

# **ENGLISH LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES OF NON-NATIVE ENGLISH POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN AN ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES AT A THAI UNIVERSITY**

Phiphawin Suphawatt Srikrai

([phiphawin@yahoo.com](mailto:phiphawin@yahoo.com))

Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand

Deng Lin

([20100101@163.com](mailto:20100101@163.com))

Xi'an Shiyou University, China

Saiyachit Lakaisone

([lakaisone@yahoo.com](mailto:lakaisone@yahoo.com))

Savannakhet Teacher Training College, Lao PDR

Seepho Sirinthorn

([sirin@sut.ac.th](mailto:sirin@sut.ac.th))

Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand

## **Abstract**

While studying in Thai Universities, non-native English postgraduate (NNEP) students face major challenges in their academic study. The English language itself is one such hurdle, particularly at the beginning stage of their academic study. They need to be competent in both disciplines and language skills to be able to cope with academic demands. Situated in an academic context at a Thai university, the researchers adopted a mixed method, consisting of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, to discover the English language difficulties of NNEP students, to find out the relationships between non-linguistic factors and NNEP students' English language difficulties, and to investigate causes for the difficulties. Eighty-five NNEP students from four faculties responded to the questionnaire. The findings indicate that writing in an academic style was found the highest difficulty among the students, followed by paraphrasing and synthesizing essays, reports, dissertations, theses, research paper, and articles. This study also suggests some pedagogical implications for both administrators and practitioners.

## **1 Introduction**

### ***1.1 Background***

The spread of English as an international language has engendered an ever-growing number of students studying at university levels through the medium English instruction. Many universities in English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries are providing such programs to students all over the world.

Thailand, as a member country of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), attracted thousands of international students, non-native English students in particular, in and

out of the region every year. While studying in Thai Universities, these non-native speakers of English (NNS) face major challenges in their academic study. The English language itself is one such hurdle, particularly at the beginning stage of their academic study. They need to be competent in both discipline areas and language skills to be able to cope with academic demands. These students are required to use English to acquire knowledge in specific disciplines. They also need to be able to understand lectures, participate in the classroom discussions, attend conferences, and write lab reports as well as class assignments in English.

Suranaree University of Technology (SUT) is a science and technology oriented university which was established as the first “public autonomous university” of Thailand in 1990. SUT is located in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand. It offers many international graduate programs to Thai and foreign students under 4 academic institutes including Social Technology, Agricultural Technology, Science and Engineering. At present, there are about 1,956 graduate students enrolled in Academic year 2015 under 37 graduate programs in both master and doctoral levels. Around 257 Thai and foreign students registered in the programs where English is used as a medium of instruction. In order to enhance the efficacy of teaching and learning at the graduate levels, it is worth investigating the difficulties encountered by NNS students in these classes. The results will allow SUT to provide appropriate assistance to those who may need in order to facilitate their academic achievement.

In the past, there were a number of studies exploring the difficulties faced by NNS students. However, most recent studies have been devoted to the basic academic linguistic skills students need in order to succeed in their academic studies (Ferris & Tagg, 1996a, 1996b; Ferris, 1998; Zhu, 2001; Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Phakiti & Li, 2011; Yanagi & Baker, 2015; Yildirim, 2015). Though these studies have been very helpful to researchers and teachers in the area of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), yet they might be, to some extent, a bit too general to offer concrete help to NNS students. In addition, only a few studies have touched upon the NNS students’ language difficulties from the perspective of their academic activities. To fill in the gap, this study adapts and elaborates on Jordan’s (1997) research on academic activities and attempts to investigate the English language difficulties of non-native English postgraduate (NNEP) students at a Thai university from the angle of individual academic activities.

### ***1.2 Definition of language difficulties***

According to Jordan (1997), language difficulties may arise during lectures, seminars, tutorials, discussions, supervisions, laboratory work, fieldwork, and private study. They may also arise when students read journals and books, use library resources, write essays, reports, projects, dissertations, theses, and research papers, do case studies, and take written or oral examination.

In this research, language difficulties are defined as the problems of using English in students’ academic activities in the postgraduate learning programs.

### ***1.3 Research purpose***

There are two research purposes for the present study which include (1) to identify the English language difficulties, if any, of non-native English postgraduate (NNEP) students in

the academic context at a Thai University and (2) to provide practical guidelines for pedagogical practices.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

The research aims to answer following research questions:

- 1) What are the possible language difficulties among the NNEP students in an academic context at a Thai university?
- 2) Would such non-linguistic factors as gender, level of study, stage of study, and field of study, influence NNEP students' English language difficulties?
- 3) What are the causes for NNEP students' language difficulties in their academic activities?

## **2 Literature review**

There have been numerous research studies which tried to find the students' difficulties when studying at the graduate levels where English or students' second language was used. The major problems that were reported involved academic writing, reading, listening and speaking, and other academic study skills. Possible causes are also discussed.

### **2.1 Difficulties relating to English language in an academic context**

#### Academic Writing

In relation to academic writing, many studies revealed students' difficulties in several areas such as answering written exams, writing papers for course assignments, and writing a thesis/dissertation. The difficulties were found in the following areas:

##### a) Grammar

Al Fadda (2012) reported that the main writing problem was grammar, e.g., subject-verb agreement and sentence structure.

##### b) Logical organization, cohesion, and coherence of a paragraph

Hassan & Badi (2015) pointed out that postgraduate students in Oman University had difficulties in using referencing, citations as well as coherence and cohesion when writing.

##### c) Rhetorical differences

In Terraschke & Wahid's study (2011), it was also found that writing skill was the most difficult, especially, rhetorical differences between English and Chinese written languages.

##### c) Generating ideas and expressing ideas

According to Chou (2011), the abilities to express their own voice and select a significant topic and relevant references were reported. When some had difficulties on generating ideas about their topics, it affected their writing (Al Murshidi, 2014).

d) Writing a thesis or a dissertation

Yasuda (2004) and Bitchener & Basturkmen (2006) specifically pointed out the difficulties in thesis writing that was found in the discussion and result sections.

In short, it is clear that problems concerning academic writing were found in all levels of writing abilities – simple grammar to advanced discussion section in a dissertation where complex ideas need to be coherently presented and academically argued.

Academic reading

With regards to academic reading, most studies stated that NNS students had difficulties understanding academic texts which are discipline specific. For example, Taiwanese and international students in Taiwan University lacked disciplinary reading and writing skills (Ho, 2013). Therefore, they cannot comprehend the readings thoroughly. As a result, they cannot summarize the reading gist (Dehkordi & Allami, 2012).

Academic speaking

With respect to speaking in an academic context, Yanagi & Baker (2015) showed that difficulties with oral comprehension skills were mainly on participation in discussion of academic issues with professors and/or classmates, asking questions or expressing ideas during class, and making oral presentations. Many of students were afraid of producing incorrect pronunciation. A research study by Brown (2008) also found that international postgraduate students who studied at a university in England had anxiety over their level of English language when they compared themselves to better speaking European students.

Academic listening

Concerning academic listening difficulties, Mills (1997) pointed out that students had problems understanding classmates' presentations, lectures due to lecturers' accents, slangs, speaking speed, and discussions when they had insufficient technical and general vocabulary.

**2.2 Possible causes of these difficulties**

Several possible causes of these difficulties are presented as follows:

Limited exposure to reading and listening input

Ward (2001) addressed that engineering students in Thailand did not like reading engineering texts in English in their undergraduate level. As a result, they have a limited ability to read required texts and to write a literature review. In addition, adequate exposure to academic writing conventions, academic words and phrases, and grammar should be taken into consideration when dealing with academic writing especially in EFL contexts (Abdulkareem, 2013). Cai (2013) added that 70% of the participants did not take an academic writing course before and that the academic writing skills. Therefore, English Language Difficulties (ELD) could be the result of the students' lack of experience and knowledge of academic reading and writing (Hassan & Badi, 2015).

Lack necessary academic study skills

Some research studies (Tahaineh, 2010; Tanaka, 2002) found that when students lacked basic language skills, it can affect the development of other study skills such as note-taking,

summarizing, synthesizing, critical thinking, paraphrasing, and so on. When students cannot summarize the main ideas, they cannot write or express their ideas effectively.

#### Limited English proficiency

The research study conducted by Tanaka (2002) on academic difficulties in five American Universities found that the language difficulties were mainly caused by low English proficiency. Unfortunately, some other researchers (Hansen, 2000; Spack, 1997) found that the language abilities gained in general classes could not be readily applied in many academic contexts. Academic programs are different in their context, purposes and content (Rance-Roney, 1995). Activities and objectives between general language classes and academic classes are different.

#### Limited knowledge in academic disciplines

In addition, the knowledge of the field was also important. If postgraduates did not have background knowledge in their subject areas, they would rather have difficulty to understand lectures and course readings (Ballard, 1996).

In Thailand, Phongsuwan (1997) found that postgraduate students lacked of experiences of using English with native English speakers, were not good at reading large quantities of materials, used Thai-English writing style without interference from the native language rhetorical form. Furthermore, writing academic English, dealing with reading assignments, giving oral presentations, and participating in class discussions were found as the difficulties. They also faced other English difficulties understanding others' pronunciation, having inadequate vocabulary, using low reading and writing speed, and low ability in catching native speaker speaking rate.

In sum, previous studies showed various dimensions of ELD among NNS postgraduate students, mainly using English both in written and spoken forms in academic context.

### ***2.3 Suggestions to eliminate the English language difficulties***

For writing, Abdulkareem (2013) addressed that teaching students how to brainstorm ideas can contribute in minimizing their problems in academic writing. Furthermore, preparing an outline of their topics before starting to write, and following the three main stages (planning, writing, and editing) might assist novice writers to be successful in academic writing (Al Fadda, 2012). Crosby (2009) recommended introducing learners to academic writing strategies by giving samples to identify their structures, organizations, cohesive devices and the other key features could help them in their writing. In addition, to become a good writer, students need to acquire a large vocabulary, develop the ability to understand and use complex grammatical constructions, develop a good writing style (Al Murshidi, 2014).

For reading, readings such as books, journals, and even some websites are useful sources to enrich learners' lexicon with academic vocabulary and expressions that can enhance the ability to express their views and ideas in their own voice effectively (Gordon, 2008). Instructors can give out samples of excellent assignments written by other students, and then discuss with the students in order to assist them develop the sense of critical thinking and how to transfer other's work into their own words. Reading and writing skills should be better taken into account for the successful completion of their Ph.D. studies (Son, 2014).

To improve listening and speaking skills, many teachers and researchers suggest various ways. To begin with, graduate students are likely to be independent learners studying and researching individually. Besides, the 21st century students tend to be exposed and well-equipped with educational technology. Technology of various kinds can be optional ways to improve their English skills. One example was presented by Sze (2006). He suggested podcasts (audio or sometimes video program on the Web). He also recommended two types of podcasts which are radio podcasts and ELT podcasts in order to promote learners who have less confidence, lack motivation to perfect their English through practice and rehearsal. To tackle more specific problems, Ferris & Tagg (1996) suggested students' who face content-area difficulties to practice listening to real lectures given by a variety of speakers. They should also get opportunities interacting with native speakers and handling with genre-specific vocabulary. Moreover, Richards (2008) claimed that research shows the complexity of spoken interaction in both first and second language. Therefore, lexical, phonological, and grammatical changes might be involved to produce an appropriate style of speaking. He further explained that three different types of talk; talk as interaction, talk as transaction, talk as performance, can be mastered through diverse practices. At an academic level, talk as performance features are applicable. Some of them are a focus on both message and audience, predictable organization and sequencing, and importance of both form and accuracy. Therefore, focused skills that graduate students should practice on are using appropriate format, presenting information in an appropriate sequence, maintain audience engagement, using correct pronunciation and grammar, creating an effect on the audience, using appropriate vocabulary, and using appropriating opening and closing. As mentioned, there are a plenty of ways to improve listening and speaking skills. Awareness of individual learning preferences and different aspects of language difficulties should be considered and assessed before any students attempt to practice on their own or with their peers. This is to make learning more effectively.

### **3 Research methodology**

#### ***3.1 Research participants and instruments***

There were two main groups of participants in this study. First, all 257 NNS postgraduate students both in master and PhD programs where English is used as a medium of instruction were invited to participate. Second was the teachers who taught in these programs were also the study participants.

After the questionnaire was distributed, 85 out of 257 (33.1%) students responded. And 10 out of 85 respondents who were from four academic institutes agreed for being interviewed. Four teachers who were then selected to be interviewed, one from each institute. Mixed methods research design was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data through 5 points Likert-scale questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

Table 1 below shows the number of respondents from different academic institutes.

**Table 1. Number of respondents from the four institutes**

<b>Institutes</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Agriculture	40	47.1
Social Technology	14	16.5
Science	22	25.9
Engineering	9	10.6
Total	85	100

### **3.1.1 Questionnaire**

Questionnaire questions were developed from Jordan (1997) and Tanaka (2002). The questionnaire was divided into three main parts: 1) Personal information, 2) English difficulties, and 3) Causes for English language difficulties (See Appendix A). At the end of the questionnaire, the additional part was added to ask interviewees to fill in contact addresses such as email or phone number if they agree to be interviewed. Then, for validity check, Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to check by three experts. It was also piloted with students who were taking postgraduate studies at Khon Kaen University.

### **3.1.2 Interview**

There are two sets of interview questions which were developed from Jordan (1997) and Tanaka (2002). One set of questions was used to interview teachers and the other was for students. Both sets consisted of four main aspects: EAP difficulties, causes, solutions, and suggestions.

### **3.2 Data collection procedure and analysis**

The questionnaires were distributed to all research participants via email. The researchers also sent a reminder two times to ensure enough responses. A small number of them sent the answers back. Therefore, paper-based copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the target group again. After collecting the questionnaires, the researchers arranged the interviews with those who agreed to do so.

The data from questionnaire were analyzed using the SPSS program to find Mean and Standard Deviation (SD). T-Test was used to find out the relationships between two variables. ANOVA was used to find out the relationships of more than two variables. The interviews were analyzed in accordance with the four main themes listed in the interview questions.

## **4 Results**

### **4.1 English language difficulties (ELD)**

The ELD mean scores of individual academic activities show that the NNEP students at SUT have different degrees of difficulty in these activities. Then, cumulative percent of “Always have difficulty + often have difficulty + sometimes have difficulty” (AOS) of each academic activity was calculated. The findings of language difficulty level of academic activities are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. High language difficulty level of academic activities**

<b>Academic activities</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent of “Always have difficulty + often have difficulty + sometimes have difficulty” (AOS)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
1. Paraphrasing and synthesizing essays, reports, dissertations, theses, research paper, and articles	75.3	3.11	.976
2. Writing in an academic style	75	3.14	.984
3. Summarizing and paraphrasing journals and textbooks	65.5	2.88	1.046

Taking a trichotomous perspective, the present research considers the top three academic activities among the fifteen as areas where students really have difficulty in terms of the English language. As a result, three academic activities were labeled as high language difficulty levels, as is shown in Table 2 that 75.3% of all the participants had difficulty in paraphrasing and synthesizing essays, reports, dissertations, theses, research paper, and articles ( $M=3.11/SD=.976$ ), 75% in writing in an academic style ( $M=3.14/SD=.984$ ), and 65.5% in summarizing and paraphrasing journals and textbooks ( $M=2.88/SD=1.046$ ).

The two of high difficulties found above such as paraphrasing or summarizing relate to difficulty of reading skill in academic context. Interestingly, only 1 Cambodian Biotechnology student who is writing her PhD thesis mentioned this. She said that reading for the main idea was not really difficult, but reading for details was hard.

It could clarify that “writing in an academic style” is a high demand in specific academic fields, since both students and teachers said that academic writing was the most challenging task for their academic studies. Five student interviewees mentioned they had difficulty in academic writing. Two Thai Biology PhD students said they could not write well even they knew vocabulary and grammar. When writing academic papers, they are confused with the terminology in the field. Also, a Cambodian Biotechnology student reported having difficulty with spelling and grammar structures when writing academic papers, the introduction, results and discussion parts. An Indonesian Food Technology PhD student had problem with academic writing. He found the sentences he wrote were often too long, neither understandable nor concise. A Thai Biology student said that synthesizing for academic writing was difficult. Moreover, all 4-teacher interviewees mentioned that their students had difficulty in academic writing.

Even listening was not found in the quantitative numbers, it was surprisingly found that 8 students and 2 teachers said that they found the difficulty in understanding lectures and discussions from various nationalities.

In summary, the quantitative and qualitative data revealed postgraduates had EAP difficulties such as “paraphrasing and synthesizing essays, reports, dissertations, theses, research paper, articles”, “writing in an academic style”, “summarizing and paraphrasing journals and textbooks”, and “listening to and understanding lectures”.



#### 4.2 Influencing factors

In this research, four different categories of factors are identified to test their influence on EAP difficulty in various academic activities, i.e., gender, level of study, stage of study, and field of study.

The findings are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3 Comparison of ELD of different field students**

	Agriculture (n=40)		Social Technology (n=14)		Science (n=22)		Engineering (n=9)		F (3, 81)	Post Hoc (LSD)
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
ELD	3.03	.79	2.44	.73	2.62	.75	2.37	.76	3.46*	Agriculture > Social Technology Agriculture > Science Agriculture > Engineering

\*p<0.05

The results from using independent sample t-tests showed that there were no significant differences between male and female group students, and between master and doctoral students. And One-Way ANOVA analyses results showed that there were no significant differences found among three stages: coursework, proposal writing, and thesis writing. However, when it comes to four main fields of study from Agriculture, students of Social Technology, students of Science, and students of Engineering institutes, it revealed that the ELD scores were significantly varied by different fields of study ( $F(3, 81) = 3.46$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). LSD post hoc procedure indicated that students of Agriculture had the highest level of difficulty.

#### 4.3 Causes for the language difficulties

Possible causes revealed by both teachers and students are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Causes for students' ELD**

Causes	Cumulative Percent of "Agree + Strongly Agree"
1. Insufficient English words, expressions, grammar knowledge for academic writing	58.5
2. Insufficient training in academic writing	54.9
3. Unfamiliar with new complicated words in listening and understanding lectures	53.8
4. Unable to synthesize in-depth information from reading materials	52.8

Table 4 shows the different causes for the language difficulties. As can be seen that 58.5% of the students had difficulty because of “insufficient English words, expressions, grammar knowledge for academic writing”; 54.9% thought it was the result of “insufficient training in academic writing”; 53.8% thought their difficulties were caused by “unfamiliarity with new complicated words in listening and understanding lectures”; and 52.8% chose “Unable to synthesize in-depth information from reading materials” as the cause of their difficulties.

Moreover, some of the causes of language difficulties were pointed out in the interviews. Six interviewees out of ten said the causes of their writing problem were insufficient grammar knowledge; two postgraduates mentioned they had disorganized ideas to put when writing. They all mentioned that they had not attended academic writing course before.

Furthermore, six postgraduates said they had difficulty in listening and understanding lectures because they had not been exposed to enough English usage contexts before. One said he was not used to the native Australian pronunciation and the fast native speaker speed. One said the low voice of the lecturer and the native speaker pronunciation was the cause. One said the long and complicated words caused the difficulty. One said had less exposure to different non-native English accents. One said accent of Thai teachers was difficult to understand. However, in terms of reading, only one a female Chinese Master student mentioned she did not like reading academic journals.

However, teachers did not mention about the specific causes for students’ difficulties in English. Instead, the teachers of Science and of Agriculture, attributed students’ difficulties to their poor English background. The teacher of Science and the teacher of Social Technology also addressed the students’ low English proficiency. Only teacher of Engineering thought that students’ language difficulty might be due to insufficient exposure to the English language use.

## **5 Discussions**

The research revealed three major English language difficulties, including writing in an academic style, paraphrasing and synthesizing.

Other studies also reported similar problem among Asian students, who had difficulties generating ideas about their topics in writing (Al Murshidi, 2014), summarizing the reading gist to write in their own words (Amin & Alamin, 2012; Al Fadda, 2012), writing with coherence and cohesion, expressing their own voice as well as selecting a significant topic and relevant references (Chou, 2011), and doing academic writing in Oman and Monash Universities (Ali Hassan & Badi’s, 2015; Yasuda, 2004).

58.5% of the participants agree that the difficulties were caused by insufficient English words, expressions, and grammar knowledge. They did not take any academic writing course before, so they did not know the academic reading and writing skills, as said by most interviewees. It was also discussed by Cai (2013) and Ali Hassan & Badi (2015) that Asian students had academic writing difficulties because of previous experience and knowledge.

It is interesting to notice that speaking difficulty was not high among NNS in international programs at SUT, which was different from studies conducted in America, England, and

Australia where speaking was found to be the major difficulty among postgraduates from Asian regions (Phongsuwan, 1997; Yildirim, 2015; Terraschke & Wahidk, 2011; Yanagi & Baker, 2015; Brown, 2008). Most of research participants are from Asian countries, so they might have less stress talking with other NNSs and they may not have to worry about making errors in speaking. As was said by one interviewee, “I don’t have much problem speaking, because we are all NNS so it is acceptable to make mistakes; just to make our mates to understand”. However, students who study in English speaking countries may feel more stress. Brown (2008) concluded that NNS studying in England had suffered feelings of anxiety over their level of English language although all students got a minimum level of IELTS 6, the majority felt disadvantaged by particularly poor spoken English, shame and inferiority.

The NNS postgraduates from Agricultural Technology were found to have the most ELD among the four institutes. Most of the agriculture students are Thai. Even though the medium of instruction of the program is in English, most of the lecturers are Thai. Therefore, if students do not understand lessons, they can always talk to the lecturers in Thai for clarification and assistance. Moreover, there are a lot of text books on agriculture available in Thai language for them to refer to. As a result, they can avoid reading agricultural textbooks in English. Although they know the agricultural knowledge clearly in Thai, it is not easy for them to do assignments and write theses in English. They know general English words, but it is challenging to use technical terms, such as words for animals and vegetable diseases, medicine to cure animals, types of soils and fertilizers for vegetables. Reading and writing skills used in EAP are different from the reading and writing in general English (Ballard, 1996).

Moreover, the research also found that Thai students did not have high speaking ability as other NNS students in SUT context. One of the Thai students mentioned in the interview that “it is difficult for me to explain my thought in English; I do not feel confident to speak with my international friends in English”. In addition, one Indonesian interviewee said that “I do not have speaking problems; however, my Thai classmates have a lot of speaking problems. They did not want to sit with me when we first started the course”. This might be attributed to the recruitment criteria of SUT. SUT has high English standards for the international candidates. Therefore, those international students at SUT have fewer English problems in comparison to Thais. On the other hand, Thai students did not have much experience to use English, because teachers used L1 instructions in the classrooms (Phongsuwan, 1997).

## **6 Conclusion and Suggestions**

This study explored EAP difficulties faced by NNS who are taking postgraduate courses at a Thai university and the causes of those difficulties. The results proved both similar and different ELD and causes found among NNS students to different contexts. Both writing and reading were found as higher EAP difficulties than speaking and listening. The causes of these problems were low basic English capacity such as grammar knowledge for academic writing and specific words used in the fields. They did not have appropriate training for academic writing, and they had insufficient ability to synthesize in-depth information from reading materials. These problems were handled by students and teachers in SUT, for example, reading more to learn about academic words in their fields as well as learning academic writing style, keeping journal in English, studying from English books, fixing both language and content emphasized by teacher’s comments on their work, taking writing,

TOEIC, or communicative courses, listening to music and watching movies from YouTube, and TED talk.

Teacher advisors help them rehearsing and anticipating questions to prepare appropriate answers in advance, using English as a medium of instructions, and arranging extra a lab meeting or journal meeting regularly.

However, it would be a good idea for SUT to provide more supports to reduce these difficulties. Some techniques or approaches below can be used:

- Teaching students how to brainstorm ideas can contribute in minimizing their problems in academic writing (Abdulkareem, 2013).
- Preparing an outline of their topics before starting to write using three main stages (planning, writing, and editing) is a good idea (Al Fadda, 2012).
- Giving samples to identify their structures, organizations, cohesive devices and the other key features could help them in their writing (Crosby, 2009).
- Readings such as books, journals, and even some websites are useful source to enrich learners' lexicon with academic vocabulary and expressions that can promote ability to express their views and ideas in their own voice effectively (Gordon, 2008).
- Reading helps students acquire language skills unconsciously (Krashen, 1993).
- Providing students with a large vocabulary, develop the ability to understand and use complex grammatical constructions, develop a good writing style (Al Murshidi, 2014).

All in all, reading and writing skills should be better taken into account for the successful completion of their Ph.D. studies (Son, (2014). Moreover, in order to fulfil their EAP needs, some suggestions from NNS were addressed such as: 1) SUT should provide the English language environment in order for them to use English, so they can practice both speaking and listening. 2) Academic writing courses should be organized for them to practice their writing. 3) English Entrance exam for each field should be implemented in order to get students with the appropriate English ability

In terms of learning and teaching methods and strategies, it is necessary to employ either from the teachers' side and the students themselves, approaches that are both purposeful and meaningful for the students in order to maximize the learning effectiveness and achievement.

## **References**

- Abdulkareem, M. (2013). Investigation study of academic writing problems faced by Arab postgraduate students at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3(9), 1552-1557.
- Al Fadda, H. (2012). Difficulties in academic writing: From the perspective of King Saud University postgraduate students. *English Language Teaching*, 5(3),123-130.
- Al Murshidi, G. (2014). UAE university male students' interests impact on reading and writing performance and improvement. *English Language Teaching*, 7(9), 57-63.

- Amin, S., & Alamin, A. (2012). Skills and strategies used in the comprehension and production of academic writing in Taif University. *English Language and Literature studies*, 2(3), 135-139.
- Ballard, B. (1996). Through language to learning: Preparing overseas students for study in Western Universities. In H. Coleman (Ed.), *Society and the language classroom* (pp. 148-168). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bitchener, J. & Basturkmen, H. (2006). Perceptions of the difficulties of postgraduate L2 thesis students writing the discussion section. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 5, 4-18.
- Brown, L. (2008). Language and anxiety: an ethnographic study of international postgraduate students. *Evaluation and Research in Education*, 21(2), 75-95.
- Cai, L.J. (2013). Students' Perceptions of Academic Writing: A Needs Analysis of EAP in China. *Journal of Language Education in Asia*, 4(1), 2013
- Chou, L. (2011). An investigation of Taiwanese doctoral students' academic writing at a U.S. University. *Higher Education Studies*, 1(2), 47-60.
- Crosby, C.R. (2009). Academic reading and writing difficulties and strategies of Generation 1.5 learners. In M. Roberge et al. (Eds.), *Generation 1.5 in college composition: Teaching academic writing to U.S.-educated learners of ESL*, Routledge, pp. 105-119.
- Dehkordi, M., & Allami, H. (2012). Evidentiality in academic writing. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(9), 1895-1904.
- Ferris, D. Tagg, T. (1996). Academic Listening/Speaking Tasks for ESL Students: Problems, Suggestions, and Implications. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30(2) (Summer), 297-320.
- Gordon, L. (2008). Writing and good language learners. In C. Griffiths (Ed.), *Lessons from good language learners* (pp. 244-254). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hansen, J.G. (2000). Interactional conflicts among audience, purpose, and content knowledge in the acquisition of academic literacy in an EAP course. *Written Communication*, 77(1), 27-52.
- Hassan, I.A, & Badi, A. (2015). Academic writing difficulties of ESL learners. The 2015 WEI International Academic Conference Proceedings Barcelona, Spain.
- Ho, M.Ch. (2013). The difficulties in disciplinary research writing: A case study of first year graduate students in Taiwan. *Journal of teaching and teacher education*, 2(4):77-87.
- Jordan, R.R. (1997). *English for academic purposes: a guide and resource book for teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Krashen, S. (1993). *The power of reading*. Englewood, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited.

- Mills, C. (1997). Interaction in classes at a New Zealand university: Some international students' experiences. *New Zealand Journal of Adult Learning*, 25, 54-70.
- Phakiti, A & Li, L. (2011). General Academic Difficulties and Reading and Writing Difficulties among Asian ESL Postgraduate Students in TESOL at an Australian University, *RELC Journal* 42(3), 227–264.
- Phongsuwan, P. (1997). A study of English language-based problems of Thai postgraduates at Washington State University. (Doctoral dissertation, Washington State University, 1996). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 57(11), 4676.
- Rance-Roney, J. (1995). Transitioning adult ESL learners to academic programs. ERIC Digest. Washington DC: Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education; Washington DC: National Clearinghouse of ESL Literacy Education.
- Richards, J.C. (2008). *Teaching Listening and Speaking: From Theory to Practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Son, J.B, (2014). Experiences of International PhD Students in Australian Higher Education: from an EAP program to a PhD program. *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning*, 9(1), 26-37.
- Spack, R. (1997). The acquisition of academic literacy in a second language. *Written Communication*, 14 (1), 3-61.
- Sze, P. M. M. (2006). Developing Students' Listening and Speaking Skills through ELS Podcasts. *Educational Journal*. 34(2) (Winter), 115-134.
- Tahaineh, Y. S. (2010). Arab EFL university students' errors in the use of prepositions. *MJAL*, 2(1), 76-112.
- Tanaka, J. (2002). Academic difficulties among East Asian international graduate students: influences of perceived English language proficiency and native educational/socio-cultural background. (PhD's thesis). Indiana University.
- Terraschke, A. & Wahid, R. (2011). The impact of EAP on the academic experiences of international postgraduate students in Australia. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*. 10(2011), 173-182.
- Ward, J. (2001). EST: Evading scientific text. *English for Specific Purposes*, 20(2), 141-152.
- Yanagi, M. & Baker, A.A. (2015). Challenges experienced by Japanese students with oral communication skills in Australia universities. *TESOL Journal*. 2015, 1-24.
- Yasuda, S. (2004). Revising strategies in ESL academic writing: A case study of Japanese postgraduate student writers. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 14, 91-112.

Yildirim, O. (2015). English related difficulties experienced by Turkish students studying in a dual diploma ELT program in the U.S.A. *Journal of International Education Research –Second Quarter. 11(2)*. 107-118.