

A Study of Asian Students' Perceptions of Learning Strategies and Related Issues in UK Based Higher Education Institutions

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DECLARATION

I declare that the following thesis is my own effort and that, to the best of my knowledge, I have not plagiarised any work at any shape. The whole work is my own, and researched study except those specified in references, and bibliography. This work has never been submitted to any other institution or organization for the purpose of degree or research project-initiation or any other intention. This up-to date work has no materials that overlaps others' work, except where due acknowledgments have been made according to the university of Worcester regulations.

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ABSTRACT

Research on the experiences of East Asian students' learning in the UK is growing because a large number of Chinese origin students come to Britain for higher education (HE). In recent years the number of South Asian students from India and Pakistan has also significantly increased. The current research focus on approaches to learning as means to develop independent learning (IL) is not often dealt with in depth in literature. This study examines how Asian students with English as a second language successfully transform their approaches to learning from a traditional learning background into IL skills. It probes both the academic and cultural issues of Chinese, Indian and Pakistani students in British HE institutions, from their own perceptions using a qualitative approach, by examining the inherent challenges between prior learning patterns in the home country and the necessary development of IL skills in the UK.

Data was obtained from twenty nine in-depth interviews, questionnaires (66 responses) and personal narratives giving student accounts of the UK learning process; their prior and current educational experience and the closer link that is established in relation to the realisation of the difference in IL and teacher-centeredness. Using Grounded Theory (GT), this thesis conceptualises that IL skills are critical for academic success, and both language and IL skills are vital for adjustment in the UK higher education. Adequate academic writing and communication skills are part of this, and various support strategies are needed to enhance the process of IL. My research contributes to the literature by highlighting the challenges Asian student face in developing IL. Thus, the current theoretical understanding presents some previously-ignored aspects of major learning theories which do play a helpful part in understanding the successful UK independent learning experience of Asian students.

The study – adding perspectives of non-Confucian Heritage Culture students to existing studies finds that overall Asian students share a similar learning history of teacher-centeredness and hence face issues of the same identical nature which originate largely from their prior learning experiences of dependency. Despite these difficulties, students

are able to develop IL skills. The development of IL is however a transitional process which becomes apparent with both an inclusive institutional involvement. The study recommends andragogical strategies, appropriate support strategies; and adopting a multi-ethnic approach towards a socio-cultural adjustment journey in students' own personal capacity. In order to develop IL, students must not only develop language skills by adopting a multi-ethnic approach towards socio-cultural adjustment but also a range of approaches to learning, and developing the ability to think independently about the relative topics studied; all which have clear implications in relation to successful IL experience.

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CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of Purpose

This study examines the learning approaches of Asian (Chinese, Indian and Pakistani) students in the light of learning difficulties they face, and the way they develop independent learning (IL) – a course of learning action which I personally see as not only self-directed in relation to studying and researching but also a practice which is largely student-centred. Bearing in mind that IL is contrary to what we normally call teacher-centred approach, and according to literature is commonly practiced by Asian students. For this purpose, the current study focuses on the issues students face in the development of IL in the UK – a new and different approach than the one Asian student(s) normally practice(s) (see the literature review – Chapter Two). This research is a contribution to the internationalisation process in relation to Pakistani, Indian and Chinese students, studying in English as their second language in the United Kingdom (UK), who experience difficulties in utilizing their approaches to learning and adopting IL patterns in the UK. In addition, modern research is lacking in evidence about developing IL practices among the Asian student population in the UK.

This study is important in the sense that Asians constitute the biggest student population in the world, and the majority of students arriving in the UK for higher education (HE) courses come from Asian countries (HESA, 2005 & 2010; UKCISA, 2010 & 2012). These students may face a variety of issues, such as language, IL difficulties and the sociocultural adaptation barriers. This study is also important for creating a roadmap for the use of current and new students facing difficulties in the IL environment.

A key issue encountered by Asian students is that of integration in a different learning culture. Integration could be facilitated through many aspects of learning, i.e. language, teaching and learning patterns, and the way learning practices work in a different educational environment. However, it is not easy to integrate into a foreign country's educational system (as alien to them) and to meet the expectations of those who speak a different language - necessary for communication, in both a written and spoken context. Indeed, language difficulties can cause students to feel insecure and uncomfortable

communicating at different levels, and may impede students' argumentation abilities in educational exams and discussions to develop learning autonomy.

In addition to language difficulties, Asian students from different cultures are likely to face unfamiliar teaching patterns that vary, partially if not totally, from those of their prior history of teaching experiences. Similarly the different learning practices and approaches may make it hard for them to adjust to the new learning culture. While UK students may also face similar challenges, it is less difficult for UK students to adapt because they do not have the issues of second language and cultural adaptation – which means they can learn more easily, convey their ideas and adapt with more confidence. The lack of adaptation might cause Asian students to rely on prior approaches to learning, while it is vital for them to develop a practice of IL which is critical for learning in the UK.

Additionally it must also be acknowledged that different students adopt different learning approaches in HE which may vary in different subject-studies and learning-requisites; thus, different approaches have their strengths and weaknesses (Smith, 2001). There is no clear evidence to support the strengths of an across-the-board learning approach towards all subject-studies and this practice will not be the same everywhere. Hence, approaches to learning among Asian students, and also in Asian universities, differ from those used in the UK (Carroll & Appleton, 2007: p.73; Iqbal, Sohail & Shahzad, 2010), a practice of which an overall majority of students entering HE are aware. However, a large number of Asian students feel uncomfortable adopting different and sometimes more active learning approaches (Li & Campbell, 2006), often requiring more direction in the learning process (Siddiqui, 2006; Smith, 2008) which presents them as dependent learners.

In fact, this dependency trend is particularly apparent amongst those Asian students who rely on traditional (surface and rote) forms of learning (see Forland, 2008) and is different from the IL form of learning practiced in the UK. Keeping in view the reputation of numerous prestigious institutions in Asian countries, the practice of traditional learning may not be the same for all Asian students; and simultaneously not

all western students could be classified as deep thinkers or wholly independent learners. The learning approaches (i.e. surface, deep, and strategic), explored by various studies, were originally intended to match the needs of learners from different cultures and origins; however, some researchers have looked too narrowly at the area of ‘approaches to learning’ in respect to overseas students (those who are classified as non-EU students for fee purposes) and others who have traditional (rote/surface) learning backgrounds. Such studies have also ignored the process of developing IL approaches among Asian students in HE. Hence no study has explored Asian students’ perspectives of IL development in the UK higher education.

Thus the aim of this study is to explore the learning approaches of Asian students in the UK from their own perceptions and the way they transform their own dependent learning practices into IL. In other words, the focus of the current study is to explore the andragogical assumptions (learner-centeredness/IL) in addition to pedagogical aspects (teaching as assistive) of learning in HE. Importantly, this research determines to assess how Asian students develop IL practices, and how their process of learning can be facilitated. Within this study, the research focuses more on the ‘process of learning’ and the strategies students use in higher education to make sense of what they are studying, and exploring insights in existing modern learning theories, if there are any. The research also focuses on the match between what might be identified as more independent forms of HE learning in the UK, what the students’ perceptions and expectations are and how they come to terms with the complex difference in order to become independent learners. It is hoped that a better understanding will help facilitate higher education teaching and learning in the UK. The conclusions of this study will present a theory of the understanding of learning as IL in higher education.

1.2 Background

The motivation for the current study is linked to my personal experience and realisation regarding the learning barriers I encountered during my first year of study in the UK. My initial expectation was that my learning would be directed by a high teaching standard; however despite the high standard of teaching in the beginning, I perceived

this practice as inefficient and different in the UK. My learning in the UK was expected to be more self-directed and independent rather than via tutorials – which I was expecting. I came to realise this at later stages of my learning experience, understanding these learning practices in the UK appeared more useful than the directed form of teaching – called teacher-centeredness. For this reason, as I realised later, the learner's role is practically more involved in academia than those of the teachers, a similar observation to that of Lublin (2003). Hence, in simple terms the learning practice in the UK was more independent than a dependent approach.

From my personal experience, as a student, I had difficulties coping with learning patterns in the UK. I also learned from my colleagues that many of them had similar experiences, with some having to cease their studies and some, not all, forced to return to their home countries without gaining university-level qualifications. Those students who remained for study purposes were largely unaware of the research methods and learning approaches adopted in Britain before embarking on their studies. Indeed, this is the situation in which I found myself during my first year of studying in the UK. In fact, lack of awareness about the way learning works in the UK could result in Asian students ceasing their study or else getting lower-level qualifications. Such a weak educational attainment will only enable some students to gain the right to work in the UK. Many students were caught by the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) as economic migrants who mainly attended colleges rather than universities, in order to get low-level qualifications and remain in the UK. This issue was largely highlighted in 2009 when the UKBA discovered that hundreds of accredited colleges were actually pretence to get students UK visas (Edwards, 2009; Home Office, 2010 & 2011a), who according to Coughlan (2010) are now facing a large-scale crackdown. It is possible that overseas students may have had the impression that they were gaining the necessary qualifications, in exchange for nominal tuition fees, to remain and work in the UK. The possibility that there are multiple factors behind the motivation of students to work rather than study, whilst coming to and remaining in the UK, cannot be ignored; the result may be a discontinuation of studies or becoming trapped in a system from where there is nowhere to go. Similar observations, as clues, are largely identified by Fleming

(2007) and also made in the concluding statement of the report by Coffield, Mosley, Hall and Ecclestone (2004), asking:

“Why should politicians, policy-makers, senior managers and practitioners in post-16 learning concern themselves with learning styles, when the really big issues concern the large percentages of students within the sector who either drop out or end up without any qualifications? (p.157).”

Here, we could possibly link the issue of discontinuation of studies among some overseas students to economic conditions. Students from a poorer economic background might come with the intention to work as well as study; however, it is likely that at some point, undertaking work and independent study at the same time become difficult or even impossible. Thus financial factors do play a role not only in continuation of studies but also in students’ learning independently in higher education. While this may not be true in all cases, stable financial conditions might also guarantee a successful candidature.

Different studies highlight a number of similar issues with regards to students’ studying and learning patterns in the UK, to those that I found existed among my colleagues. It would appear that these issues originate from students’ (and my own) inadequate learning skills in terms of independent learning, an important aspect of andragogical assumptions which means undertaking self-directed learning without the need for extensive support from teacher- a predominant process of learning in the UK. At this point, I was inspired to take approaches to learning as a basis to investigate these issues by identifying the most common ones among overseas students and by focusing specifically on Pakistani, Indian and Chinese students who speak English as a second language. I chose to focus on these Asian students in particular because on the one hand they make up the majority of overseas students in the UK, and on the other hand they represent both East and South Asians communities. One way to start looking at related issues is to start focusing on students’ lingual difficulties, as McMahon (2011) outlines them as necessary for academic adjustment, and financial conditions in addition to the students’ intentions about learning patterns (approaches to learning), it would also be reasonable to establish how students cope with generic learning issues and how they develop independent learning skills. These questions are crucial because many students

coming from a culture of, mainly, surface and rote learning find the transition towards IL very difficult if not impossible.

Studying students' perceptions of the identification of similarities and differences in prior learning (history) and UK learning patterns may help to create a roadmap for both current and future students in the UK. Probing perceptions of a sample of Asian overseas students could not only help to improve students' performance and map their approaches to learning but also pave a way to encourage more international (non-UK including EU) students to study in the UK. More importantly, studying students' approaches to learning could help to ease the challenges of the diverse teaching and learning environment (Caruana & Spurling, 2007) in UK-based institutions, in addition to formulating a way forward for developing IL. At the same time, the current study would also assess to distinguish between students' with the genuine ambition to study a particular subject and those with economic ambitions under the pretence of college-based studies – which is, likely, an important influencing factor towards developing independent learning. For this purpose it is vital to determine whether the development of independent learning is still a relevant issue in different subject studies and how they influence students' approaches to learning in the UK.

From my background as a teacher at different Pakistani institutions for many years and a tutor in one British institution, as well as a student of UK higher education, I realised that there were certain common concerns among students studying in some Pakistani institutions and those in the UK's one. Some of the concerns and issues were also explored by Li and Kaye (1998) to help the institutions to win the overseas students' recruitment market. While some issues were very naïvely common barriers to my own personal learning strategy, others seemed to be questions that related more to my own cultural and educational experience than to my learning approach. The difficulty with studying independently and meeting the institutional requisites (Smith, 2001; Kingston & Forland, 2008) lay somewhere in between the 'learning skills' required at UK institutions (Carroll, 2002; Wu, 2008) - which we call IL, and those of my own prior academic history which grew in a spoon-fed learning environment; however this may not be case with an overall Asian student population. In other words, balancing

institutional requirements in the UK with Asian students' approaches to learning independently tends to be a difficult task as indicated in numerous studies, such as Twigg (2006), Tian (2008) and Wu (2008).

This was the time when I was also reading a book by Marshall and Rowland (1998) which was specifically addressing some guidelines for students as how to become independent learners. Although I was impressed by the level of information in Chapter 3 of this book, it was not appealing to portray the essence of the issues I personally faced in learning independently in the UK. So I began to ask questions. These questions concerned the issues I, and my own colleagues, encountered during the course of initial experiences of independent learning in the UK; and the extent to which English language and socio-cultural transition may become problems for other Asian students. From some studies (i.e. Leung, Ginns & Kember, 2008; Mohr, 2010; Forland, 2006; Heffernan, Morrison, Basu, & Sweeney, 2010), I was aware that there were cultural issues involved in the transitional situations for overseas students, and wanted to explore whether these challenges can affect the learning approaches of Pakistani, Indian and Chinese students. The possibility of socio-cultural and academic adjustment issues among other Asian students is seen crucial from my own experience of learning in the UK. It is reasonable to question, therefore, the possibility that multiple issues could exist among Asian overseas students (see Kember, 2000; & Shafique, 2009), e.g. the role of language is a problem in Pakistani students in her education (Coleman, 2012), particularly during the development of independent learning skills. For this purpose, what can help Asian students, and perhaps other overseas students, to integrate well within the British HE system (Kingston & Forland, 2008; Carroll, 2002)? How can independent learners emerge from a population of Asian students in the UK who mainly rely on traditional learning? And finally, how could the process of learning be located within a theoretical domain? Accepting that some studies like that of Wu (2008) and Richards (2011) have noted some similar issues in a limited sample, they did not investigate learning approaches with comparison to students' prior learning backgrounds. Hence, the current study seeks to answer these questions in relation to a larger and varied sample of Asian students from three different nationalities studying in the UK higher education. These questions are crucially important when we consider the

development of IL as a learning issue among an overall population of Asian students who also form the biggest students' population in the UK.

1.3 Overseas Students in the UK and their Relevance to the Current Sample

The United Kingdom has a long history of attracting students from around the world to study at different levels (including undergraduate and postgraduate). The UK holds the second largest share of the international student' market (OECD, 2007: p.319). Every year, thousands of these students arrive to study in the UK with an estimated 104,000 undergraduate international students arriving during the year 2010 (UCAS, 2010). The HESA (2007) report shows the following changes for overseas students in British higher education institutions during the year 2005/06 which indicates that China is the first and India the second largest exporter of overseas students to the UK:

Table 1.1

Country of Domicile	Total 2005/06	Change (%) 2004/05 to 2005/06
China (People's Republic of)	50755	-3.7
India	19205	15.1
Greece	17675	-10.2
Republic of Ireland	16790	2.7
United States	14755	2.6
Germany	13265	5.7
France	12455	6.6
Malaysia	11450	-0.2
Nigeria	9605	17.9
Hong Kong	9445	-12.4

Source: HESA (2007) 'Students in Higher Education Institutions 2007

The change in number of students shifted from making Pakistan one of the top 7 senders of students to the UK; even in 2011 and 2012 this level still the same (UKCISA, 2014). Hence, with a gradual increase in the number of Indian and Pakistani students in UK's higher education institutions, the number of Chinese students rose steadily from 47,035 in 2008 to 56,990 in 2009. However, the number of student speakers of English as second language (ESL) increased and this number includes Pakistanis, Indians and

Chinese. The top ten non-European Union (EU) students in UK higher education institutions are shown in the following table (as reported in the HESA statistics 2009/10):

Table 1.2
Top Ten non-EU Countries of Domicile in 2009/10 for HE Students in UK
Higher Education Institutions

Country of domicile	2008/09	2009/10	% change
China	47035	56990	21.1%
India	34065	38500	13.0%
Nigeria	14380	16680	16.0%
United States	14345	15060	5.0%
Malaysia	12695	14060	10.7%
Hong Kong	9600	9945	3.6%
Pakistan	9610	9815	2.1%
Saudi Arabia	5205	8340	60.3%
Canada	5350	5575	4.2%
Thailand	4675	5505	17.8%
All other non-EU countries	94355	100290	6.3%
Total non-EU domicile	251310	280760	11.7%

Source: HESA: Students in Higher Education Institutions 2008/09 and 2009/10

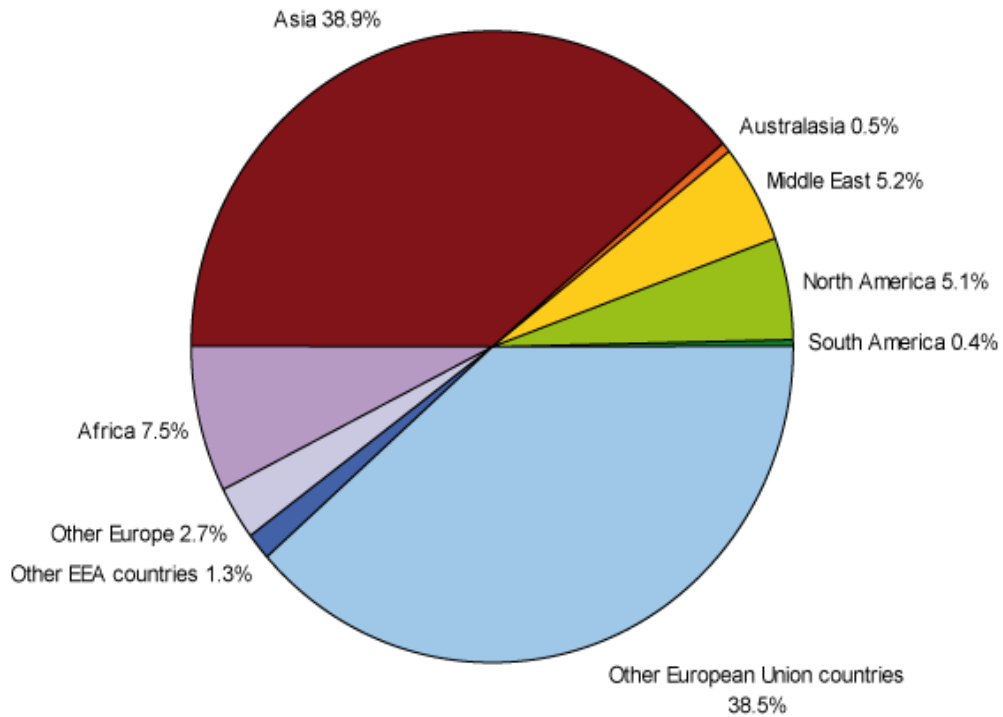
The total number of overseas students rose steadily from 157,178 during the year 2008/09 to 251,310 to 280,760 during the year 2009/10 (HESA, 2010). This trend reveals that the UK has experienced a sharp increase in overseas students during this period with the majority coming from Asian countries (also see **Figure 1.1 below**).

The current study is significant because similar/other figures show that more overseas students in the UK come from Asian countries than from any other region and the ratio of East Asian, non-CHC, students is increasing steadily (Forland, 2008; Pelletier, 2003). The same trend is apparently increasing among other Indian and Pakistani students. Asian students totalled 38.9% of all overseas students in the UK during the year 2009/10 (HESA, 2010 & 2011; UKCISA, 2010), as revealed in the following figure:

Figure 1.1

Chart 3 - Non-UK domiciled undergraduate students by region of domicile 2009/10

Percentages in this chart have been rounded to one decimal place, therefore they may not sum exactly to 100%



Source: HESA, 2010/2011

The Home Office (Quarterly) Statistics (2010) Index reported that during the year 2007, 224,000 non-EU students were given entry clearance, with above 6,000 visitor students, bringing the total of non-EU students in the UK to 230,000. This figure rose by 21,000 during the year 2008, totalling the number of non-EU students to above 251,000, with an extra 90,795 EU students (UK Council for Overseas Students Affairs [UKCOSA], 2008/09). Again the number of non-EU students went up sharply by above 60,000 during the year 2009 (p.10: Table 1a). However, the total number of international, not overseas, students was above the 355,000 mark during the year 2008/2009 while the 2010 figures represent a 35% increase in the same number of international students during the 2009 period (UKCISA, 2010). The final figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) revealed in Migration Statistics Quarterly Report August (2011), that the net migration to the UK at the end of 2010 was 252,000, the highest yearly figures

on record, while long-term immigration to the UK for formal study has increased three-fold.

The Home Office figures (2010) further testify that during the period 2009/2010, a total of 307,155 students were granted visas to enter/remain in the UK (Table 1b). This figure of leave to remain is significant for the purpose of discussing the students' desire to remain and work in the UK, if not for study purposes. The actual figure of students arriving in the UK and given 'leave to enter' was 309,000 during 2006, 361,000 in 2007, 370,000 in 2008, and 468,000 in 2009 (Home Office Quarterly Statistics, August 2010: Table 1.2). But the total number of students admitted to UK higher education institutions during the 2008/09 and 2009/10 periods remained lower than the actual figure of students who attended, as reported in the HESA (2010). This is significant when considering the possibility of study being used as pretence to obtain a visa.

Table 1.3

Students at UK HE Institutions by Domicile 2008/09 and 2009/10			
Domicile	2008/09	2009/10	% change
UK	2027085	2087615	3.0%
Other EU	117660	125045	6.3%
Non-EU	251310	280760	11.7%
Total	2396050	2493415	4.1%

Source: HESA Students in Higher Education Institutions 2010

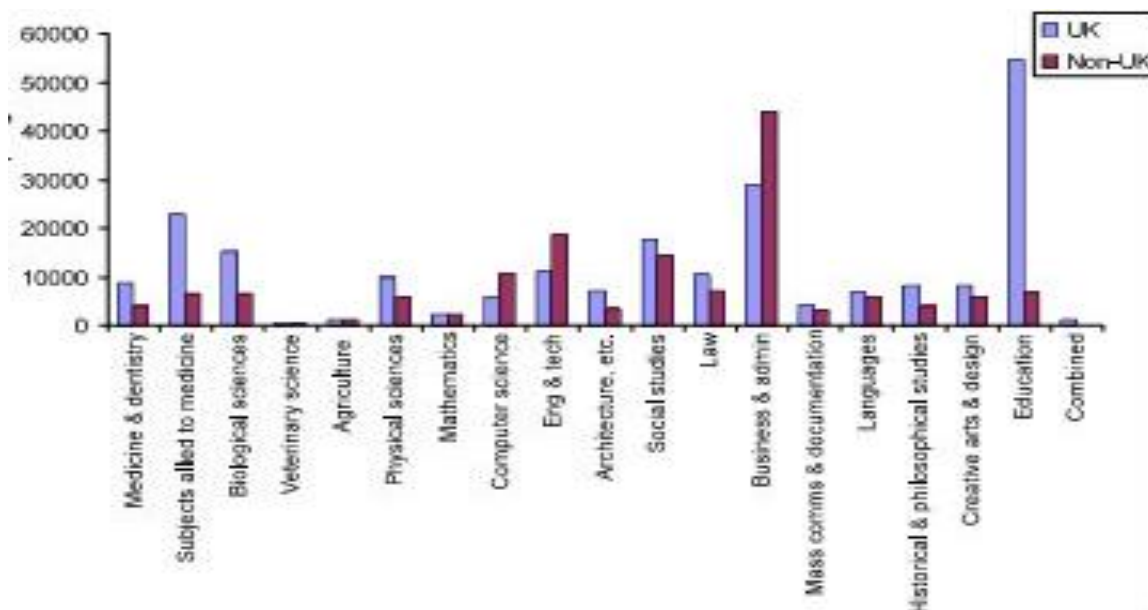
Putting the above figures into perspective, the 2007/08 numbers show that non-UK domiciled students at HE institutions consist of 41% Asian students and 59% from the rest of the world, bringing the total to 368,970 non-UK domiciled students (Universities UK, 2010: p.10). Thus, the number of non-UK students alone contributed £8.5 billion to the UK economy during the year 2007/08 (UKCISA, 2010). Hence, 41% of this revenue comes from Asian students. In addition to these statistics, a UK higher education is the first most popular choice for Pakistanis, the second choice of Chinese, the third for

Indians (based on OECD, 2007). The trend towards studying in the UK was (and is still) very popular among my own colleagues. The ratio of overseas students signifies the importance of the current study in relation to exploring the perceptions of these Asian students about their approaches to learning in the UK.

However, the majority of overseas students, particularly Pakistani students, prefer to study business, administrative and financial courses rather than the social sciences (refer to the Chart below). There are very few Pakistani students studying social sciences because more choose colleges than universities- where humanities (courses) are offered, in comparison to the majority who study engineering and business-related courses in UK institutions (British Council, 2009). Approximately 4,965 students from Pakistan concentrated on the social sciences and 10,560 on business studies, more than double those who were taking sociology-related subjects during the year 2009/10 (HESA, 2010; UKCISA, 2010); this trend was consistent in 2011/12 (UKCISA, 2014). This trend is crucial to understanding students' approaches to learning at a time when more overseas students are studying in colleges than universities where courses require intensive study, higher levels of English language proficiency, strong writing ability and the personalisation and adaptation of adequate learning skills (Fleming, 2007; Smith, 2008). This also reflects my own experience with the learning difficulties that, according to Tian (2008), other overseas students face in UK-based higher education (HE).

The trend toward the same subject-studies is not limited to Pakistani students but also prevalent among Indian students (Jawaid, 2010) and Chinese students (Maull, 2010). The British Library (2010) report reveals that the majority of postgraduate students study business and administrative courses (20%), while those taking education related studies represent 19% of this student population (p.10). The following graph illustrates the popularity of “*business and administration*” courses for non-UK students during the year 2010 and indicates the crucial role played by colleges in this trend:

Figure 1.2



Source: British Library 2010 (Figure 2: Number of assumed FTE postgraduates by domicile and subject of study, 2007-8)

Taking into account these figures, it appears that there are a number of different reasons why the majority of students choose to study particular subjects. For example, there is evidence that a number of overseas students enrol in courses of study at UK-based institutions solely in order to gain the right to work there (Home Office, 2010 & 2011a; Edwards, 2009). Business related studies, are widely offered by colleges in the UK, and allow students' to study for nominal fees, thus automatically giving them the rights to work. Considering the real purpose for study as the right to work in the UK, another study at Napier University shows that the connection between study and work is seemingly typical among Indian students (Foster, 2011: p.6), an obvious reflection on students' real motivation to study and ultimately work in the UK.

While there are clearly some students whose real intentions are to get a UK work-permit, there are also those who want to enhance their academic careers with the genuine intention of gaining a British education and with its inherent goal of qualifications; such intentions have merit because Asian employers prefer qualifications obtained overseas (Brooks & Waters, 2009: p.195). However, the issue of migrant (economic) students cannot be ignored. This was highlighted by the discovery of hundreds of visa-pretence colleges, legalising the immigration statuses of students

(Edwards, 2009; Home Office, 2010; Coughlan, 2010) - who would naturally obtain the right to stay and work in the UK.

An alternative strong reason why overseas students want to get work-permits might be their weak (prior) educational backgrounds. For example, a lack of adequate learning skills to meet educational challenges that arise at UK-based HE institutions (Carroll, 2002), might divert students' attentions to settlement in the UK, with the right to work enabling them to remain there. In contrast, Connor, Tyers, Modood, and Hillage (2004: p.89) findings, considering academic transition to the employment sector, reveal that ethnic minority students were more likely to pursue another degree than white students (Wakeling, 2008: p.90). This trend is common among Asian students (p.105) whose numbers are rapidly increasing in the UK (Forland, 2008). However, there is a dilemma that students enrolling for a second degree in the UK, mainly at colleges, might have the intention to stay there. Such intentions can drastically transform students' goal from studying into employment in the UK. Such inherent intentions are likely the result of on-going issues, students face while learning in the UK. For example, students with multiple learning issues could find their attention more easily diverted towards working than studying in the UK. Thus it becomes a problem for students to focus their attention not only on learning but mainly on the development of IL; thus these issues may exist eminently among Asian students.

1.4 Background and Relevance of Learning Issues

The platitude that education is essential to every nation begs the question about the quality of that education, and the support those being educated receive in order to attain the maximum benefit from their learning. A country's education system, particularly higher education (HE), may depend partly on what expertise comes from the international market and how that expertise is utilized in that specific country. In this regard, British universities benefit in many ways, not the least of which is financially, from the presence of overseas students, e.g. Asian, including those from developing countries (DCs), but also the diversity that such groups of students bring in large numbers to British HE institutions (Thom, 2006). Simultaneously this diversity boosts

the educational activities with the advent of linguistic and social needs that are different from those of their home countries. In the meanwhile, all such needs necessitate the institutional authorities to establish grounds for overcoming the arising issues. One example of such issues is apparent in the shape of Asian students' learning needs, and their socio-cultural and lingual impediments which are undermining their approaches to learning. For this purpose institutions are working hard to equip students with the best possible learning experiences to develop them as independent learners.

Despite the influx of students in the 21st century, institutions in Western countries are under immense pressure to harness teaching and learning practices in accordance with the Bologna process, which aims to harmonise academic diversity, mobility and degree standards. This initiative was launched in 2010 under the Bologna declaration of 1999. In such a scenario, the United Kingdom is working hard to compete in a diversified field of HE which is becoming more and more focused on an increasing number of overseas students alongside maintaining the standard of education (Quality Assurance Agency [QAA], 2012). Thus institutions have struggled to harness academic practices to the cultural aspirations of overseas students (Lie, 2009) to achieve a sound, competing and harmonised learning environment. However, meeting the goal of a diverse learning culture involves multiple factors, where academic and cultural aspects include a wide range of teaching and learning concerns (Biggs, 2003; Wu, 2008; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Pherali, 2012). For this purpose one direction is to develop more independent learners who can manage their learning by utilising the available resources and hence contribute to the learning environment; a common practice in HE. However no updated efforts have been made to maintain the momentum in sustaining the HE efforts in developing IL practices among students of greater needs. Particularly, no such efforts have been made in relation to Asian students.

In practice, there has been considerable development of research in the realm of teaching and learning in HE during the last three decades (Thom, 2006). Modern research into HE may be traced to the modernisation of teaching methods, learning theories and learning approaches. In reality teaching methods and learning theories deem to address the learning and approaches to learning as opposed to the relation of

teaching to learning. For this purpose different perspectives of learning have received subtle considerations which do attend, to an extent, the influence of new teaching patterns over learning (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999).

In more recent studies, targeted at learning in the context of universities, the focus has changed to studying students' approaches to learning (Gibbs & Simpson, 2005; Leung et al., 2008; Tan, 2011). In fact, teaching and learning cannot be separated; teaching which is aimed to facilitate the learning practices of students rather than provide all of the learning itself (Joyce, Calhoun & Hopkins, 1997; Wang & Li, 2011). Having said that, teaching is part of the learning process, higher education is facing a challenge in respect to what is taught, who is taught and how it is taught. In other words, are the academics well aware of the decorum regarding teaching methods in respect to diverse groups of students who may rely overly on traditional approaches to learning? Are overseas students, in particular Asians, able to learn well independently in British higher education institutions and the way these students develop more successful IL in order to succeed and contribute to the existing learning environment? Balancing the way the academics teach and the way Asian students find it best to learn may be one way ahead for educational diversity. The question of how and whether Asian students can develop IL approaches in the UK may have several connections that can affect educational diversity (David, Brennan & Broadfoot et al., 2009).

Hence, it is imperative to explore how students can develop IL practices (Cartwright, 2007) in diverse learning environments beyond passing the examinations –an exam-based practice commonly found among Asian students (Choudhry, 2005; World Bank, 2000; Islam & Borland, 2006). At the same time, it is equally vital to address the strategy of learning transition to IL practices. A contrary practice is deemed to result in rote-learning, affecting the course of developing IL patterns. It is particularly noteworthy when the notion that 'mostly Asian students are rote-learners' (Guner & Riza, 2008), is predominantly held by many academics. Despite this, this view is contested by numerous authors such as Nield (2007) and Entwistle and Smith (2013), who view Chinese learners as using memorisation skills to strengthen their understanding with revision. Clearly, students' surface approach to learning may be

linked with the educational culture in their home countries, called ‘prior learning’. As a result, this surface approach causes students to be vulnerable to spoon-feeding (Smith, 2008; Kingston & Forland, 2008) and thus the validity of becoming independent learners is compromised in between the required learning skills for higher education in the UK, and those of students’ prior habitual connections to learning.

Effective learning also presents an interpretation issue. For example, an overall population of Asian students only consider effective learning as a result of the teacher’s authoritative status in that specific learning environment (Nicholls, 2002), however, this is differently viewed in western education systems. Knowing that by natural inclination, some students are surface learners and very few are deep learners, it would be fairly justifiable to claim that deep and surface learning, which are different strategies, are highly influenced by the learning environment (Reid, Duvall & Evans, 2005; Dees et al., 2007: p.133) where students normally study. With regard to this point, a survey conducted in Australia reveals that Asian students need greater direction and support in the learning process and thus revealing them to be dependent learners (in direct contrast to IL). Similarly, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) occasional report (Siddiqui, 2006) reveals that students need greater direction and support in the learning process to inculcate the IL practices. It is for this reason that approaches to learning in many, if not all, Asian institutions, greatly differ from those used in the UK, which require students not only to adapt to IL patterns but also to develop its skills.

In addition, this evidence regarding dependency and direction is consistent with other non-English speaking students whose learning approaches vary according to cultural values (Holtbrugge & Mohr, 2010; Tian, 2008). However, Asian students, in particular, feel much more uncomfortable using resources, such as information technology and the library etc. (Crawford, DeVicinte & Clink., 2004), and this trend may be leading Asian students into sustained dependency – having a natural connection with prior learning dependency, within the overall HE system. This trend in itself would complicate the process of developing independent learning. Therefore the tension in learning related approaches is apparent among Asian students who come to enhance their academic careers. To further define and determine this difference, it is vital to seek students’

perception about the way they approach learning and map those approaches to learning in relation to a main theoretical umbrella. All this is crucial for developing IL as well as determining why IL development is a particular problem for Asian learners. Hence, there is a clear need to determine the way Asian students approach learning in HE and particularly the way they can develop IL in the UK.

It is important to acknowledge at this point that learning is a complex process comprised of cognitive, cultural and social activities (Fleming, 2007; Leask, 2007) which may engage lingual, social, and cultural aspects (Caruana & Spurling, 2007). In addition, second language issues are more widely discussed in academic disciplines where such issues affect students' performance (Tsung & Clarke, 2010); this often remains one of the critical issues among overseas, particularly Asian, students (Li & Campbell, 2006; Leask, 2007). However, to date the research has mainly considered a Western context in developing teaching and learning practices and categorising learners as deep, surface and strategic (Brennan, 2008; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Merrill, 2005). Studies such as the Task Force on Higher Education and Society Report "*Peril and Promise*" (World Bank, 2000) and "*Higher Education in Developing Countries (DCs)*" (Chapman & Ann, 2002) provide a fundamental basis that outlines major issues, including language relative to students from developing countries (Enemark, 2005).

Despite the variety of prevalent issues, the majority of studies highlight the issue of dependency. Tian (2008) researched what Smith (2008) calls 'spoon feeding in HE', with Bartram (2007) calling it "*the lack of ability to independently manage studies*" (p.212). It appears a matter of difference in students' approaches to learning that is directly or indirectly related to their academic and cultural issues. Approaches to learning among traditional learners in particular, therefore, differ from those used in the UK (Carroll & Appleton, 2007) and this evidence is consistent with research about other non-English speaking students whose learning approaches vary according to their cultural values (Holtbrugge & Mohr, 2010; Mohr, 2010; Heffernan et al., 2010). It follows that the notion of cultural variation may also influence the learning/studying approaches/patterns of overseas students, particularly Asian learners in the UK. Thus, cultural influence has yet to define the learning practices because Asians may find issue

with cultural adjustment in western countries, where respect for teachers may have different interpretations and attitudes. Hence Asian students must be helped to “*transcend the culturally framed borders and subjectivities*” (Li & Campbell, 2006: p.299).

In this regard, some research has been conducted on a generic level. For example, Twigg (2006) investigated the social and cultural experiences of a diverse group of overseas students studying in an English university but did not ask questions about academic issues, as the IL issue stands in focus in the current research. Other studies (Mohr, 2010; Heffernan et al., 2010; Forland, 2006 & 2008; Cooper, 2004) have also examined the cultural aspects of international students in relation to learning approaches, but these studies have not directly assessed how the development of IL of those students mentioned above could become a reality. Similarly, Tian (2008) explored generic issues of Chinese and East Asian students in the UK on a small scale whilst a study by Brown (2008) investigated the language anxiety of postgraduate international students in the UK and suggests that a true international learning environment (internationalisation) will depend on the teaching and learning patterns of all participants (p.6).

Importantly a study by Tian (2008) and, Kingston and Forland (2008) on helping Asian students to adopt the new learning patterns, by narrowing the gap between western and East Asian students, opened up the possibility for future research into Asian students and other intercultural parties to focus more on the cultural as well as academic factors. Although Kingston and Forland’s attempt is genuine to bridge the gap in between these students, the focus has not been more than cultural adaptation. Moreover, Munro (2006) focused a study on the socio-cultural influence on learning. Though Wu (2008), who broadened this attempt, investigated the academic, socio-cultural, and English Language adjustments necessary for East Asian students to adapt at a single British university at the postgraduate level; the study ignored the overall adjustment required for Asian students and the adaptation of independent learning (IL) practices which are crucially important for their adjustment. In addition, the adjustment issue of overseas students is widely discussed by Brown (2008) and Brown and Holloway (2008), and adjustment to

the learning environment and cultural differences are widely found in Fordland's paper (2006), but with a primary focus on cultural shifts and the education business. Similarly, Bartram's (2007) conclusions are also mainly relevant to the cultural and somehow to the overall learning issues of overseas students:

“International students in HE are prone to prioritise the particular importance of their socio-cultural needs Many students also feel the need for staff and lecturers to assist them socially... some students feel they lack the ability to independently manage without this external help” (p.212)

The notion that a majority of international students focus on their socio-cultural needs at all times may indicate that they are ‘traditional learners’ (Wu, 2008), which means they tend to stick to their prior learning practices. On an elaborative level, this would further mean that Asian students are commonly considered surface learners and largely rote learners and this trend is commonly reflected in the literature (see Guner & Riza, 2008; Smith, 2008; Tian; 2008; Wu, 2008 etc.). Taking such issues in perspective, the trend toward business-related courses in colleges, rather than universities, also makes sense (see **Figure: 1.2**). Hence the current study is interested in seeking to establish grounds for the development of IL practices from students own perceptions. None of the existing studies has really examined the issues, which surround the development of IL, from the students’ own perspective, which, according to Jiang and Smith (2009), can be understood from students’ voices of educational and historical contexts, nor did they give us insight into the specific challenges faced by these students in relation to becoming independent learners when studying in UK higher education. In addition, none of the studies dominate the discussion around developing the course of IL skills among Asian students.

All the above studies suggest that Asian, particularly East Asian, students are still dominated by their history of cultural heritage, branding them Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) students; however Indian and Pakistani are not CHC students because this reference is linked to a Chinese philosopher's (Confucius) teachings. This potentially necessitates a requirement for tutors to understand the needs of their students to transform their cultural approach and adjust to the learning environment. This practice is more vital with respect to the development and adoption of IL. However the literature is silent in determining how well the same CHC and non-CHC students can

emerge from their cultural and academic habits and develop IL skills without compromising their prior and ingrained perceptions of cultural and academic decorum.

With regard to how overseas students learn in the UK, some studies (e.g. Thom, 2006; Ryan, 2005) assert that academics are aware of the learning needs of their students but may lack clarity in addressing their needs, particularly groups as diverse as those studying in UK academic institutions (Leask, 2007; Tian, 2008). These needs largely arise from academic, language (Lago & Barty, 2003; Thom, 2006) - which affect both native and non-native speakers – and cultural perspectives; the needs which the current study is exploring from a learning approaches' perspective which are, likely, affecting and influencing their studies in the course of IL development. These needs are not something that could be instantly resolved during the course of higher studies but may possibly be addressed with IL skills. Evidence as to how successfully this can happen is hard to find in the literature, as Cartwright (2007) studied a similar topic with a generic approach to help coordinate students with learning, and hence they may find themselves troubled in such a learning situation.

Considering language as an essential aspect of students' learning process is vital to identify and subsequently develop the process of learning independently. The significance of English is apparent from its wider use in modern HE; and the United Kingdom is an English speaking country where students have to learn in its native language. Hence, English language learners (ELLs) are increasing day by day (Manakul, 2007; Solorzano, 2008). With more ELLs, the system of learning needs to be driven by research on the best teaching and testing practices to understand the needs of second language learners (Solorzano: p.320; UKCOSA, 2004) to provide learning opportunities to succeed in their scholastic career (Gillett, 1996; Lie, 2009). The trend towards lingual adequacy is essential because many overseas students face English language problems (McMahon, 2011) during the course of their studies. This was commonly identified during the recent probe into visa pretence colleges in the UK, as mentioned earlier. Although language barriers or language misunderstandings may be one of the reasons to restrict and limit the adaptation of strategically desirable learning approaches, a coherent framework of support for such students (and this study

references Pakistani, Chinese & Indian) will arguably facilitate them to adapt to existing methods of modern learning in the UK and bring a change from traditional learning to developing independent learning skills.

Alongside language issues (Li & Campbell, 2006; Brown, 2008; Coleman, 2010), the socio-cultural issues among students within UK higher education are also commonly noticed (Khan, 2007; Janzen, 2008; Munro, 2006), as also noted in UKCOSA survey (2004). Along with these lingual and socio-cultural challenges, there are numerous studies mentioning the experiences of overseas students in UK-based institutions (UKCOSA, 2006; Cosh, 2000; McMahon, 2011) and the ways to understand them (Flaitz, 2003) while some other studies explore the performance of overseas students in the UK (Morrison, Merrick, Higgs & Metais, 2005). In addition, Carroll (2011) recently suggested that teaching must be used as a method to encourage participation and invigoration in the learning process.

Discussion, therefore, of where and how successfully Asian overseas students can acquire and be enabled to acquire learning skills while studying programmes in the UK, is confined chiefly to journal literature (Bayliss & Raymond, 2004; UKCOSA, 2004 & 2006; Sovic, 2008; Pringle, Fischbacher & Williams, 2008), and developed mainly in the context of a Western educational system (Nichols, 2003; Bartram, 2007). There have been a number of studies evaluating overseas students and their learning barriers (Bennell & Pearce, 2003; Dewey & Duff, 2009; Dolby & Rahman, 2008; Forland, 2006; Foster, 2011; Ryan, 2005 & 2011); the experiences of international students in the UK (Merrick & Robinson, 2006; Pelletier, 2003; Cadman, 2000); studies that focused on Indian students (Burley, Walton & Uruchurtu, 2009; Foster, 2011); research on Chinese students (Liu & McLaren, 2009; Tian, 2008); and finally, some studies on both Chinese and Indian students (Patricia & Dawson, 2004). Yet none of the studies has looked specifically at Pakistani, Indian and Chinese students in a single study from their own perceptions.

The current study is also important from the economic and cultural perspectives that in return also benefit the internationalisation process, which is used as an underlying

concept in the current study. But despite the cultural and economic benefits that Asian students bring to the UK higher education system, there is a surprising lack of research in relation to major focus on learning patterns and approaches among CHH and non-CHC students at once. Most information relates to the overall experiences of overseas students (UKCOSA, 2004; McMahon, 2011) or is partly related to students from the Asia-Pacific region and their experiences in the UK (Wu, 2008; Tian, 2008; Leung et al., 2008). Little research has addressed the cultural (social) and academic (language, and prior educational) aspects of studying abroad and the way these relative issues influence one's approach to learning which can lead to the development of IL. Additionally, looking at the relationship between students' approaches to learning and IL development is an ignored phenomenon.

The current study is significant as it aims to highlight the fact that such students come from three different cultures but have, in fact, more or less similar systems of HE (Broitman, 2003; Goldman, Charles, Kumar, Krishna & Liu, 2008). Whilst the above studies are inconsistent with the cultural, linguistic, and academic requirements of students from non-English speaking countries (Leask, 2005), there is significant research focusing on overall cultural aspects that can affect the learning approaches of HE students (Mohr, 2010; Heffernan et al., 2010). However, most of these studies (mentioned earlier) are inconsistent, particularly in the case of Pakistani, Chinese and Indian students. At this juncture the process of learning (Laurillard, 1979), from perspective of learning approaches, is compromised at the cost of students' history of learning strategies, i.e. Pakistani students (Khan, 2009), and by the brand of 'Confucianism'; leaving the majority of Asian students at risk in their IL development in the UK. Hence it becomes necessary that the process of IL is developed from students' perspectives of approaches to learning in order to meet the requisites of learning in the UK. Simultaneously, it is possible that the development of IL could improve the students' chances of gaining successful qualifications which in turn might contribute to the high quality of UK's higher education industry. The development of IL and promotion of successful quality HE in the UK are some ways to boost future student recruitment.

1.5 Aims, Specific Objectives and Accessibility

This qualitative study aims to explore the learning approaches of Asian students in the UK from their own perceptions to develop independent learning (IL) skills. On the basis of that discussion, this study examines the various ways in which students from overseas might be supported in the UK studies. The research also highlights the barriers to IL faced by Asian students who study in English as their second language. In addition, it also assesses the wide range of issues that relate to the development of IL, examining the different ways through which the development of IL approaches is determined to enhance the learning skills of Asian students. These findings are aimed to introduce a model/theory of learning which may help other students to learn more effectively.

This research explores the students' perceptions of the following questions:

- How Asian students approach learning in the UK;
- How Asian students develop IL in the UK;
- How these students cope with the sociocultural, prior learning and language issues and the extent to which these might influence the development of IL;
- Which different patterns can improve the existing learning practices of Asian students in developing and inculcating IL practices;
- Is IL a developmental issue that affects an overall population of overseas students;
- How students' prior history of learning influence the process of learning independently;

1.5.1 Specific Objectives

- To critically examine approaches to learning to explore patterns of learning among Asian students;
- To assess the developmental factors related to learning approaches (i.e. transition and social adjustment) and the academic/ educational issues (i.e. prior learning and language issues) that fosters IL development;
- To evaluate learning approaches, currently used by Asian students in HE and determine the developmental elements that lead to successful IL; and

- To propose patterns of IL skills in HE that would suggest effective teaching and learning skills;
- To clarify what overseas students should expect when they apply to study in the UK; reasoned discussion of IL, how it is linked to their prior learning patterns, and how to shape its development.

1.5.2 Rationale and Limitations

The current study is vital in the wake of emerging trends in HE and the continued focus on students' approaches to learning - which are reflective of the very process of learning to inform the development of IL practices. This is a significant exploration from Asian students' own perceptions who (might) face difficulty adapting to the IL learning approaches from their prior learning. The scope is limited to students of selected nationalities undertaking specific courses, as detailed above. Hence, the study defines itself within certain limits. These definitions include:

- An examination of only those students' engaged in HE courses in the UK;
- The nationalities of students, enrolled on these HE courses, who specifically represent Pakistan, India and China;
- The medium of learning is English for students which is not their first language; and
- The learning environments are strictly the United Kingdom HE institutions.

The purpose of the study is to cover both academic and social aspects, in order to facilitate the process of learning for a varied group of students, studying in the UK. The initial findings are to help students succeed in the learning process while the long-term implication of the study are to understand the way IL is developed; and to help boost the internationalisation process and recruitment of overseas students to the UK Higher Education sector.

In order to achieve the study's objectives, a thorough search of literature is essential; hence, the next chapter will search all relevant aspects of learning and approaches to learning, thematically, and address the IL issue to locate gaps in existing research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Rationale

The current study is interested in developing independent learning (IL) practices among Asian students in higher education in the UK. Higher education (HE) learning has some principles which include self-driving and practicality. By self-driving Malcolm Knowles has referred to the phenomenon that self-learners are influenced by the environment in which they contribute and contest in contrast to direction and instruction – a common practice in school learning. However, the argument about learning in HE is mainly about to learn by one's self.

In recent times, the education sector has seen tremendous development in the teaching and learning field; and different theories have been developed in this perspective. Some of the prominent developments in this field can be seen widely today in the form of different learning theories. Learning theories largely explain how students adopt different styles and approaches to learning. Nearly all learning theories have focused both on the teaching and learning practices of an overall population of students in both early and HE learning.

The argument about teaching and learning, specifically, in HE is different and diverted towards a discussion about (preferred) learning styles (Kolb, 1976; Dunn, 1990; Coffield et al., 2004; Conner, 2005; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Peters, Jones & Peters, 2008; McMahon, 2011) and approaches to learning where the main focus have centrally remained over the learning experience of students rather than the 'Learning Process' – an examination which has a closer connection with the development of IL, however some studies call it a process itself.

Despite impressive evidence that emerges from the works of Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (LSI) (1976), as further developed by Peter Honey and Alan Mumford (1986, 1992 & 2006), Noel Entwistle (1981 & 1998) and Nick Fleming's exclusive picture of learning styles in VARK (Visual, Aural, Read/write, Kinaesthetic); and Dunn, Dunn and Price's (1979) and Vermunt's (1994) LSI, such studies remain limited to specifying

different styles of students' learning. Understanding of learning styles is crucial in some ways for academic adjustment and (as a coordinated form of) teacher-student interaction because a learning style has some effects on the students' achievement in different learning environments (Soylu & Akkoyunlu, 2002), however every student has a preferred learning style which is used differently in different subject studies (Peters et al., 2008; Entwistle, 2005), similar a different teaching style by every different tutor (Felder, 2002). In addition there is no generalised concept towards specification of a learning style that all students can use in HE for better academic coordination inside the classroom. This coordination of learning styles is largely driven by students' prior learning experience (see Malcolm Knowles, 1975) as elaborated by Franzoni and Assar (2009). In addition, the concept of learning style is largely associated with an individual level rather than a whole population - and no learning style can be specified for a larger population of students, rather different students have different learning styles. This trend is commonly noticed even within a single classroom. Thus, there is no generalised social context towards a 'preferred learning style' than toward approaches to learning in higher education.

The current study is, therefore, based upon approaches to learning in HE: a number of studies highlight Asian learning approaches as dependent and surface. In fact academics have ironically inculcated the notion that Asian students are driven by their Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) which is directing their learning towards surface learning and teacher centeredness (McMahon, 2011). However none has really focused on the notion that academic and cultural perspectives can best be explored to determine the development of IL. Therefore, the current literature examines Asian students' approaches to learning with a prominent focus on developing independent learning.

2.2 Introduction

Literature review is an essential part of any project. In a qualitative research the emphasis is more on sensitising concepts than literature review, however essential it is to present/locate the gap in the literature, by providing more avenues for questioning to generate further ideas (Ng & Hase, 2008: p.159). Dunne (2011) calls it a spark to start

discussing the issues and argues that it's not about whether literature review should be conducted rather its more about when and how it should be done (p.113); Charmaz (2006) suggests delaying the literature review, with regard to 'when to do literature review' helps articulating one's ideas (p.165).

Different search strategies are used in education research; while I conducted a systematic search of library resources, as suggested by Charmaz (2006). To conduct the search, I devised keywords under two broad categories, academic and cultural and explored patterns to ease the way for the current research. Then I refined the keywords and cross-used for rigorous search of relevant, largely journal-based, literature. In the first stage, I used comparative search with the help of extended list of key words. In the second stage, I filtered this comparison to more precise key terms (e.g. approaches to learning, learning strategies, independent learning, self-directed learning etc.). In final stage I used the key specialist books and other web sources which were pertinent to developing my argument (see **Appendix: 31**).

The essential purpose of this review is to explore six major topics to establish the significance of the current sample, starting with a generic discussion about internationalisation as an 'underlying concept in this study'. The second topic discusses teaching and learning in HE and how they are pertinent to each other with regard to IL. The third section explores the psychological issues of how students learn, and includes a discussion about the major learning theories in educational psychology and how HE learning is differently treated in educational research.

The fourth topic briefly explores preferred learning styles and how the current research is different in relation to approaches to learning. This section then leads a comprehensive discussion about approaches to learning which includes a discussion about deep, surface, strategic and IL. This also explores students' approaches to learning in different subject studies and the way language skills and support strategies might influence the overall process of learning in HE. Hence, the need to discuss and assess the influence of major learning theories, learning as a process in HE and learning approaches are central to the current research.

The fifth topic assesses the overall difference in overseas (specifically Asian) and Western students, and whether IL is a developmental issue among all students. These discussions include a discussion about the way Asian students might be different from home students. The last (sixth) topic discusses how language skills might influence the development of IL. This section also discusses whether the socio-cultural and financial matters, in addition to approaches to learning (Liem, 2005), can influence the development of the overall IL process.

2.3 Internationalisation: An Underlying Concept in the Current Study

Internationalisation has been recognised as a fundamental aspect of teaching and learning in higher education (HE), and different countries are establishing strategies to enhance its process. Over time, an increasing amount of research has focused on internationalisation (Islam, 2009), with a major focus on three areas: academic, socio-political, and economic (Dolby & Rahman, 2008). All these topics have been widely discussed by many researchers (e.g. Caruana & Spurling, 2007; Carroll & Appleton, 2007; Dewey & Duff, 2009) and have been expanded to include cultural matters as a main focus for research (Knight, 2003: p.709; Leung et al., 2008). The literature widely presents the pros and cons of internationalisation and highlights the major strands as both academic and cultural which has influence in its very course of development, for example Frolich and Vega (2005) state:

“The internationalisation of higher education is a complex, multidimensional and often fragmented process. The factors that foster or impede internationalisation activities developed at an institutional level cannot be viewed only in the national and international context. There are influences deeply rooted in the normative and cultural insights ... and globalisation.”

A study by Dolby and Rahman (2008) digs into the root of internationalisation and assert that it began with colonialism when the European university model was imposed on Asia and Africa (p.684). Nearly a century later, international influence was formalised with the establishment of the Institute of International Education (IIE), the European Regional Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS), the US Fulbright program (1946) and countless other geo-political events

(p.685). Adjusting to English as the international language for education led to a more recent contributor to the international education movement (Quality Assurance Agency [QAA], 2012), the association for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and International English Language Testing System (IELTS), which provide a basis for international study anywhere in the world (pp.694-703) and therefore promote internationalisation through its basic tool “English language”.

Considering the influence of internationalisation, the majority of undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students of East and Southeast Asia recognise Western countries as the most attractive destinations for student mobility schemes and UK for higher studies (Brooks & Walters 2009; Butcher, 2004; Lewis, 2005; Waters, 2006). Since the late 1980s, Australian and British universities, in addition to United States universities, have been especially successful in recruiting overseas students and are real market leaders in developing internationally-accredited courses (Bennell & Pearce, 2003: P.3). These initiatives begin with the notion that students from developing countries are in high demand for these programmes, especially Pakistanis (Mahmood & Shafique, 2010) and South Asians (Haider, 2008; Islam, 2009). The major reasons that Asian students flock to the West for HE include improving their English language ability along with attaining quality education (UKCOSA, 2006); however because Asian students are naïve to the learning patterns and to the use of academic language used in the UK, this “quality” aspect of internationalisation can be a tedious process (Yen & Kuzma, 2009; Islam, 2009) which in the long term might have implications on the level of students’ adjustment in western system of HE; thus raising questions about how students, in particular those from overseas, can benefit from the modern form of internationalisation.

One such approach to meeting the necessary requisites is the establishment of oversight agencies in different countries. These Quality Enhancement/Assurance Agencies (QAA) have come in a variety of names and acronyms and they include the TQEC (2002); Scotland’s SHEEC; the UK’s QAA (1997); Pakistan’s QAA, established under the higher education commission (HEC); India’s National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), established in 1994; the Academic Ranking of World Universities

(ARWU) China; and China's Project 211, launched in 1995, and Project 985. Some other remarkable education agencies include the Chinese Education and Research Network (CERNET), the Library and Documentation Support System (LDSS) and the Modern Equipment and Facilities Sharing System (MEFSS), founded in China to improve the infrastructural setting (Brandenburg & Zhu, 2007: p.38). Similarly, in an effort to improve the quality and development of HE teaching and learning in the UK, the Institute of Teaching and learning (ILT) was established in 2000. Now, nearly every country in the world is monitoring HE quality with the implementation of these QAAs.

The creation of such organisations confirms the important role that students play in promoting internationalisation; at the same time, organisational oversight can improve institutional roles toward diversifying the learning culture (Wit, 2010; Hyland, 2008; Huisman & Wood, 2007); the end game is to improve the learning standards. In other words, clarity about development of teaching and learning cannot merely survive with the establishment of different institutions with having diversity; rather students are essential parties to its success. Thus clarity must evolve at the academic programme level to identify any areas of concern, such as language, learning patterns and finance, to sustain the momentum of internationalisation. Indeed, without such standards, the internationalisation trend may not survive for long nor the learning standards can improve without enhancing the trend of internationalisation.

Chapfika (2008) claims, that higher education has deliberately been diversified through fostering the notion of diversification and the international mobilisation of students. Diversity which is mainly aimed to enhance educational trade - as an act of selling knowledge in the recruitment of new international students, has thus the main goal of modern internationalisation. For this reason, internationalisation continues to be the backbone of worldwide education. Selling knowledge, it is held, is proving to be a key economic boon for host countries (Chaudhary, Iqbal & Gillani, 2009) where trading in education is financially remunerative. Resultantly internationalisation has led to better quality and equality of education worldwide. Despite such impressive steps and the quality enhancement programmes, learners in diverse learning environment (Hyland, 2008) are doubted to have complied with the learning demands as well as requirement

which have clear implications in terms of overseas students flocking to the west, as an educational trade asset, for HE.

Educational trade, as it is viewed, has both institutional and learners' aspects to consider. No doubt that teaching and learning play important role in the process of internationalisation. From an institutional perspective, the struggle to recruit international students has not ceased, as different studies suggest (see **Section: 1.5**). From students' perspectives, learners are keen to study where they can learn best and enhance their academic statures. No doubt, coordination between institutional establishments' agendas and students' requisites towards learning cannot succeed without proper planning (Tange & Jensen, 2012). One such system of planning may come from the point where students' approaches to learning are taken into perspective, and then a system of enhanced learning practices is developed in the light of intercultural pedagogy (p.191; Arkoudis, 2007). However, momentum in internationalisation has become questionable as to how far the economic-initiated internationalisation can contribute towards the development of IL practices as a result of modern assumptions of andragogy. Essentially, if institutions expect the growth in students' recruitment, the transformation of learning approaches, as different studies suggests (for example, Biggs & Tang, 2007; Entwistle, 2001), would be essential and is mainly financially remunerative upon successful development of IL. One valid reason is that internationalisation of HE has produced more learning destinations and choices than ever before.

Although internationalisation is considered to be financially remunerative, overseas students are more prone to financial pressure in the UK (Swatz, 2009; Spronk, 2004) than other Western students; firstly because of the gaps in course costs and secondly because of the exchange value of currency (HESA, 2010). In addition, student concerns regarding finance have taken a shift to different levels of study; as such variations have been noted consistently in HE (see Kim, 2005; Entwistle, 2005). Yet in other cases, privileged families are expanding their educational choices in Western countries (Dewey & Duff, 2009). Yorke and Longden (2008) present, surprisingly, that there were no real differences between advantaged and disadvantaged students in the UK

during their first year of study and the majority of these students were satisfied (p.44). Meanwhile the prevailing impression is apparent that financial concerns do play a role in students' recruitment situation and internationalisation.

The influx of Asian students into the UK raises some hard questions as to how students get entry clearance when they have not met the financial obligations. Financial difficulties are largely part of students' lives, but it is unclear how such difficulties reoccur when clear guidelines are provided to students regarding finance; and simultaneously overseas students also provide documentary evidence of financial support in order to obtain students visas (Fosket & Fosket, 2006). Although a recent home office crackdown on different academic institutions has exposed a number of loopholes in the system (UKBA, 2011), the problematic financial situation in other existing HE institutions may mean that those students' choices have been capped to studying there or else being forced to leave the UK, even refused entry (Lotbiniere, 2012) (refer to **Chapter One**).

In addition to the economic side of internationalisation, it has quality enhancement agenda. For this purpose institutions have their, implementation and course delivery specific, obligations to enhance students' practices, in addition to participations of news learners' from different backgrounds (OECD, 2007). Similar strategies are useful to facilitate learning more reflectively and effectively (Brockbank & McGill, 2007: p.26) while studying distance learning programmes (Bennell & Pearce, 2003: p216). In the course of emerging distance courses, the significance of IL and the exposure to the Western learning approaches have increased because students are expected to learn more by themselves than from tutorials. Thus, the internationalisation trend also has a closer relation with IL approaches, essentially required in a Western learning context.

For this reason, other programmes have been developed. For instance, overseas validated courses (OVCs) are mostly offered to students who study in their home countries to gain international qualifications (Bennell & Pearce: p.218); in this regard too, language is seen a major obstacle (see details in **Section: 2.6.6**) to broadening the appeal of OVCs (p.223). English language related efforts by the British Council are

only successful in a few countries like Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore (p.224). Such attempts are not enough to cope with the English language issue which is one requisite of internationalisation because internationalisation has received widespread attention in HE (Dewey & Duff, 2009). This is because internationalisation is not only an institutional practice but also an individual one (Knight, 2003); therefore, it has a success which perhaps depends on a close relationship between learners and institutions (Dewey & Duff: p.503). This is one of the principles of teaching and learning, and educational psychology. Valadas et al., (2010) have extended these criteria to teachers' assessment techniques, mentioning that they should also receive feedback and thus be judged on their experiences and achievements. These comprise teaching and learning challenges, students' societal requirements and lingual interaction (McMahon, 2011), at least at academic level, which according Hyland (2010) is one of the key challenges to internationalisation. In this regard, the establishment of the Britain's Institute of Teaching and learning in Higher Education (ILTHE) - to oversee academic progress (Farren, 2005: p.40) is one positive development. Since its inception, the Institute of Teaching and learning (ILT) has encouraged other EH institutions to comply with its recommendations (Nicholls, 2002). Another step forward is the teaching qualification requirement in 2006 to promote higher standards in the UK (p.42).

For these reasons, and commitments by the British education authorities, the majority of international students recognise Britain's reputation as a welcoming country where everyone can pursue their learning with cultural freedom. Despite this reputation for diversity, Forland (2008) argues that with increasing East Asian students' enrolment in British universities (p.1), the differences between the individualist learning cultures of the West and the collectivist Asian ones will probably increase tension within different learning environments (p.204; Xie, 2009). Therefore the real essence of internationalisation, which is remunerative both academically and financially, may require a clear definitive focus over teaching and learning, approaches to learning and other existing issues, i.e. socio-cultural, financial and language issues in higher education.

2.4 Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Interactive Influence on Learners

Teaching and learning in modern higher education (HE) are about enhancing students' experiences of learning and the very environment where learning is experienced (Biggs, 2001). Teaching and learning are interdependent; in fact, every teaching model in HE is a learning model at the same time (Joyce, Calhoun & Hopkins, 1997: p.8). In more common words, teaching and learning are interactive parts to each other (Biggs).

The development of teaching and learning practices has remained a continuous focus of different studies. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, which is concerned with the on-going process of an individual's learning (Somervell, 2003: p.71; Richmond & Cummins, 2005), is one such prominent study. Biggs' (1993) model of teaching and learning which is very much concerned with both teachers' and students' perceptions at the same time by matching the objectives of an independent teaching and learning (ILT) project, is a continuation of the same efforts. In Biggs' model, the focus on learning activities, outcomes and approaches is somehow similar to that of Ramsden's model (1992) which is partly concerned with similar areas, as Somervell (2003) claims it is mainly concerned with learning to teach.

These models give a glimpse of how teaching and learning can work in various academic interactions. Despite a lengthy list of models, Gorard et al. (2007) explain that there is no evidence of any institutional changes in the UK that are fit for students of different backgrounds (p.103); rather diverse learning culture must encourage closer interactions for flexible communication and exchange of materials (Mestre, 2008) in order to create a positive academic environment where students can enhance the learning and research skills. Bringing any such change will all depend on the nature of teaching and learning practices; however it is worth mentioning that a centralised system of teaching may not function well in comparison to self-expressions and exchange of ideas (Ackermann, 2001).

Despite continuous efforts, the lack of evidence that teaching practices are designed for a diversity of student backgrounds (Chapfika, 2008: p.47) is exemplified by the

developmental aspects of learning, widely noted among Asian students. Clarity about issues in the existing system of teaching and learning has thus become a requisite because, as an established procedure, students show different results because of different learning experiences (Leung, Ginns & Kember, 2008) as is the case with Chinese students (McMahon, 2011). Hence, for some students ideas about learning or thinking may remain relatively unchanged; while others familiarise themselves with the established learning environment or conform to the expectations of that establishment. For instance, some students are in the habit of tutorials while others are critical thinkers who only seek support for learning; while learning in some academic programmes 'might only reveal itself after the educational programme or programme of study has finished' (Burns, 1995; Race, 2005). Hence the nature of different learning approaches (in one term- 'learning') may be difficult to coordinate with teaching.

Yet when theories are applied to the different students, institutional strategies (teaching perspective) may not allow for a difference in learning approach preferences (learning perspective). Some variety in procedural learning patterns is required under the universities' regulations to harmonise students' approaches to learning, but within the existing system of IL this may either be practically infeasible or else not considered.

Learning 'as a process' focuses on what happens gradually during the cognitive, behavioural, emotional and educational experience. At a certain juncture, the very nature of learning necessitates the formulation of a theoretical facilitation of learning which can form a realistic process of learning for different students (Rogers, 2003). Indeed, learning tends to happen as a result of a student attitude towards the process of studying (Säljö, 1979; Qureshi et al., 2008). Initially Barnett (1997) emphasised that 'how' to study is more vital than 'what' to study, a paradigm described as a 'process' by Somervell (2003). In other words, the development of learning in any existing education environment is more vital than focusing on studying a particular area or subject. Orton (2004) supports the view that learning happens gradually with stimulus-response linked to feedback (p.28). Others disagree, arguing that learning in a specific learning environment (Leung et al., 2008) happens as a result of enhanced teaching (Trigwell et

al., 2012), which may shape the very process of learning in itself. For example David et al. (2009) explain that;

“The foundations for a successful performance career are built on students’ informal and formal learning experiences, networking, group activities and sustained support for transitions from tutors.”

Thus a large amount of literature highlights the adjacent role of both teaching and learning (Atherton, 2008; Biggs & Tang, 2007; Light, Cox & Calkins, 2009; Fry et al., 2009) in shaping the very process of learning in HE. Yet students who learn on their own are unlikely to change the way they acquire knowledge or approach learning (Tomanek & Montplaisir, 2004). In Coutu’s (2002) view, learning can happen only as a result of a greater survival anxiety when the survival of an individual depends on a realisation of change; ignoring that such a realisation of change might also transform into a process of learning. Here, learning anxiety is a broader explanation because it inhibits a process that is necessary if any learning is to happen at all (Hein & Budny, 1999; Schein, 2002).

By all clarifying means, learning in HE has been realised as process. The role of teaching methods is crucial for achievement of this process of learning. This role could be a match between the student and teacher ways for better learning attitudes and higher academic achievement (Dunn, 1982; Kolb, 1984); thus paving a way towards achieving the process of learning. Honey and Mumford (1986) identified ‘the learning process as a result of different stages of learning’, which is likely a parallel idea to the learner four different abilities, as identified by Kolb; and further examined by Musa and Wood (2003) and Richmond and Cummins (2005). However Lin (2008) takes a different perspective suggesting that student facilitation is a major element that helps in the learning process where the teacher and student gradually build a relationship.

Yet, a large amount of literature (e.g. Lin, 2008; Wu, 2008; Tian, 2008) reveals about the Chinese (and Asian) educational system as non-process oriented, where a teacher’s status is to be considered a hub of knowledge because of a more distinct teacher-student relationship than in Western education. This distinction draws a line to teaching and learning as distinct processes working together. This is mainly a philosophy of

Confucianism which advocates that learning is not a natural activity, but rather is achievable with efforts (McMahon, 2011) and teacher support. The same phenomenon has been generalised to other Asian students. However it is still questionable ‘how these (Asian) students develop and maintain the etiquette of relationship with their teachers in the UK in order to develop the necessary learning (as a process) rather than relying on their prior perceptions about a process of learning’ (Lin). Therefore, students are likely to find their learning approaches (processes) leaping in between present (process-oriented) and prior learning (tuition-oriented). Apparently such a wavy relationship between students (learning) and teachers (teaching) may allow us knowing the unknown process of teaching and learning. Interestingly such a relationship may also jeopardise learning as an independent activity, actually encouraging more dependency in learning. Therefore, it is important to uncover and link how different learning theories in HE play a role in the shaping the development of IL in order to locate the existing tension in teaching and learning.

2.5 Asian Students’ Learning in Relation to Modern Learning Theories

A learning theory may be called a set of statements and principles that apply to the learning process which attempts to explain the complexities of a learning style and approach. The main goal of a learning theory is to help academics improve their teaching skills and enhance students’ learning. Smith’s (1999) description of a learning theory as “*ideas about how learning may happen*” is supported by Orton (2004), who suggests that there is no use in defining unreasonable objectives; instead, the major goal of a learning theory is always to challenge the learners and thus, extend their knowledge and understanding (p.6).

In response, therefore, different theories explain the way students learn; theories of learning are mostly generic (Mcalpine, 2004: p.120) to an overall population of students studying across the globe. Understanding these theories allow us to help students with improved learning techniques and approaches, all of which, it is claimed, are driven by certain modern learning theories (Cassidy, 2004; Dunn, 2000). However, despite

impressive research in relation to the development of learning theories, there is a lack of research, in the light of learning theories, in relation to the process of transforming Asian students' approaches to learning into becoming independent learners.

Some prominent theoretical models have been developed by theorists, and mainly the philosophical frameworks of learning theories may fall within five main categories: humanism, behaviourism, constructivism, cognitivism and socialist/situational. Ashworth et al. (2004) outlines all these five theories in the following table:

Table 1

Aspect	Behaviourist	Cognitivist	Humanist	Social learning	Constructivist
Learning theorists	Guthrie, Hull, Pavlov, Skinner, Thorndike, Tolman, Watson	Ausubel, Bruner, Gagne, Koffka, Kohler, Lewin, (Piaget)	Maslow, Rogers	Bandura, Rotter, Engestrom, Eraut, Lave and Wenger, Salomon, (Vygotsky) (Piaget) (Boud)	Candy, Dewey, Piaget, Rogoff, vonGlaserfeld, Iygotzky, Boud, Illeris
View of the learning process	Change in behaviour	Internal mental processes (including insight, information processing, memory, perception)	A personal act to fulfil potential	Interaction with, and observation of, others in a social context, Situated learning, communities of practice, distributed cognition,	Construction of meaning from experience
Locus of learning	Stimuli in external environment	Internal cognitive structuring	Affective and cognitive needs	Interaction of persons, behaviour and environment	Internal construction of reality by individual
Purpose of education	Produce behavioural change in desired direction	Develop capacity and skills to learn better	Become self-actualised, autonomous	Model new roles and behaviour	Construct knowledge

Source: Ashworth et al. (2004): Learning Theories and Higher Education, DIT.

Humanists believe in facilitation of the learning process. Carl Rogers devised the premise of this theory that 'learning can happen because educators become facilitators without pressuring students to unveil new ideas' (Dunn, 2002 [online]). According to Dunn, this theory is often termed the "*Facilitation Theory*." However some critics believe that this theory is another form of supporting traditional learning while in reality the core purpose of it is to direct students towards a desired behavioural change. To humanists, learning is a natural process which occurs because of one's own eagerness and thus, one's own concepts are changeable (Dunn). In fact, humanists' views were a reaction to those behaviourists who rely too heavily on animal research. Hence, the point turns back to independent learning (IL) which the study is trying to explore by

identifying whether Asian students can develop this pattern of learning, and the literature does not suggest any theoretical solution to the development of IL with respect to Asian students' learning.

Conversely, behaviourism advocates more for a passive type of learning (Ashworth et al.: p.6) and results in an alteration of the learning process with the dominance of teachers over students (Atherton, 2011a); the same practice is commonly recognised by Asian students (Biggs, 2003). Behaviourism originated as a paradigm of psychology based on scientific principles, combining Thorndike's conditioning of a cat which asserts the notion of the "Law of Effect" – positive behaviour is repeatable; and Skinner's "Operant Conditioning" – reward comes with behavioural change. In Laliberte's (2005) words, behaviourism reflects outside new behaviour, something observable; it is inherited as a basic biological quality. Hence, this theory includes reflexes like Pavlov's Dogs and the Skinner Feedback/Reinforcement (Skinner's Pigeon Box) (p.4). Behaviourism in the classroom setting would comprise reward and punishment where the teacher is responsible for the learning (as a process) (p.5). In other words, behaviourist views support dependency rather than IL. However the necessity of behaviourist views could not be ignored in relation to Asian students who inherit a history of learning based on such views. The difficulty arises when UK teachers struggle to transform students' approaches into IL from the decade-long ingrained dependency; although transformation of learning approaches must happen as a result of a learning process rather than tutorials.

Likewise, cognitivism advocates knowledge as given and absolute. This theory arose as a response to behaviourism where learning happens as result of a connection with different symbols by focusing on the mental processes that create those connections (Laliberte: p.7). The theory emerged because of Jean Piaget - who stated that "*learning is a developmental cognitive process*" (Hammond et al., 2001), and Jerome Bruner (Discovery of Learning) - who viewed the learner as an 'independent problem solver'. Hence, cognitivists views are concerned with inquiry by self alone in each developmental stage where age determines significant levels; at the same time, Laliberte claims that cognitivism is less concerned with motivation (p.10). Therefore, teaching

cognitive skills is a time-consuming process and hard to apply adequately within any educational setting (Reeves, 2006). However there is still room to identify Asian students' cognitive aptitudes in the process of learning to shape their IL development.

Unlike behaviourism and cognitivism, constructivism does not see knowledge as given or absolute. The idea of 'constructivism' is commonly believed to have emerged from the work of John Dewey (1859-1952) and Jean Piaget (1896-1980). The constructivist paradigm involves "cognitive constructivism" or the development of learning with particular pattern and "social constructivism" or the use of social interaction; the theory is largely believed to be based on Vygotsky's (1896-1934) ideas on 'Social Development Theory.' Driscoll (2000) hesitates to call constructivism either a philosophy or theory because it is mainly instructional. However, from Driscoll's description, constructivism can lead to the phenomenon of self-centeredness. No theoretical evidence of the development of IL among Asian students exists and there is still room for exploration of the ignored constructivist insights in 'how constructivist views can help in developing IL among Asian students.'

Likewise, constructionism is one of the most predominant theories of recent times which is concerned with construction of knowledge (Karagiorgi & Symeou, 2005). This theory has implications on practices of IL where humans construct knowledge (Atherton, 2011b); and Pritchard (2008) suggests that it is the result of building new information from an individual's existing knowledge structure, understanding and skills; which are crucial for a learning process condition. Chapfika (2008) asserts that constructionism as a valid learning theory may not draw a line to form the robust process of learning required in Western learning culture where diversity is increasing, particularly in the current context of UK. This is because learning, in constructionism, is an interaction between individuals, in a social, meta-cognitive and situated process. However, in reality, constructionism is also a broad framework of concepts through which students attempt to achieve learning with the help of existing ideas (Cooper, 2009). For example, Bruner's main idea specifically addresses learners who relate prior ideas to construct new ones. The notion of construction in itself reveals the active process of learning, which is widely Western specific. This theory's main concept is

that the goal of education/learning should not merely remain the reproduction of prior knowledge but also the creation of learners doing new things. However there is no evidence in relation to how far Asian students can use the core tenets of this theory, including creativity, reflection, exploration, presentation and transformation and is still a contested discussion among researchers.

Transformation of experience may also happen as a result of experiential learning theory. According to Kolb (1984) experiential theory is based on a continuous four stages of learning, commonly referred to as the “Experiential Learning Cycle.” These stages include concrete experience as an act of “doing;” reflective observation as an act of “observing;” abstract conceptualization as an act of “thinking” and active experimentation as an act of “planning.” This process of learning can start at any stage and is pivotal relatively to individual’s as well as teacher’s learning style (Dunn, 2000; Felder, 2002). At the same time, it must be accepted that experiential learning theory also offers room for cognitive as well as the denied subjective aspect of behaviourism (Dunn) and there is enough room for the development of students’ overall learning practices in HE from both cognitive aspects as well as the learner’s subjective role. Kolb et al., (1999) gives a glimpse about it by stating that it is concrete experience (CE) that provides a basis for reflective observation (RO) which is then extracted into abstract concepts (AC). The implications provide the basis for practical experiences, called active experimentation (AE). However, this categorization still does not explain how Asian students could transform into independent learners.

Taking the above theories in perspective, there are other theories which substantially differ from those based on the practical conditions under which humans, in particular Asian, learn (Chowdhury 2006: p.1). In other words existing theories of learning have been designed for specific learning conditions; while in reality humans learn in different conditions because of different interactions within the teaching learning environments (Ashwin, 2009). Valiente (2008), however, acknowledges that modern learning theories still do not effectively reflect the topic of foreign students studying in Western countries (pp.85-86).

Therefore, certain theoretical points can be lined up to reflect upon Asian students' experiences and providing guidelines to equip them with skills to become independent learners, and importantly, integrate into a new learning environment. In the light of the above theories, it must be acknowledged that a sizable amount of research has discussed in various ways the role of different learning theories in formulating the learning needs of HE students in respect to their cultural orientation (McMahon, 2011), and academic values. However the notion of developing IL from a history of dependency has been shifted to different interests in teaching and learning. Particularly, it is not entirely clear how Asian students could develop IL from a history of dependent learning approaches. A theoretical discussion of how learning theories can help Asian students to transform their prior learning strategy into an IL approach is scattered in the literature, thus the existing learning theories can aid to wrestle with such a complex discussion.

2.5.1 Relevance of Asian Higher Education Systems and Link to Approaches to Learning in the UK

The role of different learning theories, as discussed in the previous section, is apparent in higher education (HE), where they have led to drastic changes in learning patterns across Western countries. However, the history of HE in Asian countries, especially on the Indian subcontinent and South Asian Countries (Islam & Borland, 2009), did not undergo drastic change in the exam-orientated system (Ali, 2005; Mukhtar et al., 2011). This education system remained under the cultural, intellectual and political influence of British colonisation (Ali: p.17; Seth, 2007). That influence is the transmission of British values into an austere, traditional Indian culture (p.18) and the adoption of the English language as the medium of learning in HE, available primarily to the elite class (Adeeb, 1986; Isani, 2001) which has led to exam-oriented learning practices.

As students of exam-oriented and dependent learning in their own countries, the majority of Asians consider British learning attractive for the reasons of it being 'active' (Forland, 2008: p.216) and 'independent' (see coming sections). With regard to Pakistan, Haider (2008: p.4) refers to Rao's (2003) shocking revelation that university lecturers, even at PhD level, are not competent in their duties, which exacerbates the problems relating to both teaching and learning in postgraduate students' prior academic

history; this study is consistent with what Shafique (2009) has recently discussed in his report on “*The Fault Lines of Education in Pakistan.*” On the other hand, Wakeling (2008) asserts that South Asian students with different cultural backgrounds have often proved proficient in postgraduate studies in the UK (p.108) as well as in other western context (Islam, 2009). Thus, the major difference between Asian and Western countries is the quality of HE (Kapur & Crowley, 2008: p.8) that enforces ‘quality learning’. Apparently the influx of Asian students is largely for the purpose of gaining Western qualifications- which are considered of ‘quality learning’, however major concerns remain for the reason that many Asian students including Indians are inclined to work in the UK (Foster, 2011; Connor et al., 2004), and in other conditions cease studying due to their weak educational backgrounds.

Regarding the Chinese higher education (HE) system, Liu (2012) and Perraton (2006) calculate it as not only the largest but also the fastest-growing one in the world, with a gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education at around 2 to 3% in the 1980s, increased to 16% in 2005. An estimated 640,000 undergraduate engineering degrees were granted to students in 2004 in China, compared with 350,000 equivalent degrees gained by Indian students (p.71): thus raising question as to why a large number of such students would flock to western countries for higher education as revealed in recent HESA report. On one hand it is likely the acceptance of UK’s quality education which create potential for future recruitment of Asian students. On the other hand, Perraton claims that during the Cultural Revolution, from 1966 to 1976, the Chinese HE system experienced decline because universities were allowed to enrol around 5% of students graduating from secondary schools (p.83), and the recent influx of students seeking advanced degrees caused some chaos (World Bank, 2000: p.27). This chaos led the authorities to send thousands of students overseas to bring skills into the country. Thus Western countries have become the key learning destinations of these Asian students; and the United Kingdom has benefits from the increasing number of these students; however studies have ignored the basic skill required to achieve success in HE in western countries; the UK has obligations to offer learning experiences which are different, understandable and meet the demands of Asian students (McMahon, 2011).

2.5.2 Learning Differences among Asian Students in Higher Education

Highlighting the educational history of students in the previous section, the research reveals that Asian students have a tendency to study in the UK; however they experience different learning environments, and might also learn differently from Westerners, given that teaching and learning environments have considerable influence on the ways in which different students learn (Kember, Leung & McNaught, 2008). In general, students may adopt different approaches and strategies for learning which in particular vary within different disciplines (Houghton, 2004; Lord & Dawson, 2002), although mostly influenced by the environment in which they learn (Burley et al., 2009; Wilson & Fowler, 2005). We call these strategies ‘learning skills’, a term described by Prosser and Trigwell (1999) and Nicholls (2002), and elaborated by Chalabine (2004). Learning skills, according to Nicholls, are comprised of five skill categories: intellectual (knowing how rather than knowing what); verbal (communicating); cognitive (thinking & memorising); attitudinal (using emotions, social & cultural approaches to learn); and motor (requiring physical tasks to learn) (pp.22-23). These categories underpinned Biggs’ (1999) constructivist approach to learning. According to Biggs (2003), learning activities in HE are largely constructed and experienced in comparison to knowledge-transfer in some learning cultures. Thus, it is important to know how different students have different learning attitudes in HE and how those differences have influence to developing the IL.

A glimpse at numerous studies reveals that adopting an appropriate learning approach may become a core issue for those students who are accustomed to different patterns of learning. For example Gordon and Debus (2002) findings’ *“change in the current teaching methods and assessment requirements may encourage students to shift their approaches from surface to deep learning ... however it may not be compatible with other programmes of study”* (p.484), are indicators about the variation in students approaches to learning. This argument is differently presented by Nicholls (2002) who considers that students’ learning is mostly affected by assessment methods in HE that involves trapping them into adopting surface learning (p.39); and Mcalpine’s (2004) view that course expectations often deter students from adopting a particular type of learning approach, and it is the teachers’ responsibility to reinforce (based on

behaviourist views) the need for students to adopt a deep approach (p.121) - in other words, developing IL is a shared activity between teachers and learners. A very common practice in UK-based universities, which can influence the learning approaches of students (Heijne-Penninga et al., 2008), is however targeting certain tasks for specific outcomes; these outcomes are categorised as learning results, objectives, theory application, knowledge and understanding, etc. (University of Ulster marks cover sheet, 2010), as opposed to strict behaviourists' views. Consensus exists about the various nature of learning approaches; however it is important to explore how different learning patterns developed with the passage of time.

Here, we see the link between self-education or IL and historical ideas, with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle who very much started the concept of informal education. Informal education is what we often call active participation in learning activities within the classroom (Li & Campbell, 2006). In this regard, Socrates' role play, Plato's questions and answers to wonders and Aristotle's idea of habitual learning produced a significant basis for the idea of self-education (Kemerling, 2002) which became later to be known as a 'learning approach'.

The Socratic way of teaching is predominant in the Western education, emphasising *"independent learning, more active participation in learning, knowledge co-construction, questioning, critical analysis and evaluation of information and ideas"* (Li & Campbell: p.304). In fact, it is this quality of cooperation that can lead to the development of IL; and is also called 'integrity', a predominantly Aristotelian view for achieving competency in learning (Nicholls: p.45). Historical perspectives of learning could probably be linked more with Aristotle than Plato. Aristotle adopted a different approach towards the way in which learners acquire knowledge, which he refers to as a Practical Wisdom or Phronesis – *"a dynamic process of learning within the framework of socio-cultural and ecological relations which involves daily praxis, pragmatic action, and context-dependent knowing based on variable factors"* (Avery & Kassam, 2011) – Breier's (2009) study has shown a recognition towards phronesis in the light of prior learning; in recent times this is commonly named as IL in higher education (Wong, 2004; Ishikawa, 2006) (see **Section: 2.8**).

While HE learning was the subject of considerable research in the 1980s, the focus shifted significantly on student approaches to learning in the 1990s (Haggis, 2009) which probably stem from the work of the Montessori educational system started in 1897. This educational theory- unique in its form, shape and application- has been seen for its comprehensive nature of its ‘formative age to adulthood’ educational plan where children are ‘sensorial explorers’ (learn or explore by sensing); ‘reasoning explorers’ (learn or explore by reasoning); and then ‘humanistic explorers’ – all of whom learn by active and full participation in society (Lillard, 1996: pp.152-154). The societal engagement has constructivist elements (see **Section: 2.5**) of learning in which meaning is achieved through interaction with learning activities (Somervell, 2003). Similar educational theories have devised a direction of HE learning, but the tension in different approaches to learning among different students has a link of prior learning history (Sharma, 2012); because learning is differently approached by Asian students to Western students (see Kember et al., 2008; Huang, 2012). Carroll (2002) suggests that students from other cultures, who approach learning differently, soon realise that their learning patterns are not appropriate for the host culture. This necessitates shifting their learning approach, but students normally remain unaware about the ways they can do this. One reason is that students who lack the required learning skills are less likely to become well-integrated into HE; and are more likely to leave without completing their academic programme (Fleming, 2007).

Previously educationists, as mentioned in the above paragraph, have specifically targeted the way learning and studying patterns work in Western HE. Students might consider that learning is a process of creating links with prior learning (Brownlee, Walker, Lennox, Exley & Pearce, 2009), using memorisation as a tool to make meaning of their previous learning (Valiente, 2008). Yet the literature is scattered with no single discussion about all these Asian students together, their learning approaches and the way they shift towards IL patterns. Studies (e.g. Tian, 2008; Wu, 2008) have found that learning difficulty is linked with the way students approach their learning, or the way they shift their learning towards IL. In other words different studies inherently outline the difference that is apparent among students of different cultures.

For a similar reason, Cuthbert (2005) suggests that understanding the students' learning approaches is more important than the comprehension of teaching because such information will benefit teachers more than the students. Because learning in HE is different to school-learning, a greater sensitivity about different approaches to and concepts of learning (p.247) may help academics teach better. Cuthbert notes that there is an increasing interest shown in understanding differences in individual learning approaches (p.236). Doyle et al., (2010) adds that improvement in such understanding can come as a result of continuous change in teaching, particularly in assessment practices. Such improvement, in other words, is important to improve the very system of learning in which it takes place. Improving such a system may be one way to improve the teaching practices and another way to enhance/develop learning. Similarly, the understanding of students' approaches to learning is crucial to improve the academic learning environment (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Ashwin & Trigwell, 2012) as well as to help teachers who are actively involved in the development of the process of teaching and learning (Biggs, 2003). This is because students' personal and academic interactions during the HE process expose them to a wider community with the necessary requirements for adjusting to a new living and learning environment – that environment giving them the feeling of different pattern of learning than their prior learning history. This is normally the case with overall numbers of students in HE who study in different learning cultures, for example Doyle et al. (2010) assert that;

“Factors that inhibited or promoted the ... include the ... the benefits of studying abroad; ongoing support to students; social, cultural, and linguistic capabilities; and how effectively overseas study was integrated into student degree programs.”

Hence, it becomes necessary for student learning to harmonise with the host country teaching practices because without any coordination the process of teaching and learning (see **Section: 2.3**) may be compromised. For this purpose a constructive collaboration between teaching and learning may locate different learning practices to work better in a single learning environment and that in turn can change learning as a process in HE. To understand the very process of learning, students' approaches to learning may guide a clear way towards its achievement because HE learning is differently exercised among different students.

2.6 Approaches to Learning

The theory of Approaches to Learning in HE was initially established in the early 1970s by Farence Marton and Roger Säljö (1976a, 1976b, 1984, & 1997), in proposing the contrast between deep and surface approaches to learning. This was later developed by Noel Entwistle (1983) and Paul Ramsden (1992), (who proposed strategic learning approaches), and several others including Laurillard (1979) and Lublin (2003). The ideas were further explored by Biggs (1983), Richardson (1983), Marton, Hounsell, and Entwistle (1997), and developed even further by Prosser and Trigwell (1999), Entwistle (2001) and Kember (2000) in Britain. Thus the notion of approaches to learning has remained the focus for many psychologists and behaviourists for more than 40 years. Other attempts to explore the concept can be found in different questionnaires, such as Approaches to Studying Inventory (ASI) by Entwistle & Ramsden, (1983), and Biggs' (1987) Study Process Questionnaire and Entwistle's (2000) approaches and study skills inventory for students (ASSIST). Of course there has been further generic explorations by a number of different authors of which the important are Shen (2007), Huang (2012), Leung et al., (2008), Peters et al., (2007), Trigwell, Ashwin and Millan (2012), Marginson (2010), Jin (2011), and Trigwell, Ellis and Han (2012).

Approaches to learning have thus become a focus of modern educational psychology. A number of studies have extended their focus to factors influencing students' approaches to learning; however the majority of studies are still categorising the two different types of learner - 'surface and 'deep', and what influences the development of each type. Somervell (2003) calls learning approach a temporary 'state,' in a specific learning environment (p.70). Felder and Brent (2005) claim that no single approach to learning can be considered intrinsically superior to others; various approaches have different characteristics, strengths and weaknesses. However learning approaches interact differently with the way different teaching practices work in any learning environment, including HE. Thus, any single 'learning approach' can be either a deep, surface or strategic search towards a learning process that also interacts with the teaching practices. Every student tends to adopt at least one approach from a range of surface,

deep and strategic (Felder & Brent, 2005); approaches which are partly habitual and mainly variable in different learning situations (Entwistle, 2005). It is important to explore each one in detail.

2.6.1 Surface Learning in Perspective

To start with surface or rote learning, it is the process of memorisation and reproduction of factual information (Biggs, 2003). Memorisation results in a type of surface learning which may be appropriate in some circumstances to focus on understanding and learn more effectively (Knestubb & Bond, 2009: p.179). Different studies highlight that surface learning is more commonly practised among Asian students, including Chinese (Wong, 2004; McMahon, 2011), Pakistani (Siddiqui, 2006) and Indian (Agarwal, 2009; Marginson, 2010). This perception led to a belief that Asian students lack the ability for critical thinking (Huang, 2008), that leads to the perception that they are rote learners- which, according to Forland (2006), can lead to numerous challenges in Western HE such as plagiarism (p.206) and this issues according to Hall (2008) is common among international students. Jin (2011) also agrees that over-reliance on rote learning is a stereotypical attribute of Chinese students. In fact, the way Chinese students learn stems from Confucianism – a learning culture in which teachers impart wisdom and knowledge to their students (Cooper, 2004: p.2), a contrary approach to IL. Indeed, Chan (1999) suggests that rote learning originates from the Chinese curriculum and teaching practices. In comparison Price and Skinner (2007) clarify that in a ‘tutorial system’, students are often slow to take a lead in the discussion because tutors are only there to answer their questions, rather than teach them (p.158) while Lodish and Rodriguez (2004) found that lectures are key to students’ learning yet alone are not sufficient to cause it. Ali (2005) and Islam (2009) argue that such a practice leads South Asian students towards dependency because it directs them to study for exams; and gives them a limited space for extensive learning. However the traditional reasoning about Asian students being rote learners is disputed by Tian (2008) who notes that in fact Chinese students are required to reproduce lots of information in their exam-centred educational system, which is why they memorise information to achieve high grades. Thus they cannot be classified as dependent learners (p.93).

A somewhat similar view that Asians are mostly exam-oriented learners is mentioned by Shen (2007), and as detailed by Trigwell et al., (2012). Others (e.g. Barron & Acrodia, 2002) advocate that teacher-centeredness is commonly perceived as a traditional way of learning and this trend is more common among Asian students (Sharma, 2012). This quality develops passive learning. However the overall majority of students, entering HE, are passive learners in their first years of study, as Kolb and Kolb (2005) note:

“Many students enter higher education conditioned by their previous educational experiences to be passive recipients of what they are taught” (p.209).

In practice learning for exams and surface learning is an issue among overall students in the beginning of studies. However, if learning is to be taken as a process based on teaching, then Kolb and Kolb’s interpretation of “*passive recipients*” would be truly descriptive of HE Asian students only. Indeed rote learning is void of a systematic process that enables the learner to get information through interpretation or understanding (Li, 2004: p.9); rather, it is a strategy of repetition and storage of information. Thus the use of repetition and memorisation as a learning strategy has limited place in a modern HE system. Knowing a surface approach to learning is a way to reconsider one’s own approach to learning rather than practicing it as a learning strategy.

Biggs (1999) believes that for Chinese students, rote learning is a way towards understanding. However it would be naïve to think that a rote learning strategy leads to understanding among a majority of students, as different approaches are largely apparent among different students of HE. Li (2004) clarifies that the difference between memorisation and IL activities is much clearer among Western students than Asians; and students’ cultural beliefs might also influence the use of rote learning (p.12) - a strategy that has cultural and prior learning connections (Tian, 2008). Memorisation, a culturally acceptable practice among Asian students, is in fact repetition (Biggs, 1999; Haggis, 2003), which ultimately leads to understanding (Marton et al., 1996; Ding, 2007: p.288). Jiang and Smith (2009) reconfirm that memorisation is still a valid learning strategy among Asian students. The authors mention that although previous studies have considered the cultural norms that affect student learning strategies, they

are self-contradictory in relation to different student groups. Chinese students are neither surface learner nor are they reproductive learners; rather, they work to erase their mistakes by revisiting their assignments (Nield, 2007).

Surface learning, therefore, is extrinsically motivated by grades and represents a reproductive concept of learning (Garrison, et al., 1995) that involves the deletion or addition of concepts in the absence of integration with partial prior learning (Hay et al., 2008). Houghton (2004: p.9) summarises surface learning in the following words:

“Surface learning is the tacit acceptance of information and memorization as isolated and unlinked facts. It leads to superficial retention of material for examinations and does not promote understanding or long-term retention of knowledge and information.”

Despite conflicting findings of various studies, Xie (2009) claims that the surface approach is still used by Asian students both at the beginning and final stages of studying English as a foreign language (p.238). Bari (2012) adds that surface learning is commonly noted among Pakistani students, which is the result of a tutorial system. Conversely the case in Western learning culture is different and surface-learning tactics cannot survive in the pressure of the IL environment. That is why the surface approach to learning, according to Nicholls (2002), can simply be utilised for completing tasks with a variety of methods, including memorising facts (p.31).

Valiente (2008), however, notes that not all memorisation can be considered surface learning or the lack of understanding (p.76). Most Asian students learn directly from their seniors where learning is not a type of memorisation but the transmission of knowledge, commonly called dependent learning. Yet, Cooper (2004) mentions that while surface learning is associated with mechanical memorisation, this approach can result in deep learning to achieve good results (p.306), based on the necessary reproduction of ideas.

Indeed for some Chinese students, like other Asians (Tan, 2011), the clear difference in their educational background, compared to Western students, rests with the surface approach to learning, one that Carroll and Appleton (2007) call a ‘didactic approach’ (p.82). In fact, CHC students normally progress to understanding through rote learning

because deep learning requires it at some point (Nield, 2007: p.45; Valiente: p.77). At the same time, rote learning, as an alternate approach, is sometimes subject to time pressure and a fear of failure, caused by the cultural and communication difficulties leading to 'passive', 'obedient' and 'non-critical' learners (Valiente: p.79). Thus an overall picture of Asian students' learning has been shaped in different patterns, revealing them using memorisation as a tool to deep and IL. To agree with the above research findings, the issue of learning approach in the UK is one way to determine students' ways of learning; however in reality it merely builds a process towards learning in context.

2.6.2 Deep Learning in Perspective

In contrast to surface learning, deep learning, as an intrinsic quality (Garrison, et al., 1995) is commonly required and is an essential strategy in Western learning culture. The authors define that deep learners search for meaning within the existing knowledge (p.1). Surprisingly Gynnild et al., (2008) believe that deep learning exists as a hidden practice of learning among Asian students which can shift them toward a self-directed approach. Zhu, Valcke and Schellens (2008), investigating learning concepts and approaches to learning among Chinese and Flemish university students, confirm that Chinese students are as deep learners as the Flemish students. To agree with Gynnild et al., and Zhu et al., it would be essential that Asian learners relate material to what they already know, consider it thoughtfully, examine the argument, and look for appropriate patterns. This is what Houghton (2004) suggests in similar words in relation to deep learning:

“Deep learning involves a critical analysis of new ideas, linking them to already known concepts and principles, and leads to understanding and long-term retention of concepts so that they can be used for problem solving in unfamiliar contexts which promotes understanding and application for life”. (p.9)

Previously, Weigel (2002) contends that deep learning is most probably a branch of 'constructivist' thought, meaning that learning happens as a result of active involvement where knowledge is built through making meaning of world experiences (p.3); and from the proper use of the medium 'content' (p.4). Moreover, Kember, Leung and McNaught, (2008) suggest that deep learning is influenced by the individual's interest in learning particular subjects where the aim of understanding key concepts and

meanings is to connect new knowledge to previous understanding and personal experiences (p.44). In this regard, Hay et al., (2008) elaborate that deep learning is a meaningful integration of prior and newly-acquired information (p.225). To accept the prevailing perception about Asian students there are still misconceptions about Asian students' approaches to learning (Kember, 2000); it would appear that they do not stick to a single learning approach which would keep them apart from developing the IL approach to learning.

Thus students in HE tend to learn through understanding- which is in fact deep learning- rather than through memorizing, although memorization is crucial for reproduction of ideas (Valiente, 2008; McMahon, 2011). Cooper (2004) found that as Chinese learners are more mechanical rote learners than surface learners because they use memorisation to strengthen their understanding and hence, show high academic achievements. Thus, surface learning is associated with mechanical rote learning, whereas this kind of memorisation results in deep-learning approaches to achieve good results (p.306; Kember, 1996).

2.6.3 Strategic Learning in Perspective

Alongside deep and surface approaches, there are overwhelming numbers of students who rely on a strategic approach to learning. Strategic approach, as a term, was first used by Ramsden (Byrne, Flood & Willis, 2009) to describe a tactic that is used to maximise better results as detailed by Cooper (2004: p.296) and Lublin (2003). Lublin explains that strategic learners try to learn with a strategy of selecting important materials, which are necessary for exams. On the basis of Lublin's explanation, strategic learning can be named as selective studying with a strategy of managing time and learning conditions, i.e. exam-oriented learners with a clear strategy.

Students adopting strategic learning alongside deep learning are most likely successful engagers, in relation to both grades and subject knowledge. However, the difficulty remains when an overall majority of Asian students are using either a strategic approach to learning, which is the result of prior syllabus-based learning (Adeeb, 1986), or surface learning. Despite a large number of Chinese students' using strategic learning

alongside memorisation (Biggs, 1999), which has been widely disputed in numerous studies, the majority of studies consider Asian students as surface and rote learners. However, the generalisation of rote and surface learning to Asian students may not be ethical nor can be truly reflective of them.

2.6.4 Variations in Learning Approaches of Different Students

The nature of learning approach among Asian students, as discussed in the previous section, has led the discussion to a point that they normally lack the ‘independent learning skills’ which are commonly required and practiced at UK universities. Edwards and Ran (2006), confirm the same generic perception about Chinese students (p.4), while other (east) Asian students have been seen in the same light by Wu (2008), Xie (2009) and Tan (2011).

Numerous recent studies, like Trigwell et al., (2012), link students’ lower achievement with a surface approach to learning. A similar point was previously challenged by Leung et al., (2008) as a paradox of the Chinese student, questioning how it is possible that students using those approaches to learning which are associated with negative outcomes can achieve good results as compared to Western students. Leung et al., found that Asian students neither use deep nor surface approach to learning to achieve good results; rather they use more an intermediate approach to learning. Thus the middle-approach may form the basis of ‘required learning skills’, if it guarantees better results.

In theory, there is a developmental issue which Asian students face while developing their approaches to learning, and it has a history which originates from a system where examination cheating, politically corrupt examiners, and the lack of monitoring systems (Boston Group, 2001: p.35), find it hard to develop the ‘required learning skills’ in the UK. Such difficulty necessitates students to make their own moral choices about these matters; but it may also be the case that their particular needs – scheduling study time, accessing resources and overcoming learning barriers – are the same problems that overseas students face all the time. These are some basic needs that impede or push the development of required learning approaches.

Irrespective of students' needs, learning skills are often developed on personal preferences which students use for their own learning facility (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), following the Kolb (1984) learning cycle of experiential theory (see **Section: 2.4**). Numerous studies are thus consistent regarding the varied nature of learning approaches among different students (i.e. Carroll & Appleton, 2007; Crawford, DeVicente & Clink., 2004). Asian students who rely both on understanding and memorisation (Kember, 2000; Felder & Brent, 2005) or those who are critical in their approach in the first year of study (Twigg, 2006; Wakeling, 2008: p.51) may well develop their learning skills. In addition, many studies invite further research to identify similarities and differences in educational backgrounds (prior learning) across cultures, as an indication of the variation of learning approaches among diverse students.

Case and Marshall (2004) in a comparative study found, that the term deep approach as “procedural deep” was noticed in UK-based students, while a “procedural surface” approach was identified among South African students - concluding that shifting from a surface or a conceptual to a deep approach is impossible; rather, an approach to learning is used that is specific to course-related contexts (p.613). That view is disputed by Smith (2005) when applying the same qualities of different approaches to education in early professional learning (EPL); approaches to learning are not the same at all times and are used in varied situations for different requirements (p.7; Haggis, 2003). Such arguments would be important in terms of students' realisation of learning patterns they apply in order to develop strategies for IL. However, the criteria to developing an approach to learning would not be important because:

“Students want to (or can be made to want)... interested in subject, and enjoy studying; want to or can be made intellectually curious; are motivated by desire to link new ideas to past; and that teaching and learning at university is about discovering, questioning, and creating knowledge” (Marton & Säljö, 1984: p.97).

A problem would arise when students are found to adopt memorisation and a dependent approach to learning instead of discovery, a covert approach of IL. Haggis asserts that the adoption of memorisation will depend on students' perceptions about possible rewards in the form of results, leading to a surface approach (p.90); at the same time, students who come to study at university are primarily pre-equipped with the basic

skills expected by academics (p.97), but may be naive to the way learning approaches work in modern HE. Whatever approach students adopt for learning, they would be highly influenced by their previous academic experiences (Zeegers, 2004). However in many situations, learners are unaware about the use of different and possibly more productive approaches to learning (Pritchard, 2008). If someone's preferred approach to learning is theoretically defined, the learning process would also be eased (p.18).

2.6.5 Approaches to Learning in Different Subject Studies

The previous sections highlights the theoretical aspects of different approaches to learning that students tend to use in different situations. Modern research also shows some evidence that students normally adopt different approaches to learning in different subject studies, for example a study by Bilgin and Crowe (2008) found variations in students' approaches in statistics, and according to Cano and Berben (2009) in mathematics studies; concluding that achieving goals and approaches to learning are co-construct in different studies. One of such difference has been categorised in surface and deep learning approaches, as discussed earlier in detail. Kember (2000) linked 'understanding' and 'memorisation' to surface approaches because the 'arts and social science' disciplines are deemed to motivate students toward deep learning, as compared to science and engineering, which involve more contact hours and a higher work-load and thus, promote surface learning (p.54). Wilson and Fowler's (2005) findings are consistent on a different level, examining the possibility of course design's influence on students' learning approaches in two different learning environments. The authors conclude that teaching in HE promotes deep learning in the 'arts and social science' disciplines but not in 'engineering' (p.95). Kember et al., (2008) also leave room for further discipline-specific research, indicating that this phenomenon of discipline-specific approach to learning is still vague. Thus the approach to learning may vary in different disciplines, as revealed by Gong, Hu and Lew (1997); Entwistle (2004); Entwistle (2005); and Peters, Jones, and Peters (2007).

Similarly, Biggs (2003) previously stresses that coordination of course structure and teaching methods would assess student approaches (deep or surface) to learning (pp.4-5). Laird et al., (2005a) explore from an institutional perspective whether faculty

practices were coordinated with students' approaches to learning in some, not fully representative, US institutions (p.5); the authors concluded that students from hard disciplines (requiring a high degree of consensus about knowledge) are more likely to benefit from deep approaches to learning than others and that there is a clear gap in college and university-level students' approaches to learning (p.18). In fact, such studies seem to be preoccupied with the categorisation of disciplines, those requiring a deep or surface learning approach, and ignores the possibility that 'hard' and 'soft' disciplines could be misleading. In addition, it would also be naïve to deny the significance of deep learning in any subject studies, not only in 'hard' disciplines.

Indeed student's adoption of an approach would include both motive and learning strategy (Yong & Lew, 2005: p.2). Yong and Lew's conclusions that 'adult learners often use achieving approach to learning in marketing studies' has in fact a limited relevance overall in the broad meaning of HE learning. Keeping motive and strategy in focus, students would normally expect assessments (e.g. exams). Achieving enough education, as the authors explain, is thus the result of an informative-based assessment and teachers' demand from students; and is likely to influence their ability to adopt deep or achieving approaches to learning in a particular subject study (p.7). Hence adoption of an approach to learning cannot be materialised in specific subject study, however may be defined by the term deep or surface approach.

In another study, Kember et al., (2008) found that students studying English and history were using deep learning and students studying physics and engineering used a surface approach. Other studies, i.e. Biggs (1987) and Peters et al., have similar observations. However, these variations would be due to "*different attitudes to learning, academic skills, goals, motivations, learning styles and perceptions of good teaching*", as noted by Nicholls (2002). Thus we know that different subject studies may require different approaches to learning, so it is worth questioning whether the development of IL is also variable in different subject studies.

2.6.6 The Language Influence: An Issue and its Relevance to Learning Approaches

Language inadequacies often complicate the process of a diversified learning culture (Bennel & Pearce, 2003). The importance of the English language has risen to the point where today one in every four people across the globe can communicate in English (Barnett & Coate, 2005: p.165). Alongside the variation of learning approaches in different subject-studies, there may be numerous other developmental issues in developing independent learning (IL), for example Kinnel (1990) viewed that coping language skills are primarily possible with students' IL efforts. In similar other perspectives, language is of critical importance in the academic environment and in scholarly (academic level) communication. A lot of discussions already exist over the use of academic written English and the use of verbal communication, such as Phakiti and Li (2011), Sampson (2012) and Zhang (2012). Some studies indicate that difficulties happen in HE learning when lingual communications are less clear or less understandable. For example, Lin (2008) describes concerns in relation to dialogical or lingual strength, which acts to present the flow of meaning, the purpose of which is specific to the learners' needs (p.4). At the same time Gilbert (2005: p.90) and Cummins (1979) stress that the use of English language varies considerably across different social groups. Such a lingual difference, according to Liu (2011), may expose students to a culture of naivety in which they remain confused in judging their own lingual competency. Although the variation in use of English language may have no strong effect in spoken communication among students, written aspects have been of great concern for teachers in the UK, as noted by Yen and Kuzma (2009), Crossman and Kite (2012), and Phakiti and Li (2011). Written competence is of course vital for academic success (Zhang, 2012) while spoken competence would also be crucial for transferring internal ideas without the use of translation. Thus both aspects of language would necessarily make up academic success and adjustment in second language environment of learning (see Brown & Holloway, 2008).

Historically language has been a predominant issue among international students in adjusting to the university environment (Sovic, 2008: p.5). Cummins (2005), who initially developed a distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) in 1980, suggests that communicational ability is what is achieved by students to a functional level; and this

process can happen in the first two years of interfacing the second language learning environment. On a similar note and in different words, Holmes (2004) claims that students with less understanding of the English language remain prone to communicate in their native language, L1 (Farooq et al., 2012), using internet applications (p.29). Yet students do use English for passive understanding and more for active communication (p.50); thus signifying the crucial role of spoken English. However, the active use of the English language is crucial for understanding as well as mere communication. This is because in modern education, the English language has great influence across the globe because of the Anglo-American influence and association (Meneghini & Packer, 2007). According to the authors:

“In fact, English has ... largely dominated by Anglo-American countries. Any scientist must therefore master English - at least to some extent - to obtain international recognition ... This makes communication between scientists much easier; it also creates problems for non-English-speaking Even if their scientists are able to read English publications, to reap the societal benefits they must still translate this knowledge into a national context.”(p.113)

Thus the importance of English language use has dramatically increased, which necessitates the notion that every learner must have English language competence. Most importantly language competence should constantly improve in HE learning. There is no doubt that English is now a ‘lingua franca’ in the academic world and the medium of HE instruction, even in non-speaking countries (Dedoussis, 2007: p.135). However in a broader context of language relations, semantics, and manners, in which meaning is given to the language used, is an area of interest to linguists, and different studies discuss the use of adequate verbal communication in which meaning of speakers are transferred differently from their real meaning.

The importance of the English language is no longer contested; English as a medium of instruction remains a dominant issue for both international students and academics in universities (Egege & Kutieleh, 2004), as the only global language of science, research and academic publication (OECD, 2008: p.20). Because English is now spoken with pride in many Asian countries and maintained for the purpose of academic excellence, it may be that students from South Asian countries (Islam, 2009) are more familiar with its nuances. However, English is either a second or foreign language for many students

(Cheng, 2000), regardless of their British colonial heritage and Anglophone educational traditions (Islam & Borland, 2006: p.2), which is a reason that these students may not master English language to its academic level where normally language competency is judged in different ways.

Bowl (2003), on the educational background of non-traditional HE students, found that language is still a barrier among students who had their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in a language other than English, mostly applying to Asian students (p.32; Bolton, 2008); and therefore particularly fitting the current study. Brandt (2009) also reports that students who speak English as a second or foreign language face lingual, comprehension, difficulties (p.3) in both social and academic interactions (Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009: p.468; Zhang & Mi, 2010). Similarly Bolton has shown the issue of proficiency of English language among Asian students in Asian countries.

With regard to students learning in UK, a certain level of adequacy of language skills required for HE institutional entry might guarantee success from a linguistic viewpoint. Such skills would include, reading, writing, speaking and listening in English language effectively; which are key elements of IELTS and TOEFL, primarily designed to assess students' lingual competency. However Yen and Kuzma (2009) and Bolton (2008) questioned the authenticity of IELTS scores, arguing that teachers often feel the lack of English language understandings among Chinese students, despite their high level of scores. Matthews (2012) found the issue on institutions part that English language requirement were relaxed for overseas students to recruit more students. So, we can locate where the problem originally comes from? Brown (2008) suggests that the problems of non-native English speakers are less about adopting grammar skills and more about having communication in writing and speaking skills (p.77). Similarly Phakiti and Li, (2012) and Zhang and Mi (2010) confirm both writing and speaking issues among Asian students and call for more balanced and varied investigation into students' lingual concerns. Previously Twigg (2006) and Goldfinch and Hughes (2007) also note that weaker writing skills among overseas students may affect their academic prospects. Such findings have also been confirmed by Hyland (2010), claiming that

language competency and academic writing are still issues of major concern in the ‘teaching international students’ project’, while Cole (2012) see it important for academic transition and learner’s autonomy. The same level of linguistic competence may also be necessary because without it students may not adjust academically (p.92). There is a clue that adjustment may not be possible without language competence (Brown & Holloway, 2008) while on the other hand Kinnel see that language skills can only be overcome with self-learning initiatives. Thus Cole (2012) and Kinnel (1990) findings create a cross argument that both language and IL skills could have links to each other.

There are numerous studies conducted on the role of language within diverse groups of students in HE: language as a challenge in HE (Brumfit, 2004; Sovic, 2008); language as anxiety-producing among international students (Brown, 2008; Lie, 2009); language as a way for a communication in HE (Kuiper & Tan, 2007); language as a mean of academic success (Zhang & Mi, 2010); and language as a bridge to expectations and reality in HE learning (Pattanapichet & Chinokul, 2011). Some studies (see Holmes, 2004) investigated the entire language skills required in HE for non-English speaking students while others merely focus on reporting their language experiences.

Numerous studies have specifically focused on Chinese students’ experiences with HE learning in the UK, finding that Chinese students, with their cultural habits, are more hesitant to participate in classroom discussions; requiring a level of support to overcome any language-related difficulties (Wu, 2008; Mei & Jianwu, 2011; Crossman & Kite, 2012). Therefore it appears the language issue is still a challenge, despite the notion that majority of international students are committed to improve their language skills (UKCOSA, 2006), with an overall population of students providing documentary evidence of English language scores (Bolton, 2008: see also Appendix 1 for country wise English language test Scores); and support may influence the students’ lingual skills – which in turn may help developing their approaches to learning into IL skills. Hence, limited studies outline the need of support towards improving the language competence (Crossman & Kite, 2012). It is essential that students’ perspectives are

clearly represented with regard to their own needs about the level of support required in enhancing the language skills; which in return can contribute to developing IL skills.

Thus, the role of language is an important factor that also fosters the concept of IL in HE (Barnett & Coate, 2005). Lie (2009) additionally suggests that students' language concerns need to be addressed from cultural, social and prior educational perspectives (p.169), a notion which is part of the focus of the current study.

It is understood that language skills are considered the most important aspects of students' performance (Dayioglu & Turut-Asik, 2007) and learning in HE (Lin, 2008; Phakiti & Li, 2011). It is not clear, however, about the extent to which language remains critical (when considered at the academic level) in developing IL. Recognising such a potential question, students travelling abroad might not only want to advance their academic knowledge but also refresh themselves in the medium of learning and instruction (Kuiper & Tan, 2007; Doyle et al., 2010), however it could still be difficult for students with less competent language skills to face the associated challenges during the learning process (p.3). For example, Jin (2011) and Richards (2011) note that not only do inadequate speaking skills enforce stereotypical perceptions of Chinese students, but also that the lack of knowledge causes concern, particularly regarding the use of the resources. Hence, knowledge about the use of different resources is one of the ways to enable the students to cope with an average level of language competence; however it may remain a problem for those who visualise and interpret foreign language into English for understanding and expressions (Anderberg, Norden & Hansson, 2009: p.11); the research has grouped results into three categories of language processing and labelled them 'vague', 'stabilising' and 'developing' approaches. In other words, learners process information in language, from intangible concepts, to stabilise them and to develop them for the purpose of communication.

There are four important elements of language adequacy which are essentially assessed in the test scores (IELTS & TOEFL), however in academia, generically writing, reading and speaking are utilised. Some students are competent enough in language; however such competence is perceived on the level of its utilisation during the learning process.

In other words the understanding of development of cognitive aspects of language competency (CALP) (see Cummins) is particularly critical (Lillywhite, 2011) for HE learning. Thus different language aspects enforce the learning situations, where one major challenge is IL.

For example, the notion of silence among Chinese students in class discussions lies with non-fluency and lack of trust of the level of understanding (Christie, 2011). However, Forland (2008) believes that spoken English skills within Western culture are quite underdeveloped which is why many Asian students prefer written feedback to the oral. In contrast a study by Phakiti and Li (2011) found that Asian students in particular face reading and writing difficulties while studying in HE; though the study was limited to students studying PG level TESOL programmes. To equip a learning culture properly, a particular attention is required towards raising students' comprehension level of English language which needs to be sufficient enough for learning in HE. Indeed UK universities are struggling in this regard; and provide additional language classes even though they also demand more competent academic language skills. Similar to the lack of comprehension regarding language skills, Carroll (2002) refers to the 'cognitive load' or burden of academic language, a time-consuming process with its stress on minimisation and discipline-related terms; this process is even problematic for those students with competent English language skills. She suggests that international students who speak English as a second language must engage in both written and spoken activities with advance warning about up-coming discussions; this warning may ideally lead to participation - normally avoided in group settings, thus linking the role of theories to diverse aspects of learning (see **Section: 2.4**). However coherence in written and spoken activities cannot materialise until students' views on the matter are known.

Overcoming the same language difficulties are crucial for one's own interpretation of ideas from mother tongue to English language, named as 'vague processing' (Anderberg et al., 2009). Hence, the wider use of the English language, instead, would increase the chances of inclusive social interaction (Borg, 2008; Pilcher, 2011) among local and international students. The question about why Asian students prefer to use their own language is still unclear. Is this a generalised issue among overall

international students in the UK? The dichotomy of vague processing can best be understood from a clearer perspective of students.

2.6.7 Learning Support Relevance

Learning approaches of individuals have considerable influence over learning process in an educational setting, as well as in day-to-day settings (Cassidy, 2004). For this purpose the provision of support has long been acknowledged as a means to influence the learning process (Hounsell, Hounsell, Litjens, & McCune, 2005) and approaches to learning (Peters et al., 2007; Wang & Li, 2011). Reflection could maintain the momentum of the process of learning; because a large number of students are pre-programmed with the idea of getting higher grades (Marlina, 2009). Thus the role of support counts as crucial in influencing students' approaches to learning.

Learning support needs to work in conjunction with students' aspirations and preferences because without this information, it would hardly determine the trend towards a particular academic approach to learning; which may lead to boredom and potentially forfeiting an academic career (Felder, 1995a; Goldfinch & Hughes, 2007). However leading students towards a particular academic approach can be enhanced by the teaching involved (Hounsell, et al. 2005), i.e. learning support, in addition to the students' leading role in transitioning to ways of learning (Huang, 2012) and adaptation to the new cultural settings (Pherali, 2012).

Tones et al. (2009) even put the responsibility of successful learning on authoritative academics. They argue that institutions must harness the necessary programmes to avoid misconception of academic expectations for students to successfully complete their studies (p.507); in other words, the authors, with addition to Johnson (2008), advocate for adequate support strategies to influence students' learning. The most prominently observed requisite-support is noticed among Asian students (Meixuan, 2011), who expect adequate support to adapt to the new learning culture (Sovic, 2008; Tian, 2008; Wu, 2008). This is because Asian students, in particular, feel that they receive minimal support from lecturers during the learning process (Alder, 2011; Barron, 2004) and in acquiring the necessary language skills (Mei & Jianwu, 2011) in

comparison to their prior learning backgrounds (Valiente, 2008; Hay et al., 2008). In alternative words, Uhlin, Johannesson, and Silen (2007) explain that by introducing reflective writing activities, a similar transition of approaches to learning can be facilitated with support. Similarly, Barron et al. (2007), conducting a study on international students in a Scottish university, found that the role of language-related difficulties in leading students' approaches to learning is apparent. The requisite of support among Asian students has been intermixed in Western education at the cost of using the one 'independent learning' approach. Overcoming the prevailing students' dissatisfaction from the lack of support (David et al., 2009), austere changes to shortcomings in students' support services would require in order to create a roadmap towards developing the IL skills.

In this regard support for students could be a positive contribution to their learning practices (Nicholls, 2002: p.39). Such assistance is commonly viewed as 'generic learning support'. Different studies suggest the notion of support to direct students' learning practices. For example, Sovic (2008) elaborates on the idea of 'timely support' at the beginning by promoting the desired learning practices. This view was initially suggested by Entwistle, Thompson and Trait (1992), with the supposition that students at risk might be offered remedial support, irrespective of their learning pattern during that learning process. Similarly, Glogowska, Young and Lockyer (2007) also recommend that students with a lower-level quality of educational background might need extra support to remain committed to academic work (p.76). The same view is held by Price and Skinner (2007) that the current available educational support is not meeting the expectations of students entering HE. Hence, the majority of studies stress on importance of initial or remedial support in learning.

Students' expectations about support may change with the passage of time; one obstacle still remaining might be the issue of transition from prior learning into UK institutions (Hopkins, 2004; Maunder, Gingham & Rogers, 2009), as evidenced from Alder's (2011) study on a diverse group of students at Napier and Herriot-Watt Universities in the UK. Alder suggests that support strategies are essential for students to complete the transitional period. Transitional period is what can determine the pros of cons of

academic journey as evidenced by Gorard, et al., (2007), who found the lack of support during transitional period sometimes results in discontinuation of studies (p.94). Thus, the role of support is multi-faceted in HE and has been debated in various levels of HE learning.

Limited data highlights the multiple shapes of support before and during the learning process. Initial support is potentially aimed to prepare students for entry into HE by evaluating students' knowledge, maturity and understanding (Merrill, 2005). Such efforts of support might mean facilitating to adopt a more traditional type of learning. A common point of agreement, with regard to the appropriate amount of support, is noted in numerous studies, for example Tian (2008), Wu (2008), and Brown and Holloway, 2008. In addition, Twigg (2006) specifies that Asian students in particular require more support due to cultural backgrounds which are different from Westerners (p.9). Hence, by necessity, an accepted amount of learning support may be needed among all students at initial stages of study, often called the transitional period; however may be different among Asian students in developing their IL skills in UK institutions.

Asian students' support strategies may stem from the historical environment of teaching and learning where they are taught by teachers and supported at all stages of studies. Such strategies are yet to be considered important in modern education. Thus clarification is important and its level (Chan, 1999) must determine a solid foundation for understanding the development of IL; one way to lay such foundation is to understand, a link between prior and current learning experiences, and formulate support strategies (Johnson, 2008; McMahon, 2011). However, this trend could happen differently with Asian students, particularly in terms of different subject studies, in addition to the need for language skills support which is common for the UK's overall majority of international students (Edwards & Ran, 2006).

The term "support" has shifted to have different interpretations: some call it learning support while others link it to supporting specific subject-studies. Edwards and Ran suggest that induction and training must be extended several months for international students to fully integrate themselves into the learning environment (p.6). This

explanation raises further questions as to how students can be supported at all times for several months in many different aspects of language and generic learning when the programmes of study have limited durations. For this reason Pritchard (2008) differentiates the amount of support provided to students in university, which is limited, and school education (p.7).

Thus support is viable, if not wholly, for the purpose of academic adjustment (Richards, 2011; Meixuan, 2011) or linguistic competence (Alder, 2011; Mei & Jianwu, 2011) and may require cultural adjustment (Christie, 2011); i.e. coping with cultural issues in overall communication varies with different social groups (Lie, 2009: p.77; Goa, 2006). The most common of these is the transitional support in learning which is sought from close relatives, friends and teachers (p.64), for adjustment to the new learning environment (p.65; Hall, 2007; Jianwu, 2011). The real challenge remains when students get trapped in a system of less support than they require, then they seek it from alternative sources and it is possible that students may not find these relevant to their learning

In due course traditional learning with its emphasis on memorisation is also controversial and is largely based on the teachers' role of knowledge-transferring, often known as intensive support. In contrast, in IL, their role is mainly limited to support strategies. Wright (1982: p.25) suggests that IL requires time-consuming support from teachers, which had made it controversial. However modern learning practices have transferred a more active role to the students where they are required to spend much of their time on learning in contrast to an extensive teachers' role in support as outlined in pedagogic principles of higher education transactions. Hence teachers' role in modern HE has been confined to supporting the students, not to work as transmittance of knowledge.

During the late 1990s, some researchers (such as Hogan, 1996) believed that teachers' support for learning, also called 'tutor-centred learning', sometimes results in relatively little learning among students. However numerous recent studies suggest that support plays an important role in transforming students approach to learning (Gynnild et al.,

2008); in more strict terms Yorke & Longden (2008) assert that students' have even expressed dissatisfaction due to a lack of support from their lecturers (p.26). Numerous other studies, e.g. David et al., (2009) highlight the prevailing perceptions among students about the lack of support from teachers, particularly among Asian students.

The need for support to develop IL may not be an isolated case: support may also be required for those at risk to understand study patterns; to know or develop sufficient other skills, i.e. IT training, required to meet the learning process; and to use the academic English language in the UK. Support may also be necessary because some students have negative prior learning experiences (David et al., 2009). Such experiences, according to Valiente (2008), are likely to be overcome by a supportive academic environment which also includes students' inclusive involvement in academia (p.74). Valiente's contribution is intended to help international students' approaches to learning in the UK by linking religious, ideological and societal patterns to an understanding of those different cultural contexts which need to be known beforehand. However, there is a common weak foundation, arising from prior learning experiences, among the majority of Asian students, regarding study skills, which further confuses the need of support because Valiente stresses over the need of support to different levels of studies.

Another facet of the lack of support that is felt among students is from lecturers who fail to cope with educational diversity – which means teachers fail to meet the sophisticated and varied needs of diverse students from different nationalities (David et al., 2009: p.17); Tso (2012) call it a transition process. Barron's view is countered by David et al. who argue that diversity can be answered through a successful reflection on students' social, cultural and prior educational practices. That knowledge will help them adjust to their new learning environment at a time when new initiatives, as taken by UK universities, provide enough social and cultural support to help international students (p.49).

Hopkins (2004) insists that support plays an active role in transforming students' learning; which is essential for students' transitional period (Alder, 2011), in this case

transition from dependency to IL; Hall (2007) adds pre-teaching materials as helpful in transition. Such a practice may ultimately leave students with relative independence from teachers and teaching methods. A similar facet of support is revealed by Knestubb and Bond (2009) by suggesting that the most important factor in HE is ‘the level of coordination between the lecturer’s teaching, enhancing diversity (Lee & Anderson, 2009), and how it is conceived by students - which the author calls ‘communicative alignment’ (p.181); this is similar to Biggs’ (1999) ‘constructive alignment’ – combining objectives, teaching ways and assessment activities – in order to facilitate the practice of IL (Nieto et al., 2008; Williams, 2010). These are mainly the pedagogic principles (refer to previous Sections) which highlight the essential role of support strategies in transforming students’ approaches to learning.

However none of these studies provide a set of principles nor clarify the essential role of ‘learning support’ in relation to Asian students who can transform their decade-long dependent approaches to learning into IL (refer to **Section: 2.8**). One important way to support students could be the training of teachers to meet students’ needs. For example, Laird et al., (2005b), conducting a study in different universities in various countries, studied the impact of trained and untrained teachers on students’ approaches to learning and found ‘teacher training’ as an integral part of successful university strategies in the UK (p.88). Another way could be promoting the type of cooperative learning among students (Felder, 1995b; Zakaria & Iksan, 2006) where they support each other in problem solving and engaging in active learning activities; Goh (2011) refers to this as students’ own interactive cooperation. Before students are offered any support, it is necessary that lecturers know about the way students approach learning in general because the trend towards outcomes of learning is more or less the same among an overall population of students. Without teachers understanding of their students’ views about the learning process (Hampson, 2010), support strategies may not be aligned properly; and the teaching and learning will still remain in chaos.

2.7 Relevance of Cultural Difference in Higher Education Learning and Approaches

In Western education, the two main cultural groups of Asian and Western students are commonly considered as different (Twigg, 2006; Wong, 2004). For example, Pelletier (2003) claims, there is an obvious issue of cross-cultural difference among students (p.17). Pelletier explains that the ‘cross-cultural adjustment as an issue’ is due to the lack of awareness in both teaching and learning aspects, creating misunderstanding for both the academics and students. Previously another study by Jin (1992), about the cultural gap between British tutors and Chinese students, found that each party lacked insight about the other’s academic culture. In the same academic context, Holtbrugge and Mohr (2010) tried to fill the gap by investigating the relationship between cultural values and learning patterns preferences among students from across the globe. The authors conclude that variances in learning patterns among students of different nationalities are widely influenced by their culture. They mention:

“Individuals from different cultural backgrounds have the preference of different learning styles; a one-size-fit-for-all model might be unlikely to help students achieve the required learning outcomes (p.6330)”.

The above quotation reveals the phenomenon that students from different cultures produce differing learning outcomes; and a single learning model may not fit the learning preferences of all students. However the necessity of learning models cannot be ignored. Research involving British students, their perceptions, attitudes and interactions with overseas students, exists on cultural adaptation and academic integration (Pelletier, 2003: p.23; Twigg, 2006), in order to find the relationship between culture and the learning process (Munro, 2006). Indeed, other studies like Carroll (2002), Kuiper and Tan (2007) and Wu (2008) have shown that overseas students coming from a variety of backgrounds have specific needs and issues. These needs and issues are combined by the notion of culture and academic concerns which the students find in the HE culture in the shape of their differences. The argument by Li (2000) that “*the most obvious differences are found among Asian and Western students*” (pp.21-22) is similar to that claimed by Pelletier; and as elaborated by Brooks and Walters (2009) that the level of coordination between native and overseas students is not clear (p.195). Hence, a change in cultural interaction is essential to appreciate the diversity of knowledge and learning in HE (Brownlee et al., 2009), and possibly a change in understanding the cultural interaction may be appropriate. A very recent study

by Coles & Swami (2012) tried to fill the gap of cultural adjustment in British institutions and opened a possibility for understanding adjustment as a long and uneven process. The same process and interaction is particularly Asian's specific in the current study; and these understandings can better come from students' own perceptions, which have yet to be explored.

Previously, on a similar note, Sovic (2008) suggests that it is essential to understand that our own current perceptions about international students will obscure their real cultural needs (p.5). This argument originates from Spronk (2004), who states that what matters for students are their cultural differences. For Asian students, such differences include the respect paid to their teachers without questioning authority and the attention given to the learning text (Spronk, 2004). Accepting whatever is fed to them by their teachers (Richard & Mona, 2009), contrasts with Western education and the common 'egalitarian approach' which encourages IL (pp.3-5) as a core andragogical principle of learning. Culturally, Asians often consider this pattern of education 'a form of disrespect for their teachers' (p.6). Hence there is a clear cultural aspect of learning that students originating from particular socio-cultural backgrounds find hard to adopt, at least at initial stages of learning. The same cultural differences may lead students into isolation and dependency; this according to McMahon (2011) is merely the Asian students' inability of making meaningful contact with their Western classmates in the UK. Hence it is vital that cultural influence is known in relation to what Liem (2005) studied about students' approaches to learning; and the aspects which are more relevant to socio-cultural adjustment which may help students to develop IL skills.

It is also vital that students learn to appreciate the traditional differences in interpretation of the modern education system. Any cross-cultural awareness, even by cross cultural activities (Coles & Swami, 2012), is vital where Western academic skills can be taught at the core level, as partly suggested by Carroll (2002). One way to overcome cross-cultural confusion may be to use concept mapping (CM), which according to Hay et al. (2008) helps teachers to capture graphically their students' personal interpretation of learning issues. Carroll and Appleton (2007: p.72) claim that the students' transition process from home to an alien academic' culture is less-

addressed and less-planned - this is what cause them to a level of culture shock in the new academic settings. Hence, teachers' expectations of preparations of overseas students for academic life in the UK are problematic. The key to a successful transition is 'raising students' confidence to meet their tutors' expectations, learn in an alien culture and integrate within that system'. The responsibility to improve student confidence may also lie with teachers (McCombs, [ND]) or at the very least, be equally shared. Spronk (2004) claims there are many ways to narrow the cultural gap, including focus on learner-autonomy, outcomes, and discussion groups. In other words, cultural differences can be better managed with a range of academic practices and techniques. By welcoming diversity in the learning environment, both students and teachers benefit in many ways; particularly students by acquiring new skills and cultural awareness (Spronk: p.8). Coles and Swami (2012) agree that different socio-cultural activities raise students' confidence in diverse learning culture, but note that it takes time for such processes to build up. However, cultural influence on approaches to learning (see Liem, 2005) from students' own perceptions to develop IL has been curved in this respect.

Referring to the term diversity, it is complex in its very true sense. For example, Felder and Brent (2005) mention three main facets of student diversity in teaching and learning: student learning patterns, intellectual development levels and attitudes about the nature of knowledge and the way it should be attained and evaluated (pp.57-58). To acquire a certain level of diversity, it would be helpful to anticipate any cultural differences before students encounter them. For example, Bowl's (2003) counter argument, about students' complaining that cultural misunderstanding was keeping them at a distance from their teachers, asserts that such an attitude is already embedded in academia (p.159); at the same time the knowledge and experiences students bring with them are valuable assets (p.160), which require harmonization and not change, as evidenced by Leung et al. (2008) on cultural specificity to approaches to leaning among Hong Kong and Western students. Such harmony can come from students themselves by knowing their own views about the associated cultural directions, which may cause some academic related costs if any. However Wakeling (2008) disputes that South Asian students who were portrayed to have different cultural backgrounds participate on the same level as their British counterparts (p.108). In any case, cultural influences still

exist in academia, due to the current diverse learning environment and which may guide direction towards the very learning as well adjustment. For example, De Vita (2007) concludes that international students have variable characteristics of culture, language and curriculum (p.86) – and these are the directions towards a successful adjustment.

Thus, students' differing characteristics necessitate that teachers must be well-equipped with the necessary knowledge for understanding their challenges in an intercultural learning environment (De Vita: p.87; Dees et al., 2007) – where the main challenges causing confusions among students are the content and mode of learning (p.131); the result is likely to be what Huang (2012 and Tso (2012) call it a form of successful transition. Richard & Mona (2009) suggest that better preparation of both candidates and supervisors would increase the chances for a successful start to candidature. However it is not clear how these understandings can come without probing students' perceptions about the possible harmony and change.

In British institutions today, the scenario is also different, with students expected to take control of their own candidature instead of teachers having a dominant role. For this purpose, De Vita argues that teachers must use 'cultural diversity as a learning resource' (p.87) – a term largely been used by Ho, Holmes and Cooper (2004) to manage increasing level of diversity in classrooms. Hence, underpinning this research is a perception or a finding that many international students experience culture shock (Forland, 2006) during their time in the UK. This shock is often associated with the limited interaction among diverse students (Pelletier, 2003: p.10; Coles & Swami, 2012) as well closer interaction with their teachers. In addition, it is difficult to measure how students can make the necessary transition within a limited interaction in diverse culture. In fact the cultural transition for these students to the Western learning environment has somehow hindered them from adopting advanced strategies of learning (Valiente: p.87; Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009) which is possible by encouraging them to adapt to the new learning environment (Somervell, 2003: p.60), aligning the association of cultural perspectives with other academic aspects.

2.8 Independent Learning (IL) and Andragogical Assumptions

The concept of IL, or Autonomous Learning and self-directed learning as it is alternatively known, is not new; the term ‘self-directed learning’ was initially proposed by Malcolm Knowles in 1975, and reiterated by Leach (2000), O’Doherty (2006), Lin (2008) and numerous others. Previously Candy (1991) used all three terms – IL, self-directed learning and autonomous learning – while Leach indicates that approximately thirty different terms used for the same idea, which according to Kerka (1999) have several different facets of IL practice.

There are several other interpretations of its meaning, but in general theorists outline autonomy in learning as the capacity with which students take control of the learning process. Perhaps the tradition of IL is similarly adopted by Broad (2006), Benson (2001), and Mestre (2008). Similarly Candy (1991) identified four facets of IL: self-management, learner-control, autodidaxy and autonomy, while Leach (2000) conceptualised IL in terms of self-study, self-regulation, self-managed study, non-traditional learning and participatory learning (p.10). Every term for IL represents a common goal, which is clearly explained by Williamson (2007) who suggests that to achieve the full level of learning in HE students need to equip themselves with the key skills of self-directed learning (p.66). According to Williamson’s self-rating scale of self-directed learning (SRSSDL), monitoring one’s own learning process may be an additional key to understanding the process of teaching and learning. By this understanding IL is not only a learning activity in itself, but the development of a process of learning, however it is not clear how this IL process is developed, particularly in relation to Asian students who have natural connections with prior dependent approach to learning.

Candy suggests the ‘why and how sides’ of IL as “*a process, a method and philosophy of education whereby a learner acquires knowledge by his or her own efforts and develops the ability for enquiry and critical evaluation*” and are clear in terms of acquisition qualities of learning. In contrast, Guglielmino (2008) identifies some misconceptions about the ‘what’ side of self-directed learning. Regardless of misconceptions to the ‘what’ side, the literature has largely discussed the ‘why’ side of

IL. In other words, it makes sense to theorists why students are required to learn independently which is because economic related pressure, in addition to the growing number of international students, is growing on institutions.

Regarding the 'how' aspect of IL, andragogy assumes that learning is a controlled activity of the learner; and that the learner/s is/are independent in the process of learning; Knowles has thoroughly explained this. Duffy and Kirkley (2004) point out that while controlling one's own learning (self-directed learning) may be easy, its implementation in an educational environment is difficult (p.4); particularly from a teaching or pedagogic perspective. For this reason, Knowles' principles of self-directed learning are somehow valid, both for tutors and students (Lin, 2008: p.3). Knowles' principles are that proactive learners (those taking initiatives) have the ability to learn more and better; secondly, those accepting responsibility in maturing; and lastly those entering HE should take the initiative in their learning. thus, the literature defines the 'why' side which is much clearer, as taken by Gynnild et al., (2008) that self-directed learning is seen as a promoter of learning practices. Although the production of such a process is a natural step in HE learning today (Guglielmino), particularly in IL process, its development is still crucial to HE learning.

Modern research has thus climbed from descriptions to theorisations. Recent educational psychology studies have devised andragogical spheres which suggest that learning has to be student-centred, i.e. autonomous. However, autonomy in learning perhaps occur as a result of relative freedom from teachers or else with pedagogical assumptions - which indicate the role of teachers as that of a guide, and facilitator; and also as a result of 'awareness' about the individual learning process - which is a precondition of IL. In the process of IL, one would think that weighing the contribution of peers, in addition to the teachers' support, and the shared meaning they perceive (Lin, 2008: p.6) might step up its development. Thus the IL process has not only roots from pedagogic principles but also links with it; one such principle is that of active support (Gynnild, Holstad & Myrhaug, 2008). However, Vermunt and Vermetten (2004) interpret there is an interplay between the students' self-regulation and external regulation of a learning environment, which may vary and depends on the nature of

institutional strategies of teaching and learning. The authors leave a research gap with regards to students' preferable learning patterns, which the current study seeks to assess in the light of both prior- and UK learning experiences.

However there are numerous challenges in the course of the IL development. For example, Kemp (2010) links IL with listening logs in English language learning while Cartwright (2007) links it with the student's way of learning from teaching. In this capacity, reflection on one's performance and the taking control of learning by listening is one way to lead students to academic autonomy (Kemp: p.3). This presents a narrow language-specific understanding of IL development because listening activities are mainly individual; however individual experience of learning satisfaction is another way to lead it properly (Guglielmino, 2008; Diamantis & Benos, 2007).

Satisfaction, not only from learning experience (Arambewala & Hall, 2008), but also from the process of IL is to comprise active involvement. For example, Knowles' (1975) enumeration of the three reasons for IL's importance in an academic field have more influence over the process of learning; he argues that self-directed learning is part of active learning. Those students who engage actively in education learn better, in terms of getting higher marks and improved recall of facts which Smith (2002) calls 'proactive learning' (p.14); and which means "a generalization of active learning designed to relax unrealistic assumptions and thereby reach practical applications" (Donmez & Carbonell, 2008). The phrase "proactive learner" has been used to describe the student's meta-cognition or learning skills in a process that also transforms active learning into a practical application (Donmez, 2010: p.2); and Barron (2004) stresses on adaptation of proactive approaches within Western universities to achieve the learning. Donmez elaborates, that:

"Proactive learning bridges the gap between traditional active learning and many practical problems. The main purpose of proactive learning is to reach out the appropriate predictor(s) with the appropriate query at the appropriate cost (p.61)."

The way to learn and apply or transfer information to the appropriate situation is a different phenomenon of students' involvement in the learning process. Active involvement is to build the capacity to use a participatory approach within a learning

process (Shen et al., 2004). In other words, active involvement, in different aspects of learning, may lead students to learn independently. Thus IL is one of the essential parts of a psychological developmental process that puts greater responsibility on the individual to promote a gradual and constant learning process, as partly suggested by Knowles (1975). Failing to comply with modern learning rules means to invite severe problems, including frustration, anxiety and failure (Wu: p.15; Brown, 2008). A similar point is raised by Ramsden (2003) who concludes that quality learning outcomes are the results of IL. However Byrne et al. (2009) emphasised that learners must be given enough autonomy to become independent learners but not so much that they are lost, confused and discouraged (p.163). Kemp (2010) interprets this matter as taking partial control over courses (support), leading to more autonomy in learning (transition).

As noted above, IL has two broader frameworks; first is individual specific and second is institutional one. Ishikawa (2006) asserts, in relation to individual specific framework, it's the willingness to adoption of IL which influences it; and those who are willing are capable of adopting IL. Williamson (2007) further explains this from theories of self-regulated learning that students are able to take their own initiatives and meet the needs of an autonomous learning environment, which not only benefits them but their teachers too (p.68). This argument also agrees with Dillon et al., (2005) study on undergraduate engineering students when assessing learners' "traits" through learning styles, suggesting that it was more essential for teachers to know students' goals than their learning styles. The institutional framework of IL has been suggested by Williamson; providing students with confidence-building opportunities to become independent learners in a variety of settings (p.5). The converse reason for the same argument is apparent in the UK Council for Overseas Students Affairs (UKCOSA) (2006: p.4) study which suggests IL is the goal of only 29%, a significantly low ratio, of students. Hence one would certainly question the low ratio of those overseas students who may be willing to develop IL skills.

Indeed, the majority, if not all, students possess the potential to adopt learning by themselves, but the variance lies in the development of learning capacity (Williamson, 2007) which is unlikely to be judged by learners alone. Both students and teachers have

their roles to formulate adequate IL strategies (pp.66-67), however may be in a specific educational environment. In more narrow (subject-specific) terms, Silen and Uhlin (2008) and Robinson (2003) advocate for the role of teachers in developing IL skills. To conduct such a practice and develop IL, students require the teaching role from the faculty where they are studying (p.462), which is consistent with Duffy and Kirkley (2004) who agree that IL does not mean learning without any teacher support or guidance, although it is worth to say that no single theory of IL can capture the entire meaning of a learning process (Ishikawa, 2006: p.365). Hence collaboration between teachers and students is one important aspect of self-directed learning (Silen & Uhlin, 2008; Bound, 2007) and there is still room for better integration policies in teaching and learning practices to enhance the development of independent learning.

One way to locate the IL framework is to look at Montessori work (**discussed earlier**) which is considered a search to combine encouraging initiative and independence in learning with developing self-discipline and responsible social behaviour (Lillard, 1996: Bernier, Djokic & Spelt, 2005). This combination is more like a basis for both individual and institutional aspects of IL. However, the Socratic Method (**mentioned earlier**), adopted in Platonic models, is also considered as key to two fundamental principles of self-directed learning (SDL) (Guglielmino, 2008). According to the Socratic Method; first, teachers should be mentors and facilitators; and second, they must be thinkers and knowledge generators. These principles maintain a closer relationship between the individual and institutional frameworks, however ill-regarded there because teachers still dominate the classroom and students still listen, memorise and reproduce information (p.4). This, according to numerous studies, is mainly an Asian-specific stigma. Despite this constant, there is evidence of an increasing level of study programmes designed to promote self-directed learning (Guglielmino: p.5), particularly in reference to Western education (p.7). Marshall and Rowland (1998) stressed students to take initiatives to resolve the pressure of IL by talking to peers; those who can provide help, easing this tension (pp.11-12), however this behaviour would be affected by the conditions of the studying environment (pp.13-14).

As obvious from its very name, IL encourages students to take the spoon and feed themselves (Smith, 2008), despite their understanding that spoon-feeding by others is quicker. A practice of self-feeding may vary but probably take the same time when fed by others. Institutions are expecting students to have adequate skills to studies and there are no solid criteria for those beginning to learn. Smith explains that IL has initial setbacks, including confusion and frustration; however it is required only for the final year of study where it can be seen as an achieved goal (p.717).

It has also been suggested that IL is becoming more influential and attractive in different academic fields (Guglielmino). For this reason, institutions not only tend to provide a broader range of teaching methods to encourage students to adopt IL approaches (Harvey & Watt, 1996), but also stress to provide enough exposure to the UK type of learning. There comes the stability issue of approaches to learning; learners usually adopt those approaches which suit their needs of study (Biggs, 1993). However Kember et al., (2008) suggest that stability in approach can remain if the learner maintains a predominant approach; than relying on continuous teachers' support. Hence there seems to be tensions in between what theorists believe in contrast to what the actual condition are in IL development.

Despite similar tensions and various institutional efforts, students are finally required to have the necessary skills to take their own initiative in learning (Ishikawa, 2006: p.347); Knight (1996) sees 'learning autonomy' as a goal of students' learning. Knight believes that whenever we think about the learning process, that thinking is IL itself (p.35). It is the moment when students make meaning of the world around them and include such tasks as mastering abstract principles, remembering a series of facts, or developing specific skills (Fry et al., 2009). This theory is again developed in Western students' perspectives of learning and research studies are hesitant to generalise the IL concept to Asian students' patterns of learning, perhaps see them as traditional learners.

In context of teaching and learning, IL, according to Duffy and Kirkley (2004), can ideally happen when *"accepting and confirming each other as a person ... builds trust between the educator and learner, helps the learner gain confidence in the meaning of*

human existence, and kindles the learner's curiosity, interest, and desire for inquiry about the unknown" (p.4); however, as the literature suggest, e.g. Biggs and Tang (2007), Asian students have a different history of learning. Candy's (1991) view that 'some educational systems are not designed for IL' has firm ground; and hence, this particular learning theory might not fit every educational system. However, Hopkins' (2004) finding, that students become increasingly autonomous learners during the course of their degree programmes and Race's (2005) finding that without creating an enjoyable learning environment and using a proper medium to help students make sense of what they are learning, suggest that IL would not happen without a highly trusted way of sharing the teaching and learning responsibilities.

Although there are generic indications in literature towards the development of IL, it is still pertinent that students with a history of dependency and rote learning are encouraged (and supported) to become and involved more actively to learn by themselves. How Asian students develop IL is a phenomenon missing from the literature, and the current study seeks to assess this differently, from a different and varied sample.

2.9 Summary

Learning is all about a successful interaction by the learner with the learning environment and his/her teachers. Success from the learner's perspective is apparent to lead development of independent learning (IL). Learning independently is in fact an individual activity where the learner's role is prominent; however its development can be assisted by the teachers; indicating that teaching and learning are part of each other.

Thus, searching and looking both diametrically and circumferentially at students' approaches to learning, the current study highlights the mainstream factors that drive the process of learning in higher education (HE). The current chapter reviewed and discussed those prominent research findings and the factors which can shape the development of IL. First this chapter reviewed the internationalisation trend which is beneficial in the long term for HE. Later we reviewed the teaching and learning

practices and how they relate differently in different learning environments, in particular the way Asian students interface the associated issues in the process of developing their approaches to learning. Similarly, this chapter identified the prevailing concepts that underpin the very development of IL in the shadow of modern learning theories by highlighting the recent theoretical understanding which has closer relation to students' approaches to learning. In the next stage the review tried to locate a link of students' approaches to prior learning history and discussed the Asian HE systems to locate the link between prior learning and IL skills.

Furthermore, the chapter critically discussed whether a learning approach is a developmental issue among different students in HE; and discussed how surface, deep and strategic learning works in relation to HE learning. The review also explored whether there is subject-specific link to approaches to learning that can influence the development of IL in different disciplines. Following the review, language relevance to learning was explored, and the role of support and cultural relevancy to approaches to learning; and the way they influence Asian students' in HE. Folding the review, IL was thoroughly explored as an issue and the relevant role of language which influences its development.

Thus, IL is not a question of how to learn independently (CIEL, 2000) but more of how to learn well independently and how to develop IL within a population of Asian students in the UK; leading to adjustment. Hence IL practices, with the notion of support and adequate language skills have still room for developing and – one way to explore this is what can best be done by knowing students' own perceptions of it. In order to investigate students own perceptions about the journey of IL, a sound methodological approach is pertinent. Therefore, the next chapter is about the methodological approach used in this study to devise a strategy towards uncovering students' views about the development of IL in the UK.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

The aim of the current study is to explore students' perceptions of approaches to learning in the UK higher education system, in order to generate a theory of independent learning (IL) development. The previous chapter reviewed the literature pertinent to Asian students studying in the UK and extensively explored those concepts which relate to approaches to learning. All relevant issues were also explored in detail. The literature review revealed that investigating students' views would be a more useful approach. Therefore I have adopted a qualitative interpretivist approach to gather students' opinions about the way they develop IL and cope with the associated issues.

In this chapter, I have explained the chosen a qualitative interpretivist approach in detail. In this study, I used an initial qualitative questionnaire and three stages of interviews in addition to using personal narratives (Bold, 2012). I combined an online questionnaire (see Newby, 2010) and semi-structured interviews, (see Simon & Barbara, 2007; Kvale, 2007; Hannan, 2007) with a three-stage formula – as Morse (2007) suggests in Grounded Theory (GT) method, in this study. This process helped me to combine personal narratives with those views obtained from students. Considering Twigg's view (2006) of combining different data collection methods (2007), whilst relying on a qualitative approach, I used a qualitative questionnaire in combination with one stage of semi-structured interviews in the first phase to establish a clear picture of a range of learning issues, followed by two more interview stages (Stages 2 & 3) to clarify a fuller view of approaches to IL by Asian students in the UK and to generate a learning theory.

Some studies have used questionnaires and interviews for data collection purposes using Grounded Theory (GT), adopting various samples (e.g. Goh, 2011; Twigg, 2006; Tian, 2008). I have used questionnaire and interviews, as data collection methods, and GT approach - "*a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon*" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: p.24) in this study. I used the Strausurrian and Corbin, and Charmaz's

version of constructing GT which is a comprehensive methodological approach in comparison to other methods, e.g. Thematic Analysis (TA), giving me more freedom to construct and interpret meaning of students' understandings of their own views (see Charmaz, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Heist, 2012). Thus, this chapter discusses how data is collected; and how the main themes and categories are emerged through GT (Charmaz, 2006), and how a theory is developed from students' own perceptions.

3.2 Comparison from Mixed-Methods Perspective

My main concern is to clarify that this study is not attempting to carry out a mixed methods approach which would require a large scale quantitative data to justify its validity and reliability (Creswell & Clark, 2011; O'Cathain & Collin, 2009). The mixed-method, also called 'integrative method' (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009 - i.e. integrating quantitative and qualitative methods) is widely used today (Creswell, 2014; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Mixing quantitative and qualitative data is possible (Charmaz, 2012), though. My current research however fits in a 'qualitative approach' without substantial quantitative data.

3.3 Justification

Qualitative studies are important to search for inductive meaning subjectively, in real-world settings, which Corbin and Strauss (2008) emphasise that the "*phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally*", to increase its understanding from multiple realities (p.25). Students' perceptions are the main tool of the current study in the interview sessions; this is crucial because a qualitative research attempts to understand the meaning of the discussion provided by participants about a phenomenon inductively (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Charmaz, 2006). A researcher using GT would seek to generate a theory of study, allowing for the construction of knowledge; and relying on the emergence of discovered 'grounded' information inductively rather than on pre-existing theoretical ideas (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Whereas positivist research tests a hypothesis (Creswell, 2014), I am concerned with generating a theory inductively based on qualitative research methods.

Thus qualitative researchers, using GT, interpret data as it emerges and becomes apparent (Bitsch, 2005: p.77); and constructs the real meaning from within the data (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher's role in a qualitative research is two-fold, combining same-time data gathering and analysis; this is why decisions about data analysis, according to Cousin (2009), should be taken in the earlier stages of a study to stabilise the researcher's role in relation to the claims made. Cousin suggests a researcher should look at what the participants say rather than what a researcher wants them to say. Cousin claims that the inductive nature of a qualitative GT research is to be researched-centred rather than researcher-centred (p.31) and this is what leads me as a researcher, to explore a theoretical direction "from the participants' data." This is very different from positivist-theory testing (see Cousin, 2009: p.34 for details).

In the present context, the importance of IL has remained a focus of discussion for more than 40 years, both from deductive quantitative and inductive qualitative perspectives. Although a qualitative research has dominated, attention has largely shifted to categorising students as activists and pragmatists, (Somervell, 2003) and as both deep and surface learners (Brennan, 2008; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Merrill, 2005). If we adhere to positivist-deductive principles, we are more likely to come up with a mere categorisation and calculation. However, it could be argued that in order to understand a social perspective, the researcher has an obligation to look at the social phenomenon from multiple viewpoints. For this purpose, interviews have often been used to achieve this aim.

In principle, a key priority in a qualitative research is interpretation, data from field to interpretation to the readers (Denzin, 2007), where the researcher role is actively involved. By necessity a qualitative principle, for a researcher, would also mean to examine his/her own experiences along with those of the participants to interpret things from multiple viewpoints, as they emerge. In contrast, quantitative principles on the other hand would count and measure the reality from a single objective perspective; raising questions what is counted needs to valid and reliable. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2002), both approaches can raise issues of reliability, impressionism and objectivity (pp.10-11). However, the qualitative research is more open and it is more

important to consider trustworthiness, probability and reflexivity in interpretation (see Cousin, 2009: pp.8-15; Watt, 2007).

Therefore, the current qualitative approach, along with the use of personal narratives, is a soft approach in the form of interview data and online questionnaire. The use of questionnaire data, normally called hard data, according to Twigg, is a useful form of data-collection for achieving a preliminary understanding of a research study (p.45): and according to Tymms (2012) is effective in collecting information to start defining and locating the problem (p.231), thus creating a stronger basis for a naturalist paradigm (Newby, 2010: p.117) through ‘abductive’ logical interference in GT method to construct meaning from the data (Charmaz, 2006) (see **Section: 3.6**). Similarly, social research not only relies on ‘descriptive fact-gathering exercises’ but also on understanding the social situation where a researcher is involved (Hall & Hall, 1996: p.30). The use of personal narrative in the current research is therefore important to stress the production of meaning and process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002), to explore all sides of data and probe the understanding of Asian students about IL in HE in greater depth. Hence there is a need for a soft qualitative approach to explore students’ perceptions of developing IL.

3.4 Overall Approach

Thinking epistemologically, non-positivists (interpretivists) believe that a single reality is highly complex and a social phenomenon can change along with a clear broader in-depth understanding of different social settings (Bassegy, 2001) and interpretations, providing illuminative evidence through analysis (Cousin, 2009: p.31). However, its critics believe that instead digging deeper into a reality, interpretivists have widened the scope of research inquiry, as Cousin (2009) reflects on it from different perspectives by arguing that there is ‘no black and white thinking’ in social science research. Non-positivists argue for the importance of subjectivity, privacy and emotional knowledge – all which is socially constructed (p.32; Bassegy, 2001: p.10) with other individual entities, which Thomas (2011) emphasises that ‘individual views are constructed on the base of a particular representation given in the context of one’s own experience rather

than calling it a generalisation'. One has to agree that there is no way for generalisation in such a perspective, which Thomas puts as 'there is no special or common generalisation in social sciences research rather it is all about interpretation in a given context and one's own experience' (p.27).

This challenge of the variation in the way students adjust to a learning environment allowed me to use a subjectivist approach for interpretation of students' views as those of individual cases; which according to Knight (2010) is crucial to an educational study where participants are expected to be self-reliant, articulate and opinionated, rather than an objectivist one; and which Thomas (2011) advocate for as a case of representation 'given in context and understood in that context', admitting that its interpretation is only possible in one's own context of experience (p.31). Although an objectivist approach is somehow crucial in terms of self-direction for creativity, freedom, curiosity and self-respect, the research needs to take a subjectivist approach to serve the interests of a diverse group of learners (Knight) rather than students of the same origin (Kapoor, Comadena & Blue, 1996). It does so in a naturalist setting and with constructivist understandings, which Charmaz (2006) put in the following words;

"Neither data nor theories are discovered, rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interaction with people, perspectives, and research practices (p.10)."

The data-ordering strategy used in this research reflects my understanding of a qualitative approach, based on Flick's (2009) data ordering and collection technique, an essential method in a constructivist paradigm. The order of data collection is questionnaire-interviews - where the questionnaire, after piloting stage, was followed by the first stage of interviews - to a qualitative, with two more stages of interviews, a sequence Flick (2009: p.26) endorses. The reason for this particular ordering is the need to identify diverse cultural issues that would not happen otherwise; hence applying more weight from a subjectivist epistemological stance to enforce inductive subjectivity. This order of data collection was adopted for the purpose of GT to establish a theoretical background and gain all data relative to the qualitative perceptions of students to construct meaning of the data and to generate a theory.

3.4.1 Sample

The goal of this chapter is to formulate the approach used in this research and throughout the research process. The scope is limited to students of selected nationalities. Non-European Union (Non-EU) countries were ranked by the number students studying at UK higher education institutions; only overseas students from the top ten non-EU countries (as revealed in HESA, 2010) were selected for interviewing with preference given to students from China, India and Pakistan.

These students share similar educational attitudes and are more focused on medicine than sciences or social studies. This distinction is important because David et al. (2009) suggest that a better understanding of HE diversity should be based on a full range of social, cultural and educational backgrounds (p.17). In order to formulate methods to investigate these issues in more detail, a methodological research approach using Patton's (1990) three probes, (detail-oriented, elaboration and clarification probes) during semi-structured interviews, is appropriate to achieve the objectives of this study.

While a total of 95 students took part in the whole study, 66 of them participated in the questionnaire (see **Appendix: 9**). This approach relied on the availability of students to participate in interviews and their access to email accounts for the questionnaire. The questionnaire was first randomly emailed to 90 students whose email addresses were provided by friends and their colleagues. Due to my national background from one of the countries of interest, I made all efforts to minimise possible bias; therefore, the questionnaire was emailed to participants by an anonymous electronic method. The questionnaire was also sent to graduate overseas students from the countries of interest (at University of Worcester) in the form of an invitation. A total of 66 completed questionnaire responses were received.

3.4.2 Sampling Phases: Convenience to Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is commonly used to seek information from a particular respondent in a specific area to serve the purpose of a study (Puparampil, 2011). Particularly, it seeks to gain access to those who have deeper knowledge of the research issue (Flick, 2009 & 2014). This kind of sampling is common in qualitative research and offers the

researcher some control in the selection process (Barbour, 2001) to serve specific requirements. Purposive sampling is important for relevance rather than representativeness and, according to Flick (2014), this strategy should not be jeopardised at the cost of convenience (p.176) sampling which facilitates the researcher more than the researched. However, there are stages when a researcher has to rely on convenience sampling (p.177).

Elaborating on sampling strategy, Flick (2014) suggests that there are points of which the researcher needs to be aware, such as the purpose of a research study. Here the researcher role needs to be acknowledged because various factors can influence the sampling strategy and the nature of the analysis, which must be known to ensure a speedy and steady process. Newby (2010) outlines low-response and limited resources as indicators which can influence the sampling strategy (p.260).

Taking into account all the above criteria, the major focus of sampling strategy in interviews here is to gain relevant, possibly expert level, information from participants, which can best be determined from participants' level of knowledge and understanding about a given area of research. This type of 'purposive sample' selection is one of the characteristics of the qualitative research where *"the individual participants are selected deliberately for their specific characteristics that are of importance to the study"* (Crinson & Leontowitsch, 2006). Thus the study heavily relied on purposive sampling; however there was also a need for proximity because the questionnaire and interview data in stage one could be properly obtained with the assistance of close friends and their friends - using the aforementioned 'convenience sampling' technique which has also benefits.

One of the benefits of convenience sampling is that it expedites the systemic and rigorous research process (Procter et al., 2010: p.149) and offers maximum variation in sample selection. In the current study, convenience sampling, which begins with identifying the selection criteria (see Trochim, 2006) and using friends of colleagues, forms the groundwork of sampling in the first stage. Hence, during the electronic self-questionnaire and interviews procedure, there was heavy reliance on purposive

sampling; however the use of convenience sampling was kept to a minimum, only being used at times when I had to rely on friends of friends for possible participation in the beginning of this study to avoid lack of participants.

The use of both convenience and purposive sampling makes my sampling method a diverse strategy, which can also create many issues. One major problem with diverse sampling is the kind of bias which can pose a threat to its strategy, e.g. a specific sample of male or female can cause a threat to gender-specific representation etc., which was avoided by designing a gender-free sample; hence this study has no gender specific ambition. Similarly, the behaviour of the interviewer or interviewee can also jeopardize the smooth process of sampling which was avoided through the use of an informed consent form. Hence a balance was kept to suffice the core requisite of, ethically accepted, sampling strategy.

3.4.3 Sampling Justification

Different sampling strategies are used in both qualitative and quantitative research, and different guidelines suggest various sizes of what is called an ‘appropriate sample’ e.g. Gorra, (2007) and Feeler (2012) etc. have used a combination of both qualitative and quantitative samples. Generally, qualitative studies use smaller samples than quantitative studies, and essentially require a clear strategy to present a lucid understanding of “*how the related participants were selected and the characteristics of the population in the study*” (Crimson & Leontowitsch, 2006). A good sampling process is one which represents the population from which it is selected (Jacobs, 1999), however its emphasis should focus on the relevance of cases instead of representativeness (Flick, 2009: p.121). Sampling decisions, while planning the research, are mainly defined in relation to the structure of the group taken into account (Flick: p.117). My sampling strategy is diverse due to the nature of the current GT research and is based on a combination of convenience and purposive sampling (refer to **Previous Section**). The nature of the current study, comprised of qualitative methods, suits my specific requirements; therefore, purposive sampling is considered suitable; and thus largely used.

3.5 Methods

In relation to the interview sample, ten semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in the first stage, twelve in the second stage and seven in the third stage. All interviews were conducted in English, despite confusions arising on some occasions because of students speaking English as their second language. Participants were randomly selected without prioritising gender or education level; however, I interviewed only those degree level students who were studying in the UK from three selected countries, India, Pakistan and China; and those who were willing to be available for at least two stages of interviews. This step was taken to ensure and enhance my data collection process. To avoid problems with the sample mixture, a smaller number of students were preferable to a larger population for a feasible approach and I adhered to these principles; as Morse (2007) put that a 'sampling strategy in GT research usually adheres to three-dimensional frame of interviews - not large numbers, thus every stage must develop a relationship with each other.' Morse further suggests that participants must be expert in order to obtain excellent and relevant data from them (p.231); I followed these guidelines in all three stages of interviews.

After the questionnaire data collection process, the first stage of the interviewing process discussed a definite but possibly broad topic for less than an hour; follow-up questions were not planned and any specific issues could be discussed according to the subject matter (Hislop, 2004), as mentioned in Patton's probing techniques (see **Section: 3.9.1**). Before in-depth probing, my positionality concerned general conversation and consultation with participant-involvement that relates to informing and consulting - a process that is conversational and generalised (CEMCA, 2008).

The questionnaire also requested the students' current subjects and level of studies and this was questioned again in interviews. The purpose of this information was to map subject-study specifications (as suggested by Kember et al., 2008) and link the questionnaire data to the participants themselves, as well as their subjects of study, broadening the topic scope for further in-depth interviews during the second and third stages. In the context of subject enquiry, the study tried to establish learning issues

among overseas students to clarify any challenges associated with particular subjects or to investigate concerns associated with different subject studies, which could possibly affect the IL process. The interviewees list, based on their nationality, gender and education level in Stage One, is as follows:

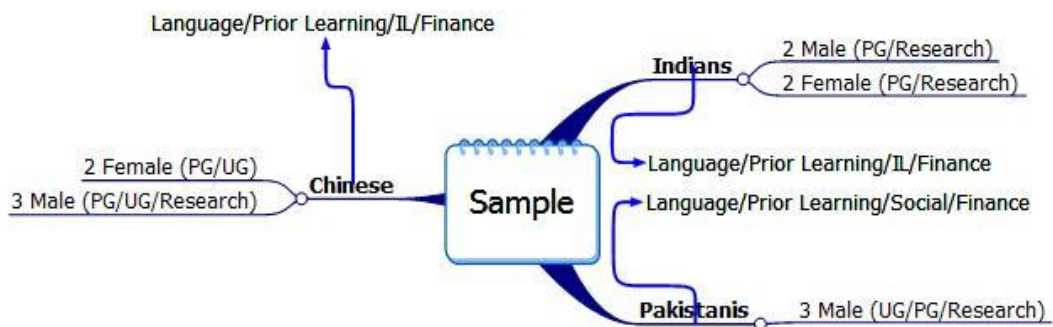
Table 4.1 - List of Interviewees in Stage One

Country of Origin	Male (UG)	Female (UG)	Male (PG)	Female (PG)	Male (Research)	Female (Research)	Total
India	1	0	0	1	1	0	3
China	1	1	1	1	0	0	4
Pakistan	1	0	1	0	1	0	3
Total	3	1	2	2	2	0	10

Fifty percent (50%) of the students in the first phase were studying subjects related to ‘mathematical, physical, technological and life sciences;’ 30% were in the field ‘finance and business;’ and 20% the ‘social sciences’. All these students were currently studying at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh Napier University, University of Edinburgh, University of Worcester and University of Birmingham.

In Stage Two, a total of 12 students from the three selected countries were interviewed (see the following **Figure 3a**). Eight of these students were first interviewed in the Stage One; they also participated in Stage Two where only four students were new participants. At this stage, the idea of subject-related understanding was abandoned as it did not reveal any specific information. A graphic sample was designed in Mindmapper 2008 and is as follows::

Figure 3a: Sample Stage Two Interviews



In the case of the final stage (three), information was sought from a further seven participants as follows who were also interviewed in stage one and two:

Table 3.2: Participants in Stage Three Interviews

Origin	Male (UG)	Female (UG)	Male (PG)	Female (PG)	Male (Research)	Female (Research)	Total
India	-	-		1	1	-	2
China	1	1	1	-	-	-	3
Pakistan	-	-	1	-	1	-	2
Total	1	1	2	1	2	0	7

This third stage was aimed to clarify the issues raised earlier, in order to answer the research questions. I encouraged all participants to clarify their perspectives in all interviews.

3.6 The Use of Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory (GT), an inductive form of a qualitative research primarily developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), starts with data collection and analysis simultaneously (Charmaz, 2006). Its structure is apparent in three main elements: concepts – the basic units of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990: p.7); categories – the generation of lower-level concepts; and propositions – a generalised relationship between categories and concepts (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Its significance was conceived, particularly in social science research, when symbolic interactionism was declining (Thomas & James, 2006) and principally because of numerous researchers', including Strauss and Corbin's (1997), assertion that GT methods are the most influential methods in social sciences research, with theory generation as the aim of the researcher (Thomas & James: p.2). However, Thomas and James call it an invention and not a theory or discovery. Here one would doubt the distinction between GT and Thematic Analysis (TA) (see Heist, 2012; Brawn & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic Analysis by all standard definitions draws a parallel line with GT – in fact TA is part of GT; Brawn and Clarke (2006) call it a 'GT lite' (p.81). The only major differences are that TA is a straightforward process of data analysis, giving the researcher more flexibility, which is not aimed to generate a theory, while GT is more

complex and is aimed to generate a theory (p.81). Brawn and Clarke argue that this does not mean that TA has no analytic appreciations; however it is more poorly demarcated and its rigorous form can help produce more insightful analysis (p.97). Whereas, Grounded Theory Method (GTM) provides a basis for a developmental process, taking the journey from the general to the specific (Charmaz, 2006), this procedure also explains why the GTM comprises codes, concepts and categories that are central to the writing in this approach and maintains the sequence of development in the form of emergence of data and concepts.

Grounded Theory Method is a more systematic and flexible way of collecting and analysing qualitative data where data forms the basis of concepts and the analysis of such data leads to further concepts and theory generation (Charmaz, 2006). This method is less relaxed than TA. The term 'data' is very much embedded in the early development of GTM and is a circular identifier to this method. Data means "*raw materials that are transformed into information by data processing*" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007: pp.14-15). GTM allows the development of theoretical analysis at the very start of a research process through observations, and interactions with data materials (Charmaz: p.3). The coding process of this method forms the basis for the analytical sorting of data. Following the coding, memos or analytic notes are written about the codes; ideas and comparisons are formulated and this analytical categorization provides a framework which is checked and refined. These notes might be observation, theoretical or personal (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010) which Charmaz (2006) outlines:

"As Grounded theorists we study our early data and begin to separate data, sort and synthesize data through qualitative coding. Coding means that we attach labels to segments of data that depicts what each segment is about. Coding distils data, sorts them, and gives us a handle for making comparisons with other segments of data. Grounded Theorists emphasise what is happening in the scene when they code data (p.3)."

Grounded Theory (GT) is used widely today in different disciplines and normally begins with a general discussion of observation-related perspectives; while the interactions and interpretations later happen as a result 'of interpreting the actions that occur' (Goulding, 1999: p.5; Denzin, 2007) - which means free discovery without any preconceptions in the existing literature (Trochim, 2006). However, Charmaz (2006), in

her constructivist approach, suggests carrying out an initial literature review to form a basic understanding of the existing literature to provide a more guided route for the grounded research. Hence, a review of the literature was conducted initially before starting primary data collection, in order to provide a stronger basis for the main 'cultural and academic' concepts in this study and simultaneously ensure constant comparability.

In this research study, a constructivist version of GT (Charmaz, 2006) – which assumes that data is constructed through on-going interaction with participants and hence meaning is constructed by participants (Hallberg, 2006: 146) - not strictly Glaserian or Straussian (Glaser, 1992; Corbin & Strauss, 1990), has been consistently used. The constructivist approach was used with a sound comparative method, i.e. reflecting on the interviewees' prior comments and comparing those with their current comments. The current study used GT to ensure that the expounded theory is based on data and theoretical sampling has reached the saturation process. The transcribed data in MS Word (2003 version) was coded in NVivo (N9) software for analysis, using Bazeley (2007) guidelines, which helped creating categories, and further concepts, leading to theory generation in one single platform.

Thus, a theory of learning approaches was developed through GT, as the issues were emerging; which Charmaz (2006) calls 'emergence'. Using GT, a researcher facilitates the investigation in a systematic manner, with a more complex process than Thematic Analysis. In this regard, NVivo helped with data organising, data coding, and data analysis under a single framework.

As GT uses a coding concept, my current study followed this process throughout the memoing, sorting, saturation, comparison, extreme comparisons, and conceptualisation of core categories. I used the following process here, which led me to develop categories and conceptualisation of categories.

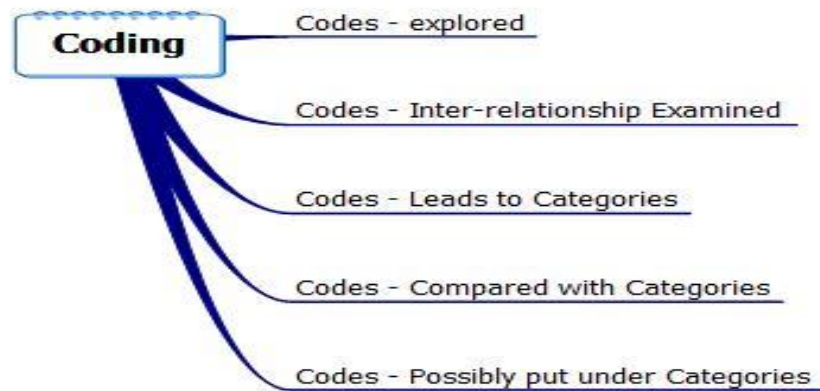
3.6.1 The Data, Transcription and Coding

As specified earlier, the data was collected from semi-structured interviews and online questionnaires. The data was collected in three stages: exploration, elaboration and clarification probing. However the questionnaire data was only used to shape and probe the common issues in the first stage of interviews and only data from interviews was imported into NVivo.

Transcribing the data is an essential stage of GT where information is transferred into written form to code, categorise and then develop core categories; this is the most time-consuming process in the GT method. Recoding and transcribing interviews are significant practices in a qualitative research and have been viewed as essential steps in social research studies (Newby, 2010; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Upon data collection, all interviews were transcribed in MS Word (2003 Version) which took multiple days to complete (see **Appendix: 30 for time planning**). The data was then imported into N9, a sophisticated conceptual coding space for organizing and analysing data (Bassett, 2012) for analysis.

Grounded Theory starts with initial coding, and according to Charmaz, this must be limited to the participants' actions in data rather than applying to existing categories (p.47). Thus I first relied on the exploration of codes in open coding to develop conceptual categories in order to align and arrange the data in major concepts. Upon completion of open coding, the data was then organised into categories until conceptual categories emerged. Thus, initial coding then led me to develop core conceptual categories, a process essential to GT. The second stage was axial coding in which I attempted to find links between codes and categories. I continued the axial coding process continued until the codes were linked under central categories which Creswell (1998) calls "*interconnectedness of categories.*"

Figure 3.2: Coding Interaction Explained



Another stage of coding was ‘selective coding’ to identify core codes. I continued this process until ‘saturation’ was reached. At the end of this stage, conceptual categories were rigorously looked to ensure if they have been put under core categories. All these procedural steps were adopted on the basis of the above description.

For the purpose of identifying similarities and differences, relevant codes were constantly compared to each other. As a result, themes started to emerge from the combination of data, codes, categories and sub-categories. Initially, there were 120 codes (see **Appendix: 5**) in total which decreased to 44 refined codes (see **Appendix: 6**) when integrated into common categories. This consolidation process paved the way for the later development of 26 axial codes (see **Appendix: 7**). Each emerging concept was coded and each code was constantly re-evaluated for overlapping information to identify similarities and differences; this process was to ensure constant comparability as is otherwise called GT method. The emergent themes from the coding process facilitated my ability to make logical links with the research questions. These themes were also gradually moved from a lower to a higher level of sophistication, based on selective coding, to provide evidence supporting the review of literature. This was the stage when theoretical saturation – a process where data ceases to uncover new revelations, new theoretical insights and properties (Charmaz, 2006: p.113) – was complete.

3.6.2 Memoing

Memoing refers to the researcher's self-reflection on the ideas presented by participants in a qualitative study, and particularly in GTM. Memos are normally the researcher's written notes regarding conceived ideas during the data collection process. I wrote memos at all places where necessary to shape the concepts arising from the collected data and to remember ideas for further (future and possible) comparisons (see **Appendix: 7**). In GT two different kinds of memos are used: theoretical and operational. Theoretical memos are used by the researcher to derive meaning from the data while operational memos are his/her reminders and instructions (Groenewald's, 2010). I used both theoretical and operational memos throughout the analysis. This was due to the core interpretive nature of the GT method where my subjective role was important in the data and note-taking effort; which Glaser and Strauss call 'theoretical memos.' In the form of such memos, the researcher's role requires insight which ultimately leads to the conceptualisation of abstract and core categories, leading the researcher through the pattern of theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006: p.1000). This process of theoretical sampling, as emergent, is naturally grounded (p.104). Thus I did not want to stray away from the process of memoing, hence I had to rely on both theoretical, to remain guided, and operational memos, to remember the arising ideas during the memoing process.

3.6.3 Constant Comparison

In GT research, constant comparison is conducted to identify similarities and differences for the purpose of conceptual categorisation of the data. (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: p.73). This comparative style is often referred to as 'descriptive conceptualisation' in qualitative research (p.73). This process also helps the researcher to identify properties and concepts for existing categories or any emerging themes after the comparison of data with other data and codes with other codes. I continued the constant comparison throughout as it was integral to all open, axial and selective coding procedures.

Revisiting the coding, the 'constant comparison' method was used throughout the process of coding the transcribed data. The result of this comparison was to incorporate and accommodate data into the best possible emerged or emerging categories. For

example, when I used the constant comparison, multiple themes resembling existing categories were sorted accordingly. This sorting procedure in the later stage helped me to form the core-categories. The benefit of constant comparison, according to Corbin and Strauss (2008), is the grouping of related items into similar categories and different ideas/quotes under separate codes to shape an organised and systematic form of data. The constant comparison also helped me to separate text into categories; units of analysis. I continued this comparison along with emerging categories until more abstract categories emerged, I abstracted and conceptualised those categories; a process Trochim (2006) suggests in his study as essential. At this stage, my constant comparison reached saturation which, according to Charmaz (2006), happens when nothing new (no new ideas) occurs in the data (p.113).

3.6.4 Theoretical Sensitivity or Sensitizing Concepts

The term “theoretical stance” or “theoretical sensitivity” is crucially related to, and is an important feature of, GT (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Theoretical sensitivity is not only introduced from a collection of past experiences but also generated within a research context, as a result of greater awareness of the study (Waring, 2012: p.300). At the same time, it is not about determining the concepts of a study, rather it represents the researcher’s approach of commitment (Corbin & Strauss: 42); it is ‘thinking about data in terms of personal quality of researcher’ (p.74) to sensitize concepts from immersing in the data (Bowen, 2006). The researcher’s role is not only limited to participants’ views, but extends to the self-reflection which is crucial to overcoming the possibility of preconceived bias (p.301), as indicated in the ‘personal narratives’ description of this study.

Indeed, in qualitative research, text not only plays a special part in findings but is also a basis for interpretation; it is the central medium for presenting such findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: p.75). This text could originate from interviews, questionnaires and social interaction (pp.76-77); it also derives from data which holds priority in the GTM (p.90) where reflection stems as a result of theoretical sensitivity; providing me a viable grounding for using GT in the current research and thinking within and about the data to sensitise concepts (see Bowen, 2006). Thus to sensitise concepts it was appropriate to

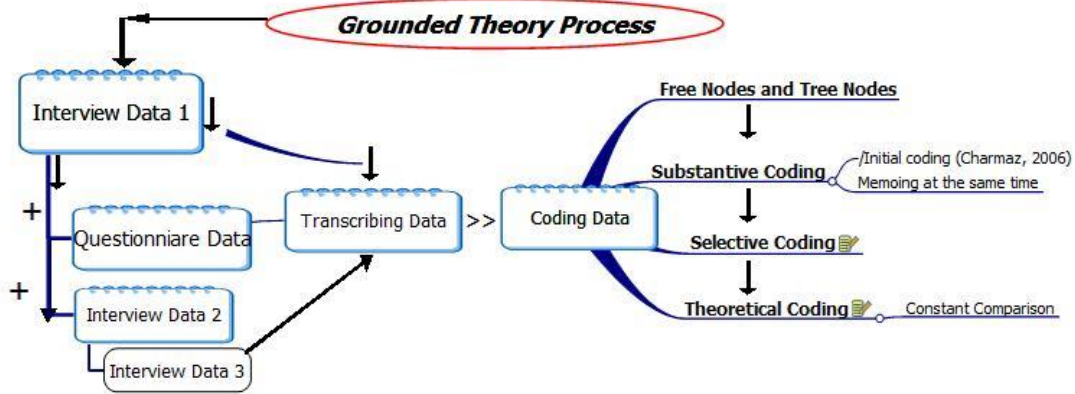
look for patterns around the data, as Bowen suggests, that also falls in the naturalist ontological sphere which has also an inductive property. This also gives me grounds to justify the use of an inductive approach as well demonstrating the trustworthiness of data, used in the current qualitative non-positivist research. All those thick relationships within concepts, reflection over those concepts and their interpretation as well as use of personal narrative enables me to present a clear process towards the theory development, aimed to understand how students develop independent learning in higher education.

3.7 Rationale to Three Phases of Research, GT and Personal Narratives

In modern social research, various strategies are used in the data analysis process, e.g. Thematic Analysis (TA) (refer to **Section: 3.6**), Content Analysis etc. Most commonly, codes are used in GT (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as a means of data extraction from raw information (Newby, 2010: p.487; Charmaz, 2006), similar to TA. However, generating a theory - -an aim of the study- - and a core process of GT could not be achieved with TA or with a single phase of data collection.

Referring to the research questions, a range of approaches were used to collect data from students of three Asian countries studying in the UK. The first stage was aimed to explore the main issues, directly or indirectly related to learning. Therefore, the purpose of Stage One was to use, an explorative techniques for identifying learning related issues, as a process of GT that emerges from the data. As a result of Stage One, a perception of common issues was gathered. The second stage comprised the elaboration of the issues identified in the first stage from students' perspective to examine the data thoroughly. The third stage was comprised of the clarification of those issues identified in the second stage; this process involved Patton's (1990) extensive probing (see **Section: 3.9.1**). This procedure helped me to facilitate the follow-up of the GT research and combine the data to address the research questions and link them with the review of the literature. This was to justify the GT approach used in the current study. A sample sketch of the process is as follows:

Figure 4: Grounded Theory Process



The purpose of grounding the data was to answer the research questions, by digging deeper into students’ perceptions in stage-wise interviews (refer to **Section: 1.1**), related to educational and cultural issues and to look for emerging instances, if any, of issues associated with IL development. The GT process led to the emergence of numerous themes in the first stage. The themes emerging from the data in the later stage were to be organized by the core categories identified earlier or any emerging new ones. The recognition of themes was also a result of my intimacy with the data, the research questions, familiarity with the coding system in NVivo software (Bazeley, 2007), my personal experiences as an international student and a thorough understanding of the literature. This whole process of grounding the data was to create a well looked-after data form that later resulted in the emergence of learning theory, a core final-aspect of using GTM.

3.8 Justification of Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods which can be classified into categories like interviews, surveys, questionnaires etc., are considered the major ways to obtain systematic knowledge for supporting a research process. In today’s educational research, interviews are a widely-accepted and common research method (Kvale, 2007; Cousin, 2009). Semi-structured interviews with some pre-set questions allowing room for open-ended answers (see McKenzie, 2007) were mainly chosen to obtain in-depth understanding of the students’ learning issues and to encourage their maximum participation.

Realistically, in qualitative research, knowledge of students' real concerns emerges more efficiently with a consistent pattern of interviews. Some experts are critical of the sole qualitative approach because, according to Hammersley (2007) the qualitative paradigm has somehow strayed from scientific procedures of verification and useful generalisations. Grounded theorists (Gorra, 2007; Feeler, 2012 etc.) have answers and assert that a qualitative research is looking for emergent information to interpret the real situation rather than verifying or negating preconceived ideas; in which interviews and partial information from questionnaire are recognised as important tools.

With regard to the use of diverse methods, its use is justifiable as Charmaz (2006) suggests that the construction of new data-gathering methods sometimes becomes necessary; this also gives the researcher a cause to revisit the earlier methods (p.15) which makes ground for my use of questionnaires and three stages of semi-structured interviews. To enhance the information level of authenticity and trustworthiness, Patton's probing techniques as well as 'probes as techniques' suggested by Cousin (2009) were thoroughly used. Thus I used a combination of interviews and questionnaire data with personal narrative input, to generate a refined form of learning theory.

3.9 Data Collection Methods: Interviews and Piloting

As previously noted, interviews have been used extensively in social science research during recent years. Interviews are conducted not only to establish opinions about issues but also to elaborate on existing information (Kvale, 2007: p.3). Hence, epistemologically interviews, particularly semi structured, allow the interviewer to pursue in-depth information about the discussion from a subjective viewpoint (p.59). In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer and interviewee discuss details about an issue of particular interest with no definite questions in mind (Hislop, 2004) but with a possibility of some prompting or probing questions to explore information regarding a particular issue (Morton-Holmes, 2009). During the interview process in this research, I avoided the use of compound and leading questions, as Gillham (2000: p.10), Simon

and Barbara (2007) and Kvale (2007) suggest, to maintain the pattern and structure of semi-structured interviews.

The pilot stage of this study involved 5 interviewees from studying HE courses in different universities in Edinburgh and Birmingham. I imported the transcribed data to NVivo for practicing and locating the ideas. The data obtained from pilot sample was thoroughly examined and I was able to see the width of my questioning in the pilot interviews, rather my focus should have been on the depth; a technique detailed by Flick (2009), Morton-Holmes, (2009), and Simon and Barbara (2007). In practice I used Thematic Analysis (TA) in piloting to locate the main themes. However, apart from the width of the data, no significant understanding could lead to satisfy the GTM requirement. As a result I had to rely on expanding my questioning techniques for certain questions in further interviews and realised that probing, as suggested by Patton, is a better way to expand and control the focus of the current inquiry. The piloting process led me to review my questioning techniques, locate the probing criteria and recognise my reflexive position as a researcher to meet the complex process of Grounded Theory approach.

3.9.1 Interview Probes

The probes used in interviews are based on Patton's (1990) three probes: 'detail-oriented' - to form a bigger picture for inquiry; 'elaboration' - encouraging the interviewee to explain more openly while the interviewer remains silent, attentive and controls the focus of questionings; and 'clarification' - seeking further clarification for understandings and misunderstandings. Using Patton's formula; all three probes and their sequence were followed and maintained throughout the interview sessions.

3.9.2 Stages of Interviews

I divided the interview sessions into a three-stage formula. The first-stage is experimental design of development with an emphasis on the linguistic art of interviewing; commonly known as the interviewing craft (Kvale, 2007: p.51) to encourage student participation in the next interview stage; the second stage is based on data elaboration for theory refinement; and the third stage is based on data clarification

for theory generation and presentation. Throughout all interview stages, the participating students were flexible, cooperative and ready to help.

The first or early stage was partly facilitated by friends and their friends they agreed to be interviewed further (see **Section: 3.4.1**). Although the interviewing process was time-consuming, the early stage explored some very interesting issues; while there were many similarities within the UK learning and prior learning environment, differences in students' views of each nationality were clearly identifiable.

The stage-specific interviewing process, as Morse (2007) considers the best in GT, allowed me to identify gaps in already explored issues as they related to students of sample nationalities, providing more depth in the knowledge derived from the early interviews. Bear in mind that a questionnaire was used to probe some predefined codes. Hence, it was through an analysis of the early semi-structured interviews that a theory started to emerge (see Charmaz, 2006). The emerging theory was then explored, elaborated upon and clarified in the follow-up stages of interviews.

3.10 The First-Stage Questionnaire

A questionnaire is one of the most effective ways to obtain quantitative data (Newby, 2010: p.297). A successful questionnaire commonly seeks to collect two types of information: attributes – personal and demographic backgrounds like sex, age, marital status, religion and occupation; and attitudes – personal opinions, usually employing scales where a statement is made and respondents are asked to agree or disagree; questions requiring a yes or no answer (Simmons, 2001; Newby, 2010; Simon & Barbara, 2007). A common error in a questionnaire is poor layout, which could cause it to dead-end before finalisation, which according to Newby (2010: p.297) can leave many more questions than answers.

However, the current questionnaire was a qualitative one. The purpose of the current qualitative questionnaire was to generate data with demographic information, which according to Simon and Barbara is essential to start a systematic data collection

procedure. Hence, the current questionnaire was designed to potentially involve those who had limited skills in addition to those also possess adequate skills and others who might hesitate to reveal information in face-to-face interviews. One purpose of the questionnaire was to locate pitfalls or problems, which Simon and Barbara call ‘sensitive data’, in a more structured way to pave a way for interviews predefined codes and themes. In this study, I designed a self-completing questionnaire in a Google-form which also enabled me to remind the respondents with a quick email to avoid the issue of low response (see **Appendix: 9**), which according to Walonick (2004) is normally a major issue in questionnaire design.

3.10.1 The Questionnaire Structure

In constructing a questionnaire, use of the correct wording is crucial because researchers can manipulate responses, a practice which conflicts with his/her ethical commitment (Newby, 2010: p.304). The questionnaire was prepared and designed consulting Simon & Barbara (2007), Trochim (2006) and Newby (2010). The structure of the questionnaire encompassed the following criteria:

- The general purpose of the questionnaire;
- The questionnaire’s objectives;
- The integration of structured and unstructured design;
- The facilitation of questionnaire processing by spreadsheet; and
- The elimination or minimisation of ethical issues and bias.

I followed Newby's (2010), and Simon and Barbara’s (2007) guidelines relating to the construction of a questionnaire which outline that:

- The questionnaire designer must keep the respondents’ command of the language in focus;
- The research must consider the reading habits of respondents which might otherwise result in a low response or a steady response;
- The research must also avoid jargon, technical words and personal abbreviations which could be difficult to understand for respondents;
- The researcher should keep questions short and simple and introduce one issue in a single question; and

- And most importantly, the researcher should avoid double negation in the questions.

3.10.2 Piloting and Refining the Questionnaire

Piloting a questionnaire, before the formal data collection process, is central to any research. A questionnaire, using structured questions in a qualitative study, requires piloting to refine the questions in order to enhance the analysis process (Simon & Barbara, 2007); this is particularly relevant for this study. Friends at Heriot-Watt University, University of Edinburgh and University of Birmingham were used to complete the pilot questionnaire which included a total of nine responses with educational, socio-cultural and demographic data. The initial pilot questionnaire had a total of 26 questions, divided into four parts. The first part included information about the course and level of study, as well as ethnic information. The second part featured questions regarding the satisfaction rate with home country and UK-based teachers, in addition to learning patterns. The third part consisted of questions requesting cultural and social answers about the UK learning environment. The fourth and final part had an open question about the reason for studying in the UK.

The initial questionnaire was designed in such a way that it took no more than six minutes to ensure a positive level of comfort for participants. The aim was to strengthen the structure and design of the questionnaire while knowing if participants were able to understand all the questions, which Butler-Kisber (2010) calls as ‘a linguistic art in questionnaire design’.

After the piloting process, the questions were reorganised, restructured and clarified where necessary. The original idea was to link the different data collection methods. Thus, after piloting the questionnaire, its development clearly addressed the identification of questions, twelve of which were specific, for an in-depth interview. The goal was, indeed, to facilitate the long process of semi-structured interviews.

3.10.3 The Question Types

Using a questionnaire is a tricky method in educational research, particularly when a qualitative approach is used (Butler-Kisber, 2010). A questionnaire normally consist two types of questions; closed questions, which are often quick to complete, simple to code and easy to pre-code (Simmons, 2001); and open questions, which give respondents the freedom to write, explain and convey responses by avoiding the limitations of pre-set response categories. However, modern studies use a blend of closed and open questions to explore participants' factual knowledge, their understanding and values (Newby, 2010: p.302). The aim of a combination of questions is largely focused to get a thorough understanding of participants by all possible means.

In this study, questions are a combination of structured and un-structured questions where most are either dichotomous, multiple choice, rating scale or contingency. By contrast, when asking about students' views on their choice of education, which may fall under the sensitive question area (Newby, 2010), I designed more open questions and to avoid a poor response rate, the number of questions was kept to a minimum.

During the final questionnaire, different students answered thirty questions through a self-questionnaire designed in Gmail online-format where every submission was automatically and anonymously stored in a spreadsheet. See **Appendices (9, 10, 11 & 12)** for details about the questionnaires and responses.

3.10.4 Questionnaire Response Rate

The possibility of a low response rate, a major hazard in the data collection process (Walonick, 2004), was reduced through an arranged and agreed-upon timetable with reliable friends; current students at Heriot-Watt University, Napier University, University of Edinburgh, University of Worcester and University of Birmingham who were continuously chased up by mean of Gmail form reminder. These students, as a means of helping the researcher, also requested that the questionnaire be forwarded to their colleagues in other universities. Hence, the response rate was limited to a certain number during the initial stage of the process but later expanded. Over the phone, a very small number of student friends asked clarity about few generic questions, to the UK cultural, social and learning environment, and some specific questions about

academic/learning satisfaction. There was some confusion about two questions because they were considered to be repetitive; this was the time when I realised an awareness of the use of 'linguistic art'. Once these matters were explained - which were also circulated through Gmail reminder, the respondents successfully completed the questionnaires. The study received a total of 66 completed responses which were reasonably enough to identify the issues as wider concepts.

3.11 Personal Narratives (PN)

A personal narrative, meaning self-reflection of historical and cultural events giving birth to experiences (Czarniawska, 2004; Elliott, 2006), was also used in the current research. The use of personal narratives (PN) fits the current research for two reasons; first PN represent subjective experiences (Bold, 2012) and secondly, as Riessman (2000) suggests, it is a human narrative for the "*meaning-making unit of any discourse.*" Although Riessman stresses that the uniqueness of PN can be judged from its story format, rather than as a factual statement, which helps in any systematic study of someone's personal past experiences and the meaning they portray. The objective of PN is to contribute to the story's purpose from the narrator's perspective; however, the implication for an audience is to make sense of an existing problem, which I have clearly mentioned throughout the study. This connection helps to gauge the relevance of issues and their elaboration by putting them in a real-life context, and interpret the data more thoroughly. Webster and Mertova (2007) are true in stressing that because of the human dynamic and the sensitive nature of PN, it is more appealing to the researcher for use as a reflective method (p.24). While this type of personal narrative is rarely used in social science research, it is a vitally important method to uncover forgotten experiences and abstract themes into more concrete theory (p.46).

During the use of PN, four commonly-used approaches are the thematic, structural, dialogic and visual (Eliot). As the current study emphasises more in-depth interviewing, it would not be suitable to use most of these strategies. Therefore, this study heavily relies on the thematic approach, which more or less focuses on analysis to support

student views about emerging themes to help proceed to the GT method of developing a theory.

3.12 Reflexivity, Trustworthiness, and Positionality

Reflexivity is also an important aspect of the qualitative interviewing data collection process; and is one essential element to deal with the research study's 'trustworthiness' of data and results (Cousin, 2009). To generate trustworthy results, the researcher has to pay attention to his/her own positionality (p.18) – meaning where the researcher originates from and how this might influence the whole research process; this include the researcher's 'interpretive moves' (p.35) and those researched. Trustworthiness in a qualitative study is thus aimed to justify that the study's findings are obtained as a result of rigorous consideration of methodological approach used; however the researcher reflexive positionality is also important to comply with the study trustworthiness (p.18). This also involves, according to Richardson (2000), the researcher's accountability in knowing the way information is collected and analysed and how ethical standards are maintained.

By trustworthiness of the data, a qualitative researcher aims to get the complex meaning of social phenomenon by the use of what is described by Cousin (2009) as 'interpretive moves' – all which are subject to the researcher's reflexive and subjective stance (p.35). It is also important for a researcher to be reflexive to ensure a quality research is conducted. All this can happen as a result of the researcher's knowledge about the methods and ethical issues during the research process to ensure that their position does not influence those of the participants. However the researcher's epistemological and ontological stances, according to Cousin, would frame the data in line with the chosen strategies and cross-checking of interviews data to ensure data's trustworthiness and the researcher's reflexivity (p.19).

In the current study I acknowledge that IL development is a serious problem, particularly among Asian students. Acknowledging my own position, to align ways to overcome the issue and formulate a theoretical understanding of the way they develop

IL, was thus crucial. I strived to be more open and interpretational (using Cousin's interpretive moves) in the interviews, yet profoundly asserted my reflexive position to interpret the original meaning of data. At the same time, I tried to maximise the trustworthiness of my data and results by means of interview probing techniques and using personal narratives, as detailed earlier.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues relate to the principled sensitivity of the researcher to others' rights (Bulmer, 2001). Respect for others' privacy, often considered as confidentiality, and the effects of his/her actions on subjects/participants are some of the ethical issues that must be reassessed during any study (p.46). A qualitative research is about interpretation of social meaning portrayed by participants, and not an act of spying on others to discover truth (Patton, 2002) because this behaviour is not merely unethical but also violates the individual's privacy: Creswell (2014) view it a serious threat as 'privacy invasion'. There are accepted ways to conceal one's identity from others by interacting in a covert role; however this is also liable to bias, distortion and error; and is also seen as a bad scientific research practice (p.47). During the current research it was a challenge to align the need of GT approach, probe the issues in more depth and simultaneously avoid some of the arising ethical issues.

One way to overcome the ethical issues is encouragement and informed consent which reassure and guarantee respondents their privacy and realistic representation, in contrast to under or over-representation (Schostak, 2006: p.136). To properly govern the research process, Bulmer (2001) outlines the necessary ethical principles for subjects and self which include 'informed consent, respect for privacy, safeguarding the data - confidentiality, avoidance of harm, the absence of deception, and attention to publication consequences' (pp.49-52).

As this study also relies on a qualitative questionnaire, which sometimes seeks to intrude into people personal lives, this may introduce the issues of privacy and sensitivity (for details see Newby, 2010; Simon & Barbara, 2007); however I have

strictly avoided the use of language which can intrude into sensitive data. Alongside interviews which were to seek qualitative data within the same spheres, I have taken all steps to ensure that data is mainly pertinent to the study and does not involve intrusion into confidential spheres. A problem arises when the study focus is too narrow, thus it can miss the real point and hide the reality about a particular situation (Schostak, 2006). Yet ethical concerns need to transcend political ones. In this scenario, Schostak's (p.123) suggestion, that "*guaranteeing a realistic representation of interviewees must indulge ethics to justify what is being presented*", may be a more realistic showcasing of data. Finally, it is necessary to connect one interview with another to include cultural and educational interests; hence, one needs to be open about the research goals, as compared to the interests of the researcher (pp.135-136).

Therefore, a research project has to consider ethical issues as a crucial component of any study to avoid using subjects as "guinea pigs" after the study's conclusion (Trochim, 2006). Specifically, ethical pitfalls can be avoided simply by adding a 'permission' disclaimer with details of the study (Hannan, 2007); as is the case in the current before the interview sessions begin, as well as a simple permission code at the start of any questionnaire, saving time and effort in the process (Hannan, 2007; O'Brien, 1997). A similar disclaimer is used in questionnaires and interviews to avoid any ethical concerns and take participants' consent for data use.

To the greatest possible extent, a research study is also ethically bound to disguise the identities of respondents who do not wish to be identified (Hall & Hall, 1996: p.185) in whatever capacity is optimal. Locating this issue was coped through randomising the data to conceal personal identities and confidential information. Thus, potential problems during research are not just a matter of data collection but the handling and protection of the data too (Bulmer, 2001). Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of qualitative data is a hugely responsible task. In this regard, Bulmer confirms that 'respondents names and addresses, with their geographical locations, must frequently be concealed to maintain confidentiality and this ethical standard must be re-doubled when data-matching and data-linking is involved' (p.54). To further protect the identity of

participants in this study, questionnaire data was randomised through Excel Datasheet and interviews data through NVivo software.

3.13.1 Maintaining Ethical Standards

Kvale (2007) explains the ethical issues of interviewing; starting from thematising which can create the beginning of an ethical issue if the study does not intend with clarity to improve knowledge on the subject matter. Kvale (2007) and Cousin (2009) insist on the informed-consent plan in order to consider the ethical issues that can arise during the study (p.119), which according to Creswell (2014) must be done at the beginning (p.93). However, situations can occur during the interviews where stress and alternative understanding would affect the outcome (Kvale: p.23). Hence, ethically, considerable attention needs to be given to the way the interviewee is approached, the responses are analysed, and the subject interpreted. This leads the researcher to another stage to play with the data - another critical questioning process, which must be as subtle as possible (pp.23-25). Therefore, it is essential for any study to maintain fairness, honesty, and possess the knowledge and experience necessary for sensing and identifying ethical and moral issues to eliminate possible bias (Kvale: p.118; Cousin, 2009).

For the interview itself, Kvale (2007) lists some very basic concerns that could arise including informed consent; confidentiality; study consequences; the researcher's role; the initiation of interviews; and digressions or the willingness of the interviewer to stray from the subject matter. Kvale further notes that while interviewing, the researcher must maintain appropriate behaviour during the entire study process. Hence, I, as a researcher, was very sensitive to the participants' opinions and values about their scholastic, known or unknown, contribution to the investigation. In addition to being knowledgeable about the process, I probed questions with reasonable clarity to meet the data's credibility with its in-depth understanding from students experiences (Mears, 2012); handled knowledge with respondents responsibly; and interpreted information usefully and accurately, in keeping with the principle that a study's attributes depend on the interviewer's qualifications about the research process and acceptable procedures (Kvale: p.137).

Corbin and Strauss (2008: p.28) and Cousin (2009) stress the importance of silence as another common strategy at the beginning of the interviewing process; maintained in the current research. A potential problem arises, however, when interviewees have little or no new information to offer which complicates the researcher's role with uncertainty; this vacuum may stop the researcher from proceeding with the interview (p.28). However, as the current study involved participants with knowledge about their experiences of the issues and my (researcher's) role was from a similar background, the issue never arose significantly. Whilst it is also important for the researcher to handle the collected information sensibly to ensure the study's integrity (p.29), I took necessary steps, using data for the study purpose only without revealing any sensitive information, to ensure data as my higher priority. Corbin and Strauss, and Cousin (p.31) have common agreement over confidentiality and reflexivity as important considerations in a qualitative research, especially over the protection of participants' information which might influence the entire research project. Therefore, I maintained the consistency of reflecting on my own actions and behaviour and considered my positionality to keeping the study and participants closely related. Simultaneously, I stress that no sensitive information was revealed during the entire process of this study.

I also assured participants of their right to withdraw from the study or cease to elaborate on matters uncomfortable or else concerning to them. A similar method of maintaining privacy is one by Bulmer (2001), which suggests that to properly govern the research process's ethical issues, 'informed consent, respect for privacy, safeguarding data confidentiality, avoidance of harm, the absence of deception, and attention to publication consequences' (pp.49-52), must be given proper consideration. Schostak (2006) also contends that informed consent is to reassure and guarantee respondents their privacy and realistic representation, in contrast to under or over-representation (p.136).

3.14 Summary

In this chapter, I explained the methods which were used to answer my research questions, and the process that I used to gather and analyse data. I have given all possible examples of the data collection and analysis process and how this study fits into a qualitative approach.

The following chapter is aimed to present the findings from the data analysis, thus it introduces first the steps taken to data analysis and discussions about the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined in detail the methodological approach and research techniques used in the current study. The entire process of data collection, the limitations of data collection methods and ethical considerations were also discussed.

The current chapter describes the analysis of the data revealed in interviews. After careful analysis, several major themes emerged out of the data which have led to important categories. The analysis is carried out in detail and I have tried to establish the link between the categories. Starting from the analysis of Stage One, some important themes emerged from the first-stage interviews and questionnaire data, issues relative to prior education, independent learning (IL), language, finance; and cultural issues relative to socio-cultural adjustment.

Stage Two interviews, which involved probing of issues, explored some significant categories and themes which arose from the data collection, coding and categorisation. These interviews investigated the challenges students face in UK higher education. I tried to encourage students to elaborate on issues largely common to all of them, matters related to social influence, finance, language, prior learning experiences and IL skills.

At the end of the Third Stage of interviewing, the emerging data clarified hindrances to their learning, comprised of interconnected issues to IL. These issues, which related to UK education, were further examined to clarify student perceptions on adjusting to the academic environment. Whilst student perceptions made it possible to form a descriptive theory, on the challenges students face and their lack of the necessary skills to meet UK independent learning standards, it was also necessary to critically analyse the transcribed data in detail. The emerging theory is thus based upon the core indicators derived from categories and includes both academic (language – writing and expert communication; learning support – impact of support on IL; likes and dislikes; and IL itself – from exam-oriented education to learning independently) and socio-

cultural issues (social adjustment to the new environment). Each category is analysed in detail as follows.

4.2 Academic Backgrounds

The questionnaire data shows the following academic and demographic information.

Table 4.1: Participation in Questionnaire by Gender, Ethnicity and Education Level

Education Level	Ethnicity and Gender of Participants							
	Pakistan		India		China		Others	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Mphil/PhD	3	1	2	1	2	0	0	0
Postgraduate	21	1	7	2	6	4	1	0
Undergraduate	4	0	0	2	2	2	0	0
Others	1	0	0	1	1	2	0	0
Total: 66	29	2	9	6	11	8	1	0

The questionnaire data also reveals that 65% of participants were studying for the first time in the UK and 35% of participants had studied there previously. It is important to note here that only 35% are repeating their studies in the UK which means they have already obtained a previous qualification in the UK. A link can be identified that language skills would have already improved as a result of previous studying experience in the UK (see Section: 4.3.2). In addition, the level of satisfaction among these students with their learning experience in the UK may have future implications for other, and future, overseas students.

Students were also asked questions regarding their previous level of academic achievement and their current study level in the UK.

Table 4.2: Students by Level of Previous and Current Study

Qualification	UG	PG	MPhil/PhD	Other	Total
Prior Obtained	36%	55%	3%	6%	100%
Current Studying	14%	67%	14%	5%	100%

The above figures were not a surprise for two reasons. First, the consistency in the continuation of studies (i.e. studying in the UK after graduating in home countries) indicates a variation between research degrees in home countries (3%) and the UK

(14%). This shift would indicate a preference for research degrees in the UK because of its reputation. Such preference is also associated with acquiring advanced degrees to improve professional skills in order to gain more opportunities.

The questionnaire results, relating to the participants' current study subjects, indicate that nearly half of the participants (48%) were taking courses more closely related to "*physical, mathematical, technological and life sciences.*" Those studying courses related to "*arts and humanities*" and "*social sciences*" were the second and third largest groups (see **Appendix: 16**).

The significance of these figures contrasts with literature which shows the majority of overseas students study business-related courses (refer to Chapter Two). The reason for this shift in concentration may possibly be linked to United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) initiatives tightening the rules for institutional participation, now limited to highly-trusted institutions. As a result, this change has caused the closure of many UK colleges that could not meet the criteria of their highly-trusted status given by the UKBA. This further strengthens the argument that because highly trusted institutions require students to devote much of their times to study, this tend to take precedence over the way learning skills are utilised in order to gain success in developing IL skills.

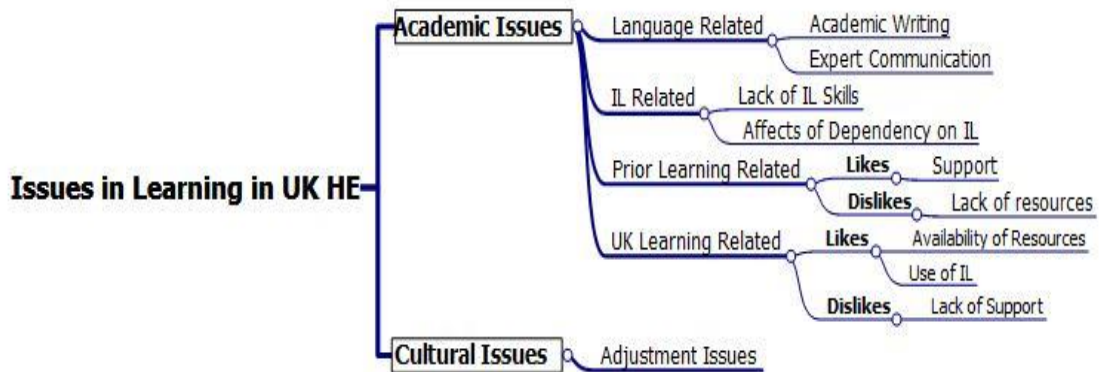
4.3 Mapping the Main Categories: By Prior and UK Learning

Noting the significance of the major issues, the questionnaire data indicates that for the majority of students, key concerns centred on cultural differences (29%), educational issues (27%), social adjustment issues (18%) and language issues (18%). In addition, from the initial stage of interviews, students recognised some common academic (IL, language, financial and prior learning) and cultural (socio-cultural settings and adjustment to IL) issues.

Figures 4a (and 4b in the following section) below schematise the coding and categorisation of interview data. As a result of the coding categorisation (Figure 4a), some academic issues became apparent. These concerns were about language issues,

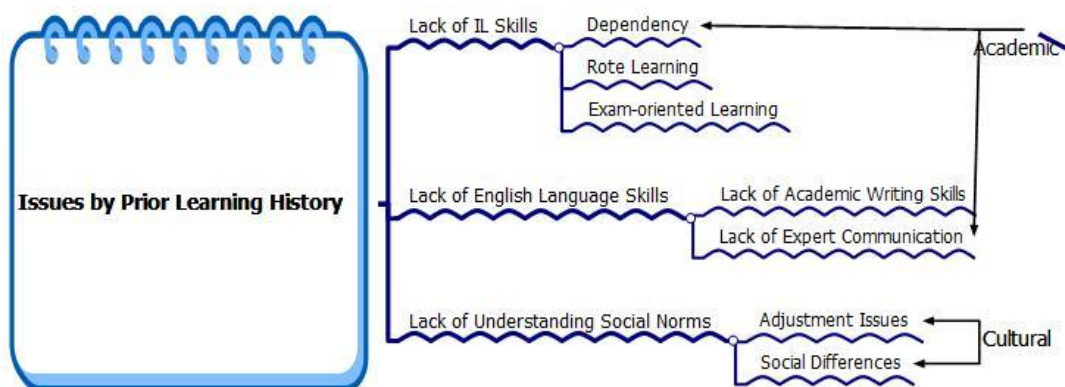
lack of IL skills, likes and dislikes about education in the home countries and current learning in the UK. The emerging categories were identified and probed more specifically regarding prior learning and current learning in the UK. The analysis of rich data reveals that the emerging issues in UK learning can broadly be located, in the following categories.

Figure 4a: Some Coding Categories by Issues



In addition, the categories of learning issues which were developed based on prior educational experiences, encompassing academic and cultural aspects, are also shown in the following figure:

Figure 4b: Categories by Issues in Prior Learning



Thus, when patterns in prior learning (PL) were explored, most students agreed that their previous learning was mainly syllabus-based and teacher-dependent with one-on-one private instruction:

“Teachers ... always taught so we never learned ... we could not cross [the] syllabus but always stick to it Exams are based on [the] syllabus...”

“Teachers’ authority makes you dependent ... teachers want students to read and study what is taught ...”

“[A] syllabus is not possible to cover in full ... [you] rely on private tuition ...[and] pass exam with good marks ...”

The above comments clearly indicate the dependent approach students used in their prior learning. At the same time this dependence has been linked by students to the way they were taught in prior learning. In this regard, a Pakistani student revealed that:

“The education ... [in] my home country is not ... [something] which fulfilled the challenges ... [of the] modern era. ... teacher is not very well trained ... facilities ... [are] limited as compared to UK and other European countries”.

“[We] were helped ... taught by our teachers very enthusiastically”.

A Chinese student suggests teacher support as essential for learning, and indicates that:

“Every time I need... help from my teachers in home country, this stops me from thinking [for] myself ... teachers guide us. ... [we] need to learn... something... ”.

Students also view teachers as the source of knowledge transfer and this is another hint towards their ingrained habit of dependency:

“Yes, I think teachers ... [are the] source of knowledge transfer, so they need to explain complex issues in learning process ... teachers are the one[s] we learn from in PL... expert in the field ...”

The above comments reveal students experiences of dependency and teacher-centeredness. At the same time, students reveal their vulnerability of learning attitudes which are mostly exam-oriented – meaning they learn/t to pass examinations and have/had natural connection with prior learning exercises. The practice of teacher-centeredness, thus, curtails their learning patterns into specific and limited learning habits. These views also reflect my own learning experience in being too dependent on and needing support from teachers in my own country; findings which are partly consistent with literature. The teachers in my own home country were always available to help – this does not mean excellence of teaching but a common practice among lecturers; this notion is contrary to my previous UK learning experience where learning

support was nominal and not always available. Over time, I phased out my dependence on teachers and started relying on self-study and online resources instead. In order to confirm the significance of prior learning here, the study mainly notes dependency as a prior learning issue among some Asian students. Similarly this study notes here that these students have a natural connection with the dependent approach to learning contrary to IL. Thus we can see how and why the issue of IL exists among Asian students.

Hence, the data analysis further suggests that numerous issues to IL arise as a result of students' experiences both with prior and current learning in the UK. Some examples of respondents' answers to the question about the reasons they chose the United Kingdom (UK) for Higher Education (HE) studies are:

“Better prospects ... have my relatives here ... to work in UK ... have friends in the UK ... UK had a very good reputation worldwide ... UK universities are well-known for their reputation ... UK degrees are acceptable in all over the world ... British qualification is considered as a guarantee for job [in Asian countries].”

These findings support the literature; that overseas students consider British qualifications of greater value than some other countries. In other words, overseas students recognise the value of a British education with its reputation and quality as a gateway for future prospects in Asian countries (refer to **Appendices: 17, 18, 23, 24 & 25**).

4.3.1 Language Issue and its Relation to IL

The questionnaire data shows that initially there was a general agreement among participants in restating the importance of English-language fluency. In total, 76% of students indicated they were proficient in English language, while 16% considered themselves at an intermediate level and only 6% reported they were expert (see **Appendix: 10 & 15**). The issue of English language skills here contrasts with literature reports about international students. However this ratio most likely represents the students' level of study because a majority of them are taking postgraduate courses in the UK (see **Table: 4.1** above), thus a contradiction exists.

Students' perceptions of the second language (SL) issue vary in relation to academic writing (AW) skills, communication ability and learning activities. Discussion of the language issue in the interviews revealed that poor writing patterns and communication skills, as well as an unawareness of plagiarism, were commonly shared factors. For example, students commented:

“I don't know but I think [it's] the writing methods ... strict time scales, and too much self-work ...”.

“I have ... language problem, and writing problem mainly in argumentation.”

“Teachers are very strict about plagiarism and something I am confused about the term plagiarism”

“I [think]..., English is a big problem. ... second problem is the writing and communication...”

“Well, I have the issue of language ... cannot express ... in a good way in a SL on which I don't have full command.”

Initially students' responses contained many contradictions; however they later recognised that their English language skills were weak; and realised that support in writing would enable them to overcome the 'declining language issue' in a timelier manner. Indeed, the use of English as the language of academia is one of the challenges for these students, as they reveal. Thus, facilitating the process of learning, all of which requires one's own effort, is what they interpret differently:

“Writing in English language is somewhat difficult ... teachers in UK check assignments and papers word by word ...”

“I think my teachers need to help me in my writing skills ... and they need to give me more guidance than they normally provide ...”

Therefore, guidance in academic writing seems to help students overcome English language hurdles. This much-needed help, however, does not mean that students will necessarily acquire all the skills; but at least, they become able to participate and communicate in a diverse learning environment. The realisation of the language issue among overseas students is not only historical but also a current one; hence, the initial data confirms its significance as an academic issue which has closer relations with the development of IL and becoming successful learners.

Elaborating on the language issue, students' perceptions of English language difficulties varied in terms of both writing and speaking challenges, as revealed earlier. In the UK, academic writing is more frequently stressed by teachers and practiced than in the students' home countries. Students revealed teachers are not typically concerned with the quality of classroom writing; however, they do not ignore writing skills at grading time, especially during exams. When students were asked to elaborate on their views on language issues, the main concerns were much the same for all of them. For example, one Chinese student elaborated on his previous comments:

“Language is one of the big problems ... [the] teacher is never satisfied from our writing skills. I don't feel the mistakes ... [about my] writing but teachers will always point out ...[that] is what I have heard from ...[those] who are not British...”

When the student was prompted to elaborate on the significance of the English language within the UK self-learning environment, the student responded that:

“Academic writing ... I have never experienced before and teachers ... want adequate academic skills. This creates problems for my learning [they are]repeatedly correcting sentences. ... if I had enough language writing skills, then it would be very easy for me to follow up [on] the course. IL certainly requires good language writing and reading skills which I think I don't have.”

At this point, we know that both writing and expert-level speaking are major concerns among students, so I tried to find out whether language skills have any major link with IL development. So when the same student was encouraged to say more about the effect of language on IL, his/her response was:

“I think that language efficiency is important for IL skills for two reasons ... to develop and sustain an argument and ... think reflectively. ... (Argumentation & reflection) ... [This can] only be met with adequate language skills. Without language expertise, it is not possible to sustain the process of IL.”

Another student commented that:

“It is language that affects ... learning. I am very good in grasping ideas but I and my [colleagues] ... have no command over English language which hurdles my [and our] thinking process. ... I write something, my ideas disperse and at many stages, I interpret and translate ideas.”

“In my opinion ... [those] who are not good in English writing ... cannot be good ILs ... without language fluency, one is unable to write a good assignment. Language problems ... lead to negative feedback ...[from] teachers.”

The above comments are indicative of the significance of language for IL skills. In this regard, another student commented that:

“In the UK [when] teachers are marking ... [they pick] mistakes in my writing which is not affecting anything in my subject (structural engineering) but I don't like that.”

Whilst students recognised that the English is important for learning effectively and independently, they also indicated that many mistakes are commonly made that did not affect the learning in a student's subject area, e.g. structural engineering; the implication is that English language skills may not affect some studies in some disciplines. This presents a conflict for students; some of them believe that without adequate language skills, they cannot be good independent learners, while others think that language requisites cannot be applied in every subject.

However, one common theme emerges: writing skills are relevant for sustaining argument in different disciplines. Hence, the significance of language skills for IL was noted by the some interviewees as follows:

“To overcome [academic hurdles]... while learning independently, it is essential that we have good language understanding. Without language awareness and knowledge, it is not possible to be successful ILs.”

“I don't know but language difficulties are there ... [and] make it hard for me to use IL in HE. To learn independently, one needs good English language understanding and good writing skills.”

The above comments reflected the views of another student:

“Command over language is the backbone for IL. If one have enough command over language ... no much problem. The only problem ... is methodology or the way we are taught which is not enough...”

These comments agree with previous ones but contradict the findings from the questionnaires, when 76% of participants viewed themselves as proficient in English. However, the students' assessment of their own language proficiency in the interviews

differ from previously mentioned views in the questionnaires; in other words, students who judge their own language adequacies are not in the best position to reveal their proficiency levels required for IL. Their questionable self-assessment did not help in determining proficiency or deficiency in language skills. Interviews were further analysed where student views again revealed a clear contradiction in (language) writing and speaking skills. For example:

“In my university, I speak my native language with my Asian friends especially ... and I communicate with others in English. So I don't have a problem with English language. But I guess I am not a good writer”

“Although I feel that my English is not that bad but still it is very difficult for me to express what I want and what I feel. ... [the] problem occurs in writing when my teachers want a standard ... writing In UK universities, teachers require students to be sufficiently [strong in]... the writing skills. ...[English is] my SL; hence I feel to have writing and speaking problems.”

The above comments refer to two key themes in the language issue which were previously identified: lack of writing skills and speaking ability. One student revealed that speaking is not a major problem while others see it as an impediment to better understanding. However, the majority are clear that writing constitutes a problem.

Another feature of student comments regarding language impact, which all three nationalities share, is the difficulty in understanding IL patterns. The notion that IL requires extra effort and language skills is confirmed by few respondents. The above extracts also suggest that many students do not realise that language has significance in the learning process in the UK. Elaborating on the real essence of the learning process, the majority of students reported difficulties with English writing skills. For example:

“Teachers are never satisfied with my writing, because they check the assignments word by word in grammar and ... structure. I don't agree with this type of marking because the language should not affect my grade as I am not a student of language; rather I am studying structure engineering.”

A realistic approach toward the ‘writing-correction process’ is expressed by one student:

“Now as I have submitted my project, one thing I learned was that I need to look at my report again and again to take out the grammatical mistakes from it.”

These remarks suggest that some students recognise the significance of re-reading in the academic field, a significant revelation, not only to enhance reading skills but attain good writing skills too. An example of such comments might happen during writing assignments and dissertations. In fact, such comments ultimately confirmed one another and added value to previous comments about the need for competent language skills.

“The other problem which I still face is the language deficiency. I have not yet learned adequate writing skills which make it difficult for me to sustain argument in my writing ... and so on”

All the above comments begin with some generic concepts leading to vague areas of interest. These areas of interest can stem from certain possibilities and processes in the data. Currently, there is evidence of a lack of academic writing (AW) skills and of a dearth of understanding in complex and formal language communication, particularly apparent from students' comments. Although some of these students are not happy with their teachers' marking criteria, this lack of knowledge is widely evident for students who are possibly not aware of the UK marking criteria and the emphasis on academic writing.

While teachers do not consider language and grammatical structure a deciding factor in marking assignments and papers, this practice varies in different disciplines in UK institutions and is based on individual university regulations. The major concerns of UK teachers normally include the strength of arguments in academic writing, along with what level of language skills students present when they arrive. In other words, do students come to the UK with sufficient language skills like IELTS or TOFEL certificates, a minimum requirement by British universities? Are their commitments to learn on their own reasonable if they have linguistic deficiencies?

A number of students linked IL to existing learning settings in the UK. Referring to previous comments, there is agreement with the notion that language skills are necessary for IL in higher education. In addition, language is a major factor that affects IL skills. For example, the findings from the comments above indicate that the majority of students have the necessary knowledge for IL and its implications within the UK-based educational environment; and recognised the significance of language skills for

IL. It is somehow clear that the use of academic English language skills differs among students from diverse backgrounds; this opinion contradicts previous statements about language skills regarding their use of academic English; similar to idiomatic expressions which are sometimes not clearly understood as one of the issues Asian students face at early stages of learning, as they revealed.

Some of the above comments also refer to the notion of teacher awareness of their students' class writing and critical thinking skills in order to meet their learning needs. For example, students expressed their concerns for AW skills which were not adequate enough for IL in the UK. However, questions again arise about whether or not the importance of language skills is limited to writing and speaking and whether these skills are really subject-specific and thus, require clarification.

Reflecting on personal experiences, I experienced that most friends from similar backgrounds face language issues in both writing and speaking in different academic disciplines. As an international student, I began my first-degree studies in the UK with the notion that it was merely complex to understand; yet the zest for education there encouraged me to follow the learning process. Difficulty started to decline during the following year of my study. Similar cases were also anecdotally common among other Asian colleagues; but those students who took the initiative and asked for support to overcome language difficulties successfully acquired some of the required skills (i.e. IL) to complete their studies.

4.3.1.1 Academic Writing

In the current research, when clarification probes were used to explain previously identified issues like English AW, relative data started to emerge. Students gave various accounts of their concerns regarding AW. Some presented themselves as confident that they possessed adequate AW skills, while others were quite open to discussing the difficulties they faced. After being asked to comment on the AW issue (if present), one student revealed:

“I think that language skills are important for successful [independent] learning. I personally find it very difficult to write academic essays because I make so

many mistakes. ... when it is marked by my supervisor. It's not only the case but I sometime[s] can't make sense of what I write."

Academic writing skills are necessary for students to clarify their views to the readers; thus, they are well aware of its real impact in HE learning. In the reflection above, this student seems to portray two aspects of the writing skills challenge. The first is the lack of grammatical skills; the second is the inability to structure sentences to present clear meaning in writing. When asked to clarify his/her views, the student commented:

"Writing ... is very difficult for students like me ... [I] never learnt the way to write ... in school ... [I] used to write essays and applications but in college and university life, ... no opportunities to write. ... I never knew that I was given less marks in prior learning for lack of English ... as an Asian student ... [it is] difficult ... to write sensibly ... connect sentences"

These comments highlight further the core AW issue. The student's realisation that he/she did not know about the possibility of marks for writing skills in their home countries contrasts with what is normally practiced in the UK. Hence, an issue from prior academic practices presents itself where little, if any, attention might have been given to AW; this inattention to detail is unlike the Western learning environment where greater emphasis is put on writing skills because institutions largely value well written documents and research papers. In the comment above, the students' inability to connect sentences or make meaningful sense of written text may fall in the category of translation – a period of student life where he/she is transferring ideas in the form of translation. This transference may also be called low-level writing and speaking ability. The last sentence of the above comment, "*others ... make sense of sentences,*" also support the point made earlier. However analysis of comments, like "*I never knew that I was given less ... learning for lack of English language skills (ELS) ...,*" reveals that the students' lack of English writing skills originates from the socio-cultural terrain of prior academic training.

It is surprising to note that my sample students share similar cultural bonds and linguistic strains (see **Section: 4.3.10**). No evidence has been seen in terms of excellence in AW skills among participants, despite some students' claims of having better writing skills. For example, different students commented:

“Me and my colleagues were not aware ... it is so difficult to study in [the] UK because English language is important in UK ... [we were] cheated by agency people that studying in [the] UK is very easy ... it's simply not true ... writing is very important in [the] UK to pass assignments and exams Support at the start of learning will help a lot” (Chinese)

“Well, I know that tutor in UK pay high attention to academic writings but at the same time, there is no formal training of doing so ... unless students are given proper training ... [it's] hard to satisfy tutors in UK....” (Indian)

“We come from a culture where English is used as a SL. We know how to write and how to speak in our country... here things are different... lecturers in universities are interested in type of writing ... what students write ... they check every word and line ... and grammatical accuracy determine[s] the final marking criteria ... support is needed at the very beginning or else ... difficulties will make hard to get rid of them ...” (Pakistani)

All the remarks reveal the need for support, however this requirement may be different in different discipline areas (see **Section: 4.3.5**), and were highly applicable to me as a researcher in my area of prior study. Originating from a strong socio-cultural background, the examination system was never intended to assess AW skills in my prior learning. In my home country, where selective assessment or choice-based exam papers might have resulted into inappropriate study patterns, these criteria were never known to me either. In such learning cultures, it is less likely that students will develop AW and IL skills. While inherent language skills may be hard to polish, they are not impossible to improve. Similarly developing AW skills allow students to end the period of translation into independent thinking. In due course, training, tutoring and strict guidance might also help erase the decade-long, ingrained habits of dependent learning in which no emphasis is given to developing AW skills.

While the literature shows that Chinese students are the weakest in English language skills, it may simply represent the widespread use of their native language rather than English. Yet the results in the current study are different from those in various studies (as shown in **Appendix: 1**). Whilst students from the selected countries were asked to clarify their perspectives on the lack of AW skills, they more or less shared the same wide range of problems. Despite my realisation following discussions with many Indian students that they are more fluent in English-speaking than students from other selected

countries, surprisingly they also face the same overall challenges as the Chinese and Pakistani – thus the apparent level of better fluency from my own view may be misleading me as researcher (as I have no proper means to judge this on my own); indeed, writing skills are essentially considered for academic success.

Similarly, there are ‘support’ factors reflected in students’ earlier comments that appropriate and timely support helps to enhance language skills. Support strategies are necessary because students with immediate HE entry are likely to be unaware of expectations such as asking questions and participating in classroom discussions – a contributory factor to developing IL skills. I experienced such interactions myself in classrooms and other academic discussions when teachers more often intervened to correct and provide us instructions about the use of correct spoken language – particularly in our academic English classes. As such, it appears unlikely that sample students would differ in their perceptions and strategies about AW in English. As a result, students’ perceptions about writing in academic English reveal that they are influenced by prior learning strategies where they are equipped with specific training, i.e. taught at levels of transmittance in a spoon-feeding context, contrary to IL. The reason for this common experience also rests with the notion that Asian students not only share a history of dependency but also the issue of AW skills; as a result, these students face similar challenges. From students’ overall perceptions it appears that they want AW to be taught in order to overcome the associate issue of learning independently.

4.3.1.2 Expert Communication Skills and Independent Learning

Students’ lack of expert communication skills – the ability to communicate easily and to exchange complex ideas without translation from their mother tongue into the English language – was identified as a major issue of concern, particularly in developing IL. Thus, students revealed they lack the adequate communication skills, required for IL. Initial results also suggest that lacking the ability to communicate at an expert level are linked to cultural traditions and prior learning (dependency) history which affects the students’ ability to learn independently, as noted earlier. Thus, oral English skills are necessary for cultural adjustment in British universities; those with adequate

communication skills are more likely to make friends, and adapt to UK social life which may guarantee more inclusive participation to learn independently and adapt to the very environment where IL is practiced.

Another common view is apparent that while Asian students remain silent in their classes, they consider silence to be a moral attribute which is also common in many other cultures; for them to challenge the teacher's authority would show disrespect. Such views are seen differently in a Western learning culture and were essential to be clarified with to the aim of encouraging 'active participation' in discussions to enhance IL and avoid complicating the process of personal understanding at the expense of a conceived belief of obedience. Silence as obedience is merely a cultural burden which Asian students either realise later or else conceive as a result of adjustment in their learning experience in the UK.

When students were asked to clarify their views with regard to the cultural label of silence in the classroom and its relation to students' communication skills, they commented:

“In China, students are scared of their teachers ... teacher is the only one [to] control the class ... students also respect the teachers.... On occasions, students find difficulties; still they do not ask the teachers for explanation ... this depend[s] from teacher to teacher ... some are friendly and some are not... those with friendly manners encourage students for participation in classroom discussion [it] improves language skills if it is language class ... hard teachers are good in management of the class ... teachers focus more on grammar than speaking ... [it] does not help in improving speaking skills but help[s] writing skills”

The above excerpts might represent the collective point of view, commonly noted among Asian students. As students revealed, the real difficulty was finding the confidence to express themselves and their ideas during the studies. That reticence might be another reason for silence in class because they were uncertain about what they knew and how well they could communicate in spoken English. Another Pakistani student was encouraged to clarify his/her position on oral skills and its use in the classroom, he/she commented:

“In my class, there are students of many countries but majority are Chinese... some are very good in communication because they are bold or they can speak

fluently ... Chinese students are very quiet in the class, ...as Pakistani, ... I personally find it hard to speak until I ... make sense of ... [what I am] talking about... some students try to make sense of what they speak ... [it] is hard sometimes to transfer good ideas from mind to English language”

The above comments reveal that an assessment of students' oral skills would benefit international students in the UK by uncovering difficulties with communication at an early stage, in contrast to students' realisation of such difficulties at later stages. The last comments also show the link between students' ability to learn independently and the development of better communication to convey complex ideas; hence transition from the period of translation (as discussed earlier) is possible with more independent approach to learning activities.

Regarding Chinese students in their home countries and the English language teaching techniques, there is apparently a lack of awareness of the process that normally leads to the development of speaking skills; at the same time, teachers are also unaware of the needs of their students. This gap suggests that while students want to enhance their speaking skills in the prior learning environment, those opportunities were not available to them. In contrast, teachers concentrate on grammatical skills which relate more to writing than speaking; but the students' confidence level in grammar is still underdeveloped (see **Previous Section**). Another student commented:

“Only learning grammar is not enough ... [it] does not improve speaking ... fluent speaking skills are important ... [to] help in easing exchanging ideas ... also good for presentation ... required at different stages of study”

The above comment reflects student concerns about less-expert communication and its practical implications for IL. The real surprise goes beyond the sense of expert communication; it is the students' desire and need to succeed at every stage of their studies. Such desires are among the attributes needed for successful HE learning; in the same way, students considered them to be important for the entire UK learning process – a process which we normally define as IL. When another student was asked about general speaking skills and those at an expert level, the comments were:

“As ... speaking is concerned, I can speak English very well ... but sometimes I speak in a way when the other party is unable to grasp the idea of what I mean.... It is also sometimes difficult to convey and express ideas clearly in

English language ... all this is because we were taught specific things ... language skills are still not developed”

These comments correspond with the literature, mentioning that test scores (IELTS & TOEFL) are not a guarantee of having adequate speaking skills. The above comments also refer to the expert communication ability that students need to gain. At the same time, such observations explain the desire for successful learning at all stages of study. Students appeared to have difficulty only in exchanging complex ideas; presenting simple concepts do not seem to be a problem among Asian students, however exchanging complex ideas or creating ideas, as part of a learning process, would require adequate communication skills.

From students perceptions other complexities in spoken English are also apparent. While first, second and foreign language speakers of English share many of the same difficulties in academic writing (refer to previous sections); the latter two suffer disadvantages not shared by first-language speakers when it comes to academic topics. Hence, the real focus might be on developing speaking skills in order to exchange ideas more fluently and seamlessly which so far, appears to be a problem associated with speakers of English as a second or foreign language. In this regard, previously, during interview sessions, students commented about linguistic communication that “*dialogue acts to present the flow of meaning in a learning process ... and the purpose of learning has to be specific to the learners’ needs.*” Thus, both writing and speaking abilities are important for academic achievement, however communication skills (both speaking and AW) among non-native English speakers are still problems in a Western culture; this is due to the necessity of syntactical grammar skills and linguistic competence for academic communication skills. Thus, as emerged from the data in this study, the adaptation process is neither easy nor impossible for overseas students studying in the UK; however the inadequacies in speaking appear to be easily overcome than academic writing.

When students were asked to clarify their views in relation to overcoming speaking inadequacies, the responses were:

“It’s hard to remember how difficult it was to chase and follow the discussion in the classroom difficult to understand the accents in the beginning and type of ungrammatical sentences ... by British students... later I realised that in spoken language they don’t care about grammar and ... that [which] make[s] sense, is accepted ... very difficult to follow lectures in the class ... [to] participate in the discussions ... [it] was a nightmare to go for presentations ... later I ... communicate properly in social life ... with my teachers in university ...”

Such comments would normally be typical of second-language speakers who are not used to conversing at native level and who at the same time, may be unable to grasp the way others speak early on. Asian students also note that they find it hard to acquire natural speaking and writing skills upon their arrival in the UK, which is evident in these students’ comments.

The question arises of why communication skills would even be a problem inside institutions where teachers are presumed experts in their fields and in understanding the requirements of international students; and expect students to learn independently – which is because of their declared levels of English language skills. It is likely that these teachers expect students to have acquired adequate language skills for IL before they are admitted. One main reason for such perception is because students often declare documentary evidence of English language skills for entry into HE in the UK. Repeating student comments would seem to portray a perception that Asian students possess the test scores required, however there is still a major difference in students’ perception of adequate academic language skills and those assessed in English tests. The very difference lies in the way students approach and utilise their learning skills.

On the researcher’s part, from my own personal experience with many international students in the UK, language inadequacies at the start of study is problematic, and such a situation is normal among those who go to another country to study at HE level. In fact, it is rarely noted that Asian students speak English sufficiently well at the start of their coursework. I knew that those who pretended to speak English well did so because of their prior association with the language. Either a student’s parents lived in an English-speaking environment or that person had studied previously in the UK. I personally found it very difficult at the start of my studies in the UK to participate in discussions and presentations for two reasons. The first challenge was the difficulty in

following the discussion and the second was the inability to communicate well enough to be understood, i.e. the lack of communicating at comprehension level. Both aspects of language are necessary for a discussion or presentation and importantly for developing IL skills.

Whatever English language proficiency students have upon their arrival in the UK, they often find it daunting to grasp the level of institutional language expectations required for IL. Indeed, like all communication skills, the understanding of spoken language and its relation to the development of IL is much more complex and widespread than originally thought. For example, the issue of spoken language, at comprehension level, is not limited to the students in the current sample but is widely noted among overseas students, as revealed in numerous studies. Labelling the relationship between the English language and students of non-English speaking countries, the main academic indicator is that technical terms are largely harder for non-English speaking students to understand than native speakers. Students blame this inability of comprehension for miscommunication in discussions, and following those discussions. However at some stage, students revealed, they begin to find communication with westerners easier, thus signifies the decreasing nature of spoken language issue in developing IL skills.

4.3.2 Language as a Declining Issue in Independent Learning

Development

Knowing the persistence of English language issue, the results in the current study revealed different results as the data emergently clarified. Thus, it is possible to compare students' previous comments and the ways they ultimately overcame their part-language problems with the passage of time. In fact, language progressively became a non-issue to a greater extent as skills improved.

Students' lower level of English language ability is troubling enough to prevent them from participating in IL activities which is helpful in improving their English language skills. However, less participation in English language activities causes students to revert back to their native community for communication rather than active involvement to bolster IL development.

Students' previous comments also justify their commitments towards enhancing their language skills, which does require some direction from teachers in order to overcome language issues more progressively – which in return does improve students' abilities to develop IL skills. Such results underpin the declining nature of the language issue in IL development; but they also indicate that language difficulties persist, if not addressed right away, and can cause IL complications. As one student in this study commented:

“In my case, language issue was very severe at the beginning but later on, it was not a major issue. I still face ... problems both in writing while speaking was much easier at later stages ... language issue is mostly temporary ... I am more confident to learn [independently].”

This excerpt typifies the nature of the language problems that Asian students, in particular, bring with them to the UK. It is not a surprise, however, that they cope better with the language issue in later stages of study and this decline also means improvement in IL strategies. Another student commented:

“During my entire period of study [of my] in prior learning in home country, language was an issue ... whilst in UK I learnt how to write successfully and correct my writing and improve my speaking... I am learning myself ... although the standard of writing (the one required at my university) is much [more] difficult than speaking. ... I tell you why that is... because we never get marks for oral communication but we are always assessed for what we write.”

Such comments, though, explain the scale of the language problem found during students' prior learning experiences which have in fact exacerbated the IL issue. In the case of UK-based learning, the issue is more closely related to writing than to speaking; it also represents the degree of importance given to oral and written skills in the UK where speaking skills are considered secondary to writing. Students mentioned that writing is more difficult than speaking because oral skills are not assessed in the UK, and are not necessary for learning independently. This distinction does not mean that students are unable to meet university requirements; rather, it refers to the difficulties they encounter in the course of their IL process of studying. It is again interesting to note the declining nature of language problems because the students are ultimately able to develop academic language skills and hence improve their IL abilities.

Despite a realisation of the decreasing nature of the language issue in IL, from the students' perspective, a dilemma appears that writing is more seen as valuable than speaking because the former is assessed, demonstrated while learning by themselves and formalised which may, in fact, be part of the problem. Communication and conversation/debate are important parts of the learning process for students; thus, if oral skills are not developed and students do not overcome the hesitation in communication with each other or their tutors, they will find it more difficult to improve their IL skills.

Interestingly students who expressed that they lacked writing ability linked the problem to minimal interest in their prior learning, lack of direction from tutors and those prior learning assessments in which teachers did not take much interest; in contrast, academic writing is highly-valued in the UK and students are assessed for what is written – this written assessment aids the development of IL skills. This comparison, in between prior and UK learning, can be drawn to reveal the level of the language issue and development of IL skills; which appears to be decreasing in UK learning, however not in prior learning because it was not given enough assessment-based attention nor emphasised in IL activities. Such contradictions would certainly raise anxiety at the beginning and prove difficult for students at the transitional level – when students come to the UK - without training in academic writing and IL skills. Hence we know that although language is a declining issue over time, there are consequences in terms of time, anxiety and, sometimes, failure. All this indicates a potential way and timely solution to overcome the language issue even if it is declining in nature. At the same time, overcoming the language skills would mean providing students a realistic opportunity to develop IL skills.

Student views that support and guidance work to minimise the tension in the transition to UK requirements are, thus, differently and generically portrayed in the literature; in the current study, students specifically referred to language support as the primary element for enhancing and sustaining IL skills and overcoming the associated issue in language. Hence, we find no difference between those who speak English as a second language and those as a foreign language in developing the IL skills. For speakers of English as a second or foreign language, it is normally sufficient to write and express

something; at the same time, however, it is difficult to communicate well – a primary IL situation in which students are required to demonstrate their skills.

I as a researcher myself experienced this dilemma during my prior degree coursework in the UK, during which it was easier to acquire speaking skills than writing ability. This may be due to the fact that speaking involves ‘inclusive participation’ in social and learning settings where everyone uses English to exchange ideas. Regarding academic writing, I was unaware at the beginning about topics and methods of academic writing and the way IL was required. At the same time, research articles and specialist text books gradually exposed me to IL and academic writing, a ‘non-inclusive participation’ process– where students, in general, do not come across the patterns of academic writing that others use. Thus, the lack of written skills among students is identified as a result of continuous assessment methods in the UK which is not common in students’ prior learning practice, as they revealed.

The notion of the declining nature of language has many other possibilities, particularly language inadequacy. Cultural and social commitments – where students associate with colleagues from their home country rather than with British students – can result in a lack of interaction in both speaking and writing. Whilst it is a widespread perception among students before embarking on their studies that British culture presents many opportunities for everyone to enhance communication skills, very few actually enhance their writing skills in a shorter period of study; however, this is a temporary state and often improves over time as a result of the process of developing IL skills.

Mapping the research question (see **Section: 1.1**) relative to the language issue among selected students, the emerging themes of poor spoken and written language skills have strong links with prior learning experience. At the same time, it is surprising to note that students also considered support had a vital role in overcoming the necessary language skills, despite their test scores (IELTS & TOFEL etc.) upon entering HE. These test score results are indicative of the educational differences in approaches to learning in the prior and UK academic settings. That is why students have strong views in relation

to the impact of language and support over IL skills, which are analysed in the coming sections.

4.3.3 Impact of Language on Independent Learning as a Whole

From the perceptions of students, the lack of adequate language skills impairs their ability to actively participate in the learning process. Such a hurdle originates from the hesitant nature of some students who are unwilling to communicate in English among their co-nationals; a conception which is consistent with what is apparent in the literature about an overall population of international students. Indeed, achieving a level of competency in English language skill to productively involve oneself in active discussion is a necessary part of the independent learning process. This is an indication that language skills impacts on the development of IL.

Hence, the current study sought to clarify the effects of language on IL skills. As noted in the previous sections, students regard language as crucial for the process of learning independently. Therefore, students were encouraged to expand their views on the extent to which language impacted the skills to learn independently. An engineering student commented:

“I personally recognised the importance ... [of] language skills at the start ... in UK. ... I was not hesitant to contribute but after my initial failure in writings, I became conscious, fearing ... [that I had] not yet attained the appropriate level of academic English, and may not ... proceed with my studies. ... [I] realised when I was given warning and re-assessment. ... [that I] learn differently in UK (IL) ... and the language of learning is much higher [here] than in India, so [I] felt the need of better language skills. ... good writing skills, reading skills and grammar skills facilitate the process of IL in UK ...”

The above extract represents the students' views regarding the importance of language and highlights the common perception about Asian students at the start of their studies. They are enthusiastic and their very enthusiasm sometimes leads them to misunderstand the UK standard of learning, where knowledge and skills are constantly assessed (refer to earlier sections). Hence, despite initial enthusiasm, students get trapped in a different learning environment. At some stage, they discover that without adapting to the UK learning patterns, it will be hard to achieve their educational goals or the necessary qualifications in a learning environment where language skills are required; hence, a

worrisome trend is evident in the above extracts. Although the student indicates that the level of language skills needed in the UK is far higher than the Indian requirements, and necessary for learning independently, it was not clear to what extent such language skills were required. Another graduate student, studying for an MBA degree, clarified:

“Honestly ... language is the backbone of studying in the UK ... [I’m] jealous to see others speaking good English and writing better assignments. Language ... affect[s] student’s way of IL in the UK ... not only in the sense to meet the degree requirements ...[but] also [for] the purpose of participation in open discussion ... and teaching etc.... language skills also improve students learning to avoid plagiarism ... it is very difficult to cite ... [I] remain in the fear of not been caught of plagiarism.”

Such comments are representative of the nature of understanding the impact of language skills on the IL process, where success involves broad aspects of learning, particularly students’ eagerness to acquire better language skills for IL. In the current case, the student is aware of the importance of collaborative participation, discussion and presentation – which are essential aspects of language development ability, as aspects of the IL and assessment process; thus, the student realised that language skills impact not only on academic practices but also on collaborative ones. The student even indicates that language ability impacts upon the way teaching and learning is exercised in the UK. Furthermore, the same student notes that language is crucial for moral academic behaviour when plagiarism is considered a form of theft. He/she believed that an adequate facility with language would ultimately determine the outcome of successful academic writing which shapes a way for the development of IL skills.

The above remarks are broad in meaning and context. For example, poor academic writing skills might tempt students to plagiarise others’ intellectual property. Student’s suggestion is that good and repetitive assessment practices help to avoid plagiarism, a notion that is evident in the following comments of a PG student:

“I think that good language skills ... [is] required for learning independently in HE. Without language expertness, no student can contribute in class, in discussion, in writing ... [they will] fail to avoid plagiarism... although I do not like too many assignments ... for students to know their lack of understandings and language mistakes ... as language is important for IL ”

These comments represent common ground for the argument that language skills not only impact on IL but also shape it as a fair academic practice of learning. For example, adequate language skills will allow students to participate in discussions and the classroom learning environment, as well as write successful papers that meet assessment requirements by avoiding plagiarism – an unethical practice of which students are not aware in the beginning of their studies, as they revealed. In this learning scenario, success can happen without the fear of failure or the temptation or unawareness to plagiarise.

Therefore, the clear impact of language on IL appears to exist and present the basis for a two-way discussion that language skills affect IL and that IL affects language skills too. This theory requires further intensive research as it has multiple perspectives to explore. The current study simply finds a two-way link between language skills and independent learning.

4.3.4 The Independent Learning Development and Support Influence

The idea of learning in HE raises multiple academic complications. While interviewing, the students first major concern revolves round academic language ability, and the majority of students strongly indicated that it is their language skills (and the lack of them) that sustains their dependence on teachers. For this purpose they expressed the need for continuous support. These students also felt that these issues healed with time because once used to the process, they found it easy to adopt IL patterns. For example, one student commented that:

“The course ... is satisfactory ... sometimes we don't understand that we [are being] asked from our teacher to explain more. IL is ... an integral part of my study ... it means learning by self.”

Another student indicated that:

“Whenever we used to ask ... our teachers, they used to tell us... you are doing masters; you should know everything though in the beginning ... [it is] difficult for me to adopt everything in the beginning ... difficult at the start ...”

A large number (8 out of 10) of students claimed to have adopted IL skills in the initial phase of interviews. When the question about “IL skills and related difficulties” was

probed, students could clearly link these concerns with the available resources. This connection means that the availability of resources may help in developing IL skills. According to these students, resources include internet and computer access, online resources, and campus facilities:

“Students in my country ... simply had no access to e-resources... they tend to prepare for exam ...[where] degree marks are valued in job market ... Resources make you take the initiative... you simply can't excuse [yourself] because everything is there ... you have to pick up and read ...”

Regarding IL, the majority of participants said that it is a common UK practice which essentially everyone has to adopt:

“Independent learning means learning by [one's] self which is common in UK and every student have to adopt it.”

“Independent learning ... need[s] a lot of information ... understanding from online materials.”

Another student has the same view:

“Independent learning ... is common here. If someone is not [an] independent learner then ... [they] cannot pass the exam and coursework ...”

The majority of students have knowledge about what IL means. They also have a view that IL is crucial for HE success, used by every student in one form or another:

“Independent learning is more effective and productive ... [it] enable[s] you do everything by your own. It ...[is] hard but very effective ... hard to understand ... independent study is time consuming.”

“Every student in higher education use[s] independent learning... [it] is a good practice for learning ... [and] enable[s] students' to learn themselves. ... [It mean[s] that students give more time to study instead of relying on teachers for explanation.”

There is a realisation that a level of achievement in IL skills can also have additional demographic influence and hence, realising its relevance, such demographic influence or prior learning of students was also explored (see previous **Section: 4.3**).

To summarise the above responses, independent learning is recognised by students as a practice of modern education. They consider IL part of higher education (HE) in the UK and the majority of students in the current sample are aware of the need for self-study

skills and its importance for their own success. According to students, IL is a useful educational strategy, allowing them to familiarise themselves with the practice during the course of their studies. There are indications by students that they might not succeed in their exams and assignments if they do not understand the nature of IL required in HE. Here, we note from the data that the majority of selected students are well aware of the IL as a learning process in the UK.

The research question concerning the current position of independent learning approaches of students in the UK was sub-divided to meet the objectives of the study:

- Student views about IL;
- Awareness of learning patterns in the UK;
- Influence of IL over learning strategies;
- Factors affecting the IL process (dependency and lack of IL skills); and
- Ways to adapt to the IL environment in the UK

First, the interviews were designed to establish students' views about IL patterns in the UK. During the first phase of interviews and questionnaires, the study confirmed that most students viewed UK learning as a preferred process. The study also established that students were aware of the existence of learning patterns in the UK and the way they were used. Students' views regarding the sub-questions c, d and e (above) were explored to probe and discern the influence of independence within the learning strategies, the adaption required for an IL environment and other factors affecting it. Hence, the study attempted to elaborate upon the emerging issues summarised in the bullet list above. These topics included the lack of IL skills among students; the link between dependency in prior learning and the current learning; and the effect of learning dependency on IL in the UK (see the forthcoming sections).

From the initial data, the study established that dependency in learning originated from students' previous learning experiences. It would appear that this dependency had a significant influence over learning experiences in the UK. It is an indication of new students' widespread concern about IL skills. The results from Stage One provide an insight into the lack of IL skills where students from the selected countries see support

as a crucial part of their learning progression. Hence, when students' views about the lack of IL skills were elaborated, one student commented that:

“In my home country, we used to write what the teachers were writing and explaining; so yes, we totally depended on teachers and private tuitions... Learning in UK is totally learning by [one's] own. ... it is the only learning way in UK. I have to learn [by] myself or else I will fail the exam or will not be able to write up [the] assignment”

The above comment hints that students were virtually spoon-fed in their home countries; but in the UK, they could have opted for a different strategy. The amount of pressure students feel because of inadequate preparation for the new learning environment is one reason they require more intensive support. Here, the significance of a prior educational context regarding approaches to learning emerges: in their home countries, students were less encouraged to take the initiative; yet in the UK, they are compelled, and may be encouraged, to learn independently.

Surprisingly, some students indicated that they were not totally dependent on their teachers; in fact, they had previously been learning somewhat independently. For example:

“I was taught ... in HE ... less by teachers and I had to study [learning] course materials myself. ... I learnt the same way as here ... but here teachers are more difficult in giving support ... home countries ... always helping in solving problems. ... marking assignment was not as strict [there] as in UK and we were always given support ...”

“...In the beginning it was difficult but ... I got used to it. My [prior] learning was too structured while here in UK, it is more IL ... and while despite initial learning difficulties and adjustment to the social culture, ... student[s] adjust to it with the passage of time.”

Here, the data demonstrates that students' prior learning was not totally a matter of dependence, as long as support was available to them; however the feeling of teacher-centeredness (passive), active learning, learning from course materials and learning from teachers is apparent. The significance of such a contradiction, where previously students indicated they were totally dependent, does not mean that all Asian students are dependent learners. For example, the case for dependence or independence might well be made in any learning environment where generalisation counts. The student, who

revealed that he/she was not previously too dependent on teachers, may contradict many expert findings, questioning conclusions of some of the previous studies on Chinese students. The same comments also suggest that although learning independently in the UK is initially difficult, they get used to it. Indeed, that process is a generic case in learning experiences which is a process normally established toward the end of final year studies, as students are given more responsibility for developing their own IL skills right from the beginning of their first year. The shift in approach to learning also confirms the notion of a scholastic experience that gradually acquaints the current students with a new learning culture. This theory seems to be a realistic identification of students who have similar learning requirements.

When discussing the level of IL skills expected in the UK, students commented on the degree to which they are not independent learners, and the need and importance for acquiring these skills. Students elaborated on their prior comments:

“More support from my teachers in learning ... [would] improve my learning ... I acquire more and learn less which is due to the ... learning in UK... [I am] given assignments or experiments ... that I have done the work; and then I know because I also consult ... friends ... [who] agree with the teaching and learning ... I find it hard to follow. But overall, I have the freedom to learn the[ir] way ... within the universities’ set methods.”

“Traditional ... solving problems with repetitions ... [I] may not forget but even then I sometime forget ... IL is hard ... but [I]would certainly prefer IL...”

The different degrees to which students had acquired IL skills were very clear from the above comments. Students referred to support as being vital for learning independently which helps them acquire new ideas for learning – shaping the way they approach learning. The students also indicated that they found it hard to follow learning on their own; these comments reveal a lack of IL skills. Students also mentioned that:

“I ... prefer direct learning for the initial stages of the learning ... [I] need much care and direct instructions ... independent learning [I] prefer for the graduation and post-graduation level. ... [I am] mature and they know how to approach the particular source for learning”

“In UK ... learning is practical ... searching for the materials and solving the problems. ... [or] self-learning. ... [is] gained through this method [and] is always practical and unforgettable ... but I find it very difficult ...”

“I used to study and learn through my teachers but in UK I learn myself which is fantastic but it is ... time-consuming. The good thing about IL is that I don't forget it once I learn”

The above comments indicate that while support is important for IL skills in HE, this type of learning was hard to acquire and time-consuming. However, once followed, it is remembered. More student comments followed a similar trend:

“I learn independently ... I have to discuss it with my friends and then search the materials but I need some support to go on the right way ...”

“I ... need support and I wish to have more support to build up my understanding the teachers won't help ... they will give me an appointment for an issue ... I have to wait and wait”

Students articulated the need for support both for self-learning in the UK and in their home countries:

“I prefer IL ... I have to give more time to learning which keep[s] me in touch with my learning process. ... [I] take help from my friends ...”

The above comments are endorsed by another student who is keen for the combination of IL skills and dependent learning. This preference does not mean that they want to be completely dependent in learning but simply signifies the tutor's role in harmonising teaching and learning practices. That distinction is due to their fear of being trapped in a single learning option:

“I would prefer a combination of both independent learning and dependent learning ... a balance so that we are not at risk to lose or [be] spoon-fed.”

Such comments recognise the potential of teacher support as a vital part of any generic approach, combined with ones' own efforts. There is no distinction between students of the three nationalities regarding the nature for support to learn independently. For example, Chinese students are more open to discussion of potential support in the context of learning independently, while Indian and Pakistani students do not openly reveal any potential during discussions. However, the level of support required is different: some Asians indicate the need for support from friends while others want it from their teachers.

Thus, students recognise the importance of IL and the reasons for considering IL an issue in higher education. In previous sections, students were probed to identify their awareness about IL, its importance and the possible issue they faced when trying to learn independently. One student, who attempted to clarify his /her views, comments:

“Based on prior [learning]... we were ... dependent on our teachers ... the source of transferring knowledge; but when [I] came to UK, [I] realised that IL is also possible as a good learning experience. ... [it] is easy, ... time consuming. It does not take much effort if someone has adequate language skills. I think that if students are inducted about its process, then every student will learn through ... an issue but a process of learning or an approach to learning ...”

This student called IL an issue on the basis of prior learning history due to not having experienced it in the home country. Previous comments are consistent with such remarks where students realised that IL was a valuable learning experience. There were some concerns, however, which included the necessary time and language skill level that it required. Lastly, students referred to the value of support from teachers as a helpful way of developing the learning skills required.

Therefore, three main concerns emerged about IL from the above comments: the required time, the necessary language skills and the needed support for students to succeed, despite their preference for it. When another student was asked to clarify, the response was:

“I think not to some extent ... but yes, IL is an issue when in broad terms. As everyone know[s] that IL is the only way to learn in HE; but some are good at it while others are not... (What about you?) I am ok with it, but as mentioned before, it will be much [more] easy to learn when one has good language skills which are necessary for making sense To write good thesis and assignments ... (Does support/help may improve this?) Yes, of course ...”

This is the same opinion that an earlier respondent had regarding IL: it was not a major issue for them because it was the only appropriate learning approach in UK higher education. The respondent also realises that the only difference among learners is that some are good at learning independently and some are not, a common aspect of an approach to learning. The student expresses his/her thoughts about the level of language skills and support required to facilitate IL, as indicated by the previous respondents;

thus linking the necessity of language skills with IL. Students also had consistent views with regard to the need for adequate support to enhance their IL skills.

Two repetitions were noticed: one regarding adequate language skills and the other the required support for improving IL skills. When other students were encouraged to clarify their views, the comments concerned the lack of training in prior learning and the significance of support as vital for IL success:

“I don’t think it is a major issue, but as I was not used to it, so I was having difficulties in the beginning which vanished away ... up to [a] great extent ... with the passage of time ... and teachers can help to make it easier ...”

These excerpts indicate a commonality of views among most students: IL was not a major issue because they adjusted gradually and the novelty was a result of minimal training in their prior learning experience. At the same time, students expressed the view that support eventually helps to facilitate IL.

When students repeatedly mentioned the significance of support, I was unaware of their reasons. When encouraged to clarify, they state that teachers in the UK are less supportive than those in prior learning:

“The problem in the UK ... teachers are less willing to help students and ... teach well. They are mostly working as guide[s who] just guide students and works goes on. The result is that students need to give much and extra time to studying and learning And if students do not do this, then it is impossible”

The above comments are again indicative of the emerging concern about non-supportive UK teachers. Indeed, the impact of minimal help is evident when it requires greater student effort to attain learning goals. While this endeavour is, in a sense, a positive aspect of IL, students see it as a negative element of gaining academic independence. Although students must contribute to their own educational process which enables them to learn independently, it would not be suitable nor practice for the purposes of IL if students are only novices and inexperienced. Hence, support may be helpful at certain stages or to certain limits but it is still vague as to how lecturers might help students in this process of IL. Thus support is seen only as a kick-starting aspect of students’ learning.

In a similar perspective, students' views about the IL facilitation show the consistency of similar and related concerns, as revealed by one of them in the following terms:

“The learning experience in UK is very helpful and is good for learning more efficiently. The only problem ... [is] feeling isolated and not aware how to proceed. The first fear I had was to express my views ... writing and fearing failure I am now feeling comfortable to learn myself but the first two years ...[were] too difficult. I was desperate for help. I was running after my course leader and friends ... teachers do not help ... expect students to learn themselves.”

Clearly, the above comments reveal that UK education is more satisfactory than that in the home country because of IL, and also highlight initial declining difficulties. Hence, learning independence is not a process beyond the ability of Asian students. Yet their training makes them rely on prior dependent learning. The more significant revelation is the fear of failure which could possibly be linked to the habits of memorisation and teacher-centeredness in prior learning that traps them in a worry some situation. Such fears could also result from a lack of an IL background. It also emerges that where learning practices are expected to be more student-centred, students in return expect support; at least support is seen as kick-starting element in initial stages while its provision at later stages stabilises their ambitions to learn by themselves. Breaking students' dependency can be painful; however there is a stronger link between support and the development of IL skills in higher education, combining the role of teachers and students to start breaking dependency not only procedurally but also with adequate interaction. This can only happen with better coordination among teachers and students to align IL as a practice of development.

4.3.5 Dependency Based Support to Independency in Different Disciplines

What constitutes learning support is viewed in different ways. Students in the current sample revealed that their ability to develop a learning process (of IL) and improve comes mainly with support from their teachers. For example, one student clarified the previous comments by saying:

“Support will facilitate the learning process more because as an international student, I need it at different stages of my study...”

Another student clarified his/her point that without support, he/she is unable to kick-start the IL as a process of studying. Support provided by teachers is the most useful in many disciplines for students; without this help, the majority of them seek alternative sources:

“My view about support is that it is part of the learning process. And yes, it is required for me at least. It helps me to learn and solve problems quickly ... one thing teachers need to understand in UK [is] that students need to be taught or else they will be taking help from others... It is still the same as students will take support from others if not provided by teachers Without support, we cannot learn properly.”

When the student was asked to clarify ‘why he/she is unable to learn properly without support,’ the response was:

“It depend[s on] ... what I am studying, at what stage I am studying and what my teachers expect from me... for example, if my teachers are putting too much pressure and restrict me in timing schedule, ... which is commonly the case in UK, ... I will need more support ... while in the case of a degree spread across many years, I may not require so much support... again, if I am studying finance subject, I won’t require much support but while studying a course of business, [it] will compel me for extra support ...this is what I experienced while studying [for] a diploma in finance and currently in MBA ... ”

When other students were encouraged to reflect on support in their subject areas, another respondent commented that:

“In UK, teachers do not help much in comparison to teachers in my home country. In my view, there are subjects which require more learning support than others. ...[In] the example of English, we need support in terms of writing skills but if we take physics, ... [we] need to learn more [by] ourselves than requiring support. Therefore, [the] ... nature of learning support is different in different subject areas ... still my subject area require[s] support at all stages.”

Here is an emerging trend which might be the result of subject-specific requirements in different institutions. Some subjects might not require intensive support for independent learning or language skills while others may need it at all times. Although these extracts suggest that students were well aware of the level and type of support required in their subject areas, they also hinted at the need for adequate English language ability and support towards achieving the required skills. In particular, students acknowledged that

support is vitally important while independent learning strategies in certain subjects. For example:

“If our teachers do not ... support us, then it is virtually impossible to learn this ... petroleum engineering. ... the way teachers provide support is different from what we initially were used to. Teachers in UK guide us instead of providing help and support. ... [This is] what compels us to learn by [one’s] self, which is still working. ... [it’s] difficult at the beginning but later on ... normal.”

The above comments show students’ emphasis that IL without support in some subject areas is hardly possible. Hence, the study consistently found that while support may not be required in all subject studies, there are some subjects which require support at all stages, particularly at the start of the course.

This student’s responses are different from some of the previous comments which suggest that support might be required in certain study subjects. It is clear from such comments that students need help in programmes requiring intensive study; this idea makes sense in terms of the pressure of an alien learning environment, exams in a foreign language and unfamiliar learning patterns – which are historically different from the ones experience in students’ prior learning and the reason for students’ high level of expectation.

Similarly another student revealed:

“When I departed for my degree in civil engineering, ... I was not aware that I will have to study too hard ... [I] carry out so many experiences, ... learn on my own ... maintain my learning consistency and improve writing and researching methods ... all such skills for a new learner are very difficult in the beginning and especially for those who are not willing to devote much of their time... if I was given good guidance and proper support, ... I think it would not be that difficult as it was for me ...”

The above comments can be seen as representing the student’s lack of knowledge about the way IL patterns work in the UK in different disciplines. In other words it hints towards the very process of learning in the UK in which they are under pressure because of the lack of support. At this juncture, it was necessary to further probe the student about the information available on studying, different subjects and learning in the UK, and the student’s knowledge about it. When the participant realised that British

universities are committed to providing professional support before and after arrival in the UK, including the benefits students can get from British qualifications; the interviewee suddenly interrupted the researcher with the following response:

“I was never given proper guidance and the agency which got me admission in UK never mentioned anything to me like this; rather, the agency man misguided me and cheated me ... telling me ... learning is easy in UK than China ... this was not the case and I faced lots of difficulties and lost [a] huge amount of money while seeking to take admission to low level course in a college which prepare[s] students for university course... it was a nightmare ... I can't believe this ... I will always advise my friends before they are coming to studying in the UK.”

Another Pakistani student commented:

“People in Pakistan are more interested in coming to the UK than wanting to know about the learning patterns in the UK ... initial learning support and support about the way learning works in the UK would be very useful for students I have seen many leaving their studies and trying to look for paid employment ...”

Such remarks represent a clear example of the lack of understanding that exists among students about the learning patterns in different subjects and levels in the UK. In addition, students' comments illustrate the scale of corruption in the international student recruitment process. At the same time it reveals the gap in understanding of the learning process which is crucial for the successful completion of studies, particularly in certain subjects.

For example, overseas recruitment agencies may have lured in students with false promises or twisted versions of the UK learning experience or else exploited them in visa pretence colleges – offering admissions in diploma level courses; it is also possible that students themselves were not interested in genuine studying or knowing more about the IL process in British institutions. The issue does not appear to be one of unprofessionalism of tutors, who might be doing their best to encourage more independent work; rather it is the students' lack of understanding that tutors want them to develop their own IL skills. Therefore, the depth of the problems faced by international students in the UK is wrongly conceived.

In addition to the above issue, Asian students, commencing their studies in genuine institutions, hold a generic perception that without support they are not able to adapt properly to a new learning environment and approach that is primarily independent and which is vital for the process of learning in different disciplines. They find the lack of support stressful, sometimes resulting in them ceasing their studies. Therefore facilitation, guidance or support are some of the main elements that can drive a way forward for students to align and steer their process of learning in the UK, leading a way for adaptation to the new learning environment. Based on students' perceptions, as identified, more interviewees were asked to clarify their perceptions. One student commented:

“The impact of guidance on IL is like to push-start when the learning is not working properly... IL can happen best when it is supported at different stages.... For example, I cannot learn everything myself and I need support at some stage which must be provided while ... required in my subject because it's too difficult.”

The above comment clearly indicates the impact of support for learning independently in different disciplines; at the same time it indicates that students do require support to enhance the process of learning. To start learning on one's own in different subject studies requires the provision of what is called 'adequate help and guidance'. In generic terms, student views indicate that support is useful for IL in addition to its requirement in different disciplines. However, it is still not clear why students feel they need support for IL across different subject studies when learning independently is in fact a process in which students need to apply efforts to learn on their own. With regard to this paradox, one student responded:

“Support helps in saving our time, solving problems, and learning ... from teachers who are [a] source of knowledge. If teachers do not provide support, as is the case in UK, then who ...? Support necessarily improves the ways to learn independently... when I say ... [I] require support ... I want to see the role of the teachers in teaching when ... [they are] expecting my role as a learner...”

Such comments indicate that the student needed support to save time; he/she recognised the role of the teachers in a novel way by confronting them, which helps students to improve the way they learn in different disciplines. These comments left the impression that by saving time, students were unwilling to devote more of it to their studies. Another student negated that interpretation in the following terms:

“I do not need to save my time for leisure but only to finish my studies within the university timetable... [they are a] stressing experience ... [I have] never done such learning before ... IL requires lots of effort If supported, [it] will help ease the process ... it's simple that I play my part and teachers play their part”

Responding to the above comments, students indicated that support was not intended for time-saving purposes but to overcome the problems of stress and the required independent work in their subject of studies which they had not previously experienced. Such comments certainly confirm the findings of previous studies (identified in the literature; see chapter two) noting that stress and anxiety are common issues among international students studying in the UK. The literature also supports the idea of providing students with enough learning support to enable them to learn independently; and the additional data suggests this approach to achieve the process of learning in different disciplines. However, the type of help students might need at different stages of study varies among students who reveal that initial support is essential to kick-start the learning and push-start the very process while continuous support is essential for achieving throughout the process of learning in different disciplines. Hence students' views clearly indicate that a considerable level of support must be available for them in the initial stages of their studies to accelerate the process of learning in the UK as a whole.

4.3.6 The Impact of Dependency on Independent Learning: Prior and UK Learning Perspectives

The influence of dependency is seen as a continuous challenge for the development of IL skills. When this issue was probed from student perspectives, there were different views and interpretations. The majority indicated that it was just a gradual process - an 'experiential learning process or a strategy by which students either acquire or develop different approaches to learning - which helps them adjust to the new learning environment. For example, during IL students take (and should take) initiatives, with tutors guiding them in the developmental process, rather than working as agents to transfer knowledge, even across different study subjects.

In contrast with the UK process, the transfer of knowledge is traditionally common in Asian countries, as students revealed above. Whilst discussing the impact of dependency on IL skills, one student mentioned that:

“During the course of my studies, I was stuck in between the line of my prior learning experience which was dependency and the IL skills required for learning in [the] UK. This was a terrible time in the course of my studies...”

Another student indicated that adjusting to the new learning environment was part of the pressure of potential exam failure:

“There is no other choice because it is the only learning way in UK. I have to learn myself or else I will fail the exam or will not be able to write up [the] assignment ...”

The above excerpts indicate that there exists on the one hand the phenomenon of ‘fear’, among students and on the other hand the lack of experiencing self-learning. For example, students without fear are likely to adapt to the new learning culture, developing the appropriate patterns of learning, more easily than others. In other words, those who experience the process of learning without pressure are likely to adapt to IL better than others. However, this fear is largely related to the students’ dependency in their prior learning environment which is now causing a problem for them in adjusting to their new learning environment, particularly in transforming their approaches into learning independently.

Elaborating on the response to the process of adjustment to IL, another student commented:

“In the beginning, it was difficult but with the passage of time I get used to it. My learning before [prior] was too structured while here in UK ... it is more independent learning ... despite initial learning difficulties and adjustment ... I think ... [I’ll] adjust ... with the passage of time....”

Such comments explain the adjustment necessary for an alien learning culture, given the students’ background in traditional learning.

The above comments are important for a number of reasons. Firstly, the students reveal prior learning experiences based on rote-learning and dependency; secondly, the same students are second-language speakers; thirdly, they are traditional learners; and finally,

above all, they understand what IL is about, although they might not understand its true principles. Thus the history of dependency largely creates a problem for students in transforming their prior approaches of learning into the IL ones which are practiced in the UK. For these reasons students responses led to the formation of the ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’ categories (analysed below).

4.3.7 Likes and Dislikes about UK Independent Learning and Prior Learning

As in previous sections, culminating in terms of ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’, the data reveals that students liked support but disliked dependency and the lack of resources in their prior learning environment; while they liked IL and the availability of resources, they disliked the lack of support in the UK. Although the majority of comments were strictly coded in two terms ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes,’ this distinction does not necessarily mean that they were the only terms with regard to the concerning matters.

Concerning the limits of clarity regarding differences in likes and dislikes, arguments about learning experiences represent the continuation of the previous section’s ‘impact of dependency over IL’. In order to analyse the data further, students’ views were analysed where differences were found. Combining both the previous and elaborated comments, it was possible to deduce its limitation to certain categories. In fact, one could possibly determine the relationship between such categories more clearly when the data is indicative of factors like lack of IL or resources and support which in other terms, relate to dependency and teacher-centeredness. Analysing such data further, the study noted an important point: there are both positive and negative views about prior and current learning. When students were asked about prior learning, three students commented that:

“It’s hard to memorise ... memorise everything. ... This is very difficult sometimes ... everybody is selective in studying. There was always [a] lack of resources and facilities which are extremely required ... won’t be able to enhance learning.”

“Guidance and support from teachers will certainly help learning by [one’s] own ...[I was] sometimes confused [by]what to do when I am stuck in an assignment and the teacher is not helping me,... I ... prefer to take some advice from my teachers....”

“We learnt the same way as in UK but here, teachers are more difficult in giving support while in my home countries, [and] teachers were always helping in solving problems.”

These comments suggest that students’ prior learning was selective for two reasons: first, the lack of resources and second, the prevailing memorisation and rote-learning trend. From the data, it is evident that the same students are asking for more support which they consider important for learning in the UK. This naïveté is clearly the result of their prior educational history (see **Section: 4.3.6**). Hence a clear preference for support is demonstrated when the interviewee distinguishes between the teachers in the prior learning environment and the UK. The study adopts a view that tutors serious about the ‘independent learning process’ have to provide students with some tutorial support; acknowledging the fact that teachers are less supportive in the UK. Providing minimum tutorial support might mean relying on guidance while allowing students to learn themselves and not allowing reliance on teachers alone. This argument begs a question: is support vitally important for all subject studies? (For full details see **Section: 4.3.5**).

Although the overall responses show that students are still learning despite what they consider the lack of support in the UK, the extent to which students learn may have implications in terms of achieving good results and developing the ability to think independently. At the same time, Asian students view the lack of support in a variety of ways; for some students, guidance alone is enough to adapt to the UK learning environment; for others, adequate support is required at all stages, particularly at the beginning of studies. Support is seen by the majority of these Asian students as a change in teachers’ approach to teaching in the UK, whereas in real sense teachers want their students to disagree rather than agree to the overall transmittance of knowledge. However students have clear indication of learning from teachers – which is normally known as teacher-centeredness. Similarly students’ views give clear indications that teachers are not complying with the way they feel teaching should be which they call ‘lack of support’. Despite their declaration that UK learning happens with some support and guidance, and requires more effort on their part, it also indicates that students

gradually adapt to the IL environment. This description leads me to categorise what is best seen by students in the UK and prior learning environments in comparison to the negative aspects.

Hence, students' level of educational achievement in UK learning is not yet clear to the extent that they develop IL skills. Although the achievement of IL is a useful and positive aspect of students' approaches to learning, the liking for certain aspects shows a shift from traditional to non-traditional learning patterns; these new learning approaches are more innovative or independent than the previous ones. Meanwhile, the way these students can successfully shift from traditional to non-traditional patterns of learning or become successful independent learners is reliant on the adjustment journey, despite their verbally declared preference for UK-based patterns of learning. Hence there is a clear indicated route from disliking factors to those of liking and adjustment journey.

4.3.8 From Disliking to Liking and Adjustment Journey

Learning in UK higher education may not be exam-specific – when education is designed to pass an examination – to the same extent as the Chinese, Indian and Pakistani education systems. In the United Kingdom, the emphasis is on independent learning with guidance rather than completely dependent learning; the focus is more on outcomes than the process itself, more on problem-solving than memorisation. In the UK, students learn independently but they are assessed to a level of reaching the learning outcomes.

Students' comments about 'positive and negative categories' revealed a consensus regarding independent learning skills, as well as the dependent, rote, and exam-oriented learning approach, learning support and resources. The study found in earlier sections that students unanimously preferred IL and the availability of UK resources, in contrast to dependent learning and lack of resources in their countries; at the same time, students disliked the lack of UK learning support, as compared to the availability of support in their home countries (see **previous Section**). The categories of liking and disliking, which emerged as a result of the student perceptions, are shown in the following table.

Table 4.3: Main Themes of Prior and UK-Based Learning

Likings (UK)	Disliking (UK)	Liking (prior)	Disliking (prior)
Independent learning	Less support	Enough Support	Lack of IL
Enough resources			Lack of resources

Regarding the dichotomy in these categories, I as a researcher have a preconception that no student would see the lack of resources as a positive factor for learning; it was also difficult to understand the reasons that students disliked the lack of support in the UK when they clearly preferred IL patterns. For myself, there was my own personal experience during adjustment to the new learning environment, one in which timely-support was crucial to kick-start the process and become an independent learner.

It is obvious that a change in approach would require the abandonment of some pre-existing ideas and patterns which would be the preference for IL, in contrast to the lack of it in the prior learning environment. One student commented:

“In my home country, the learning was different than UK. ... simply, we were learning, memorising ... and teachers were teaching and teaching... here in the UK, it is to learn by [one’s] own which means that I have to study and learn myself... this is a good experience and therefore, we learn a lot while in my home country, we were limited to certain books of studies which was even difficult to cover....”

Based on the above comments, in addition to previous related ones, the data suggests that a change in one’s approach to learning is a positive experience; as a result, the student is able to learn and explore on a far wider scale, compared to his/her learning options in the home country.

Similarly, another student indicated that learning by one’s own is a good experience for studying and exploring new ideas; while at the same time, it is necessary to have enough training to learn independently in the UK. Without support and guidance, it is difficult and time-consuming (see previous comments) to start the process of learning on one’s own. Similarly, another student commented:

“The good thing about learning in UK is to learn and explore new ideas by [one’s] self which was not available in my home country ... at the same time, it is hard to learn by [my]self without having the background and training of doing so; therefore, I need my teacher to help me ...”

The liking for support which according to students is normally not available to them is a result of seeing that support as a boost to the learning process, as well as to starting it. For example, another student indicated:

“Learning support is only to bring us on the mainstream position of learning properly ... but not providing any help would mean that teachers do not care about students like us ...”

The concept of lack of support is thus widely understood by students in the current study. The matter of learning support for an overall number of international students requires further in-depth study to investigate the necessary, stage-wise and continuous support needed in different disciplines and at different times. Such ideas also obscure the concept of support for wider aspects of learning from the socio-cultural perspective (refer to the next **Section: 4.3.10**) where tutorial support is pursued to initiate any IL at all.

4.3.9 Framing Financial Concerns in the Light of Learning Experiences

Exploring students’ financial issues and its influence on their independent learning experiences in the UK, the questionnaire data suggests that although around 80% of students were confident or very confident of completing their current studies with success; this success depended on the financial situations they faced.

During the interviews, it was revealed that the majority of participants were concerned about financial matters. For example, students felt that the high tuition fees and living costs make it difficult for them to afford UK study without employment. In some student views, they were enticed into these universities with the promise that it would not be difficult to learn/study and find part-time, possibly, full-time work in the UK. For example, students commented that:

“The costs in China are five times less than here. Tuition fee and accommodation costs are too much ... I was cheated by agent ... [that] getting degree in UK is easy. This is not true ...”

Other students noted:

“It’s not an issue because I am supported by my parents... I have to show good results to my parents ...”

“... It was an issue. Without part time job, it was very hard to survive ... my university ... helped me financially ...”

These comments indicate a mix of views that some students supported by parents or sponsors do not feel the financial strain while others consider it a real problem which ultimately influence their attention to their studies – which are driven by the way IL practices are practiced in the UK. Certain comments from students indicate that financial strains could also precipitate the discontinuation of studies:

“Finance is also a big issue because of which some students couldn’t complete their studies as they are financially weak.”

These comments also suggest the overall perceptions of students about fee ratios, accommodation costs, living expenses; and the possible prospect of working in the UK. At the same time, these students realise the value of such a large investment by expressing the fear of failure in exams. They realise that financial issues are affecting their very approach to learning, potentially causing them to abandon it. However, the financial burden is also broadening their minds about whether to learn seriously, which is normally taken as IL and also required in the UK, or face failure:

“The main difficulties ... [for the] international student are finance - accommodation and tuition fees ... beyond our imagination.”

“Tuition fee and accommodation costs [are]... too much ... [I] feel worried about my result. (What result?) I think that if I fail then I don’t have [any] choice”

Linking the literature from the impact of part-time work on Chinese students and the burden of huge tuition fees during the course of changes in immigration rules has shaped numerous troubles for students, particularly in the course of IL development. Thus, at this stage I sought to determine student perceptions about the topic of UK immigration and employment to explore the link between the financial constraints and independent learning. Students were encouraged to discuss the financial challenges of their studies and whether finance could influence their IL in the UK. There were many accounts from students regarding part-time employment, particularly the ones who are

only in the UK to work instead of study; interest in working is what is normally seen as a diversion from studying, jeopardising their learning prospects. Interestingly the phenomenon of economic immigrants came up. One of them commented that:

“Nowadays ... very few opportunities of jobs searching for [a]job for so many months ... as [a]genuine student, it is hard to study full time and [the]majority of employers are offering full-time jobs... colleagues work full time ... they are not allowed to work FT, .. [I am] looking for part time work ...”

When students were asked whether financial problems were recent or had been present from the beginning, the following student indicated:

“I am self-funded but my father [who]sent me the full tuition fees ... parents [are]expecting me to work part-time [I] was promised part-time work when recruited in my country ... [I]was told ...[it was] easy to work during the study ...[I] will easily find a job Things are different here ... I intend to finish my studies and return to my country...”

In this regard, another respondent revealed that:

“There are students who do not study at all but work FT ... some students work more than FT hours ... have no intention of studying ...[some] looking to settle in UK ... some marry European upon lump-sum of money to get permanent stay ...”

So far, the most striking revelation by students is real-time financial difficulties whilst studying; only those students interested in paid employment without paying attention to studies are differently noted from the literature.

From the analysis of the above data, three categories of students emerged in relation to financial difficulties, out of which some are affecting their IL approaches. The first category includes those students who come to the UK with alleged sponsorships from agencies and governments etc. who are affected by their sponsors' financial commitments; the second category include those who are normally called economic migrants who have real intentions of working rather than studying; and the third involves financially stable and rich students who take paid employment without needing it. For the latter category, the likely reasons for financial embellishments are boredom with long hours of study or greed for money. The remaining students fall under two broad general categories: genuine students and economic migrants. Genuine students

are those who focus on their studies from the moment of their arrival in the UK despite the changes in their financial circumstances or financial difficulties; and economic migrants who come on student visas to settle in the UK and work. These economic migrants might typically come from a lower social background. While this opinion might be applicable for some students, there are consistent reports about others taking full time (FT) employment, as confirmed by students in previous comments.

My personal experiences, as a researcher, with colleagues may well suit the current discussion. Many of them were seen as ‘decoy-students’ (students registered for the purpose of complying with the immigration rules and not for genuine studies) in colleges, particularly in London areas. The majority of such colleges have been discovered by UKBA and disciplined with drastic changes to immigration rules. Previously, students used to pay a nominal sum of money to maintain their student status or to accompany British or European nationals in order to stay in the UK. The purpose was clear: they were simply economic migrants in the name of students. However, there are other students, for example some Pakistani, for whom their circumstances changed upon arrival in the UK; one reason for this change was the prevailing violence in Pakistan, and as a result their economic situations worsened. Hence students may not have been able to rely on their sponsors for funding. The resulting financial troubles have led some students to divert their attention to employment rather than developing the required IL skills in the UK.

Thus, it seems somewhat disingenuous to label a group of students as either economic migrants or genuine students. It is possible that students with fewer financial problems might not seek paid employment and focus on their studies, developing more independent learning skills, to attain better results and secure a brighter future. Some students, even with financial strain, might well be able to secure funding from other agencies, their parents or friends. When one student was asked about his financial difficulties, he/she responded:

“Initially I got funding from a French agency but later I was not getting my allowance [s] ... my living costs were getting [to me] too late... my friend helped and I lived with him for some time ... but I managed to study so far ... [I] tried to take part-time work but study requirements did not allow such... [I]

got a bursary from my university ... every student face[s] it but some manage it while others don't."

The above comments represent an example of students with funding support from organisations which pledge funding but do not keep their commitment, thus endangering students' careers by not providing the promised financial support on time.

Anecdotal evidence about a colleague may be relevant here. A student came to the UK on funding from the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. Upon completing his first year of study, the HEC suspended funding to students throughout Western countries in 2010. His dilemma meant that he would either need to seek alternative funding or paid employment in the UK. He finally managed to fund his studies through partial parental support and with some paid employment. In such cases where students are determined to complete their studies, they plan ahead without relying on a single source. When one respondent was asked about his/her intentions after studies, the comments were:

"I will go back to my country because I can get good employment ... there. This degree will help me a lot ... here; I don't want to waste my time"

The above comments are reflective of those genuine students who come to Britain for the purpose of enhancing their learning, broadening their employment prospects in their home countries. But the financial strain clearly presents a hurdle or barrier to achieving the desired UK qualifications, which essentially requires the skills to learn independently, as was the case with another student:

"I used to work part-time in university café ... then focused on my studies when funding arrived from my agency... [be]cause it was difficult for me to work and study at the same time... other students still do it ... some even work more than their study hours."

Such comments suggest that if students are provided with timely funding, the majority are likely to focus on their studies and develop IL skills. Anecdotal evidence such as that mentioned above might not suit those students with inclinations toward economic prosperity during study time. Hence, the intentions of economic migrant students regarding studying and working may vary and could possibly be examined in a broader framework. Thus, it is clear from some studies and the majority of comments that

economic migrants are still a major factor in the UK and that financial difficulty of students from the selected countries are multi-fold in nature, the extent of which is yet to be revealed. However, it is clearer that in the case of financial issues, students divert their attention to working which jeopardises their ability to give enough time to learning independently. As a result, the whole process of learning, which requires more self-directedness, becomes uncertain.

4.3.10 Socio-Cultural Adjustment Journey

In the case of socio-cultural issues, students expressed different views about the social settings in UK higher education. As a result of the data analysis and coding process, the main categories, including socio-cultural adjustment, that emerged link to the very development of IL.

When discussing the socio-cultural settings in the UK learning environment, students revealed that their preconceptions about UK learning were actually different, and they later recognised that the UK social system has the capacity to integrate people well from other cultures; however this was not the case with all students. When some participants were asked about socio-cultural concerns, one student was critical of the openness between teachers and students, the way they interact with teachers and the way IL works in the UK; and mentioned:

“I think that culture has great influence ... in my class [where] students are very open with their teachers and I still think that teachers should not be challenged this way and I feel very much respect for them.”.

These comments highlight the difference in Asian and western culture. Western culture is more open to questioning and interaction, which is set to develop IL as a result of challenging others views. However in the above comments, the students are critical of the openness and frankness with teachers whom they consider as worthy of a kind of respect they think is right. This, questioning style of the students, is seen as disrespect in Asian culture. However, this practice in the UK is part of socialising in classrooms and developing patterns of independent thinking and problem-solving; raising more awareness about the development of critical thinking skills.

Another participant hinted that social norms are always different in reality. In other words, socialising in the UK varies from the process in the student's home country while at the same time, admitting that it is not a major issue:

“Socialising in this country is different ... the way students are having social parties ... unacceptable but ... with time, I realised that we Asian students also socialise but differently. We ... spend time with our colleagues. ... I think that social issue is not ... for me.”

The above comments indicate that students clearly notice a difference from Asian culture, while admitting that everyone has their own way of socialising. Thus the student does not see the social issue as a major concern. However, another student felt that it was very difficult to integrate into an alien learning environment; it was nevertheless surprising to see the level of adjustment in institutions and the degree of understanding between institutions and their students.

For example, a student commented that:

“Asian students like me always find it hard to mix with British people ... but it is easy [for me] to mix with students in universities ... learning environment [in the UK] is so [developed in a way] ... that makes it easy for someone to adjust [successfully].”

Another student indicated that he/she could easily meet his/her Asian colleagues but did not have English friends:

“I don't know but people are normally good ... In India in some [universities]... there is also co-education. Me and my friends meet ... sometime have parties. I spend most of time in the study; meet ... many Indians, and Pakistani. ... I don't have any English friend[s] ... they think themselves superior than us.”

This view flows parallel with previous findings. For example, a Chinese student previously hinted that cultures differ in terms of showing respect for teachers, i.e. “UK students do not show respect for their teachers the way Chinese students do”. However this cultural variation does not necessarily mean that British students do not respect their teachers. Rather, they show respect in a different way than Asian students. Such perceptions indicate cross-cultural differences in terms of understanding the very nature of social settings. For example, another Chinese student further indicated that the social structure in his/her class is an issue and that students take teachers for granted there:

“Chinese culture is different but here students don’t respect teachers. It’s a problem because teachers are too easy in UK... and this is an issue on the base of social settings...”

Regarding the above comment, another student commented that his/her social upbringing was different and hence, it was hard to integrate easily into a different culture and different learning environment. That view is not a surprise when other students have the same views, mentioning they normally socialise with their fellow Asian colleagues rather than with their Western counterparts:

“We are here in ... for a part of time and have to go back our home country. So it is very difficult to adopt the culture for some time I think that friendship ... or social life of most of the foreign students ... [is] limited to the university; outside the university they prefer to live with their own community ... own culture.”

Such comments confirm that these Asian students normally feel more comfortable socialising within a homogenous group and where language is a major influence factor, as the data reveals in previous sections. Some students view social differences as part of cultural differences and express the opinion that social settings within the UK sometimes feel dangerous for them. For example, one student commented:

“Culturally Asian students are different, socially ... different ... difficult to mix with British people. I feel uncomfortable to go to social parties ... drunk and speaking in bad language ... becoming violent which is dangerous ... is not an issue for my learning.”

The above comments highlight the students discomfort with other western students who socialise their way; however this does not represent a danger for other students. When students were asked whether they take a different meaning from social norms in the UK, their perceptions were:

“Social norms in Asian countries have different meaning...our social activities [and], cultural interactions are totally different... than students, Western and UK students”

“... One of the big issues in UK ... student come across different students ... who have different cultural, religion and social backgrounds... are social ... [having such] difficulties.”

To understand the true sense of socio-cultural factors, students’ views reveal that although they are culturally different from their Western counterparts and their prior

social up-bringing varies; it is not seen as a major problem by most students, because they can adjust to the new social setting with the passage of time, as the data suggests. These comments made by students hint that although there is some level of integration problem in the diverse learning culture of independent learning, the overall number of students feel that the level of social adjustment and independent learning improves over time. Hence we can note that there appears to be a fair ratio of variance in students' understandings regarding the social setting and adjustment journey – which ultimately has consequences for the learning experiences and independent approach to learning.

4.3.11 Adjustment to Independent Learning Environment

Initial data, concerning the influence of IL over prior educational experience, indicates that there is a consensus among students in the current sample regarding 'likes' and 'dislikes', as analysed earlier. Whilst developing these arguments, students were encouraged to elaborate on their responses relating to the effects of the adjustment process in their new learning situation which mostly requires scholastic independence – independence in developing critical thinking skills, understanding, and knowing and utilising the resources.

Typically, the adjustment experience within a new learning environment is largely exhausting for students when teaching and learning methods are alien to them. When students were asked about their opinions concerning their prior learning experiences and the adjustment to an IL environment, they commented:

“Yes, in [the] homeland ... I was mostly dependent on my teachers. Because our brought up from the school life was such that we never use[d] to study independently and I think it reduces the thinking ability when taught by teachers”

“Here in UK ... I regularly attend my class lectures and also participate in the class group discussion ... I also use course books, ... of related topics ... and particularly the Internet ... [an] easy source of getting knowledge ... after all it's learning by own ways[we had] fewer resources ... in home country; the learning process was dependent and bookish ... but the system [there] is gradually changing to autonomous learning ...”

The above extracts refer to a mix of views about prior learning experiences and the transition to new learning experiences in the UK. Student views relate to two broad

categories: dependency in prior learning and autonomy in the current UK learning. Dependency and independence in learning are all influenced by the level of (socio-cultural) adjustment students achieve in the UK. Moreover, students elaborated on their views, based on previous findings in earlier sections, which they expressed to form a basis for the argument that ‘students were previously dependent, which they dislike now’. It means that adjustment in the UK enables them to realise their positive attitudes towards IL in the UK. This argument represents a shift in approaches to learning where students were previously dependent learners but now prefer IL. A question arises as to why they dislike prior approaches and why they now prefer IL and this dichotomy does not make sense. In such a case, when a student was reflecting on his/her own learning experiences, the comments were:

“In my home country, there were [a] lack of resources ... [it] hurdled me [to] learn independently ... in UK, I always feel comfortable to learn ... resources are available all the time; for example, in my home country, we had issues of power failure, Internet problem[s] and above all, the use of such resources ...”

Such comments indicate that the availability of UK resources was very helpful in the adjustment process - an ‘essential requisite’ for IL. In fact, student views essentially changed with the notion that dependence reduces productivity and initiative. Hence, the independent learning process, based on adequate resources, is required for adjusting to the new learning environment.

According to students, the adjustment process is dependent upon many influencing matters, including the correction of student misunderstandings about UK cultural values; the achievement of clarity regarding the IL environment; utilisation of the English language; and the development and use of IL skills, all which have been analysed earlier in detail. Alternatively, successful learning is indeed the result of successful adjustment, as students revealed; while Asian students recognise the potential of closer interaction with British students, they do not practice this and simultaneously demand a similar interaction with teachers. All this confusion is disruptive to their adjustment journey to the IL environment.

A similar revelation is also apparent in students’ further comments that, language skills are also vital for adjusting to the new learning culture where the their adjustment

process also depend on prevailing cultural misconceptions. Despite the view that the Western learning culture is more individualistic than the more collectivist Asian one, this confusion can probably increase misunderstandings with other traditions; perhaps these misunderstandings already exist.

However, the conflict between cultural backgrounds must not be overestimated because the majority of students ultimately adapt to the UK culture as indicated by an overwhelming majority of students in the current sample. Whether Asian students are able to adapt quickly or not, a strategy for the transition to the new teaching and learning environment is essential to enable them to think and process change in their own way without complaining and criticising others. Students' typical complaints and criticism are caused by feelings of loneliness and isolation, as apparent from their comments, where they find themselves during their early UK studies. So a question arises, why not let these students learn in their own way, i.e. as they did in their prior learning setting? In contrast students have clearly indicated their preference for IL, and not for prior learning. The major question is how they can better adjust to the new IL environment.

Conversely, it would seem that the lack of resources or lack of understanding of their appropriate use is seen as an impediment in the adjustment process. For this reason, some students find it exhausting to learn about the available resources before applying them to their subject-studies. There is also not a surprise that many other Asian students may find it too hard to learn using resources and other facilities, including the use of data analysis software etc., without adequate support. Thus, as a matter of changing the educational environment, the chances are high that older students – students of mature ages who are novices to IT usage – might face this issue in particular. My own narrative might help to elaborate on this issue when a large number of students were gathering to discuss to the use of the software they did not experienced in the past; and there is a possibility that older students might need extra support in comparison to other younger Asian students to adjust to the new IL environment. However, the current study could not locate this age-related difference in the adjustment journey to IL.

4.4 Summary

The summary of the overall data reveals that interconnected issues, both generic learning issues and specific issues, with the development of IL are impediments to studying in the UK. Emergent categories were classified on the basis of good and bad experiences and students' preferences for the old or new. Liking support in prior learning while liking the availability of resources and IL skills used in the UK were noted as the main themes, as were a dislike for the lack of resources, the dependency on prior learning, and less support in the UK. Differences in viewpoints about preferences for learning patterns, i.e. transitioning from dependent learning to IL, were noticed as a clear change in students' approaches. In other words, students have indicated a shift in their learning patterns from dependent to independent and improving their chances to become successful independent learners. The analysis also shows that learning attitudes vary across different disciplines.

Major issues were identified including learning, finance, language, IL, prior learning habits of memorisation and teacher-centeredness. These subjects are characterised by dependent learning and adjustment elements in the key areas arising from the data at the end of Stage One. Other themes examined in Stage Two related to the effects of dependency on IL. The same students considered IL gradual and difficult without support, which they considered important for the development of IL skills. Although the type of support required by Asian students also varies in both prior and UK education varies, it is seen to have a closer connection with the development of IL skills.

Financial issues were present among self-funded, scholarship-based, and parent-sponsored students. Two broad categories of students were identified which included economic migrants and genuine students from across a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds. The need to work full-time in order to study in Britain is an issue for students, regardless of background, which proves significant in relation to learning; in particular to the development of IL. The data also reveals that overseas students study primarily for postgraduate qualifications, despite having prior postgraduate degrees from their home countries.

The analysis of the overall data also indicates that process of learning is complex for students of diverse cultures studying in the same learning environment while facing similar factors or issues which drive or hinder the development of learning independency.

The levels of both written and oral skills required for learning were probed to examine the extent of lingual challenges for students in HE. It emerged that students consider English language skills crucial to becoming independent learners. Students also viewed support as a key requirement for their HE success. From student perceptions it appears that language difficulties are more common in writing than speaking; however, competency in both areas is important in specific subjects. Language issues were found in some subject studies despite the students' declaration of English Language Tests - necessary aspects of the recruitment process. It was found that language difficulties originate from prior learning practices where writing and speaking skills are not included in assessment methods. A clear indication that students' ability to cope with language problems would help them adjust to IL is apparent from the transient nature of language problems among students even where the need for support was expressed.

It was interesting to note that students considered learning support essential to overcome language difficulties, which had a major impact on the process of developing IL. It was found that students' initial enthusiasm towards their studies in the UK mislead them at the assessment stages, where they found themselves trapped in an educational culture beyond their comprehension in the early stages, a realisation they understood as their studies progressed. Students realise that additional generic learning support is very positive for their adjustment to IL in the UK, as they only discover UK learning patterns upon their arrival.

As the study explored the impact of support on language skills it was also found that the students' perceptions about their prior education – the practice of traditional learning with the memorisation required for rote learning and exams – have now changed.

Student perceptions also showed that the preference for the positive aspects mentioned above would lead to successful adjustment to the new academic environment, often called 'widening participation.' Student opinions also revealed that upon abandoning their mono-ethnic communication and mixing within a wider community - where English is spoken daily, the adjustment process could be achieved.

Regarding cultural issues, students expressed mixed views and indicated that while social factors are generally not affecting their studies, it is an issue for adjustment. Hence, the study opts to conclude that the significance of social issues does not affect learning strategies; rather, it is significant only in terms of academic social life within the UK.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSIONS OF OUTCOMES

5.1 Introduction

As a result of student perceptions, data analysed and discussed in the previous chapter, the following findings, suggest common grounds for the development of independent learning (IL) approaches. The discussion about the IL development is engulfed by some associated issues which cause difficulty for students in higher education (HE). These perceptions, which reveal academic as well as cultural concerns, form the basis of the study, relating the ways students tackle the demands of the UK teaching and learning environment which particularly helps in the development of IL skills.

The academic aspects of the findings are the most relevant because from an educational perspective, as Rogers (2003) outlines that learning is best considered a process that goes through certain changes, and is recognised by students' themselves. In the case of learning in a second-language environment, there is clear evidence of a process of gradual change in the way students learn or develop patterns of IL; however lingual difficulties, which still exist, influences and decelerates the process of IL development. With regard to the literature, the notion of similar problem has been described as a case of continuous major issue, for example, Bennell and Pearce's (2003) view is that 'language will remain a major problem;' and simply it cannot be ignored because English is now an international language and the main mode of communication (Dedoussis, 2007). The role of competence in language is dominantly noted in the development of IL issues among sample students. Therefore, as language ability improves, it causes a gradual but relative change in students' behaviours of academic adjustment as well as in the development of IL. Simultaneously as IL improves, the language skills also improve.

Analysis of the data also indicates the need for a teacher-centred approach which gradually transforms into a student-centred one. Thus, with emergence of IL as a preferred study method, it is easy to see that 'the environment' has an active role in shaping learning as an active process; from students' perspective we can also see the flexibility for a necessary shift in the learning approaches adopted by them. This gradual

shift in the learning process is seen by students as well; however, the change reflects the acquired learning as a, behavioural, change in prior learning which is succeeded by IL through overcoming numerous associated and influencing factors (see Hopkins, 2008; Maunder, Gingham & Rogers, 2009 for transition issue). Its importance also lies in the multiple factors that influence the depth of a process of learning. This observation was noted from students' experiential accounts of learning.

From the data analysed earlier in Chapter Four, there are seven major strands that drive students' ambitions of IL development in the UK:

1. An alien or unfamiliar second/foreign language learning environment;
2. The issue of academic writing and expert communication approach;
3. The challenge of learning independently;
4. The lack of support from teachers in different aspects of learning;
5. The persisting influence of prior learning issues in developing IL;
6. The trend of mismatch in some 'likes and dislikes' factors in relation to IL; and
7. The adjustment challenge in the UK learning environment.

The real interest of the study, as previously mentioned, is the students' (experienced) developmental process of IL that has now emerged from the data. The data revealed it is the process of developing into UK independent learners from a prior different 'dependent' approach; this process represents more significance than the product itself. These developments, integrated with previous studies and identifying new ideas – showing more meaningful interpretations and insights than previously claimed – are discussed below.

5.2 Summary of Facts in Literature and Findings in the Current Study

Indeed, as identified in the previous chapter, students come to UK education with certain abilities and ambitions. Yet they do find academic support (Li & Campbell, 2006), which Lin (2008) calls facilitation, an important component for adjusting to a new learning environment. In particular such adjustment, as data analysis reveals, is

crucial for students to adapt the skills to learn independently in the UK. Importantly facilitation, as a support factor, is also seen by sample students to kick-start the learning process of IL which somehow contrasts with previous claims, i.e. UKCOSA (2006) and David et al., (2009) stressed providing initial cultural support to international students, and Hall (2007) stated that pre-teaching materials help students to successfully adjust to the new learning environment. Smith (2008) suggests the notion of providing students with opportunities of partial tutor support to ease the learning process; however students in the current sample have strong feelings for coordinated interaction with teachers to transform the learning approaches into IL. Meanwhile, the case for academic support is seen by students, differently from the literature, as essential to ‘kick-starting the process of IL’.

To overcome and enhance the socio-cultural adjustment challenge (Coles & Swami, 2012), the results for learning (Munro, 2006) and IL are encouraging (see Bernier et al., 2005) in transitional arrangements, however such outcomes are not only based on students perceptions, that a successful transition is possible with a multi-ethnic (language) communication approach - where students accept and communicate with those from different nationalities, instead of using mono-ethnic communication - limiting themselves to people from the same ethnic background to communicate (refer to Kuiper & Tan, 2007) but also on essentialist beliefs – which means “*that there is a common core of knowledge that needs to be transmitted to students in a systematic, disciplined way*” (Cohen, 1999) - where the core principles are taught to them in order to facilitate the adjustment journey of foreign students. Essentialist views are important to consider because, in a sense, by similar ways ethnic tension in a learning environment can be voided where some students may lag behind in learning than those who have lingual competence.

The current study has not observed any issues of ethnic tension among sample students adapting to UK higher education, however there exists a shadowing influence of matching adjustment issues among all of them; all which may explain why they inherit similar prior learning patterns in contrast to what is found in the literature, i.e. Chinese as Confucian heritage culture (CHC) and Indian and Pakistan as non-CHC students.

Similarly, the findings of Forland (2008) and Xie's (2009) studies, suggesting an increase in divisions among Asian and Western students in the West, are not relevant in case of the current students' adaptation process as they are no more significant in influencing students' development of IL practices. Even if there were different influencing factors that could lead further to academic achievement gaps, they could not simply jeopardise the learning process; instead they could enhance the element of greater diversity, as revealed by Lee and Anderson (2009). Huang (2012) also suggests that a support system could address some influencing factors of students' learning, at some level, and benefit all international students (p.144), leaving a knowledge gap for researching students in an alien learning environment with its inherent culture shock. Addressing these gaps is what applies to the current study regarding academic and cultural challenges of the UK's diverse international student population.

Framing the literature, in the last decade, learning-approach studies tried to reinterpret the perceptions of Chinese (Wu, 2008; Tian, 2008) and other East Asian students (Nield, 2007) separately; meanwhile, the current study has tried to challenge their narrow focus by involving Chinese, Indian and Pakistani students perceptions who may vary in terms of culture but share many academic similarities (Mukhtar et al., 2011). Therefore, this study has led to new findings that somewhat negate previously held beliefs about Asian students on a much wider scale.

The discussion of how learning happens best is not simply about the individual's learning abilities itself; this study is comprised of multiple academic and cultural aspects which influence the learning process - often practiced as IL in the UK. Understanding a complex relationship among different learning aspects that have transformation effects over the process of learning, student' perceptions were essentially helpful to gain their cognitivists understandings. For example, the notion of a teacher assisting process of learning with actively-involved students might be helpful for the purpose of elaborated discussions. I argue that the cognivist' relations are more likely to play a major role in the learner's education because students, in the current sample, are both teaching-tended (reclined to the role of active teaching) and learner-centred (motivated to learn independently). This study, using a larger and more varied sample

than previous studies, chose selected nationalities with important and varied learning experiences which include memorisation, rote, self- and teacher-centred learning. Upon deducing the results from a variety of data collection techniques, the current study identified specific issues to develop a theory of “learning approaches” to discuss how students develop the IL skills. Therefore, before reflecting on the theory of “learning approaches”, it is essential to present its theoretical conclusions with regard to “academic” and “cultural” perspectives as detailed below.

5.3 Academic Perspective

According to Guglielmino (2008), humans need to learn and re-learn and this demand cannot be met nor adequately applied in any institutionalised setting (Reeves, 2006). Vermunt and Vermetten (2004) on the other hand believe that there is strong interplay between self-regulation and external-regulation in the learning environment which may vary, depending on the institution (p.381). The authors left a gap concerning favourable learning patterns in different learning environments and suggest further research; the current study fills this gap with student input from prior and current learning situations, creating a link with the objectives of the current study and the current findings.

In fact, a recent article by Sharma (2012) would fit discussing the goals of this study by examining the effect of students’ prior learning experiences in Asian (home) countries of tutor-centred culture and exam-orientation tendency. The article notes a tutor (King’s) perspective in the following words:

“Panic comes from the exams themselves. If there was no examination in Hong Kong, no matter what I say or look like, they would not come to me.”

In the same article, an Indian student indicates:

“Tutoring is a way of boosting confidence and self-knowledge as much as ability and subject knowledge. They are often much greater hurdles to get past than lack of understanding.”

And a Chinese teacher mentions:

“Pressure of Hong Kong students is immense, and therefore many parents and students look for tutors to aid them in their studies.”

Similarly a Pakistani student is quoted in the same article:

“People who are rich are more likely to succeed because they can 'buy' an education, but that doesn't mean that spending money on private lessons and tutors is going to help your grades. It all depends on the student and if someone isn't succeeding simply by going to classes and studying alone, then they might need a tutor” [online].

The above extracts represent an overall picture of what is tagged as traditional learning for Asian students as seen in many other studies (e.g. Ali, 2005; Islam, 2009; Shen, 2007) who could benefit from a similar assistance in the UK; such comments were typically parallel in this study, as well as scarcely predominant in the literature. Ironically, students studying in the UK indicated a dislike for most prior learning practices, except when they favoured support. Yet they endorsed many other aspects of the UK experience, except the lack of support. To interpret the so-called “interplay” identified by Vermunt and Vermetten (2004), the current study argues that learning, by all means, is a combination of both institutionalised teaching policies, as outlined by Somervell (2003), and IL efforts, both of which are necessary to provide clarity about the IL requirement as well as student needs; exchange of both practices is what we call a ‘coordinated interaction’ that could suffice the requirement of successful learning experience. Clearly, there is also a need for integration between student needs for support and those institutional strategies to coordinate them in order to succeed in IL practices to a level of achieving the learning goals. In this scenario, it becomes possible to formulate a strategy for IL development that includes both teaching and learning patterns, as part of each other, in the UK. We may call this a ‘two-tier coordinated interaction’ of IL development.

Additional learning in HE happens when academic institutions help students learn, acquire, accumulate, construct, and engage in conversations to boost existing knowledge – which are complementary aspect of Papert’s constructionist theory (Ackermann, 2001) – and keeps building on itself during the experience, as exists in Kolb (1984) experiential learning theory. Yet the ‘traditional accumulation and storage of information’, used by Asian students as a learning strategy as well as a reproducing strategy during exams, involve not only memorisation but also reflection which they consider naturally in enhancing their learning to secure future employment prospects.

As such, students do build up the process of learning to increase knowledge; resultantly, its utilisation leads them to gain experience, as well as to the memorisation of some facts and figures. However, from the literature, a similar tension in learning patterns is apparent in the forms of 'rote learners' 'exam-oriented learners' (Li, 2004) 'culture' (Sovic, 2008; Marlina, 2009) and 'dependency' (Tian, 2008; Jin, 2011). Differently, students' perceptions in this current study revealed liking for IL and learning resources, and negated the label of rote-learner and complete dependency by showing flexibility for the IL development and academic adjustment. However they also revealed their major concerns in the course of IL development.

To assess the phenomenological aspects of students' experiences, an appraisal of the learning practice or summative as seen dependent on formative assessment – which helps learners reflect upon the learning experiences, are shaped by the notion of behaviourists' views. Biggs and Tang (2007) note that a majority of students in the current international educational setting, are less seen as constructing knowledge, i.e. they are more "surface" learners than "deep" learners. The reason for this perception might lie more in students' lack of preparation for classroom learning in the UK than prior learning patterns or else what the current students revealed: the lack of time they devote to studies. Thus, students would be unable to benefit from UK teaching patterns. Ultimately, the majority of students might use memorisation or the passive process to construct more knowledge (active process), as was previously revealed by Kember (1996) while studying student intentions of memorisation to understanding – which he calls as another approach to learning. Although such traditional views have been widely disputed, the passive/memorisation technique fails to make a link with prior knowledge (Biggs & Tang, 2007: p.9). As a result, these students can be called 'unmotivated learners' and require more support from teachers (p.10). To agree with the authors, about the gap between 'academic' and 'non-academic' issues that can be bridged only by enhanced teaching methods (p.10) similar to David et al. (2009) who state "*effective teaching, reminding us that lecturers ... are most effective when they plan approaches in response to how students are learning*" (p.11), may seem unrealistic in a discussion of IL. This is because IL itself contrasts with the notion of enhanced-teaching, rather it reiterates on involving learners to engage with learning materials more exclusively

(Trigwell et al., 2012), rather I state more extensively. Surprisingly, however this kind of enhanced teaching practice is somewhat demanded by students in parallel terms, in order to be able to enforce their IL skills. Hence, from their perceptions, two categories of students emerged: those requiring intensive support and those needing support to kick-start the process of IL. Indeed, academic support is unilaterally required for language adequacy in writing and expert speaking skills, as well as other generic learning and adaptation to IL practices. All these, e.g. support and adaptation, are elements of the circular process which strengthen the foundation of what we identify as 'learning skills' in one phrase.

The need for support may not be a surprise because all students may require it at one point or another; but the level of support varies among them. The majority of sample students wanted to see more teachers involved in 'coordinated interaction' to enhance academic English-language skills. However, the support factor is different from their prior learning or teaching environment, as revealed in a number of studies (Smith, 2008; Tian, 2008). Wong (2004) stresses the notion of initial-stage support for early identification of student difficulties. Similarly Johnson (2008), mentioning institutional support strategies for better academic skills, suggests that "*educational expectations and techniques must be made more explicit to an entire student body*" and "*we should not limit our understanding of what works and what not in relation to academic skills*" (p.2). Johnson further explains that students should be encouraged to identify their own learning patterns, i.e. what succeeds and what does not, by relating to the acknowledgement and awareness, and evaluating those patterns with their previous (culturally-oriented) ones (p.3). Hence, such relating could encourage students to learn about their new environment, meaning developing the sort of IL, at the same time.

In my view, this relating of prior and the current learning is a constructivist learning approach, underlying students uncertain ambitions of learning which can be driven right by what I have repeatedly referred to as 'coordinated interaction'; and one teaching solution widely known as constructivist theorisation. Therefore, students in the current study preferred IL practices which appealed to them because of the more 'favourable learning patterns,' compared to their prior exam-specific learning methods (see Burley

et al., 2009). Students remained consistently concerned about the need for support which they considered vital (as guidance) to start learning (first stage) and steer (second stage) the IL process. With the students' profound understanding regarding this issue, it is necessary to reflect on all categories, developed from their perceptions, in the current study.

5.3.1 Reflecting on Linguistic Spheres

As the previous chapter showed, students revealed that expert verbal communication and academic writing skills were vital for UK learning and impacted on the development of skills that would enhance independent learning. This opinion varies with the findings from previous studies, however. For example, Cole (2012), in a small study, found academic writing as one aspect of transition into UK, which we see helpful in developing learning autonomy, and Tian (2008) suggests that IL has a major impact on language skills where there is a lack of insight and language issues are discussed in more generic ways. Participants in this study confirmed that there is insufficient support available to help them to acquire the necessary verbal communication, at expert level, and academic writing skills; however a gradual decline in language issue occurs naturally and necessarily with using a multi-ethnic approach to communication.

Therefore, the present study has clearly identified student concerns unlike previous studies. The complex relationship between academic writing and speaking patterns demonstrate the need to recognise diversity and improve speaking skills. For instance, the structure and expression in English language usage differs among students (Gilbert, 2005) where the meaning of expressions may be difficult to grasp (Anderberg et al., 2009); differently McMahon (2011) findings stresses on lingual support for medical purposes only. Again, we return to the argument that overseas students are not competent speakers, as vague processing of ideas in English language (p.11), whose lingual expressions cause anxiety (Brown, 2008) or cognitive load (Carroll, 2002). This anxiety is only seen acute by students in initial stages of learning, however they realise at later stages the unevenness in language comprehension at 'thought process' level.

For this reason, in the past decade, institutions in the UK have consistently struggled to recruit students with adequate language skills, as assessed by TOEFL and IELTS. In response to these difficulties, UKBA moved to tighten immigration rules for overseas students (UKBA, 2011) by refusing entry to some of these students at the airports (Lotbiniere, 2012). It was suggested that raising the required English language competence levels, i.e. the IELTS scores, would be necessary to meet the growing demands of internationalisation (QAA, 2012) where language has been a major constraint (Bennell & Pearce, 2003). These efforts coincided with major university funding cuts and thus, a need to attract more overseas students, is even recognised. Universities then had to loosen the English language requirements and standardise admissions scores below recommended levels (Matthews, 2012). Universities still needed to recruit competent students, even though the lack of English language ability was seen as one of the major problems among students in HE learning (see UKCOSA, 2006; Barnett & Coate, 2005). Clearly there is a conflict between the need for university funding cuts versus the demand for academic rigour at these institutions, as partly identified by Brooks and Walters (2009). Instead of raising entry standards to enable better prepared students, the reverse has actually happened; the problem of those with inadequate language skills is likely to worsen the situation of independent learning rather than improve.

At the same time, language differences regarding students' written skills symbolise this struggle as they seek to meet the educational requirements and develop learning autonomy. One can certainly understand the impact of lingual differences on the teaching and learning process. These difficulties, however, negate the potential of English language tests which are designed to assess language competency (Brown, 2008) and determine admission to a UK higher education institution. In practice, because language competency varies among different students, it is likely that the variance ultimately appears in academic writing and expert speaking communication, as students suggested in this study.

Such variance in HE language practices has been recognised by students as an obvious issue, because students are required to have adequate language skills to succeed (Lie,

2009); there are also academic advantages, as the students revealed in the study. These advantages range from self-improvement efforts like independent and deep learning practices to the strategic variety, i.e. the pursuit of high grades. Necessarily, the difference in students' ability of language competence has to balance relative to academic advantages as well as requirements; in such a way only, students can coherently develop IL, a core objective of the study.

Reflecting on the literature, one would question how a student can understand that his/her writing and speaking ability is deficient when no one has assessed it in the prior learning environment; this concern is widely revealed by the students themselves when they found that assessment (Reeves, 2006) is a common and important factor in successful learning in HE. Hence, questioning students on language issues becomes problematic because it would require both parties (teachers & learners) to define the level of issues which potentially harms the process of learning independently. On their part, teachers are clear about academic duties; including an awareness of the student language proficiency level (Cummins, 2005) to facilitate the IL process (Nieto et al., 2008; Williams, 2010). Meanwhile, teaching guidelines could be useful in helping students develop the right language skills for independent learning and thinking. However, teachers are also reluctant to provide intensive support to these students, as they revealed. At the same time, understanding the variable use of language, both written and spoken, presents a difficulty for students to develop independent learning practices.

My argument is to look at both sides of the language-specific problem and to understand that awareness about "*students' language incompetence*" is as essential for students as it is for teachers. This knowledge has to narrow the language deficiency gap, identified by students and assessed by teachers. Similarly, the realisation that writing is assessed in the UK and not in the prior educational system is also not enough to overcome the language deficiency; rather, it seems necessary to perceive the competency level for written skills to improve the art of analytical writing skills. This understanding might emancipate students from their native language (L1) use or interference in thinking (Farooq et al., 2012) by harmonising competency levels with

insights to a thought process, i.e. the notion of “*thinking in that language*”, where students are able to visualise words as native-born speakers and writers do. Progress can happen with practice and support because this process is usually gradual and improving, as students revealed.

In the course of writing, other native speakers are better able to visualise written materials to present information with aestheticism and accuracy; non-native speakers are more likely to translate ideas from their own language first (see Farooq et al., 2012). At this stage, language skills are likely to be assaulted by first language confusion and hence, any linguistic competence fails, at least at a written level; it is more likely that written materials lose what we call ‘argumentation consistency’, as students revealed that “*it is hard to maintain the momentum of writing with ideas that can present the sequence and argument in academic writing.*” The idea of lingual incompetence, when students are unable to translate intellectual ideas into a second or foreign language, as seen in the current sample, is important. If writing incompetence causes anxiety to increase (Farooq et al.), it is most likely the result of lack of support (as encouragement) from teachers (Forland, 2008; Cole, 2012) for the transitional period which could jeopardise their future academic prospects.

There is also a problem caused by loopholes in the language assessment process with IELTS or TESOL testing etc. In this case, Williams (2010) mentions that all assessment methods would be unnecessary if we knew what students had learnt. However, assessment methods not only tend to minimise ambiguity but also represent generalisations for future HE performance (p.255). To reflect on student academic writing abilities, in a broader lingual competence context, these students share an equal stake in the quality of what is called ‘written material’ to present lingual competency in order to contend learning independency. For example the students and teachers in academia, where the purpose of academic writing is aimed to be beyond institutional boundaries, have shared interests in developing IL. In such a case, students’ role is to present a good writing sample while teachers’ role is, not in all cases, to assist their students in order to improve or demonstrate their writing skills. If writing skills do not improve with appropriate support and feedback, lingual incompetence would mean

curtailing any academic as well future prospect journey. This categorisation implies to all those with English as foreign or second language (Islam & Borland, 2006; Cheng, 2000).

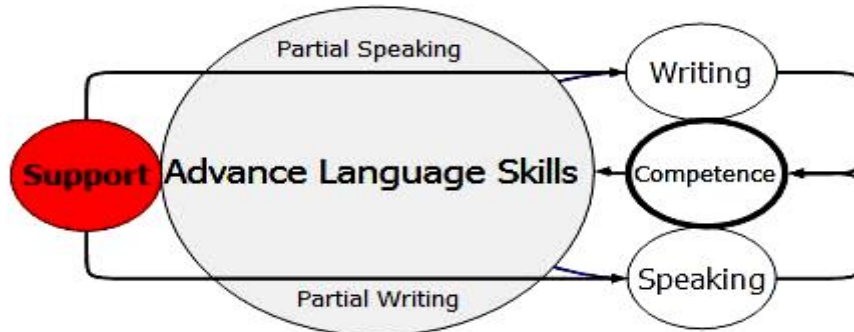
To assess language incompetence, with academic writing and expert communication as issues of major concern, another analysis of ‘what can be done to overcome lingual concerns’ was conducted; here, it became apparent that as academic writing strengthens, so does expert communication levels or speaking ability and vice versa. Students revealed that both language elements (speaking and writing) are necessary and interdependent. In this way, an effective support cycle emerges, as captured in **Figure 5.1** below.

Referring to Zhang (2012) arguing that academic writing, as a natural activity, is essential for academic success of students; and according to Yen and Kuzma (2009), Crossman and Kite (2012), and Phakiti and Li (2011) lack of academic writing skills is of great concern for teachers at the same time. Hence, explicit support strategies can be helpful to balance the wider gap in students’ requirements and teachers’ concerns; and ultimately overcome the academic writing issue among students to gain academic success. In the current study, such an argument reflects on the institutional context of academic writing where students, who are not competent English language writers, are particularly vulnerable. Whilst reflecting on student perceptions, it became clear that initial support helps them achieve the required minimum standard of academic writing on the one hand; on the other hand, both writing and speaking strengthen each other. This could be one of the reasons that students actively embrace (and prefer) independent learning patterns in the UK, in contrast to the more teacher-centred patterns of their prior education which they dislike now.

We cannot ignore the possibility that partial language skills may be necessary to advance academically, as well as strengthening those ‘acquired skills.’ When partial language ability is compared to “expert communication,” students may face it as one of the major HE problems (Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009). While considering partial

improvement in language skills, it is likely to enhance the lingual cycle, necessary for HE learning, as shown in the following Figure.

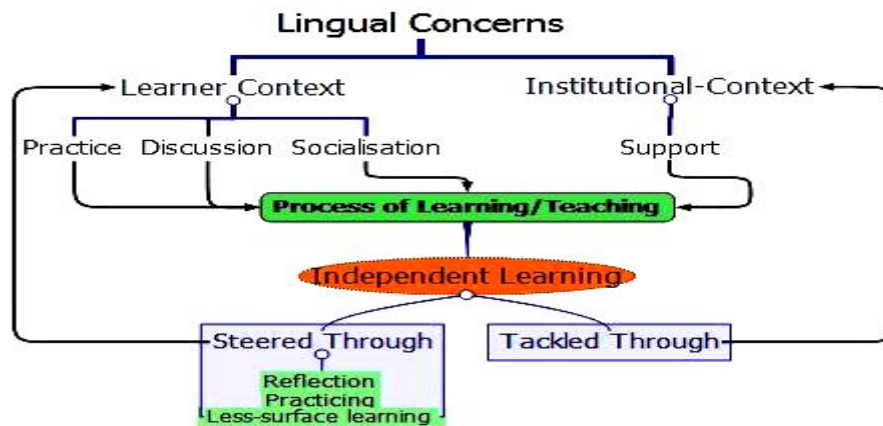
Figure 5.1: Lingual context in terms of issues, impact and needs



Referring to **Figure 5.1** above, support strategies bring both writing and speaking skills to a higher level of academic requirement. This improvement happens when students already possess partial speaking and writing skills. In such a situation, they improve and further develop their language ability, which means that language issue decline only when students have gained some level of language skills.

Whilst examining lingual concerns, student perceptions led to a process which in principle formed a basis for both teaching and learning. This process, including teaching/learning patterns, is defined within a ‘learner’ and ‘institutional’ context (Somervell, 2003). For the student, communication skills can be facilitated by more practice and participation in discussions by intermingling with Western students and participating in outside activities – confirming students’ rigorous attitudes towards a need of multi-lingual approach; the institutional context can improve with teacher guidance/support in writing skills and teaching ‘technical terms’ –which often cause confusion in subject-specific studies – to minimise confusion in language-specific thinking. Cole (2012) suggests that discussion among teachers and students about writing in different disciplines within assessment criteria can be used in academic context (p.10). This practice is one way to improve student attitudes about courses and another to enhance both the teaching and learning process. Similarly adopting both learner-specific and teacher-specific strategies could essentially impact the development of IL skills and which leads to yet several categories of theoretical understanding, as shown in the following figure:

Figure 5.2: Lingual concerns in terms of issues, impact and needs



The above figure (5.2) illustrates lingual concerns that cannot be overcome simply by the learner alone. In terms of support, the teacher's role is crucial to tackle the language-related challenges; this is one of the balancing ways to overcome the language issue (Zhang & Mi, 2010; Wu, 2008) in students' transition (Cole, 2012). Students can also improve language skills with more practice in writing and speaking, English language discussion groups and social activities. These outlined practices are some defined clues to help develop competent lingual skills and ultimately help to steering the process of independent learning. Conversely, this process of independent learning can also be stabilised with institutional support.

Thus, we are able to identify a successful route for teaching and learning. Meanwhile, it is imperative to ground this process, along with lingual concerns and independent learning spheres.

5.3.2 Language and Independent Learning Spheres: Connecting a Process

While Wu (2008) investigated the impact of independent learning on language ability, my argument showed the reverse: language skills are essential for successful IL. In fact, the study of impact of independent learning on language is not new; Kinnel (1990) believes that any language issue can be decreased with independent thinking efforts (p.55). For the purpose of the current study, it was also important to explore whether independent learning issue could be tackled simultaneously with language skills. These findings newly reveal that competent language writers and speakers can cope more

easily with independent thinking practices and that the main difficulty in adopting these skills comes from poor language ability. Student perceptions vary in practical activities where some find it easy to practise independent learning and others do not. Therefore, creating a connection between theoretical understanding and practical considerations would pave a way to improve their ability to grasp and develop the independent learning and thinking skills. For example, students revealed their theoretical comprehension of independent learning but not the practical one where they traditionally tend to memorise rather than understand. An analogy could be made with the process of learning how to drive a car. Someone could understand about driving on an intellectual level but in fact not knowing how to drive it practically; while both elements are necessary, the latter is the practical skill and the former merely a theory.

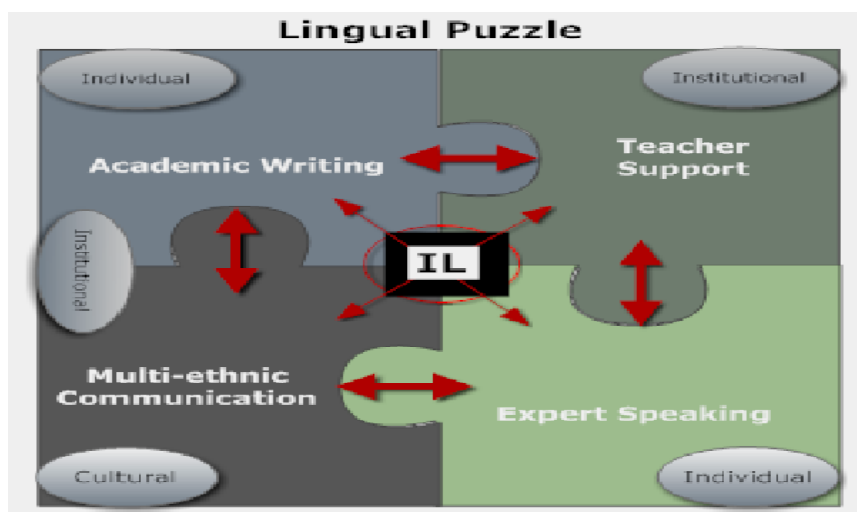
In practice, learning would become a successful process upon reflection of experiences (Barnett & Coate, 2005), this learning process may not materialise without a ‘coordinated interaction’, because academics have more responsibility here (Tones et al., 2009) and is expected from them by students, as revealed earlier. This responsibility becomes more crucial when students specifically stated that they were unable to apply theory to practice – meaning they are deemed to follow the teaching in order to develop independent learning which is expected of them. That shortcoming represents the most difficulty for students in the UK learning process which may explain the reason that students in the current research revealed both positive and negative aspects of independent learning. These categories about independent learning are shown in the following **Table**:

Table 5.3: Aspects of independent learning as a learning strategy

Negative Aspects	Learning Strategy	Positive Aspects
Incompetent Writers	<i>Independent Learning</i>	Competent Writers
Difficult to Practice		Easy to Learn
Unable to Practice		Able to know it
Dependency		Support/Guidance
Hesitant Speakers		Competent Speakers
Non-adjustment		Adjustment

Understanding IL as a theory, yet not knowing how to put it into practice, is normal for Chinese students (Wu, 2008), as well as their Indian and Pakistani counterparts, as they revealed. This practice of mere “understanding IL” in HE can only change from experiencing it (Ishikawa, 2006). ‘Support’ as one element is what can change theory into practice, bridging the gap between students (Richard & Mona, 2009) learning practices on one side and linguistic competence on the other. However, teachers’ improved understanding can enable the process of learning to move forward and harmonise diversity, for the purpose of what Huang (2012) and Tso (2012) call it a ‘transitional process’. This transition itself involve both the learners and institutional aspirations (i.e. successful learning) which play a part in the process of learning requisites (assessment criteria) and diversified approach (communication with diverse students), indicating academic writing and expert speaking as both individual activities which are steered by institutional responsibilities. Therefore, both individual and institutional harmony would steer the IL process:

Figure 5.4: Lingual puzzle affective of learner and institutional context

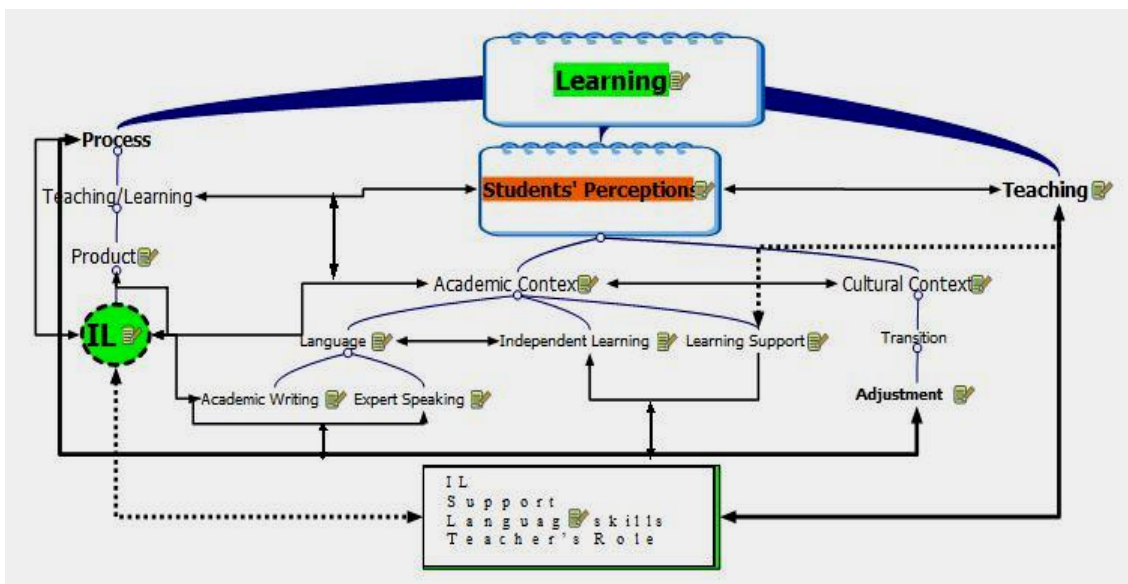


As noted before and in the puzzle above, there is a mutual interconnection between support and the required writing, and communication skills. Students whose language limitations cripple their ability to improve could lead to social isolation (Sovic, 2008: p.30), preventing use of the English language in a wider academic context – limiting to the use of mono-ethnic approach to communication and socialisation. Often, self-doubt comes from the cultural heritage that students bring with them; at the same time, it reflects the prior academic training they inherit. Such a divide would thus label students

“academic” and “cultural” which is not the way they identify themselves. For instance, the notion that students who learned in the Confucian heritage culture (CHC), which is specifically teacher-centred, prefer independent learning is paradoxical: not utilising independent thinking skills in an academic environment yet understanding and liking them too. Additionally, initial cultural support (UKCOSA, 2006), learning support and language adequacy may ultimately ease the way forward to map “approaches to learning” in the right direction.

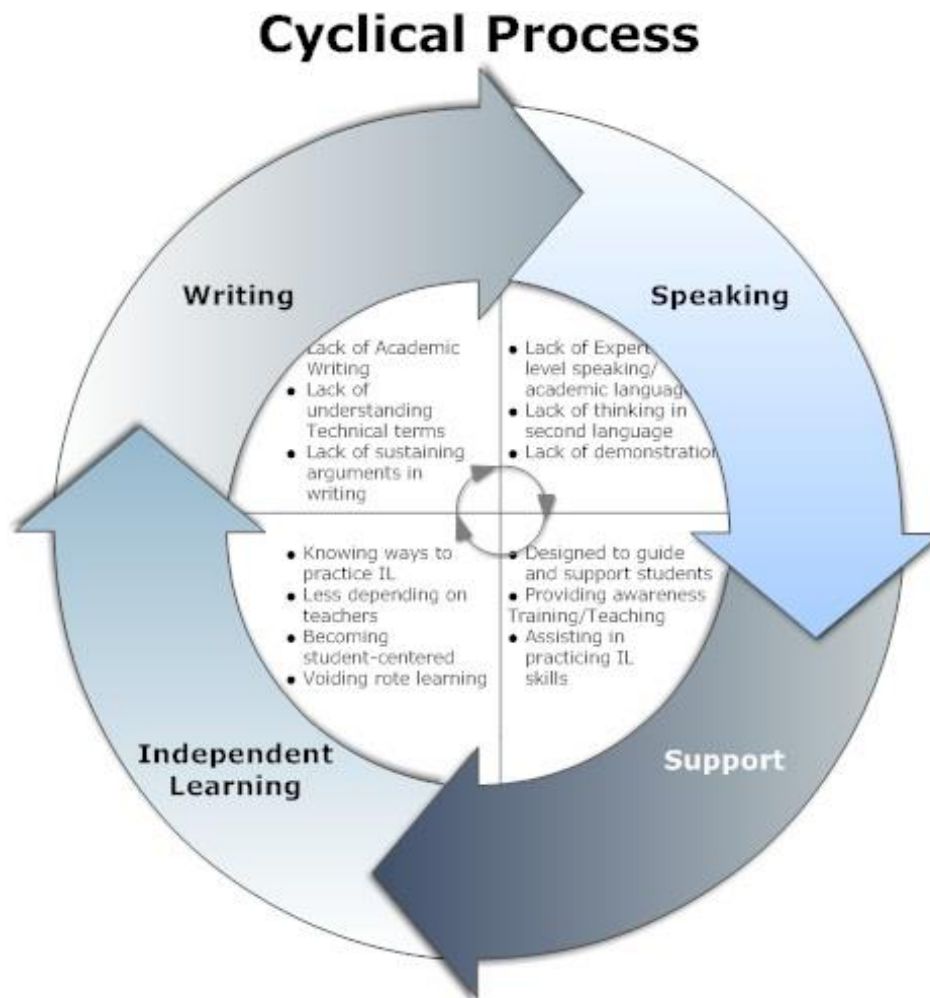
A sample sketch of the learning process, leading to IL, shows both the academic and cultural elements in **Figure 5.5** where the academic context comprises both the individual and teaching aspects of learning. In an academic context, learners’ aspects include language skills and independent learning and thinking abilities. Similarly, the academic context is governed by a cultural context from transition to successful adjustment and a teaching; and from provision of guidance and support to successful learning, as shown below:

Figure 5.5: A process independent learning



Once again, we are presenting independent learning as a higher education cycle in the current study. That cyclical process include language and support (integrative of learners’ revealed) for independent thinking purposes. The relevant aspects are presented along with sub-categories in the following diagram:

Figure 5.6: Aspects of cyclical process of independent learning



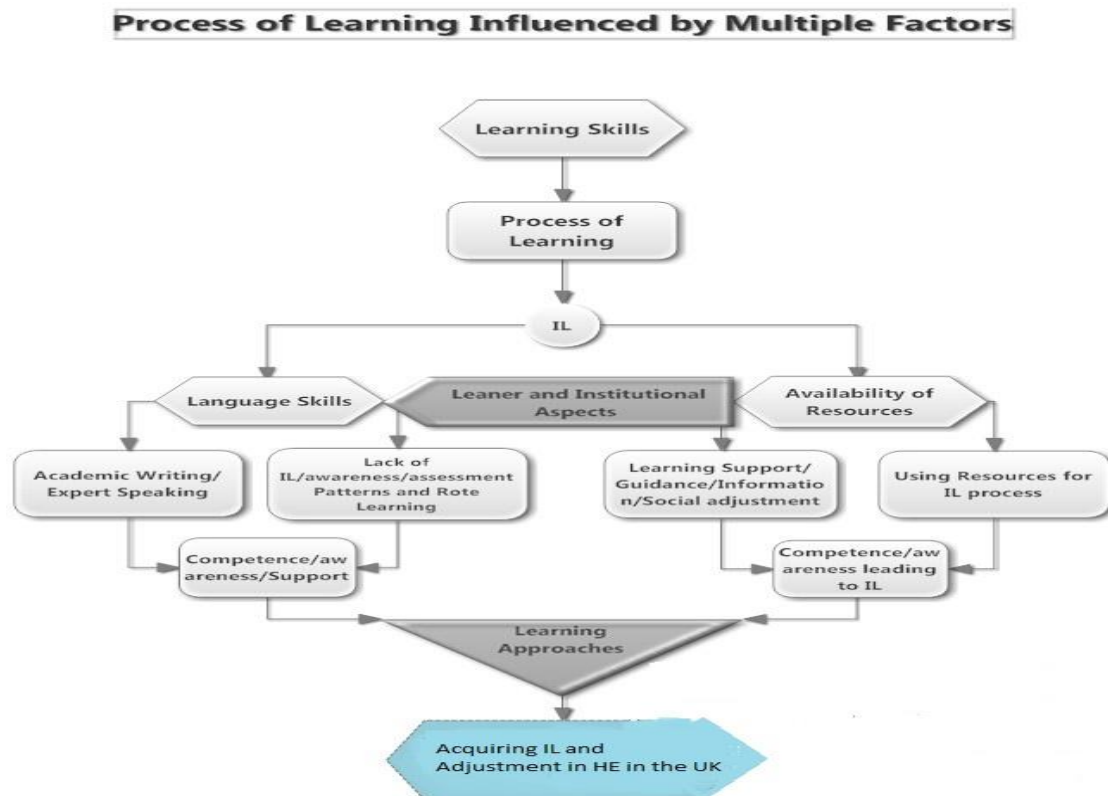
From the cyclical process discussed earlier, it is clear that independent learning does not happen in a vacuum; support and language are co-dependent to guide the process forward, as shown in Figure 5.6. We will now address specific ways to help students in independent thinking and learning skills, and adjustment process.

5.3.3 Independent Learning Skills and Adjustment Process

When analysing the learning process, it would seem from the data that students are assessment-driven in education where they place too much attention on the product, i.e. grades, examinations, for which Asian students require more support to steer their learning process (Twigg, 2006); in this way, the process is likely jeopardised. Johnson (2008) clearly indicates a formulation of strategies to overcome a similar issue. Thus considering that education must invariably include the product through the process, a similar way could also meet the student needs and the teachers' expectations. Such a

trend is likely to improve the teaching and learning environment which could enhance the process as well as achieving the product. The process includes those aspects and stages shown in the next diagram (**Figure: 5.7**) with specific input from the current sample. This visualisation resulted from the analysis in this study, now presented with this flow chart:

Figure 5.7: The development of independent learning and adjustment process



The understandings and expectations between teachers and students are complex. Similarly, the aspects of learning which cause confusion are the ‘content’ and ‘mode,’ where complexities will remain for students (Dees et al., 2007: p.131). Thus, it is useful for teachers to present educational materials in a way that helps their students understand (p.132). Similarly, success will depend on the environment where these activities take place (p.133); a welcoming atmosphere not only needs to be created but also sustained for effective IL to happen (Nicholls, 2002: p.1). Hence, to harmonise teaching with learning, Gynnild et al., (2008) state teachers must know that Undergraduate students are often novices in the learning culture, therefore the knowledge transfer process will not equip students with independent learning skills;

rather, they would first need to understand that learning depends on their own efforts. In contrast, they also have a need to ask for the necessary support to decrease difficulty and sustain those independent learning efforts. Indeed, these are parts of collaborative endeavours which are necessary to help students in developing independent thinking skills. Such collaborative endeavours are also necessary to sustain their learning efforts in taking control of their own education, confirming Silen and Uhlin (2008) and Bound (2007) contribution of collaboration, which the current study elaborate to a more integrated form. We may call this a “coordinated interaction” among students and teachers for successful learning as well as adjustment process.

From my findings in the current study, elements most likely to influence student attitudes about the ‘process of learning’ include their likes and dislikes. As explained earlier, aspects of liking feature available resources, learning and language support (when required) and independent learning efforts; aspects of disliking are the lack of support and guidance (when not offered) in the UK, as shown in the **Diagram 5.3**. For example, in the current case, students had a tendency to ‘like’ and ‘dislike’ certain facets of both their prior learning and current learning environments. Students expressing liking for some necessary aspects, of a process of successful learning, themselves validate by expressing dislike for some aspects of their prior learning and some aspects of their learning in the UK. Hence, to balance the notion of liking and disliking for learning purposes, the best approach toward independent learning would certainly require some aspects to be potentially adopted and some carefully avoided.

Indeed, the concept of likes and dislikes is helpful for guidance purposes and the creation of new strategies for independent learning. Initially, any support-based strategy is rarely available for those Asian students who arrive in the UK and expect help at all stages. In reality, most students strive to get teachers’ support, and this is consistent with literature (see Glogowska et al., 2007; Gorard et al., 2007) mentioning that they require support to overcome the transitional period. By striving for extra support, students themselves negate the potential of independent thinking and learning. However, despite practicing traditional learning, the struggle to develop independent learning is common; but it is also true that students do not want teacher-centred learning

any longer. In fact, these students understand the significance of a transitional period and recognise the difference between the traditional and modern way of learning. This is purely students' own transitional arrangement, which is based on students' inherently held beliefs. The remaining difficulty in process-completion is the expectation itself which they openly demand from their teachers. The goal of such a need is still independence, even while they are asking for more support; therefore, it must not be taken as another form of learning dependency.

There are transitional solutions; however, reflecting on Asian students' perceptions, the use of memorisation as a tool (Valiente, 2008) could be seen as an essential transitional component for the purpose of understanding and independent learning. Everyone has to memorise something - a practice that is more commonly described as 'rote learning' and is seen as specific to Asians, which in a sense negates the essential nature of independent learning practice, as noted before. Thus, to learn independently, students may need to apply both strategies, active or independent and passive or dependent, during this period. In other words, partial memorisation can be a transitional part of the independent learning process. Such arrangement is imbedded in the learning practices of Asian students but is interpreted differently, i.e. as rote learning. Simultaneously, such arrangement, importantly, also take the journey of independent learning from creation to existence and sustaining to its development and progression.

5.4 Influence of Cultural Spheres

The stereotypical view that Asian students are strictly dependent learners because of their Confucian cultural heritage (where cultural aspects influence learning) was contradicted by the students themselves. They clearly indicated that their major concerns were academic and not cultural, both in the prior educational setting and their new one in the UK. A similar finding was identified by Marlina (2009): active participation by non-English speaking international students comes from the actual learning process in the classroom and not from culture. Marlina stresses that it is wrong to blame a culture for a problem about student participation. Therefore, we must accept that all students differ academically from one another and this difference is not limited

to non-English speaking students (p.9). However, students from diverse backgrounds are normally prone to a cultural sensitivity which may also cause them to endure an adjustment difficulty in the new environment (Twigg, 2006; Brown & Holloway, 2008). This adjustment, which students concur is gradual, happens with socio-cultural understanding and adaptability in accepting an unfamiliar locale. This sense of acceptance is the key to any adjustment process where responsibility is shared among students in learning groups. Indeed local students can play a part in it.

It appears from the current research that adjustment in a new learning culture stems from an acceptance of cooperative learning (see Felder, 1995b; Zakaria & Iksan, 2006) where learning groups share primitive interactions (Goh, 2011) and positive interdependence (see **Appendix: 3**) on each other. The current study found that students who are able to make a successful transition abandon the use of mono-ethnic socialisation – limiting to the same homogenous group for social activities. Living and studying alone in a diverse culture, while bound to a mono-ethnic culture, risks failure in internationalisation process and makes the new learning environment more difficult to function. It is important to note that understanding diversity during adjustment, however gradual, is a positive step in the learning process where adjustment is both vital and encouraging for students, in particular Asian students.

5.5 Key Lessons Learnt

To summarise results of the whole process, the current study learnt the following lessons from the research probing:

- Independent learning and thinking are seen crucial to HE studying;
- Language competence is 'key' to independent learning development, especially writing and speaking skills, which also impact each other;
- Asian students share a history of surface or rote learning and inherit a similar cultural heritage;
- Students are aware of studying patterns and the UK's independent learning tradition;

- Preference for and adaptation to independent learning by Asian students represents a shift from dependence to independence in the learning arena, thus negating the CHC and rote learning label;
- Students require support to become active learners and kick-start the process of learning independently;
- Support strategies are crucial to enhance the development of both language and IL skills;
- The requirement for support varies, depending on the student's needs and disciplines of study;
- Intensive support is often required at the early stages while essential (initial-stage) support is seen key to start the process of independent learning;
- The adjustment process of Asian students is a gradual but a temporary condition;
- Asian students gradually broaden their academic and personal circles to meet the demand for diversity and independent learning skills;
- Their worries/fears of failure and assessment strategies help them develop and improve their academic language skills;
- Reinforcement helps in enhancing both language and the independent learning skills;
- Reinforcement minimises the need for paid employment;
- Asian students like independent learning and prefer it to their prior learning dependence, a shift in their approach to learning; and
- Asian students are able to develop deep and strategic learning in the UK.

5.6 The Independent Learning Process Theory in Higher Education

The current theory upholds students' perceptions of learning in relation to modern learning theories – which modulate the ways through which learning happens, and captures the way through which a learning process is influenced. Students' identification of educational aspects reflect cognitivists relations – based on how learners process information to achieve the learning; constructivist' relations – based on which aspects of learning students are constructing; and behavioural relations – based on observable changes in theirs' behaviour. The struggle to achieve independent

learning includes several theoretical aspects: the cognitivists or the deep understanding of the learning process; the constructivist or the active and constructive role in learning; and the behavioural or behaviour change from reinforcement/punishment. There are many examples of applying theory to practice in the current study.

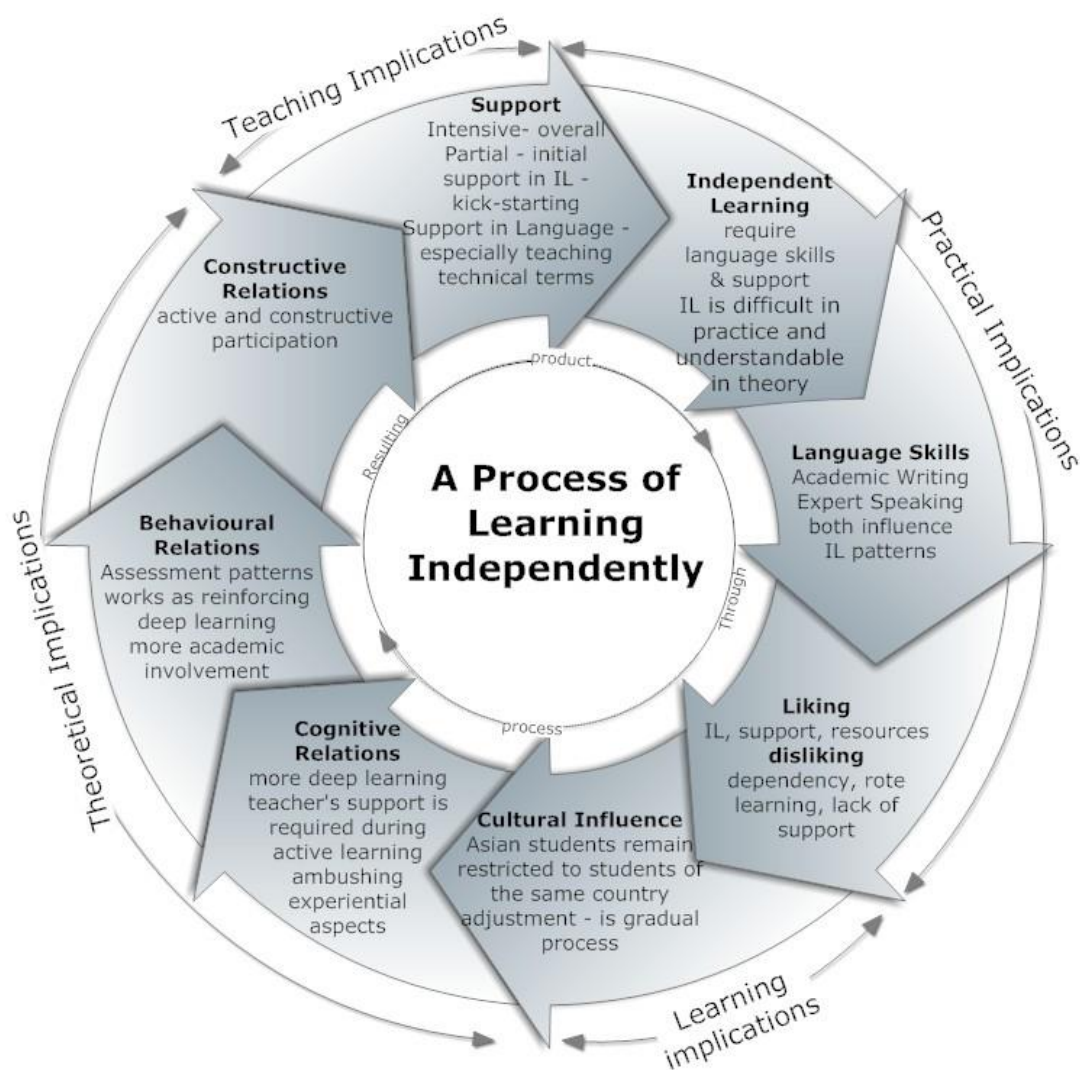
The demand for more guidance and support reflects the cognitivists' viewpoint that learning is not possible without a deep internalisation of ideas, a core tenet of cognitivism. In practice, deep learning activities are defined as the in-depth processing of information (Gynnild et al., 2008), a milestone toward the learning process, reflecting cognitivists' aspirations. Similarly, to shift from dependent/rote learning to an independent learning approach, when they asked for and received support, reflects a constructivist perspective of the process. As previously noted from student perceptions, behaviour changed because of stricter marking criteria, called the 'reinforcement aspect,' which pressures them to improve their academic writing as well as learning abilities. Such reinforcement works via deep learning strategies and results in better academic writing as well in developing a way forward to independent learning. Similarly, Asian students have grasped the negative effects of remaining in the same, comfortable social group for improving communication skills. Hence, by accessing a wider community beyond their culture, they are reinforcing the development of language skills – another behavioural aspect. Thus, the three-theory relations, 'cognitivists,' 'constructivists' and 'behaviourists,' help us understand the necessary inter-relationships among them and their impact on the process of learning independently. For example, Hall (2007) refers to 'constructivist' and 'socio-cultural' learning theories. The latter includes attributes of socio-cultural learning with regard to 'starting the learning process' where learning support is considered important in the process; in contrast, the constructivist role insists more on problem-solving activities.

In the current research, the cognitivists' aspirations lead students towards deeper learning because students are trying to understand from the very depth what is necessary for them to learn successfully and adopt the way independent learning patterns work in the UK. The 'behaviourist' relations are the result of huge financial responsibility students' face, from their sponsors, and the fear of failure they find imminent in

response to stricter assessments and the changing UK immigration rules. Thus, from the point of view of behavioural relations, assessment methods in the UK work as ‘reinforcement for developing deep learning’, in contrast to what is called ‘vague processing’ (Anderberg et al., 2009) without which assessment demands are difficult to meet. Such reinforcement is likely a way to discourage other students from taking paid, full-time, employment in the UK. In other words, reinforcement drives away forward to involve students academically in the process of independent learning. Such involvement in turn leads into achieving the product after meeting the demand of the learning process, as revealed earlier. Hence, the current theory cements the ‘product’ and ‘process’ aspects of learning and in this way learners try to achieve the product through the process, forming reasonable grounds for developing, and even understanding the concept of, IL.

It is now possible to present a theoretical understanding of the learning process from the Asian students’ perceptions and their experience in the UK. The emergence of this learning process theory directly relates to students’ prior educational setting or experiential accounts of learning from answers in the first two research questions. Because students normally arrive in the UK with financial sponsorships, economic worries are not considered a factor in developing independent learning skills, however it does provide a stronger or even shaky ground for independent thinking abilities - in case of both stable and unstable financial situations. Therefore, the four main aspects i.e. concerns about independent learning, language skills, support strategies, and adjustment issues in combination influence students’ approaches to learning independently. By carefully managing these four aspects, a successful transition to independent learning can happen. The following figure summarises all these aspects affecting student approaches to learning and their independent learning, as also detailed in previous sections:

Figure 5.8: A Process of Learning in Higher Education



The above illustration reveals the circular nature of independent learning that includes a wide range of academic and cultural elements. All aspects of independent learning have theoretical and practical, as well as teaching and learning implications to varying degrees, by affecting or strengthening each other to achieve the product through the process. The best description of the independent learning process would be that students can acquire knowledge more better from the ways they are taught in the prior learning context which Hammond et al. (2001: p.11) also confirm as “*prior knowledge is important to the learning process.*” Hence, without teachers’ support as a driving element, students might not move ahead. Secondly, teaching is not simply traditional tutoring; it comprises guidance and support, particularly in the initial stages, for enhancing independent learning skills.

Kerka (1999) elaborates that the concept of independent learning has many facets, whether individual or collective, and that the real essence lies within its concept and cannot be achieved from a single perspective (Duffy & Kirkley, 2004). From the current research, it appears that language skills are the essential component, and have many dimensions, as revealed in the above diagram. To acquire or improve language skills, students need teaching assistance in a capacity of support and guidance. At the same time, students recognise to move beyond their cultural restrictions and adopt a more open approach to communication with other students. In other words, students are aware to accept the real sense of diversity in HE which Hammond et al., call a sense of “*compatibility in social and cultural matters.*” Very simply, these dimensions also repeat the transitioning process to learn independently.

We also know that students are well aware of independent learning process which the overwhelming majority prefer. However students found it challenging to practice because of their difficulty in the transition process and the adjustments required for change, i.e. going from surface to deep learning; from passive role to active; and from dependent to independent. Therefore, students needed more guidance and support strategies from their teachers, not to remain teacher-centred but to be facilitated in the independent learning process, i.e. Hammond et al. (2001) also explain that teaching is to assist learners and a process to organise knowledge, information and activities. At the same time, students felt the pressure to ask for support, revealing it a necessity rather than a habit. The reason was they had inadequate language skills in both academic writing and expert communication skills – required in different disciplines. Here is the dilemma: a student’s academic success is deeply rooted in ‘support strategies’. While cultural influences may prevent students from a prompt adjustment in the new learning environment, a way to moving from prior habits of dependency; such transition is gradual but achievable.

According to Sovic (2008), international students may be assisted at the early stages of learning in the UK to promote their learning experience as well as the adjustment process. The adjustment process is perceived by students a dependent upon many

factors, including the correction of student misunderstandings; achievement of clarity regarding the learning environment; utilisation of the English language; and the development and use of independent learning skills.

However, the conflict between cultural backgrounds must not be overestimated because the majority of students ultimately adapt to the UK culture as indicated by an overwhelming majority of students in the current sample. Whether international students are able to adapt quickly or not, Jianwu (2011) suggests that a “*live and let live*” policy is the best strategy for the transition to the new teaching and learning environment; which according to Holtbrugge and Mohr (2010) is influenced by academic as well as cultural aspects. Such a policy enables the students to think and process change in their own ways without complaining and criticising others. Typical complaints and criticism would be caused by feelings of loneliness and isolation – with their inability of making meaningful contact with others (McMahon, 2011) - where Chinese and other Asian students find themselves during their early UK studies. So why not let these students start learning in their own way, i.e. as they did in their prior learning setting to locate the gap in independent learning development? Successful learning indeed is the result of a successful adjustment, as students revealed, and for this process to happen, students although recognise the potential of closer interaction with British students do not practice and simultaneously demand the same with teachers.

Referring to aspects of interest as a starting point of the process of independent learning, I personally see students’ liking and disliking for certain categories of learning experiences as a “cognitivist” push of “experiential” (Kolb, 1984) accounts in boosting the process of learning independently. For example, students liking for support from their teachers is the result of understanding a process of learning these students have experienced in the past, and now, despite liking independent learning in the UK, insisting on support is an indication of the experiential aspects of students towards processing of information competently. At the same time understanding, already gained, information from the very depth posits cognitivists’ effects – internal processing of learning-related information, a contrary approach to ‘vague processing’. Similarly, liking independent learning and disliking rote learning is the product of experiencing

the first in UK-based and the second in prior learning, leading to more internal, long-lasting, understanding of the process. Hence we find liking and disliking features, which are perceptive of 'experiential learning' accounts, leading to more cognitivistic aspirations. We may name the notion of disliking as a 'process of filtration' to develop independent learning which strengthens the value of the internal processing-power of learners. Such processing might not be merely pertinent to learning in HE but relevant to the overall learning processing in daily life. Anecdotally, we may include an example that expecting Asian students to develop independent learning without adequate learning support; transitioning from a history of dependency or teacher-centeredness would mean expecting a bird to fly when one or both wings are held by a human. A bird can only fly with her own independent efforts when circumstances are suitable for flying.

5.7 Summary

Developing independent learning is not only about enhancing the level of different skills rather it's mainly about making meaningful adaptation of both prior and new learning practices. To conclude students' ability, to adapt from prior learning to the current UK-based educational system, is thus based on the current research and indicates their strong cognitivists aptitude, paving the way for deep and strategic learning. This conclusion negates the traditional, rote learning perceptions about Asian students and confirms their unique ways to adapt to a new learning environment and develop independent learning skills. To explain their own shift in learning approach, most students revealed that they enjoyed learning by themselves, a tenet of independent thinking ability, and disregarded the rote or surface variety, a common practice in their prior learning setting. This revelation not only gives these students a psychological boost but also validates their ability to adapt to the UK learning. At the same time, the cognitivists, constructivist and behavioural theories allow us to see the paradigm shift in students' approaches to learning, effectively reconfiguring the Asian students' academic stature, as that of independent learners, in higher education.

Hence to reveal the process of learning, students have to learn the skills which the current study find dominant in the shape of independent learning - used as a crux of the current research. At the same time, the tutors need to recognise that there is a process to achieving independent learning and thinking that may be different for each individual and different specifically for Asian students. At the same time the tutors should not confuse the approaches taken by Asian students as symptoms of just a dependent learning approach but that the need for coordinated interaction and learning support are a means to the end journey – the end being developing ‘independent learning and thinking’.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

The primary goals of the current study were to assess the importance of independent learning (IL) in the academic progress of international students, to discover students' perceptions of learning in the UK and evaluate the developmental factors associated with their approaches to learning. The objective was to determine the route to the development of IL in higher education (HE) to propose a roadmap for future students based on the experiences of the participants.

For this purpose I broke the research question down into a range of relevant issues as well as students' prior learning experiences in order to clarify their perceptions of IL development. In this concluding chapter, I reflect on the students' understanding of the process of IL development, how this can be carried forward and what contribution it provides to knowledge in the field of teaching and learning in HE. To do this I revisit the research questions and how they were answered, reflecting on the methodological approach used, its strengths and weaknesses, and whether an alternative approach could have been used to answer the research questions. This chapter also details the limitations of the current study and provide suggestions and recommendations for further study in this area.

The current study found that there is more to the process of developing IL than is mentioned in existing literature. In order to develop IL, students not only need to develop the language skills necessary for successful and coordinated interaction in academic life, but they also need to develop a range of new approaches to learning. Hence, it is not just a cultural or language issue, nor is it solely one of finance or academic support; it is a complex developmental process made up of all these elements, juxtaposed on each other; which if done right can lead to a better development of IL skills. This process of metamorphosis is a result of a number of different support strategies which are essential in order to facilitate the students' development of independent learning.

6.2 Contribution to Knowledge

Students who come to HE learning have to learn to become independent learners as well as independent thinkers. While International students are similar to Western students, they do encounter more complications. International students without independent thinking skills have some quick learning to do, in addition to improving their academic language skills, adjusting to the way support is provided and starting to think independently.

Home students also have to learn to think independently when they begin studying at HE level, however they have the advantage of fluent English as well as the culture in which they grew up. The problem with Asian students' development of IL is worsened by the necessity to learn academic English in order to succeed in the UK. If students' English is weak academically, they will struggle to express themselves and put across their ideas to think in a deep way, often called 'deep learning'. Thus if a range of issues, (e.g. spoken language for ideas development; written academic language for writing without the need towards the translation of ideas; socio-cultural development as a source of multi-ethnic communication and socialisation; financial issues and the need to work as detrimental to focus; and a range of teaching support strategies as ways for two-tier coordinated interactions) are properly managed, then IL is achievable by international students in early periods of studying. However there is no quick fit solution towards the complex process of IL development. In developing IL, students show their cognitive as well as experiential abilities – as learner specific aspects - to push this process of learning ahead; and at the same time there are other vital teaching-specific elements of support and reinforcement which are vital to steer and stabilise the development of IL. Managing both learner-centred and teacher-centred aspects, as a way to formulate a 'two-tier coordinated interaction' among them, can better align the students to transform their approaches to learning into IL practices.

6.3 Reflections on Research Questions

There is a long history of research studying Chinese Mainland students to understand their experiences of learning in the UK and in Australia. This motivated me to explore whether other South Asian students, with a known history of dependent (teacher-centred) and rote learning, largely driven by their version of respect for their teachers face similar learning challenges (see Ahmad, 2009), and to explore how they develop IL skills in the UK. It was important to explore their perceptions with regard to the influence of academic as well as cultural aspects on their approaches to learning in the UK in order to examine the issues around IL development.

The questions were intentionally kept simple in order to link other developmental issues in the course of the students' learning journey in the UK and to see how different factors influence the development of IL practices. Therefore the current research was based on the following major questions from a population of Chinese, Indian and Pakistani students studying in HE in the UK.

- How Asian students approach learning in the UK?
- How these students develop IL in the UK?
- How these students cope with the learning issues and the extent to which these issues might influence the development of IL?
- Which different patterns can improve the existing learning practices of Asian students in developing and inculcating IL practices?
- Is IL a developmental issue that affects an overall population of overseas students?
- How an adjustment journey influences the students' process of learning in the UK

6.3.1 Student Approaches to Learning and its Link to Prior Learning History

The current study revealed the way Asian students approach learning in HE in the UK and their perceptions of the strategies they employ to learn successfully. There is a similar trend among these students of approaches to learning which are driven by their past learning experiences. Overall Asian students use a range of approaches to learning; and indicate preference for a teacher-centred approach, albeit unknowingly, until it transforms into IL. There is also an element of deep processing as well as rote learning of factual information which is somewhat vague to refine without the tutor's active role;

such refinement can only happen as a result of a range of support strategies, varying from generic to specific support in some subject studies. Thus, practically, students justify the need for ‘enhanced teaching’ as suggested by Trigwell et al. (2012). At the same time students see learning as a developmental process which is achievable gradually in English when it is their second language.

6.3.2 The Development of Independent Learning

Independent learning is identified by students in the current study as a preferred strategy of learning. This preference towards IL is realised by students upon recognising its benefits. One reason for such realisation is because they mainly inherit a history of teacher-centeredness and memorisation where less independent thinking is practiced, as students have revealed. From this point onwards, a flexibility of IL development, which is encouraging to achieve, is seen from the students own perceptions. The development of IL is thus seen as dependent on students’ adjustment journey - as a form of transition, and support strategies as a form of interaction - to push-starting the process of learning ahead. In addition, the need for coordinated interaction between the teaching and learning parties, which we name ‘two-tier coordinated interaction’, is seen as helpful by students to develop IL skills. This is due to their interaction experiences, either through support or guidance, with tutors in academic institutions where students engage in a process to learn, accumulate, and construct information to boost existing knowledge until they are able to reflect on their experiential learning accounts. The crux of IL development is that students go through some stages of learning difficulties (mentioned earlier) and then realise a change in their learning which happens gradually - in contrast to their teacher-centred approach in prior learning, but they like it as a practice as it gives them the opportunity to learn with deep and strategic thinking.

6.3.3 Coping with Issues

In contrast to what is found in the literature regarding students of CHC and non-CHC backgrounds, the current study found that Asian students largely inherit a history of matching issues in their learning and face similar challenges in adjustment journey. They also require a variety of intensive support as well as initial support to kick-start the process of learning by overcoming these issues and making successful adjustment.

Similarly, the issue of inadequate language abilities is realised by students upon assessment in the UK. Students unilaterally agree that support, in both academic writing and communication skills, is necessary to overcome the lingual issues; and vital to develop 'thought processes' in English. The complexity of transferring ideas into English language is thus handicapped by the lack of academic writing language. At the same time, students have also grasped the negative effects of remaining in the same social group for improving language skills. Thus, students strengthen their expert communication and academic writing skills at the same time - with both lingual elements having a positive impact over each other in relation to improvement.

6.3.4 Influence of Different Learning Practices

The current study found that students learning practices are highly influenced by a variety of theoretical spheres, ranging from behaviourist, experiential, and constructionist to cognitivist challenges - situations which make them think. As higher education students in this study have shown some essential elements of learning practices, they show how students have been learning and how they transform that history of learning into IL. For example, tutorial roles as support and guidance as well as stricter assessments are seen by students as essential as well as enforcing – which we call behaviourist essentials. Similarly, prior learning - mostly teacher-centred, and the current learning - mostly IL, then employing key deep and strategic learning practices, by relating their experiential learning, give us insights into how constructivist as well as cognitive elements have influence over students' learning in general. Alongside, all these factors influence the way these students learn while developing the independent thinking skills.

6.3.5 Independent Learning as a Developmental Issue

Independent learning is recognised by students as a developmental issue which does not happen in a vacuum. With regard to this, students relate their prior and the current learning actions to both initial-stage support, i.e. guidance – to shift from basic learning, and vital support - to steering the IL process. Thus, support and language are co-dependent to guide the IL process forward. As IL is revealed as a developmental issue, students have also shown that the differences in their level of language competence

have to be balanced relative to the academic advantages they perceive as well as the institutional requirements for successful learning and developing IL skills.

6.3.6 The Development of a Learning Process through an Adjustment to the Journey

The data has shown that academic adjustment is largely governed by cultural transition; a transition from naivety to successful adjustment, and the teachers' support to successful learning. Living and studying alone in a diverse culture, while bound to a mono-ethnic culture, risks failure to the internationalisation process regarding diversity, and makes it more difficult for them to function in a new learning environment. While the students interviewed recognise the potential of closer interaction with their British counterparts, they do not practically involve themselves in such interactions; but simultaneously demand the same interactive moments with teachers – a confusing dilemma in the successful adjustment journey; a development of a learning process is possible with a use of a multi-ethnic approach to socialisation and communication.

6.4 Newer Understandings

We must accept that certain learning approaches are no longer appropriate in higher education today. For example Biggs and Tang (2007: p.28) stress that the purpose of good teaching is to develop deep instead of surface learning, and according to Robinson (2003) the development of knowledge as well as fostering students independence is only achievable with good teaching (p.67), often called 'enhanced teaching'. The aim of enhanced teaching is to improve learning practices, and to encourage students to deep and independent learning and thinking.

Thus, deep learning, in its very essence, is a comprehensive term, meaning to achieve learning as a product through a process, with an interactive role of both teaching and partial memorisation – as a part of transitioning from dependency to IL. Deep learning, which is an important element to foster IL, can be developed by all students; however the combined interactive role of teaching and learning is critical to any such development. Thus the development of deep learning practices as a way of developing

IL is dependent on good teaching practice – which, according to Asian students, is a key to achieving success. Biggs and Tang also assert that:

“Student learning research ... which directly relates to practice, constructivism and phenomenography being the two most influential ... Both emphasize that meaning is created by the learner, but constructivism focuses particularly on the nature of the learning activities the student uses ... and on this account more readily leads to enhanced teaching.” (p.28)

Similarly, Fry et al. (2009) who define learning as *“not a single thing; it may involve mastering abstract principles, understanding proofs, remembering factual information, acquiring methods, techniques and approaches, recognition, reasoning, debating ideas, or developing behaviour appropriate to specific situations; it is about change”* is relevant. They argue that students from diverse backgrounds arrive to study in HE with certain expectations (p.8). Their diversity implies that learning patterns would vary from individual to individual. For this reason, many studies as mentioned earlier see the myriad of opportunities that students have; and the current students perceptions have shown the abilities to develop best learning practices, including their behavioural aspects, cognitive abilities and other experiential traits, as well as constructive abilities – all of which play a key role in the complex nature of better learning outcomes - with the end game seen as developing IL. In short, it is understood that learning as an activity in HE is a complex phenomenon which differs from person to person. For example, some consider learning a deep activity, in the real sense, and a strategic endeavour while others consider it an independent activity. The deep or surface learning process is in fact a reaction by the students to the learning environment (Biggs & Tang, 2007: p.29). Importantly, student behaviour as a reaction in an IL environment not only facilitates their learning but further enforces their abilities to think and study independently. Hence, this study has shown that there are two groups of learners, one group we call traditional - who understand and like IL but do not or otherwise cannot practice it; and other academic students - who like and practice it. Thus collaborative endeavours among these students and teachers are necessary to develop and sustain IL skills. This is because students have shown they no longer want the teacher-centred approach to learning.

The current study has also shown that students' learning process is jeopardised if they focus solely on the product, i.e. grades, or results. By focusing on this over the process of learning, the achievement of the product is guaranteed; however, focusing on the product cannot guarantee the process will be achieved. In addition, the transition process from dependency to IL vitally depends on the efficient role of institutional policies (i.e. assessments), teachers' improved understanding of teaching and learning requirements (i.e. guidance and support requirements) and the learners' own responsible approach to dedication as well as exclusive use of a multi-ethnic approach (abandoning the mono-ethnic socialisation with same social group) as well as lingual abilities.

Thus this study has also shown that to address the educational sophistication of any learner properly, teaching must include as 'TEACHING' - a coordinated form of interaction in which adequate support strategies are essentially proven to diametrically identify the roles of both interactive parties - the students and teachers. Meanwhile, IL happens mainly as an obsolete process that requires continuous updating for it to succeed and knowledge to make it happen.

6.5 Reflections on Methodological Approach

Different methods have varied deficiencies and strengths. To assess the learning process of IL it was necessary to rely on a range of data collection methods as a single method or one round of data collection interviews would not be enough to explore the issue related to IL in greater depth and to achieve the targeted results. On the other hand, the use of excessive approaches to data collection would have also confused and complicated the data collection process. Therefore, a reasonable methodological approach would depend on the nature of the research, which could be a mix of qualitative methods.

I have been very critical of my own methodological approach throughout the current study. I tried to make corrections and connections at large with the data collection, selection and analysis and thus placed considerable emphasis on a systematic approach. I gathered data with an online questionnaire, conducting three rounds of interviews and

then used personal narratives to support the common themes that arose. I tried to correct the sequence of interviews by using Patton's (1990) three probing techniques. The approach I chose required being systematic, procedural and context-oriented, criteria suggested by Kvale (2007) and Morton-Holmes (2009). This approach was important because I used a sample of both CHC (Chinese) and non-CHC (Indian and Pakistani) students which varied from previous other research attempts, including those of Li (2000), Tian (2008), Wong (2004), Wu (2008) and Goh (2011) etc. Their input was essential to better understand the research problem; from students' perspectives. The process of IL, in both prior and the current context, stayed in focus to map those issues which might thwart the learning process. This study became possible after 14-months of data collection, transcription, coding, categorisation and analysis which ultimately led me to challenge the misconceptions about Asian students in UK higher education.

I applied my intensive efforts to understand the concerns and difficulties of Asian students from both an institutional and individual perspective; namely, what students find important for learning in HE and the way to learn independently; and the way their approaches are relevant to modern learning theories: thus emphasising on students' own perceptions about the issues. This could better happen with in-depth interviewing which I used primarily for the purpose of gathering primary data. However, this was a challenging and time-consuming task; accessing participants, evaluating perceptions with personal narratives, and finding a diverse student sample, especially those students who spoke English as their second language. At the same time, I had to cope with the issue of data trustworthiness relative to personal narratives, where interpretations and my own positionality could potentially cause bias. For this reason, I tried to avoid unnecessary and possibly confusing cases of personal narratives (see Bold, 2012; Czarniawska, 2008) because it was not appropriate with my sample of data collection. This technique helped me to evaluate perceptions of a diverse sample, rather than a specific group of students, with my personal input only where necessary. This method enabled me to focus more on the data, ensuring that it was grounded, and to fully take care of the sensitive nature of the interpretation of data. As a change in sampling strategy, a different sequence of sampling strategy, as well using the nature of personal

narratives, could be used in future research to produce research results from different angles.

Regarding the participants in this study, although I had to focus on purposive sampling in the beginning, I soon realised that convenience sampling might also help boost the acceptability, credibility and originality of categories arising from rich data (Charmaz, 2006: p.182). This is a normal practice in modern research because sampling strategy often changes in a qualitative research and particularly in GT approach (Morse, 2007: p.243). Hence, I used convenience sampling only for initial stage data collection. This strategy helped me gather more in-depth information from the semi-structured interviews because I had to re-interview the students for further elaboration and clarification. For this purpose, I devised a schedule to get more substantive data from the relevant sample. During the current study I have to accept that it was not an easy process rather I faced some difficulties in finding the relevant sample. However, if I had to conduct another similar study, I would also use a snowballing sampling technique in order to avoid hurdles in finding relevant participants. In addition a larger sample, particularly from 1st year students would have further strengthened my qualitative stance. Therefore a more diverse sample could be used in future studies.

Upon completion of the data collection process, I was ready to make some pre-planned coding decisions which comprised the essential features of the study using key terms. As a key process of Grounded Theory, data transcription is also a vitally important and time-consuming process; to save time, I used the voice-recorder (mobile device) in order to examine the respondents' views in greater depth. Although I tried some interviews without voice recorder but they did not work very well, so I used it after piloting which worked well in Stage One of the interviews. In Stage Two and Three I had already established the use of voice recorder for in-depth interviewing in order gain rich data from participants. The strength of my data, hence, comes from the pre-format form of set questions which gave me the opportunity to transcribe the data under some pre-set transcribed categories of questions. Thus, it was convenient and appropriate to distribute the data in some pre-planned questions format (see **Appendix: 20**). In the majority of cases I had to transcribe the question and answer sessions in MS word after

interviewing. The results created a closer relationship with the participants, as well as the research questions, and provided more room for addressing the questions from all angles as well as avoiding any stoppage in the interviewing process. Again, if I was to undertake any similar study, I would change my position from pre-format questions to large scale categories in the beginning because it would give me more space to work closely with participants rather than giving time to surfing on the pre-planned questions.

After the data collection process, all interviews were imported to NVivo Version 9 for coding, categorisation and conceptualisation. This process was also lengthy but systematic because NVivo works as a conceptual framework for data coding (Bassett, 2012) until saturation is reached. Hence, I used the software to create a conceptual framework, rather than a traditional vehicle for coding and analysing data. As a conceptual framework, I was able to see the concepts and categories in one frame, in the form of single nodes or tree nodes where codes can be put easily under arising categories and changes to categories, where necessary, can be carried out more systematically by playing around those categories - addressing the challenge of using GT toward concept visualisation. The use of software for analysis is not an easy process, however in my view the use of NVivo is more beneficial to the data analysis process only when a researcher has a clearer understanding of using it (Bazeley, 2007), in addition to what could be better achieved with its use. Therefore I felt that focusing on the process of data analysis would strengthen the trustworthiness of my data rather than using the software alone, though its use gave me a solid graphical platform for looking around different codes, themes and categories etc., generated from the data.

Data subjectivity was also a factor in the current study. As the data collection approach was flexible and open in design, I was able to give priority to students' concerns which became the 'key' to this research study. I had initial worries about the lack of understanding of both my own and the participants' emotional concerns. This was because I was in one of the same peer groups; it can be distracting to involve all parties and concentrate on real issues which could miss the potential use of grounded approach. The objective perspective therefore was to understand the learning process from the literature review while the subjective nature of the data was addressed in stage-wise

interviews and questionnaires. I purposely used a three stage approach to establish what was happening, refine the findings and present a clearer knowledge of students' concerns to ensure the credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness of GT are met (Charmaz, 2006). To ensure trustworthiness of data, I tried to further strengthen their authenticity by using Patton's (1990) three-probing techniques (see Chapter 3 for details). The purpose was to acquire an original and credible source of information through a systematic process of data collection, analysis and interpretation. Thus, it became possible to involve my own reflexive position and to avoid the issues of trustworthiness and authenticity by urging on data interpretation and looking for exact interpretive themes, which are what Cousin (2009) calls "interpretive moves."

I made every effort to avoid harm to participants by preserving their anonymity, paying attention to my own positionality and how the process might influence the conduct (Cousin) and interpretation of the data. For this purpose it was essential to present an informed consent form to participants in order for them to be aware of the full scale of the research and its implications. Similarly, reflection in the form of personal narrative was also important and necessary to avoid confusion and remain close to the research. This step was taken to avoid any issue of results' untrustworthiness. However, it is never possible to adhere to all strict principles at one time. For example, Cousin (2009) asserts that researchers often use certain tactics to overcome the issue of closer observation because there is no "*formulaic prescription for the production of trustworthy research reports.*" Thus the researcher's "*reflexive and thoughtful engagement with both data gathered and of the literature read*" (p.32) is influenced by his/her positionality. As I relied on the partial use of personal narratives in this research, I could have used a more embedded approach to personal narratives to strengthen my own positionality along with the course of rich data obtained from other participants.

I had initially planned to use "mixed-methods" which should involve both a qualitative and quantitative approach, which means collecting a large chunk of numerical data as well (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This idea was abandoned because conducting in-depth interviews, adjusting a qualitative position and then collecting an appropriate level of questionnaire data for the quantitative stance (p.22) to

align with personal narratives, was neither feasible nor practical in this order. Thus, to minimise the risk of failing a mix of methods, a dominant qualitative approach was utilised to remain within the time-scale along with data analysis through description, narratives and their interpretations. I could have carried out further ‘theoretical group interviews’ – “*which are those to provide the final missing pieces of the puzzle, polish data collection, complete processes of saturation, or provide another information that the research requires*” (Morse, 2007: p.241), to find the missing bits and pieces in theory generation, as suggested by Morse. This method could have been applied to strengthen the clarity of theory development. However, in the current research data saturation was conceivably reached through stage-wise interviews and questionnaires. Adding further cases of final year and 1st year students as means of negative and positive cases, as suggested by Morse (p.242), could be used in further studies to explore how the journey towards IL development changes as they progress from their 1st to final year of studies.

In this way, my approach leaves room for further studies with mixed-methods, an emerging, social science technique (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori) which has not been extensively used in similar education studies. I would stress that every process has grounds to establish; if a research study is truly addressing the issues, it must encourage others to make their own methodological adaptations. I personally do not see a problem in borrowing an idea to explain and articulate a methodological approach. Borrowing, with self-contribution, is just a way to enable perfection or at the very least, adopt a fresher approach. Therefore, it is my opinion that a mix of qualitative methods would help establish a stronger basis in similar education studies, particularly with diverse sampling techniques; and may open a new view of an old problem with improved theoretical understanding. If observation methods are used in addition to student perceptions, discovery and identification of the issues in similar research, mixed-methods could help more precisely and coherently. For example, regarding lingual problems in academic writing as a driving element of IL, observation methods inside the classroom could be used; the identification of the real issues could be enhanced for the overall student population. Similarly, referring to IL skills, with students assigned activity for further research; relevant information for writing a

proposal (as was the case in our Research Training Programmes (RTP 401 & 402) and observation methods could improve the search for a wider student sample.

6.6 Limitations

Concerning changes in the educational environment, there is a possibility that older (aged) students might face more difficulties than the younger ones in adapting to new learning patterns; there is also a high chance that they might need extra support in terms of interaction with senior staff, to adjust to the new learning environment. In addition, those disciplines that require different levels of language skills like writing and speaking were beyond the scope of the current study and could benefit from further investigations.

Furthermore, the level of support students need in language and who are in demand of opportunities for expressing opinions in seminars is not clear. Similarly the type of support students need at different stages of study and again is beyond the approach of the current study. At this point, it would be crucial to determine whether support as a need is a common trend for all Asian students or limited to only a few; this question can also narrow down the age-related factor in terms of support requisites, as revealed earlier. Any successful academic adjustment plan in the UK could be extended to the rest of the international population and requires a thorough investigation to assess its implication.

The current study refers to ‘ethnicity’ for the descriptive purpose of ‘identity’ on the basis of the educational system and does not refer to the refined distinctions among different ethnic groups, as it is beyond scope to take a sample from all ethnic student groups.

Indeed, there is a wider social distance between lecturers and students, while in fact there needs to be more social opportunities for social mixing generally. The current study’s scope was limited to students’ perception of IL development, thus a larger sample of both parties could not be assessed in this study.

The current study found no gender specific issues, in contrast to a recent study of Utely (2009) who found that more women are feared to fail than men. However, women are often better in communications skills since they are softer colloquially, and so in theory should fare better. Referring to Cummings (2005), conversational language is important but academic language is different. Thus exploring the distinction between conversational language and academic language is beyond this study, and could be explored further to find the very issue of IL development in these two broad spectrums. Hence, a larger quantified sample might be better able to understand whether gender is a wide-scale issue in relation to IL development in general and HE in particular; and its potential implications for both genders, particularly women of strong cultural and religious orientations.

6.7 Suggestions for Future Study

While the current study focused on developing IL among Asian students, it is worth mentioning that all those who were involved were actively studying in British HE institutions, and had views about those who dropped out of learning in favour of working. Thus, those who have dropped out make the case for IL development stronger. This study suggests that exploring the perceptions of those students who have ceased or else failed to complete their studies with success, will be worth assessing. This is important because such students would have practically faced the IL environment and possibly the relative issues as well. Their revelations about ceasing studies or remaining unsuccessful in UK's learning environment would give further insights towards the concept of IL development.

There is another way to look into exploring and drawing comparisons between case studies of those students who are in the initial stages of their studies and others in the final stages to see how different students see the development of IL skills. There is a possibility to explore more clearly how final year students have gone through the developmental issues in IL. At the same time, exploring first year students' perceptions might be a key to see how they perceive trends within IL development.

The current study found that lingual incompetence at the translation stage is causing major trouble for students in developing IL skills, while awareness about such incompetence is vital for teachers. Thus this study found that writing skills, which are assessed to a certain level in the UK, are highly important for IL development, as independent thinking can help to improve language skills. Thus it is suggested to explore how, when and at what stage students realise the stage of emancipation of first language (L1) interference in their thought process as well as the stage of real transformation of IL skills from dependency. Thus it may be worthwhile to explore how students, of English as a second language, can start thinking in English, in contrast to translating ideas from their native language – a stage in which Asian students are particularly vulnerable. For example, perhaps some initial collaborative and interactive teaching programmes might help students start the gradual change earlier and begin to think in English. Similarly, it is worth assessing what other IL tasks could be helpful to enhancing students' language skills as well developing their learning independence; this will provide a basis for a two-way discussion whether language and IL skills affects each other in a similar way.

As found earlier, students consider support an important aspect in enhancing language skills and overcoming the issues in IL development. Therefore, a gap exists as to how different support strategies could be employed in both language and IL skills. Would support strategies, as encouragement, effectively help in this process? How far could transitional support strategies help overcome these issues?

At one stage the current study also found that students with competent language skills (both writing and speaking) can easily overcome the IL issue, however it is not clear whether other core elements of language, e.g. reading and listening skills, have an impact on overall IL development. For example, reading and listening skills are important aspects of the language testing system, and we are not sure whether both these aspects could have any influence on the development of IL skills. Students in the current study have not indicated any issue with listening or reading towards IL development. So does this mean that they do not face these issues? In other words, if the

students possess adequate reading and listening skills, why do confusions arise among native and overseas students? For example, there are clues in the current research, with some students revealing: *“it’s hard to follow up the conversation ... my speaking is different than here and find it hard to follow an argument ... causes confusion to what it means ... in socialising the style of speaking and bad pronunciation makes it hard for me to communicate”*. So a thorough investigation into how far reading and listening skills influence students’ abilities to developing IL is essential: do students misunderstand the lack of language skills, or do listeners, including teachers, misinterpret competence in core elements of language? In addition, this study indicates that Indian students are conceived as better in communication skills than other Asian students; however they also find more or less the same issues in English language. Hence, it would be worth questioning whether they are really better in language skills than other Asian students; and if so why they face the same issues as other students. This will open a new debate in understanding the impact of language skills over the IL development.

Based on the current research, students understand IL practice in theory but are unable to practically apply it in learning. Therefore it may be worth exploring further which elements of students’ “likes and dislikes” preferences could be carefully avoided and others potentially adopted. Similarly, as revealed earlier, students understand the difference between traditional and modern learning, and no longer wish to be dependent learners. Therefore, a question arises whether students’ transitional arrangements could be documented to support their struggle into the early development of IL skills, and what part does their reliance on prior learning practices, e.g. memorisation, play in this developmental process? To understand this educational dilemma, a wider study could further explore the influence of teaching over the process of IL development. For example, the current study found students’ positive, negative and in some cases neutral views about teaching and other issues about learning practices. However, it is suggested to examine, how far teaching with tutors’ intensive roles can have implications for the transformation of IL from a history of teacher-centeredness and dependency.

In addition, it is vital to explore how financial complications can, whether from sponsors or a self-financing perspective, influence students' cognitive as well as behavioural abilities to learn independently. Vygotsky's social context of learning is key in such a perspective. Robust studies could further assess not only 'the need for spending to increase the number of training programmes' but also on financial management programmes, to address the increasing financial pressure under which many students find themselves.

Thus, researchers could be assisted in similar troubling situations, coming with in-depth understandings of the existing learning environment, to broaden the search for research. This timely assistance is not merely a helpful method but a process that works, and is suggested for at least novice researchers. This element of collaboration (Bound, 2007) is what 'LEARNING' is all about in higher education.

6.8 Implications of This Study

British universities, as acknowledged in Chapter 2, are continuously improving the standard of both teaching and learning. This study acknowledges this and adds to the literature that certain changes or adjustments would further improve policy and practice in institutions, in particular in relation to bringing more coordinated harmony in both pedagogy and andragogy. Thus a growing number of overseas students in the UK (see ONS, 2011; HESA, 2006, 2007 & 2009/10; Home Office, 2011b etc.) necessitates that institutions take measures to change teaching practices. Changes in teaching would not only be seen by many as a quality practice but also has a clear link to students' development of IL practices. Based on the current research, the following ideas could have clear implications for teaching and learning practices as well as impacting on a gradual and steady change in students approaches to learning – leading to successful IL;

- Taking into account recent student recruitment scams, this study adds to the literature that universities have in fact ignored the formality of English language requirements which is one of the key elements for successful IL development. Institutions would need to introduce a system in which both existing and future students' language skills are not only assessed properly but also provided with

opportunities for improvement to a reasonable level of competence. The existing online discussion could provide a necessary contribution for some distance level programmes. In my view the existing system of online assessment is driven to focus more on results than the students' language skills' ability. Thus it is not sufficient to rely totally upon an arbitrary score of language competence as a gatekeeper to get entry into HE in the UK but other assessment methods, i.e. interviewing, would also impact the long term recruitment process. Similarly an integrated form of online teacher-student interaction, for those in the UK, would also improve students' skills as well as prepare them to face the IL environment.

- Adding to the gap in existing literature concerning language assessment methods, priority could be given to alternative lingual assessment programmes, as loopholes exist in the current language assessment process i.e. IELTS etc. Teaching guidelines could also be used in supporting students to adopt not only the right language skills but also to become aware of what is required in UK learning and what is expected regarding results. Thus what would be useful is some way of measuring the potential of students to develop IL and not just a blind reliance on IELTS etc.
- The current study identifies the existing misconceptions in the literature about Asian students as different identities, and adds to the literature that Asian students of CHC and Non-CHC are one identity. As this study did not observe increasing divisions among Asian students in their adaptation with other western students, the issue of culture is merely seen in the light of students taking a mono-ethnic approach to socialising. Similarly, the notion of being relieved at using a mono-ethnic approach hinders the development of language and in addition to the IL skills; while the wider use of a multi-ethnic approach enables them to develop language and IL skills more feasibly. Thus the focus has been on the way Asian students inherently keep a distance in socialising, which is not noticed normally. Similarly the way Asian students idealise respect for their teachers and the way they accept the teachers' authority, adds to the literature, as a positive aspect of good candidature because it facilitates the establishing of authority. Thus teachers need to understand this flexibility as a positive way to establish ways of developing language as well as IL skills.

- While the majority of issues associated with the development of IL arise from prior learning history, there is a financial element which may have either misguided the students, or else they opted to concentrate on financial gains. Thus economic and genuine students emerge. Institutions would have to establish patterns to discourage not only economic students but also finance-related activities which have negative effects on the development of IL skills.

6.9 Recommendations

As we now know, there is a clear dichotomy between the financial requirements of UK institutional funding (Fosket et al., 2006) and the students who want to earn British qualifications. One would be naïve to ignore the conflict that arises. It is worthwhile to note that money is one of the driving forces for overseas students who study in the UK (Watt, 2012). One solution would be forging a connection with students to ensure that in home countries enough information are provided to them before embarking for Britain; this practice is actually remunerative in the long term and would save a lot of efforts and resources upon arrival in the UK.

Secondly, with the appropriate international connections, students should be given guidelines to enable them to engage in IL activities and acquire the needed skills or at least to be aware of the skills required for learning in the UK. In this way, they would begin the transition process, from linguistic inabilities to competence and dependence to independence, before they leave home. At the same time, such initiatives would secure and recruit more competent students and those serious about studying independently.

Of course, in addition to the above recruitment issues, there are other problems like unaccredited colleges, identified by the UKBA, as well as unqualified students. See a recent probe into Visa fraud system which was identified by a news channel (refer to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-26024375>). Most importantly, it would be necessary to ascertain that students are well-prepared for UK study. Their admission could be made conditional with the introduction of ‘partial language training and learning skills’ courses where students can demonstrate sufficient skills to qualify, because it is not just

language skills or socio-cultural adjustment but also the ability to develop IL skills that is important. These training courses could be designed from the perspective of a conditional offer to study. At the same time, students may be asked to make a tuition deposit toward the completion of their courses. In this way, competition might rise with funding and students might be more vigilant and ready for UK study while institutions can also provide them with the opportunity of a quality education. This extra step would discourage people from gaining entry into the UK under false pretences. A more robust, in-depth study could investigate and enlighten the efficacy of such training courses, not only to discourage ‘economic migrants’ but also offer more opportunities for serious learning. In addition, considering the recent influx of students and closing down of many visa-pretence colleges, it is necessary to investigate whether students are really seeking part-time work and complying with immigration rules, in addition to whether part-time work helps students to develop their language skills. If so this will open a possibility for further exploration into which categories of job might boost students’ language skills as well as help in their socio-cultural adjustment; and whether institutions are also complying with student recruitment regulations.

At the same time, it is of utmost importance to provide overseas students with the opportunities to develop IL skills before embarkation to the UK; this preliminary step might help both teachers and students to meet teaching and learning requirements. Although many university websites offer guidance for overseas students regarding UK study (i.e.: <http://libweb.surrey.ac.uk/library/skills/Learningskills.html>), the information is not always available in countries with unreliable internet access. For example, in the past six years, Pakistan has experienced electricity outages which crippled the education sector. Hence, it is important to ensure that students have adequate access to such information before embarking for Britain. Similarly, it would also be helpful to identify potential learning issues for those students with disabilities, making diversity a sustainable reality and study programmes equally accessible. Once students arrive in the UK, the tutoring system creates teaching and learning issues for them; all of which occur in an educational system whose mission is not only to attract applicants from diverse cultures but also to enable them learn successfully – IL is a successful strategy of learning in HE. Tutors must prepare themselves for a demanding and ever-evolving

process to harmonise students more adequately from different cultures within the UK learning system, which requires a level of flexibility; this would necessarily be a step ahead to meet the demand of diversity.

One example illustrates the point: In a recent discussion on the 'LINKEDIN website' about second language learners, Spring Petta posted a topic: *"I'm tutoring a new student and I'm having trouble determining her level of English proficiency. The only thing I know is that her comprehension is higher than her performance."* The tremendous positive response to this discussion was significant. Spring Petta acknowledged that an online conversation was an interesting way to understand her topic of concern. Similar discussions might be useful for tutors to identify areas of uncertainty and to monitor students' contribution; both at the intellectual and lingual level and to understand the very development of IL patterns as well as monitor their inclusive engagement in learning activities. Although similar procedures are widely practiced in assessment methods in online UK courses, the same strategy could be used for sharing in-depth understanding and questions about students' development of independent learning.

Another way to assess learning patterns could include the advice of Hampton-Reeves et al. (2009: p.13) who suggests that any assessment should feature its purpose and scope. What are the questions? Beyond issues of reliability and validity, feasibility and security would also identify any core hidden problems. To include these questions with other strategies, tutors could also encourage and engage their students to improve and develop the IL process, an essential aspect of Paiget's cognitive constructivist theory; by insisting they contribute to supervised open discussions, as an important aspect of Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which could be used for assessment purposes. In this way, tutors would not only become more aware of the issues by social means but would help overseas students to potentially engage in learning, and thus become more independent learners. This is important for better assessment practice, as mentioned by Liu (2011) regarding language skills which gave him a false impression of being an adequate English learner. He narrates:

"My pre-university non-communicative English learning experience equipped me with good literacy skills in English, and my success in written English tests

gave me a false impression that I was a good English learner. That impression deceived me into taking English as my major at university.” [online]

Various studies, including this one, confirm that Asian students receive help, in order to get through their studies, from tutors in their prior educational settings. Despite the lack of support they receive in the UK, they do turn to others to steer their learning. In such situations, why is essential support not offered automatically to students when they need it? There is room for further investigation as to how the type and nature of support can help students to develop IL more easily.

Similarly, other international students often face initial adjustment problems upon their arrival in the UK. Why then, are they not connected sooner with other students from their home country, and introduced to e-resources (Sovic, 2008) in order to start learning from the very beginning? In successive steps, these students could be encouraged to participate in UK programmes through discussions and work-experience schemes, bearing in mind that some jobs would have a negative impact on students’ lingual improvement, e.g. those working long unsociable hours. Maintaining such strategies would assist learning by increasing students’ confidence levels (Jianwu, 2011: p.37) and helping them emerge from their cultural bonds. Forland (2006) describes a similar concept in the following terms:

“Universities that accept international students onto their courses, and increasingly offer courses that are designed specifically with international students in mind, need to consider issues such as where the responsibility lies for enabling the adjustment to take place and how it should be facilitated. It is particularly acute at masters’ level when the teaching period is so brief and the chance to adapt over a significant period of time is almost impossible.” (p.4)

On a related topic, Forland makes the point that although it is hard to successfully adjust in a one-year UK postgraduate programme; there is still a need to modify both teaching and learning practices. In fact, the learning process is incomplete without that adjustment where all stakeholders need to be on board for it to succeed.

Indeed, my personal experiences coincide with Liu's narrative and the findings above. If students are encouraged to immerse themselves in the English language and abandon the already dominant ‘mono-ethnic communications’ trend, they would have a better

chance to enhance their social interactions with local and other international students. The result is likely to be positive for their communication skills, as well as a better cross-cultural and social understanding of the host country.

At the same time, such social and cultural interactions would help British and other Western students to comprehend any differences which are crucial for the adjustment process and international understanding; a process that succeeds when all parties cooperate and interact with each other. At the very minimum, Brown's (2008) research considers that "*without linguistic competence, academic adjustment is not possible.*" For one to achieve such competence, exclusive participation is a necessity in the current crisis. That goal may be difficult to achieve when other students use or have inherited a mono-ethnic approach (Brown: p.75) but is not impossible as Asian students also inherit, which I call a traditional form of respect, for teacher authority (Richard & Mona, 2009). Bound's (2007) words are relevant here:

"Powerful learning process can be developed through identifying the different voices of each institution and understanding the ways in which contextual conditions mediate these voices."

Another important recommendation might include an interim or transitional learning experience. For example, by presenting students with a choice of a temporary traditional or modern training programme, they would have a taste of the two different learning cultures in the UK during their initial stage of learning. However, such a programme does not yet exist. With this method, students would be able to better prepare themselves for UK higher education. As this study has shown about HE in the UK, students' perceptions about their own challenges are as significant as their learning patterns. Therefore, it would be ideal to study their feelings more closely to improve coping mechanisms with existing and potential concerns, specifically for Asian students. No doubt similar patterns also exist for other international students in the UK and should be reassessed.

Lastly, IL as a strategy, as shown earlier is commonly hailed by students as a preferable way to learn. It was also clarified earlier that language support as kick-starting, support as subject-specific, language skills as subject-specific and support as essential in

language skills, are key issues; however encouraging IL and supporting its transition from prior learning is yet to be employed as a strategy to enhance students' learning practices. One way to achieve this could be to patronise a system in which support strategies are divided in relation to encouraging IL and to support a method of transition from students' own prior learning. In relation to Asian students, they should not be discouraged from their practice of partial memorisation, rather they must be encouraged to experience the difference, the quality and the result of what can be learnt independently. At the same time, it would be vital to define what students mean by support and how support could be classified in relation to different aspects of learning.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Top Level Countries Regarding the Use of English

1	Singapore	---- (255)
2	India	586 (236)
3	Malaysia	572 (232)
4	Philippines	566 (238)
5	Pakistan	562 (238)
6	Bangladesh	557 (228)
7	China	557 (216)
8	Sri Lanka	548 (234)
9	Hong Kong	539 (216)
10	South Korea	538 (218)

Source: Bolton (2008), *English in Asian, Asian English, and the Issue of Proficiency*

Appendix 2: Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronyms	Abbreviations
AL	Autonomous Learning
ALS	Academic Learning Style
AISHE	All Ireland Society of Higher Education
AL	Autonomous Learning
ARWU	Academic Ranking of World Universities
ASI	Approaches to Studying Inventory
ASSIST	Approaches and Study Skills Inventory for Students
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CERNET	Chinese Education and Research Network
CHC	Confucian Heritage Culture
CM	Concept Mapping
DCs	Developing Countries
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELLs	English Language Learners
ELS	English Language Skills
EPL	Early Professional Learning
ERASMUS	European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FT	Full Time
GCSC	General Certificate in Secondary Education

GoP	Government of Pakistan
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEC	Higher Education Commission (Pakistan) – formerly known as UGC
HEPI	Higher Education Policy Institute
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IAU	International Association of Universities
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IIE	Institute of International Education
IL	Independent Learning
ILs	Independent Learners
ILT	Institute of Teaching and learning
ILTHE	Institute of Teaching and learning in Higher Education
ILS	Index of Learning Styles
IT	Information Technology
LDSS	Library and Documentation Support System
LE	Learning Environment
LM	Learning Model
LSQ	Learning Style Questionnaire
LSI	Learning Style Inventory
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MEFSS	Modern Equipment and Facilities Sharing System
MoE	Ministry of Education
NAAC	National Assessment and Accreditation Council
NPA	National Plan of Action
NUS	National Union of Students
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PG	Post Graduate
PT	Part Time
QAA/s	Quality Assurance Agency/ies
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
RASI	Revised Approaches to Studying Inventory
SEDA	Staff and Educational Development Association
SEQ	Schommer Epistemological Questionnaire (1990)
SHEEC	Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee
SPICE	Student Pre-Arrival Induction for Continuing Education
SPQ	Study Process Questionnaire
SRHE	Society for Research into Higher Education
SRSSDL	Self-Rating Scale of Self Directed Learning
TESOL	Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages
TQEC	Teaching Quality Enhancement Committee
UG	Under Graduate
UGC	University Grant Commission (India)
UKCOSA	United Kingdom Council for Overseas Students' Affairs
UKCISA	United Kingdom Council for International Students' Affairs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

VAK	Visual Auditory and Kinaesthetic
VARK	Visual Aural Read/Write Kinaesthetic (Fleming, 2010)

Appendix 3: Definition of Terms

Terms	Definitions
Assessment-based Learning	The type of learning in which students learn on their own but are assessed in order to identify learning outcomes
Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC)	The type of phrase is used for students from Asia excluding some countries, e.g. Pakistan, India, Bangladesh etc. Here in the current study, we use it for Chinese students
Choice-based Exam Papers	Examination papers prepared from within the text-book specified and are only read by students to pass exams
Exam-Specific Learning	The type of learning designed or adopted specifically to pass the examinations
Instruction-based Learning	The type of learning in which teacher instruct students to learn his (teacher) ways
Internationalisation	Mobility of international students across the world for the purpose of higher education and research programmes
Mono-ethnic Communications	Communication limited to students within their own community, speaking in their own native language
Mono-ethnic Socialisation	When students only socialise with their own peer groups from the same country using mono-ethnic communication
Multi-ethnic Communication	Communication within larger group of students, speaking different languages
Multi-ethnic Socialisation	When students socialise with a wider community as opposed to mono-ethnic socialisation
Non-CHC	Those students originating from South Asian countries who have not been branded as Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) students
NVIVO	A type of qualitative data analysis software which is largely used to interpret, organise and analyse data with a recent version of NVIVO 11. This is produced by QSR international
Period of Translation	A period of a student's life in which they transmit their ideas in the form of translation (from thinking to written materials) without thinking in the target language
Positive Interdependence	When students depends on each other for the

	purpose of positive outcomes or purposes. This also include dependence towards necessary support as well as teachers' guidance
Primitive Interaction	The necessary interaction between students own peer groups which give them a sense of a learning as well as building the process towards learning outcomes
scholastic independence	Students employing their intellectual ideas with a fair level of independence from teachers, and without depriving from necessary the necessary support from tutors.
Summative Assessment	Mainly conducted to measure students' performance at the end of any learning course or activity
Thought Process	A process in which students utter words and write sentences without the necessary assistance of translation from mother tongue to English language. Thought process is a word used contrary to translation period.

Appendix 4: Main Categories and Notes under Each Category

Learning	Both formal and informal learning	A successful Learning Practice is what leads to IL
Teaching	IL Enhancement	The purpose of teaching is to provide timely support which students find essential for developing IL – and students feel they must be given information about the role of the teachers so that they get to know their own responsibilities as learners in HE
Students Experiences	Revelations about own experiences	The process of HE in the UK leads to IL practices where students becomes able to achieve adequate learning skills; demonstrate adequate language skills and as a result they benefit more through independent learning from the teaching/learning environment.
Language Relations	Academic Writing	Academic writing is seen as a problem in every discipline in contrast to speaking skills which are subject-specific.
	Expert Speaking	Expert speaking skills are required by students in certain subjects where more demonstrative aspects of communication (i.e. presentations, seminars etc.) are involved.

Communication Specifications	Mono-ethnic	Mono-ethnic communication – when students are limited to their co-national for speaking; and multi-ethnic communication - is when students accept diversity and intermingle with other group of people for communication. Mono ethnic approach limits their IL abilities while multi-ethnic approach boost their IL as well language skills.
	Multi-ethnic	
Learning Support	Initial support	There is a need of support strategies for students, and such strategies must be made available in the course of independent learning practices, academic writing, and speaking skills and transitional perspectives. Transitional perspectives could be facilitated in the beginning by accustoming students with the British culture – social and academic.
	Partial support	
Adjustment	The adjustment is fed by all factors including IL, socio-cultural, generic learning support and linguistic competencies.	
Product of learning	The process of HE in the UK leads to IL practices where students are able to achieve adequate learning skills as a product through a process, demonstrate adequate language skills; and thus they themselves are able to benefit more from the teaching/learning environment.	
Prior Learning	A history of learning from which students inherit patterns of dependency and rote learning in addition to other support specific expectations from their teachers and institutions.	
Prior Learning Dependency	The condition where students mainly remain limited to dependent, rote and memorise learning. At this stage students try to process information in order to learn how to learn with independence.	
Independent Learning	A practice of relying on one’s own selves while looking to teachers for guidance and other support strategies	
Outcomes/ Results	The intended achievements of learning in HE, which are limited to grades and prosperous careers. Students are largely driven by their ambitions to achieve good results, as exam-oriented learners.	
Re-enforcement	Enforcing Behaviours	Giving punishments as through strict marking and imposing enough and proper pressure on students to meet the demand of HE learning is what compel students to give more time to IL.

Cognitivist Relations	Active learning	Being actively involved in learning through a variety of learning practices. These practices come from Asian sample students. Students views concerns how they process learning leading to constructing some aspects of learning which in a sense is real facet of deep learning activity. Hence deep understanding of learning practices comes from cognitive perspective of students.
Behavioural Relations	Re-enforcement through assessment and exams	Re-enforcement, strict assessment and judging students' abilities to take control of their own learning. Strict marking criteria are one of re-enforcing relations.
Constructivist Relations	Students' constructing of learning activities and abandoning those do not help in constructing knowledge	When students judge their prior learning experiences in comparison to their current one, they find the difference in terms of considering UK experience as a positive one. The trend of shift from dependent learning to IL is leading example of constructivists' relations which happens as result of asking and receiving support towards adoption of IL and enough language skills. This trend necessitates the importance of understanding learning patters which students do in the current case.
Experiential Relations	Prior Learning (PL)	Students experienced both prior and UK-based learning and here they find the difference. Initially they were not happy with the UK learning, while with the passage of time, they soon realised that actually learning is practically what they do in the UK, i.e. They liked IL practices in contrast to teacher-centred learning of prior learning experiences.
	UK-based Learning	
Positive Indications	UK-Based	Choosing and giving preference to IL in the UK to dependent learning approaches in prior learning is a positive indication. At the same time enhancement of language skills and writing with better academic English gives students the confidence to know what research is actually about "quality". Hence IL and availability of resources are considered the main positive aspects.
	Prior Learning	
Negative Indications	UK-Based	Students consider weak points in both prior learning and in UK's. Prior learning weak points include dependent learning and lack of

	Prior Learning	availability of resources while in the UK; they consider lack of support in language, learning, and social setting.
Economic Reasons	Both being for financial stability and immigration purposes	Some students have inherent intentions of working in the UK and settling here. However majority of studying students in university are more inclined to return to their countries in order to get better jobs. They think that it is difficult for them to get good jobs here in the UK and therefore do not want to ruin their prospects in alien country. Students consistently complaints about high tuition fees and accommodation costs however at the same time justifies the value of British qualification and IL practices.
Socialisation	Subject to multi-ethnic communication and intermingling with western students	An overwhelming majority of student have strongly indicated that intermingling with other students and their functions is necessary for socialisation and this in return provide an opportunity of knowing them more closely. Hence facilitates the process of adjustment in the UK. This is possible with multi-ethnic communication and multi-ethnic socialisation practices.
Academic Success Stories	Depend less on students' financial stability and more on their future prospects	An overall population of students were found to successfully complete their studies despite their concerns regarding finance, language skills and socialisation issues and lack of support from teachers. Students with inherent intention of completing their studies with success are more willing to return to their countries of origin, however a very low proportion of students, studying in universities, are still finding jobs in the UK.

Appendix 5: Initial Codes Generated from Interviews

Type	No	Name	Sources	References
Node	1	Academic writing must for learning in UK	4	5
Node	2	Adjustment issues	4	6
Node	3	Asian socialize with their own community	3	4
Node	4	Asian students avoid integration	2	2
Node	5	Asian students feel social differences	2	3
Node	6	Asian students social connections	3	3

Node 7	Autonomous learning	8	19
Node 8	Colleges' lack of staff	1	1
Node 9	Communication	4	6
Node 10	Copy and paste	2	3
Node 11	Cultural pride	2	2
Node 12	Dependency	10	19
Node 13	Diversity in learning	1	1
Node 14	Socialising differences	1	1
Node 15	Learning opportunities	2	2
Node 16	Learning resources	2	3
Node 17	Examination-oriented learning	1	5
Node 18	Selective study	3	4
Node 19	Learning for outcomes	3	4
Node 20	Examinations as Aims	2	3
Node 21	Experiential accounts	3	9
Node 22	Facilities	2	5
Node 23	Fear of failure in exams	2	4
Node 24	Feeling the financial pressure	5	13
Node 25	Financial issue affecting learning	2	3
Node 26	Financial issue affect IL	14	27
Node 27	Financial issues lead to working in the UK	3	4
Node 28	Issue of communication	8	12
Node 29	Getting used to IL environment	2	3
Node 30	Good learning experience in UK	4	5
Node 31	Good learning experiences	1	5
Node 32	Lacking Grammatical skills	5	7
Node 33	IL leads to learning skills	4	7
Node 34	IL happens as a result of experience	2	4
Node 35	IL is due to less teachers support	2	2
Node 36	IL increase constructionist approach	1	1
Node 37	IL is time-consuming	2	3
Node 38	IL need training and support	2	3
Node 39	IL results into memorable learning	2	3
Node 40	Importance of Language Skills towards IL	2	6
Node 41	IL as a common practice in the UK	3	6
Node 42	Influence of language	3	5
Node 43	Issue in writings assignments	4	7
Node 44	Knowledge acquiring	3	8
Node 45	Lack of academic writing skills	4	7
Node 46	Lack of communication skills	2	4
Node 47	Lack of confidence in expressions	3	7
Node 48	Lack of IL skills	3	6
Node 49	Lack of language skills affect IL	3	9
Node 50	Lack of resources	2	2
Node 51	Lack of resources hinders the IL process	2	3
Node 52	Lack of resources in prior learning	5	6

Node	53	Lack of learning support	2	4
Node	54	Lack of social understandings	2	5
Node	55	Language issue as subject-specific	2	3
Node	56	Language issue as declining	2	3
Node	57	Language skills vital for IL	2	4
Node	58	learning with support is easy	3	4
Node	59	Teaching and learning as a partnership	2	2
Node	60	Learning environment influence	6	13
Node	61	learning experience in UK is better and organized	5	16
Node	62	Experiencing IL as a better experience	4	6
Node	63	learning in UK is more inclusive	3	4
Node	64	Learning makes proud	2	3
Node	65	Dependent Learning styles	2	3
Node	66	Learning with respect for teachers authority	3	6
Node	67	Less support from teachers lead students to seek help from colleagues	2	4
Node	68	Lack of staff and lack of available support	3	5
Node	69	Liking for IL	3	4
Node	70	Limited learning was specific for passing exams	2	9
Node	71	Limited Resources in home countries	2	2
Node	72	Memorization and rote learning as prior learning-specific	3	4
Node	73	Memorization to learning	4	5
Node	74	Memorization and rote learning to deep learning	3	3
Node	75	Mode of study	2	4
Node	76	Lack of facilities at private colleges	2	2
Node	77	cultural distance among Asians	3	3
Node	78	Notes taking techniques	3	4
Node	79	Poor writing skills	3	4
Node	80	Presentation skills	3	3
Node	81	Prior learning as dependent	4	5
Node	82	Prior learning with mismanaged enough resources	2	5
Node	83	Private colleges are not credible	2	2
Node	84	Prospects	3	4
Node	85	Religion	5	9
Node	86	Rote learning in prior learning	4	4
Node	87	Self-learning	4	5
Node	88	Social connection	2	2
Node	89	Social distance as a negative but necessary way	1	3
Node	90	Social experiences is good for learning	2	2
Node	91	Social integrity is good for multiculturalism	2	2
Node	92	Social issues is beyond universities	3	5
Node	93	Socialization is restricted by background and values	3	5
Node	94	Socializing with British students is difficult for Asian students	3	4

Node	95	Strict marking in the UK	4	5
Node	96	Student like to learning through experiencing	2	4
Node	97	Students feel comfortable socializing with their own community	4	8
Node	98	Students learn for exams	3	6
Node	99	Liking IL in the UK	5	7
Node	100	Students need support	2	6
Node	101	Students need teacher support to learn	5	16
Node	102	Students need teachers guidance for learning	2	3
Node	103	Students need teachers' support	3	6
Node	104	Students prefer deep learning	3	6
Node	105	Students prefer IL	3	5
Node	106	Students seek English writing support	4	7
Node	107	Students seek initial induction and training	2	4
Node	108	Students taking employment	2	3
Node	109	Support is essential	4	4
Node	110	Support is essential for IL	4	6
Node	111	Support required at early stages of learning	4	5
Node	112	Teachers work as guide	3	6
Node	113	Teachers authority	4	6
Node	114	Time management	1	1
Node	115	Trust deficit	1	1
Node	116	Multi-cultural learning society	2	2
Node	117	UK learning is research initiated based	3	5
Node	118	UK offer courses not Seen in Before	2	2
Node	119	Use of native language in universities	2	3
Node	120	Views about British students	5	6

Appendix 6: Free Nodes at Later Stage

Type	Name	References
Node 1	Asian students social connections	37
Node 2	Feeling a social differences	11
Node 3	Socialization is restricted by background and religion	11
Node 4	Autonomous learning Commonalties	19
Node 5	Better learning experience in the UK	57
Node 6	Independent learning as common practice in the UK	9
Node 7	Learning environment	15
Node 8	Mode of study	7
Node 9	Notes taking techniques	6
Node 10	Strict Marking in the UK	11
Node 11	Teachers authority	13
Node 12	Innovative subject studies	4

Node 13	Communication skills	8
Node 14	Disliking factors	56
Node 15	Dependency element	19
Node 16	Exam based learning	16
Node 17	Limited learning was specific for passing exams	11
Node 18	Lack of resources in prior learning	7
Node 19	Memorization and rote learning in prior learning	13
Node 20	Support availability	13
Node 21	Financial issue affecting learning (influence)	47
Node 22	Moral Perceptions	12
Node 23	Grammatical skills	17
Node 24	IL happens as a result of experience	22
Node 25	IL develops learning skills	16
Node 26	Influence of language	23
Node 27	Lack of Academic writing skills	16
Node 28	Language issue as subject-specific	9
Node 29	Language issue as Temporary	9
Node 30	Lack of communication skills	8
Node 31	Use of native language in universities	12
Node 32	Lack of IL skills	13
Node 33	Lack of resources	5
Node 34	Lack of resources hinders IL	13
Node 35	Learning for better prospects	11
Node 36	Positive views of prior learning and UK learning	56
Node 37	Enough learning resources in the UK	18
Node 38	Good learning experiences	28
Node 39	Liking for IL	19
Node 40	Generic support in process of learning	47
Node 41	Students seek English writing support	17
Node 42	Support is essential for IL	21
Node 43	Support required at early stages of learning	22
Node 44	Thinking in language	7

Appendix 7: Main Categories with Memos

Node/ Category	Name	Memos
Node 1	Behaviourist Views	Comes from re-enforcement of strict assignments and marking criteria. These also give students a sense of fear which could lead them to failure
Node 2	Career Enhancement	Promoting the chances of more well paid and honoured jobs in future. This is commonly seen under

		attainment of British university qualifications. The trend is more prevalent among fresh students
Node 3	Cognitivists Views	Comes from understanding written and other learning materials in greater depth. This in a sense give rise to deep learning activities
Node 4	Decoy Students	Students using colleges as pretence for visas
Node 5	Economic Migrants	Students with limited purpose of stay to take employment and settle in the UK. This category is contrary to Financially stable students who normally come from rich background. However, some financially stable students are taking unnecessary paid employments.
Node 6	Financial Implications	They are the result of huge tuition fees, living costs, and rare job opportunities; are the result of late or cease of funding from sponsors and recruitment under false promises/information. The result is seen in the form of discontinuation. To overcome it, students normally save money by sharing accommodation and get assistance from family members. Majority of students overcome financial difficulties
Node 7	Essential Support	Support with guidance level which is utmost necessary to kick-start students' process of learning. This also includes support for adjustment purposes.
Node 8	Essentialist Views	Students views about IL and language skills where they find that certain aspects of learning, i.e. IL are essential to learn. For this purpose language skills are essential to learn. Even it is spirally equivalent and enhances each other.
Node 9	IL Influence	Independent learning influences students from the very start. In the beginning they find it hard, even though like it and influence them to adopt IL approach.
Node 10	Kick-Starting Support	Support from teachers which is essential for students' learning to start happening. This is also called essential support
Node 11	Lingual Influence	Lingual influence mainly appears in expert level communication of speaking and academic writing. This is widely felt among students. The influence appears in the form of independent learning approach which students view will not happen with each other. It means that both are language and IL is necessary for each other. To overcome lingual concerns students seek to be taught the technical terms, want some training to learn the necessary academic writing. Speaking skills are more widely used in certain subject studies which majority of students subjects had no major relation

		with.
Node 12	Mono-ethnic Communication	Remaining limited to a group of students from the same country who speak the same language. This is seen a major obstacle in adjustment process
Node 13	Mono-ethnic Socialization	Remaining limited to a group of students from the same country for socialization purposes and get to gather activities. This also helps in adjustment process of students
Node 14	Multi-ethnic Communication	Students who are willing to merge and communicate with students of other cultures. This can mainly happen with English language and hence boosts student language skills
Node 15	Primitive Interactions	Students normally do not share their experiences of utmost importance where they found much difficulties, however they are more willing to works in groups and this can come under cooperative learning
Node 16	Positive Interdependence	At times students are willing to depend on each other. This means they want to share learning experiences and works in groups for learning to happen. We call it positive interdependence
Node 17	Qualification Enhancements	Students who are willing to gain extra UK qualification in order to go back to their countries and brighten their prospects. This category is contrast to economic migrants
Node 18	Re-reading essentialism	A lack of academic writing is a daunting experience. Students realise that upon reading and re-reading any written materials, they becomes able to drop out any major mistakes. This also give sense to them of what they have written, giving more weight to the true essence of academic writing
Node 19	Sponsored-students	Students who normally do no worry about their finances and who are more willing to return upon completing their studies. This category of students finds brighter chances of employment in their home countries. Majority of such students are less willing to turn to paid employment
Node 20	Confusion over understanding IL principles	There was a tremendous level of confusion among students who wanted to adopt IL at the same time were asking for more intensive support. Some wanted to see teachers more inclusively involved. Thus negating the true principles of IL which requires more self-efforts than guidance and teachers support
Node 21	IL vs DL	Prior learning experiences are mainly dependent, rote and traditional learning. However, students find IL useful and enjoyable.
Node 22	Adjustment	Through adjustment, students find more integrated part of UK higher education which is subject to adequate language skills, support and adopting multi-

		ethnic communication approach. Adjustment process is hindered by cultural differences and this is dominantly found in the form when Asian students consider that western students take teachers for granted and feel that teachers are not respected properly. This reveals huge cultural differences by which Asian students take respect in different meaning than western students.
Node 23	Academic Writing	Students consider that AW are necessary for arguments consistencies in writing without the need for translation from mother tongue to English language.
Node 24	Institutional Aspects	The lack of availability of learning support. These include support for language and socio-cultural adjustment. The requirement of academic writing and communication within wider community of students are also such institutional aspects
Node 25	Learner Aspects	Requirement of expert speaking and adequate academic writing skills along with understanding the true principles of IL
Node 26	Cultural Aspects	From mono-ethnic communication to multi-ethnic communication and multi-ethnic socialisation in order to acquire the adjustment process in both institutions and wider community.

Appendix 7: List of Issues Approached in Questionnaires and Interviews

Issues	Phase 1 Interviews	Phase 1 Questionnaire	Phase 2 Interviews - Elaboration	Phase 3 Interviews – Clarification
Related to Independent Learning	√	√	√	√
By Prior Learning Experiences	√	√	√	√
By Language	√	√	√	√
By Finance	√	√	√	
By Gender	√	√	X	X
By Religion	√	√	X	X
By Social Adjustment	√	√	√	√
By other demographics	X	√	X	X
By Satisfaction in the UK	√	√	√	√

By Satisfaction at home countries	√	√	√	X
By Study Levels	X	√	X	X
By Prior Learning experiences in the UK	√	√	X	X
By Studying Hours	X	√	X	X
By Choice of Study	X	√	X	X

Appendix 8: Stakeholders in the Current Study

Themes	Classification	Description
Students	As Learners	The learners involved in the learning process
Teachers	As Guides	Guiding students rather than traditional teaching
Learning Environment	As Source	Higher education institutions the UK
English Language	As Medium	The language used in learning in HE in the UK
Culture	As Identity	Students coming from different backgrounds
Social Settings	As Alien	The current social environment in the UK for different students
Independent Learning	As Patterns	The patterns of learning used in the UK
Prior Learning	As History	Learning used in the past by students in the home countries

Appendix 9: Questionnaires, the Questions Asked in the First Questionnaire

The following questions were asked and every questionnaire included the following statement in the beginning.

Ethical Statement and Consent of Information

Dear Colleagues, please help me in my research study by returning this simple questionnaire. This questionnaire is only aimed towards a research study and your details will not be disclosed to anybody. In this questionnaire, you are not required to disclose your sensitive information but as the study require information about gender, social, origin, age, and level of studies in order to investigate the issues faced by overseas students while learning in higher education in UK. Therefore your provided information will only be used for the purpose of this study investigating the barriers to

learning and development of independent learning among overseas students in UK. No personal information will be disclosed to anyone in any shape or form, and confidentiality will strictly be followed. This questionnaire will only take up-to 5 minutes to complete. Once you have answered all the questions, simply click on the submit button. Thanks

- 1: What is your age range?
- 2: What is your marital status?
- 3: Do you have any disability?
- 4: Are you by any mean religious?
- 5: Do you face any discrimination in the UK?
- 6: What is your Nationality and Gender?
- 7: What is your achieved highest level qualification from home country?
- 8: What is your current level of study or was your most recent level of study in the UK?
- 9: Are you studying for the first time in the UK?
- 10: If you have marked no for Q.9, then mention the level of degree you have studied in UK before? Mark as much applicable.
- 11: Which one best describe your English level of efficiency?
- 12: Which one is the nearest area of your studies?
- 13: How many hours do you study every week? Approximately
- 14: How confident are you to complete your current studies successfully?
- 15: Do you face financial difficulties during your current studies?
- 16: Who support you and your studies financially?
- 17: What you intend or expect to do after completing your current studies?
- 18: Do you face any issue of the following in the UK? If yes then tick all those apply to you.
- 19: Which of the following you normally face in the UK learning environment? Tick all that applies to you.
- 20: Which one of the following is the worst issue you normally face in the UK learning environment? Tick only one.
- 21: Which of the following issues you can easily cope with during your studies in the UK?
- 22: Where do you live/stay during your studies?
- 23: How often do you visit your library a week? Tick all those apply to you.
- 24: Where do you normally study? Tick all those apply to you.
- 25: How satisfied you were while learning in higher education in your home country? Tick 1 if strongly satisfied and tick 5 if not satisfied at all.
- 26: How satisfied you are while learning in the UK? Tick 1 if strongly satisfied and tick 5 if not satisfied at all.
- 27: How satisfied you were from your teachers in your home country? Tick 1 if strongly satisfied and tick 5 if not satisfied at all.
- 28: How satisfied you are from your teachers in the UK? Tick 1 if strongly satisfied and tick 5 if not satisfied at all.
- 29: Rate your learning experience in UK? Tick 1 for best and 5 for worst.
- 30: Why you choose to study in the UK and not in another country? Please answer in short words.

Appendix 10: Participants in Questionnaire

Nationality	Age Range	Gender	Religion	Marital Status	English Fluency Level	Financial Difficulty	Study Level
Chinese	23 Under	Female	No	Single	Proficient	No	PG
Pakistani	23 Under	Male	Yes	Married	Proficient	No	PG
Chinese	23 Under	Female	No	Single	Intermediate	No	PG
Chinese	23 Under	Female	No	Single	Intermediate	No	UG
Indian	23 Under	Female	Yes	Single	Intermediate	Yes	UG
Chinese	23 Under	Male	No	Single	Intermediate	No	PG
Pakistani	23 Under	Male	Yes	Single	Intermediate	Yes	UG
Chinese	23 Under	Female	No	Single	Intermediate	No	UG
Pakistani	24-29	Male	Some what	Single	Proficient	Yes	UG
Pakistani	24-29	Male	Yes	Married	Proficient	No	PG
Pakistani	24-29	Male	Some what	Single	Proficient	Yes	PG
Indian	24-29	Female	No	Separated	Proficient	Yes	PG
Chinese	24-29	Female	Some what	Married	Proficient	Yes	Other
Chinese	24-29	Male	No	Single	Proficient	Yes	Other
Pakistani	24-29	Male	Yes	Single	Proficient	Yes	PG
Indian	24-29	Male	Some what	Single	Intermediate	Yes	PG
Chinese	24-29	Male	Some what	DWtD	Proficient	Yes	PG
Chinese	24-29	Male	No	Single	Proficient	Yes	PG
Pakistani	24-29	Male	Yes	Single	Proficient	No	UG
Pakistani	24-29	Male	Some what	Single	Proficient	Yes	UG
Chinese	24-29	Male	Yes	Single	Intermediate	Yes	MPhil /PhD
Indian	24-29	Male	No	Single	Proficient	Yes	PG
Pakistani	24-29	Male	Some what	Single	Proficient	Yes	PG

Pakistani	24-29	Female	Some what	Single	Proficient	Yes	PG
Pakistani	24-29	Male	Yes	Single	Proficient	Yes	PG
Indian	24-29	Male	Yes	Married	Proficient	Yes	PG
Indian	24-29	Male	Yes	Single	Intermediate	Yes	PG
Chinese	24-29	Female	No	Single	Proficient	No	PG
Pakistani	24-29	Male	Yes	Single	Proficient	Yes	PG
Chinese	24-29	Male	Yes	Single	Proficient	Yes	PG
Indian	24-29	Male	No	Single	Proficient	Yes	PG
Chinese	24-29	Male	No	Married	Proficient	Yes	PG
Chinese	24-29	Female	No	Single	Proficient	No	PG
Pakistani	24-29	Male	Yes	Single	Proficient	No	PG
Pakistani	30-34	Male	Yes	Married	Proficient	Yes	MPhil /PhD
Pakistani	30-34	Male	Some what	Single	Proficient	Yes	PG
Pakistani	30-34	Male	Yes	Married	Proficient	No	MPhil /PhD
Indian	30-34	Female	Some what	Single	Proficient	Yes	PG
Pakistani	30-34	Female	Some what	Single	Proficient	No	MPhil /PhD
Chinese	30-34	Male	Some what	Married	Proficient	Yes	PG
Others	30-34	Male	Yes	Married	Proficient	Yes	PG
Indian	30-34	Male	No	Married	Proficient	Yes	PG
Pakistani	30-34	Male	Yes	Married	Intermediate	Yes	PG
Pakistani	30-34	Male	Yes	Single	Proficient	Yes	PG
Pakistani	30-34	Male	Yes	Married	Proficient	No	PG
Chinese	30-34	Male	No	Married	Proficient	No	PG
Pakistani	30-34	Male	Some what	Single	Proficient	No	PG
Pakistani	30-34	Male	Some what	Single	Proficient	No	PG
Indian	30-34	Female	Yes	DWtD	Expert	Yes	UG
Chinese	30-34	Male	No	Single	Proficient	No	MPhil /PhD
Pakistani	30-34	Male	Yes	Single	Intermediate	Yes	PG
Pakistani	30-34	Male	Yes	Single	Intermediate	No	PG
Chinese	30-34	Female	No	Married	Proficient	Yes	Other
Indian	30-34	Male	No	Single	Proficient	No	UG
Chinese	30-34	Male	No	Married	Proficient	No	PG
Indian	30-34	Female	No	Married	Expert	No	PG
Indian	30-34	Male	No	Married	Proficient	Yes	PG
Pakistani	35-40	Male	Some what	Married	Proficient	Yes	MPhil /PhD
Indian	35-40	Female	No	Single	Proficient	No	MPhil

							/PhD
Pakistani	35-40	Male	Some what	Single	Proficient	No	PG
Pakistani	35-40	Male	Some what	Married	Expert	No	PG
Pakistani	35-40	Male	Yes	Married	Proficient	No	MPhil /PhD
Indian	35-40	Male	No	Married	Expert	No	MPhil /PhD
Pakistani	35-40	Male	Yes	Married	Proficient	Yes	PG
Pakistani	40+	Male	Some what	Married	Proficient	No	Others
Pakistani	40+	Male	Yes	Married	Proficient	Yes	PG
Subtotal: 66	Age Rage: Below 23 =8 24-29 =26 30-34 =23 35-40 =7 40+= 2	Female: 16 Male: 50	Religi ous 25 Non- Religi ous 23 Some what religio us 18	Married: 23 Single: 40 Separate d: 1 DWtD: 2	Proficient: 50 Expert:4 Intermediate: 12	Finan cial issue: 38 No- financ ial issue: 28	PG:44 UG: 9 MPhil /PhD: 9 Other s: 4

Appendix 11: Issues Revealed in Questionnaires by Number of Students

Gender	Ethnic	Educational	Social	Cultural	Financial	Lingual
Men	50	15	13	22	29	18
Women	16	4	5	10	8	6
Total	66	19	18	32	37	24

Appendix 12: Ratio of Students Facing Issues in Questionnaires

Gender	Ethnic	Educational issues	Social issues	Cultural issues	Financial issues	Lingual issues
Men	50	15	13	22	29	18
Women	16	4	5	10	8	6
Percent	100%	29%	27%	48%	56%	36%

Appendix 13: Participation in Questionnaire: By Gender, Ethnicity and Education Level

Education Level	Ethnicity and Gender of Participants							
	Pakistan		India		China		Others	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Mphil/PhD	3	1	2	1	2	0	0	0
Postgraduate	21	1	7	2	6	4	1	0
Undergraduate	4	0	0	2	2	2	0	0
Others	1	0	0	1	1	2	0	0
Total: 66	29	2	9	6	11	8	1	0

Appendix 14: Students by Marital Status

Status of Participant	Number of Responses	Percentage
Married	24	36%
Single	39	59%
Divorced	0	0%
Separated	1	2%
Not Disclosed	2	3%
Total	66	100%

Appendix 15: Students' Proficiency Level of English Language

Level of English	Number of Students	Percentage
Expert	4	6%
Proficient	50	76%
Intermediate	12	18%
Secondary	0	0%
Basic	0	0%
Total	66	100%

Appendix 16: Students' Nearest Area of Current Study in the UK

Field of Study	No of Students	Percentage
Mathematical, Physical, Technological and Life Sciences	32	48%
Arts and Humanities	10	15%
Medical and Biological Sciences	6	9%
Social Sciences	10	15%
Others	6	9%
Total	64	96%

**Appendix 17: Satisfaction Ratio from Teachers in the UK
(Questionnaire Data)**

1 Indicate extremely satisfied and 5 not satisfied at all			
No	Number of Students	Percentage	
1	20	30%	86%
2	23	35%	
3	14	21%	
4	2	3%	14%
5	7	11%	
Total	66	100%	100%

Appendix 18: Overall Learning Experiences in the UK (Questionnaire Data)

1 Indicate extremely satisfied and 5 not satisfied at all		
No	Number of Students	Percentage
1	29	44%
2	20	30%
3	12	18%
4	4	6%
5	1	2%

Total	66	100%
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Appendix 19: Participants in Stage Two Interviews

Origin	Male (UG)	Female (UG)	Male (PG)	Female (PG)	Male (Research)	Female (Research)	Total
India	0	0	1	1	1	1	4
China	1	1	1	1	1	0	5
Pakistan	1	0	1	-	1	0	3
Total	2	1	3	2	3	1	12

Appendix 20: Leading Interviews Questions

Q1. Approaches to learning in UK

- A. Students views about approaches to learning in UK.
- B. Students' views about exam-based learning in general
- C. Students views about autonomous/independent learning
- D. What is your view about plagiarism?

Q2. Issues you face in higher education in UK.

- A. Cultural issues: (with integration, life, mixing with other people, etc)
- B. Social Issues: (with British and other nationalities of students)
- C. Socialising Issues in wider society
- D. Academic issues; lingual (English and first language)

Q3. Learning strategies in UK and Home Country

- A. Differences in learning in UK and home country
- B. Students views about IL and dependent learning
- C. Students views in terms of liking for IL or dependent learning

Q4. Expectations from teachers and institution in UK

- A. Students' expectations during the study and after the study in UK and home country?
- B. Appropriate of the mode of study for students here in UK.
- C. Preference for which type of learning mode – the one adopted in UK or the one that of home country. Or something else.
- D. Expectations from diverse learning environment in UK
- E. Expectations from teachers to change
- F. Views about institution in terms of good teaching and learning environment for diverse group of students

Q5. Learning in UK Higher Education

- A. Students' views about the teaching and learning strategies in UK
- B. Students' views about the problems (if any) in the teaching and learning environment of UK
- C. Students' views about solution for problems (if exist)
- D. Students' views about learning as experience (experiential learning).
- E. Students' views about the appropriateness of the way learning occurs in UK
- F. Students' views about approaches to learning in prior and UK learning
- G. Students views about acquisition and learning
- H. How students' learning can happen in UK?
- I. How students' learning can happen best?
- J. Students views about the transition period
- K. Students' views about issue related to religion
- L. Students views about social life in UK and adjustment process
- M. Students views about support in learning
- N. Students views about teachers in UK and prior learning
- O. Students views about IL and developing Independent learners

Appendix 21: Main Memos

Name: Benefits of IL

Independent learning makes student remember and comprehend what they do and learn

Name: Cultural Aspects

Majority of students see cultural influence more dominant in the UK than they did before in their home countries. Students are of the view that cultural differences are more imminent in between western and Asian students. When asked how far cultural differences affect their learning process, majority of my sample students were initially unaware of the strength of such influence. This would mean that students who come to UK to study are not well aware of the British culture and society. However as data was analysed further it became apparent that they do find them influential but without a direct knowledge of it.

Name: Cultural Issue as Declining

When cultural aspects were explored in greater depth, then it revealed that students actually faced adjustment issues in the beginning which started to vanish in the course of their studies. These indicate that adjustment is an issue in the beginning but not later on – a declining issue. In other words adjustment issues are short term issue among Asian students which is mainly limited to the start of their studies.

Name: Dependency in Learning (Description: Disliked by Students)

Students' dependency is closely related to their prior learning experiences (when they are mainly dependent on their teachers for learning) and they are puzzled in the new learning process because they are used to be taught before and now they need to learn themselves

Name: Exam Oriented Learning

Students view that their ultimate focus is on examination which gives them the strength to study as well as the stress and tension with fear of failure in exams. This indicates them as exam-oriented learners which are in contrast to IL.

Name: Financial Issues lead to Working in the UK

There is a minor evidence that students with no sponsorship are inclined to working in the UK while those who have pre-assurance of finance are less likely to take paid employment in the UK rather they are more willing to take internships for the purpose to promote their incentives and future prospects in the field of their studies.

Name: Financial Problem

Financial issue is mainly a management issue because overseas students in UK are always provided with information about expenditures in UK. Everybody is aware of the fee and other living expenses only if they are not misguided by their recruiting agents. Financial stability leads to better learning...

Those students who are struggling to meet tuition fees and other costs tend to turn towards paid employment and this will ultimately affect their studies. This also need to be taken in view of internship which is unlikely to affect studies but internship is likely to enhance practical skills within a discipline of study.

Name: Better Writing Skills

Better English language skills will lead students to better results and this is an important factor for IL

Questions: Are language skills only required for certain subject studies?

Notes: Students' priorities home for studying which is an indication of social distance among students.

PG students are in majority because they have already gained PG qualification in the home countries – indicating a trend of qualification enhancement.

Name: IL are Affected by Various Factors

Students view that there are multiple factors which affects their IL skills

1. Prior learning experiences which were mostly based on dependency over teachers
2. Lack of skills required for IL

Name: IL Related

When the issue of IL was explored, students revealed that the lack of IL skills was because of their prior dependency history over teachers which now create problems for them to adapt to the new IL culture. They also expressed that it is just a matter of time before they get used to it.

Name: Independent Learning; (Description: Liked by Students)

Students like to be independent but at the same time they also need some support

Name: Issues with learning culture

Students felt difficulties coping with the learning culture because of language barriers, lack of independent learning skills, financial burdens and prior educational history

Name: English Language Skills

Among the students, two themes commonly emerged in relation to issue of language. One was lack of academic writing skills and the second one was the lack of expert communication skills. Students views also revealed that they were unable to express their feelings and emotions clearly as they could in their native language which sometimes keep them stressed and un-explained. Language skills are also important for sustaining arguments in writing which give them a sense of emancipation of translation practices.

Name: Lack of Academic required Language Skills

Students' views are categories in terms of writing and speaking difficulties they face. One issue is the lack of academic writing skills and the second one is the lack of understanding complex and formal English language which sometimes lead to confusion and misunderstanding. Students also view that they sometime translate ideas from their language to English language.

Name: Language Problem vs Learning Patterns

Language problem lead to confusion and misunderstanding among British and Asian students and that may be why they normally don't trust each other in terms of jokes and other formal conversation – an example of formal and informal learning

Name: Language Related Issues

Upon exploring the phenomenon of language related issue, two categories of issues emerged. One was the lack of academic writing skills and second one was lack of expert communication. This would mean that students had not enough knowledge of academic writing and could not express themselves properly.

Name: Lack of IL Skills

Asian students' lack of independent learning skills originates from their dependency over teachers, the trend of rote learning and learning for examination purposes only. This would mean that students learnt for the purpose to pass their exams to get degrees.

Name: Lack of Understanding Social Norms

Students from selected countries revealed that they had not a clear idea of the social settings in UK which lead them to adjustment issue and kept them under social differentiation. This in common relates to social issues which is also common among other students. But overall they also revealed that it is a matter of time before they become used to it which has not a major impact on their learning during the course of their studies.

Name: Teaching and learning Partnership

Teaching and learning are two sides of the same coin and teaching is designed for the purpose of learning and learning happens as a result of good academic skills and environment. This also needs teachers' skills as expert tutors to enhance learning and develop independent learners.

Name: Likes and Dislikes

Students like support in prior learning and availability of resources and IL in UK learning while they disliked dependency, rote learning and memorization in home countries and less support in UK.

Name: About Liking and Disliking

When learning experiences of students were explored deeper, the overall number of students liked the kind of learning support in their prior learning while disliked the dependency over teachers and lack of resources. At the same time students liked the IL approaches, availability of resources in UK and disliked the lack of learning support available in UK.

Name: Social Adjustment; (Description: British VS Asian)

Majority of Asian students feel the distance with other British students. They are fond of mixing with other western students in comparison to British students. This may be for the reason that other western students (not British) speak English as a second language which is also the case with Asian students and therefore influencing Asian students to mix with those students instead of British students. This can be seen as a social gap between British and Asian students. Students indicated that because other western students are speaking a different language and English is their second language as Asian do, so it is easy for Asian students to mix with other western students. This in my view would mean that Language expertise would strengthen the process of multi-culturalism in the UK. Students who do not feel comfortable with British are due to the language deficiency and they fear to make lingual mistakes in front of them. The fear of language-weakness is thus seen as an indicator of distance between British and Asian students

Name: Students liking for IL

This is seen as a shift in approaches to learning for example, students in prior learning were dependent on their teachers but now they like IL as learning approaches which indicates a shift in their educational approach. This in fact is their cognitive thinking ability that's makes them construct new knowledge, thus making them constructivist learners in contrast to remain dependent or surface learners.

Name: Studying for a Second Degree

There were cases of students who were studying for the second time in UK despite having their degree level qualifications from home countries. This is an indicator of enhancing learning experiences in UK. UK based qualification is considered as important and a guarantee for future prospects.

Name: Teachers Dissatisfaction; (Description: in Language Skills)

Teachers are normally not satisfied from the Asian students' writing skills (according to students' views). This gives students a boost to improve their language skills which in turn develop their IL abilities and vice versa.

Appendix 22: Main Themes of Prior and UK-Based Learning

Likings (UK)	Disliking (UK)	Liking (prior)	Disliking (prior)
Independent learning	Less support	Enough Support	Lack of IL
Enough resources			Lack of resources

Diagram illustrating the relationship between UK and prior learning experiences. The top row shows 'Likings (UK)', 'Disliking (UK)', 'Liking (prior)', and 'Disliking (prior)'. The middle row shows 'Independent learning', 'Less support', 'Enough Support', and 'Lack of IL'. The bottom row shows 'Enough resources' and 'Lack of resources'. Arrows indicate relationships: a horizontal arrow from 'Enough resources' to 'Lack of resources'; a horizontal arrow from 'Less support' to 'Enough Support'; a vertical arrow from 'Enough Support' to 'Independent learning'; and vertical arrows from 'Enough resources' and 'Lack of resources' to 'Independent learning'.

Appendix 23: Satisfaction Ratio from Teachers in Home Countries

1 Indicate extremely satisfied and 5 not satisfied at all			
No	Number of Students	Percentage	
1	11	17%	89%
2	20	30%	
3	28	42%	
4	5	8%	11%
5	2	3%	
Total	66	100%	100%

Appendix 24: Satisfaction Ratio with HE Learning in the Home Country

1 Indicate extremely satisfied and 5 not satisfied at all			
No	Number of Students	Percentage	
1	5	8%	89%
2	25	37%	
3	29	44%	
4	5	8%	11%
5	2	3%	
Total	66	100%	

Appendix 25: Satisfaction Ratio with HE Learning in the UK

1 Indicate extremely satisfied and 5 not satisfied at all			
No	Number of Students	Percentage	
1	19	29%	89%

2	27	41%	11%
3	12	19%	
4	5	8%	
5	2	3%	
Total	66	100%	

Appendix 26: List of Interviewees in Stage One

Country of Origin	Male (UG)	Female (UG)	Male (PG)	Female (PG)	Male (Research)	Female (Research)	Total
India	1	0	0	1	1	0	3
China	1	1	1	1	0	0	4
Pakistan	1	0	1	0	1	0	3
Total	3	1	2	2	2	0	10

Appendix 27: Students by Previous Studies in the UK (the figures also include students with more than one level of previous studies in the UK)

Level of Study	Number of Students	Percentage
Master	8	12%
Undergraduate	2	3%
Diploma/Certificate	14	21%
Others	2	3%
Not Applicable	40	61%
Total	66	100%

Appendix 28: Students by Number of Hours (Questionnaire Data)

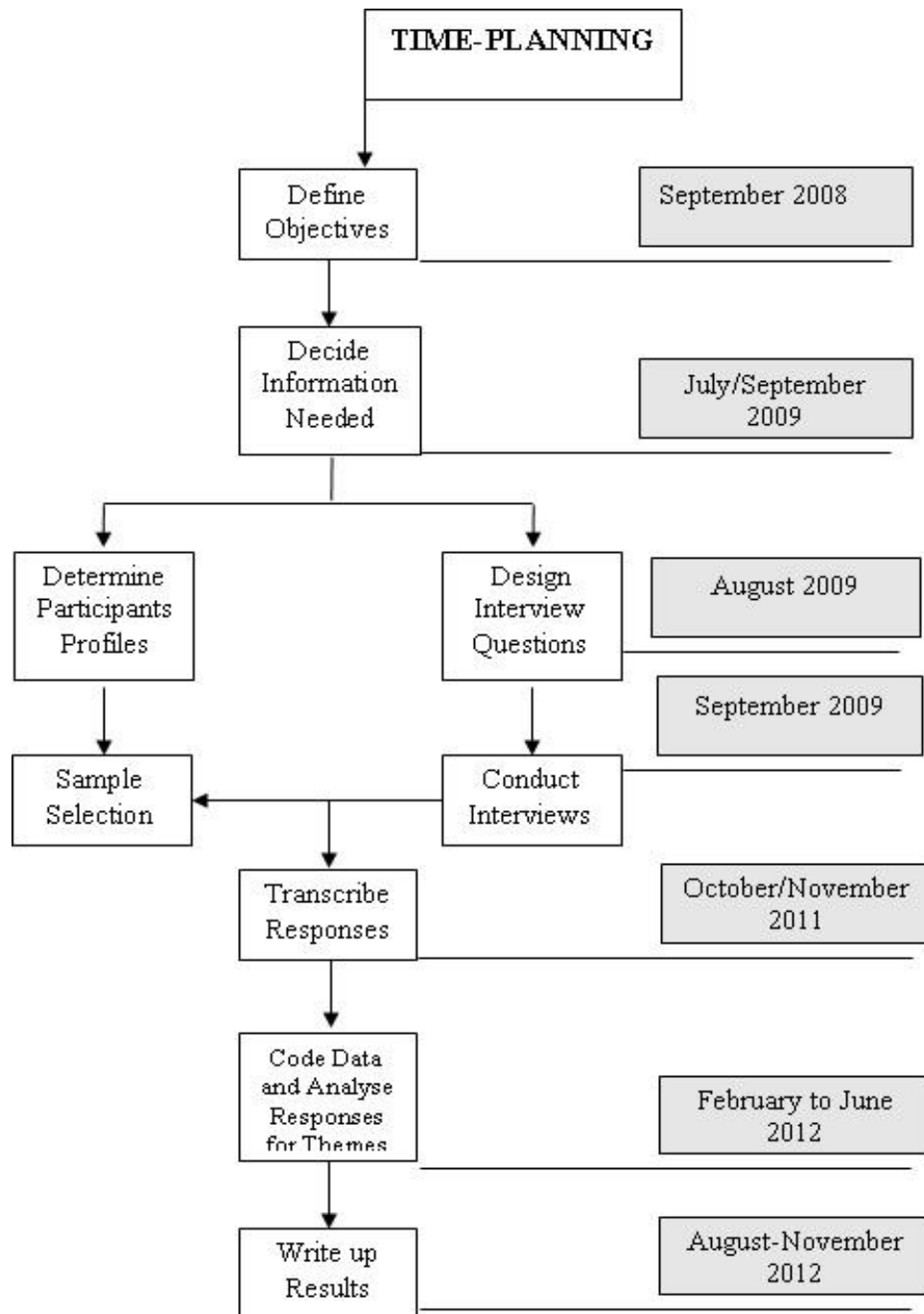
Hours of Study	No of Participants	Percentage
10-20	6	9%
20-30	37	56%
30-40	22	33%

40+	1	2%
Total	66	100%

Appendix 29: Participants in Stage Three Interviews

Origin	Male (UG)	Female (UG)	Male (PG)	Female (PG)	Male (Research)	Female (Research)	Total
India	-	-		1	1	-	2
China	1	1	1	-	-	-	3
Pakistan	-	-	1	-	1	-	2
Total	1	1	2	1	2	0	7

Appendix 30: Time Planning of this Project



Appendix 31: Main Web Resources Searched for the Current Study

Academia: <http://academia.edu/>

Asian EFL Journal: <http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/>

Association of Commonwealth Universities: www.acu.ac.uk

The Higher Education Academy: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/>

The British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP)

www.baleap.org.uk

Directory of Open Access Journals: <http://www.doaj.org/>

The British Education Index: <http://www.bids.ac.uk/>

British Council: www.britishcouncil.org

The British Library's Index to Theses: <http://www.theses.com/>

UK Council for International Students Affairs: www.ukcisa.org.uk

The National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales:

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/index.cfm>

Department for Education and Skills: www.dfes.gov.uk; now

<http://www.education.gov.uk/>

Educational Research in Scotland Database (ERSDAT)

<http://www.scre.ac.uk/is/ersdat/> (now) <http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/education/>

British Education Index: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/bei/index.html>

Society for Research into Higher Education: www.srhe.ac.uk

Times Higher Education Supplement: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/>

All Saint Educational Trust: <http://www.aset.org.uk/>

UKCOSA: www.ukcosa.org.uk

Universitas 21: <http://www.universitas21.com/>

World University Service UK: www.wusuk.org

Zetoc (provides access to the British Library's Electronic Table of Contents of current journals and conference proceedings): <http://zetoc.mimas.ac.uk/>

http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/styles/learn_style_survey.html

http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/styles/honey_mumford.html

http://www.ncll.org.uk/50_research/researchprojects/meetingtheneedsof/meetingtheneeds.pdf

http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/s15327019eb1503_2

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0729436870060204>

http://homepages.feis.herts.ac.uk/~comqtb/Grounded_Theory_intro.htm

<http://www.groundedtheoryonline.com/what-is-grounded-theory>

<http://gtm.vlsm.org/gnm-gtm.en.html>

http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc1290_en.htm.