INVESTIGATING THE ACADEMIC LITERACIES CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS IN MASTER PROGRAMMES IN AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

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by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALM Academic Literacies Model

ALQ Academic Literacies Questionnaire

ASM Academic Socialisation Model

BICS Basic interpersonal communication skills

CALP Cognitive academic language proficiency

CLA Communicative language ability

CoP Community of Practice

CW Coursework

EFL English as a Foreign Language

ESL English as a Second Language

ESOL English for Speakers of Other Languages

HE Higher Education

IELTS International English Language Testing System

IPS Institute of Postgraduate Studies

IS International Students

IGS International Graduate Students

L1 First language

L2 Second language

MoHE Ministry of Higher Education

MoI Medium of Instruction

MM Mixed Mode

NLS New Literacy Studies

NNES Non-native English students

NNSE Non-native speakers of English

PASS Postgraduate Academic Support Services

SPSS Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

SSM Study Skills Model

TOEFL Test of English as a Foreign Language

USM Universiti Sains Malaysia

UKM Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

UM Universiti Malaya

UPM Universiti Putra Malaysia

MENGKAJI CABARAN LITERASI AKADEMIK DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR ANTARABANGSA YANG MENGIKUTI PROGRAM SARJANA DI INSTITUSI PENGAJIAN TINGGI DI MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan kaedah campuran ini memaparkan dapatan daripada pengalaman literasi akademik pelajar antarabangsa dalam program sarjana mod kerja kursus atau campuran di salah sebuah institusi pengajian tinggi di Malaysia. Penyelidikan ini mengkaji keperluan literasi akademik yang dihadapi oleh pelajar sarjana antarabangsa dalam program sarjana, cabaran literasi akademik yang mereka hadapi dan langkah-langkah untuk menangani cabaran literasi akademik bagi memastikan kejayaan akademik. Rangka kerja konseptual penyelidikan ini adalah gabungan *Academic Literacies Model* (Lea & Street, 2000), *Discipline Enculturation into Community of Practice* (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991) dan *Adult Learning Theory* (Knowles, 1984). *Academic Literacies Questionnaire* yang dibentuk dengan menggabungkan item-item terpilih daripada soal selidik Chang (2006) dan Evan & Green (2007) telah digunakan untuk mengumpul data daripada 131 orang responden. Pengumpulan data kualitatif melibatkan temu bual dengan kumpulan berfokus yang terdiri daripada 70 orang responden, komunikasi e-mel dengan responden, temu bual secara bersemuka dengan 16 orang pensyarah dan analisis dokumen-dokumen objektif kursus, keperluan kursus dan penilaian kursus. Data kuantitatif dianalisis menggunakan Pakej Statistik bagi Sains Sosial. Data temu bual dengan kumpulan berfokus dan temu bual secara bersemuka telah ditranskripsikan. Kedua-dua jenis data ini yang ditranskripsikan dan dapatan daripada komunikasi email dianalisis menggunakan perisian NVivo 10. Kesemua data kualitatif ini dikodkan secara analisis tematik untuk mengenal pasti tema dan sub-tema serta membincangkan dapatan

kajian. Analisis kandungan ke atas dokumen-dokumen objektif kursus, keperluan kursus dan penilaian kursus juga dilakukan. Dapatan penyelidikan ini menunjukkan keperluan literasi akademik dalam bidang penulisan adalah paling penting berbanding pembacaan, pertuturan dan mendengar. Dapatan kajian juga mendapati bahawa cabaran literasi akademik menunjukkan ketidakpadanan di antara ekspektasi akademik para pensyarah dengan kebolehan akademik responden dalam amalan literasi akademik. Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan pelbagai langkah yang diambil oleh responden untuk menangani cabaran literasi akademik seperti bimbingan daripada komuniti akademik setempat. Langkah lain yang diambil oleh pelajar seperti menggunakan sumber internet. Responden juga bermotivasi instrinsik untuk menangani cabaran literasi akademik yang mereka hadapi. Dapatan kajian ini menyumbang pada pemahamam yang lebih komprehensif, pengetahuan dan metodologi bagi penambahbaikan dan pengukuhan literasi akademik dalam kalangan pelajar sarjana antarabangsa dalam program sarjana yang dikendalikan dalam konteks bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua. Tambahan pula, dapatan ini juga akan digunakan sebagai landasan untuk menyakinkan pihak universiti untuk menubuhkan *Learning Support Centre* yang mampu menyediakan sokongan akademik kepada para pelajar sarjana antarabangsa. Cadangan-cadangan yang dikemukakan mampu menyumbang terhadap pengukuhan agenda pengantarabangsaan pendidikan tinggi di Malaysia melalui penyediaan pendidikan tinggi yang berkualiti dan inklusif untuk para pelajar sarjana antarabangsa kelak.

INVESTIGATING THE ACADEMIC LITERACIES CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS IN MASTER PROGRAMMES IN AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

ABSTRACT

This mixed methods research presents the findings of the academic literacies experiences of international graduate students in coursework or mixed mode Master programmes at an institution of higher education in Malaysia. This research investigated the academic literacies demands faced by the international graduate students, the academic literacies challenges experienced by them and the steps employed to overcome the academic literacies challenges to achieve academic success. The conceptual framework of this research comprises the Academic Literacies Model (Lea & Street, 2000), Discipline Enculturation into Community of Practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, 1984). Academic Literacies Questionnaire created based on selected items from Chang's (2006) and Evans & Green's (2007) questionnaire was used to collect the quantitative data from 131 respondents. Qualitative data collection involved focus group interviews with 70 respondents, email correspondence, one-to-one interview with 16 lecturers and course objectives, course requirements and course evaluation documents' analysis. Quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. The focus group interviews and one-to-one interviews' data were transcribed. The transcribed data and email correspondence data was analysed using the NVivo 10 software. These qualitative data was coded and thematic analysis was applied to create the themes and sub-themes and

discuss the findings. Content analysis of the course objectives, course requirements and course evaluation documents was also conducted. The results of this research indicate the academic literacies demands in writing are most important compared to reading, speaking and listening practices. The academic literacies challenges findings indicate a mismatch in terms of the lecturers' academic expectations and the respondents' academic abilities in their academic literacies practices. The findings also indicate the steps employed by the respondents to overcome the academic literacies challenges include guidance from internal academic community. External steps include employing internet sources. The respondents were also intrinsically motivated to overcome their academic literacies challenges. The findings of this research contribute to a more comprehensive understanding, knowledge and methodology for further improving and strengthening academic literacies of the international graduate students in their Master programmes conducted in English as the medium of instruction. Furthermore, the findings will be used as a platform to convince the research site university to set up the Learning Support Centre to provide academic support for the international graduate students. The recommendations also contribute towards strengthening Malaysia's internationalisation agenda by providing quality inclusive higher education for the incoming international graduate students.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Overview of International Students Intake in Higher Education

In the recent two decades, Malaysia encountered an influx in the number of international students (IS) enrolling in its private and public higher education (HE) institutions due to the government's intensification of the internationalisation agenda of HE. According to Altbach & Knight (2007) and Yonezawa, Akiba & Hirouchi (2009), this trend motivated by many reasons is due largely by the desire of universities worldwide to improve their own international reputation, the need to increase revenues and the desire to enhance the quality of their education system.

One of the effects of the internationalisation agenda of Malaysia's HE is the increase in the number of IS enrolling for postgraduate study in many public universities since 2002 (Kaur & Sidhu, 2009). Majority of these students are from Indonesia, Thailand, Bangladesh, the Maldives, Singapore, China, Nigeria and Middle East countries such as Iran, Jordan, Yemen, Iraq and Egypt (Morshidi Sirat, 2008; Ministry of Higher Education, 2010).

Malaysia has become the preferred destination for many IS when they choose to pursue their education abroad, especially Asian students as the government continuously strengthens its internationalisation agenda. One of five core thrusts of Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) is to internationalise Malaysia's HE and increase IS

enrolment. This is in line with the implementation of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan that puts in place strategic thrusts and critical agendas to enable our tertiary educational and research environment to achieve world-class status (MoHE, 2010).

Apart from the internationalisation agenda, students choose Malaysia due to many other reasons. Firstly, it is due to high costs of education and concerns about discrimination in Western countries. For example, the notable increasing growth of Arab and other nationalities of Middle East students in Malaysia since 2001 is partly due to the "9/11" event (Al-Zubaidi & Rechards, 2010). Secondly, students find it more comfortable with the shared values among Asians (Institute for Democracy & Economic Affairs - IDEAS, 2008). Thirdly, an increasing number of students prefer to study at a university abroad (Healey, 2008; Russell et al., 2010). Lastly, the use of English language as the medium of instruction (MoI) for teaching and learning attracts students to choose Malaysia as the destination for further study (Safahieh & Singh, 2006).

Based on Verbik & Lasanowski's (2007) analysis, Malaysia had approximately 2% share of the IS market, with around 55,000 foreign students enrolled in the country's HE institutions in 2006. The overall number of foreign students who came to pursue their HE increased significantly in 2008. It was equivalent with 40% increase compared to in 2007. This increase progressed to 70,000 IS in 2010 (MoHE, 2010). The notable enrolment of IS has provided Malaysia an opportunity to become a hub of excellence in international HE by 2020 (MoHE, 2007; Tham & Kam, 2008: 353).

The Institute of Postgraduate Studies (IPS) in charge of graduate students' affairs at the research site university stated in its annual report a threefold increase in the number of international postgraduate students beginning 1990s in 39 Schools and four centres of excellence at its three campuses. These students originated mainly from Asian and Middle East countries. The percentage of international postgraduates increased modestly from 23% in 2007 to 25.2% in 2010. Master students comprised 69.10% of the 6043 students in 2008. (Graduate InfoLink, 2008; Institute of Postgraduate Studies Annual Report, 2010)

1.2 Background to the Study

The increasing number of international students (IS) studying in Malaysia has brought about various issues such as students coming from different linguistic, educational and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, as pointed out by Carroll (2005a), IS bring to an institution a diversity of competencies that have been progressively built from childhood, primary, secondary and prior tertiary learning experiences. These students have already experienced a culturally defined approach to academic literacies in learning at first-degree level in their native country's HE system.

Academic literacies practices are infused in the academic activities across disciplinary fields and participation in these activities is essential for academic success. However, as highlighted in second language (L2) academic literacy research, becoming literate in different discourse traditions is a challenging, complex and lengthy process (Belcher & Braine, 1995; Prior, 1995; Spack 1997a, 2004; Zhu, 2001; Casanave, 2002; Shi &

Beckett, 2002; Leki, 2003; Zamel & Spack, 2004). Academic literacy activities are abound in situations where the stakes are high such as in taught courses involving a variety of course assessments such as course assignments and exams (Leki, 2003: 81-98).

In relation to this research in a Malaysian university, stakes are high in the taught Master programmes. These taught Master programmes comprise of coursework (CW) or mixed mode (MM) programmes that require Master students to attend lectures, participate in tutorials and fulfil various academic literacies demands. The learning in CW and MM programmes in the university is facilitated through classroom lectures, tutorials, seminars, individual project work, industrial or business placement, problem-solving classes, group projects, research dissertation or discussion groups (Kaur, 2000).

Furthermore, becoming literate in different discourse can be particularly stressful for non-native speakers of English (NNSE) who may try to reconcile contradictory desires to adjust to and resist new ways of practicing academic literacy in a new education institution in a different country. Based on past research conducted in English speaking universities, these students face hurdles comprehending lectures, taking part in tutorial discussions, writing essays and theses, reading course books and designated articles and communicating with lecturers, supervisors and fellow students (Hellstèn, 2002; Hellstèn & Prescott 2004; Wong 2004; Sawir 2005).

Meanwhile, Crosswhite (1996) stated that in academic settings, the individual learner must master a broad range of communicative practices in order to affirm established

discourse patterns and thereby solidify their individual belonging. Krase (2003) has added on that although English as second language (ESL) graduate students are able to produce effective academic work that is a vital part of academic success, learning to participate successfully in an academic discipline involves more than just gaining linguistic facility.

In particular, academic literacies practices depend on an assemblage of what Crosswhite (1996) refers to as "deep competences" (p. 190), a term he uses to refer to "features of our being, features of our identities as participants in a particular culture, a particular society in a particular place at a particular time" (p.190). Furthermore, according to Crosswhite, whenever learners participate in any communicative exchange (speaking, reading, writing or listening), they "affirm these competences to use a particular language in a particular way, and so affirm the appropriateness of particular discourses and all that belongs with them" (p.190).

A motivation underlying this study is that there are many related studies only confined to the experiences of NNSE with English as their L2 or foreign language studying in the English as L1 environment, such as in the Anglo Saxon countries. This particular research study, on the other hand, explores the academic literacies of the IGS in Malaysia, where English is the L2 and is used as the medium of instruction (MoI) for postgraduate studies (Mahmud, Amat, Rahman & Mohd Ishak, 2010; MoHE, 2010).

This study also originated based on the long-term observations by the researcher who was teaching the IGS enrolled in the Intensive English Programmes at the research site

university for three years beginning 2008 until 2010. During the researcher's teaching and interaction sessions with the IGS, they indicated facing difficulty to read, write and communicate effectively in English in the academic tasks even though they have had exposure to some form of English language in various ways such as listening to lectures, reading reference books or journals in their first-degree in their home country.

Lastly, according to related literature pertaining to academic adjustments of international students, the IGS also have growing requirements of better academic support to assist in a range of problems and challenges linked to adjusting to academic life when they arrive at a host institution in a foreign country to further their graduate study (Al-Zubaidi & Rechards, 2010).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Majority of the CW and MM Master programmes in Malaysian public universities have a big number of NNSE IGS enrolment. NNSE IGS exposure to academic literacies from primary until tertiary level in their native countries has been mainly in their L1. This attribute of IGS contributes to the academic literacies challenges when they come to Malaysia to further their study at graduate level. The IGS face challenges in academic literacies especially reading and writing practices that are considered the core practices of academic literacies.

Furthermore, to date, most investigations surrounding IGS conducted locally on the academic literacies issues have heavily focused on investigating their writing practices.

In the context of this study, academic literacies is composed of looking at writing, reading, listening and speaking as situated literacy practices. As Braine (2002) puts it, "a fundamental shortcoming of most studies of socially situated academic literacy is their focus on writing tasks alone" (p. 63) and also the relationship between writing practices and learning and the production of written assignments (Wahiza Wahi, O'Neill, Chapman, 2012). Duff (2010a) in her research also stressed that other academic discourse socialisation such as oral academic discourse socialisation is the most neglected in studies of academic discourse that give prominence to writing and reading.

The struggle faced by the NNSE IGS in their academic literacies at the research site is further aggravated by the use of English as the medium of instruction (MoI) as it is Asian region's lingua franca and the language most commonly used by people who do not share a mother tongue (Kirkpatrick, 2009). English is also the MoI for majority of the taught Master programmes that have NNSE IGS enrolment in HE institutions in Malaysia such as USM, UKM, UM, UPM (USM Website, 2011; UKM Website, 2011; UM Website, 2011; UPM Website, 2011).

English language being the MoI for most of the taught Master programmes that has IGS enrolment requires them to fulfil English language requirement. These IGS qualify to further their study at graduate level based on their English language qualifications such as the TOEFL or IELTS results. The nine schools involved in this study have stipulated language requirement in the form of TOEFL qualification of 550 or IELTS Band 6 for both the CW and MM Master programmes. Another school, School G has indicated its

enrolling students need to fulfil TOEFL grade of 450 or IELTS Band 4 (Research Site University Website, 2012). The 10 schools set the first-degree academic requirement based on the cumulative grade point average (CGPA) which ranges from 2.75 – 3.00 for entry into their CW or MM Master programmes. However, the students are still unable to grasp the new and different academic expectations as well as adapt to appropriate academic demands as mentioned in studies conducted previously in Malaysian local HE institutions (Hafriza Burhanudeen, Siti Hamin Stapa, Norsimah Mat Awal, Ravichandran Vengadasamy, Nor Zakiah Abdul Hamid and Mohammed Azlan Mis, 2004; Kaur and Shakila Abdul Manan, 2007; Hisham, 2008; Koo, 2009; Kaur & Sidhu, 2009; Al-Zubaidi & Rechards, 2010; Nambiar and Ibrahim, 2011; Ibrahim & Nambiar, 2011a; Ibrahim and Nambiar, 2011b).

In addition, only recently, non-English speaking countries, where English is the L2, such as Malaysia, Singapore and South Africa are increasingly attracting foreign students (Crewe, 2004; Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet & Kommers, 2012). In these countries, especially Malaysia there is a wide gap in research conducted pertaining to academic literacies of IGS in the ESL context (Wahiza Wahi, O'Neill & Chapman, 2012). This is unlike the English speaking countries with high IS intake and established research base on the issue of internationalisation of HE. Therefore, research pertaining to academic literacies of IGS in Malaysia where English is the L2 and used as MoI for taught Master programmes which has IGS enrolment is an understudied field that can be explored further to attract more incoming IS.

Specifically, this study addresses the gap in the literature and adds on knowledge by exploring one of the issues pertaining to IGS that is the academic literacies challenges faced in the various ways of meaning-making in terms of thinking, ways of meaning, reading, speaking, listening and writing which are valued in the academic setting (Koo, 2008: 54). It also addresses the gap in the literature on the steps taken by the IGS to overcome the academic literacies challenges in their graduate programmes.

As the host institution, which has IS, it is a myth if we are able to improve on their prior academic and English language background in such a short period. However, through this research, possibilities exist to do more to understand the academic literacies challenges faced and the steps taken by IGS to overcome the academic literacies challenges. The findings will be a basis to provide positive academic literacies intervention programmes such as improving their learning experience and English language proficiency to create a conducive learning environment for the future incoming IGS.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

(1) determine the academic literacies demands faced by the international graduate students in the coursework or mixed mode Master programmes in an institution of higher education in Malaysia,

(2) identify the academic literacies challenges faced by the international graduate students in the coursework or mixed mode Master programmes in an institution of higher education in Malaysia,

(3) examine the steps taken by the international graduate students to overcome the academic literacies challenges in the coursework or mixed mode Master programmes in an institution of higher education in Malaysia.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions were used to fulfil the research objectives of the study.

1. What are the academic literacies demands faced by the international graduate students in the coursework or mixed mode Master programmes in an institution of higher education in Malaysia?
2. What are the academic literacies challenges experienced by the international graduate students in the coursework or mixed mode Master programmes in an institution of higher education in Malaysia?
3. How do the international graduate students overcome the academic literacies challenges in their coursework or mixed mode Master programmes in an institution of higher education in Malaysia?

1.6 Significance of the Study

In-depth exploration of the respondents' academic experiences especially academic literacies demands of the taught Master programmes, the academic literacies challenges faced by the IGS and the steps taken to overcome the academic literacies challenges in English as a L2 and MoI environment contributes to the body of research knowledge in the area of academic literacies concerning the IGS in Malaysia. The findings of the study will positively affect the IGS and the university, make important pedagogical contributions and enhancement of the scholarship of teaching, push for the formation of Learning Support centre, improve teaching and learning, and lastly, contribute knowledge or new insights to the academic literacies theoretical orientation.

Firstly, the study will benefit the key stakeholders, the international graduate students. As explained in the statement of the problem section, the number of international students pursuing Master studies in Malaysian HE institutions is progressively increasing and their learning outcomes are often undermined by the challenges imposed by the literacies demands of their graduate programmes. Therefore, based on theories of learning that emphasise the 'experiences of learning' (Marton, Hounsell & Entwistle, 1997), this study looks at academic literacies from the perspective of the IGS. They are active participants in the process of meaning making in the HE industry (Lea & Street, 1998) and their relationship with the dominant literacy practices and discourses of their academy are complex (Wahiza Wahi, O'Neill, Chapman, 2012). Looking at the academic literacies from the perspective of the IGS will operate as a way of understanding and enhancing their learning and teaching process. Furthermore, this in

turn can facilitate, improve and sustain the students' positive academic experience and lead to their academic success in graduate study.

Secondly, by addressing the gap in the literature on the IGS in an ESL context, this thesis aims to make important pedagogical contributions and enhancement of the scholarship of teaching among lecturers involved in teaching graduate programmes. The findings of this study can serve as a reference for the lecturers in HE to help increase their awareness in further understanding the literacies expertise and experiences the students bring with them. It will also identify how the current academic literacies can be accommodated, adapted and improved to further enhance the courses in the taught Master programmes in terms of teaching, learning and assessments, curriculum development, educational policy and institutional ability to deliver quality education. Knowledge of these issues might serve as a catalyst for transforming some of the lecturers' instructional and evaluation strategies as well as feedback practices to further enhance their teaching of an increasingly multicultural, multilingual and multiliterate student population.

Thirdly, the findings of the study can justify the formation of a Learning Support Centre (LSC) for the IGS at the research site. LSC as an independent centre can shoulder more responsibilities by replacing the Postgraduate Academic Support Service (PASS) that currently has a limited scope of responsibilities including organising professional and personal development programmes, providing statistical and editing assistance and plagiarism detection services (Turnitin) to graduate students (Institute of Postgrduate Studies, 2012).

LSC can contribute towards making the process of disciplinary enculturation of the IGS in a multicultural ESL environment more conducive. The centre can be a one-stop centre in supporting the learning of the IGS who come from different academic and cultural backgrounds through the empowerment of transdisciplinary cooperation among the schools, language specialists and discipline content lecturers. Transdisciplinary cooperation can function to improve and enhance teaching strategies and curricula to address academic literacies challenges. These initiatives directly contribute toward the internationalisation agenda of HE at the research site university.

Fourthly, the findings and recommendations will assist in further improving the quality of the teaching and learning activities in the present taught Master programmes at the research site university. Furthermore, future taught Master programmes can be incorporated with the design of effective and inclusive pedagogical approaches to fulfil the needs of the present generation IS**.**

Fifthly, the findings can also contribute knowledge or new insights to the Academic Literacies Model (ALM) that has been used to investigate student writing in HE (Cohen, 1992; Lea, 1994; Lea & Street, 1998). Lea & Street (1998) has used the model to investigate the difficulties faced by students in HE in their writing only. They have not fully explored the model to investigate other aspects of literacies or levels of education such as graduate study in an ESL context. The current study offers a significant extension in using the ALM. In applying this model to the IGS for whom English language is a L2 or foreign language, this study helps to explain their academic literacies challenges, investigate steps taken to overcome the academic literacies challenges and

expand the coverage of the model's application. Furthermore, the findings will fill the gaps in the literature by giving focus to the unattended aspects of literacies such as reading, listening and speaking.

This in-depth learner-centred study also takes place in Malaysia, a country with extremely limited research on the IGS academic learning and on the other hand, is actively pursuing internationalisation agenda of its HE. The significant presence of the IS in the campuses has caused the universities in Malaysia to be interested in high quality delivery of the academic programmess. Hence, addressing academic literacies issues would have far-reaching benefits for the Malaysian HE industry's internationalisation agenda.

The findings of this niche study that provides clear understanding of how the IGS sustain themselves academically in their studies can give Malaysian education providers crucial information to create and provide necessary assistance programmes. Crewe (2004) also highlighted that Malaysia will be one of the countries apart from Australia, Singapore and South Africa in attracting more IS to the extent that Anglo Saxon countries such as UK and US have to compete with them. Therefore, the findings can assist Malaysian universities to strive for academic excellence on par with other Anglo Saxon universities in the international market of HE to attract more IS from developed countries.

In summary, it is hoped the findings captured through a mixed methods research design will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding, knowledge and methodology for

further improving and strengthening the academic literacies of the multilingual IGS and IS development in Malaysia's HE institutions that is a new and growing player in the global education market.

1.7 Definitions of Key Terms

This section details the operational definitions of key terms used to guide the study.

1.7.1 Literacy –Based on sociocognitive perspective, literacy is "an activity, a way of thinking and acting and not merely as a set of reading and writing skills. It is a "culturally specific phenomenon" and cannot be separated from the social contexts and purposes in which it is practiced (Langer, 1987).

1.7.2 Academic Literacies – refers to "the various ways of meaning-making in terms of thinking, ways of meaning, reading, speaking, listening and writing which are valued in the academic setting" (Koo, 2008: 54).

1.7.3 Academic Literacies practices – refers to "… general cultural ways of utilising participants' written and nonverbal academic communication such as writing, reading, listening and speaking to overcome challenges with and complete academic literacies demands in the academic contexts they negotiate in their university experience (Crosswhite,1996: 190; Barton & Hamilton, 2000: 7; Casanave, 2002: 30).

1.7.4 International graduate students – refers to non-native speakers of English (NNSE) from abroad, who have completed their bachelor's degree in their native countries and are enrolled as graduate students in either the CW or MM Master Programmes in the three Arts, two Hybrid and five Science schools at the research site university.

1.7.5 Academic literacies demands – refers to the academic tasks used to develop the academic literacies of the IGS in their CW or MM Master programmes. This term has been used for the same purpose in previous studies by Littlewood & Liu (1996: 106), Hyland (1997: 77-99), Rushton (2000) and Evans & Green (2007).

1.7.6 Academic literacies challenges – refers to challenges or difficulties that occur when the academic literacies that served the IGS well in their previous academic experience are not sufficient to negotiate the academic literacies in their Master programmes. The use of the term 'academic literacies challenges' is adapted from previous studies by Rushton (2000), Crosby (2007), Wu (2007) and Seloni (2008).

1.8 Limitations of the Study

This research focused only on the IGS studying in CW or MM Master programmes in a public university in Malaysia. The relatively small sample size of 131 respondents for the quantitative data collection and 70 respondents for the qualitative data collection employed might not provide sufficient support for any conclusive findings that may be directly generalisable to the IGS population in similar taught Master programmes in

other HE institutions in Malaysia. Nevertheless, the research findings obtained from this particular sample is still able to provide useful insights on their academic literacies experience due to the paucity of research in this area in Malaysia.

It is crucial to note that although only 16 lecturers participated in this study, these lecturers' perspective on the IGS academic literacies further enhanced the thick description provided by the 131 respondents in the Academic Literacies Questionnaire (ALQ), 70 respondents in the focus group interview (FGI), email correspondence and document analysis.

The study also acknowledges the fact that other academic or social contributory factors might exist in the IGS learning environment that might have had an effect on their academic literacies experience. That is why triangulation through mixed methods research was employed as a tool for cross validation.

Furthermore, the accuracy of the respondents' responses in the ALQ, the FGI and email correspondence also needs to be taken into consideration. Nevertheless, the respondents were reminded at all times to give their true and honest feedback during the implementation of the research instruments. However, the validity cannot be altogether established based on their views only.

1.9 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter One offers an overview of the problems and gaps that drive this research as well as the reasons for doing this study. The chapter also includes the research objectives and research questions that guide the study and their significance and limitations. Operational definitions relevant to this research are also included. In Chapter Two, pertinent literature that encompasses the theories and research from a variety of fields pertinent to the topic is reviewed. The Academic Literacies Model (Lea & Street 1998), disciplinary enculturation into community of practice (CoP) by Lave and Wenger (1991) and adult learning theory by Knowles (1984) which provide the framework for this study are presented as they relate to IS studying at graduate level.

Chapter Three presents the overall research design. Descriptions of the methods used to collect data to answer the research questions are also detailed. The respondents, the instruments, the procedures and the statistical analyses performed on the data are described in detail. Next, Chapter Four presents the findings and analysis of quantitative data. Chapter Five reports the findings and analysis of qualitative data. Lastly, in Chapter Six, the key findings are summarised, interpreted and the results discussed in relation to the related studies in the literature. The pedagogical implications and recommendations presented serve as guide to improve the academic literacies experience of the IGS and as a springboard for future research.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the issues of literacy, literacies, academic literacy and academic literacies. The use of the terms literacy in the singular form and literacies in the plural form is governed by the information quoted and paraphrased from the literature. The discussion also includes the theories that guide this study. Next, the chapter deals with the concepts of academic literacies practices of writing, reading, speaking and listening. This is followed by the discussion of the conceptual framework of the study. The last section discusses related studies that focus on academic literacies experiences of the IGS. The discussion of related studies entails the academic literacies demands, academic literacies challenges and overcoming steps employed by the IGS in their academic literacies practices in writing, reading, speaking and listening.

2.1 Background to Literacy

Literacy was once referred to the cognitive processes of coding and decoding words and sentences. Gradually, its meaning has evolved over time in parallel with new developments in our culture, economy and society. In line with the new developments, Scribner and Cole (1981) clarified that literacy cannot be simply assumed as learning how to read and write a particular script. According to them, literacy is a set of socially organised practices. They clarified that literacy also meant applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use (1981: 236) such as broader social and

cultural context (Street, 1993). Literacy is also linked to multimodal vehicles of information and meanings that derive from various perspectives that highlight the diversity of racial, social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

A social practices approach conceptualises literacy as sets of social practices that are contextually embedded and situationally variable, rather than as an autonomous skill, practice or social technology whose forms, functions and effects are unchanging and neutral across social settings. These practices link people, linguistic resources, media objects and strategies for meaning-making in contextualised ways (Street, 1983, 1995). This approach is concerned to study literacy as variable with regard to its forms, functions, uses and values across settings and thus varying in its social meanings and effects.

The field of literacy study has developed in parallel with communities of practice (CoP) work over the past three decades. Both approaches have common roots in the work of Scribner and Cole (1981). Based on the notion of literacy as a set of socially organised practices this section presents extensive discussion on literacy from various perspectives. The literacy perspectives discussed are by Barton (1994), Baynham (1995) and New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Gee, 1990; Street, 1993).

2.1.1 Literacy by Barton (1994)

According to Barton (1994) literacy starts from everyday events. Therefore, he suggests we must have a social view of literacy that situates literate activities. For this purpose, he has outlined a literacy approach girded by four premises.

Barton's first premise of literacy is *literacy is a social activity and can best be described in terms of the literacy practices which people draw upon in literacy events* (Barton, 1994). This idea of literacy originates from the sociolinguistic notion of speech events. A literacy event refers to communicative situations 'where literacy has an integral role' (Heath, 1983: 71) and involves various kinds of situations in daily life where the written word plays a role (Barton and Hamilton, 2000). Heath (1983) further developed the earlier literacy event idea by referring to it as being 'when talk revolves around a piece of writing' (1984, p. 386).

In the discussion of the meaning of literacy events, it is essential to exemplify how literacy is really made use of or applied in people's daily lives through its observable occurrences. According to Barton and Hamilton (2000), literacy events are activities where literacy has a role and literacy events maybe regular repeated activities. There will be a written text or texts vital to the activity and there may be talk around the text. Events that arise from practices are noticeable and shaped by the practices. An example of literacy event is an academic literacies event.

Reading and writing are viewed as observable activities in the academic literacies event (Street, 2000). In the context of reading and writing, Barton (1994) stresses the idea of events emphasises the situated nature of literacy that it always exists in a social context. Texts are very important part of literacy events and the study of literacy is partly a study of texts and how they are produced and used. These three components, practices, events and texts provide the initial proposition of a social theory of literacy. Social theory of literacy understands literacy as a set of social practices that are observable in events that are mediated by written texts. Studies of literacy practices must therefore, situate reading and writing activities in these broader contexts and motivations for the use of these activities.

Barton and Hamilton (2000) further suggested different literacy events indicate different literacies as they are not similar in all situations. For example, practices that involve different media or symbolic systems, such as a film or computer and different cultures or languages can be regarded as different literacies, as in film literacy and computer literacy. While accepting this sense of the terms, the main way in which we use the notion here is to say that literacies are coherent configurations of literacy practices.

Next, it is very important for understanding semiosis or meaning making of literacy practices. For example, print literacy always exists alongside a range of other modes of meaning making and literacy is one part of a range of semiotic resources. The multimodality of speech, visuals and print mediate each another. In other words, these sets of practices are identifiable and named as in academic literacies or workplace literacies and these literacies are associated with particular aspects of cultural life. This

means that, within a given culture, there are different literacies associated with different domains of life. Different domains have their own distinctive practices and such practices contribute to the idea that people participate in distinct discourse communities in different domains of life.

Barton (1994) further explains practices are usual patterns in using reading and writing in a particular situation. Literacy practices are the general cultural ways of using reading and writing that people draw upon in a literacy event. Combined, events and practices are the dual basic units of analysis of the social activity of literacy. Scribner and Cole, cross-cultural psychologists, who introduced the term 'literacy practices' discussed how practices can be seen as ways of using literacy, which are carried from one particular situation to another similar situation (1981: 224-8). Another way of thinking about it is to start from more general notions of social practices and to view literacies practices as being the social practices associated with the written word.

Barton and Hamilton (2005) described the typical writing practices in the domain of education such as sharing, copying and collaborating. To understand particular literacy practices "there a need to look beyond the observable social relations to broader social patterning. It is clear that some practices are more dominant than others, that literacy is significant to the institutions in which events are located and that issues of power are important" (p. 4). This helps one view how social institutions and the power relations they support structure our uses of written language.

Street (2000) defines literacy practices as the 'broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts' and suggests that the notion includes both observable patterns of behavior across events and the more ideological aspects which are not directly observable. Literacy cannot be simply considered as a set of functional skills but a set of social practices very well related with social position and identity. In approaching literacy as social practices, it provides a way of making sense of variations in the uses and meanings of literacy in particular contexts rather than reliance on the barren notions of literacy skills, rates, levels that dominate contemporary discourse about literacy (Street, 2000).

According to Hornberger (2000), sociolinguists have expanded their understanding of literacy concept as a set of social practices to refer to 'language uses and attitudes' – or more specifically, uses of and attitudes toward language and literacy, i.e. not only the observable uses but also the underlying norms, values and conventions associated with those uses. Barton and Hamilton (2005) also assert Hornberger's view that when examining practices at a particular point in time, it is clear that literacy practices come from somewhere. They exist within a cultural context and are built up from existing practices. Barton and Hamilton (2005) also indicated that a key to understanding contemporary practices is to see what they are built upon; this provides another link between the local and the global and a way of understanding the power issues.

Barton and Hamilton (2000) in their earlier research indicated that literacy practices are also culturally constructed, purposeful and embedded in broader social goals. As all cultural phenomena, these practices have their roots in the past. Hence, literacy is