The Silent Struggle: Experiences of Non-native English-Speaking Psychology Students

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Abstract

The field of psychology has long suffered from a lack of diversity, with calls for greater

representation since at least three decades ago. Increasing the presence of psychologists from

diverse backgrounds is vital for bringing fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to the discipline.

A significant aspect of achieving this diversity is recruiting and retaining non-native English-speaking

students in psychology programs. However, these students encounter significant obstacles as they

adapt to academic and social life, especially when pursuing psychology courses where language

proficiency is critical for success. The study recruited a total of six participants, including three from

India, two from Indonesia, and one from Pakistan. These participants were selected from the

University of Adelaide, where they were either currently enrolled or had recently graduated from

psychology programs at the institution. A qualitative approach was used to explore the experiences

and challenges of non-native English-speaking psychology students (NESPS) in language-intensive

courses. The qualitative methodology involved conducting semi-structured interviews in person and

via Zoom, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2013) recommendations. All interviews were audio-

recorded and transcribed for analysis. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (following Braun & Clarke, 2021)

was employed to identify patterns, resulting in five themes: psychology study facts and myths;

diversity in research and practice; positive support and fostering a sense of belonging; language

barrier hinders academic performance and challenges faced due to lack of support. These findings

highlight the significance of fostering a sense of community, offering psychology-specific writing

skills to NESPS, and promoting diversity within the Master's panel.

Keywords: student support, diversity, psychology education, language barrier, international

students, higher education.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the school to restrict access for a period of time.

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October 2023

Contributor Roles

ROLE	ROLE DESCRIPTION	STUDENT	SUPERVISOR 1
CONCEPTUALISATION	Ideas; formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims.	X	X
METHODOLOGY	Development or design of methodology; creation of models.	X	X
PROJECT ADMINISTRATION	Management and coordination responsibility for the research activity planning and execution.	X	
SUPERVISION	Oversight and leadership responsibility for the research activity planning and execution, including mentorship external to the core team.		X
RESOURCES	Provision of study materials, laboratory samples, instrumentation, computing resources, or other analysis tools.		X
SOFTWARE	Programming, software development; designing computer programs; implementation of the computer code and supporting algorithms; testing of existing code.		
INVESTIGATION	Conducting research - specifically performing experiments, or data/evidence collection.	X	
VALIDATION	Verification of the overall replication/reproducibility of results/experiments.	X	X
DATA CURATION	Management activities to annotate (produce metadata), scrub data and maintain research data (including software code, where it is necessary for interpreting the data itself) for initial use and later re-use.	X	
FORMAL ANALYSIS	Application of statistical, mathematical,	X	

	computational, or other formal techniques to analyse or synthesise study data.		
VISUALIZATION	Visualization/data presentation of the results.	X	
WRITING – ORIGINAL DRAFT	Specifically writing the initial draft.	X	
WRITING – REVIEW & EDITING	Critical review, commentary or revision of original draft	X	X

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Diverse psychologists are scarce in the field of psychology, and the problem has long existed (Dimmick & Callahan, 2022). Davenhill and colleagues (1989), already raised this issue over three decades ago. Their work highlighted the lack of representation of psychologists from diverse backgrounds including people of colour, minorities, and international backgrounds, and recommended diversification in the psychology profession. An increase in the representation of psychologists from diverse backgrounds brings new perspectives to problems, which may lead to more creative and effective solutions. A diverse population of psychologists is also thought to provide valuable insights into underserved communities, such as ethnic minorities and linguistically diverse populations (Grapin et al., 2016; Rogers & Molina, 2006; Turpin & Coleman, 2010). However, achieving diversity is only possible if psychology programs actively accept and retain students from minority groups, as well as from diverse cultural backgrounds and international backgrounds. As psychology is a discipline that is language-heavy, studying psychology can be a challenge for students from culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds, particularly racial, ethnic, and international backgrounds (Bocanegra et al., 2015; Borrego, 2018; Callahan et al., 2018; Grapin et al., 2016; Rogers & Molina, 2006).

Non-native English-speaking students play a significant role at Western universities (Acquaye et al., 2017). They are not only valuable resources for universities but also contribute to cultural awareness and appreciation by bringing diverse perspectives and heritages to these institutions (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Moreover, their knowledge and skills across various disciplines contribute to the intellectual capital and economic development of the host country (Berry, 2005). However, the process of leaving one's home country to pursue studies in a foreign land can be challenging (Lee, 2013). Non-native English-speaking students face a range of difficulties when adjusting to their new academic and social environments. These challenges include feelings of homesickness, loneliness, maintaining self-esteem, dealing with family crises from a distance like the loss of loved ones, time pressure, financial burdens, loss of social support, adjustment to food and climate,

cultural shock, discrimination, language barriers, difficulty to make friends, and secure employment

(Calikoglu, 2018; Constantine et al., 2005; Grayson, 2008; Lee, 2013; Mori, 2000; Myles & Cheng,

2003; Wedding et al. 2009; Yang et al., 2021). Some of these challenges occur during the initial

transition period, while others such as language barrier, homesickness, or discrimination may persist

for some time (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). These adjustment experiences collectively referred to as

acculturative stress can lead to the emergence of various physical, social, and psychological

problems collectively (Constantine et al., 2004; Constantine et al., 2005; Wilton & Constantine,

2003). The adjustment problems faced by non-native English-speaking students may vary depending

on factors such as their ethnicity, race, English proficiency, and whether they were raised in a

collectivist culture such as India, Pakistan, or Indonesia or an individualist culture such as in Western

countries (Constantine et al., 2005; Gu & Maley, 2008; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). For instance,

students who were raised in a collectivist culture tend to experience social anxiety whenever they

are away from their familiar surroundings and family members (Rao, 2017).

Many studies and articles have explored the biopsychosocial needs and difficulties of non-

native English-speaking students as well as the contributions they make to their host countries (Lau

& Ng, 2012). However, only a few studies have identified specific challenges that non-native English-

speaking psychology students (NESPS) face due to the unique, language-heavy nature of psychology

studies (Jones et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2021). As psychology courses heavily rely on English to deliver

information and assess coursework, this can put NESPS at a disadvantage compared to native English

speakers (Quinton & Seery, 2022; Trenkic & Warmington, 2019). Thus, limited proficiency in English

presents a significant challenge for these students because they need to process the content of the

course and language simultaneously (Chou, 2020). Besides having difficulty understanding lectures,

NESPS also spend considerable time reading academic texts and completing written assignments

(Elturki, 2019; Trenkic & Warmington 2019). Moreover, NESPS face many challenges when writing in

English including vocabulary and grammar usage, adhering to style guides, organising information

effectively, analysing information critically, understanding plagiarism, and completing assignments

on time (Ravichandran et al., 2017). Additionally, they often struggle to maintain conceptual understanding during translation from their native language into English, which results in grammatical errors (Lee, 2013; Maringe & Jenkins 2015). Some of these challenges have arisen from the differences in expectations between their home countries and English writing conventions (Ravichandran et al., 2017). As a result, native speakers of a language are generally perceived as more precise, concise, and conceptually efficient compared to NESPS, who are often criticised for being imprecise, longwinded, or context specific (Maringe & Jenkins 2015). Although NESPS students may meet the required standardised English language test scores set by universities (Elturki, 2019; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), these tests cannot always accurately predict the level of proficiency needed to succeed in psychology courses or ensure that they will not experience significant language barriers (Andrade, 2010; Ravichandran et al., 2017). Research has shown that limited language proficiency negatively impacts many language skills, including students having difficulty understanding unfamiliar technical terms in textbooks, hindering their speech, not understanding lecturers because of accents, spontaneous and ad hoc lecture delivery style, and being unable to write in academic style (Aizawa et al., 2023; Bradford, 2019; Lee, 2013; Smith & Khawaja).

Thus, the language connotations associated with the nuances of language may present tremendous challenges to non-native English-speaking students enrolled in psychology programs (Wedding et al., 2009), and they may not possess the required language skills to converse with native English speakers or other students (Lee, 2013; Sato & Hodge, 2015). According to Wedding et al. (2009), psychology courses demand sensitivity to nuances and subtleties of language. Additionally, psychology as a field has been prone to developing discipline-specific terminology, more so than other comparable disciplines (Benjafield, 2014; Quinton & Seery, 2022). Therefore, studying psychology requires one to master a broad discipline with a broad vocabulary, which represents less-than-ideal learning conditions for non-native English-speaking students (Quinton & Seery, 2022). Thus, the vulnerability non-native English-speaking students face in psychology courses is unique, especially for those with weak language skills, and does not generally extend to their other

courses (Lee, 2013; Quinton & Seery 2022; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). As a result, there is an underrepresentation of diverse students in the field of psychology, whether at the undergraduate, graduate, or professional level, which has been a long-standing problem (Ding et al., 2021). This lack of diversity poses challenges in meeting the behavioural health needs of diverse populations as demographics continue to change rapidly including socioeconomic status, age, race, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and disability (Borrego, 2018; Dimmick & Callahan, 2022; Rogers & Molina, 2006). It is important to increase diversity within the psychology profession to ensure that clients receive services that reflect their own cultural and personal identities, as well as provide them with the option of choosing therapists and psychologists who understand and can relate to their unique experiences (Turpin & Coleman, 2010). As culture and language are closely interconnected and have a significant impact on mental health services, they profoundly impact every aspect of illness and adaptation. This includes the interpretation of symptoms as well as how people respond to them (Tan & Denson, 2019). Therefore, increasing the number of psychologists from diverse backgrounds can greatly benefit linguistically diverse individuals and communities in need of assistance (Borrego, 2018). Thus, it is inevitable that the range of perspectives, experiences, and talents represented in the field is going to be limited due to the lack of diversity among practitioners and academicians (Grapin et al., 2016).

There has been a substantial amount of literature examining various aspects of non-native English-speaking student experiences, including academic performance, social adjustment, language barrier, and cultural adjustment (Berman & Cheng, 2001; Calikoglu, 2018; Constantine et al., 2005; Grayson, 2008; Kukatlapalli et al., 2020; Lee, 2013; Maringe & Jenkins, 2015; Mori, 2000; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Ravichandran et al., 2017; Yang et al, 2021). However, this literature does not provide a comprehensive examination of the experience of these students in programs such as psychology, that rely heavily on the English language. This study is intended to fill a gap in existing research and to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges NESPS face while studying and how they prefer to receive support during their studies focusing primarily on writing and communication skills. A key

goal of this paper is to offer suggestions for psychology faculties to increase the number of students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds enrolling in postgraduate programs.

Aims and Research Question

The aim of this research is multifaceted, with three primary objectives guiding its purpose. Firstly, it aims to identify the challenges within the psychology undergraduate program that present significant barriers for NESPS to progress into postgraduate study. Secondly, the study seeks to comprehensively explore the experiences of undergraduate NESPS at the University of Adelaide, with a particular focus on their academic success, perceptions of belonging, and unique support needs. Lastly, the research aspires to identify discipline-specific strategies and formulate evidence-based recommendations that can enhance existing support systems and foster a more pronounced sense of belonging for NESPS at the University of Adelaide. Ultimately, this study aims to make a meaningful contribution to the existing body of literature by addressing the research question: "What challenges do non-native English-speaking students encounter when engaging in psychology courses that require a high level of language proficiency?"

Method

Design

The study adopts a critical realist perspective, alongside a qualitative methodology to collect comprehensive data from a variety of perspectives. This qualitative approach provided the flexibility and adaptability required throughout the data collection and analysis processes. It enabled us to customise our interview questions and techniques as we delved further into the experiences of NESPS. This qualitative approach was deemed most suitable for this research as it allowed greater capacity to gain more depth and meaning based on an individual's experiences. I considered Tracy's (2010) 'big tent' criteria for qualitative research (rich rigour, credibility, significant contribution, resonance, ethics, worthy topic, meaningful coherence, and sincerity) in the design of the study. These criteria were also referred to during data analysis to ensure excellence in qualitative research.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee (approval no: H-2023-44). Participants were recruited through a convenience and snowball sampling method (see Appendix C for the flyer). Participants received a participant information sheet and signed a consent form before participating in the study. All the collected data was de-identified and pseudonyms were used to ensure participant confidentiality. Throughout the study, participants were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. To guide the interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore the experiences of non-native English-speaking psychology students (see Appendix A).

Participants

The study recruited students that are currently enrolled in a Bachelor or Honours in Psychological Science, Graduate Diploma in Psychology (online), or Diploma in Psychology-Advanced (online) at the University of Adelaide. Students that graduated from the University of Adelaide after 2020 were eligible to participate. A total of six participants, consisting of five people identifying as female, and one person identifying as male took part in the interview process. The age range of participants was between 21- 44 years old.

Participants Demographics

Participant (Pseudonym)	Identifying Gender	Age	Country	Language spoken
Sally	Female	34	Indonesia	Bahasa Indonesian
Sandra	Female	21	Indonesia	Bahasa Indonesian
Elzabeth	Female	23	India	Hindi
Sonia	Female	22	Pakistan	Sindhi
Sage	Female	22	India	Hindi

Luke	Male	44	India	Punjabi

Data Collection

The interviews were designed and conducted based on the guidelines for semi-structured qualitative interviews, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013). An interview guide was developed to frame the interview against the proposed research question, without requiring all questions to be asked (see Appendix A). This approach allows the interviewer to modify interview questions as needed to gain rich data and to allow participants to direct the conversation (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Prior to the interviews, all the participants provided informed consent and received a participant information sheet outlining the study's purpose and their rights. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via Zoom, according to each participant's preference, during the period from June 2023 to August 2023. In total, six interviews were conducted, with participants' consent for audio recording. The average duration of the interview was approximately 25 minutes. Braun and Clarke's (2013) orthographic transcription method was employed for the transcription of the interviews. Pseudonyms and anonymisation techniques were utilised to de-identify data during the production of interview transcripts. Throughout the research process, an audit trail was maintained in order to ensure trustworthiness and rigour (Braun & Clarke, 2013), as well as tracking the process towards data saturation.

Rigour

Throughout the process of data collection and analysis phases, an audit trail was maintained by the researcher. This audit trail served to document the researcher's thoughts, initial impressions, and all communications between the researcher and the study participants. This practice aligns with established qualitative research methods in order to ensure trustworthiness and rigour.

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Personal Reflexivity Statement

The researcher is a NESPS and possesses firsthand experience with the challenges that non-native English-speaking students encounter while pursuing psychology studies in Western countries. Due to the researcher's personal experience with all of the challenges reported by the participants in this study, the researcher shares a similar worldview to many of the participants.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed by Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). An inductive approach was used to identify themes among data, accompanied by a thorough description of the overall data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In addition, Tracy's criteria of 'sincerity' was achieved through continuous self-reflexivity, and credibility demonstrated through "thick description...[and] multivocality" (Tracy, 2010, p.840). Following Braun and Clarke (2021), the analysis process involved six steps: firstly, familiarisation with the data was achieved by studying each transcript individually, without any initial coding in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of each participant. Then, an inductive (data-driven) approach is used to develop initial codes. Next, the initial codes were grouped into potential themes after aggregating all relevant data. The researcher and supervisor reviewed the themes, merging some and dividing more intricate ones into sub-themes. The themes were refined, and clear definitions and names were assigned. To develop themes, each theme was examined on its own and in connection to other themes, aiming to understand the unique narrative each theme contributed to the overall data. The most relevant and captivating excerpts that aligned with the themes and our research objectives were selected for each theme. Finally, the analysis and final report was produced.

Results

Reflexive Thematic Analysis identified five key themes and appropriate subthemes: "psychology study facts and myths", "diversity in psychology research and practice", "positive support and fostering a sense of belonging", "language barrier hinders academic performance", and

"challenges faced due to lack of support". The main themes are outlined below, along with subthemes related to them.

Psychology study facts and myths

The theme "psychology study facts and myths" captures participants' understandings and misconceptions regarding the field of psychology.

Evolution of Perceptions about Psychology as a Science

All the participants expressed that their interest in psychology stemmed from their desire to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological and biological mechanisms that shape human behaviour. Luke stated that "… I wanted to understand how a human mind and behaviour are related and why it impacts certain people and not the others". Elizabeth also expressed her interest, saying," I was very interested in how human mind works and how we behave in everyday settings". They did not initially perceive psychology as a scientific field. Instead, participants indicated that their recognition of psychology as a science developed progressively as they delved deeper into psychology studies. So, their perceptions move from mere interest in psychology's subject matter to recognising it as a valid science after engaging in their studies.

General false assumptions about the discipline

Most participants expressed that they had enrolled in psychology programs without a clear understanding of the field's scope and focus, as one participant, Luke, stated, "… it's not a correct impression in minds of the people that psychologist can read minds…". They believed that psychology primarily involved the analysis of mental illness, mental processes, and abnormal behaviour, as expressed by Sage, "my initial impression of psychology was that 'oh'… it's just about disorders and mental health".

Most of the participants in the study were not aware that psychology courses involve substantial research and statistical components. For instance, Elizabeth expressed her surprise, saying "…psychology will be based on statistics too and quantitative analysis…". Some participants

thought that psychology primarily revolves around everyday life experiences rather than being an academic discipline that emphasises research and statistical skills. Sally expressed "first, I didn't expect that it's really heavily [sic] on research…". Overall, the prevalent misconception among students about the breadth of psychology studies emphasises the need for better education and information for prospective psychology students to make informed academic decisions.

Diversity in psychology research and practice

The theme, "diversity in psychology research and practice", centres on the issue of sampling bias in research and the imperative of fostering diversity within the psychology field to cater to the needs of the diverse Australian population.

Lack of diversity in psychological research

Participants raised concerns that psychological research suffers from sampling bias since it is predominantly conducted on individuals living in Western countries. Sally pointed out, "…a lot of research just based on the participant that lives in the Western society but not in the society like, like with Asian background for example, or Aboriginal community…". Additionally, they indicated that the psychology program involves the reading of predominately Western-based literature. As they engaged with course materials and examples provided by teachers, participants recognised that the majority of content and real-world examples were centred around the Western population. Participants also expressed concern about generalising research findings to diverse cultures and communities. As Sage stated:

> "…a lot of research is done in countries that are Western primarily. So, for me to apply that in   my culture is not possible because it's just so different and I really disagree with a lot of things as well because I don't think they can translate really well in my culture". (Participant Sage).

They highlighted that without a representative sample from various populations, it is challenging to extend research results to different cultural contexts, with Sally stating, "…a lot of

research just based on the participant that lives in the Western society but not in the society like,

like with Asian background for example or Aboriginal community…". Participants emphasised the

distinct beliefs and values of non-Western cultures compared to Western ones, leading to questions

about the validity of applying Western research to these unique cultural and community settings. As

such, students questioned the relevance of the knowledge for their own communities and were

unsure how they could apply the knowledge they were gaining through the course to their own

context.

Change the diversity makeup of the psychology workforce

Participants also expressed concern about the diversity of the psychology workforce and

argued that psychologists should represent the entire population to benefit the profession as a

whole. As Luke expressed this perspective by stating, "… I feel some things have to change and the

field should actually be welcoming people from diverse backgrounds to make it even richer, to make

it even more meaningful, to make it more usable". This representation would not only reflect

inclusivity but also create an opportunity for a more diverse range of clients to consider seeking

mental health services.

Positive support and fostering a sense of belonging

The theme highlights the substantial role of teacher and peer support in reducing stress and

nurturing academic confidence among NESPS, emphasising the importance of building a sense of

community.

Teachers and peers support: A positive influence on non-native students

Participants highlighted the importance of both teacher and peer support in managing stress

and acclimating to a new academic environment. One student specifically noted the role of tutors

and lecturers in stress management. Additionally, students emphasised how peer interactions

boosted their confidence in their academic capabilities, as exemplified by Luke's statement that,

"...interaction or engagement with other students is what led to psychology being even more

interesting." They also believed that peer relationships fostered constructive connections, as Luke pointed out, "... rather than relying on the faculty and the infrastructure of the university". Overall, participants unanimously recognised the significance of teacher and peer support in effectively addressing challenges and coping with stress within their new academic setting, as Sonia articulated: "...that really helped me to de-stress because we can always reach out to our tutors or lecturers if you have any questions, and they're always happy to help us..."

Creating a sense of community for non-native students

Participants emphasised that international students often grapple with loneliness and social isolation due to a lack of social connections and insufficient support from their universities. They stressed the importance of universities creating platforms that facilitate peer connections and the sharing of experiences. This is critical because community involvement and the presence of supportive social networks are vital for nurturing a sense of belonging among international students as they navigate these challenges. As Sage humorously put it, " I think I did honours and I pretty much just know nobody. So, it would be really helpful if you can actually know people and then rant with them and be like, yeah, the subject is shit". Elizabeth added, "…you are away from your home you need that networking you need that social currency." Sally also highlighted the need for on-campus groups like an international students' group, where mutual support can be fostered," "…whether on campus has that kind of group, you know, like the international student's group where we can support each other". Overall, participants emphasised the importance of universities facilitating connections and supportive networks for international students to combat loneliness and foster a sense of belonging.

Language barrier hinders academic performance

Participants highlighted the challenges they faced in academic writing, particularly due to limited prior exposure to this style of writing. They reported facing difficulties related to adapting to

Western academic cultures, as expressed by Elizabeth, who said "…I didn't really know how to write a research essay". Similarly, Sage shared her initial struggles, stating:

> "… initially when I came through, you go through that phase of okay, how do you write an essay because I've never written essays in my life or how do I write a lab report because lab reports do not exist…". (Participant Sage)

The field of psychology places a heavy emphasis on academic writing, extensive reading of literature, critiquing, and presenting arguments that they were not familiar with or aware of before enrolling in psychology programs. Sage pointed out "…my issue really laid in connecting things like they were not connecting, they were different ideas put together, but they were not really making a story". This highlighted the challenges NESPS encounter due to their underdeveloped English writing skills when confronted with the demands of Western academic traditions and expectations within the field of psychology.

NESPS faced difficulties in understanding and adapting to the host country's approach to psychology. This challenge arises from the process of acculturation, where students were navigating cultural differences, language barriers, varying theoretical frameworks, cultural biases in psychology, academic rigour disparities, and the need to socialise within the academic community. Participants emphasised the crucial link between English proficiency and success in psychology, highlighting the importance of effective communication and writing skills in the field.

Furthermore, participants shared experiences of encountering implicit bias during the grading process. They believed that markers sometimes found their writing style, differing from native English writers, more challenging to understand, potentially leading to biases in grading. One participant expressed her concerns, noting that she often felt penalised for her written expression. Sage further explained, "…some words that I use as a non-native are not preferred over here in Aussie English", highlighting the disparities in language usage.

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Furthermore, participants highlighted that the language barrier posed a significant challenge for NESPS applying to psychology Master's programs. They shared their experiences of feeling hindered by their limited English proficiency, especially during interviews for these programs. Elizabeth expressed her uncertainty, saying, "…I don't know how my accent is, I don't know if it's right, I don't know my vocabulary…". Sonia also pointed out, "…they do the interview and they're not very fluent or very confident psychology, it's very difficult for them to get in even…". So, participants highlighted the critical role of English proficiency in academic success, expressed concerns about grading bias, and pointed to the language barrier's impact on psychology program admissions.

Challenges faced due to lack of support

The theme captures participants' concerns about the lack of support and resources, particularly in academic writing, NESPS at the university.

Insufficient support and resources for non-natives from universities

Participants highlighted a significant gap in the support provided by the university, particularly for NESPS. They emphasised that while some university resources exist, they are not tailored to meet the specific needs of NESPS. As Luke pointed out, "…the university resources were not that helpful…", and Elizabeth suggested that "…I think the university can be a little bit more helpful…". This lack of tailored support and services such as the Writing Centre and Studiosity, provide limited guidance on grammar and language skills, leaving NESPS without the necessary support to excel in academic writing within psychology programs.

Luke expressed that "I would say the support from the faculty and being considerate of specific needs of me being from a different background is what I felt it could have been better" and Sonia echoed that "…they can give us more specific support to psychology students…". Furthermore, participants raised concerns about the reliance on IELTS since the test's score may not entirely capture the students' capabilities within the discipline of psychology, with some students reporting being unprepared for the specific language and terminology requirements of psychology as Luke

stated, "…the universities won't enrol you for the Master's courses if you don't have that level of English ". One participant highlighted the disparity between merely completing the IELTS exam and the challenge of engaging with psychology, "studying it academically is a lot different than just giving your IELTS… (Participant Elizabeth)". Thus, participants emphasised a lack of discipline-specific support for NESPS at their university.

Discussion

This study explored the experiences of non-native English-speaking psychology students who do not speak English as their first language. The research identified five themes that highlighted the experiences of NESPS while studying and the negative impact of the language barrier on their academic performance and their chances of becoming psychologists. These themes provide valuable insights into NESPS' perceptions, difficulties, and support needs, answering critical questions about their academic journey. The findings of this research will be discussed below, followed by a brief discussion of their implications for future research.

The study probed into the preconceived notions and beliefs held by NESPS about psychology, which shaped their understanding of the field. One of the most significant findings revolves around NESPS's initial perceptions of psychology. At the outset, these students, driven by their fascination with human behaviour, did not regard psychology as a rigourous science. However, as they progressed in their psychology studies, a fascinating evolution in their perceptions occurred, and they began to see psychology as a valid scientific discipline. This transformation highlights the dynamic nature of NESPS' evolving perceptions of psychology as a scientific discipline. These findings challenge prior research conducted by Amsel et al. (2011) and Holmes and Beins (2009), which indicated that these preconceived notions about the scientific status of psychology tend to be deeply ingrained and resistant to change even when students are exposed to psychology education.

The study identified two common misconceptions among NESPS before their enrolment in psychology courses. Firstly, many believed that psychology primarily centred around mental health

disorders, indicating a limited awareness of the field's broader scope. Secondly, there was a notable

lack of understanding among NESPS concerning the research and statistical components of

psychology courses, revealing a substantial gap in their academic expectations. These findings align

with a previous study conducted by Taylor and Kowalski (2004), which supports the notion that

misconceptions about psychology are widespread but can be effectively mitigated through

participation in psychology courses.

Participants raised a significant concern regarding the overrepresentation of individuals from

Western countries in psychological research. They argued that this bias limits the applicability of

research findings to a culturally diverse population. NESPS also highlighted a related issue within the

psychology curriculum, stressing the prevalence of Western-centric content in their coursework. The

dominance of Western perspectives raised doubts about the relevance of their education to

culturally diverse communities. This emphasises the need for curricular adjustments to include a

broader range of perspectives. These findings are consistent with prior research conducted by Kehm

and Teichler (2007) and Rahman and Alwi (2022), which has recommended curriculum adjustments

to incorporate a more global and culturally diverse range of educational content, thereby promoting

inclusivity in education.

Furthermore, NESPS pointed out that diversifying the psychology workforce would directly

benefit clients, making mental health services more accessible and effective for individuals who

share similar cultural experiences. These findings align with the previous literature (Dimmick &

Callahan, 2022; Ding et al., 2021; Grapin et al., 2015; Grapin et al., 2016; Hammond & Yung 1993;

Henrich et al., 2010; Rogers & Molina, 2006; Tindle, 2021; Yang et al., 2021), which collectively

highlight the growing necessity for diversity in research and the workforce. Such diversity is vital to

meet the evolving mental health needs of diverse populations. These insights underscore the critical

need for the development of innovative strategies to promote diversity within the field and ensure

that NESPS receive the best possible support to overcome academic challenges and foster inclusivity.

The study identified two key factors in NESPS experiences. Firstly, teacher and peer support played a vital role in their lives. Participants described teachers as instrumental not only in addressing academic concerns but also in managing stress and helping NESPS adapt to the new academic environment. Peer interactions were equally important, boosting confidence and facilitating a more fulfilling academic experience. Teachers and peers collectively filled the support gap from being away from loved ones, fostering friendships and stress reduction, easing their adjustment to the host country. These findings align with previous study conducted by Wentzel et al. (2010), which highlighted the important roles played by both the teachers and peers in students' academic motivation and social engagement. Moreover, the study shed light on the significant issue of loneliness and social isolation experienced by international students, often exacerbated by a lack of support from universities in addressing these challenges. Consequently, the research underscored the pressing need for universities to take proactive measures in establishing platforms and initiatives that foster peer connections and the exchange of experiences. Previous research has shown that social interaction with peers can foster non-native English-speaking student's sense of belonging and social support (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Glass & Westmont, 2014). The need to belong is one of the most powerful, fundamental, and prevalent human drives (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Prevatt et al., 2021). Thus, it became apparent that the creation of a sense of community was a crucial step toward overcoming the widespread feelings of loneliness and isolation among NESPS and it can positively impact their mental well-being and academic success.

A significant finding in this research centres on the impact of language barriers, which significantly affect NESPS in both Undergraduate and Master's programs. These students faced challenges in adapting to the course's content and structure of the psychology courses, as well as the academic culture prevalent in Western universities in order to succeed. Additionally, they needed to acculturate to the academic norms, expectations, policies, and procedures of the university. These findings are consistent with past research (Andrade, 2006; Lee, 2013; Maringe & Jenkins 2015; Quinton & Seery, 2022; Ravichandran et al., 2017), highlighting the necessity for universities to

provide more information about psychology courses and offer additional support to NESPS in understanding academic conventions. This would facilitate their integration into the new educational system with which they were not accustomed to.

NESPS voiced their struggles with academic writing, stemming from limited exposure to this writing style. Furthermore, NESPS emphasised the challenges faced in psychology programs in understanding complex psychological concepts and theories as well as expressing their ideas due to language limitations. They stressed the need for targeted academic writing, and language support and advocated for creating an inclusive, unbiased learning environment. These findings align with previous studies by Cheng et al. (2004), Ravichandran et al. (2017), and Robertson et al. (2000), which also highlighted potential gaps in non-native students English language proficiency, their language-related difficulties in academic work and the necessity for academic support. NESPS emphasise the pivotal role of English proficiency in psychology, recognising its importance for effective communication and writing skills, both crucial for success.

Participants outlined a perception of implicit bias in the grading process. These perceived biases were thought to unfairly penalise NESPS for their written expression. Thus, there is a compelling need for inclusive, culturally sensitive grading practices, ensuring fair evaluation based on work substance rather than linguistic nuances. These findings align with the Politzer-Ahles et al. (2020) study, which also revealed the prevalence of language-based biases against the writing of non-native English speakers. Furthermore, the study shed light on the language barrier's significance as a hurdle for NESPS aiming to enter psychology Master's programs. This highlights the necessity of adapting admission processes to accommodate the diverse linguistic backgrounds of NESPS. Addressing these challenges can pave the way for a more equitable and inclusive educational experience for NESPS.

All participants voiced concerns about the inadequacy of support services provided by the university, highlighting a significant gap in the support available to NESPS in overcoming academic

barriers. They reported that while some university resources are available, they fall short of providing discipline-specific support tailored to the needs of NESPS, particularly for academic writing in psychology programs. Moreover, participants expressed concerns about the university relying solely on IELTS scores to measure their English proficiency. NESPS pointed out that studying psychology academically is more challenging than simply passing the IELTS exam. Institutions should review the IELTS test as the exclusive benchmark for evaluating the language competence of non-native English-speaking students, particularly those entering fields that are language-heavy, such as psychology. This concern expressed by NESPS regarding the adequacy of the IELTS test aligns with previous research, as evidenced in the study by Hennebry et al. (2012), which found that the required IELTS score, often considered sufficient for academic success, might not accurately reflect students' true language proficiency. Furthermore, NESPS voiced dissatisfaction with current support resources and recommended that universities should provide linguistically diverse and discipline-specific writing support to meet those needs. This call to action is necessary to address the unique language challenges and terminology requirements that NESPS encounter within psychology programs. These recommendations and findings align with previous research conducted by Andrade et al. (2014) and Cheng et al. (2004), further emphasising the importance of addressing these challenges to enhance the academic experiences and success of NESPS in psychology programs.

Strengths

The qualitative approach of this study, which utilised semi-structured interviews with open-ended questioning facilitated a comprehensive exploration of NESPS experiences. After initially coding the transcripts, an inductive approach to analysis facilitated the direct emergence of themes from the data, uncovering unexpected findings (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This study adhered to Tracy's (2010) "Big Tent" criteria for qualitative research. The researcher being part of this population is a strength that was brought to the analysis. Furthermore, participant recruitment from diverse backgrounds was employed to enhance the credibility of the author's representation of participant responses, following the principles of triangulation (Tobin & Begley, 2004).

EXPERIENCES OF NON-NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS

Limitations and Future research

The study offers valuable insights into NESPS experiences, but it is important to recognise the presence of several limitations that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the research findings. The results and findings can be considered a bridge to further research. The first limitation is that the study was conducted at a single university, and it may not capture the full range of experiences and challenges faced by NESPS in other universities. Multi-institutional studies can provide a more comprehensive perspective, which align with the principles of triangulation as promoted by Tobin and Begley (2004). Future research could complement self-report data with objective measures. The research highlighted the importance of language proficiency but did not assess the actual language proficiency levels among participants. Future research could conduct longitudinal studies with a more detailed examination of language proficiency and its' impact on academic performance. This would not only provide a better understanding of the role of language proficiency but also track the evolving challenges faced by NESPS throughout their psychology programs. Further research can help to understand NESPS' experiences and support needs more comprehensively.

Recommendations

To support NESPS, universities can implement several key recommendations. Firstly, Institutions should proactively develop recruitment and retention strategies tailored specifically for NESPS within their Master's programs in psychology (Borrego, 2018; Callahan et al., 2018; Rogers & Molina, 2006). This can be achieved by setting entry thresholds with reserved places, guaranteeing admission to those who meet the criteria, and offering support during the application process. Secondly, universities should prioritise diversity within psychology departments, including leadership positions and the selection panel for Master's programs. Promoting a diverse faculty can provide role models and mentors for NESPS, fostering a more inclusive academic environment. Additionally, institutions should offer targeted support services to address language barriers experienced by NESPS. This support could include English language courses and workshops focusing on academic

writing and content, tailored to the specific writing formats and terminology used within the discipline of psychology (Andrade, 2006; Cheng et al., 2004; Ravichandran et al., 2017). An intentional awareness campaign for markers could address perceived biases towards NESPS. Training sessions, workshops, or informative videos can help educators acknowledge and mitigate these biases, creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment (Andrade, 2006; Politzer-Ahles et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2021; Weyant, 2019). Lastly, universities should actively facilitate interactions between NESPS and domestic students to reduce acculturative stress and foster a sense of belonging. This can be achieved by providing a welcoming and inclusive environment that respects diverse values, beliefs, and opinions, ultimately ensuring that all NESPS feel included. These recommendations collectively aim to enhance the academic journey of NESPS in psychology programs and promote diversity within the field (Baghoori et al., 2022; Caligiuri et al., 2020; Wentzel et al., 2017).

Implications of this study

The findings of this study present several implications for future research in the field of psychology education and the experiences of NESPS. Academic institutions should prioritise the development of tailored academic support and orientation programs to help NESPS overcome language barriers, adapt to the academic culture, and understand the expectations of their psychology programs. Diversifying psychology curricula to encompass a broader range of perspectives is imperative to make education more relevant to culturally diverse communities and to help NESPS engage effectively with course content. Furthermore, dedicated language support services should be established to address language challenges and grading biases, ensuring that assessments focus on the substance of the work. Adaptations in admission processes to accommodate linguistic diversity and the promotion of research and curricula reflecting global perspectives are essential steps. Continued research will be instrumental in monitoring progress and refining support mechanisms to foster inclusivity and diversity in the field of psychology.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive exploration of the challenges NESPS encounter in psychology studies. It emphasises the need for greater diversity within courses and the creation of supportive academic environments. Additionally, the study highlights the necessity of psychology-specific language support to overcome language barriers. By addressing these issues, this research bridges a gap in NESPS-related studies and offers valuable insights for fostering diversity and inclusivity within the field of psychology. The future of psychology education hinges on the ability to welcome and integrate the diverse perspectives and experiences NESPS bring, thus enriching and globalising the discipline.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Guiding questions to explore the experiences of psychology students that do not speak English as their 'native' language.

1. What led you to study in Australia?

2. How did you first become interested in psychology? What aspects of psychology are you most interested in?

3. Have you always wanted to study psychology?

4. How has your impression of psychology changed since you first started studying it?

5. Were there any particular challenges you faced when starting to study psychology?

6. Can you describe a specific positive experience you had at the university? How did that experience contribute to your overall experience at the university?

7. Can you describe a specific negative experience you had at the university? How did that experience affect your studies or your overall experience at the university?

8. Were there any particular challenges you faced when completing written assignments or exams? How did you address those challenges?

9. Were there any specific resources or strategies that helped you overcome those challenges?

10. Were there any specific resources or services provided by the university that were particularly helpful for you as a non-native English speaker?

11. Were there any areas where you felt that the university could have done more to support your mental and health well-being?

12. Were there any areas where you felt that the university could have done more to support your academic success?

13. Were there any particular challenges you faced in accessing support from the writing centre? How did the writing centre support you in improving your writing skills?

14. Were there any areas where you felt that the writing centre could have done more to support your academic writing?

15. What suggestions do you have for improving the support provided by the university to non-native English-speaking students studying psychology?

Appendix B

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PROJECT TITLE: **Exploring the experiences of international psychology students that do not speak English as their 'native' language.**

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NUMBER: 23/44

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉

STUDENT'S DEGREE: ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉, Bachelor in Psychological Science (Honours)

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

You are being invited to take part in a study that wants to explore the experiences of international psychology students that do not speak English as their 'native' language. You will be invited to a semi-structured interview, where you will be asked to share your experiences and opinions about being a non-native English-speaking student in Psychology. The goal is to understand your perspectiveand gather insights that can be used to provide future international students with greater support and engagement to overcome hurdles while studying in programs that rely heavily on the English language, such as psychology.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉. This research will form the basis for the degree of Bachelor of Psychological Science (Honours) at the University of Adelaide under the supervision of ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉.

Why am I being invited to participate?

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You are eligible to participate in this research project if you are a current student in the Bachelor in Psychological Science, Bachelor in Psychological Science (Honours), Graduate Diploma in Psychology (GDP), or Graduate Diploma in Psychology-Advanced (GDPA) at theUniversity of Adelaide. Alternatively, if you have or graduated after 2020, you are eligible to participate. You should meet the following selection criteria:

- At least 18 years of age

- A non-native English-speaking undergraduate psychology student (currently studying or graduated after 2020).

- Able to attend an interview (face-to-face, or via Zoom).

What am I being invited to do?

As a participant in this research project, you will be invited to an interview where you will discuss your experiences and opinions about being psychology students that do not speak English as their 'native' language. During the interview, you may be asked some questions and asked to share your thoughts and experiences on this topic.

It is important to note that the interview will be recorded, but your views will be de-identified in the reporting of any findings.

How much time will my involvement in the project take?

The interview is expected to take 45 minutes to 1 hour, depending on the length of our conversation.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

If you decide to participate in this research project, here's what you need to know about any risks, side effects, or discomfort you may experience.

- Discussions of sensitive or personal university experiences may cause participants to become emotionally disturbed or upset.
- Your answers will be recorded during the interview and your identity will be kept confidential.

- There is a possibility that participants may feel burdened by the time they will have to spend participating in the interview.
- It is possible for participants to experience stress or anxiety as a result of the research process itself.

However, we want to make sure that you are comfortable during the research project, so here's how we

will mitigate any risks:

- You will be fully informed about the nature of the questions and themes that will be discussed during the interview.

Appendix: B

- You will have the opportunity to ask questions and discuss any concerns you may have before and during the interview.

- You will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

- The researchers will ensure that a supportive and respectful environment is maintained during the interview.

What are the potential benefits of the research project?

By taking part in the study, you will have the opportunity to share your experiences as a non-native English speaking student of psychology, and your thoughts on this topic. Having the opportunity to contribute to important research on a topic that is directly relevant to your own life might give you a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction.

Moreover, participating in the study will provide you with valuable experience in qualitative research and an opportunity to reflect on your own university experiences. The findings of this study may inform future university policies and programs. This will provide future international students with greater support and engagement to overcome hurdles while studying psychology.

Can I withdraw from the project?

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time up until the submission of the thesis results. Your personal information and responses will be kept confidential and anonymous.

What will happen to my information?

Your information will only be used as described in this participant information sheet and it will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except as required by law.

As a potential participant in the study, you should know what will happen to the data you provide in the interview.

Confidentiality and Privacy:

- The researchers will take steps to keep your information private and confidential, following guidelines set by the NationalStatement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

- This includes using pseudonyms and removing any potentially identifying information from the transcripts. The quotes used in the final report will also be de-identified. While all efforts will be made to remove any information that might identify you, as the sample size is likely to be small, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. However, the utmost care will be taken to ensure that no personally identifying details are revealed.

The results of this study will be presented in an Honours Thesis. We may also publish findings in a peer-reviewed journal or present these findings at an academic conference.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

Appendix: B

If you have any questions about the project, you can reach out to the research team:

Primary contact- ████████████████████████████████████

Supervisor- ████████████████████████████████

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the low-risk Human Research Ethics Committee in the School of Psychology, at the University of Adelaide. For any questions about the ethical conduct of the research, please contact Professor ███ ███████████████ @adelaide.edu.au) chair of the low-risk Human Research Ethics Committee in the School of Psychology.

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If I want to participate, what do I do?

If you are considering participating in the study, please contact ████████████ at █████████ @adelaide.edu.au . You will be asked to review this participant information sheet and complete a consent form.

Yours sincerely,

████████

Appendix C

International Psychology Students

Honours Research 2023

THE UNIVERSITY of ADELAIDE

We are conducting a study to explore the experiences of **psychology students that do not speak English as their 'native' language.**

To be eligible, you should be:

- At least 18 years of age
- A non-native-speaking undergraduate psychology student (currently studying or graduated after 2020).

Your participation would involve one face-to-face interview (or via zoom), lasting approximately one hour. All data will be de-identified.

Your participation would be highly appreciated.

For more information: Please contact Tarandeep at tarandeep.kaur@student.adelaide.edu.au

tarandeep.kaur@student.adelaide.edu.au