UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

CHALLENGES AND PRACTICES OF ACADEMIC ENGLISH COMMUNICATION AMONG LIBYAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN FIVE SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN MALAYSIA

AHLAM ALI SALIM HALALI

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AHLAM ALI SALIM HALALI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studie, University Putar Malaysia,
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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2022

Chairman : **Lilliati binti Ismail, PhD**
Faculty : **Educational Studies**

Malaysian universities' use of English in instruction provides Libyan international students, reportedly the seventh largest ethnic group enrolled in Malaysian universities, opportunities to study in various academic fields. However, Libyan students encounter communicative challenges in Malaysian ESL learning environments stemming from insufficient prior EFL learning experience and resultant deficiencies in communicative competence, contributing to communicative language anxiety. Consequently, the students develop mediating learning strategies. Therefore, this study investigated EFL Libyan students' academic listening and speaking challenges, their mediating learning strategies, and the effects of prior learning experiences and communication language anxiety on their academic communication challenges and strategies. The investigation adopted an explanatory mixed-mode research design with the assistance of Libyan Embassy employing an online questionnaire survey with 223 respondents. Interviews and a focus group discussion were conducted with 20 survey respondents selected through purposive snowball sampling. Field notes and member checks were used for data triangulation and validation. Correlational procedures and structural equation modelling using bootstrapping resampling analyses with SPSS and AMOS were conducted to investigate the cause-and-effect relationships between variables, determine the validity of study models, and test the research hypotheses. NVivo analysis was performed for the interviews and focus group discussion for coding and generating themes from transcript data supported with field notes.

The results showed that Libyan students experienced listening comprehension challenges in understanding accents, academic content, and cultural differences. The qualitative results revealed the participants' listening comprehension in active communication was negatively affected by insufficient prior knowledge of academic terminology and anxiety.The students speaking challenges in academic discourse were due to their inadequate communicative competence and resultant cognitive inhibition.

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Qualitative analyses revealed students' reluctance to participate in academic discourse resulted from insufficient academic speaking practice which increased their anxiety, blocking comprehensible input. Thus, the students implemented strategies to improve their academic communication skills.

The listening strategies, in ranked order, were metacognitive, cognitive, compensatory, affective, memory-related, and social strategies. The students' preference for metacognitive and cognitive listening strategies over social strategies was attributed to their negative learning experiences combined with consequential communication anxiety, which discouraged social interaction. Thus, metacognitive and cognitive listening strategies promoted the students' self-reliance and self-motivation to improve listening comprehension through repetitive listening with reduced anxiety, supporting the storage and retrieval of information between short- and long-term memory. The speaking strategies, in ranked order, were memory-related, metacognitive, affective, compensatory, cognitive, and social strategies. Qualitative results revealed the Libyan students preferred memorisation and self-practice over social strategies. Their reluctance to employ social speaking strategies was because their insufficient prior learning experience resulted in poor communicative competence contributing to communication language anxiety. Memorisation facilitated the students' mental language modelling, enabling internalisation of their communicative environment.

Quantitative analyses revealed the Libyan's prior learning experiences and communication language anxiety were significantly correlated with their listening and speaking challenges and strategies. It was further found that prior learning experiences and communication language anxiety had mediating effects on the listening and speaking challenges and strategies.

Therefore, stakeholders should consider Libyan academic communication challenges resulting from inadequate prior English learning experience affecting their learning success in international higher education through developing and improving English language practice through educational materials and resources that improve English learners' academic success. Additionally, pre-sessional English programs at Malaysian universities should be aligned with students' fields of study, emphasising academic terminology enhancing their communicative academic discourse. As the main theoretical components addressed in this research are Piaget's (1936) cognitive theory, and Krashen's (1982) affective filter Hypothesis. Therefore, additionally, emphasising the importance of communication theories towards understanding internationals academic communication skills from EFL context by investigating the psychological factors influencing learners' engagement and cognitive communicative competence enabling internationals to communicate and critically participate and corresponding progression in their learning.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

CABARAN DAN AMALAN AKADEMIK BAHASA INGGERIS KOMUNIKASI DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR ANTARABANGSA LIBYAN DI LIMA UNIVERSITI TERPILIH DI MALAYSIA

Oleh

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Penggunaan bahasa Inggeris dalam aktiviti akademik di universiti-universiti di Malaysia membuka peluang belajar dalam pelbagai bidang akademik kepada pelajar antarabangsa Libya yang dilaporkan sebagai golongan etnik ketujuh terbesar mendaftar di universiti-universiti Malaysia.Walau bagaimanapun, pelajar Libya menghadapi cabaran untuk berkomunikasi dalam persekitaran pembelajaran ESL di Malaysia disebabkan oleh kurangnya pengalaman dan pembelajaran EFL dalam kecekapan berkomunikasi seterusnya menyebabkan terjadinya kecemasan bahasa komunikatif. Kesannya, pelajar akan membangunkan strategi pembelajaran pengantara. Oleh itu, kajian ini mengkaji tentang cabaran mendengar dan bertutur EFL dalam bidang akademik yang dihadapi oleh pelajar Libya, strategi pembelajaran pengantara yang digunakan serta kesan daripada pengalaman pembelajaran terdahulu dan kecemasan bahasa komunikasi terhadap cabaran dan strategi komunikasi akademik mereka. Penyelidikan ini mengadaptasi reka bentuk penyelidikan mod campuran penjelasan dengan bantuan Kedutaan Libya, menggunakan tinjauan soal selidik dalam talian terhadap seramai 223 orang responden. Temu bual dan perbincangan kumpulan berfokus telah dijalankan dengan seramai 20 orang responden tinjauan yang dipilih menerusi persampelan bola salji bertujuan. Nota lapangan dan semakan ahli responden digunakan untuk triangulasi dan pengesahan data. Prosedur korelasi dan pemodelan persamaan struktur menggunakan analisis pensampelan semula tarikan rawak bergantian dengan SPSS dan AMOS telah dijalankan untuk mengkaji hubungan sebab dan akibat antara pemboleh ubah, menentukan kesahan model kajian dan menguji hipotesis kajian. Analisis NVivo dilakukan bagi temu bual dan perbincangan kumpulan berfokus untuk tujuan pengekodan dan penjanaan tema daripada data transkrip yang disokong dengan nota lapangan.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar Libya mengalami cabaran kefahaman mendengar dalam memahami loghat, kandungan akademik dan perbezaan budaya. Keputusan kualitatif mendedahkan bahawa kefahaman mendengar peserta dalam komunikasi aktif dipengaruhi secara negatif oleh pengetahuan sedia ada yang tidak mencukupi tentang istilah akademik dan kebimbangan mengenai perbezaan budaya bangsa lain. Cabaran bertutur pelajar dalam wacana akademik disebabkan oleh kecekapan komunikasi yang tidak mencukupi dan seterusnya menyebabkan rencatan kognitif. . Analisis kualitatif mendedahkan keengganan pelajar untuk mengambil bahagian dalam wacana akademik disebabkan oleh amalan pertuturan akademik yang tidak mencukupi dan perasaan malu untuk mendapatkan sokongan. Hal ini meningkatkan kebimbangan mereka dan menyekat input yang boleh difahami. Oleh hal yang demikian , pelajar telah melaksanakan strategi untuk meningkatkan kemahiran komunikasi akademik mereka.

Strategi mendengar dalam susunan kedudukan adalah strategi metakognitif, kognitif, imbuhan, afektif, berkaitan dengan ingatan dan strategi sosial. Keutamaan pelajar terhadap strategi mendengar metakognitif dan kognitif berbanding strategi sosial adalah disebabkan oleh pengalaman pembelajaran negatif mereka digabungkan dengan kecemasan komunikasi akibat, yang merencatkan interaksi sosial. Oleh itu, strategi mendengar metakognitif dan kognitif menggalakkan kemandirian dan motivasi kendiri pelajar bagi meningkatkan kefahaman mendengar melalui pendengaran berulang dengan mengurangkan kecemasan, menyokong penyimpanan dan mendapatkan semula maklumat antara ingatan jangka pendek dan jangka panjang. Strategi pertuturan dalam susunan kedudukanadalah strategi yang berkaitan dengan ingatan, metakognitif, afektif, imbuhan, kognitif, dan strategi sosial. Keputusan kualitatif mendedahkan bahawa pelajar Libya lebih memilih hafalan dan amalan kendiri berbanding strategi sosial. Keengganan mereka untuk menggunakan strategi pertuturan sosial adalah kerana pengalaman pembelajaran sedia ada yang tidak mencukupi mengakibatkan kecekapan komunikatif yang lemah sehingga menyumbang kepada kecemasan bahasa komunikasi. Hafalan memudahkan pemodelan bahasa mental pelajar dan membolehkan penghayatan persekitaran komunikatif mereka.

Analisis kuantitatif mendedahkan pengalaman pembelajaran pelajar Libya terdahulu dan kecemasan bahasa komunikasi berkait rapat dengan cabaran dan strategi mendengar serta bertutur mereka. Lanjutan daripada itu didapati bahawa pengalaman pembelajaran terdahulu dan kecemasan bahasa komunikasi mempunyai kesan pengantara terhadap cabaran dan strategi mendengar serta bertutur.

Oleh itu, pihak berkepentingan harus mempertimbang cabaran komunikasi akademik pelajar Libya akibat daripada pengalaman pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris terdahulu yang tidak mencukupi dan menjejaskan kejayaan pembelajaran mereka dalam pendidikan tinggi antarabangsa. Ia dapat dipertimbang menerusi pembangunan dan penambahbaikan amalan bahasa Inggeris berdasarkan bahan dan sumber pendidikan yang dapat meningkatkan kejayaan akademik pelajar dalam bahasa Inggeris. Selain itu, program pra-sesi bahasa Inggeris di universiti Malaysia harus diselaraskan dengan bidang pengajian pelajar yang menekankan terminologi akademik dalam meningkatkan wacana akademik komunikatif mereka. Komponen teori utama dalam penyelidikan ini

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ialah Teori Kognitif Piaget (1936) dan Hipotesis Tapisan Afektif yang menekankan kepentingan teori komunikasi dalam memahami kemahiran komunikasi akademik antarabangsa daripada konteks EFL dengan mengkaji faktor psikologi yang mempengaruhi penglibatan pelajar dan kecekapan komunikatif kognitif yang membolehkan pelajar antarabangsa berkomunikasi dan mengambil bahagian secara kritis sepadan dengan perkembangan pembelajaran mereka.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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This is to confirm that:
- the research conducted and the writing of this thesis was under our supervision;
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL	English as a Second Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
CS	Communication Skills
ALC	Academic Listening Challenges
ALS	Academic Listening Strategies
ASC	Academic Speaking Challenges
ASS	Academic Speaking Strategies
CLA	Communication Language Anxiety
PLE	Prior Learning Experience
AMOS	Analysis of a Moment Structure
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
MLR	Multiple Liner Regression

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of the Study

Having a good command of academic English communicative competence in general and academic discourse for individuals is essential to achieving academic success (Mulualem et al., 2022). This academic communicative competence consists of academic listening (AL) and academic speaking (AS), listening, comprehending and speaking and interacting academically, which are essential for learners to express, share, and participate in international academic educational settings. However, international students from EFL backgrounds would find it challenging to achieve this competence in ESL classroom settings at a university while participating in oral classroom activities such as academic engagement, discussions and oral presentations. Thus, some countries found it essential to improve the English language in their educational settings. For example, Libyan attitudes and educational policy toward the role and the importance of improving English language teaching and learning have recently become more supportive, especially in educational contexts. Nevertheless, despite the changes in perceptions and policy, there have been continued challenges to improving academic English listening and speaking skills posed by the lack of opportunities for learners to practice the language in natural situations.

In response to these limitations, Libyan educational policy began prioritising English language learning in schools so that it would be taught in all schools by 2019. English is thus included in all levels of education, beginning with kindergarten and Primary One (six-year-olds) and continuing to higher education (19-year-olds). This contrasts with previous policies that started English language learning among 12-year-old pupils. It is also important to note that Libyan students are primarily EFL learners with Arabic as the medium of instruction (Omar, 2016; Owen et al., 2019a).

As a result of the new policy, Libyan students would be sponsored by Libyan government grants to pursue higher education at any of the world's 300 top-ranked universities (Abduljalil, 2018). Thus, the Libyan Ministry of Education approved Malaysian higher education institutions as destinations for Libyan students to continue their education under Libyan government grants. The officially approved institutions in Malaysia among the selected universities are Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Malaya (UM), University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM).

Therefore, it is essential to have a clear and in-depth understanding of the role of the English language in the Libyan education system, which would influence Libyan students who aim to further their studies abroad. Therefore, considering the Libyan present English language learning experience, studying overseas would expose the students to serious issues related to their academic English listening and speaking

performance (Aldoukalee, 2013; Diaab, 2016; Owen et al., 2019b). Their ability to comprehend and communicate effectively while studying abroad in an international setting might not be easy due to their prior lack of English learning experience and their low levels of communicative competence.

For instance, many Libyan international students have chosen Malaysia as their preferred destination for higher educational pursuits. This is corroborated by Said and Yassin (2014), who reported that Malaysia has been "one of the top destinations for Libyan students to further their education in both undergraduate and graduate studies" (p. 1). This interest on the part of Libyan students and their corresponding increase in numbers in Malaysia over recent years may be explained in large part by incentives resulting from changes in the Libyan government's overseas higher education policy, where Libyan students are encouraged to study abroad in the selected universities (Abduljalil, 2018).

Malaysian higher education's reputation regarding the use of English is more specifically known for its strengths in English academic listening and speaking components and the use of the language as a medium of instruction. Malaysian higher education's reputation regarding the use of English is more specifically known for its strengths in English academic listening and speaking components and the use of the language as a medium of instruction. The Malaysian ESL academic setting supports learners in improving their communicative competence to use the English language correctly and appropriately for effective communication with others in educational settings. Moreover, as English is the medium of instruction in Malaysian higher education, learners are expected to have rich and comprehensive communicative competence reflecting on their academic listening (AL) and speaking (AS) to present higher-order thinking and critical thinking skills in their academic engagement, performance, and participation. Thus, Malaysian higher education has established a high English language standard requirement that international students must fulfil rigorous English language requirements specified by the Malaysian institutions of higher learning..

However, stringent English language requirements have presented difficulties for Libyan international students studying abroad. The challenges faced by Libyan international students stem from the educational policies in effect during their prior education in Libya that determined their English language use and practice, specifically in relation to students' academic listening (AL) and academic speaking (AS) experience (Aldoukalee, 2013; Owen et al., 2019b; Youssef & Bose, 2015). Additionally, despite, the is great intention for enhancing AL and AS globally as reported by (Doiz, and Lasagabaster, 2022; Sung, 2022), EFL teachers' still facing limited resources and lack of actual listening and speaking practice in the L2 lead to hinder English language improvement for the EFL students which lead to raise students' academic listening and speaking challenge.

Therefore, English academic language proficiency deficiencies may prevent students from fully comprehending and participating in English academic discourse. As academic language is challenging to acquire through short-term training (O' Malley & Chamot,

1990; Oxford, 1990) thus, Libyan international students may need to rely on strategies to aid them in overcoming their academic language challenges.

A review of related literature indicates that international students use strategies to compensate for the communication challenges discussed above and improve related skills. As these strategies may be essential to the success of students in international study programmes, it is essential that the strategies need to be investigated to describe them and determine their various types and associated factors.

For example, academic listening and speaking have features that differ from general listening and speaking that are aligned with cognitive and metacognitive strategies such as clarification/verification, monitoring, memorisation, guessing/inductive inferencing, guessing/deductive reasoning, and practice (O' Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1989; Rubin, 1981).

Furthermore, in addition to factors that have been found important in academic listening and speaking challenges and strategies implemented by the international students, research should be conducted to examine the effects of prior learning experience and communication language anxiety associated with adult language learners' processing experiences and abilities (Griffiths, 2004; O' Malley & Chamot, 1990).

It is, therefore, would be important to determine the Libyan students' specific academic communication challenges in relation to academic listening challenges (ALCs) and academic speaking challenges (ASCs) as well as determine the students' communicative experience, particularly regarding their implementation of academic listening strategies (ALSs) and academic speaking strategies (ASSs) to overcome their communication challenges. Furthermore, to determine how these processes are associated with factors such as prior learning experience and communication language anxiety.

The communication challenges faced by international students vary by country and region depending on differences in their educational systems, languages used in academia, cultures, and the primary language used in comparison with those of the students' home countries (Fu et al., 2018; Tham & Kam, 2008). As the academic language in the context of this study primarily concerns listening and speaking, international students' primary challenges would involve activities requiring them to express themselves through sharing information and discussing academic topics with colleagues of various backgrounds (Abdullah & Mahfoodh, 2019; Shafaei & Abd-Razak, 2016; Zainuddin et al., 2019). This is particularly true for international students from EFL backgrounds with a lack of prior practice in their own countries or experience studying in academic settings involving the targeted medium of instruction.

Moreover, several factors make English as a second language (ESL) usage in educational settings academically challenging to international students transitioning from EFL to ESL contexts. These factors include lack of English language practice, psychological factors, differences in academic levels, and cultural differences (Kulwattanapaisarn et

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al., 2022; Quintos, 2022; Shafaei & Abd‑Razak, 2016). Therefore, prior English language practice has a fundamental aspect that need to be investigated further. The role of prior learning experience would be very crucial in any research ear on learners language learning which have been report influencing the research results and interpretation as Dochy (1988), found that prior learning experience could explain 30–60% of the variance in research results. Apart form that as AL and AS are very will known as anxiety as anxiety-provoking. Thus these two factors would have an important cause and effect contribution on international student ASC and ASS for listening as well as for speaking

For example, a mixed-method study by (Abdullah & Mahfoodh, 2019) on international university students studying in Malaysia found that students from EFL backgrounds experienced major academic communication problems regarding their speech accuracy due to their lack of prior English language practice and exposure.
Similarly, another mixed-method study by Fu et al. (2018), supports the effects of several factors on the academic performance of Chinese international students in the US. The factors included learning preferences, anxiety, motivation, and variation in the academic major. The study further found that students responded to these factors with direct and indirect strategies to overcome them, such as memory-related, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

In their attempts to overcome their academic language challenges, international students adopt strategies meant to improve their abilities in skills such as academic listening (AL) and academic speaking (AS) lowering their anxiety, improving their prior lack of communicative competence (Singh, 2019). Such learning strategies can therefore be "extremely powerful learning tool[s]" (O'Malley et al., 1985, p.37), and it is thus crucial to examine them and understand how they are implemented. Prior research has agreed with implementing various strategies related to language skills by international students at several institutions (Bamford, 2008; Singh, 2014, 2019). However, there is still a dearth of information on listening and speaking strategies and their implications (Fu et al., 2018; Park et al., 2017).

Malaysia has become a significantly important provider of educational programmes for international students. Concerning their Vision 2020 achievements, the Institute of International Education reported that enrolment of new international students in Malaysia was expected to be 200,000 soon. Therefore, international students have become a topic of interest in many studies from various perspectives in the Malaysian context (Aljaberi et al., 2018; Singh, 2019; Yusoff, 2012). For example, while Yusoff's (2012) study focused on the self-efficacy, perceived social support, and psychological adjustment of international undergraduate students, Singh's (2019) research explored the academic English language challenges of EFL international students.

In line with the above trend, this study identifies challenges to ALC and ASC performance faced by Libyan international students of various academic levels studying in Malaysian universities and investigates these students' potential academic listening and speaking strategies in relation to their prior learning experience and communication language anxiety. The results may inform Libyan international students regarding the

potential communication challenges they could encounter and methods of overcoming them and support Malaysian universities in facilitating efforts to aid the students' in overcoming their communication challenges. The study findings may also be of value to the Libyan Ministry of Education in taking cognisance of Libyan international students' unique communication challenges resulting from weaknesses in their English language education within the Libyan educational system.

1.2 Problem Statement

While studying in the new cultural environments of foreign academic institutions, international students are confronted with various obstacles and challenges that affect their abilities to communicate with people of other nationalities (Kim, 2006; Mulualem et al., 2022b; Nguyet & Robertson, 2022; Yusoff, 2012). Aside from the demands of academic communication and engagement in academic settings, undergraduate and postgraduate students are expected to exhibit higher-level reasoning and critical thinking skills in their interactions with others.

Regarding the expectations mentioned above, Libyan international students' English communication in academic settings is challenging as their prior experience with English was confined to EFL programmes in school classroom settings where the traditional grammar-translation teaching method was employed (Diaab, 2016; Omar, 2016; Owen et al., 2019a).

Thus, the change in language usage from their home country to the host country is extreme, and little would have prepared them in Libya for such challenges in their overseas educational experience. Their difficulties often stem from their lack of practical experience in academic English language listening and speaking in their previous educational programmes. Thus, the transition to communication with people of other nationalities in academic settings leads to severe academic listening challenges (ALCs) and academic speaking challenges (ASCs) (Aldoukalee, 2013; Diaab, 2016).

Although the number of Libyan students studying overseas has reached as high as 1,453 as stated by Said and Yassin (2014), and Malaysia has been reported as the top destination for their pursuit of higher education (Said & Yassin, 2014). However, a review of related literature supports that no previous research focuses on this population. Furthermore, despite the Libyan Ministry of Education's support of international education opportunities to study at the world's top 300 universities, there has been no reported consideration paid to the preparation of these students prior to their enrolment in Malaysian universities, where the medium of instruction is English (Abduljalil, 2018; Said & Yassin, 2012). Therefore, it would benefit from investigating these problematic issues from various perspectives and exploring how students employ coping strategies to deal with their challenges by conducting in-depth, reliable, descriptive research among Libyan international students enrolled in overseas universities.

The challenges discussed above may result from the students' prior learning experience with the teaching methods, teachers' and students' personality traits, and teaching and learning resources of the Libyan educational system. For example, the grammar-translation method used in traditional Libyan English language teaching and learning relies on translation and memorisation. Thus, Libyan learners are marginalised to the fringes of English language ability due to their lack of realistic practical experience in language use (Alhodiry, 2016; Owen et al., 2019b).

Therefore, the main challenge of these students would be transitioning from the traditional grammar-translation teaching methods and assessment of their prior education to the rigorous systems of overseas universities that rely on highly developed, well-documented methods of teaching and assessment to develop cognitive and metacognitive skills, which in turn rely on higher-order thinking skills (Deuchar, 2022; Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu, 2014; Pourfarhad et al., 2012;).

Thus, the overseas educational context requires more emphasis on the enhancement of abilities needed to participate in academic discourse and discussion. This implies that the students need to enhance academic listening and speaking competence to improve their cognitive and metacognitive skills needed to facilitate their overseas educational experience.

Furthermore, communication skill in academic listening and speaking is well known as anxiety-provoking. Thus, language anxiety cannot be ignored as an essential factor in communication skill development (Young, 1992; Horwitz et al., 1986). Many researchers in the field of communication language anxiety have reported that academic listening and speaking are particularly associated with learner anxiety that impedes the ability to effectively communicate in a foreign language, leading to stressful learning situations (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Elaldi, 2016). Researchers have reported various types of anxiety as affecting international students in new living and educational settings (Brisset et al., 2010; Shafaei & Abd-Razak, 2016). In this regard, communicative language anxiety has been found important in several studies focusing on international students (Lee, 2016; Singh, 2019; Yılmaz & Temizkan, 2022).

In addition, prior learning experience has been found to be a process factor that enhances the internal factors such as interest in language learning, which motivates the improvement of language learning in the face of challenges resulting from low self-esteem and a lack of self-confidence (Kulwattanapaisarn et al., 2022; Quintos, 2022; Trigwell et al., 2013). Therefore, the prior learning experience has an essential role in facilitating or impeding new learning and can enable new stages of learning through the activation of good prior knowledge.

There is also a lack of previous research on the relations academic listening and speaking challenges have with academic listening and speaking strategies and the roles played by prior learning experience and communication language anxiety in international students' learning experience, all of which greatly influence the learning processes related to language use. Furthermore, because of this absence of research, the Libyan Ministry of

Higher Education has found no practical solutions to the commonly encountered obstacles experienced by students in their overseas educational pursuits.

Libyan international students may also encounter challenging problems arising from differences in the languages used in instruction. In Libya, the medium of instruction is Arabic, whereas English is used in Malaysian universities. The concerns arising from this change in the language of instruction should therefore be considered.

The Libyan government has long recognised international education as a way to gain new knowledge, explore scientific development, and gain other achievements through higher education in world-class institutions. The government strongly believes in human capital. Therefore, despite the obstacles and challenges that Libyan students may face as a result of the differences that exist between the Libyan educational system and overseas institutions, such as language concerns, the government views overseas education as an opportunity to improve Libyan education and believes that better education is the right of every Libyan citizen.

Therefore, it is necessary that Libyan international students adapt to the ESL academic context and gain practice through natural exposure to the English language through the use of various learning strategies, such as the cognitive and metacognitive strategies proposed by Oxford (1990). Cognitive strategies enhance and improve communication skills and involve practising and repeated use of patterns and recombining them by forming meaningful sentences in academic speech.

The sound system of the target language must be practiced in natural settings as well as sending and receiving messages or speaking with the support of equivalent resources, and the skills of quickly acquiring and understanding ideas, note-taking, summarisation, and reasoning need to be developed. Metacognitive strategies are for enhancing communication skills and involve centring a learner's own learning, paying attention, and delaying speech production while focusing on academic listening, organising, planning language tasks, self-monitoring, seeking opportunities for practice, and self-evaluation of learning (Lan & Oxford, 2003; Rubin, 1975, 1981).

The implementation of these strategies would enable learners to improve their abilities to reason and engage in critical thinking, which are required for communication in international academic settings while communicating with others, particularly in academic discussions. Thus, the students need to address issues such as how to cope with ALC and ASC challenges and decide which strategies to apply and whether they are valid based on their own individual perspectives.

The literature review for this study showed that considerable attention from various perspectives has to be paid to the challenges experienced by international students around the globe and their strategies to overcome them (Abdullah & Mahfoodh, 2019; Singh, 2019; Shafaei & Abd-Razak, 2016).

The findings of this study could contribute to the existing body of research in related fields on how international students such as this study's Libyan participants overcome academic English communication challenges by adopting strategies to facilitate their learning and overcome their academic communication challenges. The focus of this study is on issues related to the language learning strategies of the participating students and the resultant findings help to establish the significance of these aspects of academic language learning.

For instance, previous studies supported the conclusion that using such learning strategies in short-term educational experiences can result in long-term effects on students' personal, professional, and academic lives (Splan et al., 2017). Furthermore, it is the view of this researcher that the examination of language learning strategies could implicitly improve the quality and depth of cognitive processing achieved by students through reflection on the implementation of the strategies during short-term overseas educational programmes Splan et al. (2017).

The contributions of this study along with previous research on other international students studying in Malaysia and elsewhere, could represent the foundations of research involving cross-analyses investigating the relations among identified language learning challenges to explain how academic speaking and listening learning strategies are formulated. More specifically, few studies have been conducted on Libyan international students' academic language performance issues, in general. Moreover, this study's large-scale, mixed-method research design involving a questionnaire survey, interviews, and focus group discussion produced in-depth findings. Therefore, this study's focus on Libyan students studying in Malaysian universities was needed to provide findings specific to that population. This deliberate limitation to the scope of the study is discussed further in the following section.

Therefore, this study's in-depth explanatory analysis contributes to the body of knowledge by identifying the academic communication (e.g., AL and AS) challenges experienced by Libyan international students enrolled in Malaysian universities, and the strategies (e.g., ALS and ASS) used to overcome them. Furthermore, the study examined the roles of prior learning experience and communication language anxiety in relation to Libyan international students' communication challenges and strategies.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of this study was to determine the academic communication challenges of participating Libyan international students and the strategies they adopted to overcome them with a focus on the factors that influenced their academic listening and speaking strategies. More specifically, the objectives of the research were as follows:

1. Identify the EFL academic communication challenges experienced by Libyan international students studying in Malaysian universities.

a)   Examine and explore the EFL academic listening challenges experienced by Libyan international students studying in Malaysian universities.

b)   Examine and explore the EFL academic speaking challenges experienced by Libyan international students studying in Malaysian universities.

2.   Identify the EFL academic communication language strategies implemented by Libyan international students studying in Malaysian universities.

a)   Examine and explore the academic listening strategies implemented by Libyan international students studying in Malaysian universities.

b)   Examine and explore the academic speaking strategies implemented by Libyan international students studying in Malaysian universities.

3.   Determine the roles of prior learning experience and communication language anxiety in relation to the academic listening and speaking challenges and strategies of Libyan international students studying in Malaysian universities.

4.   Test for mediation effects of prior learning experience and communication language anxiety on the academic language challenges and strategies of Libyan international students studying in Malaysian universities.

a)   Test for mediation effects of prior learning experience and communication language anxiety on the academic listening challenges and strategies of Libyan international students studying in Malaysian universities.

b)   Test for mediation effects of prior learning experience and communication language anxiety on the academic speaking challenges and strategies of Libyan international students studying in Malaysian universities.

1.4   Research Questions

This research investigated the following five research questions:

1.   What are the academic communication challenges encountered by Libyan international students while studying in Malaysian universities?

a)   What are the academic listening challenges encountered by Libyan international students while studying in Malaysian universities?

b)   What are the academic speaking challenges experienced by Libyan international students while studying in Malaysian universities?

2.   What are the academic communication language strategies implemented by Libyan international students while studying in Malaysian universities?

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a) What are the academic listening strategies implemented by Libyan international students while studying in Malaysian universities?

b) What are the academic speaking strategies implemented by Libyan international students while studying in Malaysian universities?

3. What relationship do prior learning experience and communication language anxiety have with the academic listening and speaking challenges and strategies of Libyan international students studying in Malaysian universities?

4. To what extent do prior learning experience and communication language anxiety affect the academic communication challenges of Libyan international students studying in Malaysian universities and the strategies they employ to overcome the challenges?

   a) To what extent do prior learning experience and communication language anxiety affect the academic listening challenges of Libyan international students studying in Malaysian universities and their strategies to overcome these challenges?

   b) To what extent do prior learning experience and communication language anxiety affect the academic speaking challenges of Libyan international students studying in Malaysia and their strategies to overcome these challenges?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The following twelve research hypotheses were formulated based on the review of related literature (see Chapter 2), the research questions, and the objectives of the study. Each hypothesis relates to a variable examined in this research.

Hypothesis 1 (H1) : Prior learning experience significantly influences the academic listening challenges of Libyan international students.

Hypothesis 2 (H_2) : Prior learning experience significantly influences the academic listening strategies of Libyan international students.

Hypothesis 3 (H_3) : Academic Listening challenges significantly influence the communication language anxiety of Libyan international students.

Hypothesis 4 (H_4) : Communication language anxiety significantly influences the academic listening strategies of Libyan international students.

Hypothesis 5	(H$_5$)	:	Prior learning experience significantly influences the academic speaking challenges of Libyan international students.
Hypothesis 6	(H$_6$)	:	Prior learning experience significantly influences the academic speaking strategies of Libyan international students
Hypothesis 7	(H$_7$)	:	Academic speaking challenges significantly influence the communication language anxiety of Libyan international students.
Hypothesis 8	(H$_8$)	:	Communication language anxiety significantly influences the academic speaking strategies of Libyan international students.
Hypothesis 9	(H$_9$)	:	Prior learning experience has a mediation effect on the relationship between academic listening challenges and academic listening strategies.
Hypothesis 10	(H$_{10}$)	:	Communication language anxiety has a mediation effect on the relationship between academic listening challenges and academic listening strategies.
Hypothesis 11	(H$_{11}$)	:	Prior learning experience has a mediation effect on the relationship between academic speaking challenges and academic speaking strategies.
Hypothesis 12	(H$_{12}$)	:	Communication language anxiety has a mediation effect on the relationship between academic speaking challenges and academic speaking strategies.

1.6   Significance of the Study

This study was conducted among Libyan studying in several top Malaysian universities. The study aimed to produce findings valuable to understanding the academic listening and speaking challenges experienced by this group of students and their strategies to overcome these challenges. Considering the increasing number of Libyan students enrolled in Malaysian universities, the information accumulated through this research on the academic communication challenges of the participating Libyan students and their strategies to overcome them provides a significantly important contribution to the education field.

The findings are expected to be helpful to Libyan undergraduate and postgraduate students, the Libyan Ministry of Education, and Malaysian higher education institutions in preparing and orienting students for their programmes of study in Malaysia. The importance of the study and its benefits are presented under the four following subsections in accordance with related benefits to Libyan international students, the

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Libyan Ministry of Education, Malaysian higher education institutions, and in relation to the study's contributions to the literature of related fields of study.

4.1.1   Significance for Libyan International Students

Students planning to further their educations overseas need reliable information on the universities to which they intend to apply for admission and the countries in which they are located. In order to provide comprehensive information, including expectations related to communicative competence, it is of vital importance to conduct research investigating the academic language communication performance challenges experienced by students currently studying in those locations.

Therefore, to provide Libyan international students with an understanding of the potential challenges they could encounter in pursuing their studies in Malaysian universities, the findings of this study comprise detailed information on these challenges and viable solutions that may be beneficial to improving their academic language performance. The data collected from this research and its findings may be helpful to Libyan international students as well as other international students with EFL or other similar educational backgrounds in comprehending and having prior knowledge about the potential challenges involved in pursuing their educations in foreign universities such as those in Malaysia.

Thus, future Libyan students and other international students may benefit from the availability of prior knowledge of the methods or strategies they can utilise to overcome commonly recognised academic challenges.

4.1.2   Significance for the Libyan Ministry of Education

As it is crucially important for some countries to invest in human capital by providing educational grants to their students, they must have sufficient and reliable information regarding the academic challenges the students may encounter in their overseas educational programmes. Therefore, this information would provide guidance to developers, policymakers, and academic institutions about how to assist students to plan for their overseas educations, which could include any alterations to their academic English language preparation prior to enrolment in foreign institutions.

The contribution of this research would have a great potential value to such stakeholders considering the present dearth of literature on the issues it explored. For example, suggestions from students on how to improve the overseas educational experience are lacking in the extant literature, and this information could be of value in enhancing academic language programmes for preparing students for overseas studies. Therefore, the present study's findings comprise valuable resources useful to policymakers in developing effective teaching and assessment methods to assist Libyan international students in overcoming their communication challenges.

4.1.3 Significance for Malaysian Higher Education Institutions

As Malaysia has become one of the world's top 10 destinations for Libyan international students Said and Yassin (2014) and students from other regions (Abdullah & Mahfoodh, 2019; Shafaei & Abd-Razak, 2016), it has become crucial for Malaysian institutions to have reliable information on the backgrounds and academic experience of incoming international students. Therefore, particularly in relation to Malaysian institutions' reputed emphasis on the ESL context in their instruction. Therefore, the present study would serve to facilitate the students' educational experience by reducing the level of ambiguity regarding the assessment of communication challenges and the adoption of strategies intended to strengthen their communication skills. This information would be valuable to Malaysian institutions in making educational contexts amenable to students from differing backgrounds so that they may quickly overcome academic language performance issues through systematic methods (Dafouz & Camacho-Miñano, 2016; Lee et al., 2015).

1.7 Scope of the Study

The principal aim of this study was to identify and investigate the academic English language communicative listening and speaking challenges and strategies and the mediation role of prior learning experience and communication language anxiety on these academic communication challenges and strategies in ESL academic settings among Libyan international students. The data for the research was collected from five Malaysian public universities. As the study involved participants from this specific population, the results may not be generalisable to all international students. However, other researchers have reported this limitation who have argued that studies of this nature should be conducted separately according to nations or regions due to variations in contextual factors (Abdullah & Mahfoodh, 2019; Singh, 2019; Lee et al., 2015).

The data collection for the study was conducted in two main phases of the research: the quantitative and qualitative phases. Both phases of research involved Libyan international students from bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programmes of various academic disciplines and at various levels of progress. While the questionnaire survey of the quantitative phase began with the total population of Libyan students enrolled in the selected institutions, the qualitative phase with interviews and focus group discussion involved twenty informants. The sampling methods and the number of participants for the two research phases are described in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

1.8 Definitions of Terms

This section provides constructive and operational definitions of the significant terms used in this thesis that are essential to the reader's understanding of concepts central to the research. The terms and their definitions are presented in the following subsections for constructive and operational Definitions:

4.1.4 Constructive Definitions

Academic Communication (AC)

Academic communication are the registers and genres of a language that are specific to the academic content of communication in formal educational contexts. The acquisition of academic language is essential to second language learner mainstreaming and to students in English for academic purposes programmes (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

Language Learning Strategies (LLSs)

Language learning strategies are the cognitive and metacognitive steps that learners follow to enhance their academic listening and speaking skills (O' Malley & Chamot, 1990). According to Oxford (1990), these strategies are comprised of "Specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that students use to improve their progress in developing skills of the new language. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or the use of new language"(p.157).

Academic Listening Challenges (ALCs)

Academic listening challenges are the challenges that inhibit the language performance of English as a foreign language (EFL) international students studying in higher education degree programmes as a consequence of the students' lack of academic listening knowledge and practice.

Academic Listening Strategies (ALSs)

Academic listening strategies are the strategic plans for the development of listening skills relevant to engagement in academic discussions and devised to support and improve the comprehension and subsequent production of spoken input (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Yulisa, 2018).

Academic Speaking Challenges (ASCs)

Academic speaking challenges are the language performance challenges that impede the abilities of English as a foreign language (EFL) international students to engage in academic discussions in higher education contexts.

Academic Speaking Challenges (ASCs)

Academic speaking challenges refer to challenges that inhibit international students' comprehension and expression of academic speech in communication with interlocutors such as academic staff, lecturers, and supervisors during discussions in academic settings.

Academic Speaking Strategies (ASSs)

Speaking Strategies are strategic plans for direct or indirect situations that require learners to engage in or listen to discussions in order to develop their speaking skills to support and improve their spoken academic input (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Xu, 2016).

Prior Learning Experience (PLE)

Dochy (1988) explained that this is a learner's "prior knowledge state" and encompasses "the totality of domain-specific knowledge and skills available for the execution of particular learning activity" and further noted, "One can also speak of part declarative, part procedural knowledge" (p. 22)

Communicative Language Anxiety (CLA)

Horwitz et al. (1986) define this as "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (p. 125). They further explain that this anxiety is manifested as a result of the self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours resulting from the unique nature of classroom language learning processes.

4.1.5   Operational Definitions

Academic Communication (AL)

AC refers to students' proficiency in academic listening and speaking and their ability to comprehend and express ideas relevant to their academic success in modes of communication appropriate to undergraduate and postgraduate academic contexts during communication with their peers, academic staff, lecturers, and supervisors in situations such as academic discussions.

Language Learning Strategies (LLSs)

language learning strategies are specific direct and indirect actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that are utilised to improve academic listening and speaking communication skills.

Academic Listening Challenges (ALCs)

ALCs refer to all types of potential challenges that inhibit international students' comprehension of communication during academic discussions with interlocutors such as their peers, academic staff, lecturers, and supervisors.

Academic Listening Strategies (ALSs)

ALSs refer to direct and indirect strategies that are implemented to facilitate international students' comprehension of the content of academic discussions with peers, academic staff, lecturers, and supervisors.

Direct academic listening strategies comprise cognitive, memory-related, and compensatory strategies related to cognitive-linguistic processing that allows for the storage and retrieval of information expressed through language (e.g., academic English). Strategies may involve processes such as creating mental linkages, applying sounds, practicing, analysing, reasoning, and guessing. Indirect strategies comprise metacognitive, affective, and social strategies that indirectly support language learning in combination with or with the support of direct strategies. These strategies may involve processes such as centring learning, arranging, encouraging, and asking questions.

Academic Speaking Strategies (ASSs)

are the direct and indirect academic speaking strategies employed by international students to improve the expression of ideas during discussions with peers, academic staff, lecturers, and supervisors in academic settings.

Direct academic listening strategies comprise cognitive, memory-related, and compensatory strategies that involve the cognitive processing of language and include processes such as reviewing, using memory for retrieval of information, practicing naturalistically, and code-switching. Indirect strategies include metacognitive, affective, and social strategies for the indirect support of language learning with the combination and support of direct strategies. These strategies involve processes such as centring, arranging, planning, and evaluating the learning, as well as evaluating, encouraging, and tracking emotional temperature, cooperating with others, and seeking opportunities for interactions and cooperation with interlocutors in academic situations.

Prior Learning Experience (PLE)

prior learning experience is defined as comprising the English language knowledge and communication skills acquired through the teaching and learning methods experienced by international students in the EFL context of their home country (e.g., Libya).

Communicative Language Anxiety (CLA)

communicative language anxiety is manifested as learners' subjective negative feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, or worry resulting from the difficulties they encounter with the comprehension of English academic communication while listening to or speaking with peers, academic staff, lecturers, and supervisors in academic situations.

1.9　　　　　Chapter Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the research with the background of the study leading to the problem statement; the fundamental elements of the research design including the objectives of the study, the research questions, and research hypotheses; the implications of the study; and definitions of the essential terms used in the thesis. The contents of this chapter thus strengthen and support the research as a basic introduction to the detailed discussions and presentations of the related literature, methods, results, and findings presented in the following chapters.

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