of these interviews was to identify the challenges that NNES international students face in Irish universities, and to explore the relationships between the three adjustment domains (i.e., academic,

sociocultural, and psychological) and the relationship between students' demographic characteristics and the language-related challenges identified. This allowed the researcher to address RQ1: What are the language-related challenges that NNES students face in Irish universities? and RQ2: What relationships might exist between the studied variables (i.e., demographic and adjustment areas)?, as well as to provide a more in-depth explanation of the challenges identified in the quantitative analysis.

In the interview, language-related challenges were reported by the students across the three adjustment domains. The most prominent academic challenges related to language were connected to the students' reading speed, their ability to understand lectures and class discussions, and their ability to write in an academic style. Regarding the sociocultural domain, students reported experiencing challenges predominantly related to social skills, such as making friends who are native English speakers, and making themselves understood; they also reported challenges related to cultural empathy and relatedness, including understanding jokes and humour, and understanding the locals' worldview and language. Although less commonly mentioned than challenges concerning the academic and sociocultural domain, students reported difficulties associated with the psychological domain, including symptoms of stress, such as difficulty to relax and frustration; and feelings of sadness and lack of self-confidence.

Lastly, results from the conceptual mapping showed relationships between the three adjustment domains, particularly between the academic and sociocultural domains. These findings will be compared and discussed in more detail in Chapter 8. The next chapter focuses on Phase II of the study, and will explore the results from its quantitative and qualitative components.

CHAPTER 7: Results From Phase II

7.1. Chapter Introduction

Phase I focused on identifying the challenges that NNES students face at universities on the entire island of Ireland. However, Phase II focuses on specific challenges for students in a particular institution, in order to answer RQ3: Do EAP in-sessional programmes help NNES students overcome the language-related challenges they face in Irish universities? If so, how?. This was done by means of a quantitative method – the NA Questionnaire – and a qualitative method – second set of interviews – directed towards students registered in an EAP in-sessional programme. As in the previous chapter, the two main sections of this chapter revolve around the two methods included in this phase.

7.2. Findings From the Needs Analysis Questionnaire

As mentioned in Chapter 5, results from the qualitative component of Phase I (i.e., the first set of interviews) informed the two research instruments used in Phase II (i.e., the Needs Analysis Questionnaire and the second set of interviews). Consequently, this section has been divided into three themes that emerged from the preliminary data analysis of the first set of interviews: Theme 1: Academic skills for university; Theme 2: Pre-university preparation; and Theme 3: Students' preferences for the EAP programme (see sections 5.6.2.1 and 6.3.6). A total of eight questions were included in the NA Questionnaire. Q1 and Q2 were Likert-type and yes/no type questions respectively, and were analysed using the SPSS Frequencies tool. Contrarily, Q3 to Q8 were formulated in an open-ended fashion, and were analysed using SPSS Modeler Text Analytics tool, which allowed the researcher to identify qualitative themes and code them into quantitative data.

7.2.1. Academic skills for university

The first part of the NA Questionnaire focuses on the students' linguistic needs at university and involved three questions of the NA Questionnaire: Q1. 'In your studies at university, how important are the following skills?'; Q2. 'What skills would you like to improve through the EAP Programme?'; and Q3. 'What skills are emphasised the most during the EAP classes?'

Q1 consisted of 16 Likert-type items adapted from Xu's (1991) academic variables, in which the respondents were asked to rate the skills from 1= Not at all important to 5= Very important. In order to determine which skills are reportedly more important for students, descriptive statistics were calculated using SPSS Statistics. The non-parametric descriptive statistics including median and Inter-Quartile Range were considered as the most appropriate to report the results, given that the data was found to be non-normally distributed (see Section 5.9.2). Table 35 below presents a summary of the results obtained from the SPSS Frequencies output, including median and the Inter-Quartile Range (i.e., 25th percentile and 75th percentile) ranked by descending importance.

Table 35. *Median and Inter-Quartile Range*

Item	Percentiles		
	25	Median	75
Q1.5 Structuring essays/dissertations	4.00	5.00	5.00
Q1.7 Writing in an academic style	4.00	5.00	5.00
Q1.14 Understanding lectures/ class discussions	4.00	5.00	5.00
Q1.1 Reading critically	3.75	5.00	5.00
Q1.4 Reading for specific information	3.75	4.50	5.00
Q1.3 Reading specialised papers	3.75	4.00	5.00
Q1.2 Reading quickly	3.00	4.00	5.00
Q1.6 Summarising/synthesising	3.00	4.00	5.00
Q1.9 Participating in class discussions	3.00	4.00	5.00
Q1.10 Communicating with lecturers	3.00	4.00	5.00
Q1.11 Communicating with classmates	3.00	4.00	5.00
Q1.12 Giving oral presentations	3.00	4.00	4.25
Q1.16 Understanding technical vocabulary	3.00	4.00	5.00
Q1.13 Taking notes in lectures	2.75	4.00	4.00
Q1.8 Taking written exams	1.75	3.50	5.00
Q1.15 Understanding colloquial and idiomatic language	3.00	3.00	4.00

As shown in Table 35, students ranked 'structuring essays/dissertations', 'writing in academic style', 'understanding lectures/class discussions' and 'reading critically' as the most important skills in their studies at university, with a median of 5.00. However,

'understanding colloquial and idiomatic language' and 'taking written exams' were considered as the least important skills. Overall, writing and reading skills are considered as more important than listening and speaking skills, and therefore, are situated at the top of the table.

The second question included in this theme was Q2. 'What skills would you like to improve through the EAP Programme?'. As for Q1, the 16 items of this question were based on the academic skills identified by Xu (1991). Q2 was a yes/no type of question, since the purpose of the question was to identify which skills the students would like to focus on, and therefore, was analysed using SPSS Statistics. Frequencies, including count and percentage were used to rank the skills from most commonly to least commonly reported, and are presented in the table below (see Table 36):

Table 36. *Frequencies summary for Q2*

Item	Frequency	Percent
Q2.7 Writing in an academic style	31	91.2%
Q2.12 Giving oral presentations	26	76.5%
Q2.5 Structuring essays/ dissertations/ theses	25	73.5%
Q2.1 Reading critically	21	61.8%
Q2.2 Reading quickly	18	52.9%
Q2.6 Summarising/synthesising	15	44.1%
Q2.10 Communicating with lecturers	15	44.1%
Q2.13 Taking notes in lectures	15	44.1%
Q2.14 Understanding lectures/ class discussions	15	44.1%
Q2.15 Understanding colloquial and idiomatic language	14	41.2%
Q2.4 Reading for specific information	13	38.2%
Q2.9 Participating in class discussions	13	38.2%
Q2.11 Communicating with classmates	12	35.3%
Q2.8 Taking written exams	11	32.4%
Q2.16 Understanding technical vocabulary	11	32.4%
Q2.3 Reading specialised papers	8	23.5%

The top three skills identified included writing in an academic style (31 responses, accounting for 91.2% of the responses), giving oral presentations (26 responses, 76.5% of the total), and structuring essays/ dissertations/ theses (25 responses, accounting for 73.5%). Conversely, the least frequent skills were reading specialised papers (8 responses, 23.5% of the total), understanding technical vocabulary (11 responses, accounting for 32.4% of the total), and taking written exams (11 responses, 32.4% of the total).

Lastly, the third question included in this theme was Q3. 'What skills are emphasised the most during the EAP classes?'. This question was formulated in an open-ended way, and therefore, analysed with SPSS Modeler using the Text Analytics tool. 43 key concepts (or descriptors) were automatically extracted from the responses by SPSS Text Analytics. Of the 34 documents, four were uncategorised as they were left blank. Key concepts (or descriptors) extracted from the remaining 30 documents were grouped in categories and revised by reviewing the corresponding extract of the document. Results from the SPSS Modeler interactive workbench were summarised and presented in Table 37 below. These include the 'Categories' pane, that displays the number of categorised documents and the number of concepts extracted (i.e., Documents Summary); and the 'Visualisation' pane, that displays the categories count and percentage (i.e., Categories).

Table 37. *Text Analytics summary output for Q3*

Documents Summary		
Categorised documents	30	
Uncategorised documents	4	
Concepts extracted	43	
Categories	*Count*	*Percentage*
Writing	27	90%
Presentations	9	30%
Communication	6	20%
Vocabulary	5	16.67%
Reading	4	13.34%
Other	3	10%

As presented in Table 37, a total of six categories were found. Writing was by far the category most commonly reported, as it was found in responses from 27 (i.e., 90%) students out of the 30 categorised documents; followed by giving presentations, which was

present in nine responses; communication, reported by six students; vocabulary, mentioned by five students; reading, found in four responses; and other. Descriptors for the category 'other' included: taking notes, exam preparation, and knowledge about the functioning of the university.

7.2.2. Pre-university preparation

The second part of the NA Questionnaire concerned preparation for university and included two questions: Q4. 'To what extent has IELTS prepared you for the reality of the university experience?'; and Q5. 'Do you think that taking an EAP course before the start of the course (e.g., during the summer months) would have been more beneficial for your experience at university?' Both questions included in this theme were formulated in an open-ended fashion, and therefore, were analysed using the Text mining tool in SPSS Modeler.

Results for Q4, which explored students' opinion on to what extent does IELTS test prepare students for the university experience, are summarised in the table below:

Table 38. Text Analytics summary output for Q4

Documents Summary		
Categorised documents	17	
Uncategorised documents	17	
Concepts extracted	48	
Categories	*Count*	*Percentage*
Not for university	8	47%
General English	7	41.2%
Reading and writing	6	35.3%
Speaking and listening	3	17.6%

As seen in Table 38 above, 48 concepts were automatically extracted from the 17 categorised documents. The other 17 documents were uncategorised, since three of them were not related to the question asked, and the other 14 were not applicable mostly due to the students not being required to demonstrate their command of English to access university. Key concepts extracted were categorised into four broad categories: not for university, general English, reading and writing, and speaking and listening. Comments regarding the unsuitability of the IELTS examination were found in 8 documents (i.e., 47%).

Students felt that IELTS did not prepare them for the university experience or made them familiar with academic practices. For example, student 11 answered:

> I believe that IELTS does not prepare you for the university generally as they do not emphasise in the academic style. (S11)

In addition, it is seen as a step to access university rather than equipping the students with the necessary skills to enter university. Student 22 answered:

> IELTS taking is just a step of joining university, I did not spend much time preparing for it. (S22)

This is partly linked to the issue highlighted by participants that the English used in IELTS differs from the language used in the academic setting. Seven out of the 17 categorised documents (i.e., 41.2%) mentioned the differences between the language used in IELTS and the language used at university. Students consider that IELTS has provided them with basic general English, not academic language. This is illustrated in the answer of student 27:

> It equips me with basic language ability to study and communicate. I don't think it gives me much knowledge about academic writing or social skills. (S27)

Nevertheless, the reading and writing parts of IELTS were seen as helpful by 6 (i.e., 35.3%) of the respondents. Students reported improvements regarding reading speed, vocabulary, essay writing and grammar. Contrarily, the speaking and listening parts are seen as not helpful by 3 (17.6%) of the respondents, as those do not reflect real language used in the academic setting. For example, student 6 wrote:

> The skills for IELTS listening and speaking do not help me a lot when I study at university. Because the real situation when I have a class or meeting with classmates is totally different with IELTS test. IELTS writing test helps me to reduce grammar mistakes to some extent. (S6)

Students' opinion on the benefits of taking part in a pre-sessional course were explored through Q5. 'Do you think that taking EAP before the start of the course (e.g., during the summer months) would have been more beneficial for your experience at university?'. As with the previously reported open-ended questions, SPSS Text mining results have been summarised in the following table (see Table 39):

Table 39. *Text Analytics summary output for Q5*

Documents Summary		
Categorised documents	33	
Uncategorised documents	1	
Concepts extracted	100	
Categories	*Count*	*Percentage*
Yes	28	84.85%
No	13	39.4%

As shown in Table 39, 100 concepts were automatically extracted from 33 out of the 34 responses, as one response was left blank. Concepts were categorised into two main categories 'Yes' and 'No'. 28 out of the 33 responses (i.e., 84.85%) regarded taking pre-sessional EAP as beneficial for the following reasons: there is more time to focus on EAP, as students do not have other academic responsibilities; and it provides students with the language, academic and university life skills, therefore easing the adjustment process. This is illustrated in the answers from student 20 and student 6:

> Yes, of course. It would spare time during the course for studying, reading and focusing on structuring essays, rather than learning how to do so during the course. (S20)

> Yes, it could be beneficial. Because for most non-native speakers, it could take two or three or even months to adapt to a new language environment. Taking EAP before class can help us to understand what the campus life could be. (S6)

On the other hand, 13 of the 33 responses categorised (i.e., 39.4%) mentioned finding in-sessional EAP more beneficial, as it allows the students to reflect on their own work and improve the quality of their work. For example, S1 responded:

> Not really. I like to be able to have EAP during class to go back and forth from class to EAP and improve in quality. (S1)

As it can be seen from the results, and due to the open-ended nature of the question, some students included both positive and negative elements in their response, therefore some answers were categorised as 'yes' and 'no'.

7.2.3. Students' preferences for the EAP programme

This part of the NA Questionnaire looks at students' preferences and expectations regarding their EAP programme. This includes: Q6. 'What do you expect from an EAP tutor?', Q7. 'What style of class do you think would benefit your learning experience?', and Q8. 'What kind of materials would you prefer to use during your EAP classes?'. These three questions were formulated in an open-ended fashion and were analysed using the SPSS Text Analytics function in SPSS Modeler.

Question 6 concerned students' expectations with regards to EAP tutors. Results from the interactive workbench 'Categories' and 'Visualisation' panes in SPSS Modeler have been summarised in Table 40:

Table 40. *Text Analytics summary output for Q6*

Documents Summary		
Categorised documents	31	
Uncategorised documents	3	
Concepts extracted	82	
Categories	*Count*	*Percentage*
Individual support	17	54.84%
Writing	15	48.39%
Speaking	8	25.8%
Personal qualities	8	25.8%
Reading	3	9.7%

As presented in Table 40, a total of 82 concepts were automatically extracted by the Text Mining node from the 31 categorised responses. Three out of the 34 responses were uncategorised as they were left blank. When asked about the students' expectations regarding EAP teachers, the responses fell into five main categories: individual support, writing, speaking, personal qualities and reading. 17 responses (i.e., 54.84% of the responses) stated that participants expected to receive personal or 'individual support'. Students' expectations included teachers providing personalised feedback, answering their questions, and understanding their individual needs. For example, S7 responded:

> Understanding my problem in academic writing style and give feedback to help me to solve my writing skills (S7)

The second most frequent category was 'writing', with 15 responses (i.e., 48.39%) indicating expecting support with their essay writing. Eight out of the 31 categorised responses (i.e., 25.8%) stated expecting help to improve their 'speaking' skills, including presentations, and speaking like a native speaker. Students also considered teachers' personal qualities in their expectations, with eight responses (i.e., 25.8%) considered expecting a 'kind', 'friendly', 'knowledgeable', 'comprehensive' or 'patient' tutor. This is illustrated in the response from student 3:

> Be comprehensive, and patient and push you to your limits. (S3)

Lastly, 'reading' was mentioned by 3 students (i.e., 9.7%), who expected to receive support regarding critical reading and reading techniques. Student 34 responded:

> I want to learn some technique regarding article reading or concepts criticizing in a well-structured way. (S34)

When running the SPSS Text Mining node for Q7 'What style of class do you think would benefit your learning experience?', 37 concepts were automatically extracted from the 31 categorised documents. The three uncategorised documents correspond to blank answers. A summary of these numbers, and the frequencies for the categories can be seen in the following table:

Table 41. *Text Analytics summary output for Q7*

Documents Summary		
Categorised documents	31	
Uncategorised documents	3	
Concepts extracted	37	
Categories	*Count*	*Percentage*
Workshops	14	45.16%
Hands on	12	38.71%
Student-centred	8	25.8%
Other	5	16.13%
Seminars	4	12.9%

The 37 extracted concepts were categorised manually into five categories: 'workshops', 'hands-on', 'student-centred', 'seminars' and 'other'. As seen in Table 41, 'workshops' was the most common category with 14 responses, accounting for 45.16% of the responses.

This was followed by 'hands-on' activities with 12 responses, accounting for 38.71% of the total. In their preferences, students also mentioned a 'student-centred' style of class with 8 responses (i.e., 25.8%) including the concept. Five out of the 31 responses (i.e., 16.13%) indicated preferring 'informal' classes, mainly when related to conversational and presentation skills. In addition, 'seminars' were considered as the preferred style of class by 4 students, accounting for the 12.9% of the responses. The responses from students 2 and 22 below illustrate these:

> Informal, student centered, workshops. When there is interaction. (S2)
>
> I think the combination of student-centered, hands on, workshops and projects is more beneficial. (S22)

Q8 asked students to state the type of materials that they would prefer to use during the EAP classes. The table below presents a summary of the output:

Table 42. Text Analytics summary output for Q8

Documents Summary		
Categorised documents	34	
Uncategorised documents	0	
Concepts extracted	36	
Categories	*Count*	*Percentage*
Written samples	26	76.47%
Textbooks	13	38.23%
TED Talks	12	35.29%
Other	6	17.65%

In this question, all documents were categorised and a total of 36 concepts were automatically extracted by the SPSS Text Mining node. Four main categories were found: 'written samples', 'textbooks', 'TED talks' and 'other'. 'Written samples' was the most frequent category, with 26 students (i.e., 76.47%) including it in their response. Students prefer using essay samples from previous students, especially if those include comments from lecturers. For example, students 4 and 22 responded:

> Students written samples with detailed tutor comments are very useful. (S4)
>
> Textbooks with exercises and samples would have been good. Students written samples and the evaluation of the work by the examiners, TED talks that are only extreme relevant. (S22)

'Textbooks' and 'TED talks' were also included in the responses with 13 (i.e., 38.23%) and 12 (i.e., 35.29%) students respectively preferring using those in class. Finally, the category 'other' included responses regarding the use of journal articles, other universities EAP course materials, and useful materials.

7.3. Findings From the Second Interview

This section presents the results obtained from the qualitative component of Phase II, that is, the second or follow-up interview conducted at the end of each term. A total of 17 students out of the 24 interviewed during Phase I took part in this second or follow-up interview. The semi-structure interview guide was designed according to the responses provided in the first interview regarding the students' individual challenges (see Section 5.6.2.2). This is due to the fact that the aim of the follow-up interview was that of exploring the aspects that have contributed to the improvement of the challenges experienced by the participants, as well as their views on the EAP in-sessional programme, in order to assess their perspectives on the improvement or not of those challenges after participating during a semester in the EAP programme. In contrast with the two-cycle approach used in the first set of interviews, the analysis of the second set of interviews involved a single coding process, based on an inductive approach that allowed the identification of emergent codes in order to respond to RQ3: Do EAP in-sessional programmes help NNES students overcome the language-related challenges they face in Irish universities? If so, how? (see Section 5.9.3). This section is then divided into two main subsections – the first subsection explores the aspects that contribute to NNES students' adjustment; and the second focuses on the students' views on the EAP in-sessional programme.

7.3.1. Aspects that contribute to NNES students' adaptation

One key element of this research project was to identify the aspects that contribute to the students' adaptation in the three adjustment domains addressed (i.e., academic adjustment, sociocultural adjustment, and psychological adjustment). The three following subsections explore the aspects that contribute to each domain, therefore, providing an answer to RQ3a: What aspects of EAP in-sessional programmes may contribute to students' adaptation?.

7.3.1.1 Aspects that Contribute to Academic Adaptation

Seven themes were identified in the responses of the EAP students interviewed which related to the aspects that contributed to their academic adaptation. These are listed in Table 34 below and explained in the subsequent paragraphs.

Table 43. Themes and frequencies of aspects that contribute to academic adaptation

Themes	Cases	% Cases
Practice and familiarity with academic skills	14	82.4%
Understanding academic writing practices	11	64.7%
Preparation for lectures	4	23.5%
Developing reading techniques	4	23.5%
Having friends or partners who are native English speakers	3	17.6%
Receiving feedback from the EAP tutor	2	11.8%
Communicating difficulties	4	23.5%

Students considered **practice and familiarity with academic skills** as a factor contributing to the overcoming of academic challenges, including challenges related to reading, writing, speaking and listening. Reading both academic and non-academic materials was seen as beneficial for acquiring vocabulary both technical and general, and improving reading speed. For example, S14 said:

> Yes, well, right now I feel it's better, because I'm familiar with those terminologies, but if were syntax, when I'm in contact with a really complicated terminology I feel it still consumes me a lot of time to understand it, because my foundation of linguistics is not that solid, but as for those maybe not easier terminology it might be better, and I admit that my reading speed is faster than before. (S14)

> [...] I mainly focused on reading academic like journals and things which can be quite hard to understand and easy to get lost, so now because I'm reading a lot of news and academic article but not that hard to understand, which I found really relevant to my own experience like Chinese background and also Irish lives, so that helped me a lot to improve my vocabulary and everything you know get that feeling of the written academic language, so when I look back at all those academic materials, for example I needed to know references and different articles it would be much easier for me to read and digest now. (S1)

Reading practice was also considered as having a positive effect on speaking and writing, which was mainly linked to the fact that it expands students' vocabulary and syntax, and it serves as a model of correct use of English:

> I read a lot during this one month break, I 've been reading every day in English, and when I came back to school I realized that it's much easier for me to start talking, maybe because my

mind adjusted to think in English, and because of that I was able to communicate in English. (S18)

[…] and again, I think reading is very helpful because it's expand your vocabulary and then it's much easier for you to express your thoughts and feelings, so reading is maybe the key. (S18)

I suppose looking at the literature and reading the articles and matching what are the expectations and what are actually in the articles, and seeing the samples of the article structures your mind towards academic writing. Reading, reading and reading helps and establishing what is in the area of your module, for example professors would suggest the region and that would contribute as well. (S16)

Developing reading techniques such as skimming and scanning was also reported by students as a way to read quicker and in a more efficient way, and therefore, helping them overcome the challenge of dealing with the reading workload:

So now I feel that I am much better at it, I know that I don't need to understand every word, I don't need to translate the text, but just the general meaning. (S20)

[…] it's not hard for me anymore and I can skim and scan very quickly and could the most important thing is I could get the main point from maybe one paragraph or one article. (S14)

Students also reported that **practice and familiarity with writing skills** helped them overcome the writing challenges. This improvement is commonly reported to occur after submitting their assignments and receiving feedback from their lecturers:

I think I kind of improved, because the last term was the first time that I wrote those academic essays and I had no idea what the professor wants, and after I received feedback from professors, I have an idea what kind of essays they want, and also, what my essay is in their eyes, so I think I can do a better job this term. (S6)

Students also found beneficial **receiving feedback from the EAP tutor** to overcome challenges related to the productive skills of speaking and writing, as it helps them identify the areas they need to improve:

I think it's a progressive thing, slowly and getting more confidence on that, because the feedback, particularly when I give my assignment to the EAP teacher and I said give me feedback and I would literally give him a list of question that I want to ask, and he would give me back the feedback and answer support to most of my questions I want to know, so it definitely gave me clarity, and what I need to improve on and what I want to know as well. (S15)

[…]so the EAP just give me the structure of how can I improve my practice, and also give me some hints, some really good advice to improve my written skills. (S9)

Another factor that reportedly contributed to the students' overcoming of writing challenges is **understanding academic writing practices** as a result of attending the EAP in-sessional programme. These include structuring texts, using an academic register, writing

critically, and writing techniques such as avoiding plagiarism by summarising and paraphrasing. For example, S16 said:

> Yeah, it just shows the structure. What needs to go into the content. I suppose on the bigger picture is a scope of academic writing, and what goes into that scope, its structure, it's a vocabulary, it's its paragraph, and it's all of those techniques and methods that have to be applied for academic writing, so it develops your understanding and I suppose that contributes to measure performance. (S16)

Practice and familiarisation also played an important role in the overcoming of speaking difficulties. Students reported improving their speaking skills as an outcome of practising speaking inside and outside the classroom setting, as well as practising giving oral presentations:

> Last term I had difficulties to communicate with in anyone in any occasion, and now I see that there is some progress after this class (EAP in-sessional) from last term, because I've been doing several presentations on my own […] (S18)

This improvement is commonly linked to the advantage of **having friends or partners who are native English speakers** who they can practice their speaking and listening skills with:

> Actually my personal life changed since the previous interview, because meanwhile I became very close to an Irish native man, he's my partner now he's my boyfriend and having regular meetings and hearing him speaking, I took many words from his language so, and usually he doesn't use academic words, in spite of coming from an academic background, and he doesn't need an English academic level you know because he comes from science area so in its numbers, mathematics more than language. (S7)

Improvement in listening skills has also been attributed to practice and familiarisation. Students report getting used to the accent and speed of classmates and lecturers, which helped them overcome challenges related to understanding lectures and class discussions, and taking notes in class:

> I think that that is really hard to avoid because for example this term we have different, new lecturers and one… like the first class I was there I couldn't understand him very well because he was speaking very fast, and also, cause he's not from Dublin, he's from somewhere else, from the west, so they have different accents, so it took me a while to get used to his accents and actually I wrote to him like a an email and asked him could you slow down a little bit, so do not speak that fast just because it wasn't only my problem, because some other international students found him hard to understand too, and then he said he would .. and actually he announced something like that, I would try to slow down my speed in the class. I think that's another thing, it takes time, so after a few months, let's say half a year, it would be much easier for me to understand people here now, and also talking to classmates, you know, from here , they also speak fast with strong accents but like for now I want it's not an issue for me anymore. (S1)

As seen in the extract from S1 above, **communicating difficulties** understanding speech is a factor that contributes to the overcoming of listening skills in the academic setting. Students reported asking lecturers and classmates for help and making them aware of their difficulties as beneficial, as they tend to adapt to their audience as a result.

Lastly, **preparation for lectures** was also stated as a factor that contributes to overcoming speaking and listening challenges faced by the students. Reading the materials and presentations before class helps the students understand the class content and participate in class discussions:

> Yes, I cannot say this problem has been totally solved, but one strategy is to preview the content before the classes and it would help me to understand their points easier, and it does help, but the problem is sometimes if you are so busy and you don't have to do that, and another point is your teacher will not upload the PowerPoint but if I do not preview the points before it might be still hard to understand, because you don't know what they're talking about. (S14)

> Yes, before the lecture I would read the material that I need to, and also if the professor already uploaded the power point, I would read it before. (S6)

It is worth noting that generally students report an improvement in the academic domain after a period of three to six months. The following section moves to explore the aspects that contribute to the second area of adjustment investigated in this research project, that is, students' sociocultural adjustment.

7.3.1.2 Aspects that Contribute to Sociocultural Adaptation

Aspects contributing to students' sociocultural adaptation extracted from the interview data can be summarised in six themes. These are presented in Table 44 below and described in the following paragraphs.

Table 44. *Themes and frequencies of aspects that contribute to sociocultural adaptation*

Themes	Cases	% Cases
Participating in social activities	6	35.3%
Being exposed to English language	5	29.4%
Expressing difficulties understanding	4	23.5%
Group work arrangements	4	23.5%
Familiarisation with academic practices	3	17.6%
Using humour	2	11.8%

Participating in social activities was considered by students as improving their social skills, as it helped them make friends who are native English speakers, which in turn, helped them get used to a variety of accents and understand the locals' worldview. For example, this is reflected in the extract from the interview with S10:

> I think that's getting better. I've started to know some local friends, and I like to attend all of these different parties with different people. I think it's a different experience if you

communicate with people with different accents, it can tell you something more and it is not something you can't discover on the campus. That can enrich my life, so I like this difference, and sometimes I like to learn some of the accents and this is got to do with the language identity from the sociolinguistic aspect, you try to be more engaged and get closer to the local people. (S10)

Another example of the advantages of taking part in social activities was the students' engagement in societies and the Chaplaincy. Students regard as beneficial for meeting domestic students their participation in societies, especially at the beginning of their sojourn. Talking about this issue, S9 said:

[…] I started to maybe socialize with locals more. It's hard to say with the societies and with the Chaplaincy, also I'm quite involved in the Chaplaincy, so maybe from the fifth sixth week, and after the reading week also just before the weekend before the reading week I was in a retreat with the chaplaincy, and so it was a good ambience. We moved to the south of Ireland, and we had really good fun, so and I met more people but it was also internationals, some American, Australian, and Irish people. (S9)

As presented in the extract below from the interview with S3, it is important to note that the tendency to socialise with conationals or other international students still persists:

I dropped two of the societies, because I didn't find them really entertaining. […] It's actually interesting that I have met another girl, she's Ukrainian, she speaks the same language as me, so now I have one person that it's much easier to talk about something in your native language and she goes to a lot of societies like shooting, hiking, riding…and she's always texting me like: do you want to go there? do you want to take ballet lessons? do you want to do this and that? and they're like nope thank you, I just feel like I don't have motivation to do it anymore, because why would I go there? what is there for me? and then it doesn't make any sense anymore so, yeah. No more societies. (S3)

In addition, when asked about sociocultural challenges, students who reported socialising with native English speakers or locals tended to consider that they had overcome the challenges they had faced relating to cultural empathy and relatedness. For example, S14 commented:

Yes, right now it's okay, because I have several native friends and they are also very friendly, and one of my Irish friends even invited some of the classmates to her home for celebrate Christmas holiday […] (S14)

Therefore, **being exposed to English language,** both inside and outside the classroom setting was also considered as a factor that contributed to the overcoming of sociocultural challenges, mainly in relation to dealing with basic needs and social skills. For example, S2 considered that attending the EAP class improved their ability to make themselves understood:

Yes, because although we had to focus on academic writing either you want it or not we were speaking, so it was like one and a half hours speaking with each other, and supporting our arguments, supporting our thesis with argumentation and maintenance, so yeah either you

want it or not, at that time you are exposed, and anytime you are exposed you need to support your position. (S2)

Language exposure through a part-time job was also found to contribute to the different areas of students' sociocultural adaptation, S11 said:

> For me I think a part-time job. I mean maybe local person shop it's a way to adapt yourself to communicate with others, and this is a method. (S11)

Students also made reference to the benefits of **expressing difficulties understanding** conversations as helping them overcome sociocultural challenges related to social skills, such as interacting in social activities; or to cultural empathy and relatedness, such as understanding jokes or humour:

> I always ask them if I don't get their accent or if I don't get the joke. I always ask them. I'm not embarrassed anymore and maybe that's because we have become, I think, friends. This is how I feel, so I have this kind of comfort to do so, but I don't remain silent anymore. (S2)

Using humour was also seen as a factor that helped them overcome sociocultural challenges. Students reported using humour as helping them changing their manner of speaking to suit social norms and making themselves understood inside and outside the academic setting:

> I think that humour is a nice way to pass your message through in whatever language you speak, so yes, now is better even in class. (S2)

The difficulty working effectively with other students was reportedly ameliorated by group work practice. Some lecturers strategically used **group work arrangements** to combine native English speakers and NNES students in the same group:

> For the other one, the teacher divided the groups himself, so I guess he divided the groups according to the nationalities, so in every group you can find a native speaker and non-native speaker. I think that's good. One of the presentations will be graded, and students need to find their group members, and they prefer native speakers, because that would help their grade. (S5)

Students regard the EAP programme as helpful to overcome the challenges of understanding academic regulations at university and coping with the academic workload. This included **familiarisation with academic practices** such as criticality and academic writing practices. For example, S1 said:

> Yeah, I think the most important thing for Chinese students because we're not used to you know academic language or use critical thinking way it's actually the idea of the whole academic setting so the EAP tutor did help me a lot like you know getting used to these concepts and to differentiate between the different settings like the register as well, and also about the vocabulary and also the way how you are going to approach it and also the basic structure and things so yeah it's more like a skeleton, now what I need to do is just to feel in my original thoughts and my point of view and things like these so it's much easier. (S1)

7.3.1.3 Aspects that Contribute to Psychological Adaptation

The third and final adjustment domain analysed in this research focuses on the language-related psychological factors that affect adaptation. A total of four themes emerged regarding aspects that contribute to the students' psychological adjustment. These are listed in Table 45 below and described subsequently.

Table 45. Themes and frequencies of aspects that contribute to psychological adaptation

Themes	Cases	% Cases
Familiarity with classmates	7	41.2%
Familiarity with academic practices	3	17.6%
Having an action plan	2	11.8%
Familiarity with lecturers/supervisors	2	11.8%

Familiarity with classmates was the factor most commonly reported by students. This includes with classmates during lectures and other activities in their course of study, and in the EAP classes. Students reported feeling more confident, more relaxed and less anxious when they interact with classmates that they are familiar with. For example, S5 said:

> If the group members are people who I am familiar with, I would not, but if I'm not familiar with, I would. When I am nervous, I cannot organise my words and I get stuck, and my brain goes blank. (S5)

This is also related to the classmates' first language, since students report feeling more confident and at ease if they are among other NNES students, as it is the case in the EAP classes:

> The first term we were three French and one from Arabia, and now I'm the only French and they are from every countries from the world, from the south of America, from Europe mostly, and it's really nice because we can talk with each other, all people are really kind, friendly, so we could be more confident to speak and not be so shy, so I can speak even if I make some mistakes, I'm not so shy when I speak, because I know that people are really kind, and they really listen to me. (S9)

In the same way, **familiarity with lecturers and/or supervisors** was also reported as a factor that impacts on the students' psychological adaptation:

> I won't see less stressed and nervous, the only way I can think of is to know them better, so one of the ways I'm thinking of is to sit in for one of the modules that's both of them are teaching, so I'm just off from a lecture by one of the supervisors, I'm approaching that, and I think we're getting along well I stopped to know the styles the way he's working and I started reading some of the articles that he's written, so I definitely think that can be helpful yeah and I feel less stressed about just seeing them every week, sometimes I even kind of looking forward to that because we have some smaller discussions before each lecture and then at least we have something to say about it. (S10)

Another factor contributing to the students' psychological adaptation is the **familiarity with academic practices**. Students report feeling more confident and less anxious after having the experience and knowledge about academic practices, mainly related to assessment involving writing and speaking skills. For example, S16 said:

> Yeah it's great, it's kind of it gets better after we've done the essays, so you know more about it and you kind of start established in the scope for its academic writing about and it just helps through practice, but it was a lot a lot of anxiety, and still is until we hear back from our supervisors about the assignments, and say that we submitted, so I think anxiety is a big factor that prevents probably some students to reach their potential, starting from the starting point, so because we come here and we are facing this unknown academic writing, so what it is all about, and it takes time for us to establish what it is, while we could have contributed to the content of our I suppose progression to the content of our writing to the content of our research. (S16)

Students also mentioned that taking a pre-sessional EAP course would have helped them acquire this familiarity in advance, and therefore, the psychological impact aspects such as frustration, anxiety and confidence would have been avoided beforehand:

> I just find if there was a course before this course, just to learn all the principles and approaches to academic writing, it would have helped me and reduce my anxiety and I suppose it will contribute to my performance in the course. (S16)

Lastly, **having an action plan** was reported as contributing to the students' psychological adaptation. Students consider that having a clear plan of action regarding their work helps them to reduce previous feelings of anxiety, stress and sadness. For example, S2 said:

> […] when it comes to my dissertation because I get anxious I don't know where to focus also this is my problem, but I think it's better now because I have clarified what I'm going to do and maybe it's better now that I have already submitted my research proposal, so I know what's going on so it's like yourself is helping you going through this research process. (S2)

It is worth noting that, as in results from Phase I, results related to the psychological domain are less frequent. This is partly linked to the fact that from the small number of students referring to the psychological domain during the interviews, only a few mention aspects that might have helped them overcome the psychological aspects, while others still consider experiencing those challenges even more frequently than during the first interview. For example, student 5 commented:

> […] We don't have a real vacation, and we had lectures these semesters and a lot of reading, it's stressful. I feel more stressed than last term. (S5)

7.3.2. Students' impressions of the EAP in-sessional programme

The second issue explored during the second round of interviews is the students' views on the EAP in-sessional programme, to respond to RQ3b: What are the students' impressions of the EAP in-sessional programme?. This includes results on what the students liked about the programme, which are examined in the following subsection; as well as what the students would like to improve about the programme, which are considered in the second half of this section. In addition, these results complement the results examined in the previous section (see Section 7.3.1), by providing a deeper understanding of the underpinning of the EAP in-sessional programme aspects that contribute to students' adaptation.

7.3.2.1 Aspects of the EAP In-sessional Programme that Students Liked

A total of nine themes emerged from the analysis of the students' responses related to their views on the EAP in-sessional programme. Those are listed in Table 46 below:

Table 46. Themes and frequencies of aspects of the EAP programme that students liked

Themes	Cases	% Cases
Classroom environment	9	52.9%
Type of activities	8	47.1%
Class materials	7	41.2%
Receiving feedback from EAP tutors	7	41.2%
EAP tutors' approach	6	35.3%
Making friends	6	35.3%
Language exposure	5	29.4%
Reduced groups	2	11.8%

Classroom environment was the most recurrent theme among the interviews. Students report enjoying the class atmosphere, as they feel relaxed and more confident. This is mainly linked to the fact that all the students taking part in the programme are NNES, and they all experience similar difficulties:

> I mean something new, I just reconfirmed everything that I knew there, but just being there with those people who struggling with the same problem as I do made me more confident. (S18)

Students find the EAP classes as useful for **making friends**. This is also related to the fact that they all are international students. For example, S6 said:

> Yes, because it is a very good place to make friends, because you all have the same difficulties as international students, so I think it's easier to make friends compared to your classmates. (S6)

Another aspect of the EAP classes that students liked is the **class materials**. They find the materials useful and relevant, especially those regarding academic writing such as academic phrasebanks and previous students' sample essays:

> The teacher gave us some previous very good students assignments for us to have a look, and it helped me a lot, because I could clearly what the structure is and that is the thing that really helped me a lot, because after having looking at that, I had some idea about the structure, and how to write those things. (S6)

> I think some of the material that the EAP teacher gave me help me as well, some the academic word phrase, those help, because I'm using some of them as well in my academic writing now. (S15)

Receiving feedback from the EAP tutors was also mentioned in the interviews as a positive aspect. The students value receiving feedback of their speaking and writing skills before being evaluated by their lecturers:

> Yes, definitely! Not only in the speaking, but also the grammar, we did some activities and I had the opportunity to share my first philosophy essay with the teacher and they corrected, and gave me some comments about it. That was helpful as well. (S18)

The students also allude to the fact that in the EAP class the tutor corrects their speaking mistakes, which it is not common in other settings, including academic and non-academic, as some people might consider it impolite:

> They sent a journal with something that we read and we discuss because writing is very different from speaking, even we were saying that people will not correct you if you speak wrongly even grammar anything and that's something we said we would like to work on it, so the EAP teacher said we pick a topic and we discussed and then we can correct the grammar or maybe even a syllable sounding of the word. (S15)

The **EAP tutors' approach** was also considered as a positive aspect of the programme. Students regard EAP tutors as approachable and helpful. This is also related to the fact that tutors provide support to the students outside of their working hours and provide individual feedback:

> I just want to add also to the EAP that the teachers have been fantastic because they are stepping out of the EAP hours, and if you have any questions they would accommodate and they would assist and provide the materials and resources so it's on the personal level, I think we are very lucky having people who are also very dedicated to the students, and I suppose they understand students on the personal level because they've been to do that in that position, maybe just you know just type of people that they want to help others. (S16)

The second most frequently reported theme was the **type of activities** used in the EAP class. Students like the diversity, relevance and practicality of the activities, especially

writing activities and group discussions that allow them to put their skills into practice. For example, S3 said:

> […] the teacher sets the deadline for something and then because it's all related to your work, even if you have to prepare an article, or paraphrase something, or make a presentation, it is still related to your course, so you kind of prepare your task beforehand. (S3)

In addition, related to the lessons practicality, students reported enjoying the **language exposure** during the two hours of class, as well as the advantages of having **reduced groups**, in which they can practice and receive individual feedback.

6.5.2.2 Aspects of the EAP In-sessional Programme that could be Improved

Students interviewed indicated a series of aspects of the EAP in-sessional programme that would like to change in order to improve the programme. Table 47 presents the list of themes that were found related to the improvement of the programme:

Table 47. *Themes and frequencies of aspects of the EAP programme that could be improved*

Themes	Cases	% Cases
More practical and more frequent feedback	5	29.4%
Class timetable	5	29.4%
Also offered to native English speakers	4	23.5%
Activities more academic	4	23.5%
Divided into different levels	4	23.5%
More advertisement	3	17.6%
Divided by discipline or field of study	2	11.8%

Although in the previous section some students considered the EAP classes beneficial due to the practicality of the activities and the feedback provided, other students alluded to the fact that they would like the lessons to be **more practical and receive more frequent feedback**. The students mentioned that during the lessons they learnt the theory, but they did not have enough time to put those into practice, and they would also like to receive more frequent feedback:

> I think that if the programme could involve more feedback from the tutor or maybe another more professional lecturer you know that would be much more better because we got, we were exposed to the different sections and the strategies and how to use it but we didn't really get that much time to practice and then afterwards we only get like one to one feedback like from the EAP tutor so she always emails us with the changes and her comments on the writing but it's better to talk face to face. (S1)

Students also mentioned that they would like some of the activities to be **more academic**. They make reference to activities in the writing class that they considered to be more related to general English, such as fill in the blank activities; as well as non-academic topics covered during the Oral Fluency sessions. For example, S21 said:

> Friday, well… it was oral fluency and sometimes it was very… I don't know, we talk about our life, it was very non-academic, I don't know sometimes I feel that I don't want to talk about my life, it's too personal…(S21)

Class timetable was also considered as an aspect to improve the EAP in-sessional programme. Students reporting dropping the class or not being able to join during the second semester as the classes clashed with their timetables or were taking place too late in the evening:

> […] the main reason for giving up these classes was the time, the timetable of the classes. They were very late actually, and I simply couldn't stay awake physically and mentally focusing on those classes, so I gave up unfortunately. (S7)

Some students mentioned that the classes should be **divided into different levels**, since they considered the level too low, and they could also witness how other students were experiencing difficulties with the level of the class:

> Maybe I would ask when you sign up for the EAP classes, I would ask the students for their English level and put them in one group, because I just feel like I wish there would have been more input, it was too easy for me, but at the same time some of my other classmates didn't understand what was happening. It is hard to pre-select that, but it would have been better maybe to put people more advanced in one class, and the ones that were new and have never studied in an English country before in another class. (S20)

However, other students alluded to the fact that this classes should be **also offered to native English speakers**, considering that academic English and the academic practices of the institution are independent of their previous knowledge as a native speaker:

> I think that for native speakers they should take some lessons like these as well because as far as I know they are not allowed to take it because they are native speakers, but I mean academic language is totally another language is not you know even for native speakers it's not their language either and I've heard so many Irish people saying <oh really? that's nice! and I wish I could take it> […] (S1)

Students also considered that the classes mix people from very different disciplines, and would like the classes to be **divided by discipline or field of study**:

> […]sometimes is like a mingle of different disciplines, somebody studies sciences, and somebody studies literature linguistic and actually there are differences between all these different domains, so maybe if they could divide the class into more specific domains that would be better. (S1)

Lastly, a couple of students mentioned the fact that there should be **more advertisement** for the programme, since they suggested that the classes were not known by many students. For example, S10 proposed some ways to give more visibility to the programme:

It's definitely worth it, but it's a shame that many students from another department don't actually have much information about EAP class. Sometimes it's their first time to hear about it before I actually mentioned it, so maybe we could have a Facebook page about the EAP class, people just pay attention to posters on campus, we can do some activities. The Long Hub would definitely make it famous. (S10)

7.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter was divided into two main sections, corresponding to the two research instruments used during Phase II of the study. The first section has presented the results obtained from the quantitative tool used in Phase II (i.e., NA Questionnaire). These were analysed according to the three themes identified in the first interview, which not only allowed the researcher to gather additional quantitative data to further explore the findings from the first interview, but also to explore students' preferences of the EAP programme, and the aspects that may contribute to the students' adjustment. In this way, responding to RQ3: Do EAP in-sessional programmes help NNES students overcome the language-related challenges they face in Irish universities? If so, how?.

The first part of the NA Questionnaire focused on the students' preferences for the EAP programme and showed that: students considered writing and reading skills as more important than listening and speaking skills, that students would like to improve academic writing skills and oral presentation skills, and that writing was the skill that was emphasised the most during the EAP classes. The second part concerned preparation for university. When analysing this part, it was found that: students felt that IELTS did not prepare for the university experience or equipped them with the necessary academic English skills to enter university, and the majority of participants regarded taking part in pre-sessional EAP courses as beneficial. Lastly, the third part of the questionnaire explored the students' preferences for the EAP programme. Results from this part indicated that students expected receiving individual support from the EAP tutor, that they preferred a hands-on and student-centred style of class, and that their preferred type of materials during the EAP classes were previous students' written samples.

In the second section, the results obtained from the follow-up or second interview have been addressed. These explored the aspects that contribute to the adaptation of NNES students in relation with the challenges found during the first interview, and provides a qualitative insight to the NA Questionnaire conducted during this second phase of the research. The most prominent issues included understanding and familiarisation with

academic practices and skills, exposure to English language, and EAP tutors and peer-support. Again, the interconnection between the academic, sociocultural and psychological domains emerged, with aspects such as familiarisation with academic practices being present in all three. These findings will be compared with the results of the first set of interviews presented in the previous chapter (see Section 6.3) and will be discussed further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8: Discussion

8.1. Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, quantitative and qualitative results from the two research phases are compared and discussed in relation to the research questions. Section 8.2 explores the language related challenges that NNES face in Irish universities in order to address RQ1: What are the language-related challenges that NNES students face in Irish universities?. Section 8.3 focuses on the relationships between variables, exploring RQ2: What relationships may exist between the studied variables (i.e., demographic and adjustment domains)?. Section 8.4 considers the possible impact of an EAP in-sessional programme on adjustment, addressing RQ3: Do EAP in-sessional programmes help NNES students overcome the language-related challenges they face in Irish universities? If so, how?. These are summarised in Section 8.5, providing an overview of the discussion in relation to the research questions.

8.2. Language-Related Challenges Faced by NNES in Irish Universities

The first research question of the study sought to determine the challenges that NNES face in Irish universities. This was explored by means of the International Students' Questionnaire (ISQ) and the first set of interviews conducted during Phase I (see Section 5.6). In the following sections key findings from the ISQ and the first interview are compared and discussed in order to respond to RQ1: What are the language-related challenges that NNES students face in Irish universities?. These are divided into the three adjustment domains considered in this study– academic, sociocultural and psychological.

8.2.1. Academic challenges

This subsection addresses the academic challenges relating to language that NNES students face at Irish universities, and therefore, addresses research question 1a: 'What are the language-related academic challenges?'. What follows is a comparison and discussion of results from the ISQ and the first interview in relation to the four academic challenge areas: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Regarding reading, findings from the ISQ showed that *reading specialised papers[17]* and *reading quickly* are academic areas in which students experience most difficulty. These results are similar to the findings from the first interview, in which *reading quickly* and *reading specialised texts* were the issues most frequently reported. Difficulties regarding *reading critically* and *reading for specific information* were also evident from both the ISQ and first interview. From the interview findings, it appears that the reasons for these challenges were strongly linked to: a) the difficulty students experienced managing their reading workload; and b) the differences in academic conventions.

With regard to dealing with their reading workload, students attributed their difficulties to the substantial amount of reading required, and often considered themselves to be 'slow readers'. These results support the findings of previous studies. As mentioned in Section 3.3.1, the difficulty of coping with the reading workload has been identified in studies including Hirano (2015) and Wang and Hannes (2013), and the self-concept of the student as a 'slow reader' has also been identified by Lin and Yi (1997). These studies associated the difficulty of reading quickly with students' need to read a text multiple times and their unfamiliarity with academic and discipline-specific terminology. This aligns with the findings from this study regarding students' difficulties understanding specialised vocabulary. However, findings from this study have identified the difficulty in understanding not only academic, but also general vocabulary as affecting their academic reading skills, which may indicate challenges in relation to general English proficiency in some cases. Another finding emerging from the results of the first interview is the students' reliance on rather ineffective reading strategies such as the students' tendency to use a dictionary to translate every word. This, together with the problems they reported *reading for specific information*, highlighted the students' need to develop reading strategies in order to overcome academic reading difficulties.

In addition, during the first interview the participants associated the difficulty students faced in relation to *reading quickly* with the differences among education systems, not only regarding the amount of reading workload, but also the difficulty applying critical skills when reading, or *reading critically*. The issue of coping with the reading workload as a result

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[17] In this chapter, italicised words refer to ISQ items and/or questionnaire themes.

of the differences between the amount of reading required at the host university and the students' home university had previously been considered by scholars such as Novera (2004). However, the issue of criticality has been widely associated with academic writing challenges rather than reading (see for example Ravichandran et al., 2017). Therefore, equipping the students with the necessary academic reading skills and knowledge about host university practices such as criticality prior to starting their university degree could be suggested as coping strategies.

8.2.1.2 Challenges Related to Academic Writing Skills

In terms of difficulties relating to academic writing skills, both the ISQ and the first interview participants identified *writing in an academic style* and *structuring essays or dissertations* as the most prominent challenges. Findings from the interview suggest that the differences between academic and general English may be one of the reasons why students find writing in an academic style challenging. This might be a result of students encountering academic writing in English for the first time, and the influence of previous English language education and language entry requirements being built around general English, despite the claims of international examinations to test academic English. This is in line with Sawir's (2005) concept of prior language experience having an impact on coping with the host university academic requirements.

Moreover, students who took part in the interview reported that they experienced difficulties when structuring academic texts, largely due to the use of translation and the application of academic conventions associated with their home culture. These results reflect those of Novera (2004), who also found that the students' difficulties structuring academic texts were due to both the use of direct translation and the application of academic conventions associated with the students' home culture.

The students' lack of vocabulary and difficulties with precision and clarity identified during the interviews resulted in challenges related to the students' *use of language*. This was also found to be related to difficulties understanding academic practices of the host university, including criticality and plagiarism. Scholars such as Harris and Ní Chonaill (2016), Holmes (2004), Mehar Singh (2016), Phakiti and Li (2011) and Braxley (2005) attribute the difficulties understanding plagiarism and referencing, as well as expressing their own voice

to the differences in orientation towards intellectual property in the students' home country.

When comparing the mean of reported challenges in the ISQ for the four subdomains (i.e., reading, writing, speaking, and listening), the results showed that students experience greater difficulty in writing. These results are consistent with those found in previous research on the academic challenges faced by IS, which identify academic writing as their major concern (see Eujeong, 2016; Evans & Morrison, 2011; Wu, 2011). This might be also related to the fact that assessment at university relies heavily on written assignments, and therefore students need to use their writing skills in order to prove their knowledge.

8.2.1.3 Challenges Related to Academic Listening Skills

Difficulties related to listening skills identified in the interview findings correspond to those included in the ISQ (i.e., *taking notes in lectures, understanding lectures and class discussions, understanding the accent and/or pronunciation, understanding colloquial and/or idiomatic language, and understanding technical vocabulary*), apart from *understanding the accent and/or pronunciation*. In the interview, this challenge was found to relate to difficulties *understanding due to accent and/or rate of speech* rather than to accent and/or pronunciation, as students did not make reference to difficulties related to pronunciation during the interviews, but the rate of speech of their lecturers.

Difficulties relating to *understanding lectures or class discussions* were the most widely reported listening challenges in the interviews. These results concur with those from previous studies, in which students position understanding lectures as the foremost challenge (Kuo, 2011; Medved et al., 2013; Wang & Hannes, 2013). During the interviews, students attributed their difficulty in understanding lectures to the accent and rate of speech of the lecturers, which is consistent with the findings of Kuo, (2011), Medved et al. (2013), and Wang & Hannes (2013).

This difficulty understanding lectures and class discussions was also associated in the interviews to the students' previous English learning experience, as they made reference to their familiarity with 'standard Englishes' and the IELTS exam. This, again, raises the issue mentioned in the previous section when discussing writing challenges, of the negative

impact of previous English language education and language entry requirements being built around general English.

Another aspect found in the interview data in relation to understanding lectures concerned the difficulty students experienced when taking notes. Participants attributed this difficulty regarding taking notes to the extra effort they had to make in order to listen to the lecture, as well as the challenge of listening to the lecture and take notes at the same time. This might reflect both the students' lack of note taking skills, and lecturers' lack of adaptation to their international audience. Moreover, in the interview students associated the difficulty regarding taking notes with the use of colloquialisms and informal language, which suggests that lecturers are not adapting to their audience. This was previously identified in the studies of Holmes (2004) and Sandekian et al. (2015), who highlighted the use of idiomatic styles, humour and culture-specific references among the reasons for students' difficulties in relation to understanding lectures.

In the same way, students reported difficulty in relation to understanding classmates due to their accent, rate of speech and use of colloquial language. This might indicate a lack of awareness and adaptation from the host students, highlighting the importance of the role of host students on internationalisation at home practices. In addition, as identified by Scandrett (2011), these difficulties were found to have a negative impact on the students' participation in class discussions and group work.

8.2.1.4 Challenges Related to Academic Speaking Skills

Regarding speaking challenges, when comparing findings from the ISQ and the first interview, difficulties were found related to the same areas (i.e., *participating in class discussions*, *giving oral presentations, communicating with lecturers,* and *communicating with classmates)*. However, the analysis of the interview data showed that students reported experiencing difficulties communicating with classmates and lecturers concurrently, therefore those difficulties were regarded as one.

Findings from the interviews showed that students who expressed difficulty in participating in class discussions often felt that they had no chance to participate in class, since other classmates who had a better level of English or are native speakers responded before them. This again raises the possible issue of host students not being aware of the challenges that

their international peers face. This is also linked to the students' concerns about not being able to express themselves more precisely, clearly or spontaneously during class discussions and oral presentations, and their concerns about making grammatical mistakes. These often lead to the students taking a passive role in class, adopting the role of the 'passive student'. As pointed out in the literature, this passive role may be interpreted by lecturers and classmates as a lack of discussion skills, lack of critical thinking skills, and low language proficiency (see Holmes, 2004; Robertson et al., 2000) and therefore, may impact negatively the student adjustment process. For example, interview participants mentioned feeling left out during group work. Fear of making mistakes and the students' self-perceived low level of English were found to be causes of the students' passive role in the academic setting, as identified in previous studies by Jacob and Greggo (2001) or Poyrazli and Grahame (2007). This fear was reportedly more common in the presence of native speakers, including lecturers and classmates, which again raises the need for awareness of IS challenges among host students and lecturers.

8.2.2. Sociocultural challenges

This section will explore the challenges associated with the sociocultural domain, therefore, addressing research question 1b: 'What are the language-related sociocultural challenges?'. For this purpose, findings from the ISQ and first interview are compared and discussed in subsequent paragraphs around the four sociocultural challenge areas: basic needs, social skills, adaptation to college, and cultural empathy and relatedness.

8.2.2.1 Challenges Related to Basic Needs

Difficulties explored in the ISQ regarding basic needs included *using the transport system*, *going shopping*, *dealing with bureaucracy*, and *ordering at coffee shops/restaurants*. Difficulties in skills related to basic needs were the lowest reported of all the domains in the ISQ, however, challenges relating to basic needs were described during the interviews, although to a lower extent than in other areas of challenge. Those included difficulties communicating when going shopping, ordering at coffee shops/restaurants, using the transport system, and using daily vocabulary in other essential tasks. While the difficulty *dealing with bureaucracy* included in the ISQ was not reported during the interviews, the difficulty *using daily vocabulary in other essential tasks* was raised. These challenges were found to be related to difficulties understanding spoken English, which was attributed to

people's rate of speech and participants' lack of everyday vocabulary; while previous research linked those challenges to the difficulty understanding local accents and colloquialisms or culture-specific vocabulary (see Gautam et al., 2016; Sherry et al., 2010).

8.2.2.2 Challenges Related to Social Skills

Regarding social skills, the ISQ explored difficulties related to four areas: *making friends who are native English speakers, making yourself understood, interacting at social events or community activities,* and *accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions*. In both the ISQ and the interview, making friends who are English speakers and making yourself understood were the most widely reported challenges. Students also reported challenges associated with interacting at social events or community activities in the interviews, since the participants made reference to encounters in the pub or social activities such as hiking, going to the gym, or practising other sports. In the same way, the initial code 'accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions' was replaced during the interview analysis by 'expressing feelings and emotions', since students refer to the difficulty expressing their own feelings and emotions rather than understanding others. This challenge, although it has not been widely included in the literature regarding students' adjustment, excepting Gautam et al. (2016), has been explored in the literature on multilingualism, language acquisition and the psychology of the language learner (see for example Dewaele & Nakano, 2012).

The reasons behind the difficulties reported by participants in relation to making friends who are English speakers appeared to be linked to language as well as culture. This issue was also widely identified in the previous literature (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Church, 1982; Sherry et al., 2010; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002). Participants found it easier to communicate with people who share their language and culture or other international students, as they consider them to be in a similar situation as themselves and, therefore, can relate and find support. This would explain the conational tendency identified in the interviews and highlighted previously by Alsahafi & Seong-Chul Shin (2017) (see Section 3.3.2). In line with previous studies (see Gartman, 2016; Sherry et al., 2010), this challenge was found to be associated with the difficulty of communicating, as well as the students' feelings of insecurity and lack of self-confidence. These will be further discussed in the psychological challenges section.

Student's difficulty in making themselves understood was also found to be common outside the academic setting. This could have a negative impact on the students' social skills. Interviewees reported having difficulties communicating with Irish friends outside the university, and as a consequence, remaining silent. In fact, difficulties communicating outside the academic setting appeared to be greater than in the academic setting, since interview participants indicated greater difficulty understanding and expressing themselves outside campus, which in turn, might be related to the accents and the use of colloquial language as explored in the academic section.

8.2.2.3 Challenges Related to Adaptation to College

When considering the theme of adaptation to college, results from the ISQ showed difficulties related to *coping with the academic workload, working effectively with other students, understanding policies and regulations at university,* and *dealing with lecturers or supervisors*. Similarly, findings from the interview were found to relate to those four areas of difficulty; however, when analysing interview data, 'understanding policies and regulations at university' was slightly changed to 'understanding academic regulations at university', and 'dealing with lecturers and supervisors' was changed to 'engaging with supervisors and lecturers', since those were considered to reflect more accurately the challenges described.

Coping with the academic workload was the most commonly reported challenge in both the ISQ and interview. This challenge was related to the difficulty with reading quickly, explored in the academic challenges section, as well as the longer time needed for writing assignments (see Section 7.2.2). Students reported spending most of their time completing academic work rather than socialising or doing other activities, which affects their sociocultural adjustment. Therefore, supporting the findings from Gautam et al. (2016), who associated the longer time needed to complete academic work, compared to host students as a result of limited language proficiency, with diminished social interaction.

Regarding communication with lecturers and supervisors, students' difficulties were related to accent and rate of speech, as explored in the academic section, but also to the difference between the role and status of the teacher in different education systems. Students coming from East Asian countries considered the discussion between lecturer and

students as challenging the lecturer or disrespectful, possibly due to the influence of Confucius philosophies on the education system (Straker, 2016).

8.2.2.4 Challenges Related to Cultural Empathy and Relatedness

Language has been found to be a key challenge affecting cultural empathy and relatedness. Both the ISQ and the first interview identified difficulties *understanding jokes and humour, understanding the local language/accent, understanding the locals' worldview, and changing the manner of speaking to suit social norms.*

In line with findings from Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) or Zhang (2016), participants reported difficulties understanding jokes and humour as a barrier to form new friendships. Difficulties understanding jokes and humour were found to be related to the use of culture-specific references or language as well as the local accent, which resulted in difficulties socialising and making friends with host nationals. For example, interview participants reported feeling excluded as a consequence of not being able to understand the jokes and humour inside and outside the classroom environment. These difficulties communicating with host nationals, in turn, impede cultural adaptation, since effective intercultural communication with host nationals has been largely established to be intrinsically correlated with cultural adaptation (see, for example, Kim, 2001; Masgoret & Ward, 2006).

Understanding the local language and accent not only posed a challenge for students when understanding jokes and humour, but also in other communicative situations. The use of culture-specific vocabulary, colloquialisms and accent by host nationals resulted in ineffective intercultural communication, thus, affecting students' cultural adaptation. As suggested by Rosenthal et al. (2006), this might be linked to students' previous English language education in their home country being based on standard accents and formal language, as mentioned earlier when discussing academic listening skills. Similarly, difficulties understanding the locals' worldview due to rate of speech and differences in cultural background was found to have an impact on students' sociocultural adaptation. The use of cultural or historical references and differences in cultural backgrounds or the lack of background knowledge of the host culture resulted in ineffective intercultural communication or superficial conversations, which in turn, have been found to hinder international students from gaining an understanding of the local worldview and create cultural distance (Harrison & Peacock, 2008; God & Zhang, 2018).

Another key challenge found in this study related to cultural empathy and relatedness was the difficulty to adapt the manner of speaking to suit social norms. This challenge concerns differences in communicative conventions between cultures including appropriateness, directness, politeness, as well as the use of small talk. For example, interview participants reported being afraid of being misunderstood due to the differences in communicative conventions between cultures or 'cultural codes', and not feeling themselves or 'playing a role' when using local communicative conventions, which once again act as barriers for social interaction. This is consistent with previous studies that have identified NNES international students' difficulty to follow communicative conventions including appropriateness, directness and small talk as negatively impacting their sociocultural adjustment (Volet & Tan-Quigley, 1999; Scollon & Scollon, 2001). Moreover, these reported feelings of 'not being themselves' or 'playing a role' when using local communicative conventions, although not addressed in the literature on international student adaptation or EAP, may be related to the previously mentioned difficulty 'expressing feelings and emotions' and the literature on multilingualism and personality, in which multilinguals reported feeling less emotional and more fake when communicating in the L2 (see Wilson, 2013b; Dewaele, 2010).

Therefore, it can be argued that although language proficiency and communication competence in the host language play a crucial role in NNES international student adaptation, understanding and following cultural communicative conventions is indispensable in order to achieve effective intercultural interaction and, therefore, ease the sociocultural adjustment process.

8.2.3. Psychological aspects

Lastly, the third domain of adjustment challenges explored during Phase I was the psychological domain, in response to research question 1c: 'What are the language-related psychological challenges?'. What follows is a comparison and discussion of findings from the ISQ and the first interview around the three areas explored under psychological challenges: stress, anxiety, and sadness and depression.

8.2.3.1 Symptoms Associated with Stress

When exploring students' difficulties relating to stress when communicating, the ISQ included *find it difficult to relax, find it difficult to tolerate interruptions, find yourself getting upset,* and *finding yourself getting impatient*. In the interview, difficulties were reported about the students' difficulty to relax and nervousness, as well as about getting upset at themselves, corroborating the findings from the ISQ. However, no difficulties were found in the interview data relating to tolerating interruptions and getting impatient. The recurrent theme of frustration emerged instead.

The students' difficulty in relaxing and their feelings of nervousness when communicating and frustration were found to be related to the students' difficulty expressing themselves precisely, as well as feeling overwhelmed by the workload. These two difficulties relate to academic and sociocultural aspects explored earlier, partly agreeing with the findings of Gautam et al. (2016), who attributed the feelings of frustration to the students' inability to communicate and express emotions and feelings. However, in this research, feelings of frustration were found to relate to students' difficulty in understanding spoken English, as well as their conception of not improving their language skills after a certain period in Ireland.

8.2.3.2 Symptoms Associated with Anxiety

Regarding symptoms related to anxiety, although students reported experiencing difficulties regarding *experience dryness of mouth, getting so nervous that you forget things/words that you know, find yourself in situations that made you so anxious that you were relieved when they ended, and feel your heart pounding*, the findings from the first interview identified three symptoms: palpitations, blushing, and sweating. As with stress, these symptoms were found to be more common when communicating in the academic setting, as they were related to the students' participation in class discussions and presentations, which in turn, relates to public speaking anxiety and a higher stake environment. The literature in relation to adjustment points to students' lack of confidence in the host language as the reason for these symptoms, which leads to students' poor participation in the classroom (see Valenzuela et al., 2015; Gregersen, 2003).

8.2.3.3 Symptoms Associated with Sadness and Depression

In relation to sadness and depression, the students completing the ISQ reported experiencing feeling like a failure and feel frustrated when communicating in English more frequently than feeling sad and depressed. However, when looking at the findings from the interviews, *feeling sad and/or depressed* and *feeling insecure and lack of self-confidence* emerged more frequently than *feeling like a failure* and *loss of motivation*. In this area, the feelings of frustration were found to be related to stress rather than sadness and depression, and *feelings of insecurity* and *lack of self-confidence* emerged from the inductive approach.

Students attributed *feeling sad and depressed* to not being able to participate in class. This was often a consequence of not being able to express themselves and understand classmates and lecturers, as well as not being able to communicate with people outside the academic environment, which also affected their social life. In addition, the students reported feeling like a failure or disappointed in themselves as a consequence of the difficulty participating in class. This is also related to the students' insecurity and lack of confidence, since they expressed that they felt afraid of making mistakes or being judged, especially in the presence of native speakers, which affects not only their participation in class, but also in their social environment as discussed earlier in the sociocultural section. The students lack of self-confidence leads them to feeling afraid of making mistakes, and according to studies by Gartman (2016) and Rice et al. (2012) those students are more likely to experience severe depression, although this was not measured in this study. Lastly, the loss of motivation reported by some students was linked to their difficulty understanding lectures, which agreeing with Valenzuela (2015) and Gregersen (2003) affects their motivation to attend class, and it is again, a consequence of their lack of self-confidence.

8.3.   Relationships Between and Among Adjustment Variables

After highlighting the challenges reported by the students in each domain and discussing how the qualitative interview data explained the challenges reported in the quantitative ISQ data, this section moves to discuss findings in relation to RQ2: What relationships may exist between the studied variables (i.e., demographic and adjustment domains)?. These relationships between studied variables were explored quantitatively during Phase I by

means of the one-way analysis of the ISQ and the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (see Section 6.2), and qualitatively by further explaining those relationships in the data obtained from the first interview (see Section 6.3).

8.3.1. Relationships between adjustment domains

From the beginning, this study considered that language is a common factor of relevance to the three adjustment domains – academic, sociocultural, and psychological – and therefore investigating this relationship between domains has been the cornerstone of the study. This conception was based on the review of the literature (see Section 3.3), in which language has been proven to constitute a major adaptation predictor common to the three adjustment domains. However, these language-related relationships seem not to have been systematically addressed in previous studies, and for this reason, this study specifically explores student adjustment in the three adjustment domains by focusing on language-related challenges. Thus, what follows is a discussion of the relationships between domains analysed in the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (see Section 6.2.3) and further explored when analysing the results from the first interview (see Section 6.3.5), in order to address research question 2a: 'What are the relationships between adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural and psychological)?'.

8.3.1.1 Relationships Between Academic and Sociocultural Domains

In the CFA, the correlation coefficient between academic and sociocultural adjustment domains in the final model was .87, which indicates strong correlation between the two domains (see sections 6.2.3 and 6.2.4). When looking at the results from the interviews, this might be explained by the strong relationship found between challenges pertaining to the academic and sociocultural domains, particularly the difficulties related to adaptation to college.

When analysing the academic challenges, difficulties in reading quickly were associated with the students' ability to cope with the reading workload. This could also be considered as one of the sociocultural challenges related to adaptation to college – i.e., coping with the academic workload. In addition, this inability to cope with the reading workload has been identified in this study as having an impact on students' social life, as the interview participants considered that the time spent trying to cope with the reading workload would

prevent them from taking part in social activities. In the same way, challenges regarding reading critically and writing in an academic style were found to be related to the challenges understanding academic regulations at university, since these included reading and writing challenges such as understanding the concepts of plagiarism, referencing and criticality.

Difficulties included in the academic domain relating to speaking and listening were found to affect adaptation to college. Challenges related to communication with lecturers and classmates such as participating in class discussions, communicating with classmates and lecturers, and understanding lectures and class discussions appeared to determine the students' difficulty working effectively with other students, as well as engaging with supervisors and/or lecturers, therefore having a negative impact on the students' adaptation to college. In addition, the figure of the 'passive student' highlighted in the previous sections has been proven to be present not only in the academic setting, but also in the sociocultural context (see Section 6.3.2.2). Thus, the interview data allowed the researcher to further explore and understand the high correlation between the academic and sociocultural domains, specially between challenges related to the academic domain and those related to adaptation to college, that were quantitatively identified in the CFA of the ISQ.

8.3.1.2 Relationships Between Psychological Aspects and the Other two Domains

This subsection will explore the relationships between the psychological domain and the other two domains. Academic and sociocultural domains are considered together in this subsection due to the significant correlation highlighted in the previous subsection. When considering the correlation between sociocultural and psychological domain, and academic and psychological domain, the CFA showed a correlation of .76 and .65 respectively, which indicates that although there is correlation among domains, there is discriminant validity and the measures of constructs do not overlap. It is however important to note that the psychological aspects explored during the interviews differ slightly from those explored in the ISQ, as discussed in Section 8.2.3 above.

When analysing findings from the interview regarding psychological adjustment, it can be observed that the psychological aspects reported by the students were found to be either a cause or effect of academic and sociocultural language-related challenges. In fact, the

majority of the psychological aspects reported related to both academic and sociocultural domains, although some of the challenges were more prominent when communicating in the academic setting. For example, symptoms related to stress, anxiety and sadness and depression were found to be a result or cause of difficulties communicating precisely in the academic setting, as well as of making themselves understood in the social setting. Students reported getting nervous when communicating in the classroom setting, which in turn affects the students' adaptation to college, as it would affect the students' capability of working effectively with other students. Frustration and insecurity and lack of self-confidence as a consequence of not being able to communicative effectively were also found to be more prominent in the academic setting, as the students would feel more judged or under pressure in front of lecturers or classmates, especially those who are native English speakers. Another example that illustrates the interconnection between domains is the difficulty to relax and frustration as symptoms associated with the difficulty dealing with the workload. Academic difficulties reading quickly would lead to sociocultural difficulties coping with the academic workload, and this would result in feelings of frustration and difficulty to relax and nervousness. Lastly, feeling sad and depressed were symptoms associated with both the academic setting– not being able to participate in class; and the sociocultural setting– not being able to communicate with people, which could have a negative impact in the students' social life.

8.3.2. Demographic factors that determine adjustment

This subsection focuses on exploring the findings in relation to research question 2b. 'What demographic factors might impact the adjustment process?'. This was explored during Phase I of the study through the one-way analysis of the responses regarding demographic factors in the ISQ reported in Section 6.2.2, and the demographic considerations described in Section 6.3.5. The demographic factors explored included students' level of study, field of study, length of residence in Ireland, length of residence in an English-speaking country before coming to Ireland, and certified level of English.

8.3.2.1 Level of Study

The one-way analysis regarding participants' level of study identified that PhD students face less difficulty compared to the other three groups – Foundation Programme, undergraduate and master's students – when reading specialised papers. This was also

evident in the findings from the first interview, in which master's and undergraduates reported more challenges related to reading than PhD students. A plausible explanation for this is PhD students' greater level of experience reading specialised papers, as well as their wider knowledge of technical vocabulary in their field given that, as discussed in the previous section, students' academic reading challenges were associated with unfamiliarity with academic and discipline-specific terminology.

Another important consideration regarding differences between student challenges and level of study was highlighted in the findings from the interviews. Students reported different challenges associated with their level of study possibly due to the differences in course requirements and assessment specific to their level of study. For example, PhD students' main concerns included writing and communication, as they are required to write a thesis and discuss their research as part of their PhD; while undergraduate students reported challenges related to written examinations and understanding lectures and classmates. This suggests that the academic challenges that students experience are determined by the students' level of study. This is in line with Kim's (2018) assertion that undergraduate students' adjustment experiences are different to those of graduate students partly due to differences in programme levels and academic requirements. For example, undergraduate assessment often includes written examinations, while postgraduate assessment is commonly based on written assignments. This established difference might be the reason why a great amount of research has tended to differentiate between undergraduate and postgraduate students (see for example Rao, 2017; Lowinger et al., 2014), or has focused on a specific group (see for example Luo and Jamieson, 2015; Caplan and Stevens, 2017). However, the differences found between master's and PhD students suggests that the distinction between different levels of graduate students should also be considered.

8.3.2.2 Field of Study

When looking at differences in the challenges experienced regarding the field of study, findings from the one-way analysis of the ISQ indicated that students of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences experienced a lower level of difficulty compared to students of Engineering, Maths and Science. These differences included challenges related to academic writing, as well as challenges related to communication in and off campus, including higher difficulty communicating with lecturers or giving presentations. They also included

sociocultural challenges such as making themselves understood or interacting at social events. This might be attributable to language being more problematic for students in fields related to science that require numerical skills over linguistic skills, than students in fields related to humanities, as found by Light et al. (1987). While, in the interviews, students of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences also reported challenges concerning academic adjustment, it is worth noting that participants studying courses related to linguistics and language were more precise when identifying and describing their language challenges. This might be attributed to the students' discipline-related knowledge allowing them to be aware of their needs.

8.3.2.3 Length of Time Residing in Ireland

Length of time residing in the host country was found to be a factor impacting students' adjustment in this study. Findings from the one-way analysis of the ISQ have revealed that students who lived in Ireland for three or more years report generally lower difficulty than those that have lived in Ireland for less than a year, especially in those aspects related to sociocultural adjustment. By the same token, interview participants reported experiencing less difficulties after a period of one to six months, especially regarding academic challenges such as understanding lectures, and sociocultural challenges such as dealing with basic needs. This would be in line with the culture learning theory in which the adjustment process is considered to be reliant on the acquisition of culture-specific skills (see Bochner, 1972, 1986) and, therefore, the more time a student spends in the host country, the fewer difficulties they will encounter. However, when looking at language, in this study this has been found to apply to academic and sociocultural aspects, but not to the psychological factors, which accords with Wang et al. (2018) findings. Interview participants reported feeling frustrated as they felt that their language skills were not improving or had not improved enough after a period of time in the host country. It is, however, important to note that although academic difficulties seem to improve with time, interview participants reported experiencing academic challenges irrespective of the time the student has spent in the host country. For example, S15 had lived in Ireland for 20 years and reported challenges regarding formality and structure of academic writing. A possible explanation for this might be the widespread notion held by Bourdieu and Passeron (1994, p.8) that academic writing is 'no one's mother tongue', as well as the misconception that academic literacy corresponds to linguistic competency (Wingate, 2015), which might

imply that both NES and NNES students may encounter difficulties when approaching academic writing for the first time.

8.3.2.4 Length of Residence in an English-speaking Country Before Coming to Ireland

As in the length of residence in the host country, students that lived in an English-speaking country before coming to Ireland were found to experience lower difficulty. This was supported by data from the ISQ, in which those participants that lived in an English-speaking country for over three years reported experiencing less difficulties than those who never lived in an English-speaking country. Data from the interviews revealed that these differences are related to sociocultural challenges such as socialising and understanding the culture. In the interviews, students also made reference to their previous experience abroad as beneficial to their current experience, as they already had the experience and knew what to expect regarding aspects such as communication or cultural differences. Therefore, it seems that students that have lived abroad previously experience fewer sociocultural challenges and their cultural awareness and multicultural competence seems to have improved with time. These results are consistent with those of researchers who have followed a culture learning approach and determined previous cross-cultural experience as a significant predictor of sociocultural adaptation (see for example Kennedy, 1999).

8.3.2.5 Certified Level of English

As highlighted in the review of the literature (see Section 3.3), language has been largely considered as a predictor for adaptation. Therefore, students with higher language proficiency should experience less difficulties than those with lower language proficiency. The findings from the ISQ support this, as differences in challenges were found between students with higher certified level of English and those with lower certified level of English. This can be also inferred from the results from the interviews, in which participants with high certified level of English (i.e., equivalent to C2 of the CEFR), although they still reported challenges, seem to report less challenges related to areas such as basic needs and understanding lectures. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the transferability of IELTS and other entry assessment has been questioned during the interviews, in which students explicitly made reference to IELTS as not reflecting their real English ability. This exposes the transferability dilemma previously described by, for example, Rochecouste et

al. (2010) and Mehar Singh (2016), whose research questioned the adequacy of these language tests as a measure to determine the students' ability to deal with the academic demands of tertiary education.

8.3.2.6 Cultural Closeness

Cultural differences between the host culture and international students' culture of origin have been found to have an impact on adaptation. In this study, students from Asia reported facing more sociocultural difficulties than students from European countries due to differences in communicative social conventions and culture-specific practices. These results seem to be consistent with those obtained in previous studies (see Krishna, 2015; Jones & Kim, 2013) in which European international students were found to experience less acculturative stress than students from Asia due to cultural similarities between European and host country cultures. For example, a recurrent topic in the interviews was the Irish pub culture being perceived by Asian participants as a main issue inhibiting intercultural interactions. These results support previous research on interactions between international and host students that point at the drinking culture in the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom as a deterrent to sociocultural adaptation (see Byrne et al., 2019; Thurnell-Read et al., 2018).

These differences between European and Asian students have been also discussed in the literature regarding students' adaptation to college, and has potentially been attributed to the Confucian tradition influence on Asian education systems (see for example Bista, 2011; Do and Pham, 2016). However, although the degree of difference between education systems can be considered as a negative predictor of adaptation, during the interviews in this study European students also reported challenges related to academic practices such as plagiarism or referencing, which are common practices in their country of origin. These findings again relate to Bourdieu and Passeron's (1994, p. 8) notion that academic writing is 'no one's language', and the misconception raised by Wingate (2015) that academic literacy equates to linguistic competency. Thus, academic literacy is a skill that needs to be acquired independently of the students' first language, and differences between academic practices might vary not only between countries but also between institutions.

8.4. EAP In-Sessional Programme and Adjustment

After highlighting the challenges reported by the students in each domain and discussing the relationships between variables, this section will consider RQ3: Do EAP in-sessional programmes help NNES students overcome the language-related challenges they face in Irish universities? If so, how?. This was addressed during Phase II by means of the Needs Analysis Questionnaire and the second interview conducted with students on an EAP in-sessional programme in one university. This section firstly focuses on discussing the EAP-related aspects that might contribute to students' adjustment; and secondly, the students' experiences of the EAP in-sessional programme considered in this study.

8.4.1. EAP-related aspects that contribute to students' adaptation

This subsection focuses on exploring the findings relating to research question 3a: 'What aspects of EAP in-sessional programmes may contribute to students' adaptation?'. Findings from the Needs Analysis Questionnaire, including Academic skills for university and Pre-university preparation (see sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2), are discussed together with the findings from the second interview, particularly those related to the aspects that contribute to NNES students' adaptation (see Section 7.3.1).

Students' views on pre-university preparation covered entry language examinations and pre-sessional EAP courses. IELTS was considered by the participants as 'not preparing them for university', as it provides students with general English skills and not the academic skills necessary for tertiary education, despite the fact that students would have taken the IELTS Academic exam. These results reflect those of Sabet and Babaei (2017) or Moore and Morton (2005), who found little resemblance between IELTS tasks and language used in the academic environment, especially listening skills linked to the different varieties of English they find at university and the lack of diversity in the IELTS listening, which was also highlighted in the results of this study. On the contrary, participants regarded taking an EAP pre-sessional course as beneficial, as it provided them with academic and university life skills, and it includes tasks and materials that expose the students to the challenges that they may experience at university before they start their studies. These findings are in line with Hyland and Shaw's (2016) claims, who regarded EAP programmes as a way of exposing the students to the challenges they might encounter at university due to their use of

authentic materials. It can therefore be assumed that while EAP pre-sessional courses may ease the adjustment process, language entry examinations should also include authentic academic tasks and materials that ensure that the students acquire the necessary skills to study at university.

Findings from the NA questionnaire positioned reading and writing as the most important skills at university. This might be linked to the students' course requirements and assessment specific to their level of study, given that the majority of participants were master's students (i.e., 55.9%), who at that level are commonly required to read large quantities of academic texts and are assessed through essays. This, again, draws attention to the difference in student's needs between the various levels of study at university. However, when analysing the skills that students would like to improve during the programme and the skills that are emphasised during the EAP classes, there appears to be an emphasis on productive skills over receptive skills. A possible explanation for this might be that the participants' choices were influenced by the name of the EAP courses offered during the first semester, as one related to writing and the other to oral fluency. It would be then plausible to suggest that the students' expectations were linked to those two skills. Another possible explanation for this is that summative assessment commonly involves productive skills such as writing essays or doing oral presentations.

During the second interview students reported that receiving feedback from lecturers and EAP tutors supports them to overcome their writing challenges, as it helps the students understand what is required from the assessment. Students would get an idea of what is expected from them, how they should structure the essay and the type of language that they should use. However, students would normally receive feedback from their lecturers after submission and marking, and therefore, receiving feedback from the EAP tutors would help them identify the areas they need to improve and would allow them to improve their assignments before those are marked. In addition, it is worth considering that feedback from lecturers regarding essays is commonly provided at the end of the semester, while in the EAP course feedback is more frequent, which enables students to act on this feedback sooner, and as a result, could potentially speed up the adjustment process. This aspect also relates to practice and familiarity with writing skills, since taking an EAP course would help students practice their writing skills and gain familiarity with the academic writing conventions, such as the use of language, structure, or referencing among others. This

familiarity with academic practices, that might be acquired during pre-sessional or in-sessional EAP programmes, has also been identified in this study as a factor contributing to the students' psychological adjustment, as it helps them feel more confident and less anxious.

In the same way, the EAP programme allowed the students to overcome their speaking challenges through practice and feedback. In the EAP class, students are able to practice discussion and presentation skills, while they receive language-related feedback from the EAP tutor, which makes them aware of their specific areas for improvement. Receiving language-related feedback during lectures or in social contexts would not be a common practice, as it could be considered as rude. However, in the EAP class context students could potentially be open to receive feedback from the tutor without feeling threatened. It has been observed that the EAP class constitutes a supportive environment in which students feel more confident and at ease among other international students who have encountered the same challenges. Therefore, it offers an appropriate setting for students to develop academic and social skills that are sometimes not acquired in the academic and social settings due to the presence of native English speakers.

Although the courses offered focused on writing and speaking skills, students also considered that the EAP course helped them develop reading techniques such as skimming and scanning, which has a positive impact on the challenges discussed earlier in relation to reading quickly and dealing with the academic workload (see Section 8.2). Therefore, by attending an EAP course students may develop academic reading skills that would accelerate the academic adjustment process, and as a result, their sociocultural adjustment process, as the difficulty of dealing with the reading workload has been shown to impact on the students' sociocultural skills. Additionally, students reported that working on their assignments during the EAP classes helped them to organise their workload and create an action plan, which may reduce feelings of anxiety, stress and sadness, therefore contributing to their psychological adjustment.

Participants also reported that their listening improved as a result of attending the EAP course. Practising listening skills during the EAP classes may help the students to get used to the accent and speed of classmates and lecturers, as well as taking notes in class. For example, students may learn and practice strategies to take notes in lectures. Students are

also exposed to listening to English for the duration of the class and are required to support their arguments, which has been proven to improve their ability to make themselves understood, therefore contributing not only to the academic, but also to the students' sociocultural adjustment. In addition, given that preparation for lectures was also considered as a factor that contributes to overcoming speaking and listening challenges, EAP courses may provide students with strategies on how to prepare for lectures.

8.4.2. Students' experience of an EAP in-sessional programme

This subsection is devoted to exploring the last research question 3b: 'What are the students' impressions of the EAP in-sessional programme?'. For this purpose, results from the Needs Analysis questionnaire regarding students' preferences (Section 7.2.3), and findings from the second interview considering students' impressions (Section 7.3.2) are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Receiving individual support and feedback from the EAP tutors was highlighted as one of the aspects of the EAP in-sessional programme most valued by the students. This supports one of the aspects contributing to adjustment discussed in the previous subsection regarding writing and speaking feedback, which identifies receiving individual support and feedback as a key predictor of students' adaptation. EAP courses allow the students to identify and improve their language-related difficulties through personalised and regular feedback, which is unlikely to occur in discipline-based modules.

In order to receive feedback, the students need to practice their skills. Practice has been proven to pose another important predictor of students' adaptation. Students preferred the EAP class to follow a practical approach such as workshop-style or hands-on sessions in which authentic materials such as previous students' written samples and TED talks are used. This is also reflected in the students' views on the type of activities that were considered as a positive aspect of the EAP programme, specifically relevant writing and speaking activities that allowed them to put academic skills into practice and receive feedback. This brings the issue of IELTS transferability back (see Section 4.2.3), since students benefit from the use of authentic materials and tasks that prepare them for the university setting. This is also related to the fact that interviewees with higher English proficiency expressed dissatisfaction because some of the activities covered during the EAP class were related to general English rather than academic English. Therefore, the

differences between general English and EAP might be considered not only during the EAP courses, but also when assessing students' entry requirements, in order to ensure a rapid and successful adjustment process.

It was suggested that students should be allocated in the EAP classes according to their level of English, level of study and discipline. This may be associated with the earlier findings related to demographic factors as having an impact on students' adaptation. Given that students face different challenges depending on their discipline, level of study and level of English, class arrangements should be made considering those factors.

Lastly, the classroom environment in the EAP programme has been considered as another significant aspect that students valued. Students reported feeling more relaxed and confident during the EAP classes. This may be linked not only to the fact that they are all international students facing the same challenges and might feel intimidated in the presence of native speakers as suggested by previous research (see Gartman, 2016; Sherry et al. 2010), but also to the fact that students are not expected to be familiar with a specific topic related to their discipline, as opposed to their discipline-specific modules. In addition, this positive environment allowed the students to establish friendships with their classmates, therefore contributing to their sociocultural adaptation. In this way, the EAP class can also be considered as a way of meeting new people and improving social skills.

8.5. Overview of the Discussion in Relation to Research Questions

While the previous section (see Section 8.4) allowed to combine and discuss the results obtained from the different research tools, this section presents an overview of the discussion in relation to the three research questions addressed in this study and their corresponding subquestions.

8.5.1. RQ1: What are the language-related challenges that NNES students face in Irish universities?

8.5.1.1 RQ1a: What are the language-related academic challenges?

In the academic domain, challenges included difficulties regarding academic reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. Challenges relating to academic writing skills were the most commonly reported by participants. These findings are consistent with previous research that identified academic writing as students' major concern (see Eujeong, 2016;

Evans & Morrison, 2011; Wu, 2011), which may be attributed to reliance on written forms of assessment. Academic writing challenges included difficulties relating to writing in an academic style, structuring essays and/or dissertations, summarising and/or synthesising, and difficulties related to the students' use of language such as clarity and precision. Difficulties writing in an academic style were found to be related to the influence of previous English language education and language entry requirements being built around general English skills, which supports Sawir's (2005) notion of prior language experience affecting students' ability to cope with the host university academic requirements. Difficulties regarding academic writing skills were also found to be related to the students' use of translation when writing, and the differences in academic conventions associated with the students' home culture, which support studies such as those conducted by Harris and Ní Chonaill (2016), Mehar Singh (2016, or Phakiti and Li (2011).

Challenges related to academic reading skills included reading specialised papers, reading quickly, reading critically, and reading for specific information. Findings regarding difficulties reading quickly and reading specialised papers, which were associated with the inability of coping with the workload, the students' need to read a text multiple times, and the difficulties understanding specialised vocabulary, had previously been identified by researchers such as Hirano (2015) or Wang and Hannes (2013). Furthermore, findings from this study have identified the difficulty in understanding not only academic but also general vocabulary, the students' reliance on rather ineffective reading strategies, and the difficulty applying critical skills when reading as affecting students' academic reading skills.

Regarding academic listening skills, challenges included understanding lectures and class discussions mostly due to accent and rate of speech of lecturers and classmates, taking notes in lectures, understanding technical vocabulary as well as understanding colloquial and idiomatic language. These results support and expand on those from previous studies, in which students reported understanding lectures as the foremost challenge due to lecturers' accent and rate of speech (see Kuo, 2011; Medved et al., 2013; Wang & Hannes, 2013), as well as the use of colloquialisms and informal language (see Holmes, 2004; Sandekian et al., 2015). However, it was found that the difficulty understanding classmates was also related to the accent, rate of speech and use of colloquial language, which highlights the importance of awareness and adaptation not only from lecturers, but also from host students. In addition, as with the difficulties relating to academic writing skills,

the difficulty understanding lectures and class discussions was found to be related to participants' previous language learning experience. Therefore, emphasising the significant role of pre-university preparation and language entry criteria on student adjustment.

Lastly, challenges related to speaking skills consist of difficulties participating in class discussions, communicating precisely and naturally, communicating with classmates and lecturers, and giving oral presentations. These difficulties were found to lead to students taking a passive role in class as a result of their fear of making mistakes and the participants' self-perceived low level of English, which agrees with previous studies by Jacob and Greggo (2001) and Poyrazli and Grahame (2007). It is, however, worth noting that these difficulties were reportedly more common in the presence of native English speakers, including both lecturers and classmates. This, together with the participants' perception of not having the chance to participate since other classmates that are native English speakers or have a higher level of English often responded before them, accentuates once again the importance of awareness and adaptation from lecturers and host students.

8.5.1.2 RQ1b: What are the language-related sociocultural challenges?

Language-related challenges affecting sociocultural adjustment were found relating to four areas: basic needs, social skills, adaptation to college, and cultural empathy and relatedness. Challenges regarding basic needs included difficulties going shopping, ordering at coffee shops and/or restaurants, using the transport system, and using daily vocabulary in other essential tasks such as communicating with landlords. These difficulties were reportedly related to people's rate of speech and participants' lack of everyday vocabulary, while previous studies (see Gautam et al., 2016; Sherry et al., 2010) linked those difficulties to local accents and the use of slang.

Challenges related to social skills include difficulties making friends who are NES, making themselves understood, expressing feelings and emotions, and interacting in social activities. These findings contribute to the limited literature considering these difficulties (see for example Gautam et al. 2016). The difficulty making friends who are NES was found to be linked to both language and culture. This is related to the conational tendency observed in this study as well as in previous research by Alsahafi & Seong-Chul Shin (2017), which was found to relate to the difficulty communicating and participants' feelings of insecurity. These difficulties communicating outside the academic setting were found to be

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more preeminent than in the academic setting, and often result in NNES international students assuming a silent or 'passive' role in social situations.

With regard to adaptation to college, language-related challenges include difficulties coping with the academic workload, understanding academic regulations at university, working effectively with other students, and engaging with supervisors and/or lecturers. Coping with the academic workload was the most frequently reported challenge regarding the sociocultural domain. Participants report spending more time completing academic work than their host peers, which has a negative impact on their social interaction, and therefore, corroborates the findings by Gautam et al. (2016).

Language was also found to affect cultural empathy and relatedness. This includes difficulties understanding jokes and humour, understanding the locals' worldview, understanding the local language and/or accent, and changing their manner of speaking to suit social norms. An emerging topic in the interview data was the difficulty to adapt the manner of speaking to suit social norms, which resulted in difficulties communicating due to differences between cultural communicative conventions.

8.5.1.3 RQ1c: What are the language-related psychological challenges?

Lastly, language was found to impact the psychological domain and was manifested in symptoms associated with stress, anxiety and sadness or depression. These symptoms were found to be more commonly experienced in the academic setting, possibly due to the students' self-perceived low proficiency in the host language and the evaluative character of the communicative situation. When communicating in English, participants reported experiencing stress symptoms including difficulty to relax and nervousness, frustration and getting upset at themselves. Feelings of frustration was the most frequently reported psychological aspect. These feelings were found to relate to difficulties dealing with the workload, as well as expressing precisely and understanding spoken English.

Anxiety symptoms when communicating in English include palpitations, blushing and sweating. These were commonly associated to students' participation in class discussions and presentations, which may be a result of students' lack of confidence in the host language (see Valenzuela et al., 2015; Gregersen, 2003).

Sadness and depression symptoms related to language were also reported including feelings of sadness and/or depression, feelings of insecurity and lack of self-confidence, feelings of failure, and loss of motivation. These feelings were attributed mainly to the difficulty communicating in the academic setting as well as outside the academic setting, which is in turn, associated to the fear of making mistakes or being judged in the presence of ENS.

8.5.2. RQ2: What relationships may exist between the studied variables (i.e., adjustment domains and demographic factors)?

8.5.2.1 RQ2a: What are the relationships between adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological)?

In line with Schartner and Young's (2016) model of student adjustment and adaptation, the three adjustment domains (i.e., academic, sociocultural, and psychological) were found to be closely related. A strong interconnection between challenges pertaining to the academic and sociocultural domains was evident in the reciprocal impact of academic-related challenges on sociocultural challenges, mainly concerning adaptation to college, social skills and understanding academic regulations at university. These two domains were likewise found to be interconnected with the psychological domain, since the psychological aspects reported in the study were either a cause or effect of language-related challenges pertaining to the academic and/or sociocultural domains.

8.5.2.2 RQ2b: What demographic factors might impact the adjustment process?

Relationships were found between students' academic and sociocultural adjustment challenges and the demographic factors considered in the study. These demographic factors included students' level of study, field of study, length of time residing in Ireland, length of residence in an English-speaking country before coming to Ireland, certified level of English, and cultural factors such as communicative social conventions and culture-specific practices.

Regarding level of study, differences in academic challenges were found among groups attributed to differences in course requirements and assessment. For example, PhD students were found to experience less difficulty in academic reading skills than the other groups.

Differences in challenges experienced were also found related to students' field of study. Students of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences reported lower difficulty than students of Engineering, Math and Science regarding academic writing difficulties, and communication in and off campus. This could be linked to the findings by Light et al. (1987), who found language to be more problematic for students in fields related to science that require quantitative skills over linguistic skills. In addition, students of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences generally identified and described their challenges more precisely than students of other disciplines, possibly due the development of awareness on these issues as a consequence of the discipline-related knowledge.

With regard to length of time residing in Ireland, students who had lived in Ireland for three or more years generally reported lower difficulty regarding academic and sociocultural challenges than those that lived in Ireland for less than a year. Students report noticing improvement regarding academic and sociocultural challenges after a period of one to six months in Ireland. In the same way, students that lived in an English-speaking country before moving to Ireland reported experiencing less difficulty regarding sociocultural challenges than those that never lived in an English-speaking country before, which are not surprising findings considering the reported improvement of academic and sociocultural challenges with time.

Concerning certified level of English, in general students that hold a higher certified level of English reported facing less challenges than those with a lower certified level of English, especially regarding academic and sociocultural adjustment. This is in line with previous studies in the field considering the relationship between language proficiency and adjustment (see for example Messner & Liu ,1995; Stoynoff, 1997; Senyshyn et al., 2000). Differences between the host culture and international students' culture of origin were found to affect sociocultural adjustment. In this case, European students were found to experience less sociocultural challenges than students from other countries, possibly due to the similarity between cultures.

8.5.3. RQ3: Do EAP in-sessional programmes help NNES students overcome the language-related challenges they face in Irish universities? If so, how?

8.5.3.1 RQ3a: What aspects of EAP in-sessional programmes may contribute to students' adaptation?

Practising academic skills, as well as receiving feedback from EAP tutors was regarded as having helped the students overcome their academic challenges, given that students reported that receiving individual feedback helped them identify and improve language difficulties. By practising academic skills in the EAP class, students would familiarise with academic practices and would have the opportunity to receive feedback before being formally assessed by their lecturers. This authenticity and practicality was also identified as a positive aspect of EAP pre-sessional programmes, which participants felt would help them acquire academic and university life skills, as opposed to the IELTS test, which was considered to provide general English knowledge rather than equipping the students with the academic skills needed at university.

Although the main aim of EAP support is generally to facilitate academic adjustment, the results of this study indicate that it also has an effect on the sociocultural and psychological adjustment domains partly due to the interconnection among adjustment domains. For example, it may help students feel more confident and less anxious as a consequence of practising and gaining familiarity with academic practices. In addition, this study shows that the EAP classroom can constitute a supportive environment in which students feel more confident and relaxed, as they are surrounded by other international students, as well as a place to socialise and establish friendships.

8.5.3.2 RQ3b: What are the students' impressions of the EAP in-sessional programme?

The results indicate that students preferred the EAP classes to follow a practical approach and use authentic materials that allowed them to put academic skills into practice and receive individual feedback. Students also regarded the EAP classroom environment as a positive environment that allowed them to feel more relax and confident during the EAP classes, as well as to establish friendships with their classmates. However, students suggested the allocation of students in the EAP classes according to their level of English, level of study and discipline; as well as a focus on academic English skills and the exclusion of activities related to general English.

8.6. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, quantitative and qualitative results from both research phases have been combined and discussed in order to compare, critically examine and provide interpretation of the research findings, as well as to examine how these may relate to existing knowledge on the topic. Each of the three sections of the chapter addressed one of the three research questions that were posed in the Introduction and Methodology chapters. Thus, the first section focused on the language-related challenges that NNES international students face in Irish universities based on the results from the ISQ and the first interview conducted during Phase I, regarding the three adjustment domains – academic, sociocultural and psychological. The second section explored the relationships between adjustment variables, including the relationships between adjustment domains, as well as the relationships between the demographic characteristics included in the study and the reported challenges. The third section explored the role of EAP in student adjustment, by considering the aspects that might ease the student adjustment process, and the students' views on an EAP in-sessional programme. Lastly, the final section provided an overview of the discussion in relation to the research questions. The following chapter will provide a conclusion to the thesis, by presenting the main conclusions of the research, implications, limitations, and recommendations for practice and future research.

CHAPTER 9: Conclusion

9.1. Chapter Introduction

This final chapter begins by summarising the conclusions drawn from the research in relation to the three aims of the study that have been discussed in the previous chapter (see sections 8.2-8.4). After that, the chapter will consider the theoretical and methodological contributions of the study. The main limitations of the study and how those potentially impacted the study will be highlighted; and finally, some recommendations for practice and further research are provided.

9.2. Research Conclusions

Although language had been previously identified as a major determining factor in NNES international students' adaptation, up until now there has been a siloed approach to investigating the role of language on adjustment. Thus, the first research aim consisted of identifying the language-related challenges affecting adjustment at the three adjustment domains: academic, sociocultural and psychological. These challenges were quantitatively identified by means of descriptive statistics of the ISQ questionnaire (see Section 6.2.1), which were addressed to NNES international students pursuing their studies in the nine public universities on the island of Ireland. Results from the ISQ were then corroborated and further explored qualitatively through semi-structured interviews conducted among a group of students who were taking part in an EAP in-sessional programme at one of the nine public universities in Ireland (see sections 6.3.1- 6.3.3). Although the results indicated that students face language-related challenges pertaining to the three adjustment domains, some challenges were more widely reported than others. Academic language-related challenges were the most commonly reported by participants, given that academic achievement is the foremost concern of a student and they are seen as having a direct impact on students' achievement. These language-related academic challenges included difficulties related to academic reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. In the sociocultural domain, language-related challenges were also widely reported, and they were found to relate to four areas: basic needs, social skills, adaptation to college, and cultural empathy and relatedness. Conversely, psychological aspects, although still

significant, were the least commonly reported, possibly due to the sensitivity of the topic and the lack of awareness among the students on how these aspects are impacted by language. Those were more commonly experienced in the academic setting and were found to be manifested in symptoms associated with stress, anxiety, and sadness and depression.

The second research aim was to determine the relationships between adjustment domains in relation to language, as well as the demographic factors that might impact the adjustment process. This was achieved through the statistical analysis of the ISQ (i.e., one-way analysis and CFA) and further explained by qualitative data obtained from the first set of interviews. Relationships between the academic and sociocultural adjustment domains were found to be particularly significant. The strong correlation found between these two domains in the CFA was later explained by the strong relationship found between academic-related challenges and the sociocultural language-related difficulty areas of social skills and adaptation to college when analysing interview findings; therefore, highlighting the impact that language has on those concurrently. However, it is worth pointing out that the direct impact of language on the psychological domain was less clearly established than for the other domains, since psychological aspects were found to be either a cause or effect of language-related challenges pertaining to the academic and/or sociocultural domains. In addition, the demographic factors studied were found to impact the adjustment process. These included students' level of study, field of study, length of time residing in Ireland, length of residence in an English-speaking country before coming to Ireland, and certified level of English.

The third and final research aim entailed exploring what EAP-related aspects might facilitate NNES international students' adjustment in EAP support programmes offered by university during the academic year. Results obtained from the needs analysis questionnaire and the second interview based on a group of EAP in-sessional students, allowed the researcher to explore the views of the students on the EAP programme, as well as to draw conclusions on the EAP-related aspects that may contribute to student adjustment. It was concluded that students' preferences for the EAP programme included practical classes, the use of authentic materials that allowed them to practice academic skills, and receiving individual feedback on their writing and speaking. The EAP-related

aspects that may contribute to student adaptation will be further explored in Section 9.5.1. when making recommendations for practice.

Thus, this study provided an exhaustive and comprehensive account of the language-related challenges faced by NNES international students in the three adjustment domains. It also substantiated the relationships between adjustment domains suggested in recent research on adjustment (see Schartner and Young, 2016), by focusing on language as the common factor. In addition, this study explored the participants' views on effective EAP practices, as well as identifying EAP-related aspects that contribute to NNES international students' adjustment. After presenting the research conclusions, the following section addresses the theoretical and methodological contributions emerging from the study.

9.3. Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

Firstly, this study contributes generally to the literature on adjustment issues of international students, and particularly, to the language-related aspects concerning NNES international student adaptation. As it has been highlighted in the literature review, language plays a key role in the adjustment process and remains as a main area of unsolved problems. This also applies to the Irish tertiary education context, in which although English language is an attractor for international students (see Section 2.4.3), it continues to be regarded by NNES international students as the greatest adjustment challenge (ICOS, 2012b; ICOS, 2012a; Harris-Byrne, 2017; Lewthwaite, 1996; Robertson et al., 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Moreover, despite the emphasis and value attributed to internationalisation in higher education worldwide, this topic has received relatively little attention in Ireland as highlighted in the recent study conducted by Clarke et al. (2018). Thus, the study not only provides a deeper insight into the language-related aspects of adjustment, but also contributes to the current literature on internationalisation and international students in the Irish context.

Another contribution to the field is that this study encompasses the three adjustment domains regarded as affecting student sojourners – academic, sociocultural and psychological (see Section 3.3), and the role of language in each of the domains. The study allowed the researcher to identify the specific language-related challenge areas in each adjustment domain, as well as their relationships and the demographic factors affecting

adjustment. The study then provides a framework for studying and measuring adjustment from the language perspective, and an understanding of the interconnection between domains, particularly the interrelationship between the academic and sociocultural domains (see Figure 28 below). In this way, it offers a multi-faceted approach to the study of language as a factor affecting international student adaptation.

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Writing
- Writing in an academic style
- Structuring assignments
- Use of language
- Summarising/synthesising

Reading
- Reading quickly
- Reading specialised texts
- Reading critically
- Reading for specific info.

Academic

Listening
- Lectures/ class discussions
- Accent/ rate of speech
- Taking notes
- Technical vocabulary
- Colloquial & idiomatic language

Speaking
- Participate in class discussions
- Communicate precisely & naturally
- Communicate with classmates & lecturers
- Giving oral presentations

Basic needs
- Going shopping
- Using daily vocabulary in other tasks
- Ordering at coffee shops/ restaurants
- Using the transport system

Adaptation to college
- Coping with the academic workload
- Understanding academic regulations
- Working effectively with other students
- Engaging with supervisors/ lecturers

Sociocultural

Cultural empathy &
- Understanding jokes &
- Understanding the loca
- Understanding the loca accent
- Changing the manner suit social norms

Social skills
- Making friends who are NES
- Making yourself understood
- Expressing feelings & emotions
- Interacting at social events

Anxiety
- Palpitations
- Blushing
- Sweating

Sadness & Depression
- Feel sad and/or depressed
- Feelings of insecurity and lack of self-confidence
- Feel like a failure
- Loss of motivation

Stress
- Difficulty to relax & nervousness
- Frustration
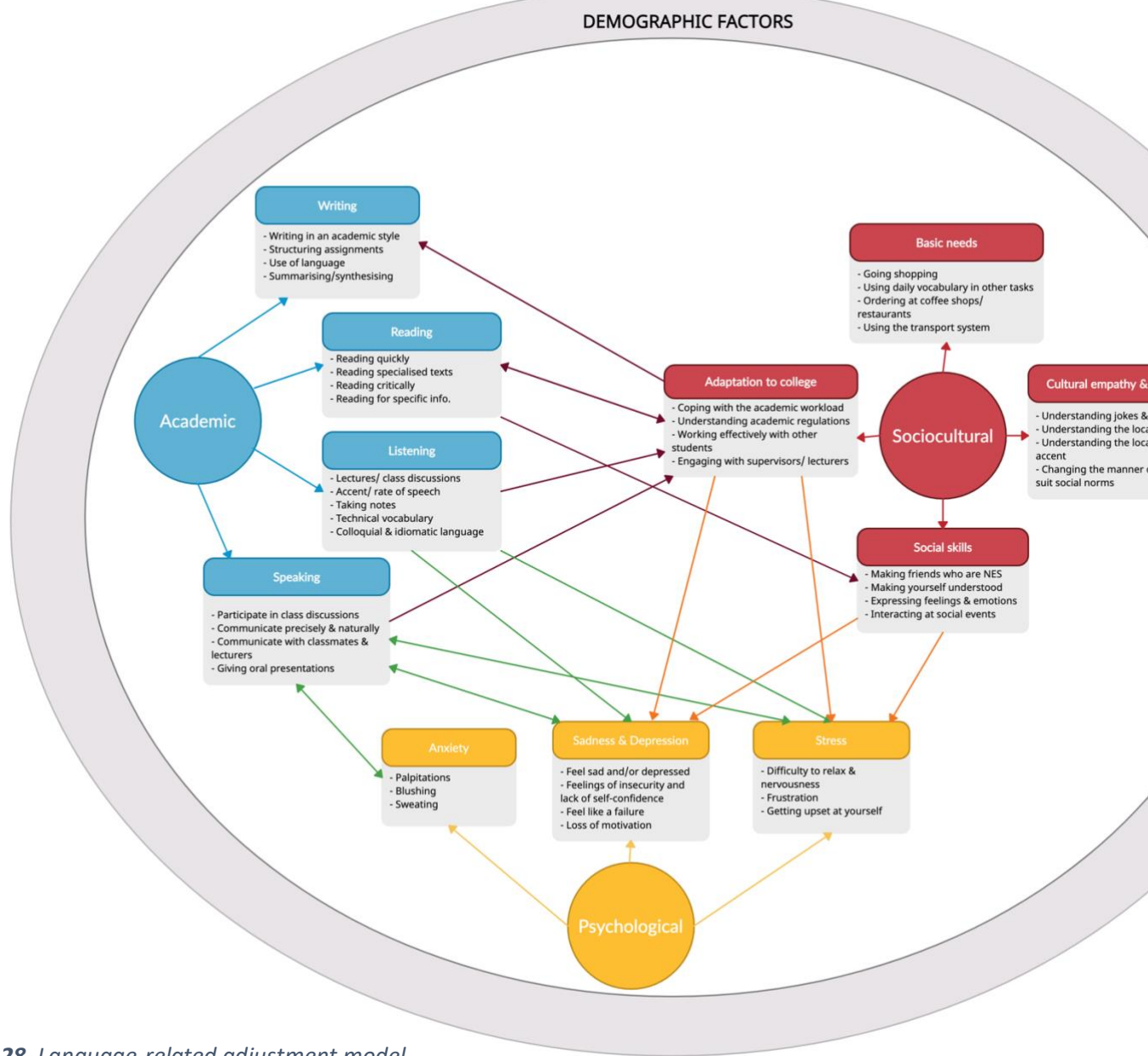- Getting upset at yourself

Psychological

Figure 28. Language-related adjustment model

Secondly, the study contributes to the field methodologically. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as the various data analysis techniques, allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth insight into the language-related challenges that NNES international students face, as well as the EAP-related aspects that may facilitate students' adjustment. In particular, the use of SEM allowed the testing of relationships between variables (i.e., observed and latent variables), and as a result, the development of the language-related adjustment model presented above that might serve as a basis for further research in the field. It is worth noting that this might not have been addressed if traditional statistical methods were used. The use of SEM, although widely used in the social sciences, is uncommon in language education research (see Law and Fong, 2020). Therefore, it may begin to be considered as a valid and effective quantitative empirical research method in future language education research.

9.4. Limitations of the Study

This study is subject to certain limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the findings. In the first place, it is worth considering that the study focuses on the Irish context, which might limit the generalisability of the findings. Generalisability is also affected by the fact that qualitative data collected during Phase I of the study, as well as data collected in Phase II, was drawn from an EAP in-sessional programme at a single institution. A higher number of participants would have been desired, especially given the longitudinal character of the study, which resulted in 18 students participating in the second interview, out of the 24 that took part in the first interview. This limitation is also linked to the study being conducted in a single institution with a limited number of students enrolled in the EAP in-sessional programme (i.e., a total of 112 students registered during the academic year 2017/2018).

Moreover, the quantitative data from the ISQ was collected from the nine public universities on the island, excluding private colleges and other tertiary level institutions such as IoTs. As mentioned in the methodology chapter when discussing the sampling techniques (see Section 5.8), the denial of access to participants by certain universities did not allow the use of proportional quota sampling, and in turn, self-selection sampling was used, resulting in some universities being more widely represented than others (illustrated in Table 8). As in the questionnaire, representativeness of the interview sample was

affected by self-selection bias, which may have resulted in a higher percentage of master's level and Humanities students taking part in the study.

Another limitation that should be considered is that the study focuses on the language-related challenges that the students face and does not consider other aspects that are not related to language that might affect student adjustment, with the exception of the demographic variables examined. This focus on language was especially challenging when obtaining data regarding language-related challenges related to the psychological domain. The scarcity of research that explores the role of language on psychological adjustment, together with the lack of tools designed specifically to analyse this topic, is reflected in the lower volume of data obtained on psychological challenges, as well as the differences between the psychological aspects explored during the ISQ and the interview, which resulted in a more inductive approach needed during the interview analysis. This limitation could have been overcome by the use of sequential exploratory design during Phase I, instead of the convergent parallel design, in which results from the first interview would have informed the design of the ISQ. This could be also added to the difficulty obtaining data on sensitive topics including the psychological symptoms explored such as those pertaining to sadness or depression.

9.5. Recommendations

9.5.1. Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this study have a number of implications for future practice. Considering that language has been identified as the biggest challenge for student adjustment in Ireland (ICOS, 2012b; ICOS, 2012a; Harris-Byrne, 2017; Lewthwaite, 1996; Robertson et al., 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003), the language-related challenges and EAP-related aspects identified in this study provide a deeper insight into language as a challenge, and therefore, may serve to inform national and institutional internationalisation strategies. This, in turn, would contribute to the development of effective internationalisation practices that would have a positive impact on international student recruitment by assuring the highest quality experience; and accordingly, posing an advantage in the competitive global market that is characterised by a shift to internationalisation at home practices and the increasing number of non-English speaking countries providing education through EMI.

The findings of this study demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of EAP programmes, both pre-sessional and in-sessional, on student adjustment, and hence these programmes should receive appropriate attention in internationalisation strategies. In addition, given the role and impact of lecturers and host students on internationalisation at home practices and NNES international student adjustment, strategies should be developed to ensure awareness and encourage inclusivity and a supportive classroom environment. These could include, for example, the provision of professional development directed towards lecturers, as well as awareness campaigns and activities directed towards host students.

The transferability and appropriateness of language entry examinations have been questioned in previous literature as well as in the results of the study due to the reliance on general English and the lack of relation to skills needed at university. In order to ensure a quicker and less arduous academic adjustment process and to support international student academic success, entry examinations should be based on authentic tasks that reflect those academic skills needed at university, or institutions should contemplate the completion of EAP pre-sessional courses as an entry requirement.

Findings concerning the EAP programme identified a number of EAP-related aspects that might contribute to students' adjustment, and therefore should be considered in the planning and development of EAP courses:

- o The EAP classes should take a practical approach and rely on authentic materials and tasks that allow the students to develop and practise academic skills and familiarise with academic practices.
- o This practice should be combined with individual and regular feedback that allows the students to identify and progressively improve their academic language-related difficulties.
- o These suggestions and the study findings also imply that the EAP classes should focus on academic skills, and there should be a distinction between general English and EAP materials and tasks. Students could be provided with separate English tuition, if necessary, in order to cover their general English needs.

o Considering that the students' needs were found to vary according to the students' level and field of study, students could be grouped according to those in order to establish the appropriate outcomes for that specific group.

9.5.2. Recommendations for Further Research

As mentioned above, this study is based on the Irish public university context, therefore, research in other contexts would allow comparisons and would possibly address the generalisability limitation. In the same way, including other tertiary level institutions in Ireland such as private colleges and IoTs would procure a more rounded understanding of the challenges that NNES international students face in Irish tertiary education. This would allow more in-depth exploration of, not only the language challenges that student sojourners face, but also those experienced by students from migrant backgrounds who received their secondary education in Ireland and then progressed to higher education.

Another limitation considered in the previous section is that the study explores the views of a group of EAP students in a single university, which affects the study generalisability. A greater focus on EAP programmes could help to identify and establish a wider range of aspects that would inform EAP practice. In addition, this study focused on the perspectives of NNES international students. Further research might consider the views of other stakeholders, including lecturers and host students, which would provide a broader perspective on the language-related challenges faced by NNES international students.

Considering the notion that academic writing is a skill that needs to be acquired independently of the students' first language (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1994) as well as the participants' views in this study that suggest EAP as beneficial for NES students, further research comparing the language-related challenges that NNES and NES face and the adequacy of EAP programmes for NES students would be worthwhile to conduct in order to establish whether NES would benefit from EAP support.

Although differences between the host culture and international students' culture of origin have been identified as affecting adaptation in previous research (see for example Krishna, 2015; Jones & Kim, 2013) and as a demographic factor impacting the adjustment process in this study, further research would be needed in order to provide a wider understanding

of the role of cultural closeness and the particular culture-specific factors that contribute to international student adaptation.

A final recommendation for further research might be to explore the impact of EAP support on students' academic adjustment by investigating how it may influence students' academic outcomes.

9.6. Final Remarks

Considering that language is reportedly the biggest adaptation challenge for international students, this study has identified the language-related challenges faced by NNES international students in Irish universities, providing an in-depth analysis of these challenges as affecting the three adjustment domains that impact the international student experience (i.e., academic, sociocultural and psychological). In this way, it contributes to existing research on international student adaptation, and more specifically to research on the language-related aspects affecting adaptation in the Irish HE context. The identification of these language-related challenges may serve to inform national and institutional internationalisation strategies, as well as EAP programmes and other university support services directed towards international students. This would assist to ensure that NNES international students achieve successful academic performance and receive a high-quality educational experience. Identifying these challenges also led to the development of a framework for investigating adjustment from the language perspective, which can serve as a basis for further research. Furthermore, the analysis of relationships among variables and domains showed the role of language as a factor in NNES international student adaptation across the three domains, and allowed the study to determine the role of demographic factors in NNES international student adaptation. Lastly, the investigation of the participants' views on the EAP in-sessional programme, enabled the identification of certain aspects of EAP programmes that may contribute to student adaptation; and therefore, can serve to inform future EAP practice. This was achieved through a mixed methods study that included a combination of various quantitative and qualitative tools and data analysis techniques, including the use of SEM, that might contribute to the educational research field in a methodological manner.

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Appendices

Appendix A. International Students' Questionnaire

Language Challenges of International Students at Irish Universities

Thank you for taking part in this survey. It offers you the opportunity to have your opinion heard about your experience at university. Your feedback is extremely important to the researcher as it is meant to be used to improve learning and teaching for non-native speakers of English. All data will be held anonymously and students who participate will not be identified.

*Required

1. Demographic Information

Please select the university you are currently studying at: *

Mark only one oval.

- Dublin City University
- Trinity College Dublin
- University College Cork
- University of Limerick
- NUI Galway
- NUI Maynooth
- Queen's University Belfast
- University of Ulster
- University College Dublin

Which level are you studying? *

Mark only one oval.

- Undergraduate
- Master
- PhD
- Foundation Programme/Pathway Programme

What is your field of study? *

Mark only one oval.

- Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
- Health Sciences
- Engineering, Maths and Science

How long have you been living in Ireland/Northern Ireland for? *

Mark only one oval.

- 0-1 year
- 1-3 years
- 3+ years

Have you been living in an English speaking country before coming to Ireland/Northern Ireland? *

Mark only one oval.

- No
- Yes, 0-1 year
- Yes, 1-3 years
- Yes, +3 years

What is your country of origin? *

Mark only one oval.

What is your certified level of English? *

Mark only one oval.

2. Academic language-related challenges

Please indicate the degree of difficulty or ease you experience in each of these areas. *
Mark only one oval per row.

	Extremely difficult	Difficult	Neutral	Easy	Extremely easy
reading critically					
reading quickly					
reading specialised papers					
reading for specific information					

Please indicate the degree of difficulty or ease you experience in each of these areas. *
Mark only one oval per row.

	Extremely difficult	Difficult	Neutral	Easy	Extremely easy
structuring essays/ dissertations					
summarising/ synthesising					
writing in an academic style					
taking written exams					

Please indicate the degree of difficulty or ease you experience in each of these areas. *
Mark only one oval per row.

	Extremely difficult	Difficult	Neutral	Easy	Extremely easy
participating in class discussions					
communicating with lecturers					
communicating with classmates					
giving oral presentations					

Please indicate the degree of difficulty or ease you experience in each of these areas. *
Mark only one oval per row.

	Extremely difficult	Difficult	Neutral	Easy	Extremely easy
taking notes in lectures					
understanding lectures/ class discussions					
understanding the accent and/or pronunciation					
understanding colloquial and idiomatic language					

	Extremely difficult	Difficult	Neutral	Easy	Extremely easy
understanding technical vocabulary					

Comments (optional)

3. Socio-cultural language-related challenges

Please indicate how much difficulty or ease you experience in each of these areas. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Extremely difficult	Difficult	Neutral	Easy	Extremely easy
using the transport system					
going shopping					
dealing with bureaucracy (visa, Erasmus agreements...)					
ordering at coffee shops/restaurants					

Please indicate the degree of difficulty or ease you experience in each of these areas. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Extremely difficult	Difficult	Neutral	Easy	Extremely easy
making friends who are native English speakers					
making yourself understood					
interacting at social events/community activities					
accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions					

Please indicate the degree of difficulty or ease you experience in each of these areas. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Extremely difficult	Difficult	Neutral	Easy	Extremely easy
coping with the academic workload					
working effectively with other students					

	Extremely difficult	Difficult	Neutral	Easy	Extremely easy
dealing with supervisors/ lecturers					
understanding policies and regulations at university					

Please indicate the degree of difficulty or ease you experience in each of these areas. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Extremely difficult	Difficult	Neutral	Easy	Extremely easy
understanding jokes and humour					
understanding the local language/accent					
changing your manner of speaking to suit social norms					
understanding the locals' worldview					

Comments (optional)

4. Other language-related challenges

When communicating in English, how often do you... *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Always	Very often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
find it difficult to relax?					
find yourself getting upset?					
find yourself getting impatient?					
find it difficult to tolerate interruptions?					

When communicating in English, how often do you... *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Always	Very often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
experience dryness of mouth?					
get so nervous that you forget things/words that you know?					
find yourself in situations that made you so anxious					

	Always	Very often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
that you were relieved when they ended?					
feel your heart pounding?					

When communicating in English, how often do you... *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Always	Very often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
feel sad and depressed?					
feel that you have lost interest or motivation?					
feel like a failure?					
feel frustrated?					

Comments (optional)

Appendix B. Interview Guide

Interview 1	Interview 2
(Identify the language-related challenges that international students face and explore students' views on language support)	*(Analyse changes over time and explore EAP-related aspects that contribute to NNES international students' adjustment)*

Interview 1	Interview 2
1. Demographic info. ° What is your current level of study? ° What is your current main area of study? ° How long have you been living in Ireland for? ° What is your country of origin? ° What is your certified/non-certified level of English? *2. Academic* ° When arriving at this university, have you encountered any: ❖ Reading difficulties (i.e., read critically, read quickly, read specialised paper, read for specific info.)? ❖ Writing difficulties (i.e., write lengthy paper, write reports, synthesise multiple sources of info.)? ❖ Speaking difficulties (i.e., participate in class discussions, communicate with prof(s) or students, oral presentations)? ❖ Listening difficulties (i.e., take notes, understand class discussions, formal and informal language? *3. Socio-cultural* ° In terms of language competence, have you found any difficulty related to: ❖ Basic needs (i.e., use the transport system, go shopping, deal with bureaucracy, etc.)? ❖ Social skills (i.e., make friends, expressing yourself, interact at social events, etc.)? ❖ College adaptation (i.e., coping with academic work, work effectively with other students, follow rules and regulations at uni, etc.)? ❖ General acculturation (i.e., understand jokes and humour, understand the local language/accent, understand the locals' worldview, etc.) *4. Psychological* ° In relation to language competence, have you experienced any: ❖ Stress symptoms (i.e., difficulty to relax, intolerance, anger, etc.)? ❖ Anxiety symptoms (i.e., embarrassment, physical symptoms, etc.)? ❖ Depression symptoms (i.e., loss of interest/motivation, sadness, etc.)? ° Overall, what are the most significant language-related challenges that you currently experience? *5. Language support* ° What strategies do you use to overcome those challenges? ° Why are you taking EAP classes? What are your expectations? ° Are you taking part in other language support activities inside or outside the university?	° What are the language-related difficulties that you have experienced or are still experiencing during this academic year (academic, sociocultural and/or psychological)? ° Individual difficulties ° How could the EAP classes help you to overcome such difficulties? ° Does the EAP programme fulfil your individual academic needs? ° What aspects of the EAP programme would you change in order to meet your individual linguistic needs? ° Has the EAP programme helped you to overcome language-related difficulties (academic, sociocultural and/or psychological)? ❖ If yes, how? ❖ If not, how could this be improved? ° What other aspects (non-EAP) have helped you to cope with those difficulties? ° What did you like best about this course? ° What would you like to change about the course? ° Overall, did the programme meet your expectations? ° Would you recommend the programme to other students? Why?

Appendix C. Needs Analysis Questionnaire

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
SCHOOL OF LINGUISTIC SPEECH AND COMMUNICATION SCIENCES

Needs Analysis Questionnaire for EAP Students

International Students in Irish Universities: Overcoming the Language-related Challenges,
Carmen María Ortiz Granero, PhD Student
Dr. Sarah O'Brien, Supervisor

You are being asked to participate in this research project which is being carried out by Carmen María Ortiz Granero. This questionnaire is anonymous. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Please do not write your name or put any other identifying information on the survey. Your completion of the survey serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project.

There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to this questionnaire, simply give your answers sincerely as this will guarantee the success of the research project.

Thank you for your time!

Please indicate your level of study:

☐ Undergraduate
☐ Master
☐ PhD
☐ Foundation/Pathway Programme

Please indicate your field of study:

☐ Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
☐ Health Sciences
☐ Engineering, Maths and Science

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1. In your studies at university, how important are the following skills?	Not at all important	Slightly important	Important	Fairly important	Very important
1. Reading critically	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Reading quickly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Reading specialised papers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Reading for specific information	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Structuring essays/ dissertations/ theses	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Summarising/ synthesising	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Writing in an academic style	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Taking written exams	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Participating in class discussions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. Communicating with lecturers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. Communicating with classmates	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. Giving oral presentations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. Taking notes in lectures	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. Understanding lectures/ class discussions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. Understanding colloquial and idiomatic language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. Understanding technical vocabulary	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	2. What skills would you like to improve through the EAP Programme? (Please tick the box on the right as appropriate)	
Reading	Reading critically	
	Reading quickly	
	Reading specialised papers	
	Reading for specific information	
Writing	Structuring essays/ dissertations/ theses	
	Summarising/ synthesising	
	Writing in an academic style	
	Taking written exams	
Speaking	Participating in class discussions	
	Communicating with lecturers	
	Communicating with classmates	
	Giving oral presentations	
Listening	Taking notes in lectures	
	Understanding lectures/ class discussions	
	Understanding colloquial and idiomatic language	
	Understanding technical vocabulary	
OTHER (Please specify in the space below)		

3. What skills are emphasised the most during your EAP classes?

4. To what extent has IELTS prepared you for the reality of the university experience?

5. Do you think that taking EAP before the start of the course (e.g., during the summer months) would have been more beneficial for you experience at university? Why? (Please state your reasons)

6. What do you expect from an EAP tutor?

7. What style of class do you think would benefit your learning experience?

8. What kind of materials would you prefer to use during your EAP classes?

Appendix D. Participant Information Leaflet

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
SCHOOL OF LINGUISTIC SPEECH AND COMMUNICATION SCIENCES

Participant Information Leaflet

International students in Irish universities: overcoming the language-related challenges,
Carmen María Ortiz Granero, PhD Student
Dr. Sarah O'Brien, Supervisor

You are invited to participate in this research project which is being carried out by Carmen María Ortiz Granero. Your participation is voluntary. Even if you agree to participate now, you can withdraw at any time without any consequences of any kind.

The study is designed to investigate the language-related challenges that international students experience in Irish universities, and in which ways the English for Academic Purposes programme may help to overcome those difficulties.

If you agree to participate, this will involve you (i) participating in two audio-recorded interviews of approximately 20 minutes (one at the beginning of the semester, and one at the end).

The results of this research may help you to identify and overcome the language difficulties that you experience at university. Also, those results may improve the future of the EAP programme in which you are involved, and other EAP programmes presenting the same objectives.

Any information or data which is obtained from you during this research which can be identified with you will be treated confidentially and anonymously. We will do this by replacing any personal data with codes, and keeping data (including hardcopies and digital data) securely stored at all times. Only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor will have access to it.

The audio-recordings of the interviews will be transcribed replacing all personal data for codes, and destroyed after the transcript has been typed. Interview transcripts will be made available to each participant on request, providing the opportunity of deleting any wording that may be perceived as identifying. The original recording will be available only to the present investigator and will be stored in my own password-protected computer for the minimum period of time (until the transcript has been typed). Materials that are sensitive will be kept in a secure location in the School which will be locked when the researchers are not present. Data from this research project may be published in the future.

If you decide not to take part in this study, the researcher will exclude any observational data including you, even if it also includes people who have agreed to take part. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in anyway.

If you have any questions about this research you can ask:
Carmen María Ortiz Granero, email: ortizgrc@tcd.ie.

You are also free, however, to contact the project supervisor to seek further clarification and information:

Dr. Sarah O'Brien
Director of CELLT
Assistant Professor, Applied Linguistics
School of Linguistics, Speech and Communication Sciences
R. 3040 Arts Building
Trinity College, The University of Dublin
Dublin 2, Ireland
Tel: (+353) (1) 896-1626

Appendix E. Informed Consent Form

Consent Form

International Students in Irish Universities: Overcoming the Language-related Challenges,
Carmen María Ortiz Granero, PhD Student
Dr. Sarah O'Brien, Supervisor

I am invited to participate in this research project which is being carried out by Carmen María Ortiz Granero. My participation is voluntary. Even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time without any consequences of any kind.

The study is designed to investigate the language-related challenges that international students experience in Irish universities, and in which ways the English for Academic Purposes programme may help to overcome those difficulties.

If I agree to participate, this will involve me participating in two audio-recorded interviews of approximately 20 minutes (one at the beginning of the semester, and one at the end).

The results of this research may help me to identify and overcome the language difficulties that I experience at university. Also, those results may improve the future of the EAP programme in which I am involved, and other EAP programmes presenting the same objectives.

Any information or data which is obtained from me during this research which can be identified with me will be treated confidentially and anonymously. This will be done by replacing any personal data with codes, and keeping data (including hardcopies and digital data) securely stored at all times. Only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor will have access to it.

The audio-recordings of the interviews will be transcribed replacing all personal data for codes, and destroyed after the transcript has been typed. Interview transcripts will be made available to each participant on request, providing the opportunity of deleting any wording that may be perceived as identifying. The original recording will be available only to the present investigator and will be stored in her own password-protected computer for the minimum period of time (until the transcript has been typed). Materials that are sensitive will be kept in a secure location in the School which will be locked when the researchers are not present. Data from this research project may be published in the future.

If I decide not to take part in this study, the researcher will exclude any observational data including me, even if it also includes people who have agreed to take part. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and choosing not to take part will not disadvantage me in anyway.

If I have any questions about this research I can ask:
Carmen María Ortiz Granero, email: **ortizgrc@tcd.ie**

I am also free, however, to contact the project supervisor to seek further clarification and information:

Dr. Sarah O'Brien
School of Linguistics, Speech and Communication Sciences
R. 3040 Arts Building
Trinity College, The University of Dublin
Dublin 2, Ireland
Tel: (+353) (1) 896-1626

Signature of research participant
I understand what is involved in this research and I agree to participate in the study. [*I have been given a copy of the Participant Information Leaflet and a copy of this consent form to keep.*]

Email address*: _____

*If you choose to participate in the interviews, please provide your email address so that you can be contacted by the researcher in order to schedule the interviews.

_____   _____   _____
Name of participant   Signature of participant   Date

Signature of researcher
I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Signature of researcher   Date

Appendix F. Codebook for Comments Question

Comments on Academic Challenges

CATEGORY	CODE	DESCRIPTION
UNDERSTANDING SPOKEN ENGLISH	Accent	This code represents any reference made to difficulty understanding due to accent.
	Speed	This code represents any reference made to difficulty understanding due to rate of speech.
	Colloquialisms	This code represents any reference made to difficulty understanding due to the use of colloquialisms.
WRITING AS MOST CHALLENGING	Academic texts	This code represents any reference made writing as the most challenging skill when writing academic texts in general.
	Paraphrasing	This code represents any reference made writing as the most challenging skill due to difficulties relating to paraphrasing.
MORE TIME	Exams	This code represents any reference made to more time needed to complete exams compared to native English speakers
	Class discussions	This code represents any reference made to more time needed to participate in class discussions compared to native English speakers
OTHER	No exams as assessment	This code represents any reference made to exams not used as assessment in the student's course

Comments on Sociocultural Challenges

CATEGORY	CODE	DESCRIPTION
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES	Jokes	This code represents any reference made to understanding local jokes.
	Differences in culture	This code represents any reference made to cultural differences having an impact on communication in the social setting.
	Directedness	This code represents any reference made to differences regarding directedness of expression having an impact on communication in the social setting.
EXPRESSING THEMSELVES	Eloquently	This code represents any reference made to differences regarding difficulties expressing in an eloquent manner as having an impact on communication in the social setting.
	Right words	This code represents any reference made to difficulties finding the right words as having an impact on communication in the social setting.
CLASSMATES' ATTITUDE	Impatient	This code represents any reference made to the impatience or friendliness of some classmates as having an impact on communication in the social setting.
	Lived abroad	This code represents any reference made to classmates having lived abroad as having an impact on communication in the social setting.
UNDERSTANDING SPOKEN ENGLISH	Partner native speaker	This code represents any reference made to the positive impact of having a relationship with a native English speaker on their ability to understand spoken English.
	Accent	This code represents any reference made to difficulties understanding accents as having an impact on communication in the social setting.

Comments on Psychological Challenges

CATEGORY	CODE	DESCRIPTION
FRUSTRATION EXPRESSING IN ENGLISH	Meaning	This code represents any reference made to difficulty conveying the exact meaning resulting in feelings of frustration.
	Vocabulary	This code represents any reference made to limited vocabulary resulting in feelings of frustration.
	Time to find the right words	This code represents any reference made to the limited time to find the right words when speaking resulting in feelings of frustration.
ANXIETY	Large lectures/ discussions	This code represents any reference made to the limited time to find the right words when speaking resulting in feelings of anxiety.
	Classmates	This code represents any reference made to the limited time to find the right words when speaking resulting in feelings of anxiety
PRESENTATIONS	Presentations	This code represents any reference made to difficulties in the psychological section of the questionnaire being linked to presentations.

Appendix G. Codebook for the First Interview

CATEGORY	CODE	DESCRIPTION
READING	Quickly/ workload	This code represents any reference made to the challenges dealing with the reading workload.
	Specialised papers	This code includes references to difficulties related to reading due to technical vocabulary.
	Critically	This code represents any reference made to difficulties regarding reading critically.
	Specific information	This captures any relevant information that makes reference to difficulties when reading for specific information.
WRITING	Academic style	This code represents difficulties regarding writing in an academic style.
	Structure	This code includes difficulties regarding assignment and/or dissertation structure.
	Use of language	This code includes difficulties related to the use of language when writing academic assignments.
	Summarising/ synthesising	This code includes reported concerns regarding summarising and/or synthesising and writing a literature review.
	Exams	This code covers all relevant information that makes reference to issues taking written examinations.
LISTENING	Lectures/ class discussions	This code represents difficulties understanding spoken English in lectures or class discussions.
	Accent/ pronunciation	This covers any information in the data that makes reference to understanding the accent and/or pronunciation in the academic setting.
	Taking notes	This represents any reference made to taking notes in class.
	Technical vocabulary	This code refers to listening difficulties related to academic technical vocabulary.
	Colloquial/ idiomatic language	This covers any information in the data that makes reference to understanding colloquial and/or informal language in the academic setting.
SPEAKING	Preciseness/ native-like	This covers references to the willingness of improving preciseness and being more native-like
	Class discussions	This code represents speaking difficulties participating in group discussions.
	Native speakers	This code includes references to difficulties speaking when native English speakers are present.
	Oral presentations	This covers all relevant information that makes reference to difficulties related to giving oral presentations.
	Classmates	This code refers to difficulties communicating with classmates.
	Lecturers	This code refers to difficulties communicating with lecturers.
REASONS FOR TAKING EAP	Writing skills	This code refers to improving writing skills as the reason for taking the EAP programme
	Oral fluency	This code refers to improving oral fluency as the reason for taking the EAP programme
	Exposure to language	This code includes references to exposure to language as a reason for taking the EAP programme

	Reading skills	This code refers to improving reading skills as the reason for taking the EAP programme
	Critical thinking	This code refers to improving critical thinking skills as the reason for taking the EAP programme
	Presentation skills	This code refers to improving presentation skills as the reason for taking the EAP programme
	Socialise	This code includes references to socialising as the reason for taking the EAP programme
PRE-UNIVERSITY PREPARATION	IELTS	This code includes reference to IELTS lack of transferability
	Pre-sessional EAP	This code includes references to pre-sessional EAP programmes as beneficial to student adaptation
PREFERENCES	EAP tutor feedback	This code covers references to the value of receiving feedback from the EAP tutor on their productive skills
	Lesson practicality	This code includes references to the practicality of the EAP sessions as beneficial

Appendix H. Codebook for the Second Interview

CATEGORY	CODE	DESCRIPTION
ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT	Familiarity/practice	This code includes references to practice and familiarity with academic skills as a factor contributing to the overcoming of academic challenges
	Academic writing skills	This captures any relevant information that makes reference to understanding academic writing practices as a factor contributing to the overcoming of academic challenges.
	Lecture preparation	This code includes references to preparation for lectures as a factor contributing to the overcoming of academic challenges.
	Reading techniques	This captures any relevant information that makes reference to developing reading techniques as a factor contributing to the overcoming of academic challenges.
	Partner/friends native speakers	This code includes references to having friends or partners who are native English speakers as a factor contributing to the overcoming of academic challenges
	EAP tutor feedback	This code includes references to receiving feedback from the EAP tutor as a factor contributing to the overcoming of academic challenges
	Communicate difficulties	This code includes references to communicating difficulties as a factor contributing to the overcoming of academic challenges
SOCIOCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT	Exposure to English	This code includes references to being exposed to English language as a factor contributing to the overcoming of sociocultural challenges
	Group work	This code includes references to group work arrangements as a factor contributing to the overcoming of sociocultural challenges
	Social activities	This captures any relevant information that makes reference to participating in social activities as a factor contributing to the overcoming of sociocultural challenges.
	Familiarisation with academic practices	This code includes references to familiarisation with academic practices as a factor contributing to the overcoming of sociocultural challenges
	Expressing difficulties (sa)	This code includes references to expressing difficulties understanding as a factor contributing to the overcoming of sociocultural challenges
	Humour	This code includes references to using humour as a factor contributing to the overcoming of sociocultural challenges
PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT	Familiarity with lectures/supervisors	This code includes references to familiarity with lecturers/supervisors as a factor contributing to the overcoming of psychological challenges
	Action plan	This code includes references to having an established plan of action as a factor contributing to the overcoming of psychological challenges
	Understanding academic practices	This code includes references to understanding academic practices as a factor contributing to the overcoming of psychological challenges
	Familiarity with classmates	This code includes references to familiarity with classmates as a factor contributing to the overcoming of psychological challenges
LIKED	Language exposure	This covers references to language exposure as an aspect of the EAP in-sessional programme that students liked.

		Materials	This covers references to class materials as an aspect of the EAP in-sessional programme that students liked.
		Feedback	This covers references to receiving feedback from EAP tutors as an aspect of the EAP in-sessional programme that students liked..
		Activities	This covers references to the type of activities as an aspect of the EAP in-sessional programme that students liked.
		Tutor	This covers references to the EAP tutor's approach as an aspect of the EAP in-sessional programme that students liked.
		Environment	This covers references to classroom environment as an aspect of the EAP in-sessional programme that students liked.
		Make friends	This covers references to making friends as an aspect of the EAP in-sessional programme that students liked.
		Small groups	This covers references to small groups as an aspect of the EAP in-sessional programme that students liked.
IMPROVED		Level of English	This covers references to the class arrangement according to the students' level of English as an aspect of the EAP in-sessional programme that students consider that could be improved.
		More practice/feedback	This covers references to a more practical approach and more frequent feedback as an aspect of the EAP in-sessional programme that students consider that could be improved.
		Field of study	This covers references to the class arrangement according to the students' field of study as an aspect of the EAP in-sessional programme that students consider that could be improved.
		Native speakers	This covers references to the course been offered to native English speakers as an aspect of the EAP in-sessional programme that students consider that could be improved.
		Timetable	This covers references to the class timetable as an aspect of the EAP in-sessional programme that students consider that could be improved.
		More academic	This covers references to the need for activities to be more academic as an aspect of the EAP in-sessional programme that students consider that could be improved.
		More advertisement/awareness	This covers references to increasing advertisement and awareness among university students about the EAP programme as an aspect of the EAP in-sessional programme that students consider that could be improved.

Appendix I. Conceptual Map