

Uncovering Challenges Mainland Chinese International Students Face in English Language Communication in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: Since establishing the Silk Road initiatives, Malaysia, as a significant ASEAN country with top-ranked universities in QS, has become one of the most popular Edu-hubs for mainland Chinese international students to pursue further studies. This qualitative case study explored mainland Chinese international students' challenges in English communications through interviews. The data were sorted into three categories: academic oral English communication challenges, the factors causing these challenges, and the methods to solve these challenges. Qualitative data were collected through three sessions of in-depth individual interviews. Informants were six mainland Chinese international students (three master's students and three Ph.D. students) from a public university in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The data were analysed using the thematic analysis method. This study discovered the challenges in English communication by mainland Chinese international students, for example, insufficiency of social and linguistic competence of using appropriate words. This research also identified the factors that contribute to these challenges, for example, insufficient exposure to actual English communication settings. The researchers also investigated the strategies used by these students to overcome these challenges, for example, undergoing oral English training, prior preparations, and self-learning methods. The findings contribute to the improvement of international education services for Malaysian higher education institutions.

Keywords: English academic communication, Challenges, Factors, Mainland Chinese international students, Strategies

1. Introduction

Due to China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI) and ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership, it is hoped that the ASEAN-China international collaborative program in higher education will significantly enhance talents and academic support while also connecting people from various backgrounds (Yeoh et al., 2018). ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand have embarked on several international collaborative programs in higher institutions (Yeoh et al., 2018). Under this background, an increasing number of mainland Chinese international students are pursuing higher education in ASEAN countries. According to earlier research by Zhai and Razali (2020), it is beneficial for mainland Chinese students to study abroad because it provides a valuable chance to integrate with students and faculty from other countries, thereby contributing to their confidence.

Meanwhile, having mainland Chinese international students on campus could bring diverse racial, cultural, and global perspectives and worldviews that are suitable to the institutions and necessary for other students in the classroom and learning environment (Zhai & Razali, 2021). Furthermore, according to the United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020) statistics, Malaysia has been one of the most popular higher education hubs for mainland Chinese international students, where most Malaysian higher institutions use English as the language of instruction (Ridge, 2004). As the largest population of international students, the learning experiences of mainland Chinese international students should be emphasized to improve international education quality (Zhai & Razali, 2021).

However, due to their limited English language proficiency, mainland Chinese international students face numerous academic learning difficulties while studying in English-medium higher education institutions abroad, including language barriers and some unexpected cross-culture problems (Zhai & Razali, 2021). To gain admission to English medium universities, mainland Chinese international students typically take language proficiency tests, such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). However, despite having studied English for years and passing the English language test before enrolling, they face language communication difficulties in their studies (Zhang & Beck, 2017). However, it has also been reported by Imamura and Zhang (2014) that mainland Chinese international students also have difficulties in communicating with their lecturers/instructors, the frustration of having to repeat themselves, and fear of not being understood during viva voce. Furthermore, it has been reported that mainland Chinese international students encounter many English communication challenges to study in English-Medium colleges (Zhai & Razali, 2021), such as speaking anxiety, shyness in speaking English, and a lack of subject-specific vocabulary (Zhai & Razali, 2020).

In Malaysia, very little research has been done on mainland Chinese international students' English communication challenges, factors contributing to these challenges, and strategies for improving English communication competence (Zhai & Razali, 2021). Previous studies in this field were mainly conducted in Western countries (Yuerong et al., 2017; Zhai & Razali, 2021). Meanwhile, few studies have mentioned the cultural schema for curriculum design in Asian countries, which plays a significant role in students' intercultural communication knowledge learning, as it is regarded as the connection between past and present intercultural knowledge (Yassin et al., 2020). Additionally, for the theories used in the recent studies, most of which are concerned with the western context, the critical gap that exists is non-western perspectives (Yuerong et al., 2017). Few Asian scholars conducted studies on English communicative competence for mainland Chinese international students in Asian classroom settings (Zhai & Razali, 2021). Therefore, this study helps to fill in these gaps.

To fill these gaps, this study explores the challenges that mainland Chinese international students face when communicating in English during their postgraduate studies in Malaysian higher education institutions. In doing so, this study also discusses the factors that contribute to the challenges in English language communication among mainland Chinese international students pursuing a postgraduate study. Furthermore, the researchers discovered the methods used by mainland Chinese international students to overcome the challenges when communicating in English during their studies.

Specifically, this study addresses the following three questions:

1. What English language communication challenges do mainland Chinese international students face while studying for their postgraduate degrees at this Malaysian university?
2. What factors contribute to English language communication challenges among mainland Chinese international students pursuing postgraduate degrees at this Malaysian university?
3. What methods do mainland Chinese international students use to overcome challenges in English language communication problems while pursuing postgraduate degrees at this Malaysian university?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Importance of English Communicative Competence

There is an emerging awareness of the importance of English communicative competence for mainland Chinese international students' academic achievement in their overseas studies (Singh, 2020; Yassin et al., 2020; Zhai & Razali, 2021). Due to a lack of oral English language education and exposure to the English communication environment, international students from the Asian context face many

oral communication problems when studying in an English-medium context (Nachatar Singh & Jack, 2021; Zhai & Razali, 2021). Furthermore, a lack of English communication competence will impede their academic progress because they lack the confidence and ability to communicate correctly with lecturers and peers (Zhang & Beck, 2017). According to Zhai and Razali (2021), mainland Chinese international students with better speaking skills are more confident in their first-year studies, reducing their academic pressures in English-medium educational contexts. Therefore, English communication competence is significant for mainland Chinese international students' studying at EMI higher education institutions.

2.2 English Language Communication Competence Education at Tertiary Level in China

In China, English Language Teaching (ELT) adheres to the traditional Chinese teaching model, in which the purpose of learning English is to pass examinations, with teachers only assisting to accomplish their goals, resulting in Chinese students' lack of communicative competence in natural communication environments, which has been regarded to as "Dumb English" or "Deaf English" (Du & Guan, 2015). However, as China's economy grows, increasing numbers of Chinese families send their children to study overseas to get their degrees and improve their comprehensive competitiveness and broaden their horizons for a better future, highlighting the significance of CET reforms in China (Zhai & Razali, 2021).

2.3 Challenges Mainland Chinese International Students Face in English Language Communication

Previous studies have shown that mainland Chinese international students face two significant challenges during their overseas studies at the EMI campus: challenges in foreign language anxiety and English communication.

2.3.1 Foreign Language Anxiety

Deriving from a psychological, linguistic view, numerous studies on foreign language education have indicated that foreign language anxiety is an influential factor in a learner's foreign language acquisition (Imamura & Zhang, 2014; Zhai & Razali, 2021). When learning English in China, the majority of mainland Chinese students are affected by perfectionism, which "misleads them to an unreal ideal pursuit of speaking English like native speakers with no grammatical errors or phonetics problems with the high level of English speaking competence" (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002, p. 565), and is regarded as a psychological barrier in mainland Chinese international students' English communication when pursuing their further studies in English-medium campus. Furthermore, Zhai and Razali (2021) argued that mainland Chinese international students experience more English anxiety when combining their thinking skills with communication in-class activities and interactive activity workshops than their host countries' counterparts. In this regard, language anxiety also negatively influences mainland Chinese international students' academic performance (Sang & Hiver, 2021). Furthermore, this cohort of students keeps silent in class and is afraid of communicating in English with their lecturers and colleagues.

2.3.2 English Language Communication Challenges

Zhai and Razali (2021) posit that mainland Chinese international students have difficulty understanding the content of lectures and seminars. In addition, mainland Chinese international students struggle to understand the range of the problems to make verbal responses to the questions or participate in class activities due to their poor oral communication competence, which resides in three major dimensions: 1. speed and accent; 2. vocabulary; 3. interactive verbal engagement. The researchers also posited that the rapid speech of lecturers and peers from host countries may negatively impact mainland Chinese international students' listening comprehension. Therefore, it is a challenge for this cohort of students to respond to their lecturers and counterparts, which impedes their academic success (Zhai & Razali, 2021).

In terms of challenges in English speaking, Kang and Liang (2018, p. 40) indicated that numerous phonetic challenges faced by Chinese EFL learners reduce their oral language output ability, related to: "1) certain individual vowels and consonants which do not occur in Chinese or are pronounced differently in Chinese; 2) vowel combinations and consonant clusters which are not allowed

by Chinese phonotactic constraints; 3) sound variations in forms of liaison, weak form, elision and assimilation in connected speech." Furthermore, Zhai and Razali (2021) posited that most mainland Chinese international students lack actual English listening competence due to their prior English education in China. Hence, academic communication skill plays a significant role in mainland Chinese international students' studying on the EMI campus for educational purposes, which also plays a crucial role in students' comprehension in conference lectures. Therefore, in English for academic purposes, instructional settings need high standards of listening ability (Serra Hagedorn & Zhang, 2010) for learners to decipher the content of the material and professional knowledge of the subject in actual academic learning situations.

Considering the intercultural communication competence perspective, God and Zhang (2018) indicated that due to the lack of intercultural and linguistic knowledge, mainland Chinese international students mismatch the accurate information from their lecturers and host countries' counterparts, which is detrimental to their academic success in EMI colleges (Yassin et al., 2020). Furthermore, God and Zhang also raised concern about finding the equivalence of home and abroad English. Each has its uniqueness to make better academic adaptations for Chinese students in a strange community. In addition, we agreed with Phan Le Ha (2009, p. 212) as he argued that English is "utilized for communicators to make expressions from their cultural perspectives, which might be barriers to intercultural communication." Thus, this study aims to help mitigate these problems.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Current research is guided by two theoretical approaches, as stated in the conceptual framework (Figure 1). These two theoretical approaches are the Communicative Competence theory (Canale & Swain, 1980) and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977).

2.4.1 Communication Competence Theory

The notion of communicative competence originated from Hymes (1966). He defined communicative competence as the primary social skill for speakers to become competent communicators in natural settings. And, centuries after centuries, this concept has been further developed by numerous linguists and is widely used by English educators worldwide (Canale & Swain, 1980). Canale and Swain (1980) also propose a model of communicative competence, which defines communicative competence as an international competence comprised of four individual competencies: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic.

2.4.2 Self-efficacy Theory

Complying with Bandura's social cognitive theory, self-efficacy theory can be analyzed in attitudes for individuals towards their self-judged ability to reach the academic goal. More specifically, academic self-efficacy means a person's belief (conviction) that they can achieve a designated level of achievement on an academic task or attain a specific educational goal (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, students with high self-efficacy may more motivated to engage in their academic activities with diligence and perseverance to accomplish themselves in their academic study (Yu et al., 2019). Furthermore, students' beliefs about their efficacy to meet academic task requirements also impact their emotions to reduce their psychological pressures. Their self-efficacy might be influenced negatively to a lower degree while witnessing others' improvement of academic performances while boosting their self-efficacy and academic performance.

Unlike the familiar context both in culture and teaching method in their home country, mainland Chinese international students studying at EMI Malaysian colleges require academic adaptation ability and oral English communication competence. When encountering different education systems, teaching methods, educational evaluations, mainland Chinese international students need to be prepared to adjust to a new culture while completing the course requirements of foreign lecturers with distinguished teaching and evaluating methods.

Based on the two theories, the conceptual framework figure is shown as follows (see Figure

1). Mainland Chinese international students with the high motivation of improving oral academic English competence will undoubtedly benefit from the improvement in the four perspectives provided by the communicative competence theory combined with self-efficacy theory. The most crucial factor in determining an international student's literary adaptation is the students themselves. Details are shown in Figure 1.

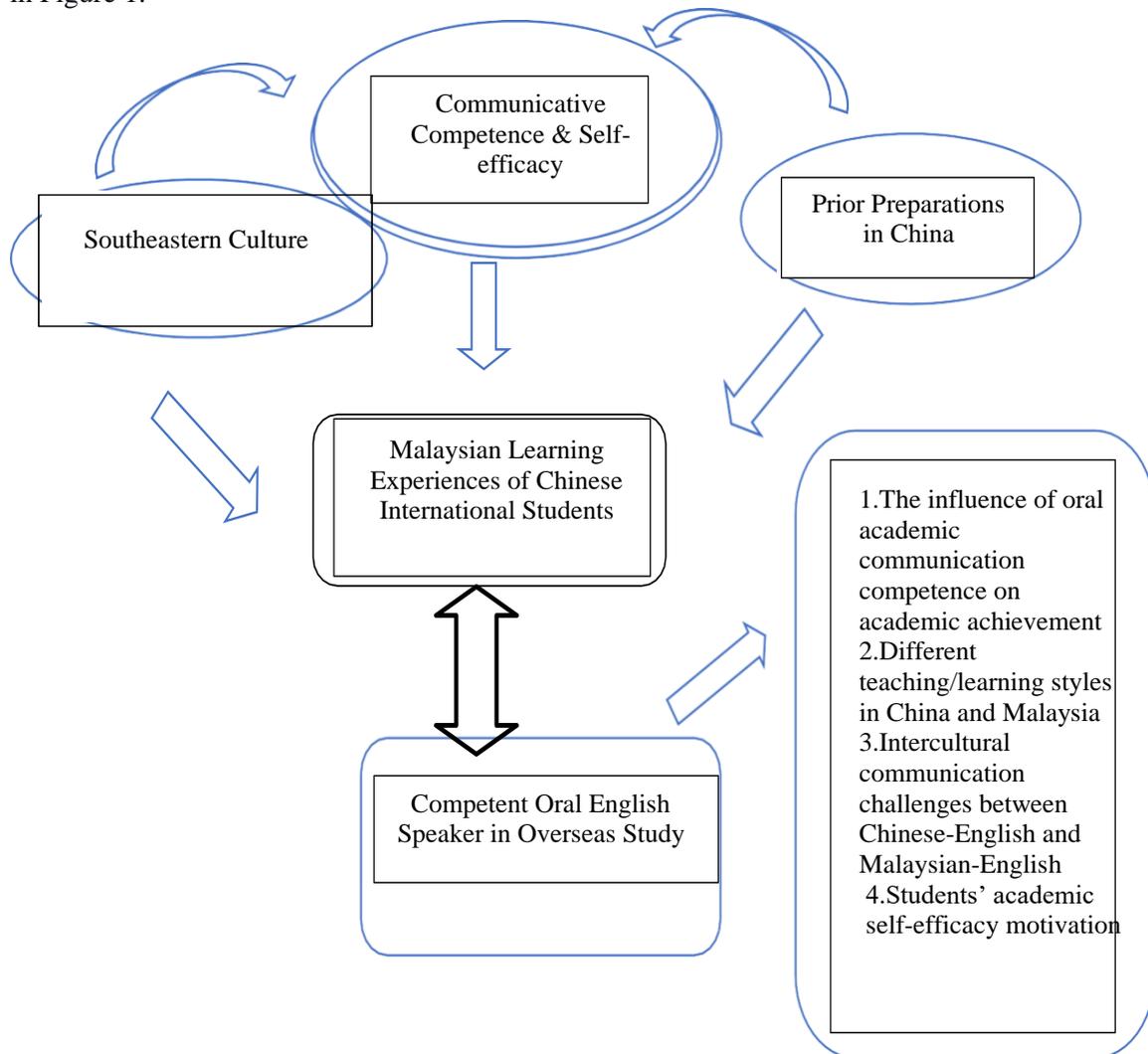


Fig. 1 Conceptual framework

3. Research Method

This study used a qualitative case study approach, which was used to gain a holistic understanding of mainland Chinese international students' English communication experiences in Malaysian higher institutions with six mainland Chinese international students treated as a single case (Yin, 2014).

3.1 Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at a public research university in Malaysia. More than 5289 international students were enrolled in this university at the time of this research. The target population of this study was mainland Chinese international students. Creswell et al. (2007) argued that only participants with meaningful contributions can be selected by purposive sampling. The researchers used the snowball sampling technique to choose all accessible informants. Snowball sampling could select a sample that "yields a holistic understanding of the research topic" (Goodman, 1961, p. 167).

The justification for selecting mainland Chinese international students is because these students are exposed to numerous academic English communication settings (e.g., English lectures, English oral presentations, workshops, seminars, and international conferences). They must have competent English communication performance to finish their studies and further their research in the international community. Only mainland Chinese international students (e.g., master's or Ph.D.) who had spent at least six months full-time in Malaysia were selected as they had rich English communication experiences to draw upon. Six participants confirmed their participation. Their IELTS scores are all above 6.0. They were three master's mainland Chinese international students, and three doctoral mainland Chinese international students. Their consent was obtained through a consent form sent by emails voluntarily. The six informants (Table 1) voluntarily participated in the semi-structured interviews. The researchers used pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of the informants and the confidentiality of data pertinent to the specific informants.

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Information

Participants Name	Gender	Degree Level	Major	Time in Malaysia (month)	IELTS Score	CET-6 Score
HY	Female	P.h.D	Music	10	6.5	580
KQ	Male	P.h.D	Human Resources	10	6.0	570
XZ	Female	P.h.D	Mass Communication	10	6.0	556
HC	Male	Master (Coursework)	Economics	10	6.0	560
MR Q	Male	Master (Coursework)	Corporate Communication	10	6.0	530
ZZ	Female	Master (Science)	Water Resources	10	6.5	575

3.2 Data collection

Before data collection, the content of the self-developed interview questions and protocols were reviewed and evaluated by three experts in the field of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) at a research university in Malaysia. The interview questions and protocols were also peer-reviewed by other fellow TESL postgraduates to identify potential issues and provide valuable improvement suggestions. Based on the valuable feedback, revisions were made several times. The semi-structured interview questions were related to three research questions (e.g., challenges, factors, and strategies of English communication practices in Malaysian higher institutions).

The researchers conducted this study in three phases following Seidman's (2019) interview protocol. The in-depth interviews with six mainland Chinese international students were done via zoom-meeting because this study was done during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each interview session lasted about 50 minutes. The first interview session (i.e., Phase-one interview) was performed with each student-participant to gather information about their challenges in oral academic English communication in their overseas studies in this particular Malaysian higher education institution. After analyzing the data from the first session, the second interview session (i.e., Phase-two interview) was implemented with each student-participant in the middle of this research. This session of interviews was to gather factors that might cause these challenges from student participants. The third interview session (i.e., Phase-three interview) was conducted with every individual student-participant at the last phase of the study after the researchers analyzed the data from the first and the second sessions. This

session of interviews was to collect the strategies that the informant might use to overcome these challenges. All three discussions were audio-recorded in a digital recorder and stored confidentially. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. All interviews used Chinese-Mandarin. The transcription procedure is also critical to data analysis so that the researchers can go through the textual data systematically.

Table 2. Data Collection

Phase	Theme	Time/3 times/six	Feedback	Transcription
One	Challenges	50 minutes each	1.We-chat Message 2.Interview Responses	Notes Audio-recorder
Two	Factors	50 minutes each	1.We-chat Message 2.Interview Responses	Notes Audio-recorder
Three	Methods	50 minutes each	1.We-chat Message 2.Interview Responses	Notes Audio-recorder

3.3 Data analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded, and verbatim transcriptions were stored for further analysis. The interview records were initially transcribed into Chinese and then translated into English. The translation of the transcription was reviewed by two Chinese scholars with extensive experience translating between Chinese and English. The researchers communicated with them via emails. The researchers revised the transcripts following the experts' comments. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data. The data analysis process followed six steps based on the thematic analysis approach proposed by Nowell et al. (2017). The researchers created three themes across the data-set: challenges faced in English academic communication for mainland Chinese international students, factors possibly causing these challenges, and methods used to overcome these challenges, which are significant for illuminating the research questions.

Table 3. Thematic analysis of Interview Transcripts

	Key Themes
1	Challenges
2	Factors
3	Methods

4. Findings

4.1 Challenges to Academic English Communication

The first research question explored challenges to English academic communication faced by mainland Chinese international students studying in Malaysian higher institutions. Based on the data collected from the interviews, mainland Chinese international students face nine academic communication challenges in their overseas studies: (1) Communication Comprehension Challenges,

(2) Speaking Anxiety, (3) Cultural Differences, (4) Limited Vocabulary and Terminologies in the Fields of Study, (5) Limited Subject Content Knowledge, (6) Length and Speed Rate of Communication Context, (7) Lack of Conduciveness of the Classroom, (8) Differences in Malaysian Accent vs. Chinese Accent, and (9) Difficulty with Malaysian Local Expressions. The findings revealed that academic English communication challenges faced by mainland Chinese international students include different domains, such as psychological domain, linguistic knowledge domain, social culture domain, external surroundings, and subject knowledge domain. This highlights that mainland Chinese international students' insufficient linguistic knowledge and cross-accent communications, cross-cultural misunderstandings, and insufficient Malaysian local expressions might be their challenges in their English communication for academic purposes in Malaysian higher institutions. Furthermore, these findings are similar to those of the previous studies focusing on mainland Chinese international students' overseas academic oral communication challenges in other European countries (see God & Zhang 2019; Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011).

Table 4. Challenges -Thematic Map

Challenges	
Sub-themes	1.Cultural Differences
	2.Speaking Anxiety
	3.Limited Vocabulary and Terminologies in the Fields of Study
	4.Limited Subject Content Knowledge
	5.Length and Speed Rate of Communication Context
	6.Conduciveness of the Classroom
	7.Malaysian Accent vs. Chinese Accent
	8.Malaysian Local Expressions
	9.Communication Comprehension Challenges

4.2 Factors to Challenges in Academic English Communication

The second research question investigates the factors to the challenges in English language communication among mainland Chinese international students in their overseas study in Malaysian higher institutions. Based on the data collected from the interviews, the findings presented the factors to the oral English academic challenges of mainland Chinese international students: 1. Lack of Real-Life Authentic English Language Learning in Chinese Education; 2. Lack of Focus on Communication in English Education in China; 3. Chinese Lecturers' Lack of English Communication Competence; 4. Unfamiliarity with Malaysian Academic Teaching and Learning Approaches; 5. Traditional Chinese Save Face (Mian Zi) Culture; 6. Negative Feedback from Lecturers; 7. Lack of Specific Training on English Communication at the Host University; and 8. Insufficient Exposure to Academic English Communication. Specifically, a traditional Chinese value teaches Chinese people to have high self-esteem and to be humble. Additionally, many traditional Chinese students emphasize their face-MianZi too much during their whole life. Thus, this kind of psychological factor might make it more difficult to use the English language. Furthermore, some of these findings are in line with those of Kuo (2011), who stated that mainland Chinese international students lack real-life English communication practices due to their insufficient real-life content of English knowledge learning, traditional Chinese Save Face (Mian Zi) Culture, and the perfectionism of learning English concepts in China.

Table 5. Factors -Thematic Map

Factors	
Sub-themes	1.Lack of Real-Life Authentic English Language Learning in Chinese Education 2.Lack of Focus on Communication in English Education in China 3.Lecturers’ Lack of English Communication Competence 4.Unfamiliarity with Malaysian Academic Teaching and Learning Approaches 5.Traditional Chinese Value Save Face (Mian Zi) Culture 6.Negative Feedback 7.Lack of Specific Training on English Communication 8.Insufficient Exposure to Academic English Communication

4.3 Strategies to Solve Challenges to Academic English Communication

Based on the data collected from the interviews, the findings presented the strategies and methods used by mainland Chinese international students to solve their English oral academic communication challenges: 1. Prior Preparations in China; 2. Undergoing oral Academic English Training; 3. Taking Measures in Avoiding Prejudice; 4. Providing English Communication Activities; and 5. Equipping Oneself with Self-Motivation Self-Learning Methods. These findings align with the theoretical framework by the self-efficacy theory and communicative competence theory, which explains the effective measures to improve oral English communication competence for mainland Chinese international students and be self-motivated in English communication language learning in their daily lives. Furthermore, these findings are also in line with previous studies in this field (Canale & Swain, 1980; Bandura, 1977; Megat-Abdul-Rahim et al., 2021).

Table 6. Strategies-Thematic Map

Strategies	
Sub-themes	1.Undergoing Oral Academic English Training 2.Measures in Avoiding Prejudice 3.Providing English Communication Activities 4.Equipping Oneself with Self-Motivation Self-Learning Methods 5.Prior Preparations in China

5. Discussion and Implications

This study examined mainland Chinese international students’ difficulties in English academic communications, investigate the factors causing these difficulties, and discover strategies to solve these problems. From the analyses of the data and complying with communication competence theory, mainland Chinese international students’ approaches to solving academic oral English communication challenges are divided into four domains: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. Specifically, they acquire these competencies via two approaches: self-perceived learning and English language learning classrooms.

More importantly, following self-efficacy theory to uncover challenges mainland Chinese international students face in oral academic English communication, strategies could be employed via three approaches: 1. Self-learning motivation 2. Prior study in China. 3. English Oral Communication Competency Training Courses by Host Institutions.

Taken together, the findings of this study provided effective measures to improve international education quality for both mainland Chinese international students and Malaysian higher education institutions. In addition, the current results reveal the importance of support from Chinese higher education institutions and the host universities, and more importantly, from due diligence of the mainland Chinese international students, themselves as adult learners to improve their English communication competence in their overseas study in Malaysian higher institutions or higher institutions in other ASEAN countries. Furthermore, this study fills the research gap of existing literature (God & Zhang 2019; Yuerong et al., 2017; Zhai & Razali, 2020) that explores the English communication competence for mainland Chinese international students in European countries, but the exploration of mainland Chinese international students' communication experiences in ASEAN countries was lacking, so as the novice tries to validate the Communicative Competence theory and the Self-efficacy theory on the exploration of mainland Chinese international students' English communication competence for their overseas study in one of the ESL ASEAN countries, hence the novelty of this study, making contributions to the theoretical development of Communication Competence theory.

Based on the results, the researchers provide some suggestions for improving mainland Chinese international students' overseas study in Malaysian higher education institutions. First, mainland Chinese international students should make complete preparations before pursuing their higher degrees in the Malaysian EMI campus. These cohorts of students should read some subject-related books in the English language to get familiar with the terminologies of their major. The majority of textbooks of subject-knowledge for students in China are written in Chinese. Therefore, the preliminary reading of subject-related books in the English language can help accumulate English terminologies for mainland Chinese international students' oral academic communication. Furthermore, future mainland Chinese international students should prepare to become acquainted with the Malaysian English accent. Doing some listening activities in Malaysian English accent to get acquainted with Malaysian English accent can help them adapt to the Malaysian English-medium lectures in their overseas study in Malaysia (Zhai & Razali, 2021). They can watch some Malaysian English movies to become more familiar with the Malaysian English accent and learn more about Malaysian culture and customs. Meanwhile, they must be aware of Malaysian local English expressions to improve their English communication competence.

Subsequently, we believe there is a great need to reform English education in China due to the global trend in international education. Changing the position of English as a subject for examination neglects the significance of English language communication teaching in the Chinese curriculum (Zhai & Razali, 2021). Policymakers should make English education reform in China to focus on the importance of communication ability (i.e., listening and speaking). Furthermore, the training of English teachers for English communication teaching should be the primary concern of the policymakers in China (Du & Guan, 2015). With the development of the Chinese economy, more and more effective education reforms should be implemented in the Chinese English education system (Sang & Hiver, 2021). Looking forward to the new future of Chinese English education in English language communication teaching, hopefully, the new generations of China will be equipped with fluent English communication competence during their overseas study at the EMI campus.

Furthermore, Malaysian Higher Education Institutions are encouraged to provide, emphasize, and enhance English oral academic communication courses for mainland Chinese international students who wish to study in Malaysia. Host universities can fully utilize the English Language Center to improve both mainland Chinese international students' English language communication competence and host universities' lecturers' English communication competence via academic expertise English communication knowledge training program (Zhai & Razali, 2020). This is because the problem stems from two sources: mainland Chinese international students and Malaysian lecturers. Some participants said that some lecturers prefer to speak in the Malay language in the classroom, even with international students (Ridge, 2004). Hence, English is widely used in Malaysian society as a second language, where most Malaysian people can speak fluent English. Therefore, it is significant to enhance mainland

Chinese international students' communicative competence and enhance Malaysian lecturers' awareness of speaking English by specific training to guarantee the quality of courses for mainland Chinese international students. Meanwhile, host universities can help hold some classes in teaching Malaysian culture and provide opportunities for mainland Chinese international students to interact with their local Malaysian colleagues to effectively adapt to the new environment. As a result, this study contributes to developing effective strategies to resolve the English oral communication challenges mainland Chinese international students and Malaysian higher education institutions face.

6. Limitations & Implications for Future Studies

Summing up, the findings may shed light on mainland Chinese international students' oral English academic communication studies in Malaysian higher education institutions. Due to the increasing number of mainland Chinese international students studying in ASEAN countries and the essential role of English academic communication competence, more research is needed on English academic communication competence focusing on both postgraduate and undergraduate mainland Chinese international students (Yeoh et al., 2018). Meanwhile, considering the nature of the universities in Malaysia, mainland Chinese international students from private higher institutions should also be concerned for future researchers in this field to ensure the findings to be represented to the whole mainland Chinese international students in Malaysia. Furthermore, future investigations can also focus on other ASEAN countries such as Singapore, Thailand, or Vietnam. Thus, this study only used three-session semi-structured interviews to collect data from mainland Chinese international students. For future research, establishing triangulation among multiple perspectives, data from different stakeholders, such as teachers, lecturers, policymakers, and administrators, will make the study more comprehensive, convincing, and trustworthy. In addition, the research methodologies can be more diversified in future research. Although the qualitative case study was selected for this research, quantitative research or a mixed research method can also be used to get more generalizability and rich results.

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