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University
of Glasgow

**A cross-cultural study of academic
help-seeking among postgraduate-taught
students at a Scottish university**

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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Academic help-seeking behaviour is an important learning strategy that helps students succeed when they are unable to solve an academic problem on their own. Educational psychology research has strived to identify which factors predict academic help-seeking and has indicated that self-efficacy is significantly related to academic help-seeking. However, previous studies have neither considered international students nor provided an in-depth exploration of the help-seeking process in the Scottish postgraduate taught context. Thus, the overall purpose of this thesis is to examine and understand what and how PGT academic help-seeking process took place in a Scottish university. Consisting of a main study and a follow-on study, it helps to understand how academic and social self-efficacy and other influential factors influence academic help-seeking behaviour among postgraduate taught students (PGT) and to examine the similarities or differences between British and Chinese international PGT students — and provides insight into how the time-transition figures into PGT students' help-seeking behaviour trajectories.

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach was used for this thesis, entailing a quantitative online survey ($N = 104$) followed by qualitative semi-structured interviews ($N = 14$) to elaborate on the quantitative findings. The online survey data were analysed using SPSS software and interview transcripts were analysed thematically using NVivo. The interpretation was drawn from both the quantitative and qualitative results. With the onset of the pandemic (2020-), in order to increase the thesis' scope and test the proposed model from the original sequential explanatory mixed-methods study, a follow-on study was conducted using the chosen qualitative visually-guided interview method ($N = 8$) to explore PGT academic help-seeking behaviour trajectories. The interview transcripts were analysed thematically using NVivo. The final interpretation and conclusions were drawn from both the original study and the follow-on study results.

The key findings from this thesis suggest that there is a complex dynamic interaction of demographic, psychological and contextual factors with participants' personal beliefs and attitudes towards seeking academic help. Additionally, some cultural differences emerged, although academic and social self-efficacy were equally important for British and Chinese PGT students' academic help-seeking. By using a combination of Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory as theoretical frameworks, this thesis offers new insight into conceptualising the mechanisms involved in academic help-seeking. The findings of this thesis support and expand on recent work

suggesting the inclusion of environmental influences in academic help-seeking, the importance of social interaction, the reflection of academic development, and the need for a comprehensive framework for understanding academic help-seeking in the Scottish PGT context. This thesis also demonstrates the value of mixed-method approaches to understanding PGT students' academic help-seeking behaviour. The implications and limitations of the current research are discussed, highlighting that the academic help-seeking process is more complex than previous research suggests and that multiple environmental influences should be considered.

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List of Abbreviations

ASE: Academic self-efficacy

AHS: Academic help-seeking

HESA: Higher Education Statistics Agency

HE: Higher Education

PGT: Postgraduate taught programme

RQ: Research question

SSE: Social self-efficacy

UG: Undergraduate

UK: United Kingdom

US: United States

Glossary of Key Terms

Academic help-seeking behaviour: an active and self-regulatory learning strategy that involves social interaction and cognitive aspects as people try to deal with an academic problem (Karabenick, 2013).

Academic help-seeking process: academic help-seeking can be considered a process; that students need to go through a number of decisions or steps to engage in help-seeking behaviour (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981; Karabenick & Dembo, 2011).

Academic self-efficacy: “personal judgements of one’s capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated types of educational performances” (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 203).

Avoidance help-seeking: a type of behaviour when individuals need help but do not seek it (Ryan et al., 2001).

Culture: in this study, culture refers to the influence of people’s national culture (Hofstede, 2001); culture more generally is the individual attitudes, norms and values, and way of thinking that are learned within a social environment to make sense of the world.

Executive/expedient help-seeking: a type of help-seeking in which students directly seek the correct answer from the helper without necessarily developing the required skills to solve the problem themselves (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985; Nadler, 1998).

Instrumental/Adaptive help-seeking: a type of help-seeking behaviour associated with the help-seeking process in which a student asks for help with the process of learning, getting the minimal support needed, such as tips or explanations, rather than the answer (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981, 1985).

Postgraduate taught programme (PGT): it is a Master’s taught degree in the UK that usually lasts one academic year. Usually results in MSc. or MA. qualification.

Social self-efficacy: “the individual’s confidence in her/his ability to engage in the social interactional tasks necessary to initiate and maintain interpersonal relationships” (Smith & Betz, 2000, p. 286).

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Finally, I would like to thank my dear friends and fellow research colleagues for their constant encouragement and genuine support throughout this work. Thank you all!

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: HSIN-YI SHIH

Signature:

1. Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Overview

This PhD research arose out of my personal interest in educational psychology and developed from my postgraduate experience when I was studying in the UK. The experience of being an international student made me very aware of the crucial role that seeking help plays in the quality and effectiveness of learning. Reflecting on my Masters' experience, I barely remember how I did when I needed help. Although I had already studied psychology for four years as an undergraduate, the one-year postgraduate Masters' programme in psychology still made me stressed and depressed as all the courses were concentrated into a one-year period. These learning experiences raised my awareness that students might actually not seek help when they need it; they may evaluate the cost and benefit of seeking help; their decision to seek help might be influenced by different factors. Especially for international students like me, fears about language insufficiency or embarrassment to ask for help could ultimately lead the students to avoid seeking help. Importantly, if students need help and do not ask for it, it might affect their education outcomes or even stop them from graduating successfully (Karabenick & Newman, 2013; Magnusson & Perry, 1992).

Although the number of studies related to academic help-seeking is massive, the help-seeking studies focusing on students in postgraduate taught programmes are limited. Thus, I developed an interest in exploring the process and influential factors related to academic help-seeking as I believe it is important to understand this issue. Having provided the personal rationale, this chapter will next introduce the research background on postgraduate taught students, Chinese international students, and what they face when studying in a postgraduate programme, which helps explain why academic help-seeking is important. This chapter then explains the purpose of investigating this area and outlines the research aims. This will be followed by a brief introduction of the theoretical framework and an explanation of the choice of methodological approaches, and finally an outline of the thesis structure.

1.2. Research background

This study examines a range of postgraduate taught students, including both those from the United Kingdom (UK, i.e., England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as they all have similarities in culture, language and are not considered international students), and Chinese international students studying in Scotland, to compare help-seeking and self-efficacy or

other influential factors across groups. The following sections will first briefly introduce the student groups that this study focuses on, then it will outline the situation that the British and Chinese students face during their studies to explain why academic help-seeking behaviour is essential to academic achievement. It should be noted that there are some significant differences between PGT programmes in Scotland and the rest of the UK, such as their frameworks or the qualifications they offer. Thus, in considering the wider UK PGT system, this thesis aims to focus on a specific angle: to use the Scottish PGT context to explore students' academic help-seeking behaviour.

1.2.1. Postgraduate taught students (PGT)

Understanding the context for postgraduate taught students (PGT) is useful for positioning this study's purpose on a broader scale. According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, nd), the numbers of students in postgraduate taught programmes in the UK have seen significant increases since 2008 (HESA, nd; UK Council for Graduate Education, UKCGE, nd). The PGT programme is a unique type of taught degree in the UK that usually lasts one academic year; students are assessed based on coursework, examinations and/or a dissertation, with successful students earning a Masters qualification. As it is only one-two year, the reasons why students choose to study in UK PGT programmes over other countries' postgraduate programmes (e.g., the US, where such programmes typically take 2-3 years) could be that it allows them to achieve their career expectations much faster (e.g., Park & Kulej, 2009) with less financial burden (e.g., Higher Education Commission, 2012).

However, the short duration of the PGT programme means the students need to adapt in order to achieve their goals far faster than they did their undergraduate degrees, and this intense nature causes the students to experience more challenges (e.g., Tian & Lowe, 2013), and it may have some impact upon their learning experiences or academic achievements. Previous research has demonstrated that PGT students experience some barriers or anxieties that influence their studies (e.g., Bamber et al., 2019; Morgan & Direito, 2016; Ward, 2001). PGT students might have a difficult time adapting to the new intensive style of teaching or find it hard to overcome the time transition from undergraduate to PGT programme (e.g., Bownes et al., 2017; Ward, 2001), or they may experience barriers regarding their social and academic lives (e.g., Lillyman & Bennett, 2014; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). With the increasing numbers of PGT students, research is still aimed at understanding which factors impact students' experiences and the academic problems that PGT students face (Morgan,

2014), which suggests that there still a need to better understand PGT students to support and help them in an academic context.

1.2.2. Chinese international PGT students

The UK is one of the most popular countries for international students to study for their postgraduate degrees (e.g., Lillyman & Bennett, 2014). The increasing number of PGT students since 2008 is partly due to the rising number of international students. In the academic year 2018/2019, there were 485,645 international students, with the majority cohort of 120,385 Chinese students enrolled in higher education (HE) institutions in the UK (HESA, nd). Chinese international students who study in the UK as the main cohort of international students can face several academic problems due to potential cultural differences, such as the language barrier (Ruble & Zhang, 2013), which can lead them to have different academic experiences than British students (e.g., Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Volet & Ang, 1998; Volet & Karabenick, 2006). However, although these cultural differences have been noted, there is still a lack of research looking at cultural differences in academic help-seeking, leaving a need to investigate how influential factors relating to cultural differences (e.g., academic skills, language competence and individual factors) have potential impacts on help-seeking, as well as whether there are cultural differences in the factors that shape help-seeking. In order to support the Chinese international students to get the help they need, the mechanisms behind the cultural differences in academic help-seeking should be further investigated.

1.3. Research rationale

A PGT programme is challenging and many students may struggle at some point with their studies. While universities offer a range of supports, if students do not seek help when facing difficulties, then they may not get the support they need (Almeda et al., 2017). Seeking help in the academic context is therefore an important academic behaviour for students to engage in when they encounter academic problems that they are unable to solve on their own (Karabenick, 2013).

Academic help-seeking is a type of behaviour in which students seek others' help in order to solve academic problems, which has been a main research topic in education and psychology since the 1980s (e.g., Ames, 1983; Karabenick & Knapp, 1988; Nadler, 1983; Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). Previous studies have demonstrated that academic help-seeking in

different global contexts is important as it influences and relates to academic achievement and success (e.g., Karabenick & Berger, 2013; Newman, 1994, 2002). However, there are a number of limitations to the existing research (e.g., Karabenick, 2003, 2004; Karabenick & Gonida, 2018; Newman, 2000). While several studies exist investigating help-seeking behaviour in the education context, they are largely quantitative in nature, relying on self-report surveys. The field focuses on the primary and secondary levels (e.g., Butler, 1998; Nelson-Le Gall, 1981; Newman & Schwager, 1995); meanwhile there is a huge amount of research on academic help-seeking at the university level, but mainly with undergraduates rather than postgraduates (e.g., Horowitz et al., 2013; Karabenick, 2003; Magnusson & Perry, 1992; Payakachat et al., 2013). As the majority of help-seeking studies focus on the undergraduate level, our knowledge of postgraduate taught students' help-seeking behaviour is limited. Previous studies have also indicated that many students do not actively seek help with their academic work when it is needed (Karabenick, 2003, 2004; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Newman, 1990, 2000), which might be due to some potential reasons like personal psychological factors (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Newman, 1990). If students have the capacity to be aware of their need for help with academic tasks, why do many decide not to seek help? PGT programmes are intense, so what could PGT students do to ensure they have enough support to help them achieve their goals? The limited understanding that currently exists of PGT students' help-seeking behaviour shows why it is important to consider what factors might influence it. By looking at PGT students, this study may provide a more comprehensive route to understanding HE students' help-seeking behaviour and provide more knowledge about students' academic help-seeking behaviour in the Scottish context.

Other researchers (e.g., Butler, 1998; Nelson-Le Gall, 1985, 1990) suggest that self-efficacy has an important influence on one's willingness to seek help in the academic context. Self-efficacy refers to students' judgements of their capabilities to complete their schoolwork successfully (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 1989). According to Bandura (1977, p191), self-efficacy determines "whether coping behaviour will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long it will be sustained in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences". In this case, self-efficacy may act as an influence factor on help-seeking by influencing the student's choice to seek (or not seek) help, their perseverance in academic help-seeking, and future academic help-seeking based on prior results (Newman, 1990; Ryan et al., 1998). Yet, no research on self-efficacy and academic help-seeking has been conducted with PGT students in Scotland, nor has any research compared the relationships between help-seeking and self-efficacy in different cultural settings under PGT context. Against this background, this study developed out of an interest in exploring academic help-

seeking behaviour in the Scottish HE context and a belief that it is important to understand this issue.

1.4. Research purpose, aims and questions

This study is interested in understanding the academic help-seeking behaviour processes of Scottish PGT students. More specifically, this study is interested to understand the extent to which and reasons why self-efficacy (both social and academic) and other potentially influential factors influence individual academic help-seeking behaviour among postgraduate students; i.e., how do they make decisions when establishing academic help-seeking processes? To compare with Chinese international students, this study uses British (i.e., from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) students as the reference group. By comparing British and Chinese students to see whether and how they differ in academic help-seeking, this study aims to determine how the state of being an international student in Scotland influences academic help-seeking experience. Ultimately, this study is interested in understanding the context for PGT students' academic help-seeking and comparing both British students and Chinese international students in terms of their academic help-seeking behaviours, which is useful for positioning this study in the broader field.

The study's overall purpose is to examine academic help-seeking among PGT students studying within one Scottish university context and thus inform educational and pedagogical practices. Based upon this broad overall purpose, the research aims for this study were identified as follows. Research aim one is based on each step of the help-seeking process, drawing from both quantitative and qualitative data where relevant, to understand and address each help-seeking step. Research aim two explores the role of academic self-efficacy, social self-efficacy, and other potential factors that influence PGT students' academic help-seeking. Research aim three focuses on comparing the similarities and differences between British and Chinese students in their approaches to academic help-seeking processes. Finally, research aim four mainly focuses on international Chinese students' experiences in Scotland and how the experience of being international students influences their academic experience. In order to address these aims, a mixed-method approach is used. The first phase comprises a survey examining differences between Chinese and British students regarding different aspects of help-seeking (e.g., intentions to seek help, where they go for help) and how their academic and social self-efficacy predict help-seeking decisions. The second phase is an interview-based exploratory investigation of postgraduate students' experiences of academic

challenges, what type of academic help-seeking they engage in (or not), and what factors that influence their decisions about whether or not to seek help.

To break it down, this study is organised based upon the following four research aims and specific questions for each phase, as Table 1-1 below.

Table 1-1*Research aims and research questions*

Research Aims	Phase One (Quantitative) Research Questions	Phase Two (Qualitative) Research Questions
1. To understand the process of academic help-seeking within the context of PGT study	<p>RQ1a: To what extent do PGT student engagement in adaptive and avoidant help-seeking?</p> <p>RQ1b: What mode of communication are PGT students most likely to use for help-seeking?</p> <p>RQ 1c: Who are the PGT students intended to seek help from?</p> <p>RQ1d: How likely are PGT students to go to different sources of people for help?</p> <p>RQ1e: To what extent do PGT students perceive benefits and costs of academic help-seeking?</p>	<p>RQ 1a: What does the current educational context look like for students? (<i>Potentially related to academic help-seeking occurs</i>)</p> <p>RQ 1b: What does help-seeking look like for students?</p> <p>RQ 1c: What decisions do PGT students make when they need academic help?</p>
2. To understand the role of academic self-efficacy, social self-efficacy, and other potential factors that influence PGT students' academic help-seeking	<p>RQ2a: What is the relationship between academic self-efficacy and the help-seeking variables*?</p> <p>RQ2b: What is the relationship between social self-efficacy and the help-seeking variables*?</p> <p>RQ2c: How does the relationship between social self-efficacy with help-seeking compared to the relationship between academic self-efficacy with help-seeking?</p>	RQ 2: What factors influence PGT students' help-seeking?
3. To explore similarities and differences between Chinese and British students in academic help-seeking process.	<p>RQ 3a: Do Chinese and British students differ in their level of reported academic and social self-efficacy?</p> <p>RQ 3b: Do Chinese and British students differ in reported different help-seeking variables*?</p> <p>RQ 3c: Do Chinese and British students differ in terms of the relationship between social/academic self-efficacy and help-seeking variables*?</p>	<p>RQ 3a: How do Chinese and British students differ in terms of their approaches to and understanding of help-seeking and their execution of each step of the help-seeking process?</p> <p>RQ 3b: What factors influence Chinese and British students' help-seeking?</p>
4. To understand the experiences of international Chinese students' academic help-seeking while studying abroad	n/a	<p>RQ 4a: How does studying abroad influence academic help-seeking?</p> <p>RQ 4b: How does adapting to an educational system in a new cultural context influence academic help-seeking?</p>

Note. Help-seeking variables include: adaptive help-seeking, avoidance help-seeking, preference for different modes of help-seeking, likelihood of going to different people for help, Perceived benefits of help-seeking; Perceived faculty helpfulness; and Help-seeking threat.

By understanding the relationship between self-efficacy and help-seeking, this study will contribute to understanding how academic and social self-efficacy relate to students' academic help-seeking behaviours in the HE context, and how being an international student in Scotland may influence their decisions regarding academic help-seeking. This study also expands upon previous literature, which is largely quantitative, by providing a mixed-method investigation of how help-seeking changes over the course of the year for PGT students as they adapt to the new academic culture; data drawn from interviews with Chinese international groups will provide a richer picture of these issues. It is intended that the results of this study will contribute to a better understanding of academic help-seeking among an underexplored student population and inform universities about how they may improve their provisions for postgraduate students. Importantly, this study shall make a contribution and extend the previous research by comparing the relationship between self-efficacy and other potential factors with academic help-seeking among Chinese international and British postgraduate students. This study has implications for furthering theories of academic help-seeking. Knowledge of why and how students seek or do not seek academic help has practical implications for how HE institutions may better support students, especially Chinese international students.

1.5. Theoretical framework

Previous researchers have identified different factors that may influence academic help-seeking. Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986) and Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory (1977, 1979, 1992, 2001) will be reviewed in Chapter Two as theoretical frameworks that help account for different influences on academic help-seeking. Bandura's model of reciprocal determinism will be used as part of the theoretical framework to consider the complex interactions between personal factors (self-efficacy beliefs within individuals), the environment (the educational context), and behaviour (seeking or not seeking academic help when it is needed). Looking outward, the Bio-ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2001) will be used to offers the considering different systems that may influence (and be influenced by) the learner. In the context of help-seeking, especially among Chinese international and British PGT students in this study, this includes contextual factors such as students' peers and instructors (microsystem) as well as more distal factors such as university policies and support systems (exosystem) and broader cultural differences that may influence help-seeking (macrosystem).

As will be mentioned in Chapters Two and Six, although Social Cognitive Theory already comes with a substantial basis of research data indicating the reciprocal interaction between

students' help-seeking behaviour and the influence of various factors, academic help-seeking also involves social interaction, which should be considered alongside social factors (Lau & Ng, 2014; Woolfolk et al., 2007). While the Bio-ecological Theory alone could be used to address the role of social interaction in help-seeking behaviour, filling the gap left by Social Cognitive Theory's limitations, it does not adequately capture the complex and dynamic changes in thinking, decision-making and self-belief that influence academic help-seeking. Thus, to understand more about the individual cognitive level that influence how students decide on and proceed with academic help-seeking, a more comprehensive theoretical framework needs to also incorporate both theories' perspectives – as complementary components – to provide a deeper understanding of academic help-seeking. Together, these two frameworks provide a theoretical lens for considering the large interplay between the range of possible factors involved in academic help-seeking at both the individual and nationality/cultural levels to help guide this examination of self-efficacy and academic help-seeking among Chinese and British postgraduate taught students studying in a Scottish context.

1.6. Methodological choice

As will be further argued in Chapter Three, using either a quantitative or qualitative approach alone may be inadequate to gain a holistic understanding of the research aims. Conducting mixed-methods research provides strengths that reduce the potential insufficiency of quantitative or qualitative approaches alone, helping achieve a more comprehensive understanding of PGT students' academic help-seeking behaviour (Creswell, 2015).

More specifically, a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach was deemed appropriate for the purpose of this study because this method “provides for a more comprehensive picture of what is being studied, emphasising quantitative outcomes as well as the process that influenced the outcomes” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 401). This approach entails two sequential data collection procedures: a quantitative online survey followed by qualitative semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The sequential methods employed for this study are an online questionnaire in the quantitative stage, then semi-structured interviews in the qualitative stage, as the interviews could provide more in-depth data, leading to additional explanations and more in-depth individual views on how and why students seek academic help.

1.7. Structure and content of the thesis

Chapter One of this thesis (the current chapter) includes the introduction, research background, and rationale for conducting the research; the purposes and aims; the theoretical framework; and an overview of the methodology for this study.

Chapter Two, the literature review, reviews the academic help-seeking literature and the influential factors influencing students' academic help-seeking decisions. This chapter is organised into three main parts: 1) academic help-seeking; 2) influential factors, mainly focusing on self-efficacy, and 3) theoretical framework. The first part explains what academic help-seeking is and what the academic help-seeking process entails. The second part focuses on the influential factors that affect academic help-seeking behaviour, with a particular focus on self-efficacy, which is examined in the quantitative phase. The third part discusses potential theoretical frameworks to support the understanding of academic help-seeking among PGT students in a Scottish context and how Chinese international students differ from British students when it comes to making decisions to seek help.

Chapter Three presents the research methods that are employed in this study. This chapter includes the research design, information about the participants, research instruments for both phases, methodological procedures, and how the data were analysed. In addition, Chapter Three demonstrates the ethical considerations that must be taken into account when conducting this study and discusses the reliability/trustworthiness and validity of the mixed-method research.

Following the methodology, Chapters Four and Five will present the quantitative and qualitative findings. Chapter Four includes the quantitative results derived from the survey regarding the similarities and differences between the Chinese and British students regarding different aspects of help-seeking and how their academic and social self-efficacy predict their help-seeking decisions. Chapter Five presents the qualitative results to understanding the PGT students' academic experiences, and exploring unique factors that influence Chinese international and British students' help-seeking.

Chapter Six will then provide an in-depth discussion of the findings to synthesise both the quantitative and qualitative results to address the four aims of the study in relation to the previous research. A number of key findings are reviewed and discussed in relation to the literature in this area. The discussion also presents this study's theoretical contributions by offering a new theoretical framework as a means to understanding PGT students' academic help-seeking behaviour.

Chapter Seven presents a follow-on study to increase this thesis's scope and test the proposed theory from the original study qualitatively. This follow-on study forms a separate chapter, with a brief introduction explaining how I chose to extend one of my key findings from my original study (Phases One and Two), and providing rationales for the method chosen and details of the method, along with a results section and a brief concluding section to summarise the follow-on study's key aspects.

Finally, Chapter Eight presents a summary of the study and the implications of this thesis. The contributions of the research are highlighted, including practical and methodological contributions. It also summarises the limitations and challenges of the thesis and finally offers some suggestions for future research.

2. Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1. Overview

This chapter will critically review the existing literature on academic help-seeking to address the overall research purpose, which is to explore what and how PGT academic help-seeking process took place in a Scottish university in this study. Through examining the previous literature, this chapter will examine what academic help-seeking is, what the academic help-seeking process is, what steps the process includes, and what factors are associated with academic help-seeking. When PGT students have an academic problem, there are several decisions they have to make around help-seeking, including the source of help and the method of obtaining help that they will use (if any), and it is important to examine the factors that influence these decisions. Thus, the purposes of this literature review are to summarise and evaluate the existing research in this area, to understand the need for research on academic help-seeking within the Scottish PGT HE system, to narrow down the focus of this study, and to identify the gaps in the field in order to demonstrate why this study is worth pursuing.

This chapter will begin by defining two key constructs being examined in this study – academic help-seeking (Section 2.2) and self-efficacy (Section 2.3) – while exploring the relevant research on the key factors that influence each of them; this will help justify the purpose of this research. Next, the theoretical framework will be discussed (Section 2.4) and two theories that may help provide a broader understanding of help-seeking behaviour in the academic context will be critically reviewed. Finally, this chapter will summarise the gaps and limitations identified during the literature review (Section 2.5) and present the current study's focus.

2.2. Academic help-seeking

2.2.1. Definition

Academic help-seeking behaviour refers to a type of self-regulation strategy in which students go to different sources to solicit information or knowledge when they encounter an academic problem (Karabenick, 2013; Karabenick & Berger, 2013; Karabenick & Dembo, 2011). It is a purposeful behaviour, which has a self-regulatory function to help the individual address an existing problem (Mousa Golestaneh & Askari, 2014). The first

researchers who proposed help-seeking behaviours as a learning strategy were Nelson-Le Gall (1981) and Ames (1983). They suggest that academic help-seeking occurs when students are unable to independently solve an academic problem, and it is more adaptive to find a person who has a better ability to help them or provide advice than to simply give up or meaninglessly insist on solving a problem they cannot figure out on their own (Ames, 1983). Additionally, Karabenick (1998), summarises the works of several researchers (e.g., Newman, 1990, 1994; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994), provides a comprehensive explanation that “help-seeking is a strategy of self-regulated learners who efficiently seek necessary assistance in response to perceived lack of comprehension” (p. 2). Overall, it can be seen that all of these definitions view academic help-seeking as a purposeful self-regulatory strategy and a useful learning behaviour (e.g., Karabenick, 2006).

In more contemporary research, help-seeking is widely defined as the process of behaviour that seeking information, guidance or any type of academic assistance from other individuals or other sources that can help students deal with their problems (e.g., Butler, 2006a; Karabenick, 2004; Karabenick & Newman, 2006; Zusho et al., 2007). In more detail, pulling from previous research, help-seeking in an academic context can have several features. First, academic help-seeking behaviour can occur when students actively ask questions or seek help; and, academic help-seeking reflects a type of relationship between people. For example, as will be mentioned later regarding the source of help the help-seeker turns to (in Section 2.2.4), there will be an interaction between helper and help-seeker (e.g., Black & Allen, 2017, 2019; Newman & Schwager, 1992; Zimmerman, 1989). Therefore, drawing from previous studies, this thesis defines academic help-seeking as an active and self-regulatory process that involves social interaction and cognitive aspects as people try to deal with an academic problem.

2.2.2. Process of academic help-seeking

Seeking help in an academic context is an important adaptive self-regulated learning strategy (Butler, 1998; Karabenick & Newman, 2006; Newman, 2000; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997), and is actually a complex behaviour as it relates to students themselves along with social interaction and environmental influences. This thesis uses the definition of self-regulated learning strategy provided by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986): “actions directed at acquiring information or skill that involve agency, purpose (goals), and instrumentality self-perceptions by a learner” (p. 615). Within the self-regulation behaviour, Bandura (1986) suggests it involves three main steps – observation, judgement, reaction – which are all

important aspects of academic help-seeking behaviour. As such, academic help-seeking can be considered as a process; that is, students must go through a number of decisions or steps to engage in help-seeking. Based on this view, previous researchers have proposed different yet overlapping models of the help-seeking process. For example, Nelson-Le Gall (1981) divides the process of academic help-seeking into the following five stages: 1) The awareness of the need for help. This comes when individuals encounter problems and difficulties, but have no way of solving them on their own, which produces in the individual an awareness of their need for help; 2) The individual's decision to seek help. In this stage, once the individual is aware that they do not have enough ability to independently solve the problem or difficulty, they will decide whether to seek help or give up. If they decide to ask for help, then the process will enter the next stage; 3) The individual's need to identify and select potential helpers. At this stage, the individual will select a person who has the knowledge and ability required to solve the specific problem; 4) When the helper has been selected, the individual will take action to seek help. This is the stage where individuals actually elicit help; 5) Finally, when the previous four stages are over, help-seekers may need to evaluate the result of their help-seeking behaviour by indicated success or failure. This five-stage model captures important aspects of help-seeking, although other researchers have noted some additional steps and decisions that need to be made during the process.

Karabenick and Dembo (2011) present another model of help-seeking building upon the previous one, which contains the following steps: 1) determine whether there is a problem; 2) determine whether help is needed or wanted; 3) decide whether to seek help; 4) decide on the type of help; 5) decide who to turn to for help; 6) solicit help; 7) obtain help; and 8) process the help received.

The two models outlined above share similar elements, showing that help-seeking involves a combination of behaviours, and suggesting that learners who seek help must have cognition, self-awareness and a sufficient understanding of the problem they have encountered to identify the assistance they need. Then, the individual must engage in a social process by identifying potential helpers, obtaining help, executing the action of going to seek help, and finally evaluating the help-seeking process (Cheng & Tsai, 2011). However, it should be noted that not all learners might think about each of these steps or decisions. For example, students who need help might not actually ask for it; they may be too shy, or they might just ignore the problem, or keep trying to solve it on their own, or even have access to no suitable helper (e.g., Almeda et al., 2017; Nadler, 2015). In fact, help-seeking behaviour is a decision-making process involving different decision steps (e.g., Ryan et al., 2001; Sakiz, 2011; Shim

et al., 2013). Yet, although the help-seeking process is presented in order, students may not actually proceed to follow the same steps (Makara & Karabenick, 2013). It is therefore necessary to examine the different steps of the academic help-seeking process among different environments, to fully understand students' actual help-seeking behaviour and know how students can be supported in each step.

The next section will review the rich evidence and research findings on help-seeking, pointing to different types of academic help-seeking behaviour. This will be followed by a look at the different factors that relate to or predict students' academic help-seeking, and a summary of the different methodologies that have been used to study academic help-seeking.

2.2.3. Types of academic help-seeking behaviours

One step in the help-seeking process is to decide what type of help to use. Interestingly, although help-seeking is viewed as an active process that can be beneficial for learning, not all types of help-seeking behaviours are adaptive. Several researchers have theorised help-seeking behaviours in different ways (e.g., Nadler, 1998; Nelson-Le Gall, 1981; Newman, 1994). For example, according to the purpose, Nelson-Le Gall (1985) classifies help-seeking into 'executive help-seeking' and 'instrumental help-seeking'. Instrumental help-seeking is considered adaptive, and this study defines it as students actively seeking only the help that is necessary to help them complete the task at hand. Executive help-seeking is defined as students seeking the answer to achieve their goal, which helps them with their immediate performance but may not benefit their overall learning process. Building on this, other researchers (e.g., Butler & Neuman, 1995; Karabenick, 1998) suggest that help-seeking can take several forms that differ based on how positive the students are about learning or seeking assistance. In general, they have labelled these different forms or types as instrumental help-seeking, executive help-seeking and help-seeking avoidance (e.g., Butler & Neuman, 1995; Karabenick, 1998; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991). The subsections below will review all three types in detail.

2.2.3.1. Instrumental/adaptive help-seeking

Instrumental help-seeking was first proposed by Nelson-Le Gall (1981, 1985). This is a term associated with the help-seeking process in which a student asks for help by getting the minimal support needed, such as tips or explanations, rather than the answer. In this way, the student can then finish solving it on their own rather than simply getting the answer from

the provider. This type of help-seeking has also been named autonomous help-seeking (Nadler, 1998), or adaptive help-seeking (Newman, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006). In this thesis, it will be referred to as adaptive help-seeking to clearly reflect that it is the most adaptive form of behaviour.

Adaptive help-seeking is a useful self-regulation tool because the individual might try to “gain the minimum assistance sufficient to achieve independently” (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991, p. 221). Previous studies of academic help-seeking frame this type of help-seeking as a positive behaviour that helps promote academic success (e.g., Makara & Karabenick, 2013; Roussel et al., 2011). Students who prefer to use the adaptive help-seeking are more likely to have higher learning motivation to achieve the academic goal (e.g., Butler, 1998; Karabenick, 2004; Magnusson & Perry, 1992; Ryan et al., 1998). As such, students who use adaptive help-seeking would likely be more aware of their need, make the right decision involve in help-seeking process (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981).

Previous studies on adaptive help-seeking intentions have found it to be positively correlated with grades and negatively correlated with nonadaptive help-seeking (e.g., Kitsantas & Chow, 2007). However, most of these studies were conducted in the US undergraduate context; the implications of adaptive help-seeking intentions for the Scottish context remains largely unknown, and that more research is needed. Moreover, previous studies mainly focus on a certain aspect of adaptive help-seeking (e.g., achievement goal, as in Karabenick, 2004; Tanaka et al., 2002), not taking into account all the other aspects of help-seeking or the range of factors that influence their behaviour. Consequently, the broader relationship of adaptive help-seeking in the actual help-seeking process remains unknown. This thesis thus considers adaptive help-seeking within the help-seeking process in order to investigate its relationship with other associated factors.

2.2.3.2. Executive/expedient help-seeking

Executive help-seeking is a type of help-seeking in which students directly seek the correct answer from the helper (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). Students who use this type to ask for help to solve their problem or achieve their goal usually without necessarily developing the required skills to solve the problem themselves (Nadler, 1998; Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). Thus, executive help-seeking is seen as a dependent behaviour in which the student only wants the help from the helper to achieve an immediate goal, such as getting a specific answer (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991). For example, a student asking a peer for the answer to a

question they do not understand on an assignment is demonstrating executive help-seeking since the student might try to avoid exerting any effort to understand the problem by seeking only the answer. When using this type of help-seeking, the student does not try to learn the process for understanding the answer, which may not benefit their future learning. Based on this help-seeking type's focus on addressing an immediate problem quickly, it also identified in the literature as 'expedient help-seeking' (Butler, 1998). This study will use the term expedient help-seeking to emphasise that the nature of this strategy is to get a quick response, and to avoid engaging in much help-seeking behaviour.

Previous studies suggest that expedient help-seeking contrasts with adaptive help-seeking, highlighting the varying natures that help-seeking can take (e.g., Karabenick, 2004). While expedient help-seeking has been found to possibly negatively influence students' long-term achievement (e.g., Karabenick, 2013; Ryan & Shim, 2012), other researchers also suggest that even expedient help-seeking can result in successful outcomes (i.e., getting the desired result by get the correct, Magnusson & Perry, 1992). As such, the preference of help-seeking types is worth investigating to better understand students' academic experience or motivation. Although the preference for expedient help-seeking has been suggested as a factor influencing students' help-seeking behaviour and academic experience (e.g., Butler, 1998; Karabenick, 2004), the results on actual help-seeking behaviour are somewhat different. As previous studies mainly focus on a single type of help-seeking behaviour (i.e., adaptive or expedient, but not both), the relationship between help-seeking types in the actual help-seeking process still remains unknown. Since students may prefer different types of help-seeking behaviour in different situations, this study considers both of these help-seeking types to investigate their relationships with various associated factors.

2.2.3.3. Avoidance help-seeking

Avoidance of help-seeking refers to behaviour when individuals need help but do not seek it (Ryan et al., 2001). Based on the definition, Ryan et al. (2001) suggest that avoidant help-seeking strategies may be the result of a need to be independent or might perceived threat. Moreover, avoiding academic help-seeking might be a behaviour by which students try to not engage in the learning environment (Shim et al., 2013); that is to say, avoiding help when needed may be kind of act of disengagement from the learning process, which may negatively influence the student's learning outcome and performance. Consequently, it is important to understand why students avoid seeking help and how this avoidance influences their academic outcomes.

Previous studies have focused on how goal orientations or other influential factors predict avoidance of help-seeking (e.g., Ryan et al., 2001), which are largely self-report survey-based research, suggest that personal factors may influence students' help-seeking avoidance tendencies (e.g., Roussel et al., 2011; Ryan & Shin, 2011). For example, it has been argued that students who do not rate themselves as highly skilled are less likely to seek help or even avoid it (e.g., Karabenick & Knapp, 1991). Whereas other studies suggest that goal orientation is related to students' help-seeking behaviour (e.g., Karabenick, 2003, 2004) that students with positive goal orientation are less likely to avoid seeking help and are more likely to perceive the benefits of help-seeking behaviour (e.g., Kaplan et al., 2009; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). Moreover, studies have also suggested that avoidant help-seeking behaviour is related to helper source preference, that if students have avoidant help-seeking tendencies, they are more likely to seek help from the source that they perceive as least threatening to them (e.g., Kitsants & Chow, 2007), for example, peers. Meanwhile, students who avoid seeking help could also be due to avoid facing judgement from others (e.g., Ryan et al., 2001); in this case, students might be well aware the need but still avoid it. Taken together, avoidant help-seeking could be influenced by several elements, yet previous research has been largely survey-based, offering limited deeper understanding from students' points of view about why they would avoid seeking help. Knowing how avoidant help-seeking is related to other elements is not enough to understand why students avoid seeking help, nor does it provide suggestions for educators to help students get the help they need, as the research cited above suggests that avoidance relates to the student's attitude toward help-seeking and their helper source preference.

2.2.3.4. Relationships among different help-seeking types

Besides suggesting that students have preferences for single types of help-seeking behaviour (i.e., adaptive, expedient, avoidant help-seeking), researchers also suggest that the types of help-seeking may influence one another (e.g., Ryan & Shin, 2011; Shim et al., 2013). For example, adaptive and expedient help are on opposite ends of the help-seeking scale, but Karabenick and Knapp (1991) found that the students' intentions to seek help is related to the style of help-seeking. That is, if students perceive significant threat by seeking help (i.e., if their attitude toward help-seeking is negative) they may be more likely to use the expedient style rather than the adaptive, and are even more likely to avoid asking for help (Karabenick, 2004). Building on this, research has demonstrated that in general, help-seeking avoidance and expedient help-seeking styles are frequently found to be related, while adaptive help-seeking is frequently found to be related to attitudes toward help-seeking (e.g., perceived

benefits of help-seeking, Karabenick, 2004; Kitsantas & Chow, 2007; Roussel et al., 2011; Ryan & Shin, 2011). This supports the view that help-seeking types are in fact related to one another.

Previous studies have tended to deeply explore a single type of help-seeking behaviour, for example, that students who are avoidant help-seekers might be more likely to seek expedient help to avoid mistakes. However, as help-seeking behaviour is complicated (e.g., Karabenick, 2003, 2013; Karabenick & Gonida, 2018), it could be influenced by, for example, the classroom environment, students' perceptions and beliefs, and the educator's teaching approach (e.g., Kitsantas & Chow, 2007). Using the classroom environment and teaching approach to give an example, as PGT programmes nowadays are blended or web-based in general in the Scottish HE context (especially since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020), students' preferred help-seeking types might be influenced by this learning environment. However, it should be kept in mind that the situation is changing rapidly; the teaching methods may well change going forward into an unpredictable, post-pandemic future. As previous researchers have indicated, students in a traditional classroom environment are more likely to perceive threats when seeking help than students in a blended environment (e.g., Kitsantas & Chow, 2007; Kumrow, 2007). As such, the help-seeking type and the mechanism behind it could be influenced by the teaching approach and the learning environment (as contextual factors, which will be discussed in Section 2.2.6). However, previous research does not indicate which type of help students in the blended approach or online teaching, like the PGT students in this thesis, are more likely to seek. As each help-seeking type has unique relationships with the help-seeking processes, engagement and achievement, and they might be interrelated with other types. Therefore, this study considers all types of help-seeking and examines all three of them as important aspects of the help-seeking process.

2.2.4. Source of help

Another important step to be considered within the help-seeking process is where or whom to go to for help – in other words, the source of help (e.g., Makara & Karabenick, 2013; Puustinen & Rouet, 2009). The person to whom learners turn for help has important implications for other steps in the help-seeking process. That is, if the source of help is too costly for the help-seeker in terms of time or money, this may negatively impact their decision to seek help from this source in the first place (Makara & Karabenick, 2013). For example, in very large PGT programmes, it may be difficult to get access to instructors, and

thus the students might only turn to peers for help. Based on previous studies (e.g., Makara & Karabenick, 2013), there are a range of potential sources both at the university (e.g., peers as PGT students, teaching assistants, tutors and instructors) and outside the university (e.g., family), and students can decide which is most appropriate for their particular problem. Meanwhile, technological developments (e.g., Google) have expanded the options of sources of help (e.g., Knapp & Karabenick, 1988; Ryan & Shim, 2012).

Traditionally, researchers categorise helping sources as “peers” (e.g., PGT students, students in the same Programme and “instructors” (e.g., lecturers, tutors or teaching assistants), but the range of possible sources of help available to students is much broader (Makara & Karabenick, 2013). Previous studies have mainly focused on these two source categories, which makes conceptual sense because the participants were students within classroom settings (e.g., Newman & Goldin, 1990). Researchers (e.g., Karabenick & Knapp, 1991) based on their analysis of college students’ helper preferences, indicated that students preferred the source like peers, over other potential sources of help because they are more easily accessed or they perceive lower judgement when going to a peer for help (e.g., Angelopoulos & Catano, 1993; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Knapp & Karabenick, 1988; Thomas et al., 2017; Qayyum, 2018). However, formal sources are also available, as students may have the opportunity to seek help from their current instructor, from a lecturer from another class, or from their supervisor if they are having difficulty understanding. Still, critically, some students might not seek help due to their perception of the helper’s low motivation and unwillingness to provide help (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2001; Pellegrino, 2012), for example. Research has not been expanded to explore Scottish PGT students in particular, so it is not known where or to whom PGT students may go for help, or how they perceive each source. Thus, students’ preferences of sources within the Scottish PGT context remain to be explored.

Additionally, previous studies suggest that nationality has an effect on preference for help sources. For instance, Schwalb and Sukemune (1998) found that Asian cultures like Japan’s and China’s discourage students from pretending to understand, and that Asian students believe that asking an expert (e.g., instructor) for help is the only way to gain extra knowledge. However, other also suggested that Asian students, as international students studying overseas, may be less likely to turn to instructors for help due to language barriers and their understanding of the material, as language skills can affect Asian students’ performance academically (Swain, 2014). Thus, there is no consistent conclusion regarding which source is preferred by international students, and this is unexplored in the Scottish

postgraduate context. Therefore, it is necessary to find out who they go to for help in general (peers, instructors or other sources) and whether Chinese international and British students differ in their preference.

Overall, the decisions involved in the process of seeking academic help are multi-faceted and complex. As discussed above, help-seekers already have a process of thinking and evaluation before making decisions. In these processes, there are many factors that can influence the decisions – what type of help to seek, and who to go to for help (Karabenick, 2004; Payakachat et al., 2014). Therefore, the following sections will provide a further discussion of the influential factors examined in the research that are related to academic help-seeking.

2.2.5. Personal factors' influence on academic help-seeking

In the relevant literature that has been developed through the decades, a few main themes have been widely explored: how students' personal factors influence academic help-seeking; source preference and academic help-seeking; and attitudes toward academic help-seeking (e.g., Bornschlegl et al., 2020; Karabenick & Berger, 2013). Thus, this section covers the literature from previous studies that summarises the key aspects of psychological factors and attitudes toward help-seeking, which have been the focus of much existing research.

There are the several types of psychological factors that have been explored in the past that are important for help-seeking, for example, self-esteem (e.g., Kitsantas & Chow, 2007; Ryan et al., 2001); self-efficacy (e.g., Nelson & Ketelhut, 2008; Williams & Takaku, 2011); motivational goal (e.g., Karabenick, 2004; Roussel et al., 2011); and attitudes toward help-seeking (e.g., Alexitch, 2002; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). The previous research on academic help-seeking has indicated that self-efficacy (i.e., students' judgements of their capabilities to complete their schoolwork successfully, as in Bandura, 1986) is highly related to help-seeking (e.g., Payakachat et al., 2013), as students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to seek help. In order to differentiate self-efficacy from other factors and their relationship to academic help-seeking, the following subsections only summarise self-esteem, motivational goals and attitude, while self-efficacy as a main factor related to help-seeking behaviour will be introduced systematically in a later section (Section 2.3).

2.2.5.1. Self-esteem

Self-esteem can be defined as an individual's overall evaluation or attitude towards their own worth (Rosenberg, 1965). Previous researchers have paid some attention to the relationship between self-esteem and academic help-seeking and have shown that it can influence an individual's willingness to seek help (e.g., Karabenick, 2003; Raviv et al., 2000; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997; Tessler & Schwartz, 1972). By asking for help, the individual may feel that they are admitting that they are unable to cope with their failure, thus lowering their self-esteem (Žitný & Halama, 2011).

Previous researchers (e.g., Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Nadler, 1983; Newman, 1990) suggest that self-esteem has a certain influence on one's willingness to seek academic help. Researchers have indicated that people who have low self-esteem would be less likely to seek help than individuals with high self-esteem (e.g., Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Li, 2002), as individuals with low self-esteem have little positive self-cognition and are more likely to avoid self-threatening situations (e.g., seeking help). In contrast, other researchers also suggest that people who have high self-esteem are expected to engage in less help-seeking behaviour than low self-esteem individuals (e.g., Raviv et al., 2000). Thus, based on these two correlations, it can be seen that self-esteem has an effect on academic help-seeking, and that both high and low levels of self-esteem can possibly lead students to avoid seeking help. However, studies on help-seeking now place much more focus on self-efficacy or on other factors like motivational goals rather than self-esteem, as it is more important in the academic context for students to develop accurate and positive beliefs regarding their academic performance (e.g., Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003).

2.2.5.2. Motivational goals

Motivational goals have been shown to be important predictors of self-regulated learning, especially for academic help-seeking (e.g., Butler & Neuman, 1995; Karabenick, 2004; Newman & Schwager, 1995; Newman, 1994, 1998). The definition of 'motivational goal' in this section is largely drawn from Achievement Goal Theory (Elliot & McGregor, 2001), in which is suggested to be "what a person plans to do in a particular achievement situation" (Fryer & Elliot, 2008, p.54). Karabenick (2006) summarises previous studies (e.g., Karabenick, 2004; Ryan et al., 1998; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997) on goal orientation model, suggesting that there are being two general orientations (Mastery and Performance; for a detailed review, see Karabenick & Newman, 2013, p15-44; Butler, 2006b). *Learning or*

achievement goals relate to an individual's need to increase their ability at a particular task, which also known as 'mastery goals' in the psychological literature (Butler, 2006). For example, a student with a mastery goal would concentrate on learning, understanding or self-improvement, whereas a *performance* goals implies a focus on how one compares to others and an aim to receive positive judgements from others or avoid negative judgements (Midgley et al., 2001; Newman, 1998; Ryan et al., 2001). For example, students with performance goals would focus on the outcome more than the process.

A number of studies have examined the influence of motivational achievement goals on academic help-seeking (e.g., Karabenick, 2003, 2004; Newman & Goldin, 1990; Newman, 1990, 1998; Roussel et al., 2011; Ryan & Shin, 2011; Ryan et al., 1997; Ryan et al., 2001, Sakiz, 2011). For example, Pintrich (2004) suggests that HE students who have a motivational goal tend to ask for more help, whereas help-seeking avoidance patterns are inversely related to any type of goal focus; although this article was summarized based on the college setting, the relationship between help-seeking and students' motivation should still be relevant today in HE contexts. Previous studies focused on understanding motivation and help-seeking behaviour have shown that classroom-related factors have an impact on students' academic help-seeking behaviour (e.g., Butler & Neuman, 1995; Karabenick, 2004; Ryan & Shim, 2012; Shim et al., 2013). For example, if the classroom climate is positive for students, their motivation to achieve their goal will be higher, thus increasing their willingness to seek help. Indeed, previous studies have demonstrated that classroom-related contextual factors (e.g., classroom climate, peer interaction, instructor support) influence students' motivation and willingness to seek academic help (e.g., Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Elliot, 2005; Pintrich, 2000; Roussel et al., 2011; Zusho et al., 2007). However, as Karabenick (2004) suggests, the study of help-seeking behaviour should not just focus on classroom-related factors, but needs to consider other factors as well, such as personal factors. Thus, a broader range of potential factors' relations to motivation need to be examined, and more exploratory research is needed in this area, as understanding the influential effect of motivation is crucial if HE professionals are to develop methods that help students develop self-regulative processes and encourage help-seeking (Pintrich, 2000).

2.2.5.3. Attitudes toward help-seeking

The other personal factor related to help-seeking is the students' attitude toward help-seeking behaviour. In general, attitudes toward academic help-seeking can be referred to as students' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of help-seeking (Ryan & Pintrich, 1997).

Students with positive attitudes toward help-seeking are more likely to ask for help, whereas those who perceive help-seeking as too costly or threatening would be less likely to ask for help (Karabenick, 2004; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Newman, 1990; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). However, attitudes toward help-seeking are developed and modified based on students' self-assessments of their beliefs and values (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002); thus, it might differ individually, as it be affected by a multitude of factors (Payakachat et al., 2013).

For example, perceiving help-seeking as a type of threat (i.e., having a sense of vulnerability about their ability) could occur in many students who fear it may emphasise or confirm their insufficiencies (Kitsantas & Chow, 2007; Newman, 1998). The entire help-seeking process could be influenced by students' attitudes toward help-seeking (e.g., Karabenick & Knapp, 1991); for example, students may see academic help-seeking as a signal of their incapability, which could potentially determine their help-seeking styles and change their motivational goal (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Kitsantas & Chow, 2007). This suggests that there is a mediating relationship between attitudes toward help-seeking and motivational goals (Roussel et al., 2011). Additionally, as PGT programmes are now web-based or blended, the students are allowed to find the information online which could lead to PGT students feeling less threatened in seeking help that aligned with Kitsantas and Chow (2007) study. However, no research has explored the attitude toward academic help-seeking among PGT students in Scotland, nor has the synergistic influence of other factors on help-seeking behaviour among PGT students been explored. As the above sections have examined the relations with personal factors, the next section will discuss the research on contextual factors and academic help-seeking behaviour.

2.2.6. Environmental/contextual factors and academic help-seeking

Apart from personal factors, another broad category is environmental factors (or contextual factors, as in Lee, 2006). Contextual factors can be understood as “the nature of the task but also the sociocultural environment in which learning is located” (Volet & Karabenick, 2006, p.124), and it has been found to be related to students' help-seeking behaviour (e.g., Karabenick, 2004; Roussel et al., 2011; Schworm & Gruber, 2012; Zusho et al., 2007). For example, the classroom structure (e.g., Karabenick, 2004) or the classroom climate (e.g., Shim et al., 2013) can influence students' decisions to engage in academic help-seeking behaviours.

Other researchers have also demonstrated that classroom goal orientation is one of the contextual factors (e.g., Ames, 1992; Patrick et al., 2007; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002), which is also related to the student's motivation itself (see Section 2.2.5.2 for more detail). For example, previous studies have found that in the college (i.e., undergraduate programmes, also used as a synonym for a university, Oxford, 2009) classroom, the classroom goal orientation could predict students' help-seeking (e.g., Karabenick, 2004), as students might be less likely to ask for help if the classroom atmosphere/environment 'prevents' them from achieving the desired outcome; this is a similar pattern to the one influenced by personal motivational goals. This kind of motivational goal structure is the same in the online learning environment (e.g., Cheng & Tsai, 2011; Chyr et al., 2017).

In addition to the factors related to classroom environment (e.g., classroom structure, classroom climate, and classroom goal orientation), academic help-seeking requires social interaction with others (as was discussed above), so it is reasonable to expect that social interactions in the learning environment will also influence students' willingness to seek help. A vast number of studies have examined the contextual factors regarding students' perceptions of their instructors from different backgrounds (e.g., Karabenick, 2004; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Patrick et al., 2001; Turner et al., 2002), and it has been found with some consistency that educator support is significantly related to students' help-seeking behaviour. That is, if the students' perceptions of teacher support are high, they will be more motivated to seek help. Similarly, students' perception of faculty helpfulness is related to their willingness to seek help (Payakachat et al., 2013). As such, these above studies have highlighted the importance of relationships between contextual/environmental factors and academic help-seeking behaviour.

However, although previous studies have demonstrated the importance of several contextual factors related to students help-seeking behaviour, there has been no study exploring the postgraduate programme types difference in relation to help-seeking behaviour in the Scottish context, nor explored how contextual factors and personal factors together influence Scottish PGT students' help-seeking behaviour, although earlier studies have suggested that students' self-efficacy is related to their perception of the faculty and self-regulated learning (e.g., Ryan & Pintrich, 1998; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Thus, additional research is needed to understand further how these factors are related to, or influence, one another.

2.2.7. Cultural differences in academic help-seeking

Before discussing cultural differences in academic help-seeking, this section will first discuss why Scotland in particular, then what cultural differences are and what the term means in this study.

It is worth mentioning that the majority of research on academic help-seeking is based on the US undergraduate students' context (e.g., Horowitz et al., 2013; Karabenick, 2003). Since UK/Scottish postgraduate Masters degrees are different from US undergraduate and postgraduate degrees (e.g., in time duration; for more information, see Carpentier, 2018), it is possible that students in the Scottish PGT context would have different approaches to decision-making regarding help-seeking. It would therefore be inappropriate to apply US evidence – which is what most of the evidence in this context is – and it is necessary that this study specifically explores academic help-seeking processes in the Scottish context.

Culture, should be noted that the conceptualisation of culture is difficult to define, and many researchers across disciplinary fields have tried to define the term or concept. For example, Hofstede (2011, p. 3) defines culture as 'the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others'. While acknowledging the multiplicity of the term 'culture', some researchers have conceptualised culture as containing a number of different measurable dimensions (e.g., Hofstede, 2001) and have looked at how these dimensions differ by individuals' nationality, applying nationality as a unit of analysis in intercultural studies (e.g., Hofstede et al., 2010). However, this perspective has also been critiqued, and some would argue that nations are not the most suitable way of measuring cultural aspects (e.g., McSweeney, 2002), although most studies that conduct this kind of research still use the nation as the unit for examining culture (Eringa et al., 2015). As such, this study acknowledges the influence of people's national culture but still considers that there are variations within groups of people from the same country, and that culture is something all humans learn in different ways and simultaneously. In this study, culture is considered to be the individual attitudes, norms and values, and way of thinking that are learned within a social environment to make sense of the world (Küttel, 2017). Thus, the definition of culture applied in this study represents the influence of people's national culture on their individual attitudes, norms and values, and way of thinking.

It is known that cultural background has an important influence on individual psychological development and behaviour, including academic help-seeking behaviour. There is also a lot

of literature looking at cultural differences around seeking help for mental health problems among university students (e.g., Al-Krenawi et al., 2009; Hwang, 2006; Mojaverian et al., 2013). In brief, people from Asian cultural contexts are less willing to seek professional help than people from Western cultural contexts (Mojaverian et al., 2013); however, the influence of cultural differences on academic help-seeking is less known. While there has been a limited amount of research comparing academic help-seeking behaviours across cultures, some noteworthy studies exist that would support the claim that cultural influence is significant. For example Al-Harhi (2010) and Al-Krenawi et al. (2009) support that there would be cultural difference in help-seeking between people from Eastern and Western countries. They suggest that individuals from Western countries (e.g., the US or the UK) would believe that seeking help from others in an academic context may lead students to become overly dependent on others, and thus the Western individual may hold a negative attitude toward academic or professional help-seeking. According to these researchers, students from Asia may think that asking for help would be more likely to ask for help as they believe that asking experts for help is necessary in order to acquire knowledge. They are opposed to pretending to know the things that they do not understand (e.g., Schwalb & Sukemune, 1998). Although these studies were conducted some time ago, the specific mechanisms through which help-seeking is related to culture should still be relevant today. In this case, the Asian international students might be more likely to seek help than British students. However, there is a ‘debate’ that in fact, Chinese students might be less likely to seek help (e.g., Yan, 2017). For example, a doctoral study from Wang (2003) found that Chinese students in the US might pretend to understand and not seek help even as they struggle with their academic studies.

However, there is a lack of research exploring whether there are differences between Chinese international and home students in the UK in terms of their beliefs and behaviours in relation to academic help-seeking. In the current literature, there are mixed theories regarding whether and how international students in the UK – a largely Chinese cohort – may differ in their reported help-seeking from home students. One possible explanation is that students may believe that asking others for help may be a threat to their own self-efficacy or show the insufficiency of their language ability, or they may be afraid be embarrassed in front of others, so they prefer not to seek help (e.g., Ryan et al., 1998). Belief in one’s own ability – self-efficacy as a personality variable and its relationship with academic help-seeking – will be discussed in Section 2.3.

2.2.8. Different ways of studying academic help-seeking

Academic help-seeking studies have mainly used quantitative methods in education contexts with limited qualitative or mixed-method studies. The following section will discuss the different ways that academic help-seeking research has been conducted. First this section will consider how help-seeking has been studied in quantitative ways in various educational contexts, briefly mentioning other types of help-seeking studies, then it will briefly introduce the planned methodology for this study.

2.2.8.1. Academic help-seeking studies from quantitative studies

Previous research on academic help-seeking has primarily used surveys. Notably, however, there has been some experimental research from past few years (e.g., Chyr et al., 2017; Lavasani & Khandan, 2011), but surveys are still used in the field the most. Previous studies have been conducted in primary, secondary and some HE settings (e.g., Karabenick, 2004; Kitsantas & Chow, 2007) to provide insights into why students seek help, from whom they seek it, and in what circumstances students seek academic help when others do not (Karabenick, 1998; Knapp & Karabenick, 1988; Nadler et al., 2003). For example, Cheong et al. (2004) used quantitative methods to study academic help-seeking among high school students. They developed a survey tool to measure how students feel about getting help. Other studies conducted with self-report surveys have considered some personal factors and help-seeking types (e.g., Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Nelson-Le Gall, 1985, 1987; Wan-Chen & Cheng-Yen, 2018; Zusho & Barnett, 2011), motivation and help-seeking (e.g., Cheong et al., 2004; Magnusson & Perry, 1992; Nelson-Le Gall & Jones, 1990; Ryan & Shin, 2011) and the relationship between classroom-related factors and help-seeking (e.g., Karabenick, 2004; Peng & Cherng, 2005). As can be seen, there are many academic studies on help-seeking that use quantitative methodology.

However, academic help-seeking is not just about the feeling and the action; it also contains social interaction and personal thoughts regarding the decision making. Quantitative approaches provide valuable data to support theories on academic help-seeking, but may fail to consistently define and consider all potential influential factors together (e.g., Ames & Lau, 1982; Karabenick, 2003, 2004, 2013; Kitsantas & Chow 2007; Pellegrino, 2012). As most of the research that has been done in the past is closed-ended and researcher-led, focusing on variables identified by the researchers themselves, it may fail to capture other variables or factors deemed important by the participants. While the survey-based

quantitative method can identify and determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables using quantitative methods, it may not be able to explore the more complex reasons behind these relationships. Thus, if qualitative techniques were also employed, a fuller picture could be provided of how actual help-seeking process happen, which will add depth to the quantitative findings.

2.2.8.2. Academic help-seeking studies from qualitative studies

As mentioned, qualitative research in the area of academic help-seeking is necessary (e.g., Amador & Amador, 2017; Cheong et al., 2004) since the many influences on a student's academic help-seeking are difficult to determine purely through quantitative methods. Help-seeking has been studied in subject specific contexts using qualitative approaches, but these attempts are limited in number compared to self-report surveys. Previous examples include: case studies with middle school students (Nye, 2008); semi-structured interviews in undergraduate (Herring & Walther, 2016); interviews in focus group in secondary schools (Van der Riet & Knoetze, 2004); interviews with undergraduate students (Schworm & Gruber, 2012); and a case study involving interview and journal analysis with graduate students (Whipp & Chiarelli, 2004). Another interesting approach is researchers using Facebook to conduct a case study regarding help-seeking (Amador & Amador, 2017). In that study, the researchers looked at the usage of Facebook to understand how HE students used Facebook to seek academic help, finding that students would increase their positive perceptions of social interactions online by seeking help from the Facebook regularly. That study's result is fascinating as it allowed the students to understand that even posting on social media regarding help-seeking counts as academic help-seeking. This type of consideration would not be attainable through a survey, which shows that using qualitative methods could offer a different perspective from some of the quantitative approaches used above.

Although qualitative studies do not have such a large number of participants as quantitative studies and did not seek causal determination, factor prediction, and generalisability of findings, they still can provide a comprehensive understanding of academic help-seeking behaviour and uncover variables missed in quantitative designs (e.g., Mäkitalo-Siegl et al., 2011; Puustinen & Karabenick, 2013). That is, using qualitative methods would add a depth of understanding about help-seeking to what is known from the quantitative studies, and it would be more comprehensive if both qualitative and quantitative methods were used together to arrive at an in-depth understanding of academic help-seeking.

2.2.8.3. Mixed-method studies on academic help-seeking

Makara and Karabenick (2013) discuss a need for qualitative and mixed-methods research on academic help-seeking, as help-seeking behaviours are far too complex to only be investigated using quantitative methods. Using qualitative research to study academic help-seeking behaviours and attitudes would provide a deeper understanding and context for the previous literature, which is primarily quantitative in nature.

However, a review of several key research databases (e.g., Google Scholar, and EBSCOhost) on academic help-seeking suggests that the previous use of mixed-method approaches is limited. As the majority of the literature in this field has focused on quantitative or qualitative studies, few studies have tried to combine both types of investigation to study the academic help-seeking (e.g., Finney et al., 2018; Payakachat et al., 2013; Wirtz et al., 2018). For example, Payakachat et al. (2013) used focus group interviews followed by surveys to identify which factors are associated with academic help-seeking behaviour among pharmacy students in the US. They found that academic help-seeking behaviour was influenced by perception of academic competence and faculty members. Thus, it could be determined that using the mixed-method could not only suggest the relationship among factors, but also determine in more depth what factors influence help-seeking behaviour. By using a mixed-method approach, that study was able to collect a richer vein of statistical (quantitative) data to determine the relationship among the elements, while using the qualitative interview method to understand the hidden reasons why and how some HE students seek or do not seek academic help, especially international students.

Yet, these limited mixed-method approaches have mostly been conducted in the US; there appears to be little research that attempts to build a complete model of the help-seeking process in the specific context of the HE sector in the Scottish context. Therefore, this thesis is an attempt to address this gap in the literature by using a mixed-method study to help to build a mode to understand PGT students' help-seeking behaviour within one Scottish university context.

2.2.9. Summary of academic help-seeking studies

In summary, many studies on academic help-seeking have been conducted using quantitative methods, where help-seeking researchers employ statistical techniques to look at predictions, correlations, group differences, profiles and changes over time that relate to help-seeking

(e.g., Kiefer & Shim, 2016; Pintrich, 2000). Fewer studies have worked with qualitative methodology to investigate help-seeking (e.g., Oberman, 2000; Payakachat et al., 2013). Some studies have tried to explain the varying responses from students who seek help and the factors that prevent others from accessing it (e.g., Karabenick, 1998, 2001). The majority of this type of work in studying academic help-seeking is quantitative survey-based (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991), relying on participants' self-responses to the questionnaires. However, only focusing on this type of data gathering may influence the validity in some cases (e.g., De Vaus & de Vaus, 2013). Therefore, more complete models of help-seeking could be used for the studies (Makara & Karabenick, 2013; Karabenick & Gonida, 2018), which would be more useful to examine the matter in more depth and to better understand the relationships between help-seeking and its influencing factors. Therefore, this study expands upon previous literature, which is largely quantitative, by providing a mixed-method investigation of how help-seeking changes over the semester for PGT students as they adapt to the new academic culture, including interviews with two different groups of students to provide a richer picture of these issues. Additionally, previous studies have only considered a few types of influential factors, and have not fully considered the influence or broader contextual elements (i.e., they mostly focus on classroom-related factors, with limited consideration of programme-related factors). Although some previous studies have focused on the relationship between help-seeking and classroom goals (e.g., Ryan et al., 1998), or the classroom environment (e.g., Cheong et al., 2004), the actual decision to seek help is a crucial step in the help-seeking process, and it involves different influential elements as the students weigh the costs and benefits of seeking help. While previous studies mainly focus on certain steps during the process (e.g., source determining in Karabenick, 2003, 2004; Kitsantas & Chow, 2007), the actual help-seeking process is subject to the influence of social and personal factors, which interrelate in a complex manner to influence students' decisions and willingness to seek academic help. Thus, a fuller picture of what, how and why different factors influence students' help-seeking behaviour processes still remains unclear. Therefore, this study considers multiple types of influential factors that may impact help-seeking behaviour. This study shall be of benefit to the HE system and students themselves, as it tries to understand what PGT students' help-seeking processes are by looking at them step by step.

2.3. Self-efficacy

This study incorporates the concept of self-efficacy because the research has identified self-efficacy as a good indicator of an individual's motivation and achievement levels (e.g.,

Schunk, 2012; Schunk & Pajares, 2004). There is a growing body of literature examining self-efficacy is related to various facets of student achievement and learning strategies, or help-seeking behaviours (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016; Lent et al., 2008; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). To provide more information, the following sections will first discuss what general self-efficacy is, then what self-efficacy is in different specific domains (academic and social), addressing each in relation to academic help-seeking. Finally, the section will discuss cultural differences regarding self-efficacy.

2.3.1. Definition of general self-efficacy

Before going into detail on self-efficacy in general and in certain contexts, it is important to distinguish it from other similar concepts – self-concept. Self-concept is one's general understanding and evaluation of one's own self within a given range of functions, while self-efficacy is people's beliefs or expectations about what they can achieve (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Schunk, 1991). These two concepts share similar elements with regard to how they relate to individuals, while there are differences in how they have been defined and how they function. For example, self-efficacy researchers emphasise the role played by specific contexts in individual belief. In this study, self-efficacy is considered a concept that is worth using to investigate help-seeking behaviours because self-efficacy involves an individual's perception of their abilities in certain areas (e.g., the academic context), so it then forms into general academic ability evaluation (Schunk & Pajares, 2009).

Self-efficacy is the “beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p.3). Bandura presents self-efficacy as the mechanism of self-regulation, meaning it can influence the individuals' decisions as well as their actual adaptation process (Bandura, 1991, 1997). That is, self-efficacy could influence individuals' behaviours and environments adaptation, and be affected bidirectionally (Bandura, 1997). In more detail, self-efficacy is a subjective judgement of whether an individual can achieve a certain goal or a specific level of performance (Bandura, 1986). For example, when an individual believes that they are capable of performing the activity and put more effort into the process, that means they have a high degree of self-efficacy belief that they can conduct the activity (Bandura, 1977). In essence, an individual's self-efficacy motivates them to achieve the goal that they believe they can accomplish.

The research in the area of self-efficacy has revealed that academic help-seeking is influenced by self-efficacy (e.g., Pintrich, 2000; Williams & Takaku, 2011) and have reported significant correlations between self-efficacy and academic help-seeking (e.g., Mills et al., 2007; Nelson & Ketelhut, 2008; Paulsen & Feldman, 2005; Pintrich & Zusho, 2002; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). For example, Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1990) report that students with high self-efficacy would use more self-regulatory strategies and are more likely to seek assistance, and although this study was conducted within primary school a long time ago, the specific relationship between help-seeking and self-efficacy should still be applicable today in an educational setting. As can be seen, self-efficacy plays an important role in the process of one's success; therefore, in this study, it is expected that one's expectation/belief regarding own's ability will be associated with their academic help-seeking behaviour.

However, it should be noted that self-efficacy might vary according to the subject matter (e.g., Ren, 2000), as students might "generally [be] more interested in performing activities in which they have high self-efficacy" (Ren, 2000, p.323). As such, this study will explore the domain specific self-efficacy instead of general self-efficacy. Specifically, this study will consider two main domain-specific types of self-efficacy: academic self-efficacy and social self-efficacy, each of which will be discussed in the following sections. This will be followed by an examination of how these two domains relate to academic help-seeking behaviour.

2.3.2. Different domains of self-efficacy

This study is set in the context of HE in Scotland and focuses on understanding academic help-seeking behaviour. The self-efficacy beliefs of students are assumed to influence their behaviours, including their academic help-seeking, ultimately affecting the outcome of their learning. The following sections discuss self-efficacy beliefs specific to the academic and the social context.

2.3.2.1. Self-efficacy in the academic context

Academic self-efficacy has been defined "as personal judgements of one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated types of educational performances" (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 203). It can be understood as students' beliefs about their own abilities to achieve academic tasks successfully (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Elias &

MacDonald, 2007). Bandura (1986) explains that self-efficacy beliefs could be formed with regards to certain tasks or different situations; for example, students could have high levels of academic self-efficacy in their learning skill but at the same time have lower levels of social self-efficacy in social interaction, which, ultimately, could influence their academic performance. As academic self-efficacy is conceptualised based on Bandura and Zimmerman's definition and applied across all academic situations, this study will be using this definition mentioned above.

Studies on academic self-efficacy have been mainly focused on two aspects: the relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic achievement, and the relationship between academic self-efficacy and self-regulated learning strategies (e.g., Kitikanan & Sasimonton, 2017; Pajares, 2002; Van Dinther et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2013). Most of these studies are set in education contexts, describing how academic self-efficacy relates to academic outcomes. For example, previous studies suggest that academic self-efficacy is importantly related to academic performance, and has been studied in different types of education contexts, like youth education (e.g., Joët et al., 2011), secondary education (e.g., Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011), and HE (e.g., Robbins et al., 2004). Across different levels of education settings, academic self-efficacy has consistently been shown to be positively correlated with academic performance within different cultural settings (e.g., Honicke & Broadbent, 2016; Kitikanan & Sasimonton, 2017; Luangpipat & Padgate, 2015). For example, Luangpipat and Padgate (2015) conducted research with undergraduate students in Thailand, finding that the relationship between the academic achievements of students and their academic self-efficacy had a significant positive correlation. Although this was within the Thai setting, the meaning – that the higher students' academic self-efficacy was, the better their academic achievements would be – still helps to understand the relationship. This is a robust finding, demonstrated across a range of cultural contexts.

In light of previous evidence, studies suggest that academic self-efficacy appears to be a key variable related to use of self-regulated learning strategies (e.g., Ching, 2002; Kim et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2013). Researchers have found the consistent result that academic self-efficacy is significantly related to students' self-regulated strategies, as students who possess high self-efficacy engage in more self-regulating strategies throughout the learning process (e.g., Hong & Park, 2012; Pajares, 2002). As help-seeking is a self-regulatory learning strategy (Zimmerman, 1989), the relationship between academic self-efficacy and self-regulated learning strategies is applicable to academic help-seeking as well. Various studies support the idea of a positive relationship between academic self-efficacy and help-seeking

(e.g., Kim et al., 2015; Lee, 2006; Lent, 2008) that when students need to seek help, the ones with higher self-efficacy have more willingness to execute help-seeking behaviour. However, there are other studies that indicate the converse relation: that some students with a high sense of self-efficacy still avoid seeking help even if they need it (e.g., Ryan et al., 2001). Researchers have suggested that the inconsistency in these results might be due to certain influential factors (e.g., perception of threat when they seek help, as in Karabenick, 2003), and raise an awareness that the majority of self-efficacy studies have been conducted using the survey-based method that limited the understanding of the students' perceptions (e.g., Campbell et al., 2001). While quantitative data (e.g., standardised test scores) can reflect the ability of students to engage in help-seeking behaviour, it is still hard to determine what the internal factors are that influence their behaviour (e.g., Bandura, 2006). Thus, only using quantitative methods like surveys, while still valuable, will provide limited understanding of the conditions of student academic self-efficacy.

It should be noted, however, that there are comparatively few studies about self-efficacy in the context of UK/Scottish HE (e.g., Putwain et al., 2013; Van Dinther et al., 2011) as compared to the large body of research on self-efficacy in primary, secondary schooling or in the US context (e.g., Lennon, 2010; Pajares, 2002). Moreover, few studies specifically focus on how academic self-efficacy specifically relates to academic help-seeking in the Scottish HE context, leaving a gap in the field. In the present study, in line with the robust findings in the literature, it is expected that academic self-efficacy will also positively relate to academic help-seeking among postgraduate taught students in the Scottish context.

2.3.2.2. Self-efficacy in the social context

Social self-efficacy can be referred to as the individual's belief in their ability to have successful interactions in social situations (Sherer & Adams, 1983; Bandura, 1986). Looking at the previous research on the concept of social self-efficacy, it is not difficult to find that although Bandura pays attention to self-efficacy beliefs in the social context when proposing the concept of self-efficacy with Social Cognitive Theory (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Patrick et al., 1997), the definitions and terms of social self-efficacy still differ from one researcher to another. This means that the concept of social self-efficacy was not directly and systematically agreed upon by researchers in the early stage, which may have led to less research progress and practical guidance in the field of social self-efficacy, in contrast to academic self-efficacy. Later, Smith and Betz (2000) formalised social self-efficacy as an independent concept in the self-efficacy field and clearly defined it as "the individual's

confidence in her/his ability to engage in the social interactional tasks necessary to initiate and maintain interpersonal relationships” (p. 286). That is, an individual’s social self-efficacy can be influenced by their belief in their interpersonal ability when they face different social situations, and it might also affect the individual’s choice of interactive skills, which in turn affects the quality of their interactions and the success of their social activities. After Smith and Betz (2000) officially defined social self-efficacy as an independent concept, a solid theoretical and measurement basis existed for further research. Social self-efficacy has special and significant importance in the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships or social interactions. Subsequently, as social self-efficacy is one of the core factors that determines people’s quality of life (Hermann, 2005), researchers are beginning to pay attention to the concept of self-efficacy in social interaction situations in different studies.

In general, social self-efficacy has been most commonly applied in domains such as social interaction, counselling for students, and health psychology (e.g., Lin & Betz, 2009; Wu et al., 2012), and also in education. It also has been found to be related positively to school adjustment (Ladd, 1990; Yusoff, 2012) and academic achievement (Ladd, 1990; Smith & Betz, 2000), as well as academic performance (Bandura et al., 1996; Smith & Betz, 2000), and negatively to school dropouts (Parker & Asher, 1987). Furthermore, Patrick et al. (1997) found that students’ social self-efficacy is related to their academic self-efficacy; that is, a student’s perceived social self-efficacy to relate to and interact with others is associated with their perceived academic self-efficacy. The findings from that study is important, as no previous study had considered the relations between social and academic self-efficacy, raising the awareness that as students’ learning in academic contexts involves social interaction (e.g., students need to work in groups, interact with peers and teachers, get support from each other), the social perception is important for students’ academic progress and should be paid attention to in the field. More recently, researchers have started to pay specific attention to social perception in the academic context (e.g., Patrick et al., 2007; Wu et al., 2012), but this work has largely been conducted in the US context.

As mentioned in Section 2.2.2, academic help-seeking involves social interaction as students need to turn to one another for help. Thus, the next section will further elaborate on the relationship between academic and social self-efficacy and academic help-seeking.

2.3.3. The relationship between self-efficacy and academic help-seeking

As academic help-seeking is an academic behaviour (or learning strategy) that involves social interaction (e.g., Nelson-Le Gall, 1981; Ryan et al., 2001), students' beliefs in their ability to be successful academically and socially are both relevant to their academic help-seeking (Payakachat et al., 2013; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). This study will consider the relationships between both academic self-efficacy and social self-efficacy and academic help-seeking among Scottish PGT students. The following sections discuss previous findings in the literature on the relationship between both social and academic self-efficacy and academic help-seeking, followed by a section that looks into how culture influences individual levels of self-efficacy, to explain why this study needs to consider the levels of self-efficacy and help-seeking behaviour among international and home students.

2.3.3.1. Academic self-efficacy and academic help-seeking

In the academic help-seeking literature, students' self-efficacy has often been studied in relation to academic help-seeking behaviour. Although the majority of studies suggest that academic self-efficacy is positively related to help-seeking, the findings appear to have some inconsistencies in their results, finding that individuals with both high and low levels of academic self-efficacy could both unlikely to seek help (e.g., Butler, 1998; Nelson-Le Gall & Jones, 1990; Newman, 1990). For example, some researchers (Butler, 1998; Nelson-Le Gall, 1985, 1990) have proposed that students with higher levels of academic self-efficacy would be less likely to seek help because high self-efficacy individuals with many positive self-cognitions are more likely to perceive self-threat. Conversely, other researchers (e.g., Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Newman, 1990) propose a different assumption: that students who have lower self-efficacy would be less likely to seek help as they doubt their capability/ability, and they would be more likely to avoid self-threatening situations, which they may consider help-seeking to be threaten (Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). Based on this view, students with higher academic self-efficacy should be more likely to seek and secure the necessary help, a view that is supported broadly in the research (Cheng & Tsai, 2011; Chyr et al., 2017; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997; Sakiz, 2011; Williams & Takaku, 2011).

As previous studies strongly suggest the existence of a positive relationship between self-efficacy and help-seeking, it is still unclear how exactly academic self-efficacy may relate to student's actual help-seeking, especially among PGT students in Scotland. Among

graduate students, would feeling confident in one's ability to succeed academically lead you to seek help or would it make help-seeking appear as a threat to your ability? That is, there is still a gap in the research regarding whether the results of these studies are generalisable to different educational contexts (Li, 2002). Thus, academic self-efficacy will be explored in this study, particularly in phase one, to help better understand the help-seeking process among postgraduate students in the Scottish HE context.

2.3.3.2. Social self-efficacy and academic help-seeking

As mentioned, academic help-seeking is involved with social interaction/process (e.g., Ryan et al., 2001). Therefore, it is expected that social self-efficacy would also be associated with students seeking help from someone else. To explain more about the relationship between social self-efficacy and academic help-seeking, a few previous studies suggest that social self-efficacy as a key factor in the academic learning context (Payakachat et al., 2013; Ryan & Shim, 2012; Ryan & Shin, 2011; Ryan et al., 1998). For example, students who lack the confidence to interact with other students or faculty members may decide to avoid asking for help. Moreover, it has been found that social self-efficacy is related positively to the perceived benefits of academic help-seeking, and negatively to the perceived threats of academic help-seeking (e.g., Li, 2002; Ng, 2014; Payakachat et al., 2013). Although only a few studies could be found that specifically examine social self-efficacy and help-seeking, they point to the conclusion that students with low social self-efficacy are more likely to avoid seeking help. Additionally, there are limited studies comparing academic and social-efficacy in relation to help-seeking. Although there is some evidence (e.g., Ng, 2014; Payakachat et al., 2013) suggesting that these two factors are related, no study has yet compared the relationships between academic and social self-efficacy and academic help-seeking behaviour in the UK context, especially with postgraduate taught students in Scottish context. Therefore, one of this thesis's aims is to investigate the predictive relationships between academic self-efficacy and social self-efficacy and different aspects of the academic help-seeking process among Scottish PGT students, which will be accomplished during the quantitative phase of this thesis.

2.3.4. Cultural difference in self-efficacy and academic help-seeking

In an environment like a university, students are exposed to the effects of culture on their self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1995). That is, according to Oettingen (1995), "culture may affect not only the type of information...but also which information is selected and how it

is weighted and integrated into people's self-efficacy judgement" (p.151). Here it should be noted that, although comparing students from different countries is often used as a way to assume cultural differences (e.g., Schunk & Dibenedetto, 2016) and 'nationalities' is often used as a cultural classification (e.g., Morning, 2015, p.242), nationality does not always equal cultural differences (e.g., some might use race or ethnicity, as in Morning, 2015). As well as similarities, a country is bound to have cultural variations within it. Therefore, as mentioned in previous section, in this study, the term 'culture' is used in a broader way, meaning the cultural backgrounds of the students could influence different thoughts and beliefs (i.e., self-efficacy) when students seek help, rather than assuming that all students from a certain country think and feel the same way.

During the past decades, the number of studies that compare the self-efficacy across cultures has increased (e.g., Klassen, 2004a, b; Pastorelli et al., 2001). For example, Klassen (2004a, b) suggests that non-Western cultural groups tend to report lower levels of self-efficacy than Western groups. Studies have also suggested that cultural variables can influence the relationship between social and academic self-efficacy and academic achievement (e.g., McInerney, 2011; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). These findings indicate different levels of self-efficacy among countries, which highlights the need to conduct cross-cultural studies, as PGT programmes usually contain students from different countries (HESA, nd). Thus, conducting cross-cultural studies is important as it can expand the knowledge and allow the field to obtain a universal perspective by understanding self-efficacy in the context of different nationalities. However, comparatively, based on the systematic review by Honicke and Broadbent (2016), only four studies have been conducted with university students in the UK in past 12 years (for review, see Honicke & Broadbent, 2016); while the US has 33 studies (for the review, see Honicke & Broadbent, 2016). Thus, relatively little research has explored academic help-seeking in the UK context, and more specifically how home and international students in the UK differ in their levels of academic and social self-efficacy, and further, how that self-efficacy may influence their decisions regarding the academic help-seeking process. Thus, in this study, as the PGT programmes have international and British students, comparing these two groups will help understand whether international student status and different educational environmental factors moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and different academic behaviours and outcomes.

Additionally, according to Kwan et al. (2010), the research on self-efficacy is still relatively limited in Chinese society. Hence, the present study will investigate the PGT students' academic and social self-efficacy and different aspects of their academic help-seeking

beliefs and reported behaviours, while specifically comparing British and Chinese international students studying who are originally from different educational systems and studying in Scotland. With the Chinese international students' population group in the UK increasing and remaining the top international population (HESA, nd), different levels of cultural adjustment might become a problem for these students as they try to adapt to the new environment, and this could have important influences on both their self-efficacy and academic help-seeking behaviours. In line with the previous findings in the literature, it is expected that self-efficacy will be different among different cultures (e.g., Chinese and British cultures, in particular), which could influence students' academic help-seeking behaviour.

This chapter has so far discussed academic help-seeking behaviour and potential influential factors, such as self-efficacy, on students' decisions around seeking help. The next section will focus on the theoretical frameworks considered for this study – Social Cognitive Theory and Bio-ecological Theory – to conceptualise the students' academic help-seeking behaviour.

2.4. Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework is a structure that summarises concepts and theories, which the study develops from previously tested and published knowledge to help inform the theoretical background or provide the basis for the data analysis and interpretation of the meaning contained in the research data (Kivunja, 2018). That is, the theoretical framework offers structure and support for the rationale of the study (Swanson & Chermack, 2013), and provides a synthesis of the thoughts from previous studies and theories, acting as a 'guide' to help the researcher use theories to understand his or her research data.

This study on academic help-seeking draws from Social Cognitive Theory (Reciprocal Determinism) to understand the individual interactions between one's environment, beliefs and help-seeking behaviour, along with Bio-ecological Theory to try to understand more in-depth and comprehensively how a range of social and environment factors influence the academic help-seeking process. In this section, I will explain why these two theories have been chosen as the theoretical foundation to guide the investigation into how and why students engage in academic help-seeking. I will first review Social Cognitive Theory, in particular the model of Reciprocal Determinism, which looks at the interaction between one's personal beliefs and motivations, their behaviours, and their environment. After this will come a review of Bio-ecological Theory, explaining why this theory has been chosen

as the bigger theoretical foundation to guide the investigation into the various factors influencing the decisions behind students' academic help-seeking behaviour. During the discussion chapter, these theories will be revisited to help understand academic help-seeking as it has been explored in this research (see Chapter Six, section 6.4.1). Finally, this chapter will introduce the specific research aims and research questions for both phases of the study.

2.4.1. Social Cognitive Theory – Reciprocal determinism

There are several theories that could be used to understand the help-seeking behaviour (e.g., Achievement Goal Theory, Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Expectance-Value Theory, Wigfield et al., 2004; Self-Efficacy Theory, Betz, 2000), and most of the ways that researchers have conceptualised academic help-seeking have been rooted in a social cognitive perspective (e.g., Social Cognitive Theory, Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1989; Zimmerman, 1989). Previous researchers have indicated that Social Cognitive Theory provides the foundation for academic help-seeking research (e.g., Dunn et al., 2014; Zimmerman, 1989), and thus, this study chooses this theory as part of its theoretical framework.

Social Cognitive Theory was developed in 1977 by Albert Bandura as a framework for understanding, predicting and explaining how humans behave, and how individuals' development relates to their self, and how the environment can influence their perceptions (Bandura, 1977). In 1977, Bandura built on Social Learning Theory (Bandura & Walter, 1963) to introduce Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasises the role of cognition in human behaviour (Bandura, 1977; Pajares, 2002). According to the theory, an individual's behaviour interacts with personal and environmental factors (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Personal factors include the individual's expectations, beliefs, self-perceptions, goals and intentions give shape and direction to behaviour; that is, what people think, believe and feel affects how they behave (Bandura, 1986).

In Social Cognitive Theory, one of the most important concepts developed by Bandura (1986) is Reciprocal Determinism, which suggests that human behaviour is a reciprocal interaction between personal, behavioural and environmental determinants (Bandura, 1977, 1986). That is, in order to explain this two-way relationship between individuals, environment and behaviour, Bandura uses a model involving bi-directional relationships to explain how behaviour, cognition, other personal factors and environmental influences all interact to influence each other (Bandura, 1989). In this study, I draw from the Reciprocal Determinism Model as it is one of the central concepts of Social Cognitive Theory that refers to the

bidirectional interaction of a person (an individual with a set of learned experiences), their environment (external social context), and their behaviour (responses to achieve goals). That is, basically, what people think or believe about themselves determines how they react in any situation (Pajares, 2002). The Reciprocal Determinism Model provides the basis for explaining how certain behaviours are learned in a social context and maintained by learned observations and outcomes (Pajares, 2002), and suggests that these three components are continually interacting with one another. According to Reciprocal Determinism, students' behaviours are influenced by the reciprocal interactions of people, environment and behaviour (Bandura, 1991), which is a good fit for the current study as it emphasises that an individual's personal knowledge and thought as well as their behaviour are influenced by social and environment norms, which could shape individual behaviours around asking for help in an academic context.

In more detail, Figure 2-1 below presents a model of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory – Reciprocal Determinism for current study. Using this model of Reciprocal Determinism, the behaviour in this study will be academic help-seeking behaviour. The personal factors might vary, as during the quantitative phase the study only focuses on self-efficacy. The environmental factors in this study will be nationality and potential contextual factors. While Reciprocal Determinism is the specific model applied in this study, the broader term used throughout this thesis in order to be consistent will be "Social Cognitive Theory".

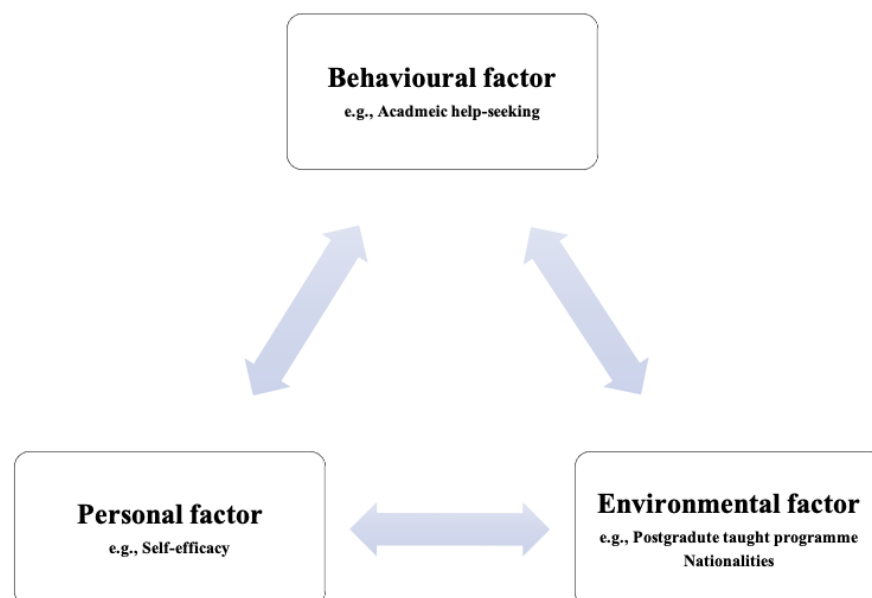


Figure 2-1. *Social Cognitive Theory- Reciprocal determinism*

However, it should be noted that Zhou and Brown (2015) suggest that one of the main criticisms of Social Cognitive Theory is that it is so "broad that not all of its component parts

are fully understood and integrated into a single explanation of learning” (p. 28), and not all the learning behaviour can be observed directly. From this perspective, Social Cognitive Theory can only help understand the relationships between elements and might fail to determine all of the complex reasons behind the behaviour process. Moreover, the learning experience is a type of development that changes throughout a person’s lifetime, but Social Cognitive Theory could potentially neglect to take into consideration human development and lifespan behaviour changes (e.g., Pajares et al., 2009); it ignores the fact that people’s behaviour can change throughout their lifetime, even if there is little change in their environment. In the context of this study, for example, self-efficacy too can change during one’s academic learning development. Thus, in order to fully understand the students’ help-seeking behaviour and academic development, Bronfenbrenner’s Bio-ecological Theory will be introduced, as the next section will discuss.

2.4.2. Bio-ecological Theory

Bio-ecological Theory was proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1992) to study individuals’ development. As the development of Bronfenbrenner’s theory had two major periods, moving from an ecological to a bio-ecological model, this section will first introduce the historical overview of Bronfenbrenner’s theories, then go into a detailed description of the Bio-ecological model and how it can relate to understanding academic help-seeking.

2.4.2.1. Background of Ecological and Bio-ecological Theory

Ecological theory was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977). It explains how individual development is influenced by different types of environmental systems. Based on the literature (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1992, 2001), Bronfenbrenner’s theories had two phases. The first phase was introduced in the 1970s, followed by the second phase in the 1990s. In the first phase, Bronfenbrenner presented Ecological Theory, which was used to describe the child’s development in terms of a set of levels or layers of environmental influences. In the next phase, Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) revised his original theory, adapting the name to Bio-ecological Theory (which will be used as a main theory in this study), emphasising the active role of the individual in the developmental process. This section discusses Bronfenbrenner’s original Ecological Theory.

As an attempt to study developmental psychology, Bronfenbrenner developed Ecological Theory in the 1970s, and he defined it as the study of human development in different environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). The original Ecological Theory is more concerned with explaining human development in a way that assumes there are multiple layers or systems represented in the environment. In the early stage of establishing the theory, Bronfenbrenner proposed that there are two layers, the upper and the supportive layers, with the upper layer including all the interaction around the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1974), while the supportive layer includes social systems that may or may not influence the inner layer (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). However, these early definitions of Ecological Theory do not define the whole environment in detail. As Bronfenbrenner (1974, p. 2) states: “The supporting and surrounding layer, in which the immediate setting is embedded, limits and shapes what can and does occur within the immediate setting.” Building on this, Bronfenbrenner developed the next version of Ecological Theory.

Bronfenbrenner’s expanded the layers from 1974’s model into a more complex and comprehensive series of system that related to each other in 1977. In this version, the ecological system is referred as a layer-related structure comprising the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. In this model, Bronfenbrenner (1977) indicates that other environmental norms like culture should be considered to include macrosystems and their relations to other layers. It is also suggested that there are certain concepts related to the environmental layer, like laws, rules or information, that are also part of macrosystems. The limitations of this version led to the next version of the theory being introduced in the 1990s.

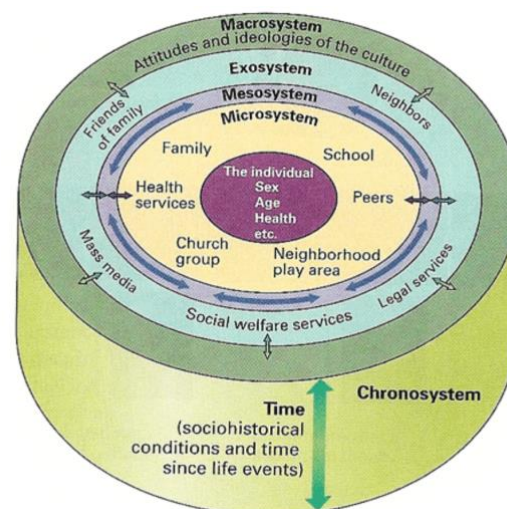


Figure 2-2. *The Bio-Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, source from Santrock, 2007, p.85)*

Following the second revision of Bronfenbrenner's theory (1980-1993), in the 1990s (1994-2006) he introduced another set of important revisions to his theory, and it was named Bioecological Theory or the bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). It values and highlights the role of the bio- (biological selves) to the development process in addition to the ecological (the different contexts in which person develop) element of Bio-ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2001, 2005), as depicted in Figure 2-2 above. The new revision makes an important contribution by noting that development is bidirectional (i.e., both away from and towards the individual), and more strongly emphasising the proximal process (i.e., the interactions that occur on a regular basis over a period of time, e.g., reading and learning new skills) as one of the main concepts of the Bioecological Theory. For example, individuals are not only influenced by the mesosystem, but in fact, they also play an active role in shaping their environment; this is similar to the Reciprocal Determinism model in Social Cognitive Theory. Furthermore, the other layers interact as well; for example, the mesosystem has a bidirectional relationship with the microsystem. However, this proximal process was not given 'pride of place' until the 1990s, which means that Bio-ecological Theory was continually evolved and adapted to other research, improving over time (Tudge et al., 2009). During this phase, Bronfenbrenner also raised the importance of including the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT, the processes of people's interaction with the contexts in which they are developing over a period of time) model to conduct bioecological research to better understand people's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1995a, b, 1999, 2001). This determined the importance of the proximal process of development (process) and also the different environment/system interactions of people (person and context), as well as the way that time influences the person's development (time). However, Bronfenbrenner did not clearly propose a method for using this theory to conduct research, and his theory is so broad that studies 'can define, delimit and choose how to understand each type of system' (Prati et al., 2019, p. 30-34). Thus, this study only adopts a component of it, informed by the PPCT model, to understand students' (person) help-seeking behaviour in a different system (context) and how it develops throughout the academic year (time and process).

A second contribution of the revision is that it adds a new system, the chronosystem, which takes into account the idea of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1995a, b, 1999). Using the educational journey as an example, the time-changing from undergraduate to postgraduate would be the chronosystem that relates to the time transition. Although the new revision of Bio-ecological Theory indicates this new element, it should be noted that some norms might not be found in just one single layer, but rather exist in every layer of the system; for example, things like

social norms (e.g., culture) in the outer layer have an influence on and exist within every other layer (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017). As such, a proper in-depth definition of environmental norms' influence and an acknowledgment of their important role in human development have been lacking. Moreover, how these layer transactions operate and how other norms are operationalised still remain invisible in this model or remain unknown. Additionally, there is limited evidence suggesting how cultural norms will influence students regarding their academic experience, especially when comparing British and international students (e.g., Elliot, Reid et al., 2016). Therefore, the environment is an important factor, and this study uses Bio-ecological Theory as an explanatory framework when conceptualising the extent to which the different cultural or environmental layers influence students' decisions regarding academic help-seeking behaviour.

Here it should be noted that although this study chooses to use this theory as one of its frameworks, some might argue that Bio-ecological Theory mostly focuses on children's development (Hayes et al., 2017). However, individuals do not stop learning after they reach a certain age, but arguably they continue to learn, grow and develop. The Bio-ecological system applies not just to children, but actually the layers' interactions also apply to adult learners as they still continue to develop and do not stop learning (Swick & Williams, 2006). As such, Bio-ecological Theory and Social Cognitive Theory complement each other to provide a deeper understanding of academic help-seeking.

2.4.2.2. Systems within the Bio-ecological Theory

Based on the literature, this model of the Ecological system and Bio-ecological system has been studied and used in several fields of psychology: for example, Paat (2013) uses the (Bio-)ecological system as a theoretical lens to study immigrant students, while Lau and Ng (2014) and Neville and Mobley (2001) use (Bio-)ecological Theory to conceptualise the consulting training environment. Other evidence can be seen in related studies on students' mental health (Byrd & McKinney, 2012); Cordell-McNulty (2009) conducted a study to test a model of college success and retention based on a Bio-ecological perspective. However, there is limited evidence showing that this model has been applied to studying international students in a Scottish university context. For some exceptions, see works conducted in the UK by Elliot, Baumfield et al. (2016) and Elliot, Reid et al. (2016). Despite the existing work that has been conducted, the focus on PGT students is still limited. This study aims to use Bio-ecological Theory as a partial lens for understanding students' academic help-seeking and how their help-seeking might develop during their PGT studies, and to find out

whether or not the Bio-ecological system influences the help-seeking behaviours of students from different countries. Given the importance and complexity of the academic help-seeking process, this model would allow researchers and educators in university to obtain a better understanding of individual and contextual factors that influence international students' help-seeking behaviour. In this model, each system operates with different forces of influence on the developing individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; McInerney, 2014; Tudge et al., 2009). Below is a discussion about each layer of the Bio-ecological system and how it may play a role in academic help-seeking.

The microsystem is a “pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). The microsystem is the most interactive and influential level of Bio-ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 2005). In this layer, the individual interacts directly, as in daily interactions with peers or instructors. Relationships in the microsystem are bi-directional, and academic help-seeking happens mostly in this level, as it is an interaction between the student and helper. Thus, it is likely that the interaction between the microsystem and individual is ‘directly’ associated with students’ academic help-seeking behaviour, as one of the steps in the academic help-seeking process is to determine the source to seek help from. Understanding the relationship between the individual and microsystem would help to understand how the individual determines the source (e.g., peer) and potentially how their individual layer influences their willingness to seek help from the microsystem.

A mesosystem is defined as a collection of microsystems and how these systems interact with each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In this layer, the interactions and associations of the individual take place between two or more settings, such as the family and the school, or the family and the peer group. In more detail, if one student’s close friends and peers have a bad experience with an instructor (the mesosystem), this can in turn influence how he/she might interact with that instructor (the microsystem). That is, the interactions between the mesosystem, microsystem and individuals are complex and connected bidirectionally, which could have both positive and negative impacts on the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Leonard, 2011). Based on this connection, it remains unknown how and why the perceptions of other students would influence the individual to seek help. For example, would the perception have to be related to classroom-related factors, or could it be to do with social interaction experiences with others (e.g., with instructor)? Thus, it shall be interesting to find

out how the mesosystem relates to individuals' help-seeking behaviour, as the layers are connected with one another.

Extending outward to the next level, the exosystem includes "other specific social structures, both formal and informal, that do not themselves contain the developing person but impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found, and thereby influence" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515). The exosystem consists of the linkages and processes that take place between two or more settings, such as local environment, formal networks and services. In the context of PGT student in Scotland, this could include academic support services, the university, university policies, etc. These settings are external to the individual but will influence their development. For example, for international students who are studying in Scotland, the university's influential structures in the exosystem may include Scottish educational policies, student visa regulations and academic requirements for international students. Thus, the exosystem in this study includes not only the university policy, but also the programme structure, course requirements, etc. It shall influence the students' willingness to engage in help-seeking behaviour; or potentially influence their self-efficacy, as they might think they are not capable enough to achieve the criteria, for example.

The macrosystem (e.g., the Scottish HE sectors) represents the broadest layer and incorporates all the other layers: the micro, meso and exosystems. The macrosystem is "the overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture, ... of which micro-, meso-, and exo-systems are the concrete manifestations" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515). That is, the macrosystem refers to the broader norms and values of cultures: for example, individuals' belief systems, societal structure, national and international resources and more. These interact with and influence the other systems and also have important influences on the development and learning of each student. For example, we can use cultural differences to explain why the macrosystem matters: as mentioned in Sections 2.2.7 and 2.3.4, culture can influence students' self-efficacy and help-seeking willingness, so it would be expected that culture would influence students' help-seeking behaviour as one's culture influences their beliefs regarding education, and it could be functioning in all the layers. Moreover, by understanding the relationship between the macrosystem and others, we can gain more in-depth knowledge to help not just international students but also home students get help if they need it. For example, about – do the differences in the educational systems experienced by home and international students influence students' help-seeking? Or is it personal factors (e.g., motivation, self-efficacy) that lead them to seek help or not?

The chronosystem refers to the “changes and continuities occurring over time that influence an individual’s development” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 2005). The chronosystem highlights the impact of time on this system of interaction; all of the other systems are situated in time and can change over time, and the chronosystem acts on all layers, including individual but also microsystem, and on out. There is limited research on academic help-seeking that focuses on the chronosystem, for example, looking at how behaviours change over time, or at how educational environments change over time and their influence on academic help-seeking. The lack of research in this area is probably due to difficulties of collecting longitudinal data. However, researchers have emphasised the importance of the chronosystem (Newell, 2015; Stebleton, 2011). At the HE level, changes in systems over time and important historical events may shape development; for example, COVID-19 has uniquely impacted all system layers and the learning of individual students, including their academic help-seeking. Related to this, access to the internet and email may influence how students seek help compared to many years ago, when it was limited to face-to-face help-seeking during class or office hours. Thus, the chronosystem reminds us that these processes are dynamic and changing over time.

2.4.2.3. Current study’s framework

From the literature review above, it can be seen that Social Cognitive Theory and Bio-ecology Theory provide two different theoretical lenses for conceptualising students’ academic development. This study adapts these two theories to build a framework to understand Scottish PGT (both international and British home) students’ academic help-seeking behaviour processes by understanding how academic and social self-efficacy influence academic help-seeking behaviour to examine whether there are differences between British and Chinese PGT students’ academic help-seeking. Specifically, this study draws on Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory, which highlights self-efficacy as one of the key factors that related to students’ academic performance or self-regulation. This study aims to analyse quantitative data from the sample of PGT students and examine how their level of self-efficacy is related to their academic help-seeking behaviour. Although quantitative results can speak to this issue and go some way in helping understand help-seeking behaviour, this study seeks to build a more comprehensive understanding in this area. While most help-seeking behaviour studies have examined the individual level, this study aimed to draw from Bio-ecological Theory to understand the multiple levels of PGT students’ experience qualitatively to explore in-depth their help-seeking process from bio-ecological perspectives. In addition, the existence of all the complex variables identified by

these two theoretical frameworks suggests the need for a methodology that allows this study to explore the different potential elements proposed in the theories. That is, using quantitative methods with two theories may make it more difficult to gain an in-depth view, as previous studies tend to use only surveys to investigate the factors that impact help-seeking. However, these issues or concerns are important as they helped inform the methodology of this study by leading me toward a mixed-methods research design: i.e., integrating the online questionnaire component with collecting follow-up qualitative semi-structured interviews to help this study to gain a richer understanding and exploration of students' academic help-seeking behaviours in the Scottish HE context.

2.5. Chapter summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature related to academic help-seeking behaviour with a focus on the research, most of which was outwith Scotland, and identified the need to expand on the limited studies of students in Scottish HE. Academic help-seeking is a process that involves a number of different decisions and steps, and the literature suggests that students' academic help-seeking behaviour can be influenced by different factors such as cultural issues, and that it may also be related to environmental factors. It should be noted that as academic help-seeking is a personal decision, the extent to which these factors influence a decision to seek academic help may vary from person to person and from context to context. Although many studies have already identified several reasons behind the decision to engage in academic help-seeking across various contexts (e.g., Kitsantas & Chow, 2007; Payakachat et al., 2013, 2014; Ryan et al., 2001), to date, studies on the factors influencing students' decisions regarding academic behaviour in the Scottish HE context are quite limited. As such, there is a need for further research investigating different aspects of PGT students' academic help-seeking beliefs and decisions in the Scottish HE context.

In addition, there has been little, or no attention given to an investigation of students' beliefs and self-reported behaviours related to academic help-seeking by exploring whether there are differences between home and international students. It is expected there may be a difference in terms of self-efficacy, as well as in help-seeking behaviour. This difference may emerge because one's cultural background influence one's beliefs (e.g., Scholz et al., 2002; Schwarzer et al., 1997), which influences one's thoughts about their own ability (e.g., Klassen, 2004a, b; Salili et al., 2001), or one's thinking about showing weakness by indicating a need to seek help. Subsequently, a better understanding of PGT students' academic help-seeking in general, and more specifically, uncovering new knowledge about

whether and how these different groups of PGT students may differ, would offer both practical and theoretical contributions. Moreover, the other potential gap found during the review is that previous studies have solely depended on one theory to understand students' help-seeking behaviour. However, as academic help-seeking is a complex process, considering adding other perspectives to this study could help the researcher understand the behaviour in more depth. Taken together, this study aims to address these gaps by understanding how and why the decision is reached when a student needs to seek academic help in the Scottish HE context. This study makes a contribution to the literature and to theory through addressing the four research aims (see Section 1.4) using a mixed-methods approach, gaining a comparative insight into the process and the mechanism that influences students' decisions to ask for help. Next, Chapter Three will present and discuss the approach and methods that were employed in this study.

3. Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1. Overview

This chapter outlines the methodology used for this research, which was a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach. It begins with an explanation of the overall research design, then it will present how the instruments were selected for each phase, their rationale and construction, details about the participants and participant recruitment, and the data collection procedures that were used. Finally, the ethical considerations, the validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the methods, and the data analysis methods will be outlined.

3.2. Pragmatic paradigm

A paradigm is “a set of basic beliefs” (Guba, 1990, p.17) that are based on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions and premises (Denzin & Lincoln 2008; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). This study was conducted from a pragmatic approach, meaning it was not committed to any one system of philosophy, but instead followed a ‘whatever works’ approach (Creswell, 2014; Tashakkori et al., 1998). The “research problem” was central to the pragmatic paradigm, which allowed the researcher to apply any and all possible approaches to understanding the problem (Creswell, 2003, p.11) and placed more importance on “why to do research” in a given way (Morgan, 2014). The reason for using this paradigm was that it combines the advantages of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, viewing the mixed-methods approach as a useful method for conducting meaningful research and finding what works in relation to the research questions being asked, rather than the researcher being strictly anchored to a particular approach or concept of ‘truth’. Also, using this paradigm can enable the researcher to understand individuals’ actual behaviours, the beliefs behind their behaviours, and what consequences are likely to follow from their different behaviours (Nguyen, 2019, p.6).

Considering the extant literature, researching academic help-seeking behaviours can be problematic given that the definitions differ and there may be systematic/cultural differences. The absence of a clear understanding of academic help-seeking across different cultures also demonstrates the lack of agreement amongst different researchers regarding which properties of academic help-seeking relate to ‘truth’ (e.g., observable, measurable behaviours versus individual constructions). Hence, the pragmatic approach used in this study believed that help-seeking behaviour is constructed from individual understandings of

the meanings of the world, and the interactions of these meanings; and believed that individual's knowledge is built through social interpretation of the world and reflects the particular goals (e.g., academic goal), or even reflect their cultural background. Looking at the existing literature, this approach, which understands academic and social factors to coexist within each individual at the same level, may be a unique one. However, further research may be required to explore whether one type of factor emerges as more important than the other over time.

3.3. The mixed-methods research design

Mixed-methods research has been defined as a model of inquiry combining qualitative and quantitative models of research in an attempt to collect evidence thoroughly, allowing for a more holistic understanding of the results (Bryman, 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This allows for a more meaningful interpretation of the results than could be achieved by using either model alone. In this study, the main purpose of conducting mixed-methods research was to achieve a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the research aims, looking at them from two different angles by using two different research methods.

Following Makara and Karabenick's (2013) suggestion, there is a need for qualitative and mixed-methods research on academic help-seeking due to the dearth of studies employing these methodologies; this gap was one reason that led me to consider a mixed-methods approach. Additionally, academic help-seeking research has been conducted using quantitative or qualitative methods (see section 2.2.8). Yet, in order to address all the aims of the study, while quantitative methods would be sufficient on their own to arrive at detailed results, adding qualitative methods helped to understand the experiences of participants' academic help-seeking behaviour and how their behaviour is influenced. As each type of data fits different purposes of this study, combining different forms of data was considered likely to provide a more complete picture to address the research aims.

Thus, this research was undertaken with a mixed-methods design, an integration of quantitative and qualitative research in one study (Bryman, 2012), to help to address the research aims (e.g., Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). In this study, using both types of data served the different purposes of this study, helping to reflect on and enhance an in-depth discussion by offering a deeper understanding (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Mixed-methods also help researchers be more confident in their results by generating detailed data so they can better interpret the phenomena being explored (e.g., Bryman, 2012; Creswell,

2010, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Specifically, with this study design, taking a quantitative approach first, followed by qualitative, allowed the study to first identify where the help-seeking patterns and processes were (using quantitative methods), then better understand and explain these findings (using qualitative methods). This study sought to reflect the participants' points of view, give a voice to the study participants, and ensure that the study findings are grounded in the participants' experiences. Further, the combination of methods can lead to more detailed results, which is superior to the investigation relying only on one research approach, particularly when addressing this study's research aims.

However, it is worth mentioning that there are some criticisms of mixed-methods research. Some researchers believe that the integration of two separate methods is irreconcilable and could cause some challenges (e.g., Bryman, 2012). While some researchers might focus on a particular type of method, as mixed-methods research is used with increasing popularity, it appears to represent the end of arguing over which is superior: qualitative or quantitative methods (Bryman, 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Thus, the arguments against using mixed-methods might, in fact, not undermine the value of the mixed-methods approach. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) and Creswell (2014) suggest, the main challenges of using mixed-methods are the requirements of multiple skills, and the time and resources needed for data collection and analysis. I overcame these limitations by conducting a pilot study to hone my research skills, and I had several discussions with expert researchers to ensure that my resources and data analysis method were sound. Therefore, having evaluated the strengths and difficulties associated with engaging in both quantitative and qualitative methods, I determined that conducting mixed-methods research would be manageable for this study. More specifically, an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was chosen, a decision that will be explained and justified in the following section.

3.3.1. Explanatory sequential mixed-methods design

Within mixed-methods research, researchers can use different approaches, with explanatory and exploratory research being the two types of research that are most used in analysing problems (Creswell et al., 2003). Exploratory sequential research (Creswell et al., 2003) is a method which uses a qualitative approach, and then follows this with quantitative analysis that aims to explore a problem that is not clearly defined. However, the exploratory sequential approach is often used when researchers want to uncover new variables or develop a new instrument for measuring such as a survey (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). As there are already many research instruments published on academic help-seeking and

relevant variables have already been identified, in this case, this exploratory approach is not especially relevant.

On the other hand, sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach was deemed most appropriate for the purposes of this study (Creswell, 2007) as one type of data may not provide a comprehensive enough picture to understand students' help-seeking behaviour, that needed more in-depth explanations to discuss and understand what the quantitative results mean (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Another key reason for choosing the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was that there was limited evidence informing the academic help-seeking and self-efficacy among postgraduate students, especially in Scotland. This supported the need for explanatory qualitative work aimed at describing the unknown relationship between influential factors and help-seeking, within a unique contextual setting, such as Scotland (Makara & Karabenick, 2013). Thus, explanatory sequential mixed-methods design is considered as the most appropriate way to gain a comprehensive insight into this study's research inquiries. Figure 3-1 below provides a visual overview of the entire research process.

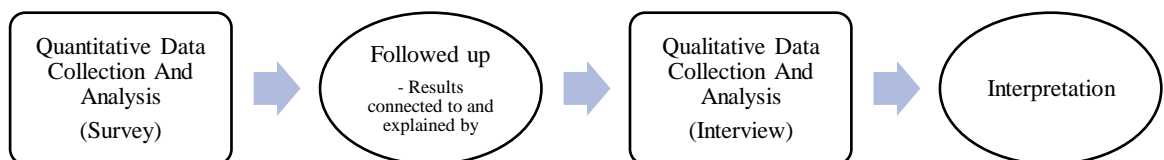


Figure 3-1. *The explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017, p.66)*

This research seeks to study the students' help-seeking behaviour and look at a number of different aspects of self-reported help-seeking behaviours and perceptions, and whether there are group differences in these between international and home students, and also how different aspects of academic help-seeking are associated with students' reported academic and social self-efficacy (Phase One, online survey), which would enable this study to identify trends and significant associations or differences in academic help-seeking for PGT students across certain groups (British and Chinese). The quantitative results then informed the qualitative methods (Phase Two, semi-structured interview), which aimed to interpret

the results of the first phase and provide more detailed understanding of how the students' academic help-seeking processes form and are influenced; it also aimed to understand what the international students' experience in Scotland was, which was not explored in the quantitative phase. During the interviews, the participants were not only asked the same things as they had been in the quantitative phase in order to confirm the quantitative results; they were also asked different things, helping the study reach a more comprehensive understanding. This aligns with the idea of qualitative interview data serving another role: explaining or expanding on the first-phase quantitative results by checking, confirming or validating the quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017, p.65).

In these ways, the quantitative and qualitative elements interacted with each other but also allow interpretation of each other's findings. In particular, the explanatory sequential design helped the study explain its results from the perspective of the statistical tests and helped me interpret the reasons behind the initial quantitative results (e.g., Creswell et al., 2003; Greene et al., 1989; Ivankova et al., 2006). Therefore, the data generated from this research was complementary and rigorous, and it also allowed for cross-checking. Although there might be other ways to address the research problems concerning academic help-seeking behaviour, given the justifications above, conducting an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research was deemed the most appropriate way to gain a holistic insight and achieve my research aims. Having established this sequential design, the next section will explain the instruments that were chosen for each phase of this study.

3.4. The research instruments

As the sequential process in Figure 3-1 above shows, the instruments for this study were an online survey in Phase One (the quantitative stage), followed by the semi-structured individual interview in Phase Two qualitative stage. The following sections will discuss how the methods were chosen and were constructed.

3.4.1. Rationale for choosing the questionnaire

“A survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of the population by studying a sample of that population” (Creswell, 2014, p. 155). Quantitative research “maximise[s] objectivity by using numbers, statistics, structure and control” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 23). Questionnaires are a widely used technique to study individual preferences or attitudes in educational research (Newby, 2014). They

were deemed appropriate to use in this study because the focus was on participants' subjective experiences of help-seeking and self-efficacy. Therefore, they needed to report on it as their experiences could not be easily seen through observation (i.e., observation cannot see self-efficacy because it is a belief, making it unobservable) and would have been difficult to manipulate in certain settings (e.g., a lab setting) (Walliman, 2005). For example, while it would have been possible to 'see' help-seeking behaviour, I would have needed to wait a long time to ensure that it had been seen, which would be very difficult to determine. There are many self-reporting instruments that have been designed to measure the constructs that this study is interested in, like self-efficacy and academic help-seeking, that have been previously validated and found to be reliable (e.g., Pintrich, 2000; Schunk & Ertmer, 2000). These allowed a great degree of ability to generalise the results and to explore the data to determine whether there were differences among different population groups. More importantly, this study looked at group differences in levels of self-efficacy and help-seeking based on students' nationality, at the relationship between self-efficacy and help-seeking, and at how self-efficacy relates to different types of help-seeking behaviours and decisions one makes when help-seeking; these questions all lend themselves to the use of statistical analysis of variables measured via a survey. Thus, the questionnaire allowed this study to compare responses across groups or to look at differences between groups of participants. Additionally, the other benefit of the questionnaire is that it allows anonymity and can provide sufficient equal opportunity for participants to check the content of the questions carefully (Walliman, 2005), leading to more accurate data collection. Moreover, a questionnaire allows the researcher to aggregate the data easily, and it is also generally cost-effective, convenient, and easily administered online (Bryman, 2012)

On the other hand, although the questionnaire might be a suitable instrument that enabled this study to collect a large amount of data in a relatively short period of time, it also has some potential limitations. For example, participants' engagement with the questionnaire, particularly in relation to the section on personal data, might be dishonest (Bryman, 2012). For instance, the students may not be willing to answer the questions. However, the anonymous nature of the survey may help to reduce this response bias. Another issue is that the participants might not wish to reveal information, or they might think that they will not benefit from responding. The participants might simply skip some questions that they are not willing to answer, which could lead to missing data (e.g., Cohen et al., 2011). Those potential risks may consequently lead to a low response rate for questionnaires. In order to increase the response rate, a pilot study was offered to make sure the questionnaire instructions were carefully worded, and the follow-up study offered a participation incentive

reward (details to follow in Section 3.6). The other potential risk is that the sample was limited to one university, sample bias might be introduced. In order to avoid bias, the data were collected in two rounds using different methods. The participant pool was drawn from different colleges within one institution to gain students from a diverse selection of programmes, which would hopefully mitigate sample bias. The next section will provide more details on how the questionnaire was designed.

3.4.2. Questionnaire design

To briefly recap, the reason this phase study only focuses on self-efficacy (in particular) but not other variables is that self-efficacy is one of the main indicators of an individual's motivation and achievement levels, as indicated by other researchers (e.g., Schunk & Pajares, 2004). Thus, by understanding self-efficacy in relation to help-seeking, the extent of the individual's other academic variable can also be indicated.

This online questionnaire (see Appendix 1) contained self-report instruments that were largely based on previously validated and standardised measurements. The questionnaires had been originally developed and tested by a large number of participants in various contexts. Additionally, the questionnaire was adapted to the context of this study; for example, where appropriate, the wording of items was adapted to fit the environment of this Scottish university environment (e.g., 'teacher' was changed to 'lecturer'). The full questionnaire given to participants contained items measuring academic self-efficacy, social self-efficacy, perceived benefits of help-seeking, perceived faculty helpfulness, help-seeking threats, adaptive and avoidant help-seeking tendencies, help-seeking source preferences and frequencies of seeking help from each source, intention to seek help from different sources, and demographic questions. Each of these will be discussed in detail below.

Academic self-efficacy

To assess students' academic self-efficacy, the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ; Pintrich et al., 1991) was used as the instrument. The MSLQ is a widely used questionnaire in different countries and different educational settings (e.g., see Credé & Phillips, 2011). The original MSLQ is an 81-item self-report questionnaire that contains 15 subscales to assess students' motivation and learning strategies, which can be used in combination with other instruments or individually (Pintrich et al., 1991). The MSLQ subscale of "self-efficacy" captures the degree to which students believe that they have

control over their level of achievement in a class (Duncan & McKeachie, 2005); thus, it was selected as a measure of academic self-efficacy for this study.

Examples of the items on the MSLQ include: “I believe I will receive an excellent grade in this class”. All items have a seven-point Likert scale response format (1= “Not at all true of me” to 7 = “Very true of me”), which allows students to choose the number that best describes their position towards the statements. Previous studies using this scale on other samples demonstrate that the reliability coefficients of MSLQ indicate a sufficient level of reliability, and it has also been used to measure academic motivation in different countries (e.g., Barker & Olsen, 1995; Feiz, & Hooman, 2013; Saks et al., 2015), which has shown that MSLQ is reliable and suitable for measuring differences among different countries’ students. The reliability was also tested among the participants within this study, and the Cronbach’s alpha was .737, indicating that the scale had internal consistency.

Social Self-Efficacy

Social self-efficacy was measured by the Self-Efficacy Scale (SES, Sherer et al., 1982), which consists of 23 items, including the general self-efficacy subscale (17 items) and the social self-efficacy subscale (6 items); this study only used the social self-efficacy subscale. Sample items include: “It is difficult for me to make new friends”. The original SES has a 14-point Likert format response scale, ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. In order to keep the Likert scale consistent throughout the whole online survey in this study, the format in this section was reduced to a seven-point scale, which still had the same scoring system as the original scale but was more consistent with the other questionnaires used in this survey, such as the MSLQ. Reversed items were converted for scoring and a mean was taken of the items, with a higher score indicating a higher level of self-efficacy.

Although previous studies suggest that the SES is a commonly used measurement (e.g., Smith & Betz, 2000), the Cronbach’s alphas for the sub-scale social self-efficacy was low among the participants in this study ($\alpha = .53$), which could suggest that this scale is not reliable. However, the researcher suggests that Cronbach’s alphas should not necessarily be seen as a measure of internal consistency as the value tends to underestimate the scales’ Cronbach’s alphas when there are fewer than 10 items (Taber, 2018). As such, since SES has only six items, there is the possibility of having low Cronbach’s alphas. Still, this study tries to improve its reliability in terms of internal consistency by using the option “Cronbach's alpha if item deleted” when analysing the data, as this test can be used to select

the best raters for a specific task. Table 3-1 below, presents the value that Cronbach's alpha would be if that particular item were deleted from the scale. It can be seen that removal of any question/item would not result in a higher Cronbach's alpha than the original's. Therefore, this study has no intention to remove these questions.

Table 3-1
Cronbach's alpha check if item deleted

Items	Cronbach's alpha check if item deleted
SES item 1	.495
SES item 2	.477
SES item 3	.501
SES item 4	.435
SES item 5	.565
SES item 6	.437

Additionally, several studies have questioned the uni-dimensionality of the SES. For example, Woodruff and Cashman (1993) find that SES items measure three distinct empirical factors reflecting different levels of self-perception of behaviour. Previous studies, such as Chen et al. (2001), conclude from previous studies that the reliability of the SES is generally high ($\alpha = .76$ to $.89$), and indicate that the SES is still one of the mostly widely used measures. Ultimately, since the previous studies suggest high reliability and because the scale measures the concept that this study is interested in, and also because the piloting of the measure did not suggest that the items were confusing or inappropriate, the justification for using this sub-scale still stands.

Questions Related to the Academic Help-Seeking Process

There are six scales that were used to measure student's self-reported academic help-seeking beliefs and behaviours.

Perceived Benefits of Help-seeking

Perceived benefits of help-seeking refer to students' reflections on help-seeking as a useful strategy that can help their learning (e.g., Newman, 1990). This scale was adapted from Ryan and Pintrich (1997) in order to measure the students' perceptions of the benefit of asking for help. The original scale created by Ryan and Pintrich (1997) was based on the work of Karabenick and Knapp (1991), Newman (1990), Newman and Goldin (1990), and Van der Meij (1988) to assess students' attitudes toward help-seeking. The format of this scale was 4 items, and each item had a Likert response scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), and the original work suggested adequate reliability ($\alpha = .79$). Therefore,

this study adapted this sub-section to measure students' perceived benefits of help-seeking. The scoring is the mean of the four items to get a value representing students' level of perceived benefits of academic help-seeking.

Although the original scale was created for adolescent students, this study focused on PGT students' help-seeking, so the items had to be slightly modified. For example, to better fit the educational environment in the Scottish HE context, the original question – “Asking questions in math makes the class more interesting for me” – was changed to “Asking questions during lectures makes the programme more interesting for me”. To ensure the modified scale's reliability, the Cronbach's alpha was checked; it was found to be .933, suggesting the modified scale is highly reliable.

Perceived faculty helpfulness

The second scale focused on students' perception of faculty helpfulness (i.e., students perception of how helpful the faculty member were) when students engaged in help-seeking behaviour. It was adapted from the work of Payakachat et al. (2013). The section consisted of six questions and used a 5-point Likert scale, range from 1 (disagree entirely) to 5 (agree entirely). Like the above section, in order to ensure appropriateness to the study setting, the questions were modified. For example, the original question “Professors are helpful when I ask for academic help”, was changed to “Lecturers/tutors are helpful when I ask for academic help”. Again, to make sure of the modified scale's reliability, the Cronbach's alpha was checked and it was .802, suggesting the modified scale is still highly reliable.

It should be noted that to make the response scales consistent across the help-seeking items, all of the measures of help-seeking in this study online survey (except the ranking scale), were consistent with the original work, maintaining a 5-point Likert scale. The remaining help-seeking scales were all adapted from Reeves and Sperling (2015), including ‘Help-seeking threat’ and ‘Adaptive and Avoidant Help-Seeking Tendencies’; ‘Help-seeking source preferences and frequencies of seeking help from each source’; and ‘Intention to seek help from different sources’.

Help-seeking threat

Help-seeking threat refers to the level of threat or cost that the student perceives when they ask for academic help. The scale was adapted from measures by Reeves and Sperling (2015),

which built upon the work of a scale originally used in a study conducted by Karabenick and Knapp (1991). An additional eight questions were added from Reeves and Sperling (2015) to the original measure to account for teaching assistants, who might generate threat (a total of 14 items were in their study, and the modified scale's $\alpha = .94$). After the pilot study and a discussion with my supervisors, the scale was modified/amended to combined to a 7-item scale to fit the educational system/environment in Scotland, as the modified items were repetitive and some of the terms were not used in the Scottish context. Thus, the remaining items were modified to fit in the Scottish context as well; for example, the original scale question, "I prefer that the professor of EDPSY 014 not find out that I am in a study group", was changed to "I prefer that the instructors of the programme not find out that I am in a study group".

All the items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree through 5 = strongly agree). The scale's Cronbach's alpha for this scale among the participants in this study was .84, suggesting high reliability.

Adaptive and Avoidant Help-Seeking Tendencies

In order to find out the extent to which the PGT students prefer using adaptive help-seeking behaviour and the extent to which they are likely to avoid seeking help, the scale focusing on adaptive and avoidant help-seeking tendency was adapted from Reeves and Sperling (2015). Both adaptive and avoidant help-seeking were measured: there were five items for adaptive help-seeking variables ($\alpha = .73$) and four items for avoidant help-seeking variables ($\alpha = .87$) on a five-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Again, the questions were modified for the Scottish PGT context. An original item for adaptive help-seeking was "If I do not understand something in EDPSY 014, I usually want someone to explain it to me and not just give me the answer", which was changed to "If I do not understand something, I usually want someone to explain it to me and not just give me the answer". Similarly, the original example for avoidant help-seeking was "If I do not understand something in EDPSY 014, I prefer to guess rather than ask the teacher for assistance", which was changed to "If I do not understand something, I prefer to guess rather than ask the instructor for assistance". As can be seen in Appendix 1, the term 'teacher' was substituted for 'instructor' to be more appropriate to this Scottish university context.

Help-seeking source preferences and frequencies of seeking help from each source

In order to check students' preference regarding sources to ask for help and how often they are likely to seek help from this source, the section was again adapted from Reeves and Sperling (2015). It first asked participants to rank help-seeking sources by preference (from 1 = never to 6 = very frequently). An example question is "I have come to see the instructor/lecturer/tutor during office hours". Cronbach's alpha was not applicable to this scale because it was a ranking question and had just one item per measure.

Next, the participants were asked to self-rank the frequency of help-seeking interactions with each source during the course. Students could select the order in which they would use each method in order to seek academic help from others (1 was the first method they would use; 6 was the last method). The sources listed were: in person during class; in person before or after class; in person during office hours; through text or messaging apps; through email; through online discussion boards or forums. Again, this scale had only one item per measure, so there is no Cronbach's alpha to report.

These two subscales aimed to examine each individual source to help indicate which that student would prefer to use when they need help, and which source would be the last one they would go to for help. Thus, these questions sought to identify which sources of help PGT students prefer.

Intention to seek help from different sources

The final measure related to academic help-seeking contained three sub-scales that measured intention to seek help from each of the three sets of available help sources. All of the scales were adapted from a measure developed by Reeves and Sperling (2015). The specific contents of some of the stem questions were again partly adapted where they were not applicable in this study's context (e.g., online office hours and teaching assistant sections were not included). Again, the questions were modified for the Scottish PGT context. An original example item was "How likely am I to ask the teacher in EDPSY 014 for help when I do not understand how to do a problem or activity?", which was changed to "How likely am I to ask my instructor/lecturer/tutor for help when I do not understand how to do a problem or activity?". This section of this study ended up having three constructs: intention to seek help from instructor/lecturer/tutor (nine items); intention to seek help from classmates/peers (eight items), and intention to seek help from the online discussion board/Moodle (six items). The scales were five-point Likert scales (1 = very unlikely to 5 = very likely). There was good internal reliability for each of the scales that measured intention

to seek help from instructors ($\alpha = .791$), from classmates ($\alpha = .901$), and from online discussion boards ($\alpha = .934$).

Demographic Questions

The survey also asked students to report on a number of demographic characteristics to allow me to better understand the sample and to facilitate comparisons across different groups. The participants were asked about their program of study, nationality, gender, age and whether they are studying abroad.

3.4.3. Rationale for choosing semi-structured interview

In the second phase of the research, to gain a more comprehensive view and a better understanding of the academic help-seeking process, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted. Interviews are one of the most widely used data collection methods within qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). In this case, they were chosen to offer elaboration to help build an understanding of participants' academic help-seeking behaviour processes, how they react when they need help, and what decisions they make in order to get the help they need.

Interviews can occur in different formats (Brinkmann, 2013), yet structured and unstructured interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009) were not deemed suitable for this study's purpose. Structured interviews require the questions to be administered in a particular order and call for consistency across participants that would not allow sufficient flexibility, while unstructured interviews would be too flexible (e.g., Bryman, 2012). In this case, a middle point between the two extremes – the semi-structured interview – was the best option as it allows the researcher to go in-depth in some interesting areas to obtain more detail (e.g., Gideon & Moskos, 2012), and thus capture in-depth thoughts from the participants. This study used individual interviews, which offered great access to in-depth details than group interviews (Gaskell, 2000), where participants may dominate other members, and where participants may conform to the responses of other participants, even if they may not agree (e.g., Dilshad & Latif, 2013). Thus, individual semi-structured interviews were deemed most suitable for this research as they could provide more control by focusing the dialogue on issues related to the research project (Brinkmann, 2013).

Pulled it together, in the second phase of the research, to collect qualitative data to gain a more comprehensive view and a better understanding of the academic help-seeking process, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted. The semi-structured interviews were built upon the quantitative survey results to collect in-depth information guided by the analysed results from the online survey data (Creswell, 2014). That is, the interview guide was built upon Phase One's result in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of participants' individual perceptions when faced with barriers and those barriers' impacts on the academic help-seeking process in the PGT context.

Thus, the quantitative results helped to inform the interview by analysing the survey results, seeing what patterns were constructed, and then trying to understand them. It also helped design the interview by enabling me to include questions that had not been fully answered during the survey phase and needed to be more comprehensively addressed to meet the research aims of the study (Bailey, 2007). By using an interview guide with specific questions, this study could ensure that the participants understood fully the questions' meanings, and thus be able to provide reliable answers (Scott & Usher, 2011) or describe in greater detail the process of academic help-seeking (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

However, there are some potential limitations or challenges when using interviews as the qualitative study method. For example, as Creswell (2010) suggests, the participants may give the message that they want me to hear rather than stating what they really feel or believe. For this research topic, as discussed in Chapter Two, the participants may have avoided or not fully reported their personal experiences as they might have felt embarrassed. In order to minimise this issue, I paid close attention during my conversations with the participants. For example, strong tones or emotional reactions would be difficult to spot in transcripts. By paying attention to their responses and reactions during the interviews, I was able to gain more information from the dialogues. In addition, since individual interviews can be time-consuming (as the data analysis demands a good deal of time), I needed to be careful with my time management to allow sufficient time to analyse the data (Bazeley, 2013), as it takes time to do the transcribing, coding and interpretation. Care was also taken to construct the interview guide/questions; see Sections 3.4.4, 3.6 and 5.1 for information on how the interview guide was built.

3.4.4. The construction of interviews

The interview guide (see Appendix 2) was based on the online questionnaire results and then revised based on expert feedback and the pilot study was conducted to ensure the interview guide's quality. In order to mirror the sequential mixed-methods design and show the link between the online survey and the semi-structured interview, some interview questions were personalised based on the results of the initial questionnaire data. For example, some interview questions might begin, 'I noticed that you answered in the online survey that ... (e.g., you prefer to ask peers for help. Could you tell me the reason that you prefer go to them?)'. Those who had not taken the survey would be asked why they were interested in doing the interview. Asking this was useful as I could show more about what this study was interested in and create a friendlier interview environment. Moreover, to improve my skills in conducting interviews and to help improve the quality of the interview guide, this study conducted a series of pilot interviews with PhD colleagues to allow me to practice the interview process. The details of how the interview question guide was revised and how the pilot interviews were conducted are presented in Section 3.6.1. Piloting the interview allowed the interview guide to be adjusted to fit the design and practice the interview techniques before I actually started collecting data. Once ready to collect data, I started to contact the participants for this study and sent them request emails to schedule interviews.

To ensure rich responses from the interviewees, the four research aims were designed to be general and open-ended (Creswell, 2014) to fit quantitative and qualitative purposes (for review, see Section 1.4). Open-ended questions can encourage participants to answer from their personal points of view and may provide me with a better understanding without being influenced by the perspective of me as a former PGT student (Creswell, 2012). The length of the interviews varied, but the aim when developing the questions was for them to last less than an hour.

The interview schedule consisted of four sections (as shown in Appendix 2). The first was to understand basic information about academic experience, which potentially related to understanding why and how help-seeking behaviour occurs. The second section was expected to capture the key factors that students thought would influence the different decisions they made when engaging in the process of academic help-seeking. Given the choice of the sequential explanatory design methodology, whereby the qualitative results would relate to the quantitative results, the online survey results informed the third section of the interview, which focused on comparing British and Chinese students. As the data from

the online survey might have called for further investigation and clarification in the interview, some participants' questions were shaped based on the overall findings from the survey. For example, some students in both the Chinese and British groups indicated in the survey that they preferred to ask peers for help. While this happened in both the Chinese and British cohorts, this is the type of response that demanded clarification: were Chinese and British students really not different with regards to the sources they chose to seek help from? Drawing on the preliminary analysis of the questionnaire data, these patterns were identified to see what needed to be incorporated into the interviews. The final section was only for international students; it aimed to understand their experiences of being international students, and how their academic help-seeking differed or was influenced while they were studying abroad. This potentially related to understanding why and how help-seeking behaviour differs among Chinese and British students. The example probes and prompts might be something like, 'Do you think being an international student would influence your decision when you want to seek academic help?', but they would be based on actual situations, so the questions would be adjusted accordingly.

3.4.4.1. Interview translated version

The interview participants included both international Chinese students and British students. The interview guide was first written in English and then translated into Chinese Mandarin. Although all PGT students are supposed to be proficient in English, some English-language terms from the field of psychology may have hindered the Chinese respondents' ability to understand and to convey their thoughts, and they may have felt more comfortable or been able to elaborate better upon their responses in their first language. Therefore, the Chinese participants were given the choice of doing their interviews in English or Chinese.

The interview guides were initially created in English, and the Chinese version was then generated using the backward translation technique (Twinn, 1997) and cross-comparison practice. That is, two bilingual colleagues (both postgraduate researchers) with native Chinese backgrounds independently translated the interview guide into Chinese, then their translations were sent to another native Chinese speaker to check the meaning and translate it back to English. After that, I compared the translations to see whether or not the meanings were the same. The piloting was conducted with three native Chinese students to make sure the Chinese version was designed and organised in a logical order, and to ensure that it addressed everything it needed to. Details of the piloting will be discussed in Section 3.6.1.

After the formal interviews had been conducted, the transcriptions from the Chinese students were originally transcribed in Chinese, as this was the common native language amongst all the Chinese interviewees and me. Once all the transcriptions were finished, they were translated into English for the purposes of this thesis. To assist with the credibility of the study, I sent the English and Chinese versions of the transcriptions to the participants to verify each translated transcript's accuracy, and to ensure that the translations fit what they meant in the interview.

3.5. The Participants

This study intends to inform the understanding of PGT students' academic help-seeking in general, one university (i.e., University of Glasgow) was chosen as the focus of this study. It is one of the Russell Group universities in the UK, one of the world's top-ranking universities located in a multicultural city in Scotland, and was ranked as one of the top 10 largest numbers of non-EU students for the academic year 2019-20 (HESA, 2021). In addition, this university was chosen as it has a large PGT population from which to draw upon for this study, and I was very familiar with the educational context and student supports available at this university, which assisted in the interpretation of the data.

The target population was PGT students, at least 18 years of age, studying across all four main colleges at the University of Glasgow (College of Arts, College of Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences, College of Science & Engineering, and College of Social Sciences). Since it was not feasible to gather information from the whole population, the study aimed to gather a non-probability sample (Etikan et al., 2016). An explanation of the selection of the representative sample for this study follows. Here should be noted that given all participants are from the University of Glasgow, some parts of the Bronfenbrenner framework shared by all participants are only based on this university, which would be discussed further in the discussion chapter.

3.5.1. Sampling – non-probability/purposive sample

Sampling, described as the process of selecting participants, is an important step during the research process because it helps to inform the quality of the study. In both the quantitative and qualitative stages of my study, I needed to decide on the sample size and method of selecting these sample members (Etikan et al., 2016; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007).

Non-probability sampling is a sampling method whereby participants are not ‘randomly’ selected but are selected based on their convenient accessibility to the researcher (Bryman, 2012). In general, the choice of non-probability sampling is attributable to its cost-effectiveness and time-effectiveness (e.g., Bryman, 2012). One of the most common types of non-probability sampling, convenience sampling, is a method of selecting only participants who are readily accessible. For example, if the population of interest is PGT students across the UK and this study only invites students from one university to participate, this is an example of a non-probability sample because students from other universities have no chance to participate. Thus, again, this study used the non-probability sampling method. Detailed discussion about the sampling for phases one and two will be provided in the next sections.

However, the sample is considered more contextually restricted to participants on the PGT programme starting 2017-2018 at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, thus, it was necessary to put in more effort to ensure the sample was a relatively fair reflection of the target population of the study. To try to get a more representative sample not only focus on certain subjects or programmes, this study recruited from multiple schools and programmes from the University of Glasgow. Although it cannot be guaranteed that this sample was perfectly representative since it was not entirely random, it is still arguable that this study did what it could to achieve its aim of getting a rounded sample, and this may somewhat mitigate the limitations above.

Additionally, another limitation is that this study does not consider that different disciplinary cultures would have different influences on students. That is, according to Becher (1989), disciplines differ in terms of gaining knowledge as well as in the social dimensions of students. Thus, from this viewpoint, one university shall consist of a variety of academic cultures, each with different aims, values, norms and basic beliefs (e.g., Ylijoki, 2000). This study is aware that this ‘academic tribes’ (Becher & Trowler, 2001) would be related to students’ help-seeking behaviour in different disciplines, yet this study was not aimed at understanding each discipline’s students’ thoughts and how their ‘individual’ thoughts would influence their ways of seeking help. This study is aimed at understanding the overall phenomenon of PGT students’ help-seeking in this university; it will only be considered in the context of the general environment over the university, rather than examining each discipline from a unique angle to understand the specifics of help-seeking behaviour in each area. The findings nevertheless have the potential to generate valuable insights into

understanding this university's students in particular and apply the results and the theory for further studies.

3.5.1.1. Sample selection process (Phase One)

The sample selection process began through each school across the four different colleges within the university. I requested permission via email from programmes within each school to be allowed to contact students to invite them to participate in this study.

At the end of the permission-requesting period, three programmes and six schools agreed and gave permission to access their students. A total 105 postgraduate taught students (72 females and 31 males, and one who preferred not to say) completed the survey. Analysis of standard residuals was carried out on the data to identify any outliers or missing data; one was removed, and as a result the sample size was reduced to $N = 104$ (99%).

The participants were postgraduate taught students from China ($n = 40$); the United Kingdom ($n = 30$), the United States ($n = 9$); and 19 other nations (e.g., France, Indonesia, $n = 25$). For the Chinese samples, there were 29 females and 10 males, with one who preferred not to say, aged between 22 and 26 years old ($M = 23.54$ years, $SD = 2.83$); for the United Kingdom, there were 24 females and six males aged between 22 and 62 ($M = 31.32$ years, $SD = 10.62$). See Table 3-2 below. To determine whether the sample sizes provided sufficient statistical power to conduct correlational analyses with the number of variables in this study, I have consulted Cohen's (1988, 1992) table and book, which indicate that each of the sample sizes (UK, $n = 30$; China, $n = 40$) was sufficient for detecting between medium and large effect sizes at $\alpha = .05$ level with 80% power.

Table 3-2

Frequency and percentage of demographic characteristics of Phase One and Two participants

Demographic (Phase One)	<i>n</i> (%)	Demographic (Phase Two)	<i>n</i> (%)
<i>N</i> = 104		<i>N</i> = 14	
Gender		Gender	
Male	31 (29.8)	Male	3 (21.4)
Female	72 (69.2)	Female	11 (78.6)
Did not report	1 (1)	Did not report	0
Nationality		Nationality	
China	40 (38.5)	China	8 (57.1)
U.K.	30 (28.8)	U.K.	6 (42.9)
Other	34 (32.7)		
College Name		College Name	
College of Arts	15 (14.4)	College of Arts	2 (21.4)
College of Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences	6 (5.8)	College of Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences	1 (7.15)
College of Science & Engineering	25 (24)	College of Science & Engineering	1 (7.15)
College of Social Sciences	42 (40.4)	College of Social Sciences	5 (35.7)
Did not report	16 (15.4)	Adam Smith Business School School of Education/Psych ology (Con.)	4 (28.6)

Note. Con. means conversion course

3.5.1.2. Sample selection process (Phase Two)

For the second qualitative phase this study use the non-probability purposive sampling as this phase specifically looked for particular characteristics, trying to get a certain number of Chinese and British participants, and purposefully targeting a range of majors. In this phase, the participants were purposefully selected based on either British nationals or Chinese international students and those who leave their email address during phase one.

A total of 28 (15 from the UK; 13 from China) survey respondents in Phase One indicated they were willing to participate in the follow-up interview in Phase Two, but only 19 left their email addresses to be contacted. After emailing these 19 potential participants, only 12 indicated they were willing to participate in the interviews. Additional recruitment was conducted since the participants from Phase One's participant pool had not generated enough responses, and there were imbalances between Chinese students (eight) and British students (three), which was not sufficiently balanced to make a comparison. Therefore, an amendment to the original ethics approval was requested and approved in order to recruit up to five more PGT students from one PGT programme at the university to participate in the

interview portion of the study. Eventually, three British students who were not among the Phase One participants were recruited. In the end, there were a total of 14 participants (six from the UK; eight from China) for the individual interviews in Phase Two, the participants used pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality (for further details, see Section 3.7).

3.6. Data Collection/Procedure

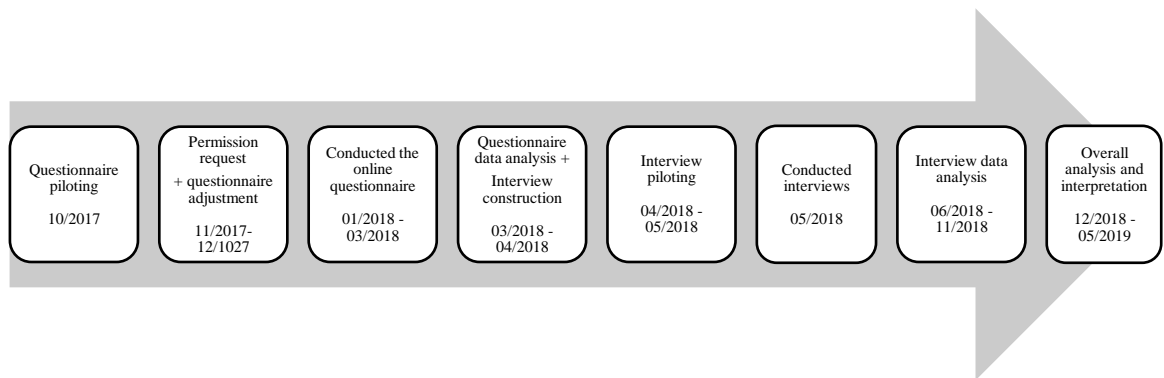


Figure 3-2. *The timeline of the data collection*

The steps and timeline are displayed above in Figure 3-2. The data collection for both the pilot study and the formal online questionnaire and interview took approximately eight months (from October 2017 to June 2018), during which the online questionnaire was distributed, the quantitative questionnaire result were analysed, and the interviews were planned and arranged.

Noteworthy from the timeline is that the online questionnaire was conducted around the beginning of the second semester on the academic year 2017/2018, which was just the start of the studying period and before the time when the students were preparing for their exams; whereas the interview was conducted around the time after the exam, when the students were preparing for their dissertations. The reason for choosing these two specific points in time was because, during the first semester, the students might still need to adapt to the new environment, and they might not yet be aware of the need to seek help or be willing to ask for it. After the Christmas break, they would know their grades from the first semester, which would possibly increase their awareness of seeking help or change the way they might seek it. As for the timing of the interviews, I chose the time after the exam period because I did not want to disturb the students' exam revision. Also, the time of the interview could be the time they were having different feelings/experiences about help-seeking, meaning they could reflect back on their courses from the year, as they had just finished their exams and

needed to prepare for their dissertations. The following sections will provide more details about the data collection procedure.

3.6.1. Piloting

A pilot study is typically a small-scale methodological trial to prepare for the main study and check the effectiveness of the methods (Jairath et al., 2000). In this thesis, the piloting was pre-testing undertaken prior to distributing the online questionnaire and carrying out interviews to validate the instruments (Scott & Usher, 2011). The purpose was to help identify any issues before carrying out the main study, and to improve the trustworthiness of the study (Kim, 2011). Therefore, the pilot study was conducted to support the main study by exploring whether any questionnaire or interview questions needed to be modified and by identifying potential practical issues.

In this study, piloting for both the questionnaire and interviews was conducted with a small sample ($n = 10$ for Phase One, $n = 5$ for Phase Two) of PhD students who were not included in the formal sample. The online questionnaire was piloted via emails, and face-to-face interviews were conducted for interview piloting. The piloting paid attention to collecting feedback on the issues of the clarity of the content of the questions and the language used as well as calculating the approximate time for the survey and interview completion. When piloting the online questionnaire, I paid particular attention to the feedback on the questionnaire formatting and the wording of each question and avoided having excessively lengthy sections. I sent the feedback comments and the results to my supervisors to discuss any adjustments before the formal data collection. After the revisions been made, my supervisors did a final check of the survey (i.e., by doing the survey from beginning to the end) to check each section in terms of logic and wording.

For the interview, the English version was piloted with two native English-speaking students to ensure the interview guide was appropriate and clear. The language translation was given careful attention to make sure the Chinese version's interview guide had the same meaning as the English version's (as discussed in Section 3.4.4.1). Therefore, the Chinese version was piloted with three participants who use Chinese as their first language.

Following the piloting feedback, adjustments were made to the wording and the language of several questions in both the interview and questionnaire. For example, the questionnaire piloting indicated that the questionnaire structure was not well organised, as the same types

of sections were not put together, which would make the participants wonder why this set of questions had come around again. As for the interview piloting, the English version was generally smooth, but it was suggested that some sentences in the Chinese version should be re-worded to allow the Chinese students to understand better. In general, as the interview guide was built together with my supervisors and had been checked by them before and after piloting, there were just minor changes to the wording. The final versions of the questionnaire and interview guide are available in Appendices 1 and 2. The questionnaire could be completed in about 25 minutes, and each interview lasted approximately 20-40 minutes. Overall, the piloting stages for both the interview and questionnaire helped me make effective amendments to those instruments prior to data collection.

3.6.2. Phase One: Quantitative online survey

Prior to beginning the data collection, the study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the College of Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow (see Appendix 3). Phase One was an online survey. After getting permission from the university gatekeepers, I sent an email to the postgraduate students who gave permission at the University of Glasgow in the four main colleges (see Table 3-2 for the participants' details). Students could participate in this study by clicking the link which was provided in the email. The link took them to a website that contained the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form. The survey was designed using Google Forms: <https://docs.google.com/forms>. Google Forms is allowed to be used freely for non-commercial educational and research purposes and the Ethics Committee approved its use. In order to boost the participants' interest, a reward was provided. Participants were informed that if they responded to the survey, they would be entered into a link for a £5, £10, £15 or £20 gift certificate to the online retailer Amazon.co.uk. Prior to giving their consent, participants were told that they had the right to omit or refuse to answer any questions, and if they did not want to get involved in the study, they could simply not complete the questionnaire. After being shown the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form and indicating their consent by ticking a box on the first page of the online survey, participants could then proceed to the survey, which contained all the measures employed in the present study, as well as a background information questionnaire (e.g., gender, age, university status, major and cultural background). It typically took 15-25 minutes to finish the entire online survey.

3.6.2.1. Reliability and validity

When conducting research, the validity represents the trustworthiness of findings (McMillan, & Schumacher, 2010), whereas the reliability focuses on the issue of the consistency of a measure (Bryman, 2012). In the quantitative phase, a series of standardised questionnaires were used. As discussed in Chapter Two and here in this chapter, all the measurements had already been tested and validated in published studies across various samples. For this study, the construct validity of the questionnaire was supported through careful review of the measures with supervisors to ensure it was meaningful, though slight revision of the measures to make sure it was appropriate for this Scottish university context, and through the piloting and adjusting of the questionnaire. In the course of online questionnaire data analysis, the internal reliability of all the measurements was sought via Cronbach's alpha (α), which was calculated using the statistical package of SPSS. The results of Cronbach's α value were shown above in Section 3.4.2. The value generally acceptable in social research is $\alpha = .70$ or above, indicating the questionnaire is of good reliability (e.g., Sijtsma, 2009).

3.6.3. Phase Two: Qualitative semi-structured interviews

Phase Two of this mixed-methods research study involved conducting one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted after the preliminary analysis of the questionnaire data, as has been explained in Section 3.3. The content and methodological nature of the interview was developed after the surveys, and then further refined after the pilot study. This phase aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the type of help the participants would seek and any potential differences between these two groups when it comes to seeking study-related help.

To remedy the likelihood of low response rates and willingness to attend the interviews, a reward was provided. Participants were informed that there was a chance to win an additional £20 gift card if they participated in an interview in addition to the survey. From the online questionnaires returned, 28 participants indicated their willingness to be contacted for the follow-up interviews. I then contacted these 28 participants, and 12 indicated that they were willing to participate in the interviews. However, as mentioned in Section 3.5, I then determined that 12 participants was not sufficient for Phase Two as only four British students versus eight Chinese international students, and I needed to find more British participants to have balance. Ultimately, 14 participants took part in the interviews; for more details, see Section 3.5.1.2 above.

All the interviews were conducted in an empty conference room in the campus library at the University of Glasgow, and one interview used Skype Connect (a web collaboration tool) to conduct a virtual interview with a participant outside the campus. The conference room was chosen with the intention of creating a quiet and comfortable interview atmosphere. At the beginning of the interview process, along with collecting ethical consent, permission was also sought from the participants to record the interview, the purpose of which was to help me with the transcription data analysis (Silverman, 2013). On average, the interviews lasted approximately 20-40 minutes. During the interviews, notes and the key comments were made about the participants' reactions. After each interview finished, I spent five to ten minutes summarising the comments and the key message from the participants and provided suggestions about how they could gain more help if they needed it through the university, and I made sure they left with basic information about the study. Afterwards, to ensure confidentiality and security, the data was saved in a secure folder on the private laptop that only I could access in preparation for transcription.

3.6.3.1. Trustworthiness

Similar to the quantitative phase, trustworthiness is also an important criterion for assessing the quality of qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). In order to establish trustworthiness, before the formal interview data collection, piloting was conducted to ensure clarity and suitability (Jairath et al., 2000). A pilot study serves as a series of small trials to identify potential or possible problems before the formal data collection, and, therefore, can improve the trustworthiness of the qualitative research.

In addition to the pilot study, throughout the interview data collection process, I checked and developed my interview skills by becoming more aware of my tone. During the interviews, my goal was for the participants to have the chance to express their feelings freely without any judgement, and I tried to avoid disturbing the participants' responses or expecting any answer to support the expected knowledge (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, to ensure dependability, all the records were kept securely in an organised way throughout the research process, from ethics application, participant recruitment, data collection and interview transcripts to data analysis.

After the data collection, I aimed to be systematic, rigorous and thorough in the analysis to help support the study's credibility; the steps of the analysis are further described in Section 3.8.2. To ensure the trustworthiness of the transcription, I contacted participants to check

through the transcriptions to ensure their voices, asking them to return a confirmation of the record. However, it was mainly Chinese students and one British student who replied to my emails or social media messages due to their mobility after graduation. Some Chinese participants corrected a few small mistakes in the interview transcripts, and I then checked the coding process and arrived at similar results. All the transcriptions and the code had cross-checks to enhance and ensure the logic of the data coding and interpretation, which increased the confirmability by ensuring that I avoided applying personal values or theoretical perspectives to the results.

However, it is possible that my personal experience as a previous international student and previous PGT student at the University of Glasgow may have influenced the data collecting and result interpreting, causing some bias. For example, I might have felt more related to students in the same programme I was in if they were having the same issue I had had. Despite that, I was aware that I should not let my personal experience influence my position during the research, and I had to follow the research procedures carefully to be an independent and professional researcher when conducting the research. Therefore, throughout the process, I tried to remain neutral, open-minded and aware of my own biased perceptions to allow open answers or opinions on help-seeking behaviour, and I analysed the data on each academic experience from a critical perspective. As such, this research has attempted to be trustworthy not just by piloting but throughout every aspect of the study, and I tried to ensure the participants' thoughts are heard validly.

3.7. Ethical considerations

According to Bryman (2012), ethics in research goes beyond just seeking consent; it can refer to the consideration of the integrity of the research, which can be impacted at a variety of stages in social research. Therefore, it is widely acknowledged that those undertaking research should be fully aware of the ethical aspects of their study (e.g., Johnson, 2003; Sales & Folkman, 2005) as failing to do compromises the research (Johnson, 2003; The British Psychological Society, 2006).

For this study, before the data collection proceeded, an application for ethics was carefully prepared, submitted, and then reviewed by the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow. Once ethics approval was received, I proceeded with the data collection phase. There are three major ethical considerations in the study: informed consent, confidentiality or privacy, and potential risk assessment (Cohen et al., 2011). As this study's

participants were all adults, the methods were not intrusive, and asking about everyday occurrences of academic help-seeking is usually not a sensitive issue, so the study was considered low-risk for both the participants and the researcher. With the second ethical consideration of informed consent, the study provided all participants with the Plain Language Statement to inform them about the aim of the research, what the study required them to do, and to confirm that their participation would be voluntary (see Appendix 4). Finally, to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, they were assured anonymity and the use of pseudonyms in the whole thesis while analysing and presenting data. Moreover, the participants were informed that all identifying data would be deleted after completion of the research. If the students agreed to participate, they were then asked to read and sign the consent form (see Appendix 5).

More specifically, in Phase One, the online survey began with an electronic Plain Language Statement and Consent Form (see Appendices 4 and 5) that presented the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, the potential benefits and drawbacks of participating, and steps to protect confidentiality. To continue taking the survey, respondents needed to acknowledge that they had read the information and agreed to participate by ticking a box on the online survey. All data from the survey were kept in secured folders on my private laptop and password-protected so only I could access them. No participant names or other contact information was associated with their responses to the survey items. Although after the questionnaire was conducted, I knew all the potential interview participants' survey responses and contact information so I could invite them to do interviews, I only kept the survey data linked with their name until the interview phase was over, and then I deleted all personally identifiable data to ensure confidentiality. Upon the end of the online survey, participants were offered the opportunity to participate in Phase Two, the follow-up qualitative interviews. Participants willing to partake in an interview were asked to check a box to acknowledge their understanding, and enter their name and email address voluntarily. If participants did not want to continue to the second phase, clicking on the survey submit button allowed them to submit their online survey anonymously.

At the start of Phase Two, it became apparent that the recruitment procedures had to change as I needed to recruit some additional participants beyond those whom I had contacted through the survey. I therefore needed to amend the extra participant recruitment for Phase Two. The request for an amendment was sent for approval to the College Research Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow, and approval was received. During Phase Two, to

ensure privacy, in-person interviews were conducted in an empty conference room in the campus library at the University. To ensure privacy in the campus library, I reserved the conference room until the interview was completed. Additionally, at the beginning of each interview, I informed the participants that they could skip any questions that they felt uncomfortable answering. All consent forms were kept in a locked cabinet that only my supervisors and I could access, the online skype interview obtained with the e-version of consent form and kept in my personal laptop. During the study, I aimed to be open and honest in my procedures, followed the guidelines and recommendations for conducting surveys and interviews, kept clear records, and stored the research data responsibly to ensure the research was followed with integrity.

3.8. Data analysis

Mixed-methods research involves the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). In a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, “the key is that the qualitative data collection builds directly on the quantitative results” (Creswell, 2014, p. 224). The data collection and analysis therefore should take place in sequential phases, with the results of the first phase used to plan the analysis of the qualitative data collection. As this study used the explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach, the procedure for data analysis proceeded sequentially in three stages: 1) quantitative data analysis; 2) qualitative data analysis; and 3) synthesising the quantitative and qualitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The specific methods and steps of the analysis are described below.

3.8.1. Phase One: Quantitative data analysis

The use of the Google FormsTM allowed for all the survey data to be collected electronically and downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet. Some manipulation of the data within Excel was necessary prior to uploading to SPSS, such as removing responses that were mostly incomplete. Once loaded into SPSS, the first step taken was to again examine the database for missing data and recode each item (e.g., some items were reverse scored). With the incomplete data sets removed and the data recoded, probability plots were examined to ensure the data was normally distributed and met the assumptions necessary for data analysis procedures. As the distribution of the data was found to be significantly different than a normal distribution, adjustments or transformations to the data were deemed necessary. The

data analysis indicated that this study would be non-parametric (Field, 2009), so all the tests below were non-parametric.

After checking the distribution, checks were carried out for the descriptive statistical analysis, including the mean, median, range and standard deviation for each variable, as well as the Cronbach's alpha for each of the scales used in this study. This analysis was also carried out on the demographic variables. The descriptive statistics were analysed to determine whether the response rates were adequate for specific groups within the population. As this study used the nationality grouping variable, descriptive analysis is particularly important to ensure that there are enough cases in each group to facilitate further analysis. While this study initially intended to look more broadly at all PGT students and differences between different nationalities, upon analysing the data it became clear that it had two major groups – British and Chinese – and that other international student groups were too small to facilitate appropriate comparisons. This led this study to decide to focus all of the subsequent analyses and indeed the broader study on comparing British and Chinese students only.

After the demographic variables were analysed, descriptive analysis of each scale was conducted in order to identify the academic help-seeking behaviours of PGT students. Each of the specific research questions designated for Phase One (see Table 1-1) was analysed using appropriate statistical methods. For example, the analysis of the relationship between academic help-seeking and academic self-efficacy was assessed using the correlation analysis. The various statistical methods used in this study will be explained below. All the findings for Phase One are provided in Chapter Four, but the specific methods used and their rationale are explained in the following subsections.

Descriptive statistics

The first stage of the analysis involved drawing descriptive statistics in relation to all the demographic questions and the items developed from Phase One's findings. For those items with nominal or ordinal scales, frequency distribution was calculated. For those with interval scales, further analysis was conducted, including calculation of measures of central tendency and measures of skewness and kurtosis. This stage of the analysis allowed for an initial overview of the findings and provided this study with an opportunity to identify trends in the data (Creswell, 2012). Descriptive statistics yielded the mean, range and standard deviation of each item.

Factor/Scales reliability analysis

The factors/scales were tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha measures internal reliability by computing the average inter-item correlation of all the items within each of the multi-item scales used for each construct. All the Cronbach's alphas for each measure were reported in Section 3.4.2. Overall multiple-item scales that have a Cronbach's alphas of .7 or above are considered to have good reliability.

Non-parametric paired samples tests

When the distribution of the variables is non-parametric, alternative measures are used. The Friedman test is a statistical hypothesis test used to compare three or more measures on a single sample when the distribution is not normally distributed. Thus, the Friedman test was used when analysing the first research aim to determine whether there was an overall significant difference in each section within the sample. Where there was a significant overall difference, I performed the post-hoc Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test because I wanted to identify the particular difference within the dimension responsible for the significant difference. It should further be noted that the p values for each test (i.e., the Wilcoxon test) were then adjusted for multiple comparisons, using the Bonferroni adjustment method.

Correlation

Once the factors/scales were identified and tested for reliability, a correlation analysis was conducted to determine whether a relationship existed in a positive or negative way between academic/social self-efficacy and the academic help-seeking variables. For example, the correlational analyses were conducted to address research aim two, which seeks to examine the associations between academic/social self-efficacy and various aspects of academic help-seeking variables.

Mann-Whitney U test

The Mann-Whitney U test is a non-parametric test which can be used as an alternative to an independent samples t-test when the assumptions are not met (e.g., Green & Salkind, 2012). In this study, as the data were not normally distributed, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare groups. For example, in research aim 3, the Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in levels of self-efficacy of Chinese and British students.

By convention, when $p < .05$, it indicated a significant difference between the two population groups.

Fisher r-to-z transformation

The Fisher r-to-z transformation is a test that allows a researcher to compare two correlation scores and see whether they are significantly different. In this study, Fisher's r-z transformation was used to test whether the association between self-efficacy and academic help-seeking was stronger for Chinese students or for British students. The two correlation scores are compared, taking into account the sample size for each, and a z-score is then calculated. By convention, if the z score is greater than or equal to 1.96 or less than or equal to -1.96, the two correlations coefficients are considered significantly different at the .05 level of significance (suggesting a difference of correlation coefficients between two population groups) (Preacher, 2002).

Post-hoc power analysis

In addition to the sample size justification (see Section 3.5.1), post-hoc (also called retrospective) power analysis is used to test the strength of the study design after the study has been conducted (Mehmet Erturk, 2005). Some researchers recommend using post-hoc power to do the follow-up analysis when the finding is nonsignificant (e.g., Lenth, 2007), as the lack of significance could be due to low power, small groups or small effects. Thus, this study used *post-hoc power analysis* (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004) to determine the strength of the study design, and to determine how many participants would have been needed to increase the power coefficient to a more acceptable 0.8 level. As such, this post-hoc power analysis shall provide useful information for future research in this field, see Section 4.3.

3.8.2. Phase Two: Qualitative data analysis

In order to prepare the interview data for qualitative analysis, once the interview data was collected, it was transcribed. The process of transcription is a good starting point to allow the researcher to become familiar with the data, although it may be time-consuming (Bazeley, 2013). The process of transcription can help me to know the initially layer of data and let the me become familiar with the data by checking the wording and accuracy. Otranscribe (<https://otranscribe.com/>) was used to assist with the transcription of audio recordings.

Otranscribe's website has features to support variable speed playback, and it allows the feet to control the playback without keyboard input, increasing efficiency.

There are different approaches to making meaning out of qualitative data (e.g., Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, IPA, Smith & Osborn, 2003), but one of the main characteristics of IPA is that it focuses more on personal (individual) experiences and shows little regard for the wider social context of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). Although this qualitative study is aimed at understanding Chinese and British students' thoughts or experiences regarding their help-seeking behaviour, this study is not aimed at understanding each student's thoughts, so it would not be suitable to use IPA.

On the other hand, thematic analysis is a flexible approach that allows the researcher to deal with large amounts of data in a manageable way, and it is also an accessible approach for novice researchers (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, this study chose to follow a thematic analysis approach to analyse the qualitative data, as this type of analysis illustrates the data in great detail and can help the researcher reach different interpretations (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006), which allows the study to engage deeply and make thorough interpretations. See below for detailed information about thematic analysis.

Thematic Analysis

According to Creswell (2015), data analysis in qualitative research includes several phases: assembling the different types of data collected and ordering it logically for analysis; then creating codes using appropriate coding techniques and reorganising the data with proper categories; and finally writing up and presenting the analysed data. Once all the transcriptions were completed ($N = 14$), the first phase was finished. Following that, coding techniques and software were used to code the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With the assistance of QSR International's Nvivo Software 12, it was organised and analysed using deductive thematic analysis to identify themes aligned with the research aims/questions, then I decided to add inductive thematic analysis as some additional information developed and were constructed from interview result, as is introduced below.

The primary method of analysis for the qualitative interview data in this study was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting themes of patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006); it is a widely used analytic method for identifying data. Thematic analysis is a kind of approach to qualitative analysis that involves

searching for patterns or themes, remains theoretically flexible and can be adapted to suit the specific context of a particular study (Braun & Clarke, 2012). It should be noted, however, that some researchers argue that thematic analysis needs a framework, as thematic analysis alone has too much flexibility (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2012; Bryman, 2012). Thus, the theoretical framework was also applied to guide this study's thematic analysis. The process of thematic analysis for this study adopted the six-step guide suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) and aligned with Creswell (2014); it will be described in detail below.

In this study, the analysis started initially used deductive thematic analysis, looking for themes relating to academic help-seeking behaviour. However, as I engaged in the process, additional information appeared that was relevant to answering the research themes but was not evident in the existing theory. This led my analysis to start to look inductively at what the students were saying, which revealed some areas of real academic help-seeking experience. Although researchers generally use some deduction or conduct their study based on theoretical assumptions, sometimes new meaningful information might come out from the data which is crucial to record. Thus, these 'extra' pieces of information led this study to use inductive thematic analysis at the later stages of the analysis. Thus, this study resulted from the using the hybrid deductive/inductive approach (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) by used a combination of a priori deductive coding (i.e., using pre-defined codes deriving from the existing literature) and then developing inductive coding (i.e., using codes that were constructed directly from the data) (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Swain, 2018) for the final analysis of research data.

In detail, this study adopted thematic analysis and followed the Braun and Clark's (2006) recommended procedure, which comprises the following six phases in detail:

Phase One – Familiarisation with the data: this step is the next important step after the transcription. Folders were created to store and sort the participants' information, allowing me to see clearly what data there was for each participant. All transcripts were actively read multiple times and took notes to assist the analysis process as I began to think about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Summary sheets were created for each student listing certain information (e.g., gender, major), and went back to phase one to check the potential linking data.

Phase Two – Generating initial codes: following data familiarisation, the second stage of data analysis is coding, which is usually the most difficult phase. Coding is the beginning of

identifying patterns in the data in which similar data segments are grouped. The coding is first done in a deductive way, with the code identified in such a way that is more focused on the researcher's theoretical interests and knowledge from the literature (i.e., preliminary coding concept framework; see Table 3-3 below) and engages with the qualitative findings (see Appendix 6 for a sample of an extract of a coded transcript).

Table 3-3

Preliminary coding concept framework

Main category	Academic help-seeking process					
	Who	What	How	Why	Social aspects	Academic aspects
Personal factor						
Behaviour factor						
Environmental factor						
Individual layer						
Microsystem						
Exosystem						
Macrosystem						

The initial phase coding was done line-by-line to create openness to recurrent codes and themes. It also involved a synthesis of different sources of data from multiple participants' perspectives, allowing for an analysis that incorporates the changes in student behaviours and personal feelings and their decisions around seeking help. For example, interviewees from the same programmes were coded together to present a whole connected picture of the individual and overall students' PGT programme experience. The preliminary codes were numerous and descriptive. I labelled as many codes as possible during the early stage of analysis and then sorted the data to narrow it down to relevant help-seeking behaviour. The data analysis was theory-driven and focused on finding themes outlined in the research question and aims (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some codes were disregarded for being unable to address participants' experience of help-seeking process in the PGT context. I kept detailed paragraphs from the original text that explained the codes, ensuring there were sufficient examples to support the codes. Through this initial preliminary open coding, the collected data were broken into meaningful units of analysis in different formats, using words or long sentences related to the research aim/question and theoretical framework.

Although this was an early phase, the participant responses still were treated individually, allowing me to extract the intrinsic elements of information from each case. In the analysis, the initial coding concept framework and theoretical framework were kept in focus at all times so I was able to find the patterns that appeared relevant and significant in terms of the overall study objectives; these were labelled accordingly. The first round of coding was sent

to my supervisors, who both have experience in qualitative analysis and who cross-checked the codes and themes and help ensure the codes were matching, logical and reasonable.

Phase Three – Searching for themes among codes: After the open coding, several similar and related codes and labels could be categorised under a general theme (Creswell, 2007). After looking through the codes, I linked similar codes from the interview data into developing themes. For example, this study created several coding tags, such as gender factors, personality factors and family factors, then classified these under the broader theme of ‘influential factors’. This process entailed sorting all the different codes into sections and identifying the hierarchy. Additionally, codes with similar scope were combined into one theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and some codes were deleted because they offered insufficient support to address the research questions. During this phase, I began to organise the relationships between the themes and subthemes to see how they related to others, and I identified which themes were subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Again, to ensure trustworthiness and reliability, I sent the data analysis example with two transcriptions to my supervisor to cross-check the theme reliability and ensure the themes matched the quotes.

Phase Four – Reviewing the transcripts and themes: After linking the themes, I reviewed the transcripts again. Initial inductive codes were also added and used for analysis, either separate from or expanding on the deductive codes. The revised themes list was again sent to my supervisors, along with example quotes for the new themes so they could check the logic and credibility of the newly constructed themes list. This is a necessary step during the thematic analysis in order to ensure the themes are suitable and to ensure the relevant themes are in the right place and in good shape.

After cross-checking for the second time, I repeated the same process described in phase two, line-by-line coding, to identify any similarities or differences among students’ perceptions and interpretations of academic help-seeking behaviour. During this second-round data analysis, some patterns were constructed more clearly; the information appeared to be relevant to answering the research themes, but was not evident in the existing theory. After reading all the interviewees’ responses, I realised that the research data raised some important themes about how and why students did not seek help when they needed it, and I again adjusted the structure of the theme by adding some developing patterns/codes, and had my work further reviewed by my supervisors to ensure the study/theme’s trustworthiness.

After reviewing all the transcripts and checking through the data with my supervisors, the structure of the themes list was slightly changed, and some themes (subthemes) were also renamed based on my supervisors' advice. For example, in the case of my study, as Figure 3-3 shows, all these factors are named as 'influential factors' as all of them influence students' help-seeking behaviour. I then went through all the transcripts again with the updated coding framework (see Appendix 7).

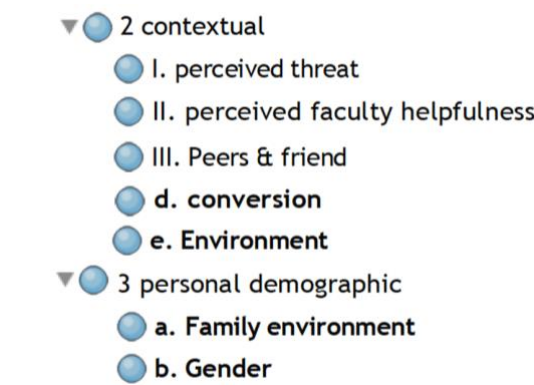


Figure 3-3. Screenshot of example themes list

Phase Five – Defining and naming themes: during this stage, the specifics of each theme are refined, and clear definitions and names for each theme are generated to ensure their conceptual clarity (Braun & Clark, 2006). This allows the themes to guide the researcher to make the data interpretation, and can clearly define what the themes are and what they are not. Thus, this set of the themes will then guide the data interpretation to focus on what factors play a part in the academic help-seeking process.

Phase Six – Producing the report: the study finally arrives at a final list of themes and subthemes, which informs the final analysis and write-up of the report. These findings are presented in Chapter Five.

Overall, the qualitative analysis followed the principles of data analysis, applying 'data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification' (Miles & Huberman, 2014, p. 12-14).

3.8.3. Synthesising the quantitative and qualitative findings

After both the quantitative and qualitative data analyses was complete, I needed to bring the data from both phases together and interpret them as a whole in order to draw some

conclusions. That is, connecting and integrating the data from the mixed-methods study allows for an in-depth understanding of the overall research purpose and the research aims (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Combining and integrating the findings led me to my overall key findings, which subsequently informed my theoretical framework. The theoretical framework contains the general insights on PGT students' academic help-seeking behaviour and the association between self-efficacy and help-seeking behaviour, the details of students' awareness of help-seeking, and how deep their understanding was of the different parts of the process of help-seeking. In addition, the results of this study provided a deeper understanding of both the British and the international Chinese students with regards to the factors influencing their help-seeking and their reflections on their academic performances in a Scottish context. By identifying some key findings after integrating the unique findings of each phase, the quantitative and qualitative results were brought together to address the four overall research aims.

3.9. Chapter summary

The chapter has discussed and presented the sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach for this study. This method was adopted to draw upon both qualitative and quantitative results to balance the potential weaknesses of each approach. Each individual approach was valuable and important, but there are limitations to all research methods, and this combination of questionnaires and interviews was chosen to best meet the research aims, and to be more reliable and flexible through the data collection and analysis. As the data obtained from each phase might be different but complement each other, this sequential explanatory method served an important role in addressing the research purposes.

In this study, the main purpose of conducting mixed-methods research was to achieve a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the research questions, looking at them not only from different angles but also from two different research frameworks. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design was used to address the research questions by using two phases of data collection: a quantitative online survey followed by qualitative semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data were analysed using inferential statistics to address each of the specific quantitative phases' research questions. The interview data was coded and analysed to identify common themes and trends across the data sources to address the qualitative phase's research questions. Chapters Four and Five will report on the findings from the quantitative and qualitative phases.

4. Chapter 4 Quantitative Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings drawn from the analysis of quantitative data in relation to factors influencing participants' decisions to seek academic help, as well as the association between academic help-seeking and self-efficacy (both academic and social) influencing students' experiences. The purpose of Phase One (the quantitative study) was to examine the influence of both academic and social self-efficacy on PGT students' decisions and attitudes toward seeking academic help. This study followed an explanatory sequential mixed-method design in which quantitative data were collected via an online survey.

The research questions developed were based on the constructs of academic help-seeking behaviour, academic self-efficacy and social self-efficacy, along with attitudes and perceptions of seeking academic help. This chapter is organised by the research questions. This phase of the research contributes to answering the first three research aims of the project. As a reminder, please see Table 1-1 for the full list of quantitative research questions.

4.2. Results

A series of different statistical tests were used in this study to make inferences based on the data collected (Cohen et al., 2007). The statistical tests used in this chapter require the data to meet certain assumptions. Thus, the independence of observation, normality and homogeneity were checked before performing analysis. Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk both suggested that all variables are not normally distributed (the help-seeking variables in this phase include adaptive help-seeking; avoidance help-seeking; preference for different modes of help-seeking; likelihood of going to different people for help; perceived benefits of help-seeking; perceived faculty helpfulness; and perception of help-seeking threat). Both tests showed a significant value for all variables ($p < .05$), which shows that the distribution is significantly different than a normal distribution. Therefore, all the tests conducted used the non-parametric alternative; for example, when running a correlation, I used a non-parametric correlation coefficient (Field, 2009).

4.2.1. Academic help-seeking within the PGT context

As a reminder, the first research aim for the study is to understand the process of academic help-seeking within the context of PGT studies. The statistical analysis intended to answer the following five research questions associated with this overarching aim: RQ1a) To what extent do PGT students engage in adaptive and avoidant help-seeking? RQ1b) What mode of communication are PGT students most likely to use for help-seeking? RQ 1c) Who are PGT students likely to intend to seek help from? RQ1d) How likely are PGT students to go to different sources for help? RQ1e) To what extent do PGT students perceive benefits and costs of academic help-seeking? To explore these patterns, a series of mean scores will be presented. The non-parametric version of the dependent t-test has been conducted to determine if the means are significantly different from each other within the sample. For example, by doing the comparison, to see the extent of PGT students engage in avoidant help-seeking or adaptive help-seeking behaviour.

The descriptive statistics on the study variables on each measure are presented in Table 4-1, which reports the mean and standard deviation for all the help-seeking variables.

Table 4-1*Means and standard deviations for the academic help-seeking variables*

Variable	Rating scale	PGT Overall	
		M	(SD)
1a: Ada HS	1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree	3.80	(.72)
1a: Avoi HS	1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree	2.17	(.92)
1b: Preference of seek help	1 = the first method I would use to	3.47	(1.80)
	6 = the last method I would use	2.59	(1.57)
	During class	3.89	(1.48)
	Before or after class	3.39	(1.83)
	During office hours	2.79	(1.51)
	Text or messaging apps	4.05	(1.70)
1c: Intention to seek help from	Email	3.40	(.78)
	Online discussion board	4.07	(.93)
	Instructors	2.44	(1.17)
	Classmates	1.60	(1.35)
1d: Frequency of seeking help from	Online/online forum	1.80	(1.42)
	See the instructor during office hours	2.16	(1.27)
	Consulted any teaching support after classes	2.07	(1.64)
	Consulted the instructor before or after class	3.34	(1.31)
1e: Benefits of HS	Accessed the online discussion board/forum in classes	4.31	(1.68)
	Asked a peer a question about classes	3.91	(.76)
	1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree	2.35	(.78)
1e: Faculty helpfulness	1 = disagree entirely to 5 = agree entirely		
1e: HS Threat	1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree		

Note. Ada HS = Adaptive Help-seeking; Avoi HS = Avoidant Help-seeking. Benefits of HS = Perceived Benefits of Help-seeking; Faculty helpfulness = Perceived faculty helpfulness; HS Threat = Help-seeking Threat.

The online survey measured the extent to which they reported that they engaged in adaptive help-seeking, which is seeking help when it is needed, or avoidant help-seeking (1a), which is not seeking help when it is needed. The results show that PGT students reported that they were more likely to use adaptive ($M = 3.80, SD = .72$) than avoidant help-seeking ($M = 2.17, SD = .92$), and the non-parametric version of the dependent t-test (i.e., the Friedman test) indicated that there was a statistically significant difference, $\chi^2(1) = 63.04, p < .001$. The result allows this study to say whether students, on average, report more adaptive help-seeking compared to avoidant help-seeking. However, although on average, students reported being more likely to engage in adaptive help-seeking, statistic still shows that 14% reported that they avoided seeking help, as they have indicated by ratings of $M = 3.25$ or higher on the avoidant help-seeking scale.

In terms of the mode of help-seeking or the preference of help-seeking (1b), the scale range positions 1 as the first method that they would use and 6 as the last (therefore lower scores mean greater use). As Table 4-1 and Figure 4-1 below illustrate, PGT students reported that they were less likely to choose to ask for help through online discussion boards ($M = 4.05, SD = 1.70$) and office hours ($M = 3.89, SD = 1.48$). They would more likely prefer to ask for help before or after class ($M = 2.59, SD = 1.57$) or by ask questions via email ($M = 2.79, SD = 1.51$).

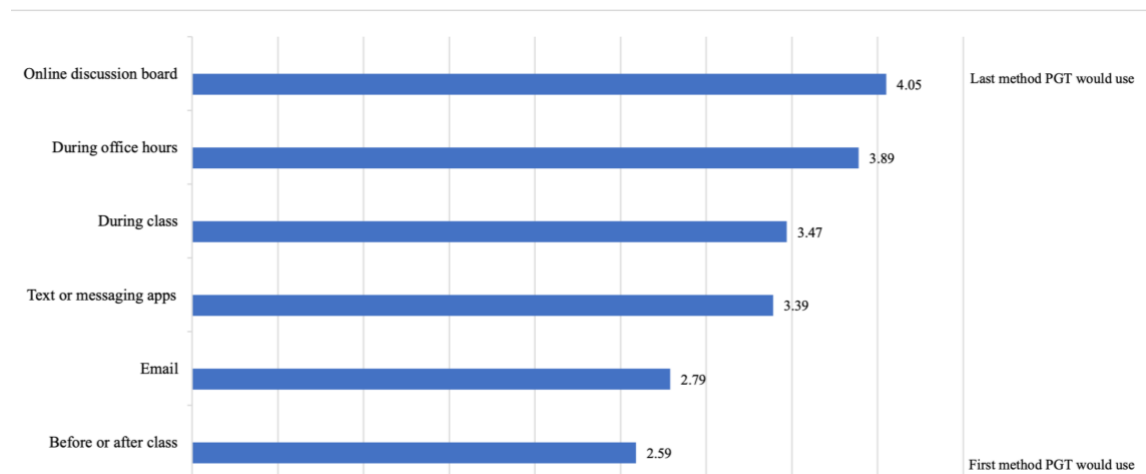


Figure 4-1. Comparison of mean scores for preference of mode of communication for seeking help (1b)

A Friedman test was run to examine the differences and the results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in preference of help-seeking, $\chi^2(5) = 60.06, p < .001$. Post-hoc analysis with Wilcoxon signed-rank tests was conducted with a Bonferroni

correction applied, resulting in a significance level set at $p < .008$. There were significant differences between ‘ask for help before or after class’ and all other sources except ‘email’ also, the ‘asking for help through online discussion boards’ also significant different from ‘email’; ‘text’, and ‘before or after class’. As Table 4-2 below shows, the results indicated that PGT would be more likely to seek help before or after class while not preferring to ask for help via online discussion boards.

Table 4-2

Results of Wilcoxon signed rank test of PGT students’ preferences of modes of communication to use for help-seeking

Z (p)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. During class	-	-4.38*	-1.78	-.24	-.267	-2.09
2. Before or after class		-	-5.70*	-3.00*	-.85	-5.18*
3. During office hours			-	-2.08	-5.23*	-1.01
4. Text or messaging apps				-	-2.76*	-2.90*
5. Email					-	-5.69*
6. Online discussion board						-

Note. Z represents Wilcoxon signed rank test coefficients, with Bonferroni correction applied, $p < .008$, *

The online survey also measured intention to seek help from different sources (1c). As indicated in Table 4-1 above, PGT students responded that they were most likely to ask a peer for help ($M = 4.07$, $SD = .93$), and least likely to seek help from online boards ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.17$). Again, in order to determine whether the all the intentions were significantly different from each other within the sample, the Friedman test was used. The results indicated there was a statistically significant difference in intention to seek help across the sources, $\chi^2(2) = 90.86$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc analysis with Wilcoxon signed-rank tests was conducted with a Bonferroni correction applied, resulting in a significance level set at $p < .017$. There were significant differences between the intention to seek help from a classmate and intention to seek help from an instructor ($Z = -6.40$, $p < .017$) and from online boards ($Z = -7.99$, $p < .017$). The intention to seek help from instructors was also significantly different from online boards ($Z = -6.13$, $p < .017$), indicating that PGT students reported that they were less likely to seek help from the online board/forum and more likely to seek help from peers than from instructors.

In order to understand how likely PGT students are to go to different sources for help (1d), the respondents were asked to report how likely they were to go to each source on a scale from 1 (not at all likely) to 5 (very likely). As indicated in Table 4-1 above and Figure 4-2 below, the PGT students rated that they were most likely to ask a peer for help ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.31$), and least likely to visit the instructor during office hours ($M = 1.60$, $SD = 1.35$).

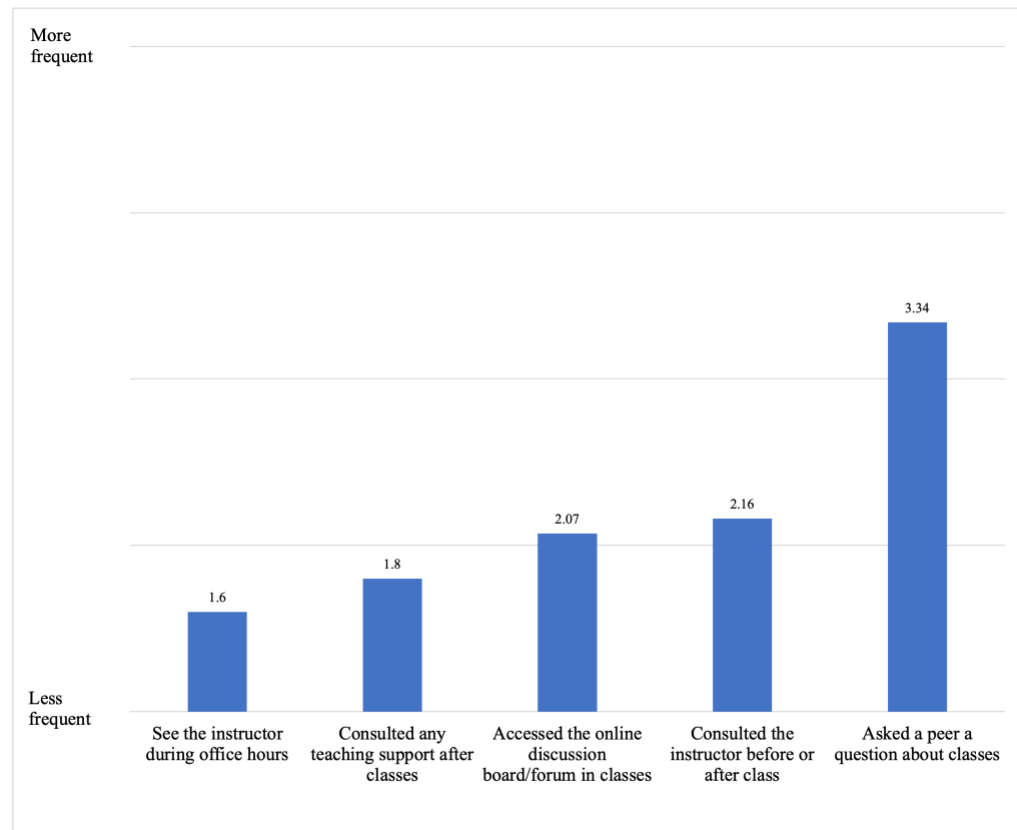


Figure 4-2. Comparison of mean scores for frequency of seeking help (1d)

The Friedman test suggested that there was a statistically significant difference in PGT students' likelihood of seeking help across the sources, $\chi^2(4) = 106.38, p < .001$. Post-hoc analysis with Wilcoxon signed-rank tests was conducted with a Bonferroni correction applied, resulting in a significance level set at $p < .01$. As can be seen in Table 4-3 below, there were a number of significant differences, most notably between asking a peer a question and all other types of helping sources. The results indicated that PGT students were more likely to ask a peer for help or ask the instructor before or after class. In contrast, they less frequently reported asking for help during office hours, which again aligns with the previous patterns uncovered for 1b and 1c.

Table 4-3

Results of Wilcoxon signed rank test of PGT students' frequency to go to different sources of people for help

<i>Z (p)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. See the instructor during office hours	-	-1.53	-3.98*	-2.63*	-7.07*
2. Consult any teaching support after classes		-	-3.10*	-1.58	-7.01*
3. Consult the instructor before or after class.			-	-.50	-6.49*
4. Access the online discussion board/forum in classes				-	-6.07*
5. Ask a peer a question about classes					-

Note. Z represent Wilcoxon signed rank test coefficients, with Bonferroni correction applied, $p < .01$, *

The online survey also measured students' attitudes toward help-seeking (1e). The results indicated that PGT students generally perceived an average level of the benefit of seeking academic help ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.68$), which is fairly moderate; and the students did not perceive a high level of threat when asking for academic help ($M = 2.35$, $SD = .78$), with the percentage rating around 2 (disagree) to 3 (neither agree/disagree). As for the helpfulness from the faculty, on average, they reported fairly high levels of perception of the faculty as helpful ($M = 3.91$, $SD = .76$), with the percentage rated around 3 (neither agree/disagree) to 4 (agree).

To understand more, the Friedman test was used and the results suggested that there was a statistically significant difference in these three different PGT attitudes toward help-seeking, $\chi^2(2) = 87.137$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc analysis with Wilcoxon signed-rank tests was conducted with a Bonferroni correction applied, resulting in a significance level set at $p < .017$. There were significant differences between the perceived threat and perceived benefit of help-seeking ($Z = -7.31$, $p < .017$) and perceived faculty helpfulness ($Z = -8.27$, $p < .017$), which indicated that PGT students' attitude toward help-seeking is generally positive as they perceived average moderate levels of benefit to seeking help and lower levels of threat to help-seeking, and a fairly high level of perception of the faculty when seeking help.

The purposes of research aim 1 (1a, b, c, d, e) was to understand the process of academic help-seeking within the context of PGT studies, how PGT students in this university perceive academic help-seeking, and which sources and modes they most like to use. It was mainly exploratory, as there was no specific hypothesis to predict the outcome, although it was predicted that PGT students would be more likely to seek help from peers than from other sources. These results suggest that PGT students prefer to ask for help from peers or directly before or after class if they have question, and are less likely to see help during office hours and from online boards. As expected, the results also indicated that PGT students in this Scottish university generally perceived moderate levels of benefit from asking for academic help, and perceived little threat. As for the type of help that PGT students engaged with, as expected, the students reported being more likely to use adaptive help-seeking than avoidance to seek help, yet some of them were still avoidant (one out seven, 14%). A more specific comparison between Chinese and British PGT students' ratings on these help-seeking variables will be presented in section 4.2.3.

4.2.2. The role of academic and social self-efficacy in PGT students' academic help-seeking

The second research aim is to understand the role of academic self-efficacy (ASE) and social self-efficacy (SSE) in PGT students' academic help-seeking in the quantitative phase. The statistical analysis aimed to address the following research questions: RQ2a) What is the relationship between ASE and the help-seeking variables? RQ2b) What is the relationship between SSE and the help-seeking variables? RQ2c) How does the relationship between SSE and help-seeking compare to the relationship between ASE and help-seeking? In order to address RQ 2a and 2b, correlational analyses were conducted to examine the associations between ASE/SSE with various aspects of academic help-seeking variables. Given that the data is non-parametric, Spearman's correlation was used. In order to test RQ 2c, Fisher's *r*-to-*z* transformation was used to compare the two correlations between these sets of groups.

4.2.2.1. ASE and SSE with academic help-seeking

A series of Spearman rank-order correlations were conducted in order to determine if there were any relationships between PGT students' ASE and help-seeking variables (2a). All the variables were significantly related to ASE except the intention to seek help on online discussion boards. For example, as can be seen in Table 4-4 below, there was a strong, negative correlation between ASE and students' perceived threat when they seek help ($r_s(104) = -.28, p < .01$), as well between ASE and help-seeking avoidance ($r_s(104) = -.38^{**}$). As the level of ASE rose, students were less likely to perceive threats to asking for academic help and were less likely to avoid seeking academic help.

A series of Spearman rank-order correlations were also conducted to test whether there were any relationships between PGT students' SSE and help-seeking variables (2b). Similar to ASE, there was a strong, negative correlation between SSE and student's perception of threat when they seek help ($r_s(104) = -.29, p < .001$); and help-seeking avoidance was also found to be related to students' SSE ($r_s(104) = -.27^{**}$). With higher levels of SSE, students were less likely to perceive threat to asking for academic help and were less likely to avoid seeking academic help (see Table 4-4). It also can be seen that SSE was not related to the type of help-seeking (e.g., adaptive help-seeking) or the intention of help-seeking sources (instructors and online boards), but it did significantly relate to the intention to seek help from peers ($r_s(104) = .32^{**}$), which indicated that students who had higher SSE were more likely to seek academic help from their peers. Interestingly, the ASE and SSE correlation

indicated that these two variables were connected. The higher the ASE PGT is, the higher SSE they have, which suggested, as ASE and SSE are both related to academic help-seeking, that self-efficacy is important for PGT students when they seek help.

Table 4-4

Intercorrelations of ASE and SSE and the help-seeking variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. ASE	-	.21*	.32**	.35**	-.28**	.19*	-.38**	.21*	.25**	.04
2. SSE		-	.27**	.26**	-.29**	.19	-.27**	.16	.32**	.05
3. Benefits of HS			-	.21*	-.20*	.40**	-.26**	.43**	.36**	.14
4. Faculty helpfulness				-	-.25*	.28**	-.29**	.34**	.33**	.01
5. HS Threat					-	-.10	.40**	-.26**	-.32**	.06
6. Ada HS						-	-.11	.29**	.28**	.05
7. Avoi HS							-	-.42**	-.25*	.00
8. From instructor								-	.45**	.11
9. From Classmate									-	.14
10. Online forum										-

Note. Table presents Spearman's correlation coefficients. $p < .05$, *, $p < .01$, **.

4.2.2.2. Comparing PGT students' ASE and SSE with academic help-seeking

In order to compare the relative associations between ASE and SSE with each of the academic help-seeking variables (2c), Fisher's r-to-z transformation was used to compare the correlations (see Table 4-5 below). The Fisher r-to-z transformation determined that the correlation of help-seeking variables was not significantly different between ASE and SSE. In other words, ASE and SSE operated similarly for students which indicated that both ASE and SSE are important for PGT students' help-seeking.

Table 4-5

Comparing correlations of ASE and SSE with help-seeking variables

	ASE (Spearman r)	SSE (Spearman r)	Z (Fisher r-to-Z comparison)
Ada HS	.19	.19	.04
Avoi HS	-.38	-.27	-.92
From instructor	.21	.16	.38
From classmate	.25	.32	-.50
Online forum	.04	.05	-.09
Benefit of HS	.32	.27	.40
Faculty helpfulness	.35	.26	.64
HS threat	-.28	-.29	.02

Note. Spearman r represent Spearman's correlation coefficients. Z represent Fisher r-to-Z comparison coefficients. $p < .05$, *, $p < .01$, **.

The purposes of research aim 2 (2a, b, c) were to understand the roles of ASE, SSE and other potential factors that influence PGT students' academic help-seeking. As expected, the result for 2a indicated that ASE was significantly related to academic help-seeking variables. PGT students' ASE positively related to the perceived benefits of help-seeking, and they felt that faculty were helpful. Meanwhile, ASE negatively related to students' avoidant help-seeking, and their perception of help-seeking as threatening. Thus, as was expected, students with a higher sense of ASE saw greater benefits to academic help-seeking and were more likely to seek help when in need. Interestingly, the analysis of 2b suggested that SSE matters as well. It indicated that students with higher SSE, who feel confident about their relationships or social interactions with other people, were confident going to others if they needed help; while students with lower SSE feel more threatened so were more likely to avoid seeking help. As can be seen in the analysis of 2b, SSE is positively related to the perception of the benefits of help-seeking, and feeling that faculty are helpful, while SSE is also negatively related to students' avoidant help-seeking, and perception of help-seeking as threatening. Thus, as was expected, students with a higher sense of SSE saw greater benefits of academic help-seeking and were less likely to avoid seeking help. That is to say, as academic help-seeking is a process which involved students making contact with other people, which means not only the ASE is important to the academic experience or behaviour, SSE is also relevant in this process. To understand whether or not there is any difference between ASE and SSE with academic help-seeking process, 2c's results were analysed. The results suggested that both ASE and SSE were significantly related to academic help-seeking variable either in positive or negative ways, but there is no significant difference among the relationship between ASE and SSE with the help-seeking variable, which draws attention to the fact that both ASE and SSE operated similarly for students and were shall be equally important to the academic help-seeking process.

4.2.3. The similarities and differences between Chinese and British students in the academic help-seeking process

The third set of research questions broadly aim to understand the differences between Chinese and British students. The analysis intended to answer the following three research questions associated with this overarching aim: RQ3a) Do Chinese and British students differ in their levels of reported ASE and SSE? RQ3b) Do Chinese and British students differ in reporting different help-seeking variables? RQ3c) Do Chinese and British students differ in terms of the relationship between SSE/ASE and help-seeking variables? As with research aim 3, the Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in self-

reported levels of ASE/SSE between Chinese and British students, and Fisher's t-to-z transformation was used to compare the correlation in order to test whether there were any differences between Chinese and British students in terms of the relationships between self-efficacies and help-seeking variables.

4.2.3.1. Comparing Chinese and British students' ASE and SSE

As a reminder, the sample size was $n = 40$ Chinese international PGT students and $n = 30$ British PGT students. In order to test the first of these research questions, a Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in the two groups' self-reported levels of ASE/SSE (3a). The results suggested that there was no statistically significant difference between the groups when they rated their levels of self-efficacy.

A Mann-Whitney U test showed that the reported levels of ASE for Chinese ($M = 3.34$, $SD = .84$) and British ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .73$) PGT students were not statistically significantly different: $U = 494.5$, $z = -1.26$, $p = .21$. The SSE scores for Chinese ($M = 3.22$, $SD = .49$) and British ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .69$) students were also not statistically significantly different, $U = 583$, $z = -.20$, $p = .84$.

Surprisingly, these results suggest that nationality does not have a significant effect on level of SSE and ASE, although it was expected that there would be differences among Chinese and British students regarding their levels of self-efficacy. However, the data shown above still suggested that there may be some differences, although not quite reaching statistical significance. Specifically, the results showed that the way British individuals rate themselves was differ than Chinese students, as British students rated their levels of ASE more highly than Chinese students; while in the meantime, British students self-rated lower SSE than Chinese students.

4.2.3.2. Comparing Chinese and British students' academic help-seeking

The Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in the academic help-seeking variables between Chinese and British students (3b). It was expected that British students would rate higher on adaptive help-seeking and Chinese students would rate higher on avoidant help-seeking. Unexpectedly, as can be seen in Table 4-6, the results show that the score of avoidant help-seeking for Chinese ($M = 2.11$, $SD = .86$) and British ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.07$) students were not significantly different, $U = 562$, $z = -.22$, $p = .82$.

Similarly, in terms of adaptive help-seeking, Chinese ($M = 3.77$, $SD = .82$) and British ($M = 3.74$, $SD = .53$) students were not statistically significantly different, $U = 550.5$, $z = -.59$, $p = .554$, using an exact sampling distribution for U (Dinneen & Blakesley, 1973).

Table 4-6

Comparison of nationalities in different types of help-seeking

Variable	Chinese PGT <i>M (SD)</i>	British PGT <i>M (SD)</i>	Mann-Whitney (Z)
Ada HS	3.77 (.82)	3.74 (.53)	-.59
Avoi HS	2.11 (.86)	2.28 (1.07)	-.23

Note. Table represent Mann-Whitney coefficients. $p < .05$, *.

Again, unexpectedly, these results suggest that nationality did not have an effect on overall reported academic help-seeking behaviours. However, it is possible they may differ in other aspects of academic help-seeking.

The Mann-Whitney U test was also conducted to determine whether there were differences between British and Chinese students in their preferences of using a variety modes of communication to seek academic help. It was expected that Chinese and British students would prefer to ask for help in different ways. The distributions of the scores for Chinese and British were not similar, as can be assessed by a visual inspection (see Table 4-7). However, none of these differences reached statistical significance. Seeking help in different modes was not different among British and Chinese students. For example, the scores for asking for help in person before or after class were not statistically significantly different for Chinese ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.51$) and British ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.32$) students, $U = 443.0$, $z = -1.77$, $p = .77$. Considering the results alongside the results for research aim 1, there was surprisingly no difference, but it can still be seen in Table 4-7 that British and Chinese students' preference were similar but slightly different, as the British and Chinese students both chose in person during office hours and online boards as the last modes that they would be likely to use to seek help, while email and before/after class were the preferred ways. Interestingly, however, the Chinese students' most preferred method was to ask for help in person before or after class, while British students reported being more likely to ask for help through email. Therefore, although there is no significant difference in the frequency of seeking help, the patterns still suggest that different groups may have different utilisations of sources, as Table 4-7 demonstrates.

Table 4-7*Comparison of nationalities preferences for seeking help*

Variable	Chinese PGT <i>M (SD)</i>	British PGT <i>M (SD)</i>	Mann-Whitney U (Z)
In person during class	3.25 (1.71)	3.80 (1.86)	-1.19
In person before or after class	2.31 (1.51)	2.80 (1.32)	-1.77
In person during office hours	3.98 (1.64)	3.87 (1.43)	-.47
Through text or messaging apps	3.46 (1.85)	3.37 (1.94)	-.30
Through email	2.85 (1.64)	2.63 (1.43)	-.46
Through online discussion boards or forums	3.83 (1.75)	4.33 (1.42)	-1.11

Note. Table represents Mann-Whitney coefficients. $p < .05$, *

In addition to the communication mode preference, the Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine if there were differences in frequency for difference sources of help (i.e., how British and Chinese students differ in going to different sources). As can be seen in Table 4-8 below, there were significant differences in the amount of consulting teaching support after class between Chinese ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.31$) and British students ($M = 1.37$, $SD = 1.38$), $U = 357.5$, $z = -2.83$, $p < .01$, as well as in the frequency of asking peers questions about classes, between Chinese ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.35$) and British students ($M = 3.87$, $SD = .73$), $U = 357.5$, $z = -2.63$, $p < .01$, using an exact sampling distribution for U (Dinneen & Blakesley, 1973). In addition, as Table 4-8 shows that there is also there were significant differences in the intention to seek help from classmates and from online forum, The results indicate that British students asked peers for help more often or more intended to than Chinese students did, and Chinese students more frequently or more intention to used teaching support after class or from online forum than British home students, all these results suggesting that different groups used their sources with different frequencies, even if it is not all statistically significantly different, as can be seen from Table 4-8.

Table 4-8*Comparison of nationalities in frequency of seeking help*

Variable	Chinese PGT <i>M (SD)</i>	British PGT <i>M (SD)</i>	Mann-Whitney U (Z)
See the instructor during office hours	1.93 (1.33)	1.50 (1.28)	-1.18
Consult any teaching support after classes	2.36 (1.31)	1.37 (1.38)	-2.83**
Consult the instructor before or after class	2.35 (1.25)	2.00 (1.26)	-.95
Access the online discussion board/forum in classes	2.53 (1.45)	2.03 (1.65)	-1.20
Ask a peer a question about classes	3.08 (1.35)	3.87 (.73)	-2.63**
From instructor	3.44 (.77)	3.34 (.86)	-.07
From classmate	3.78 (.98)	4.45 (.67)	-2.82*
Online forum	2.85 (1.10)	2.22 (1.01)	-2.22*

Note. Table represent Mann-Whitney coefficients. $p < .05$, *, $p < .01$, **.

To find out whether the nationality would affect their attitudes toward academic help-seeking – in other words, to determine if there were differences in the perceived benefit of help-seeking and the cost of seeking help – a Mann-Whitney U test analysis was carried out. The perceptions of faculty helpfulness scores for Chinese ($M = 3.87$, $SD = .93$) and British ($M = 3.85$, $SD = .53$) students were not statistically significantly different, $U = 529$, $z = -.85$, $p = .40$. The perceived benefits of help-seeking scores for Chinese ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.46$) and British ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.89$) students were not statistically significantly different either, $U = 563$, $z = -.44$, $p = .66$. However, students from different countries did perceive different levels of help-seeking threat. That is, help-seeking threat scores for Chinese ($M = 2.65$, $SD = .71$) were higher than for British students ($M = 2.11$, $SD = .81$) and these were significantly different, $U = 340$, $z = -3.10$, $p < .01$. Thus, these results suggest that nationality could have an effect on attitude toward seeking help in an academic context, which suggests that Chinese individuals' perception of help-seeking as a threat is higher than British individuals'.

4.2.3.3. Comparing the relationships between ASE, SSE and academic help-seeking between Chinese and British students

In order to test whether there were any differences between Chinese and British students in terms of the relationship between self-efficacy and help-seeking (3c), a series of Spearman correlations were conducted, and the Fisher r-to-z transformation was also used to compare the correlations.

The correlations results indicated that the relationship between ASE/SSE and help-seeking threat was negatively correlated for British students ($r = -.38$ (ASE), $p < .05$; $r = -.50$ (SSE), $p < .01$). In other words, both ASE and SSE appeared to be equally associated with perceived help-seeking threat for British students.

Self-efficacy was more associated with perceived faculty helpfulness in British than Chinese students, as is shown in Table 4-9 below; both ASE ($r = .519$, $p < .001$) and SSE ($r = .32$, $p < .05$) are significantly related to perceived faculty helpfulness. For Chinese students, on the other hand, perception of faculty helpfulness was only related to their SSE. As Table 4-9 shows, the results also suggest that SSE is more significantly related to a range of different help-seeking variables for British students than Chinese students.

The Fisher r-to-z transformation was also used to compare these correlations. In general, there were no significant differences between Chinese and British students in terms of the relationship between self-efficacy and help-seeking (see Table 4-9 below). For example, the relationship between ASE and perceived benefit of help-seeking was not significantly correlated for Chinese students ($r = .27$, ns) or for British students ($r = .22$, ns). Interestingly, as can be seen in Table 4-9 below, SSE and help-seeking threat showed a strong negative relationship for British and non-significant for Chinese students, although the Fisher r-to-z transformation suggests that these were not different enough to be considered significantly different.

On top of that, the only significant difference between British and Chinese students was the relationship between ASE and perceived faculty helpfulness, where the correlation for Chinese students was not significant ($r = .13$, ns), yet there was a strong positive relationship between these variables for British students ($r = .52$, $p < .001$). The Fisher r-to-z transformation determined that the correlation between ASE and perceived faculty helpfulness was significantly different between the two groups ($z = -1.76$, $p < .05$). The result here means that for British students, ASE mattered to their perceptions of faculty helpfulness, while for Chinese students, it did not play a role.

Table 4-9

Comparison of correlation of ASE and SSE with help-seeking variables between British and Chinese students

	British (Spearman r)	Chinese (Spearman r)	Z (Fisher r-to-Z comparison)
ASE & Benefits of HS	.22	.27	-.2
ASE & Faculty helpfulness	.52**	.13	-1.76*
ASE & HS threat	-.38*	-.24	-1.49
ASE & Ada HS	.04	.28	-.97
ASE & Avoi HS	-.34	-.31	-.14
SSE & Benefits of HS	.29	.22*	.29
SSE & Faculty helpfulness	.37*	.32*	.17
SSE & HS threat	-.50**	-.19	-1.39
SSE & Ada HS	.07	.27	-.8
SSE & Avoi HS	-.47*	-.16	-1.36

Note. Spearman r represent Spearman's correlation coefficients. Z represent Fisher r-to-Z comparison coefficients. $p < .05$, *, $p < .01$, **.

The purpose of research aim 3 (a, b, c) was to understand similarities and differences between Chinese and British students in academic help-seeking process: was there any difference in their levels of self-efficacy; did they regard the help-seeking variables differently; and would their levels of self-efficacy influence their academic help-seeking because of their cultural background. Again, it was mainly exploratory as there was no specific hypothesis to predict the outcome. Although it was predicted that British and

Chinese students would differ in self-efficacy levels, as previous studies have suggested. The analysis exploring the similarities and differences between Chinese and British students in the academic help-seeking process and the results suggested that levels of ASE and SSE were not different between British and Chinese students. While nationality did not influence or related to their levels of self-efficacy to differ, it did influence the British and Chinese students' helper source choices and their attitudes toward help-seeking. Specifically, British and Chinese students did differ in level of perceived threat when they sought help, and had some slight differences in who/how they would likely to ask for help, although they were actually similar in terms of ASE and SSE levels. Additionally, the comparison of the correlation between help-seeking variables and self-efficacy found that ASE/SSE mattered more for British students' perceptions of faculty helpfulness, but less for the Chinese students. Perhaps this is related to British individuals' belief in their own ability when they seek help, which will be further interpreted and discussed in the discussion chapter.

4.3. Post-hoc power analysis

As this study has not found statistically significant differences between ASE and SSE, I conducted a univariate ANOVA to assess whether British students report higher or lower self-efficacy than Chinese students, with nationality as the independent factor and the average score of self-efficacy as the dependent variable. The results indicated no significant nationality differences either in academic self-efficacy, $F(2, 101) = 1.752, p = .179$, partial $\eta^2 = .034$, observed power coefficient = .36, nor in social self-efficacy, $F(2, 101) = 1.301, p = .277$, partial $\eta^2 = .025$, observed power coefficient = .276. These results, again, indicate there is no significant difference between British and Chinese students' SSE and ASE.

I also conducted post-hoc power analysis as the modest sample size in the present study ($n = 70$, including the UK and China) may have played a role in limiting the significance of some of the statistical comparisons conducted (i.e., the UK participants just reach the minimum $n = 30$, Cohen, 1988). The post-hoc power analysis revealed that on the basis of the mean, between-groups comparison effect size observed in the present study ($d = .30$, power at .68) determined a small to medium effect size, and an N of approximately 90 would be needed to obtain statistical power at the recommended .80 level (Cohen, 1988). Although there is a debate surrounding the usefulness and interpretation of conducting post-hoc power analysis since nonsignificant results will result in the observed statistical power being low (e.g., Hoenig & Heisey, 2001), some researchers suggest that it is still useful for informing future research of the required sample sizes (e.g., Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004) and

reducing the probability of committing Type II errors. While this study provides suggestions for future research, one must be aware that as the data was statistically nonsignificant, the observed effect here is only an estimate, and the future sample size is just a suggestion (Lenth, 2007; O'Keefe, 2007).

4.4. Chapter summary

Before summarising the chapter, Table 4-10 below pulls together results regarding each research aim and question

Table 4-10*Quantitative result summary*

Research questions	Finding
Research Aim 1: To understand the process of academic help-seeking within the context of PGT study	
RQ1a	1a. PGT students were more likely to report using adaptive help-seeking than being avoidant to seek help.
RQ1b	1b. PGT students were less likely to choose to ask for help through online discussion boards and during office hours. They more likely preferred to ask for help before or after class or ask questions via email.
RQ 1c	1c. PGT students had less intention to seek help from the online boards/forums and more intention to seek help from peer and then instructors.
RQ1d	1d. Asking questions of peers was the most frequent way of seeking help, and the least frequent was seeing the instructor during office hours.
RQ1e	1e. PGT students generally perceived the benefit of seeking academic help and did not perceive high levels of threat when they asked for academic help.
Research Aim 2: To understand the role of academic self-efficacy, social self-efficacy, and other potential factors that influence PGT students' academic help-seeking	
RQ 2a	2a: ASE was positively associated with perceived benefits of help-seeking and feelings that faculty are helpful. Additionally, ASE was positively associated with students' adaptive help-seeking. On the other hand, ASE negatively related to students' avoidant help-seeking.
RQ 2b	2b: SSE was positively associated with the perceived benefit of help-seeking, perceived faculty helpfulness, and adaptive help-seeking. SSE was significantly negatively related with students' avoidant help-seeking.
RQ 2c	2c: The help-seeking variables were not significantly different between ASE and SSE. Thus, ASE and SSE operated similarly for students and were both important for help-seeking.
Research Aim 3: To explore similarities and differences between Chinese and British students in academic help-seeking process	
RQ 3a	3a: Chinese and British students did not differ in their reported levels of SSE or ASE.
RQ 3b	3b: Chinese and British students did not differ in their levels of adaptive or avoidant help-seeking but differed in who/how they would seek help. Chinese students reported higher perceived threat of academic help-seeking than British students.
RQ 3c	3c: For British students, ASE mattered for their perceptions of faculty helpfulness, but for Chinese students, it did not play a role.

This chapter has presented the results of the quantitative phase of the study. The first research aim was to understand the process of academic help-seeking among PGT students. These results show that PGT students, on average, preferred to ask for help from peers or ask for help before or after class rather than during office hours, and they were less likely to prefer to ask for help via the online discussion board than they were to turn to other sources. Furthermore, average PGT students preferred to use adaptive help-seeking types than avoidant ones, although still a minority (14%) of students indicated they would avoid help-seeking, which raised the concern that still one out of seven students would avoid seeking help. If that is the case, then what would happen if the class had over 100 students? As for attitudes toward help-seeking, PGT students generally perceived a benefit to seek academic help and did not perceive a high level of threat when they asked for academic help, which suggests that the attitude toward help-seeking behaviour was generally positive during these students' PGT studies. To understand more, in addressing research aim two, the relationships between ASE and SSE and the help-seeking variables were examined. The correlation results indicated that all the variables were significantly related to ASE except the intention to seek help on the online discussion board, suggesting the ASE is highly related to help-seeking behaviour, which echoes previous studies in the field. Surprisingly, SSE was also found to be highly related to most of the help-seeking variables, and especially significantly related to the perception of help-seeking and the intention to seek help from peers, which indicated that academic help-seeking behaviour is a process that involves the social element (e.g., it requires students to interact with other). This indicates that SSE matters as well, and both ASE and SSE have similar effects on students' help-seeking behaviours.

Research aim 3 sought to understand the differences between Chinese and British students regarding help-seeking process. Interestingly and surprisingly, Chinese and British students did not differ in their levels of reported SSE or ASE, suggesting that both ASE and SSE operate similarly for British and Chinese students, which is not consistent with the findings of previous studies. To better understand help-seeking, analysis was run and indicated that Chinese and British students did not differ in their levels of adaptive or avoidant help-seeking, suggesting the nationality did not affect their ways of seeking help. However, they still differed in terms of preferences, with Chinese students preferring to seek help in person before or after class, while British students were more likely to ask for help via email. Chinese students also more frequently consulted teaching support after classes or from online forums than British, and British students more frequently or more intended to ask peers questions, suggesting that nationality could have an effect on preference of who/how to ask for help. Additionally, the comparison of attitudes toward help-seeking indicated that

Chinese students had higher perceptions of the threat of academic help-seeking than British students but this was not significantly related to self-efficacy. British students indicated that both ASE and SSE mattered to their perception of being threatened when they sought help and ASE related to their perception of faculty helpfulness, which was significantly higher than Chinese students', suggesting that nationality could have an effect on attitude toward seeking help in an academic context. This study also did post-hoc power analysis, providing sample number suggestions for future studies to reach the recommended .80 level power. In brief, PGT students in general showed a positive attitude toward help-seeking and preferred to ask for help from peers or before/after class, and help-seeking behaviour was highly related to both ASE and SSE. While Chinese and British students did differ in their attitudes toward help-seeking and their preferred sources of help, they were actually similar in terms of ASE and SSE levels in the academic help-seeking process. However, it is still important to understand more of the factors behind these statistics, and these will be explored in the qualitative phase of the study, and then discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

5. Chapter 5 Qualitative Findings

5.1. Design of the semi-structured interviews

As mentioned in Chapter Three, Sections 3.4.4 and 3.6, the interview guide (see Appendix 2) was based on the online questionnaire results (Creswell, 2014) and then revised based on expert feedback and the pilot study. As the goal of this second, qualitative phase was to explore and elaborate on the results from Phase One – the quantitative phase – of the study (Creswell et al., 2003), this study sought to understand why certain variables contributed differently to the British and Chinese students as related to their help-seeking behaviour in the PGT programme. To gain an understanding as to how and why these specific questions might arise, the following section sets out why these quantitative findings were selected, with a summary of each key finding from the quantitative phase according to each research aim, and provides a series of questions for further consideration in the qualitative phase of the study.

RQ1: Exploring the understanding of help-seeking process

The quantitative results suggested that PGT students prefer to ask for help from peers or before/after classes. While this happened across the whole PGT participant pool, this response gave rise to important questions: 1) Why would PGT students prefer peers when they need help? 2) Were all the PGT students really no different regarding the sources they chose to seek help from? 3) Is there any other source that they would turn to for help?

The quantitative results also indicated that the average PGT student preferred to use adaptive help-seeking types rather than avoidant ones. To understand how and why, two questions were developed to inform the design of the qualitative phase guide: 1) How about other types of help-seeking? How did they make the decision to use certain types of help? 2) Why would some of them still avoid seeking help?

RQ2: Exploring the factors that would influence PGT students' academic help-seeking

The quantitative results suggested that both ASE and SSE matter and have similar effects on students' help-seeking behaviours. To understand in more detail, the following main question was raised for further consideration: What factors do the PGT students think would influence their help-seeking behaviour/decisions? Why?

RQ3: Exploring the similarities and differences between Chinese and British students

The quantitative results indicated that Chinese and British students differed in terms of preferences of help sources and perceptions of help-seeking. As some of the quantitative results are not consistent with previous studies' results, the following key question was raised for further consideration: How and why might the difference exist in terms of each step of the help-seeking process between Chinese and British PGT students?

RQ4: Exploring the understanding of Chinese international PGT students' experiences

This section is developed to explore how the international students' experience related to help-seeking, which raised the following two questions: 1) How does studying abroad influence academic help-seeking? 2) How does adapting to an educational system in a new cultural context influence academic help-seeking?

The above set of key quantitative findings was identified from the data analyses presented in Chapter Four. The findings presented above were selected for further exploration in three main aspects: the understanding of each step of the help-seeking process; the similarities or differences between British and Chinese PGT students; and the international students' experience. As mentioned in Section 3.4.4, these three criteria were then divided into four sections (as shown in Appendix 2) in the interview guide: basic information about academic experience; key factors that students thought would influence their decisions in the process of academic help-seeking; exploring the differences or similarities between Chinese and British students; and lastly, international students' experiences while studying abroad. The following sections will provide more details of this qualitative phase and the findings from the semi-structured interviews.

5.2. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative data. It draws on in-depth interviews to provide a deeper understanding of the students' academic help-seeking behaviour, building upon the quantitative data presented in Chapter Four. The main aims of this qualitative phase are to understand more about Chinese and British students' academic experiences and help-seeking behaviours, and to provide a more interpretive and detailed understanding of how the students' academic help-seeking processes formed and were influenced, taking into account their varied backgrounds and the differences in their attitudes

and perceptions of help-seeking. This chapter contains three main sections: Section 5.1 provide the outline of in which the survey data contributed to the design of the semi-structured interviews. Sections 5.2 and 5.3 provide an overview of the chapter and an overview of the study participants; Section 5.4 briefly outlines again the analytical approach that was employed, then presents thematically analysed interview findings. This chapter will conclude by considering how the themes discussed relate to the research aims. Afterwards, the discussion chapter will explore the findings in more depth and relate them to the theoretical framework, as well as combining them with the quantitative results (see Chapter Six, Section 6.3). As a reminder, please see Table 1-1 for the full list of qualitative research questions.

5.3. Overview of participants

As previously mentioned in Chapter Three, Section 3.5, the sample demographic information about the 14 participants was provided in Chapter Three (Table 3-2), and more detail can be found in Table 5-1 below. During the interviews, data collected about the participants included gender, nationality and which college they studied in.

This study's participants comprised students undertaking a variety of different academic programmes at the University of Glasgow during the 2017-2018 academic year. It should be noted that the interviews were conducted when the students had finished their taught courses but still working on their dissertations. Thus, their perceptions of their help-seeking processes might have been different than they had been when they took the online questionnaire, or they might have been in different mental states as they were approaching their dissertation writing. Moreover, it is noteworthy that all the students from the Business school were Chinese international students, and five of the participants were from conversion programmes, which may have affected their perceptions and experiences of help-seeking, just as being in different schools/colleges might have done (for more detail on this point, see Section 5.4.3.3).

Table 5-1
Overview of Phase Two student participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Nationality	College
Amy	F	China	CoA
Betty	F	China	Coa (con.)
Cheryl	F	China	CoSS (B)
David	M	China	CoSS (B)
Emily	F	China	CoSS (B)
Frank	M	China	CoSS (B)
Gina	F	China	CoSS (B)
Helen	F	UK	CoA
Ivy	F	China	CoSS (con.)
Jane	F	UK	College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences
Kevin	M	UK	College of Science and Engineering
Laura	F	UK	CoSS (con.)
Michelle	F	UK	CoSS (con.)
Nina	F	UK	CoSS (con.)

Note. Con. = conversion course; CoA = College of Art; CoSS = College of Social Science; (B) = Business School

5.4. Findings

This study selected a hybrid deductive/inductive process (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This study first applied a preliminary coding concept framework formed based on the theoretical framework and previous studies, using data from the qualitative process studies (N= 14), grouping and regrouping the data into different revised sets of themes and subthemes to form a final coding framework (see Appendix 7), to explain and explore the phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then, within two theories factors, this study further explored the students' responses using specific concerns expressed within the literature (e.g., culture versus environment) and an inductive approach when the existing literature did not seem to fully capture their responses, especially regarding environmental factors.

By following the detailed thematic analysis steps described in Chapter Three, Section 3.8.2, this study identified four themes from the participants' responses to inform the interview questions: (a) Students' experiences of their PGT education; (b) Different students' understanding and decisions during the help-seeking process; (c) Different factors related to PGT academic help-seeking process; (d) Chinese international students' perceptions in Scotland.

The first major theme identified is the students' experience during the PGT academic year, which basically focuses on their perceptions of their interactions with educators/faculty and how they perceived their programmes. The second main theme reveals the students' understanding of what academic help-seeking is by discovering the definition of understanding, which type of help they preferred to use, and what their academic help-

seeking process was. The third theme is the influential factors that they thought influenced their decisions regarding help-seeking. The fourth theme focuses on how Chinese international students' experiences could impact their help-seeking decisions. These themes represent how the participants perceived and made sense of their experiences of help-seeking in the academic context, while exploring the differences and similarities among international and British students. From there, the analysis aimed to make some inferences around cultural influences and how these experiences may be related. Quotes from the participants have been selected to support and further illustrate the themes, and pseudonyms have been chosen to preserve the participants' anonymity and confidentiality.

Table 5-2

Themes and subthemes identified during analysis

Themes	Subthemes
Students' experiences of their PGT education	Variation in perceived difficulty of their academic programme Variation in approachability of tutor/instructors
Different students' understanding and decisions during help-seeking process	Different types of understanding of academic help-seeking Different types of help-seeking students use Different decision making during academic help-seeking
Different factors related to PGT students' help-seeking process	Factors related to student's personal demographic Factors related to students' psychological perspective Factors related to students' education environment
Chinese international students' perception in Scotland	Cultural influences Learning ability change/improve

These four main themes and their subthemes from the analysis are summarised above in Table 5-2. Each of the four themes and their subthemes will be presented in turn in the following sections.

The findings provide an analysis of each of the themes from individual cases as well as comparing some themes based on nationality. In analysing each theme, the analysis first presents an overview of the background of the theme and then a description of this theme is developed/constructed by the researcher from the interview from two countries (i.e., British and Chinese) with quotes to help illustrate where appropriate. It will then describe whether the theme or subthemes seemed to be similar or different for the Chinese and British participants. Having identified the characteristics of the interview participants and briefly introduced the research question and themes, the next sections will present the findings from the interview on the first main theme: "Students' experiences of their PGT education".

5.4.1. Theme 1: Students' experiences of their PGT education

To fully understand students' help-seeking behaviour in the academic context, their PGT education experiences were examined during the analysis. Based on the findings, this section will discuss the programmes' levels of difficulty and whether the students found it easy to approach their tutors.

5.4.1.1. Variation in perceived difficulty of academic programmes

As the previous literature suggests, course difficulty is positively associated with learning outcome and achievement (e.g., Zainudin et al., 2012), meaning the level of programme difficulty that the student perceives might influence their academic performance. Moreover, if students have difficulties understanding the learning content or the programme materials themselves, they might need to ask for help to fill this gap (Schworm & Gruber, 2012).

When asked about their perception of their programmes, the students exhibited a noticeable contrast in their responses. Six out of 14 students expressed a perception of the programme as hard. The other participants argued that no certain course or whole programme could be considered difficult as each is difficult in its own right. Those in the former category who answered "difficult" tended to be in what may be considered more 'traditional' subjects such as drama, media studies or language-related subjects. Those who responded "not hard" most often studied maths-related subjects, which tended to be seen as being amongst the easier options by Chinese students, the majority of whom were in business school. The following responses exemplify the Chinese business students' thoughts on the difficulty of their courses/programme.

I think it's okay. It's not that difficult. (David).

Most of our core courses have...problems, although I am very satisfied with [the] university..., but [the programme] set up [was] a bit [weird] and too [easy] (Cheryl).

Generally speaking, they [the programme/the course setting] could be more difficult (Emily).

By contrast, the British students mentioned some particular courses were challenging for them because of not being well-taught. As it turns out, their perception of programme difficulty tended to be that it was hard. See below examples from different colleges.

There are challenging materials fitted in the lectures which I do find quite challenging ... [but] I survived (Jane).

I actually think it is quite a lot [difficult]. I think actually something that surprised me was the variance and level of difficulty (Kevin).

It was really difficult and stressful (Michelle).

This subtheme related to the participants' perspectives on programme difficulty. It was unexpected that the results would suggest such inconsistency between students from the two countries. In the Chinese cohort, the majority of the participants' responses indicated that they perceived the programme as not being difficult, suggesting that the maths-related programmes were generally acceptable for Chinese international students (Rae & Woodier-Harris, 2012). On the other hand, the majority of British participants held the opposite perspective on programme difficulty, indicating a quite 'negative' view and attitude toward their programmes. The issue of students' perceptions of programmes among British and China will also be explored (see Section 5.4.3.3) related to outer-environment (i.e., Exo-system, Bio-ecological Theory) and discussed in more comparative detail in the Discussion Chapter (see Section 6.3.2.3). The next section presents the data from interviews concerning another component influencing academic experience: variation in the approachability of tutors/instructors.

5.4.1.2. Variation in the approachability of tutors/instructors

The instructor's approachability construct evaluates participants' views about whether their tutors, instructors and other faculty members were easy to approach. As instructors' words and conduct can facilitate or deter help-seeking by letting students know how approachable these "sources" are (e.g., Le Mare & Sohbat, 2002), in this subtheme, the participants were commented about their perceptions of the approachability of the school staff (e.g., instructor or teaching assistant), which related to the social interaction with other (microsystem, personal-behaviour factors). The majority of participants (nine out of 14) reported that the approachability of the tutors was low, and students hardly met the tutors/instructors except during class. For example, it was common for participants to respond that 'I think they can **only** be seen in class'; 'Basically, I **can't** see them; the tutor **will not reply** to your email alone'; 'I felt like some of the lecturers ... **don't care** about the students'. This unapproachability also aligned with the quantitative result as one of the reasons why students were more likely to seek help before or after class, as that is the most direct and easiest way to meet the instructor in person.

The main ‘not easy to approach’ comments came from the Chinese cohort (seven out of eight Chinese students reported this; see below for examples of responses). Further details about the potential reasons why they thought their tutors or instructors were hard to approach will be discussed later in relation to the themes (see Section 5.4.3.3.2).

I don’t think [it is easy to approach them]. I think they can only be seen in class. (Cheryl).

I seldom see tutors other than in classes, nor do I go to offices to find tutors. (Frank).

Seldom [meet the instructors] ... I will contact him via online forum or send emails [since they are hard to approach]. (Gina).

However, surprisingly, only two of the British participants (among all) reported that the tutors were unapproachable and that certain instructors were hard to contact, while others contrast. It is also noteworthy that these negative responses all came from participants in the same conversion programme, and they indicated during the interviews that they were not well-satisfied with programme itself. In this case, the participants’ experiences might have led to different levels of help-seeking behaviour. The following responses show why these respondents themselves perceived low approachability.

A couple of the lecturers ... are not very approachable and I think ... you [will] know if somebody actually wants to help you or not, but they do not (Laura).

I feel like ... [they/school] just didn’t care about the students at all. And I still felt like some of the lecturers were not easy [to find] ... [and] don’t care about the students as well (Michelle).

However, as raised above, students in some programmes found their instructors very easy to approach, especially some of the social science students. For example, one British student from an Arts course reported that her tutors, even the head of school, were very easy to approach.

I asked for specific help and advice ... [and then] the head of department said, “Let’s sit down, let’s have a chat.” So that’s accessible and helpful (Helen).

In the interview data, most students were negative about their tutors’ approachability, indicating that the instructors were not easy to access. Most Chinese students held quite negative perspectives about their contact with their instructors. Interestingly, in the interviews, some specific programmes’ participants (those from business school and the conversion programme) complained that the instructors did not treat the students well and

were hard to approach for help, as in the examples above. Further discussion of the issue in relation to programme type (environmental difference) and how the students from different programmes differed in seeking help will be provided later in Section 5.4.3.3.3.

The above sections have presented the data from the interviews in relation to the “Students’ experiences of their PGT education”, describing the variation in the perceived difficulty of their academic programmes and the variation in the perceived approachability of their tutors/instructors. Further discussion of the issues relating to students’ experiences will be provided in Section 6.3 in the Discussion Chapter. The following sections will present the interview findings about students’ help-seeking process and behaviour from purely qualitative perspectives.

5.4.2. Theme 2: Different students’ understanding and decisions during help-seeking process

This section will be divided into three different parts, looking at students’ understandings of help-seeking, which type of help-seeking they use or which type of help-seeker they are, and what decisions they made during the academic help-seeking process.

5.4.2.1. Different types of understanding of academic help-seeking

As students who are struggling academically at an increasing rate (e.g., Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2014), those who need help might be least likely to ask for it (e.g., Ryan et al., 1998). This additional problem raises the need for a deeper understanding of students’ academic help-seeking. That is, why is students’ understanding of academic help-seeking is important? Also, what factors are more important in determining how they conceptualise help-seeking and whether they consciously consider it a helpful strategy to support their academic learning? These two questions are important to understand more about students’ help-seeking behaviour. However, there is limited evidence that can prove that students’ understanding of academic help-seeking would influence their consideration of academic help-seeking behaviour as a strategy to support their learning. Thus, this subtheme is mainly intended to gain the picture of how well students know about academic help-seeking behaviour.

In this study, all 14 participants indicated that they had sought help before, but they all had different explanations when asked about their perception of the term ‘help-seeking’. This

subtheme categorises the participants' responses into two kinds of definitions of help-seeking: *getting academic help*, or *confusion about the term*.

5.4.2.1.1. Academic help-seeking is getting academic help

When participants answered that academic help-seeking was about getting academic help that could help them achieve their goal or solve an academic problem, they tended to have a comprehensive understanding of academic help-seeking. Four students from UK and two from China expressed such ideas as, 'academic help-seeking meant getting academic help when they needed it, or anything related to their academic work'.

Well, I guess fundamentally it's ... being able to seek help for any issues that you have with any[thing] ... academically ... (Kevin).

I think it has no special definition but anything related to academic ... it is a reflection of its own ... I think that asking for help is not just ... [behaviour], but a studying process. (Amy).

Overall, of the respondents, these four British students had the most 'accurate' understandings of academic help-seeking, regarding it as a helpful strategic resource that could be used to maximise their academic achievement. Moreover, it should also be mentioned that the two Chinese students had previous study abroad or exchange experience (Amy had studied in London before coming to Glasgow; Frank had gone on an exchange to the US). Could that previous experience have influenced their understanding? Further discussion will be provided in the next chapter.

5.4.2.1.2. Confusion about the term

In addition to the definition mentioned above, many of Chinese students were confused about seeking help or how and why they would need to seek help, as they believe that language barrier is considered one of the greatest academic issues for them (e.g., Galloway & Jenkins, 2009). Six participants, only one of whom was British, reported that their understanding about academic help-seeking was unclear, as it could be just getting answer or getting help to find the answer. For example:

Sometimes I just don't understand the concept ... I don't know whether I would like to seek help... to help me the understand the concept, or give me the answer to help me out. (Cheryl).

According to their answers, the Chinese students – compared to British students – could not fully understand what their instructors and classmates were talking about (e.g., ‘many of the questions he [the instructor] gave, I did not know what he was talking about’), and that made it be even harder to ask for help. Thus, confusion about seeking academic help would make it less likely that they would seek it.

As has been shown, in a general sense, there were some differences in responses to what help-seeking behaviour is. The majority of the answers indicated some of them understand what help-seeking is, while some of them were really confused about the definition of it, but this differentially should be taken with caution. Students might not fully truly express their understanding of what help-seeking behaviour is, which would lead their apparent knowledge of the definition to differ.

Of course, it is important not just to find out how the students understood the meaning, but to understand how they actually chose to seek help; it will be interesting to find the relationships between their theoretical and practical approaches to help-seeking. Therefore, the next section will discuss the different types of help-seeking and determine what types of help-seekers the students acted as.

5.4.2.2. Different types of help-seeking students use

Students’ behaviours are affected by their concerns about help-seeking, and students decide to choose different types of help (Butler, 1998). As a reminder, adaptive help is when you actually need help and seek it, avoidant help is just not asking for help at all, and expedient help is asking for help in order to quickly get the answer, sometimes when you do not actually need help. Based on the answers the participants gave, this section will present their help-seeking tendencies within these three types of behaviours, students might: *avoid seeking help from others (avoidant help-seeking)*; *seek guidance to help solve the problem (adaptive help-seeking)*; and/or *just get the answer to finish the problem (expedient help-seeking)*.

5.4.2.2.1. Avoid seeking help from others (Avoidant help-seeking)

Some participants who tend to avoid seeking help are focused on ability or competence concerns; they are worried seeking help will display proof of their insufficient abilities, and as such, they may tend to feel threatened when they seek help. A total of five participants

indicated that they would be likely to avoid seeking help from other. In detail, three Chinese students stated that they might feel shame and fear to ask for help as they did not think asking for academic help was easy to execute. In one of the interviews, for example, a Chinese student stated:

[To ask for help is] not very simple ... because I prefer to solve problems by myself ... and I think people will judge me if I ask them for help ... most of time I could not overcome such psychological barriers and ask help. (Frank).

Interestingly, the findings indicated that British home students had similar patterns around asking for help too. They reported that they also tended to avoid seeking help and preferred to solve the problem on their own. For example,

I've never asked [for help], well, because I don't like to ask (Kevin).

However, it should be noted that some of them have mentioned that they would self-help first. As self-help is one of the types of assistance-seeking, these participants' understanding of avoiding seeking help only encompasses seeking help from others. This suggests that they might in fact seek help despite saying they would not, but that help might be self-help, which they do not consider or understand to be a form of help-seeking. Additionally, although these five students within both cohorts indicated that they might avoid seeking help even when they need it, they may still *need* help. That is, if they cannot get help in time, their academic performance might be negatively influenced (e.g., Almeda et al., 2017). Regardless of whether the question that students need to solve is easy or not, several factors (such as personal factors or course setting) might influence their decision to seek or not seek help. Therefore, as influencing factors is an important part of academic help-seeking, the factors that could influence their decisions will be discussed in Section 5.4.3.

5.4.2.2.2. Seek guidance to solve the problem (adaptive help-seeking)

Six participants express their opinions that they would like to get assistance or guidance to help them to solve a problem. These participants seems to have positive feelings about asking for help that could guide them to find the answer rather than giving it to them directly. For example, one of the respondents stated that:

I think the help I need [or ask for] is ... ask the tutor ... [they] will point out the key points and weaknesses and explain to you ... give you inspiration or give some advice [to help] (Amy).

A British student responded:

Well, usually when I finish my assignment, I [will] ask my friend to read through it for me, [to check] if I make sense of everything, to help me in the right direction. If not, they will comment, and I will re-edit it. (Jane).

The findings indicated that these participants would ask for help to guide them, as the way seeking guidance seemed most useful to help them solve the problem effectively; thus, they would mostly choose to use it. However, it should be noted that some participants, for example, Kevin (who had previously answered that he would not ask for help), also mentioned that he would ask for help to solve the problem if he could not solve on his own, or he would ask for help just to get the answer. Students like Kevin, will be discussed later in the discussion chapter as they can be categorised as multitype help-seekers.

It should be noted that adaptive help-seeking behaviour is the product of several factors' interaction. That is, when students seek academic help, they are admitting to themselves that they need help. Instead of just getting the answer or denying themselves help, adaptive-type help-seekers try to find a way to get guidance toward the solution. However, based on these participants' responses, it sounds like it was the instructor/peer or the online forum that encouraged them to use adaptive help-seeking, rather than it necessarily being something the students chose for themselves. In this case, as instructors/peers and forums are 'outside stimulants', this can be seen as a factor that influences the type of help they use. This is another point that will be considered in Section 5.4.3, which will look at the factors that influence students' decisions.

Some students are not avoidant help-seekers but do not seek guidance either; they are students who only want to find the answer from the helper rather than use the information to help their process. That is the other type of help-seeker — expedient.

5.4.2.2.3. Just get the answer to finish the problem (expedient help-seeking)

Whereas some participants express their thought about their way asking for help might be the way to let someone else solve problems for them. Five people answered that they would like to get the answer to finish the task/problem, three from the Chinese cohort and two from the British cohort.

For instance, Kevin from the British cohort initially answered that he might avoid asking or self-help first, but he also seek expedient help to know whether the answer is right or wrong.

But I would like to make sure to try something first and then ask a lecturer for clarification and then they would see yes or no or whatever (Kevin).

In the Chinese cohort, the students understood that they may only need the answer to get through the situation that they are facing, as David indicated,

[Usually] I just ask [my peers] how to do it, to get their answers (David).

These students, both from the British and Chinese cohorts, answered that they would only need the answer solve the question. In this phase, the findings regarding this sub-theme did not suggest any preference in terms of what type of help to seek in the HE environment, which does not fully match with the quantitative results. Further discussion about the help-seeking type will be later addressed in the Discussion chapter (see Chapter Six, Section 6.3.1.1.5).

This section has presented the interview findings in relation to ‘type of help-seeking students use’, including *avoidant*, *adaptive* and *expedient help-seeking*. Here it should be noted that based on the answers from the participants, it can be seen that different help-seeking types might apply to the same students when they find themselves in different situations. There is limited evidence to support this point, but it should be considered in the future that students might use a combination of help-seeking behaviours. During the Discussion chapter (see Chapter Six, Section 6.3.1.1.5), I will discuss how important it is to understand what type of help students ask for to better understand their approaches.

As mentioned in Section 2.2, academic help-seeking in the HE context can be influenced by various factors. Since academic help-seeking can be conceptualised as a process, participants expressed comments about which factor would influence the different steps or decisions they had to make when engaging in help-seeking. This enabled me to understand students’ academic help-seeking more comprehensively. As such, the following sections present the data about academic help-seeking at each different step of the process.

5.4.2.3. Different decisions making during the academic help-seeking process

Academic help-seeking is a process that involves several different decisions or steps (e.g., Karabenick & Dembo, 2011; see also Chapter Two, Section 2.2.2). Students need to recognise that they have a problem, then decide they need to seek help, then decide what

type of help to seek, where to get that help and when to ask for it, and then approach the appropriate person and ask for it. It is a complex process that requires a lot of different decisions. Since the theme of types of help to seek has already been presented in the previous sections of this chapter, this following section will draw on the interviews to discuss the individual steps related to participants' own help-seeking behaviours. The subsections will be: (1) Noticing the problem, (2) Ease of help-seeking execution, (3) Timing for help-seeking, (4) Identifying potential helpers.

5.4.2.3.1. Students have all recognised a problem existed at the time (Noticing the problem)

All participants outlined their recognition of the need for help during the interview sessions. This step is the first one in the help-seeking process. Participants from both countries indicated that they had noticed that there were some problems in the academic context, and there was a need to solve them. For example, a participant from the UK indicated that he found himself needing to ask for help when he could not solve a problem by himself:

I think the process [is you] need to know you have the problem. If you're just thinking in your own head...you could get the wrong answer (Kevin).

Meanwhile, a Chinese international student reported that she determined a problem existed when she thought she had a problem she could not deal with:

When the concept is not fully understood, I will know that I have problem and I will seek help from them [others]. (Emily).

However, simply detecting that an academic problem exists may not be enough criteria driven to make students seek help, especially if they think or believe that they have enough resources to solve the problem independently. In order for students to realise that they need help, they must come to realise that their academic problem cannot be overcome by things within their control (i.e., putting in greater effort). They must also have the *want/desire* to seek help; they need to feel some sense of motivation to solve the problem, which would lead them to execute the help-seeking process in the next step. Therefore, the next section will present the decision for students to actually go seek help and their feeling about carrying out help-seeking (i.e., did they feel it was easy or difficult to engage in academic help-seeking behaviour).

5.4.2.3.2. It was easy to ask for help (Ease of help-seeking execution)

Even after the students determine that they have some academic problem or after they have determined that help is needed, the decision to execute the behaviour may or may not be easy for everyone.

The majority of participants commented that it was easy to ask for help. Chinese students (more than half of them, $n = 6$) indicated that actually going out to ask for help is extremely easy. They may find it easy to ask for help mainly because the source of help is easy to access. For example:

It's easy [to ask for academic help]. I usually just look for a peer that I have more connection with or hang out with more, so in that way I wouldn't feel more pressure, and would not feel that I'm disturbing people with some silly questions. (Betty).

Some students from British cohort (half of them, $n = 3$) also answered that seeking help is easy, like in the example below.

Yes, certainly I wouldn't hesitate [to ask for help]. [...and yes, it's] really easy to do. (Helen).

These example quotes show that the students consider it was easy to ask for help. They identified some of the aspects that make them felt it is easy to ask for help. For example, easily accessible sources and an encouraging contextual environment allow them to feel it is easy to ask for help.

In general, it seems that most Chinese students think asking for help is easy. However, it is important to consider the sources they turn to for help, as they mentioned that they would be more likely to ask a peer for help, as peers are more accessible. When engaging in academic help-seeking, students have to think about the reasons and the possible sources to turn to and do a cost-benefit analysis before using certain strategies such as help-seeking; once students recognise that help would be useful, they weigh the costs and benefits of seeking help and make a decision to seek help or not, despite is being easy or not to ask for help.

At this point in the help-seeking process, a decision is usually also made about whom to go to for help (the potential helper) and when is the best time to ask for help (timing, self-help first). The following section will discuss the timing decision and then the sources that the students turn to when they need or ask for academic help.

5.4.2.3.3. Students choose different timing to ask for help

Based on the interview responses, seeking help can be divided into two different timing decisions: *Direct* and *wait*. *Direct* is constructed from the interview result that students ask for help immediately after they notice they have problems; they do not try to solve the problem independently first. On the other hand, *wait* is the pattern for those students who try self-help first then ask for help, or they wait for someone else to discuss the problem publicly if they encounter the same question.

When students were faced with the decision to ask for help or not, they tended to make different timing decisions. A minority of participants – one from UK and one from China – said they would ask for academic help as soon as they thought they needed assistance, but they might not only seek the answer. For example, like Cheryl commented,

If I can't keep up with the class, I will probably ask [immediately] the student sitting next to me first where we were [on which page], not just ask for what the lecturer just said (Cheryl).

These participants commented that they would ask for help right after thinking they needed it. This suggests that they may be more likely to seek adaptive help (see Section 5.4.2.2.2 for information) as they were not just aiming to get the answer but guidance; they would try to find the solution to solve the problem to help them achieve their academic goal. In contrast, most of students might like to try self-helping first and then seek help, or they might not seek help at all, as the next section will present when looking at the other type of timing decision — waiting.

Other types of timing decision pattern that identified in this study by the majority other eight students, who indicated that they would like to wait and see whether it was a problem they could solve or not. However, there are also two kinds of people here: 'wait and not seek help' and 'wait to find the perfect timing to ask for assistance'. With the wait and not seek help type, students tended to avoid asking for help as they thought it was unnecessary or were afraid to ask. Interestingly, only two British students were among the eight respondents who indicated that they would wait and not seek help. Six Chinese international students indicated that they would be more likely to wait and self-help first and then might not seek help. For example, one participant from the Chinese cohort answered that she would wait and probably not ask for help later.

I think the time I really need to ask for help is when I really get into a desperate situation. Because you can't figure out [the problem] yourself. Otherwise there is no point asking for help. (Ivy).

In terms of waiting, a minority of the other respondents ($n = 3$), from both the Chinese and British cohorts, reported that they tend to try self-helping first and then ask for help if they cannot solve it on their own. For example, as Kevin commented:

I would start to try to think myself how I should do this [solve the problem] ... But these are things ... [I cannot deal with]. I think ... I would go to my friends and colleagues [to seek help]. (Kevin).

In general, there seems to be a strong sense from many interview participants that despite awareness of difficulties they may have, and despite the availability of assistance, they tend to self-help first and then ask for help if they think they still need it or might avoid seeking help even after struggling on their own to solve the problem. Timeliness is important for help-seeking purposes because students who overestimate their academic capabilities may not become aware of this overestimation until they find that their problem cannot be solved independently. Previous studies have not examined in detail the temporal aspects of help-seeking, whereas this study suggests that timeliness is important for help-seeking; if the problem is noted earlier, it is more likely that it can be solved. For example, when help is sought, particularly for problems that will affect the student's grade and for which finding an early solution is key (e.g., final exams), it can mean the difference between earning the degree or not.

As such, the timing decision could play a role in the academic help-seeking process to determine the type of help they use; as well it might relate to other influencing factors. Further details about how the timing decision is related to the help-seeking process and why this matters can be seen in Chapter six, Section 6.3.1.1.3. It appears from the responses that timing could be related to how they usually turn for help to different helpers, which also were constructed in the previous theme. Therefore, the next section will present help providers.

5.4.2.3.4. Students will determine who to ask for help in different situations (Identifying potential helpers)

Previous studies have suggested that undergraduate students may not distinguish between formal and informal sources as they have more access to internet (e.g., Taylor, 2012). Thus,

in this study, it might be possible that postgraduate taught students may also not make a distinction or evaluate the credibility of the different sources they go to for help at the university. Therefore, this section will not use ‘formal’ or ‘informal’ as categories, but will sort the potential helpers by ‘source’. Based on previous studies (e.g., Makara & Karabenick, 2013), this research identified three sources that are most often used by students: instructors, peers, and the internet.

Instructors

The majority of the participants indicated that they would like to turn to the instructor for help when they need some assistance. As the instructors are perceived by students to be more capable but might be more judgemental than peers, some participants responded that seeking help from instructors would be more useful and less frequently used since they would provide superior help, but it might come with judgement. Comparing both countries’ students, there were five Chinese students and four British students (nine in total), who reported that they would seek help from the instructor or lecturer; thus, it can be seen that there was no observable difference between British students and Chinese students’ tendency to ask instructors for help. However, while Chinese PGT students may also use instructors as a source to gain information, they might not typically be the primary source. For example:

I think maybe I will ask the tutor [for help], but ... sometimes the tutor is not understanding [me clearly] and replying [clearly], especially through e-mail. (Cheryl).

I always ask my tutor if I do not understand or [can’t] define the different theories if my peers can’t answer me (Amy).

Based on from those responses above, both British and Chinese students would choose the instructor as one of the help sources, which means that these PGT students do seek academic help through some formal channels. However, it should be kept in mind that students may have multiple preferred sources regarding the problem they want to solve. For example, as one student said: ‘I would say tutor is probably the most useful based on the context’. As students may not only use only one source to seek academic help, but also turn to other sources. The following section will present another source that is commonly turned to for help – peers.

Peers

In this study, students also reported that they would like to seek help from peers because they perceive instructors as less approachable than peers. Alternatively, they might be afraid to ask lecturers for help. Almost all of the participants ($n = 13$) indicated that they would like to ask peers for help if they need it. As mentioned, they may use multiple sources to deal with the problem. In this case, it is expected that they would report that they would turn for help to instructors and peers.

For example, students from the China tended to interact with their own group and felt more comfortable with their peers.

For me, I am willing to communicate more with my classmates. (Gina).

In fact, ... I'm more likely to be with my classmates.... there are differences between China and the western students, and Chinese students will have similar thoughts (Amy).

For the British cohorts, students might feel the institution or the instructor is not accessible, as mentioned above, so they would ask peers for help rather than asking instructors.

I've been asking my peers for help ... the peer support is great because we all have to come together... (Laura).

Overall, there is no right or wrong regarding students' preferences as long as they solve the problem. However, different students might still have different preference of where to turn for help. Therefore, combined with the Phase One data, the findings indicate that although there is no observable difference, different groups have different preferences (e.g., Chinese students may be more likely to turn to instructors for help). Further discussion of this point will be provided in Chapter Six, Section 6.3.1.1.4.

The internet

Five participants indicated that they would use the internet as a resource to solve the problem. However, it should be kept in mind that it is possible that all the participants used online resources to seek help without consciously realising that they preferred online resources. It might also be considered that self-helping is related to online resources; this relationship between self-help and help-seeking sources could be studied more in the future to understand more about academic help-seeking.

Participants from China indicated that it would be more efficient to email someone or post on a forum than to ask for help face-to-face:

I think we have [a] Facebook group forum and people will talk/discuss about the questions themselves, and if they don't get the findings, they'll send an email to the instructors, and then everyone will be informing each other. (Betty).

Similar comments were made by a British student: that is, students email the instructor, get some help, and then share what they have learned with other peers who are struggling with the same question, as Nina commented:

I use the Moodle often for like [asking] small questions ... or use the forum to ask a particular [thing] question ... it [online forum] provides a record [so] that other students can see it ... help somebody else. (Nina).

The participants indicated they might prefer to seek help from impersonal online sources rather than face-to-face, as online help-seeking is less threatening than face-to-face communication and entails less interaction with others. Thus, naturally, some students might be more likely to choose online sources.

As such, it can be seen that students could have different preferences for their helpers. This section sheds light on the participants' different preferences when it comes to who to seek help from. In light of the interview data, some students prefer to ask instructors for help, thinking that formal help will provide them with the correct answer; some, however, prefer asking peers as it is the most "convenient way" to seek help. Since instructors and peers cannot be accessed anytime, students may also choose to use online resources as another source to seek help. It was surprising that students commented that by using online sources, they could benefit others, with the online forum keeping a record and helping to crystalise the question (Chao et al., 2018). However, not all the students indicated that they would use online sources to seek help.

In fact, students with the internet are able to search for materials through search engines, blogs and online discussion forums, especially students being taught with a blended-teaching approach (i.e., those on a PGT programme) who need to use online sources in order to finish their course assignments. While not all the participants indicated they would use the internet as a resource, it still makes sense that there is no difference in preference of sources between the cultures, as all the students would use either instructors, peers or online sources to get the information. Therefore, in order to explore students' help-seeking behaviours in a more

comprehensive way, I considered further in-depth data based on students' answers about what else they might take into account when they decided to seek help. As a result, this study arrived at "different factors related to PGT students' help-seeking process", which cover three different themes: (1) Personal demographic related factors, (2) personal psychological related factors, and (3) Factors related to students' educational environment (Contextual factors). These will be presented in the next section.

5.4.3. Theme 3: Different factors related to PGT students' help-seeking process

Both British and Chinese students reported that they had been influenced by some factors at the academic and personal levels when deciding whether to seek help. This section will outline the influential factors that determined their decisions. As the factors are considered multi-categories, this section will be divided into three main types: (1) Personal demographic factors, (2) Personal psychological factors, and (3) Contextual factors.

5.4.3.1. Factors related to students' personal demographic

This section will present the factors mentioned by respondents that related to their personal demographics: *family environment* and *Male's attitude toward help-seeking*.

5.4.3.1.1. Family environment

In this study, the students indicated that their family interactions or the environment in the families influenced their ways of seeking assistance. Most (11 out of 14) of the participants reported that their families influenced their academic help-seeking decisions. Eight Chinese participants indicated this during the interviews, as in the following excerpt:

I think family environments will influence me because ... first of all, you can see what [your] parents do in the environment and learn from them. In other words, parenting is learning and solving problems in life... Your parents' thoughts will affect your way of thinking, and ... will affect your way of academic thinking. (Gina).

Similar comments were made by three British participants, as in the following example from Helen:

I was encouraged to learn and study [by my family] ... I have brought my children up in the same way [being supportive]... I have a very supportive husband ... and ...

very supportive kids ... so I think that's very important and that would encourage me to chase a better academic career (Helen).

As can be seen from the above, the participants acknowledged 'family' as a factor influencing their academic performance and their decision to seek help. For these students, family plays an important role in influencing their help-seeking behaviour in the ways parents and other family members model help-seeking and respond to help (Hofer et al., 2009). For example, parents' interaction or the environment that they created could influence their children's development, impacting their behaviour in interacting with others. It was interesting that these comments seem to provide evidence that almost all Chinese students think family is an influential factor on their academic but not all the British students think in the same way, which may be related to cultural background. Further discussion about how family environment has an effect on academic context and how it related to help-seeking behaviour will be provided in Chapter Six, Section 6.3.2.1.

5.4.3.1.2. Male's attitude toward help-seeking

Interestingly, this study suggests that only male participants mentioned pride or embarrassment in relation to asking for help; the interview data did not find the same comments from the female participants. Male participants from both cohorts (three in total) indicated that they may feel threatened when asking for help or would be less likely to seek help because their self-esteem/self-efficacy would not "allow" it. The following responses show how these three male respondents themselves felt when they asked for help:

When I find it [a problem], [I will] ask my classmates first, but I will feel embarrassed to disturb them ... I will still feel frustrated. There is also a kind of self-abandonment that I don't want to fill in after class [to solve the problem] or when I say it [ask for help] again. (David).

The first thing that hinders me from asking for help is my personal pride. (Frank).

I didn't even like asking for help. (Kevin).

These three participants stated that their feelings kept them from seeking help. They expressed negative reactions to help-seeking, which naturally made them less willing to seek help (Ang et al., 2004). Given that only men in this study mentioned pride and embarrassment as factors, the discussion chapter will provide further discussion about the different natures of help-seeking between male and female students, how female students

talked about help-seeking in this study, and whether it is true that they did not seem to detect any perceived threat in help-seeking.

5.4.3.2. Factors related to students' psychological perspective

As mentioned in the literature review (see Chapter Two, Section 2.2.5), previous studies have suggested that personal factors influence students' decisions to seek help, that it is vital that learners consider the nature of their personal characteristics in order to identify strategies that will support their academic growth and success (e.g., Zimmerman, 2002). Therefore, this section will present the factors mentioned by respondents related to their personal psychological aspects: *Belief in social interaction with other (Social self-efficacy)*; *Students' own personality*; and *The desire to achieve the goal (Motivation)*.

5.4.3.2.1. Belief in social interaction with other (Social self-efficacy)

Surprisingly, more than half the participants (nine out of 14) mentioned that they believe their social skill or social interaction may influence their decision to ask for help. However, the social self-efficacy might actually be about relationships with particular individuals instead, thus, the actual explanation of the relationship between academic help-seeking and social self-efficacy should combine both phases' findings.

Six Chinese participants reported in the interviews that their feelings about their relationships with others usually influenced their ways of asking for help. Cheryl commented:

I think the relationship with my classmates may be one aspect [that influences decisions to seek help]. If I have a good relationship with a classmate, I may seek help from them or ask them many questions. (Cheryl).

Like the Chinese students, three British participants also mentioned that their interactions with others mattered to the process of help-seeking. For example, Michelle commented:

How I feel about someone [will influence me] ... I've never been comfortable to just like getting in there and kind of approaching someone like that [I am not familiar with]. But if it's someone that I feel is friendly and I am comfortable with them then I will [ask for help]. (Michelle).

Participants felt that they needed a certain level of confidence in interacting with others or to have positive relationships before going to a person to ask them for help; however, it is interesting that the participants only reported on social self-efficacy in relation to peers. Thus,

further discussion of why participants thought social self-efficacy was important and why they did not make reference to social self-efficacy in relation to people other than peers will be presented in Chapter Six. The following section presents the interview data in relation to another personal psychological factor – *personality*.

5.4.3.2.2. Students' own personality

Personality can refer to an individual's unique pattern of thoughts, attitudes, feelings, motives and behaviours, which are the basis of their personality traits (e.g., Caspi et al., 2005). Personality was raised by four Chinese participants as a factor that would influence their ways of seeking help. Amy commented:

Personality [would influence my decision]. Some people are embarrassed to ask ... which I am not. (Amy).

Meanwhile, there was only one British participant, Kevin, who said he thought personality would influence his way of asking for help:

I've barely asked for help when I need it although I know the reality is that probably I don't ask for help as often as I should. Not because of any institutional reasons or anything. I think that's just because of who I am. Like my personality is. (Kevin).

However, although studies have shown that personality is one of the personal factors related to professional help-seeking behaviour (e.g., Barwick et al., 2009; Tsan & Day, 2007), in the relevant literature, there is a debate about whether these personality traits are shaped by culture or if they are universal (e.g., Church, 2010). Since personality traits are not “visible”, this study deliberately chose not to assume there would be a cultural difference between British and Chinese students, but constructed the personality as one factor that related to their concerns about academic failure and the belief they were embarrassed about seeking help. The issue of influencing factors will also be explored and discussed in more detail in the Discussion Chapter (see Chapter Six, Section 6.3.2). The next section presents the interview data concerning another personal factor – *motivation*.

5.4.3.2.3. The desire to achieve the goal (Motivation)

As discussed in Section 2.2.5.2, academic motivation and goals are related to students' academic help-seeking behaviour (e.g., Newman, 2002a, b; Pintrich, 2004; Zusho et al., 2007). However, this study did not focus on certain types of motivation but only noticed that

participants mentioned overall ‘academic motivation’ as one factor that influenced their decisions to seek academic help. Thus, here in this study, motivation refers to the overall student’s desire to achieve goals.

Ten students mentioned that they thought motivation would influence their decision to ask for help. Five Chinese students reported that motivation was one of the factors that would influence their decision to ask for help, as is illustrated in the following extract:

Academic pressure [is the reason], because most people [like me] still want to be able to get the diploma ... So [I will say] the motivation to graduate [is the reason/factor]. (Frank).

Similarly, five British students also indicated that motivation would influence their decisions around asking for help. For example:

Curiosity and discipline [would be the factors that influence me]. How much they [the students] want to improve themselves [and take] satisfaction for their own work (Jane).

In general, there seemed to be a strong sense from many interview participants that their perception of their own needs (the need to graduate or achieve the goal) would influence their help-seeking. Therefore, it is possible that when students felt a stronger need to achieve their academic goals, the likelihood of their deciding to seek help would be increased.

Taken together, the findings above may be helpful to explain what factors related to personal can influence students’ decisions to seek help. These personal factors are *social self-efficacy*, *personality* and *motivation*. Further discussion on how these personal factors influence students’ decisions to ask for help and how these are associated with the research aims will be provided in Section 6.3.2 in the Discussion Chapter. In addition to personal factors, contextual factors related to students’ help-seeking attitudes further influence their decisions, as will be presented in the next section.

5.4.3.3. Factors related to students’ educational environment (Contextual factors)

Contextual factors in this study refer to any factor, like classroom climate, that is related to the academic context (e.g., Karabenick, 2004; Shim et al., 2013) which influences the learner’s decision to engage in help-seeking behaviour. This section will present excerpts from the interviews to understand three key contextual factors that the students thought

influenced their help-seeking decisions: *Students perception of threat when seeking help*; *Students' perception of faculty helpfulness*; and *Challenges of a conversion programme*.

5.4.3.3.1. Students' perception of threat when seeking help

Some respondents in the interview also reported that they would be less likely to seek help if they felt threatened by asking for it. Five participants commented that they might feel embarrassed or afraid to ask for help. Mostly, only Chinese student participants indicated that they might feel embarrassed or afraid that the helper (instructors or peer) would think they were stupid; that is, asking for academic help was perceived as threatening to their self-efficacy or self-esteem. Thus, they would be less likely to seek academic help. For example, participants from the Chinese cohort indicated a perceived threat or fear related to the concept of face, as noted in their responses below:

When you ... ask your classmates ... you [may] feel embarrassed to disturb them. Anyway, you [will] feel frustrated. There is also a kind of self-embarrassment that you need to ask it [help] again. (David).

Maybe sometimes it's face. I think I'm too embarrassed to ask others [for help]. (Ivy).

In addition to the Chinese cohort, British students made similar comments related to perceived threat. However, their answers were closer to other themes like “personality” or “perceived faculty helpfulness”. Therefore, after thoroughly examining the coding, factors in the “perceived threat” category were only found among the Chinese cohort. It should be noted that there is a new term that was not introduced before – “face” or “saving face”. This term is specifically related to Chinese culture, and the term is specially related to Chinese students; losing face may make people feel embarrassed (e.g., Huang et al., 2008), which might make them less likely to seek help.

As can be seen from the above, the negative perception of seeking help can reduce students' willingness to ask for help. When students feel that asking for help would “hurt” their feelings, it is most likely they would avoid help-seeking. Similar feelings were indicated in the quantitative phase, which suggested that student's help-seeking would be influence by their perception. Further discussion about perceived threats and how saving face is related to academic help-seeking behaviour will be provided in the Discussion Chapter. The next section will present other contextual factors – *perceived faculty helpfulness*.

5.4.3.3.2. Students' perception of faculty helpfulness

Faculty here can refer to the institution itself, or instructor-student interactions, or course structure. It sounds similar to 'instructor approachability', but here faculty helpfulness is not just about instructors; it also includes the institution as a whole. When students perceived greater help from the faculty, they would be more likely to ask for help. Nine participants commented that the level of faculty helpfulness would influence their decision to ask for help, either in a good or bad way.

Six participants – five Chinese and one British – answered that they perceived the faculty as helpful when they needed to ask for help, which more or less improved their willingness to ask for help; see the following extracts from members of both cohorts as examples:

[The faculty] is generally good [helpful], there was once ... I told her [supervisor] how I was going to write ... she was very, very encouraging...It gave me a lot of confidence ... and helped me to finish the essay. (Betty).

When I joined the course, the whole atmosphere ... were very welcoming ... I think in my department the atmosphere is very friendly...They're very accessible ... and help us to solve the problem. (Helen).

However, not every student participant from the same university felt the faculty was helpful. As mentioned, students in specific programmes may perceive different levels of helpfulness from the faculty. For instance, among the British cohort, students from the conversion programme answered that they did not find the faculty helpful, as in Michelle's comment:

I had heard from people [from our programme] ... [that had tried] to ask a question [to the lecturer] and she thinks [she] is not helpful. So I didn't bother [to ask the faculty member] ... the faculty wasn't very friendly, so I didn't bother sending [them] questions as they didn't [give] helpful feedback. (Michelle).

In reflecting on the perception of faculty helpfulness toward the decision to seek help, the interview participants reported that their perception of the faculty might influence their way of asking for help. In most cases, as the six students responded, the faculty will be perceived as helpful if the students have had a positive experience of asking for help, which would influence their future decision to seek academic help. In contrast, respondents from specific programmes seemed to have negative feelings about the faculty, which further influenced their decision, or even moved them to avoid seeking help. Perception of faculty helpfulness can be related to other themes such as instructors' approachability; further discussion concerning faculty and its association with help-seeking will be provided in Section 6.3.2.3.

The following section presents the interview data in relation to another component of contextual factors – *conversion programme*.

5.4.3.3.3. The challenges of a conversion programme

In the Scottish HE system, a conversion course is a type of degree program that trains a graduate in a new subject and (generally) prepares them for a specific occupation. Typically, a four-year programme is condensed into a year, which makes the student experience particularly intensive.

Five students (Two Chinese and Three British) in Phase Two of this study reported that they were in a conversion programme, mentioned that conversion courses were relatively hard for them, and that may have made them more or less likely to seek academic help. beside above, like from the other British students in the conversion programme, Chinese students in the conversion programme gave similar thoughts about the programme and how it influenced their way of seeking help. For example:

My major is ... a bit difficult for me, [I think] because I am [in] conversion ... is very different compare with my PGT (conversion programme), ... I have never learned any of this [conversion course material] before so I might need more help. (Betty).

Awareness of the programme difficult may influence the students' willingness to ask for help. Although not all the conversion students mentioned that the programme type negatively influenced their ways of seeking academic help, it was encouraging to discover that those negative perspectives of their programme might not necessarily be the main factor influencing their decision to seek help. In this regard, the view of the programme type influencing decision help-seeking still needs more investigation; further discussion on whether or not the programme type is related to the decision to ask for help will be provided in Section 6.3.2.3.

The result sections above have presented the interview data concerning the factors preventing/helping participants from seeking/receiving academic help. These factors have been examined under different categories: (1) personal demographic factors, (2) personal psychological factors, and (3) contextual factors. In a general sense, the impact of the factors discussed in this section have been compared based on nationalities. However, Chinese students may have different thoughts regarding the experience of seeking academic help than British home students. Therefore, in order to understand more about Chinese international

students themselves and their experiences in Scotland, the next section will focus on their perceptions of being international students in Scotland, and how being an international student might influence their ways to ask for academic help, which aligns with research aim four.

5.4.4. Theme 4: Chinese international students' perception in Scotland

As Chinese students are the main cohort in the international PGT group (HESA, nd), it is apparent that there is a need to better understand and embrace cultural and educational differences within HE (e.g., Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). Based on this perception, Chinese international students' experience becomes one of the main issues that need to be discussed in-depth. This section will present the data related to Chinese students' perceptions of living in Scotland with respect to their academic experience, including their experience of cultural influence, what barriers they encountered while studying abroad, and their thoughts about what changed when they became international students.

5.4.4.1. Cultural influences

As mentioned in the literature review, there are mixed findings about whether Asians would be more likely (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991) or less likely (e.g., Young, 2017) to seek help compared to Westerners. In addition to comparing Chinese and British students (aim 3), the interviews also contributed to trying to understand the unique experiences, such as culture shock, that Chinese international students might face which could impact their academic help-seeking (aim 4). Based on the participants' answers, the cultural influences they felt can mainly be divided into *language barriers* and *other barriers*.

5.4.4.1.1. Language Barriers

Previous studies (e.g., Andrade, 2006; Li, 2007) have suggested that the language barrier could be one main consideration that hinders students' willingness to seek help. As Chinese students might find it challenging to write in English correctly or understand the materials thoroughly, they might be more likely to need help to understand the course materials or write their assignment appropriately. There were more than 10 statements related to this issue, from all of the Chinese students. For example, Gina commented:

There are a lot of difficulties and problems [for me]. For example, the biggest problem for us is the language problem... Most of them [the reasons that I don't seek help] are related to language. (Gina).

This student suggested that language is the biggest problem for her, and that international students might not be able to understand the context well. Another participant expressed the same opinion regarding the lack of language fluency: “the international students that may not speak amazing English might find it hard to communicate [with others]” This suggests that sometimes international students did not seek help due to the language barrier.

However, one of the requirements to be accepted as international students by the university is to pass the English test (e.g., IELTS). Although Chinese students might have language barriers that influence their ability to understand the course or get high grades, it is not only the language barrier that influences students to avoid seeking help. That is to say, international students should all have basic English levels to study abroad. So what is actually influencing their help-seeking behaviour or academic experience? During the interviews, some other unexpected barriers came up, which might provide some senses of the other difficulties of being an international student.

5.4.4.1.2. Other Barriers

As the educational system here in Scotland is different than that in China, the teaching style and instructional approach used by instructors could become barriers for Chinese students. Additionally, many other academic adjustments have been highlighted by previous researchers (e.g., Fass-Holmes & Vaughn, 2014; Galloway & Jenkins, 2009; Gu et al., 2010; He & Huston, 2018), as international students might be unfamiliar with the essential academic problems in Scottish education. For example, plagiarism, inadequacy in English, and issues concerning new styles of learning, which could also be summarised as academic conventions/adjustment barrier (e.g., Wang & Shan, 2007), or confusion relating to different teaching styles here in Scotland (e.g., Kingston & Forland, 2008) all play a part. All the Chinese participants revealed that during their time as PGT students, they did face some barriers.

For example, all the Chinese participants indicated the way of thinking is difference:

The way of thinking is different! ... [I think] people in here [UK] are more likely to self-study and the way of thinking is so different. And back home we don't have that

much time for self-learning, ... I think other thing is the education [system] is very different. (Betty).

[I think it is] there would be some cultural difference. Maybe British are more likely to ask questions than Chinese students. ... the way of thinking and the language they [British students] can express their problems in are more clear... (David).

In the meantime, the UK approach to writing is also different and was cited as a difficulty:

The most difficult [thing] for me is the writing. The UK is so strict about the language, using references, etc. (Gina).

Another issue mentioned was that the teaching style was different from the style in China:

I think the teachers [in the UK create an environment] more like group study... and let us think by ourselves, which [is totally] different from when I was in China (Emily).

Although respondents did indicate the teaching methods differ from those in the Chinese education system, the central points of cultural difference cited were the way of thinking (e.g., critical thinking) and the different writing style, which could all be considered education system difference. This section has shed light on the Chinese international students' perceptions about how cultural factors influenced their experience in Scotland, with language, academic adjustment and the teaching style (the teaching approach used by instructors) being the main topics raised during the interviews. As well as some previous studies reporting the same difficulties being faced by Chinese international students (e.g., language, Sawir, 2005; academic barrier, Wang & Shan, 2007), it has been suggested that Chinese international students' experiences may be influenced by their prior learning experiences (e.g., Aarts et al., 1998; Albarracin & Wyer Jr, 2000; Becker et al., 2019), a point that was reinforced when one of the participants commented that she is more familiar with the educational system in the UK because she had studied in the London before. Based on their perceptions of barriers, when the Chinese international students came to Scotland, their academic abilities might have changed, influenced by their prior experience and the new teaching system in Scotland. Therefore, the next section will present the ways that Chinese international students' learning abilities changed during their time in Scotland, along with the potential reasons for those changes.

5.4.4.2. Learning abilities changing/improve

Almost all the Chinese students (seven out of eight) reported perceived improvements in their learning ability, such as their critical thinking skills, ability to work independently, and management of a complex workload. For example:

I think it seems that I am more willing to communicate with other postgraduates (Gina).

I think there [is some change], as I just said, in terms of independence to, like, to discuss with classmates (Ivy).

My timing management ability has changed, as I can arrange my timetable more perfectly (Betty).

In general, when I asked the Chinese students to reflect upon the academic adjustment they underwent, most recognised that the Scottish learning culture could be difficult to approach. Almost all the Chinese participants commented that they tried to overcome academic problems through lots of practice through learning experience in Scotland. For example, the key concern area for Chinese international students was writing ability, which could be related to the language barrier, critical thinking, plagiarism and time-management. This section has provided the interview responses in reflecting on the changes from their previous contexts and experiences, the participants reported that their academic ability had been adjusted over time, aligned with previous study that the length of time students' study is related to how students are able to fit into the new academic culture (Wei et al., 2007). Although the participants commented that their abilities had changed, there should still be other potential reasons to explain how and why this happened. The Discussion Chapter will consider other factors to interpret more deeply how changes in ability influence Chinese international students' academic help-seeking behaviour.

5.5. Chapter summary

The above sections and subsections have presented the qualitative results of the study. The first and second main themes (see Table 5-2 above for a reminder of the themes in this chapter) related to research aim one: to understand the process of academic help-seeking among PGT students. By exploring the students' experiences during their PGT academic years, these two themes mainly focused on the students' perceptions of the faculty and the programme, the students' understanding of academic help-seeking (which included their

understanding of the definition of academic help-seeking), which type of help they would prefer to use, and their academic help-seeking processes. The third theme, which focused on the influential factors, was related to research aim two: exploring the potential factors that could influence PGT students' academic help-seeking, which have been divided into three categories (demographic, psychological and contextual). To compare the British and Chinese students, the results relating to themes one, two and three were compared to understand the research aim three: identifying the difference and similarities between the British and Chinese PGT students' help-seeking behaviour.

Table 5-3

Qualitative results themes summary

Research Aims	Overarching themes
1	Students' experiences of their PGT education
	Different students' understanding and decisions during help-seeking process
2	Different factors related to PGT students' help-seeking process
3	(British and Chinese) Students' experiences of their PGT education
	(British and Chinese) Students' understanding and decisions during help-seeking process
	Different factors related to PGT students' help-seeking process
4	Chinese international students' perception in Scotland

Theme four, focusing on the Chinese international students' perceptions of their situation, was related to research aim four, which looks at the experience of Chinese international students when they were studying in Scotland by focusing on how their experiences impacted their help-seeking decisions. Table 5-3 above shows more visually how the overarching themes related to each research aim and question, and in Figure 5-1 below, the Venn diagram shows how the British and Chinese students regarded the themes.

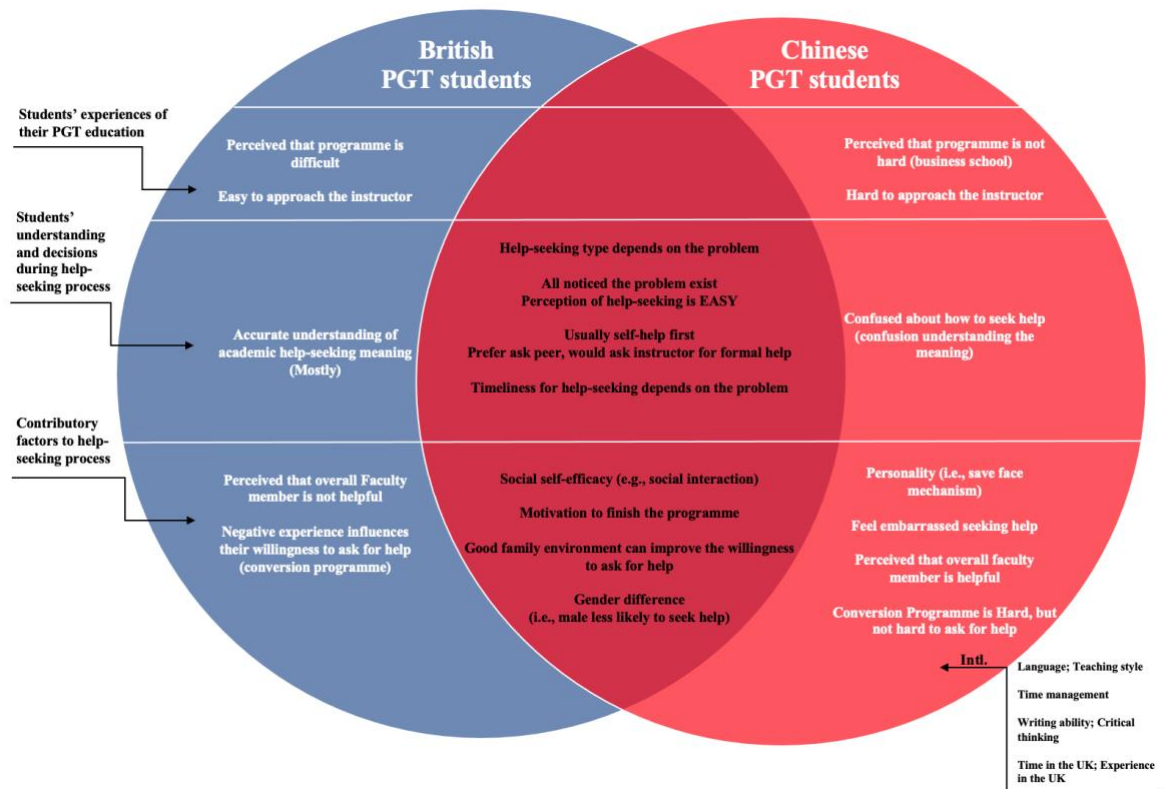


Figure 5-1. Comparison between British and Chinese students' academic help-seeking behaviour

This chapter has presented the interview findings on students' academic experience regarding the academic help-seeking process, providing insights that complement and clarify the meaning of the quantitative findings. To briefly recap: four main themes were constructed from the thematic analysis, responding to the overarching purpose of this thesis: to understand Scottish PGT (both Chinese and British) students' academic help-seeking behaviour in one Scottish university. These themes captured some aspects of both British and Chinese international students' perceptions of academic help-seeking. Specifically, they perceived academic help-seeking as a solution to academic problems when all other avenues (e.g., self-help) had not been sufficient. The results suggest that the respondents' academic help-seeking behaviours were based on and influenced by a combination of experience and perception, including how they thought about the programme's difficulty and whether it was easy to approach to tutor. The extent to which the importance of these experiences potentially influenced their academic help-seeking behaviour varied from individual to individual. However, by and large, both British and Chinese students generally thought the instructors/tutors were hard to approach, while there were varying perceived levels of programme difficulty. In addition, secondly, the respondents' academic help-seeking behaviours were influenced by a combination of different types of factors in the decision to

ask for help, including their understanding about academic help-seeking, different types of help available to them, and different decisions made during the help-seeking process, all of which was influenced by different factors (e.g., personal demographic factors, psychological factors, and contextual factors). This chapter initially expected to find some distinguishable differences between the British and Chinese students' approaches to help-seeking; however, the findings show that few differences appeared, which could potentially be due to factors like the educational system or how individual people feel about interactions.

Nevertheless, some interesting findings appeared; for example, both British and Chinese respondents might use a combination of types of help based on the different problems they have, not just simply using one type of help-seeking to solve the problem but adjusting and combining their approaches to provide more solutions (e.g., using adaptive help-seeking for guidance and expedient help-seeking for simply confirming an answer). Meanwhile, both the British and Chinese participants expressed similar preferences in terms of sources to ask for help (instructors and peers); most of them would prefer to seek help from peers as less judgement would be perceived, while asking the instructor was considered a means of getting more 'formal' help. Furthermore, it was interesting to note that help-seeking behaviour would be influenced by the programme environment; those who studied in the conversion programme generally reported negative comments, and students from CoSS (i.e., Business school) tended to report positive comments. This result highlights the importance of classroom/programme environment, which would influence students' willingness to seek help, also suggested that the contextual environment would influence student's self-efficacy in both social and academic ways, as if they perceived the negative feeling from the environment (e.g., from instructors), it would lower their self-efficacy and make them less likely to seek help. In terms of international students' experience, the interview results suggest that most Chinese international respondents perceived that the cultural influence was mainly due to the differences in the British and Chinese educational systems, but not mainly because of the language barrier, as expected. This could be due to the fact that Chinese students should have a certain English level to study abroad. To understand what the difference between British and Chinese students then, the interview results suggest other barriers (e.g., different teaching styles or different writing requirements) to be important factors for Chinese students, which could be other reasons or explanations for the lack of differences between the British and Chinese cohorts' results, as students would adjust and adapt to the difficulties during the academic year.

Overall, the interview results suggest that the academic help-seeking process is a complex process and behaviour indeed, and there are some similarities and differences between British and Chinese students regarding their academic help-seeking. Meanwhile, the findings raised my awareness of how complex help-seeking is and how it is associated with many different elements and decisions, while suggesting that the contextual environment might influence students' help-seeking as well. The findings from Phase Two represent the qualitative part of this sequential explanatory mixed-methods study, and they need to be interpreted in relation to the findings of Phase One. Thus, the next chapter will provide a detailed interpretation of the results.

6. Chapter 6 Discussion

6.1. Introduction

To briefly recap, academic help-seeking is an important academic behaviour when students encounter academic problems that they are unable to solve on their own (e.g., Karabenick & Berger, 2013). Previous research on academic help-seeking has considered different aspects of help-seeking, such as what type of help learners ask for, and has identified factors such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) as being influential on help-seeking. However, previous research has generally been limited to US populations, not considering the Scottish HE context, nor has it provided an in-depth exploration of factors that influence international students' help-seeking behaviour. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to understand the academic help-seeking behaviour of international Chinese and British students in Scottish Postgraduate Taught Degree (PGT) programmes. More specifically, this study was led by four specific research aims with one main overarching purpose: to explore students' reactions and decision-making when they encounter academic problems, how the decision influences their academic help-seeking process, and how Chinese international students adapt in the Scottish HE system when they face academic barriers. A mixed-methods sequential approach was used in which a quantitative survey with PGT students was conducted in Phase One followed by qualitative interviews with both British and Chinese international students to provide a richer picture of these issues in Phase Two. The findings for the study were presented in Chapters Four and Five. This chapter draws together the results from both phases and discusses the study's findings in relation to the research aims and the previous literature.

This chapter will begin with a study overview and a reminder of the four research aims and corresponding research questions (Section 6.2). After that, it will then move to an in-depth discussion to interpret the findings which were generated from both the quantitative and qualitative components of the research (Section 6.3). The key findings will then be drawn upon to contribute to an adapted theoretical framework, which was initially proposed but then better understood and developed based on the research findings, to present the theoretical contribution of the study (Section 6.4). Following that, this chapter identifies the limitations of this sequential mixed-method study and proposes a further follow-on study (Sections 6.5 and 6.6).

6.2. Study overview

This explanatory sequential mixed-method study comprised two phases: Phase One was an online survey and Phase Two consisted of semi-structured individual interviews to help provide a deeper understanding of the data. The first phase comprised a survey examining differences between Chinese and British students regarding different aspects of help-seeking (e.g., intentions to seek help, where they go for help) and how their academic and social self-efficacy predicted help-seeking decisions. The second phase was an interview-based explanatory investigation of postgraduate students' experiences of academic challenges, considering what type of academic help-seeking students engaged in (or not) and the factors that influenced their decisions about whether to seek help, and exploring unique factors that influenced Chinese international students' help-seeking.

There were four guiding research aims for this mixed-methods study. Research aim one was based on each step of the help-seeking process, drawing from both the quantitative and qualitative phases where relevant, to understand students' decisions at different steps in the help-seeking process. Research aim two explored the role of academic self-efficacy, social self-efficacy, and other potential factors that influence PGT students' academic help-seeking. It was expected that the influence of individual factors would vary depending on the different steps of the help-seeking process and depending on the students' home countries. This expectation led to the third aim of the study, which focused on comparing similarities and differences between the British and Chinese students regarding the academic help-seeking process. Finally, research aim four focused in more intensely on understanding international Chinese students' academic experience in Scotland and how the experience of being international students influenced their help-seeking. Each research aim was broken down into specific research questions for the quantitative and qualitative components of the study; the details of these are listed in Chapter One (see Section 1.4).

As this study adopted a mixed-methods approach in which the findings of both qualitative and quantitative research questions were planned to be mixed at the point of interpretation, the findings from each phase addressing the same research aim will be merged and discussed in this chapter. Combining both phases' results could help demonstrate this study's purpose in using the mixed-methods sequential explanatory design (e.g., Creswell et al., 2003; Ivankova et al., 2006). The interpretation of the findings will be introduced in the order of the four research aims.

6.3. Discussion of findings

The first research aim is to understand the process of academic help-seeking among PGT students. The discussion of this aim will be divided into the steps of the help-seeking process, then the discussion of the influential factors. Next, the discussion of research aim two will look at the factors influencing the help-seeking process by examining the three categories that identified from Phase Two (personal demographic factors; personal psychological factors; contextual factors). It will also focus on the relationship between self-efficacy and help-seeking under the categorisation of psychological factors. To address research aim three, the similarities and differences between Chinese and British students in their academic help-seeking processes and the relationships between self-efficacy and help-seeking will be discussed. Finally, I will discuss the findings relating to research aim four, which focuses on international Chinese students' experiences. The findings from both phases of the study will be presented according to the aim of the research aims.

6.3.1. Research aim 1: Understand the process of academic help-seeking process among PGT students

6.3.1.1. Overview of steps to make when deciding to seek help

Academic help-seeking has been conceptualised as a process that involves a series of different decisions students must make (e.g., Karabenick & Dembo, 2011). Therefore, this study examined the different steps of the process in order to understand students' academic help-seeking more comprehensively.

This study identified five main steps in relation to why and how Scottish PGT students sought the help that they did by adapting and merging Karabenick and Dembo's (2011) 8-step process of academic help-seeking, combined with Goldstein and McGinnis' (1997) timing step. The steps that were constructed and were examined in this study were: (1) Noticing an academic problem; (2) Execution of seeking help (deciding whether to seek help or not); (3) Deciding when to seek help (when they are going to ask for that help); (4) Deciding where to go for help (sources of help); (5) Deciding what type of help-seeking is needed (adaptive vs expedient vs avoidant). These steps are visualised below in Figure 6-1. Unlike previous processes proposed by other researchers, this study has uncovered a new step not previously included in traditional models of the academic help-seeking process: "timing of when to seek help", which helps the researcher and students better understand why and how they decide on academic help-seeking. The sections below present the details

of each step that were constructed from the findings in this study on Scottish PGT students and how the findings compare to existing research in this area.

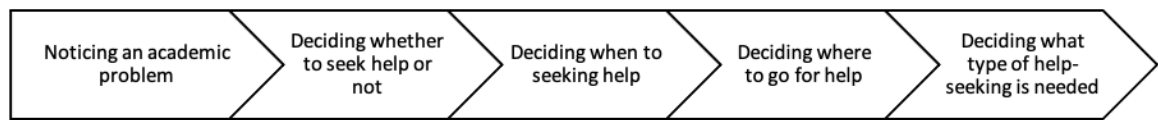


Figure 6-1. *The present study's academic help-seeking process*

6.3.1.1.1. Noticing an academic problem

In the interviews, recognising that a problem exists repeatedly emerged as a signal that initiated the academic help-seeking process. The respondents all emphasised that they noticed they needed help when they had academic problems that they may not solve by themselves. This result is similar to the existing literature that suggests that the first step of academic help-seeking behaviour is to determine that there is a problem (Karabenick & Dembo, 2011). As the participants' needs might be varied, they might feel that there had to be a reason for them to seek help, or they might perceive asking for help as a motivator to improve their study. Different purposes might lead them to make different decisions regarding whether to ask for help; for example, previous studies found that many students who identified the need to ask for help may not actually seek it (e.g., Karabenick & Knapp, 1988; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). In this case, students may not engage in further steps in the help-seeking process.

In one sense, this kind of finding is not surprising. Regarding the step of noticing the problem, previous research has shown that students can identify academic problems; as students get older, their evaluation ability to determine that a problem exists also increases (e.g., Puustinen, 1998). Consequently, it is not likely that PGT students would fail to seek help due to an inability to recognise the existence of a problem. As such, the decision-making phase, rather than the problem noticing phase, could be one of the key stages in the help-seeking process for this particular target group. However, noticing a problem exists does not mean that students would ask for help; they still need to determine whether to ask for help, which will then be discussed in the next section.

6.3.1.1.2. Deciding whether to seek help

Similar to Karabenick and Dembo's (2011) help-seeking process, after the students recognise the need to seek help, the next step is to decide whether to ask for it. The online questionnaire showed that although the majority of students would prefer using adaptive help-seeking (which will be discussed later) there was still a minority of PGT students who would avoid seeking help, showing that some students might still be unwilling to seek help. Interestingly, the survey findings suggest there were no differences between the Chinese and British students when it comes to the extent to which they reported avoiding seeking help, while the interview data suggests that actually what is more important in one's decision about whether to seek help is the learning environment itself.

During the interviews, the majority of Chinese international students and half of the British participants did not report that asking for help is hard, which might mean they are more likely to ask for academic help, as they would perceive less cost in doing so (Newman, 2002a). Unexpectedly, these results are inconsistent with previous studies which show that Chinese students might avoid seeking help due to potential cultural influences (e.g., Li, 2007). As mentioned in Chapter Five, one possible interpretation for this inconsistency could be that decisions about whether to seek help depend more upon what sources are available and the student's experience in their PGT programme rather than whether they are Chinese international students or British students (see Sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3 for further discussion). Understanding whether students seek help is crucial, as if they do not ask for help when they need it, it can adversely impact their academic achievement. Thus, one way to improve students' learning and help-seeking behaviour is to encourage them to understand the importance of seeking help when they need it. Further details about the comparison between the British and Chinese students' approaches to help-seeking will be discussed in Sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3.

When engaging in the academic help-seeking process, students have to do a cost-benefit analysis before deciding or using a certain source or step to help them; after students weigh the costs and benefits of seeking help, they decide whether to seek help. While, in this study, the decision-making that the participants cited as an important step in the process varied from person to person, by and large, the next step of help-seeking – timing – was viewed as the next influential decision in the process.

6.3.1.1.3. Deciding when to seek help

Regarding the academic help-seeking process, an analysis of the findings revealed that the timing of when to seek help is an important aspect of decisions around PGT students' help-seeking. However, this element of timing is currently missing in some help-seeking process models (e.g., Karabenick & Dembo, 2011). However, discussion of timing can be found in the more general literature with regard to the skills needed for asking questions; for example, Goldstein and McGinnis (1997) introduce the five steps to teach about asking a question. The fourth step of this process is: "pick the right time [...] to ask [your] question, by wait[ing] for a pause or wait[ing] for privacy" (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997, p. 71).

The results from this study indicate that, despite their awareness of difficulties and the availability of assistance, both the British and Chinese PGT students tended to wait passively and attempt self-help first. There are two types of 'waiting' to seek help identified in this study: one is 'wait for the right time to ask for help', which means trying to solve the problem on their own or waiting for peers to voice the same problem; and the other type is to 'wait and just neglect the problem' and avoid seeking help even after struggling on their own to solve the problem. As such, deciding *when* to ask for help could be one of the key factors in the process of academic help-seeking before moving on to the next step, which is to determine the best source of *where* to go for help. Surprisingly, there seems a strong sense from the majority of Chinese interview participants that they tended to try self-help first and then ask for help if they think still needed it, or might just neglect the problem, while the minority of British participants report the same pattern. It can be seen then that there is a 'pattern' among the British and Chinese students: both of them prefer to wait and see whether the problem is 'worth' asking for help about, and if it is not deemed worth it, they might just ignore that problem. Thus, as a result, they might not get the help they need, which highlights the importance of timing/timeliness in seeking help as an essential step in the academic help-seeking process.

There are many explanations for why this study argues that timing is important to help-seeking. For example, the results are consistent with the previously limited evidence of studies that have examined the temporal (time) aspects of other types of helping (e.g., Buckley et al., 2014, p.87), suggesting timeliness is important as it relates to avoidance or willingness to seek help, as a desire to solve the problem might make the student seek help more quickly. However, it could also be the fact that students might blame other reasons (e.g., say that sources of help are hard to approach), but not notice the importance of

timeliness in seeking help. For example, if students do not fully understand the requirements of an assignment but fail to ask for help before submission which resulted in low grades, they might blame the lecturer for not clarifying the criteria of the assignment. In fact, if they had asked for help in time, they could possibly have found out about the requirements in more detail and earned a better score. Another possible explanation for different timing decisions could be related to the available sources of help: choosing formal or informal sources could influence students' evaluations, as will be discussed in the next section.

Nevertheless, the importance of timing/timeliness in seeking help is an essential step of the academic help-seeking process and is one of the key findings of this study. Importantly, this study suggests that students also determine or proceed with academic help-seeking based on timing/timeliness, which means they might wait for the 'right' time to ask for help (which could lead them not get the help they need); or they might just wait and determine that the problem does not call for them to seek help (which means they might choose to avoid seeking help). During the decision-making phase of the help-seeking process, the help-seeker (which, in this study, refers to the students themselves) weighs the costs and advantages of proceeding with help-seeking, but without making the right decision, the student might not get the help they need.

This study finds that timing is critical in the help-seeking process and is closely related to the decision to proceed to the next step of actually asking for help. More consideration of the importance of the timeliness of help-seeking to students' academic performance could help researchers understand students' academic help-seeking more comprehensively. However, as mentioned, the academic help-seeking process is complex as influenced not just by the decision itself but also by various influential factors. Students' personal factors or overall environmental factors could impact students' help-seeking behaviour to varying degrees (Herring & Walther, 2016), and the influences may be inward, outward or both. Thus, studies of academic help-seeking behaviour should not just look at the process but also take into account that the influential factors that influence the students' help-seeking actions.

6.3.1.1.4. Deciding where to go for help

Drawing on the survey results, several of the correlational relationships provide further insight into PGT students' help-seeking behaviour. First, overall, seeking help before or after class and via email were the two most desirable sources identified by PGT students, while

the discussion board and office hours were the least desirable sources, which is consistent with Reeves and Sperling's (2015) results. The preference for seeking help before and after class indicates that PGT students prefer face-to-face sources as they can provide real-time in-person interaction (Brown, 2013), offering the students more immediate give-and-take and in-depth discussion. Email is also indicated as one of the sources that students are most likely to choose as it keeps permanent records of all the interactions and is easy to refer back to. Using email may also be a preferable form of help-seeking behaviour because it is private and secure, meaning students may feel they can seek help without being judged (Mahasneh et al., 2012). Because technology and trends in use change rapidly, it makes sense that PGT students prefer using email as it would be more accessible as it offers a range of benefits (e.g., Henderson et al., 2017). However, it was unexpected that students in blended learning (like a PGT programme) would not prefer online sources (e.g., online boards). One possible explanation for the inconsistency of this expectation with the reality is that online boards may not afford much anonymity, as the students would use their account on the site to leave the question (Reeves & Sperling, 2015), which might increase the negative feelings associated with help-seeking, even if some students indicated that the online board could help them 'crystallize' the answers to their questions. Additionally, as students use online sources very frequently (especially during the present pandemic), it is possible that the students are unaware of the benefits of those helpful resources (Aleven et al., 2003) or are not even aware of their functionality.

Additionally, PGT students reported they were most likely to go to peers with their questions, and the least frequent way they would seek help is to see the instructor during office hours. These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that university students tend to seek help from peers over instructors (e.g., Angelopoulos & Catano, 1993; Knapp & Karabenick, 1988). Previous research also indicates that students generally prefer to seek help from peers (Knapp & Karabenick, 1988), and the potential reason for this 'peer preference' can be explained by "in-group bias". That is, it is due to the nature of social interaction that students prefer interacting with their own people regardless of whether they are home or international students (Volet & Karabenick, 2006), as peers might be less judgemental than other formal sources like lecturers.

The findings from the analysis of the survey data also indicate that British students were more likely to ask a peer for help than Chinese students were. On the other hand, Chinese students were more likely to use teaching support than British students were, which indicates that different nationalities do differ in their frequency of asking different sources for help.

However, in contrast, according to the interview results, both British and Chinese students indicated that they may prefer to ask peers but might also frequently ask instructors for formal help (e.g., exam result feedback). While seeking help from the instructor might feel threatening or embarrassing, it could also reflect a student's intention to obtain the necessary help from a formal and reliable academic source. Therefore, the interviews suggest that instructors are perceived to be more competent and superior sources of help to participants, even if the surveys suggested that they are used less often than peers, and this might be due to the limited availability of instructors' time.

Moreover, although this study's results do not support the assumption that Chinese students would seek help from peers as much as British students, the results can be explained by turning to previous research (e.g., Schwalb & Sukemune, 1998) that shows that Chinese culture discourages students from pretending to understand, and that Chinese students are more likely to ask for help when they have a problem in an academic context. As Chinese students believe that asking an expert (e.g., instructor) for help is the only way to gain extra knowledge, Chinese students studying overseas should be more likely to turn to instructors for help understanding the material; this study's findings reveal a similar result. By and large, the findings align with the previous findings of many studies which suggest that asking for help from peers is the most frequent method of help-seeking (e.g., Angelopoulos & Catano, 1993; Knapp & Karabenick, 1988) but students might ask educators for what they consider to be more formal information; while the students from China would prefer different sources of help compared to students from the UK.

6.3.1.1.5. Deciding what type of help is needed

Another step of the help-seeking process is to determine what type of help is needed—for example, whether to just ask for the immediate answer, or to ask for more adaptive help such as advice or strategies in order to solve the problem. The quantitative results indicate that overall, PGT students would prefer adaptive help-seeking when they ask for help, which is consistent with previous studies showing that students in different learning contexts are more likely to use adaptive help-seeking (e.g., Newman & Schwager, 1995; Newman, 2006). The qualitative results provide further insight into the PGT student population. That is, students might choose the type of help based on the particular question or the problem they have. Therefore, one student may use multiple types of help-seeking (adaptive help, expedient help, avoiding help) during their studies as the findings from the interviews indicated that students would choose to seek different types of help, or use a combination of different types of help-

seeking behaviours, depending on the question/problem they have. For example, if the student were only seeking the answer to help them to solve the problem, they would be more likely to use expedient help (e.g., Karabenick & Newman, 2006; Nelson-Le Gall, 1981). However, it should be noted that not all the types of help-seeking are useful to students' academic performance, especially if they avoid seeking help.

The findings reveal a link between students' motivation, help-seeking types and other decisions in the help-seeking process. For example, if a student has more academic motivation, they may be more willing to use adaptive help and not perceive help-seeking as threatening (e.g., Newman, 1990; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). Since help-seeking could relate to the students' achievement of their goals and needs (e.g., Cheong et al., 2004; Roussel et al., 2011), using the most appropriate type of help for that particular problem would be reasonable. The importance of noticing this combination of different help-seeking types adds new knowledge to the academic help-seeking field, showing that students might not only use one type of help to solve their problem, but would actually use a combination; thus, this is considered as a key finding of this study.

That is, this study suggests that PGT students might use the different three types of help in combination to fit the need of solving the problem. This key finding partly confirms Newman's (2008) result showing that learners tend to seek more adaptive help (p.320), and is consistent with Protheroe's (2009) study, which found that HE students would use mixed types of the help-seeking. In fact, this study indicates that when seeking academic help, students might ask themselves: should I just ask for a hint or would getting an explanation be a better approach to solve the problem? Still, though, they might decide it would be best to use a combination. For example, the students might want to complete their academic task (e.g., assignment or exam) or solve the academic problem they have, but would also like to be able to solve future problems (e.g., finish their dissertation), or they might not ask for help on the assignment since they might feel embarrassed. If, for instance, the dissertation is a big problem for them but a current assignment needs to be dealt with first, students might just ask their peers to help with the assignment (expedient) and discuss the dissertation problems with their supervisor in detail (adaptive) at the same time. As such, they would be using a combination of help-seeking types to solve their problems.

This study's finding on combining help-seeking types adds an important new type of category of help-seeking, as this combination not only focuses on help-seekers' willingness but also takes reality into account. This understanding of using a combination of help-

seeking types can allow the field of academic help-seeking to better conceptualise and explain students' academic help-seeking behaviour. However, it should be kept in mind that any type of help-seeking includes the interaction between the academic and social elements, along with other potentially influential factors to determine the type of help students are likely to use.

6.3.1.2. Section summary

In this section, both the quantitative and qualitative findings concerning the first research aim (to understand the process of academic help-seeking among PGT students at a Scottish university) have been discussed in light of previous research. The answer to the first research aim revealed and highlighted two main key findings that came out strongly from the analysis as having a significant impact on the understanding the PGT students' help-seeking behaviour within one Scottish university context. These two key findings indicate: (1) timing decisions are also important in the academic help-seeking process; (2) students may use a combination of help-seeking types, not just one type of help-seeking behaviour. These two key findings indicate that new steps in the help-seeking process have been identified, and the decision made at all steps are arguably equally important in understanding students' academic help-seeking behaviour. However, again, there is a need to understand more deeply what factors shape or influence students' help-seeking, which is of great practical importance in deciding how to address students' academic problems. Therefore, understanding not just the decision-making regarding the academic help-seeking process but also the influential factors related to students' help-seeking decisions is important. The considerations involved in the academic help-seeking process shall then linked to research aim two, discussed in the next section.

6.3.2. Research aim 2: Potential factors that influence PGT students' academic help-seeking

Drawing on data from both the online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, the main contributing factors influencing students' academic help-seeking behaviour emerging from this study are: family environment and gender (categorised as personal demographic factors); academic self-efficacy, social self-efficacy, personality, and motivation (categorised as personal psychological factors); perceived threat, perceived faculty helpfulness, and challenges of a conversion programme (categorised as contextual factors). These factors interact with students' perceptions and attitudes towards academic help-seeking. As

mentioned in the last chapter and the previous section, participants described an intentional decision-making process and indicated that several factors might influence their decisions at each step. Participants discussed how they would routinely evaluate their academic achievement, their goals and several other factors to determine whether to seek help. Consequently, multiple categorisations of factors have been constructed from both the questionnaire and interviews, as will be explained in more detail below. Although the personal demographic factor, personal psychological factors and contextual factors were expressed as the central ideas in this study, there was a sense that British and Chinese students who studied in the conversion course had different opinions about these factors. Such different perceptions served as another factor influencing their academic help-seeking behaviour. Taken together, there are three main influential factor categories (i.e., personal demographic factor, personal psychological factor, and contextual factor) that this section will present details of while engaging critically with existing research. Here it should be noted that the following section will only discuss the influential factors within the PGT context; the comparison of British and Chinese students will be discussed with reference to research aim 3 in Section 6.3.3.

6.3.2.1. Personal demographic factors

Based on the interview data, demographic factors regarding *family environment* and *Male's attitude toward help-seeking* have been highlighted as factors that influence PGT students' help-seeking behaviour. Participants indicated that they were influenced by family environment and a comparison of male and female interviewees suggest that there are gender differences in academic help-seeking. These results further add to the existing literature suggesting that gender and family matter to academic help-seeking behaviour (e.g., Ang et al., 2004; Oliva et al., 2009).

Participants in the interviews indicated that *the family environment* or the family's interaction would influence their ways of seeking help. That is, interactions with family members or the family atmosphere could influence students' help-seeking behaviour; such findings are consistent with previous studies which show that family relationships can make students more or less willing to ask for help (Oliva et al., 2009). In fact, the family environment is important in shaping and preparing the student with knowledge to seek informal and formal help (e.g., Kliwer et al., 1994). For example, students who experience high levels of stress but have families that provide positive relationships are less likely to avoid seeking help (e.g., Jose & Kilburg, 2007; Wu et al., 2011). However, the previous

studies mainly focus on youth or children, neglecting the importance of family influence to even postgraduate students. As such, this study raises the importance of also considering the family environment as an influential factor on PGT student's academic help-seeking behaviour.

Furthermore, *gender* (i.e., Male), as another demographic factor, is suggested to be important to academic help-seeking behaviour in this study. In the interviews, the male participants indicated that they might feel more threatened asking for help or would be less likely to seek help because they would not “be allowed” to, which is similar to previous studies' findings that males generally view seeking help of any sort as a sign of weakness; they want to hide their sense of vulnerability from others (e.g., Stevens, 2016). It should also be noted that previous studies have found that females are more likely than males to seek help, more likely to seek adaptive forms of help when they seek help and more likely to perceive the benefits of help-seeking (e.g., Ang et al., 2004; Benenson & Koulkazarian, 2008). However, this study's results do not fully support this, as the analysis of the interview data does not suggest directly that the female participants were more likely to ask for help, but only shows that this is true of those female participants who noticed that their abilities had changed, which might potentially make them seek help. A possible explanation for that, which will be discussed in research aim 3 (see Section 6.3.3), could be found in the trend of cross-cultural psychology (e.g., Brislin, 1993); researchers have sought to determine whether and to what extent cultures influence help-seeking, and Chinese male students could potentially be less likely to ask for help. Another reason for the exception of this study's result could be the number of participants, as there was an uneven balance in the number of interview participants in terms of gender and country. Overall, however, this study's findings still highlight that both gender (male) and family environment are factors in students' decisions to ask for academic help.

6.3.2.2. Personal psychological factors

6.3.2.2.1. Academic self-efficacy and social self-efficacy

As expected, the results from the questionnaire data indicate that academic self-efficacy positively related many positive aspects of academic help-seeking behaviour. Additionally, social self-efficacy, less often studied in relation to academic help-seeking in the literature, was identified as another relation factors of help-seeking behaviour. For example, this study found that students with higher academic self-efficacy perceived more benefits of help-

seeking and felt the faculty were more helpful, and students with higher social self-efficacy felt more confident about their relationships and would therefore go to others if they needed help. With lower social self-efficacy, they felt more threatened so were more likely to avoid seeking help. Generally, these results support that both academic and social self-efficacy are directly related to the behaviours of academic help-seeking, which highlights the fact the both academic and social self-efficacy matter to students' help-seeking behaviour.

Students with higher academic self-efficacy tend to have stronger confidence in handling interpersonal relationships within an academic context (e.g., Zajacova et al., 2005). That is, a high level of academic self-efficacy could give students more confidence to engage with instructors and other students in the classroom, enabling them to seek help when they encounter difficulty in their studies. As mentioned before, academic help-seeking behaviour is both academic and social behaviour, as it requires the student to interact with others. This study also shows that social self-efficacy is associated with participants' perceptions of the benefits of help-seeking, perceived faculty helpfulness and adaptive help-seeking, and negatively associated with avoidant help-seeking, consistent with previous research among younger learners that social self-efficacy plays an important role in the ways students engage in their learning and achievements in school (e.g., Newman & Schwager, 1993; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). Consistent with previous studies, there was also a significant negative relationship between social self-efficacy and avoidant help-seeking behaviours (e.g., Li, 2002). More socially threatened students were more likely to seek help to reduce their efforts in studying and even avoid making efforts to solve learning problems. In short, both academic and social self-efficacy are influential factors in academic help-seeking behaviour.

In considering which type of self-efficacy matters more to postgraduate students' academic help-seeking, the findings further determined that there was no significant difference between academic and social self-efficacy, indicating that PGT students' academic self-efficacy and social self-efficacy both matter in consistent ways related to their behavioural intentions toward academic help-seeking (e.g., Payakachat et al., 2013; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997) and operate similarly for PGT students. Similarly, the interviews provided further evidence that social self-efficacy can influence the academic help-seeking process. For example, students mentioned that if they think their ability is insufficient, they might be more likely to seek help, again suggesting that social self-efficacy are one of the main factors that influence the academic help-seeking process. A possible explanation could be that, again, academic help-seeking is an academic behaviour that involves both academic and social elements. As such, when students seek academic help, it shows they have enough belief in

their social interpersonal skills to interact with others, as well as the academic self-efficacy to recognise the need to seek help. However, with limited evidence to support the ‘equal’ relationship between academic and social self-efficacy, further investigations with more in-depth studies are required to ascertain any moderators or factors that shape the relationships between them. Pulling the data together, arguably, it can be seen that academic help-seeking is not only a self-regulatory learning strategy but also a social interaction (Payakachat et al., 2013), and both academic self-efficacy and social self-efficacy matter to students’ help-seeking behaviour.

Thus, one of the key findings of this study is that both academic self-efficacy and social self-efficacy matter equally for academic help-seeking in this Scottish university context. What is more important is that this study identified that social self-efficacy has a significant effect on students’ academic experience and academic help-seeking. This key finding is important because it means students’ social attitudes and how they feel about interacting with others are equally important to their academic help-seeking, as, again, help-seeking is a form of self-regulated learning that involves social interaction (e.g., Newman, 1998; Ryan et al., 2001). From this perspective, for persons who lack the social skills and confidence for social interaction, the thought of asking for help might be more worrying, leading to avoidant help-seeking. As such, how students feel about social interaction (their social self-efficacy level) makes them decide differently when they would like to ask for academic help. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter Two, previous research has largely focused on academic self-efficacy, and there is an argument that help-seeking is an academic-social process, yet few studies have examined the influence of social self-efficacy on help-seeking behaviours. Thus, this key finding is highlighted as a new contribution to the field and suggests models of help-seeking need to include academic self-efficacy and social self-efficacy together to consider personal factors that are relevant to academic help-seeking.

6.3.2.2.2. Other personal psychological factors

The participants mentioned three psychological factors during the interview phase: *social self-efficacy*, *personality* and *motivation*. Since the above section has already discussed academic/social self-efficacy and academic help-seeking, this section discusses personality and motivation.

During the interviews, participants cited *personality* as one of the influential factors in their decisions to ask for academic help. This factor is consistent with previous evidence

suggesting personality traits affect academic motivation and performance (e.g., Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2008; Komarraju & Karau, 2005), which relate to academic help-seeking. Also, previous studies have investigated the links between attitudes toward help-seeking and personality variables (e.g., Barwick et al., 2009), as well as predicting help-seeking attitudes (e.g., Tsan & Day, 2007). For example, previous studies have suggested that having an open personality makes students more likely to ask for help (e.g., Atik & Yalçin, 2011; Bornschlegl et al., 2020). Here it should be mentioned that although my results align with the findings that personality influences academic help-seeking behaviour, in this study, students did not mention very specific personality traits but talked about the importance of personality in a general way, which suggests the need for further investigation of more specific personality variables in future research. Additionally, this present study did not investigate the interactions between self-efficacy, specific personality traits and academic help-seeking; future studies could take into account which personality traits influence students' level of self-efficacy and their help-seeking decisions.

Another key personal factor that was constructed from the interviews is *motivation*. Participants mentioned that their motivation to get a diploma or get higher grades would be an influential factor boosting their likelihood to seek help. Several studies have concluded that students who reach out for academic help are highly more likely be motivated to exert the effort necessary to achieve their desired academic goals (e.g., Sakiz, 2011; Tanaka et al., 2002; Zusho & Barnett, 2011). That is, students are more likely to seek more help when they attribute their academic difficulties to external factors rather than to themselves. In one sense, those findings are not surprising, as motivation generally focuses on the development of success or failure. For instance, when students experience a success or a failure, they might analyse the situation, look for reasons why that happened, and likely to attribute the outcome to a specific cause (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2001; Karabenick & Berger, 2013). Consequently, the strength of students' motivation could determine whether they seek help, as help-seeking can be one of the causes of their success or failure. However, again, this study did not measure motivation in a specific way (e.g., using approach orientation, as in Karabenick, 2004) but relied on general description (i.e., motivation here can be considered the desire to get a diploma or graduate). Therefore, in this study, when the results suggest that motivation could influence students' decision to seek help, that motivation refers generally to the desire to complete an academic task (e.g., to graduate or get good grades).

Of particular note, although these two factors (personality and motivation) were constructed from the interviews as the key themes/patterns, it is important to make clear that not all the

interview participants mentioned the same factors as influencing their academic help-seeking. As Ajzen (2005) suggests, personal elements could influence students' academic behaviour; thus, research aim 3 will discuss how the students from the UK and China could have different perspectives on influential factors that are related to academic help-seeking (see Section 6.3.3).

These results above indicate that students seeking different levels of academic help can be influenced by motivation and personality, which supports and is consistent with previous studies suggesting that personality and motivation influence students' academic help-seeking behaviour. However, the importance of other personal differences that can influence academic help-seeking should also be considered in future studies (e.g., IQ, learning approaches, and specific personality traits). By exploring the factors regarding academic help-seeking in relation to personality and motivation through qualitative data, this study has added supporting evidence to study the personal factors influencing academic help-seeking behaviour.

6.3.2.3. Contextual factors

During the interviews, specific contextual factors came up: *perceived threat*, *perceived faculty helpfulness*, and *conversion programme type*. Since *perceived benefits of help-seeking* was only discussed in the quantitative phase, it will not be discussed in this section as in general, could be related to *perceived faculty helpfulness* and *help-seeking threat*. In general, unlike personal psychological factors and personal demographic factors, the majority of participants in this study did raise these perceptive reasons at a high level as influential factors in their decisions to seek academic help. These results align with the findings from other research suggesting that contextual factors could be one of the main factors that influence students' academic help-seeking behaviour (e.g., Zusho & Barnett, 2011; Zusho et al., 2007). Previous studies (e.g., Newman, 2006) suggest that to better understand academic help-seeking, the role of contextual factors should be considered. Thus, in this study, the extent to which participants cited those contextual influences as important factors will be discussed below but may vary from person to person. By and large, surprisingly, *conversion programme* and *perceived threat* arose as the most striking factors among all the practical considerations within this study.

6.3.2.3.1. Perceived threat

The questionnaire data shows that the perception of help-seeking as a threat generally occurred at low levels among PGT students. Moreover, the results also suggest that perceived threat is related to students' social self-efficacy. For example, students with a higher level of social self-efficacy would be less likely to perceive help-seeking as a threat. Interestingly, these findings align with previous studies in which social self-efficacy was found to play an important role in the ways students engage in their learning experience (e.g., Newman & Schwager, 1993; Payakachat et al., 2013; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). That is, students with lower social self-efficacy may feel uncomfortable relating to others and are more likely to perceive threats from peers and instructors when asking for help. Students tend to avoid or delay learning behaviours, such as academic help-seeking, if there is more cost (e.g., anxiety) associated with it, so those students who have lower levels of self-efficacy (e.g., who feel humiliated and ashamed about their academic abilities) would think that seeking help is quite difficult (Payakachat et al., 2013; Ryan & Pintrich, 1998). Thus, perception of threat would be one of the factors to determine students' help-seeking behaviours.

Furthermore, the qualitative data highlights that perceived threat was, again, likely to influence students' decisions to seek academic help. For instance, some participants reported that they might feel embarrassed or afraid that the helper would think they lack ability. Consequently, asking for academic help could threaten students' self-efficacy, and they would thus be less likely to seek academic help. This, again, aligns with previous studies showing that students who are unsure of themselves are less likely to seek help because of the perceived threat to themselves (e.g., Kitsantas & Chow, 2007; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). In other words, students may feel that seeking help is threatening to their self-efficacy because it may signal incompetency to peers and evaluators.

As the results in this study show that PGT students reported lower levels of perceived threat, it can be suggested that the cost-benefit evaluation of help-seeking is not the main factor influencing PGT students' decisions to seek help. The reasons for failing to seek needed help may also include other psychological factors such as personality, motivation or social embarrassment (e.g., Karabenick, 1998; Newman & Goldin, 1990; Wakefield et al., 2014). Furthermore, the process of help-seeking could be determined by different factors; thus, it is necessary to consider other personal factors which may have effects on students' help-seeking behaviour.

6.3.2.3.2. Perceived faculty helpfulness and Conversion programme

In considering other contextual factors, it must be understood that programme type will influence students' perceptions of faculty helpfulness as well. Therefore, this section will discuss *perception of faculty helpfulness* and *conversion programme (challenges of a conversion programme)* together.

Looking at the qualitative data, it seems that there was more variation in terms of help-seeking between students in different programmes than between students from different nations. To reiterate, conversion courses (or conversion programmes) are one-to-two-year intensive Masters programmes that allow individuals to study a major that differs from their undergraduate degree. Pulling from the interview data, five students in this study reported that they were in conversion programmes, and they mentioned several times that it was very hard for them and they tended to need to seek academic help. Notably, the *conversion programme* factor has not been included in academic help-seeking studies in any Scottish context. Thus, the possible explanations constructed from this study for why the conversion programme matters can be the conversion programme's intensive nature, which is particularly challenging for students who have no experience of such programmes and no foundational knowledge of the materials covered in the programme, all of which may directly influence their willingness to seek help. Given that there is limited evidence about the length of cross-border learning transitions, the effect of cultural, affective and intellectual learning inherent in a one-year conversion Masters programme, and how cultural and professional knowledge engagement occurs between students and instructors, it can only be assumed that their potential for influencing help-seeking behaviour and effective learning seems high.

Given that the internationalisation of the Scottish HE system seems to continue to grow and the level of classroom diversity is increasing, the reason to stress the teaching of international conversion Masters programmes seems clear. With numerous students, both international and British, and only a one-year teaching phase, the instructors might find themselves with an overwhelming workload. Consequently, the students might perceive a lower level of *help from the faculty*, as the faculty members might be facing a challenging situation (e.g., Turner & Robson, 2008). The fact that the instructors may be in a situation that causes the students to consider them unhelpful will be discussed below.

In relation to the influence of conversion programmes, the perception of faculty helpfulness was constructed as an important contextual factor in this study. As class structures and limited faculty helpfulness might discourage academic help-seeking among students (e.g., Ryan et al., 1998), positive instructor/institution qualities such as warmth, caring and availability can influence students' help-seeking behaviour positively. Faculty members who are perceived by their students as too busy or who seem annoyed by the quality of the students' question can unintentionally inhibit students from seeking their help. Especially for students who may not have much confidence, these interactions with faculty members can become even greater obstacles to them asking for academic help. Conversely, when students perceive more helpfulness from the faculty (e.g., their institution/instructor), they are more likely to ask for help, and vice versa (e.g., Kuh & Hu, 2001; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). In the interviews, the conversion programme students said the faculty seemed unhelpful which limited their help-seeking, aligned to the literature that satisfaction with a student's overall experience is also influenced by informal faculty-student interaction (e.g., Lamport, 1993; Maestas, 2001). Along with the challenge of the conversion programme mentioned above, it can be seen that there is a relationship between faculty-student interaction and students' help-seeking behaviour. Based on those results, it is possible, therefore, that the environment surrounding the students (i.e., the programme type and the faculty interaction) is one of the main factors influencing whether they seek help or not.

As such, the fourth key finding in this study is that the students' academic help-seeking behaviour is not just influenced by one type of factor, but is, in fact, determined by the complex interaction of personal demographic factors, personal psychological factors, and contextual factors. The results were further explained and understood through the qualitative analysis, which suggest that environmental factors play an important role in the academic help-seeking process as it includes social interaction with other people, including university faculty members. For example, different learning experiences in different environments can make students feel that the faculty members are more or less helpful, influencing their attitudes and approaches to seeking help. This key finding supports previous studies (e.g., Almeda et al., 2017; Carmon, 2013; Lee, 2006) which have shown that the reasons students do or do not seek help can be divided into two broad categories of factors – environmental factors (i.e., contextual factors) and personal factors (i.e., psychological and personal demographic factors) – which suggests that academic help-seeking is a result of the interaction between individual and external factors.

6.3.2.4. Section summary

In this section, both the quantitative and qualitative findings concerning the second research aim (to understand the role of academic self-efficacy, social self-efficacy, and other potential factors that influence PGT students' academic help-seeking) have been discussed in the light of previous research. In general, supporting the existing literature (Payakachat et al., 2013; Peng et al., 2006; Tsan & Day, 2007), this study's findings indicate that different types of influential factors influence students' decisions to seek academic help; these include personal demographic factors, personal psychological factors and contextual factors. Considering these findings above, there are two key findings regarding the research aim 2. These are: (3) academic and social self-efficacy operate similarly for students and are both important for academic help-seeking, and (4) academic help-seeking behaviour is determined by the complex interaction of personal demographic factors, personal psychological factors and contextual factors.

These key findings allow us to understand that help-seeking is not merely an individual activity, but also a social action (Dunn et al., 2014; Karabenick & Gonida, 2018) or interaction with the students' surrounding environment (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Kitsantas & Chow, 2007). In this respect, academic help-seeking behaviour is not just a simple behavioural process, but is a complex, multi-influencing behaviour process. Moreover, environmental factors (such as different types of programme, different colleges/schools, different university policies, etc.) have rarely been explored in the context of Scottish PGT students. How the environmental factors and how the personal factors interact with the environmental factors regarding academic help-seeking will be discussed, using the theoretical model to understand the meaning of these key findings.

6.3.3. Research aim 3: difference and similarities between the British and Chinese PGT students

To briefly recap, culture in this study is understood to include the individual attitudes, norms, values, and ways of thinking that are dominant in a national culture (Küttel, 2017). This understanding informs research aim 3, which seeks to elaborate on the similarities and differences between Chinese and British students in their academic help-seeking processes. The results of the online questionnaire's quantitative results suggest that nationality could have an effect on attitudes toward seeking help in an academic context. Specifically, these results suggest that Chinese individuals are more likely than British students to consider

help-seeking to be a threat. This is consistent with previous research that Chinese students think asking others for help means they cannot solve problems independently, which may cause others to make a negative judgement about their ability, making the student feel their self-value is threatened (Wang, 2002; Zheng, 2000). A possible explanation for why Chinese students might perceive more threat than British students when asking for academic help is that Chinese culture does not encourage students to speak out or question what they learn, but rather to avoid expressing their viewpoints for fear of being wrong and losing face (e.g., Tsui, 1996) (the concept of face will be discussed in detail later in this section). However, interestingly, this study also suggests that Chinese students would not be likely to avoid seeking help compared to British students, which might be due to the fact that Chinese students go abroad to get a degree, and this motivation compels them to seek help when they need it.

Additionally, the quantitative results indicate that British students are more likely to ask a peer for help than Chinese students are. Conversely, Chinese students are more likely to use teaching support than British students, which indicates that different nationalities do differ in their preferences in terms of different sources of help. These results are also consistent with other research which shows that Chinese learners believe teachers/instructors to be authoritative sources that can help them avoid expending unnecessary effort to achieve their goals (e.g., Li, 2002). Although Chinese culture discourages students from questioning what they have learned, it also discourages them from pretending to understand and would encourage them to ask for help when they have a problem in an academic context. Thus, Chinese students believe that asking an expert (e.g., the instructor) for help is an effective and acceptable way to gain extra knowledge. However, it should be noted that although the results indicate that the two groups used different sources with different frequencies, both Chinese and British students would still prefer to seek help from peers, while turning to instructors for more formal help or formal clarification. Section 6.3.1.1.4 above provides more detail on how the students decided where to go for help.

In addition, the results of this study also indicate that although all the students reported that different types of factors influenced where and when they would seek help, it was interesting to find that almost all the Chinese students cited family as an influential factor, while not all the British students thought in the same way. This result is consistent with previous research showing that students sometimes prefer to ask family for help, or that family influences their willingness to seek help (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Hofer et al., 2009). This preference also tallies with China's one-child policy. Most Chinese students do not have siblings they can turn to for help, and the majority of parents 'spoil' the children and act as 'helicopter parents'

(Settles et al., 2013). It makes sense then that most Chinese students indicated that the family or the family environment would influence their decision to seek help, whereas the British students did not indicate the same and might have siblings, but should note that it is unlikely those siblings would take the same course, which reveals a recommendation for future research to understand the number of children in a family in relation to help-seeking.

Unexpectedly, the questionnaire revealed no significant relationship overall between nationality and self-efficacy. Neither the Chinese nor British nationality influenced the students' levels of self-efficacy or the relationship between levels of self-efficacy and academic help-seeking behaviour. These findings are inconsistent with previous research findings (e.g., Klassen, 2004b; Schwarzer et al., 1997) which have indicated that Chinese students should have lower self-efficacy than British ones. It was expected that because non-native English-speaking students need to make more effort, negotiating and balancing two different language systems, they may experience misunderstandings, anxiety, lost confidence, and diminished self-efficacy (e.g., Halic et al., 2009). This results' inconsistency with previous research may be explained by the different environments or academic systems. For example, some researchers believe that studying abroad can increase self-efficacy and self-esteem (e.g., de Diego-Lázaro et al., 2020). That is, during the period of their stay abroad, these students must set goals for themselves, build their own life courses, and give meaning to their experiences during their time abroad in order to be successful. Researchers also suggest that studying abroad can expand one's ability to speak a second language, which can enhance intercultural interaction competencies (Kinginger, 2009), and present opportunities for the development of self-esteem or self-confidence (Milstein, 2005). In addition, some Chinese students indicated that their previous experiences being on an exchange or studying abroad increased their willingness to seek help, which indicates that studying abroad provides chances to develop self-confidence (e.g., Milstein, 2005) and to expand their second language abilities and develop interaction competencies (e.g., Kinginger, 2009). At the same time, as their goal is to get top degrees, international students may have a strong motivation to seek help. Therefore, studying overseas can provide opportunities to develop as a person and enhance identity development (Benson et al., 2013), which may have contributed to there being no difference between British and Chinese students' levels of self-efficacy.

In one sense, the above findings are surprisingly inconsistent with previous studies, according to which (e.g., Hwang, 2006, 2011) culture is a determining factor in attitudes and preferences when it comes to seeking professional help, that it is reasonable to assume that

culture influences several aspects of academic help-seeking process (e.g., McInerney, 2011). In particular, as Chinese culture is more likely to emphasise dependence and social harmony within the group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) while Western cultures, such as British culture, are more likely to emphasise independence and individualism (Kwan et al., 2010), there should be several differences in the two groups' decisions around the academic help-seeking process. Surprisingly, though, the results from this study only suggest the influence of culture on a few aspects of the help-seeking process (e.g., source preference and attitudes toward academic help-seeking), which is not fully consistent with previous studies on students from Asian backgrounds (e.g., Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Wright & Lander, 2003).

Although only few aspects of difference, one of the potential reasons why Chinese students' help-seeking behaviour might differ from British students' (e.g., perceived more threat) could be the issue of 'face'. Saving face can be understood as "person's set of socially-sanctioned claims concerning one's social character and social integrity in which this set of claims or this 'line' is largely defined by certain prescribed roles that one carries out as a member and representative of a group" (Zane & Yeh, 2002, p. 126). Broadly, in Asian contexts, face-saving (or saving face) can be described as a desire to maintain one's and others' social integrity (Zane & Yeh, 2002). Thus, there should be a link between saving face and help-seeking behaviour, and indeed, there have been some previous studies with related populations (e.g., Asian-Americans, Asians) exploring the link between saving face and help-seeking behaviour (e.g., Bathje et al., 2014; Leong et al., 2011; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011). However, the findings of previous studies are inconsistent, as some studies suggest a negative relationship while others show a positive relationship between saving face and perspectives on help-seeking. Therefore, the relationship between saving face and help-seeking might require further investigation. However, the results from Mak and Cheung (2012) also suggest that people with greater face-saving concerns may be more likely to avoid negative evaluations from others, which means that saving face as an influence on help-seeking is a relevant cultural variable, and might also be a matter of individual personality (i.e., different people prioritise face-saving to different degrees), although that still remains unclear. As such, the potential reason why Chinese students feel embarrassed and more threatened to seek help can only be assumed to be related to the concept of face. Further studies should be conducted to provide more detail and a further explanation.

Still, this study has provided explanations for certain differences between British and Chinese students' thoughts on academic help-seeking at one Scottish university, and these should provide advice to help this university or even others meet the needs of different types

of help-seekers. The potential reason for the lack of significant differences in the findings may be that the PGT programme's length of residency and the programme type (i.e., conversion course) serve as confounding variables in the relationships between students' self-efficacy and cultural orientation. That is, course length and programme type may influence students' academic help-seeking behaviour, which in turn, may influence the relationship between self-efficacy and the cultural orientation of students.

The other possible explanation for the inconsistent results among the studies can be explained by the different environments or academic systems. As mentioned above, studying abroad provides chances to develop self-confidence (Milstein, 2005) and can be challenging. In order to expand their second language abilities and develop interaction competencies (Kinginger, 2009), international students may have the motivation to seek help. For example, Chinese students who have higher self-efficacy are more likely to start a conversation with students from other countries. In this case, they can gather enough "help" sources to seek help without finding it threatening. Also, since international students need to have a certain level of English ability to study abroad, the language barrier might be small, making the students more willing to turn to instructors for help. To understand more, the results will be discussed within the context of the theoretical framework later on.

6.3.3.1. Section summary

This section has focused on research aim 3, comparing in detail the British and Chinese international students' behaviour. Emerging from this is the fifth key finding of this study: the programme/college environment around students seems to have a stronger impact on their help-seeking decisions than their nationality does. Although previous studies indicate that culture impacts students' self-efficacy and academic experience (e.g., Klassen, 2004a, b; Klassen & Usher, 2010; Marambe et al., 2012), this study's findings suggest that Chinese and British students do not have essential differences in their levels of self-efficacy or help-seeking behaviour within this Scottish HE context (with the exception of source preference and attitudes toward help-seeking). As suggested above, a possible explanation for why no difference was detected between Chinese and British students' self-efficacy and help-seeking is that it is possible that environment (programme type, classroom environment) has more influence on students than nationality. That is to say, academic help-seeking is a complex behaviour process that different factors influence; as a university is a small society, other factors might have an influence on students' self-efficacy as well.

Despite the finding that nationality/culture did not influence students' level of self-efficacy, the interviews continued digging into how national culture does have an influence on students. Referring back to Chapter Five, the qualitative results indicated that the difference between the British and Chinese students could be attributed to their environmental contexts. For example, the participants from the School of Business perceived their programme as not being hard, and it was easy to ask for help as they might have more access (e.g., teaching assistants, peers from the same country), whereas the participants from the School of Education perceived their programme hard and said it was not easy to ask for help as they might have less access (e.g., lecturers who were harder to approach; difficult course material). Later, in the theoretical framework section, I will discuss how this study understands the differences and similarities between the two student groups' attitudes to academic help-seeking by offering an in-depth theoretical framework to address how personal and environmental factors interact to influence and shape students' help-seeking behaviour (Wolters & Pintrich, 2001; Zimmerman, 1989).

6.3.4. Research aim 4: understanding international Chinese students' academic (help-seeking) experience in Scotland

In order to find out more about international students' experiences in Scotland and how those experiences influence their academic performance or their help-seeking decisions, the interview phase sought to address research aim 4. What cultural differences or academic problems Chinese international students face is a big research question, not only for this study but among cross-cultural studies in general. Based on the participants' responses in this study, the cultural influences can be categorised as: *language; different teaching style; different time management system; need to improve writing ability; and critical thinking.*

The qualitative results show that students mentioned that the main issue as an international student is the *language barrier*, as it can prevent an individual from asking for help. That is, international students may feel embarrassed to ask for help due to their language level or fear of misunderstandings. The language barrier for non-native speakers can influence the learning environment, especially as written communication is the main form used during the academic journey. This might cause the student to avoid seeking help as well as they do not know how to ask for help in the 'right' way due to the language barrier.

Indeed, students from different learning backgrounds have different levels of learning abilities. In this study, *learning abilities* could include creative and critical thinking, analysis, problem-solving and writing skills. The Chinese international students also mentioned learning ability as one of the differences when studying abroad. As the educational system is different, students who study in Scotland have their different abilities – like their way of thinking or way of writing – influenced. This result provides new insight on how to understand international students' academic experience. Improving learning skills could help students achieve better evaluations, improving their academic achievement; therefore, learning ability can be used to predict a student's success, and can also help understand students' help-seeking behaviour (e.g., Ramos et al., 2013).

It should be noted that these barriers could be attributed to the fact that the educational system is different in China. Just as the *learning style* and *instructor teaching method* could become barriers for Chinese students, students' transition to Scotland can be difficult, given that Chinese students have to learn in a new educational system with different cultural norms. In general, almost all the participants in this study commented that they tried to overcome such differences in the educational system through practice and learning experience. For example, a key area of concern for international students is writing ability, which could be related to critical thinking and plagiarism, as well as the time management; perceptions of all these things differ between Scotland and China since there are different cultural expectations in different education systems. As such, it might be concluded that the environment surrounding international students has a key effect on their help-seeking behaviour.

The results of this study provide potential reasons for changes or improvements to international students' abilities (for example, the skill of time management). Previous studies have indicated that one's length of time staying abroad could influence students' ability to fit into the new academic culture (Wu et al., 2015). In the case of the students in this study, during the time they study in Scotland, they need to change or learn certain skills in order to finish their assignments or get their degree. Additionally, the experience of adapting to a new academic system could be another factor that explains their ability changing; that change might lead students might have a good or bad experience, which might make them more or less likely to ask for help. The participants commented that their abilities had changed (e.g., they became better able to engage in critical thinking), and these are some potential reasons to explain how and why that happened.

Despite the above outcomes, it has also been suggested that international students' academic experience may be influenced by each individual's prior learning experiences (e.g., Aarts et al., 1998; Albarracin & Wyer Jr, 2000; Becker et al., 2019; Elias & MacDonald, 2007). Two interview participants in this study mentioned that they were familiar with the Scottish system was due to their prior experience. Thus, the academic ability of international students who come to Scotland might be influenced by their prior experience and adaptation to the new teaching system in Scotland. In this sense, knowing what difficulties international students face could provide them with more potential to get the help they need.

However, it should be kept in mind that this study only focuses on Chinese students who study in Scotland; that could be some other potential difficulties for other countries' international students. For example, as there is a growing number of EU and Middle Eastern students, their cultural backgrounds or prior experiences might have different impacts on their experiences in Scotland, which could influence their decisions to seek academic help or not.

6.3.5. Finding summary

This study's attempt to meet its research aims revealed and highlighted different views on PGT students' academic help-seeking process and how personal/environmental elements influence their decision-making in the Scottish HE context. A number of key findings have been discussed above but will be drawn together in one section, which will be presented below, helping contribute a theory of PGT students' academic help-seeking. The reason these particular findings are focused on is because they were constructed most strongly from the analysis and they offer the most significant impacts on theory and practice. The key findings indicate: (1) timing decisions are also important in the academic help-seeking process; (2) students may use a combination of help-seeking types, not just one type of help-seeking behaviour; (3) academic and social self-efficacy operate similarly for students and are both important for academic help-seeking; (4) academic help-seeking behaviour is determined by the complex interaction of personal demographic factors, personal psychological factors and contextual factors; and (5) the programme/college environment around students seems to have a stronger impact on their help-seeking decisions than their nationality does.

This study's key findings address the research aims and add valuable knowledge to the literature on academic help-seeking. This study adds knowledge to the current literature by

demonstrating the help-seeking process step by step while determining the interaction between personal and environmental factors and their influence on the academic help-seeking process. The theoretical framework will indicate more about academic help-seeking behaviour and how the environmental and personal factors interact to influence when students ask for help, providing a more comprehensive picture of PGT academic help-seeking in the Scottish HE context. This chapter has now discussed the key findings for this study in relation to the existing research. The next section will present the newly adapted theoretical framework that were constructed from the findings of this mixed-methods study.

6.4. Contributions

6.4.1. Theoretical contribution

The following sections will start by explaining why a newly adapted theory framework is needed and how this study borrows from and merges Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. Next, Section 6.4.1.2 will discuss how the key findings inform different aspects of the newly adapted theoretical model. Following that, Section 6.4.1.3 will bring it all together with the presentation of the newly adapted theoretical model (which has been named the 'PGT students' academic help-seeking model'), providing explanations of the theoretical components and how they work together. After that, Section 6.4.1.4 will summarise and provide a critique of the newly adapted theoretical model.

6.4.1.1. Why a newly adapted theoretical model is needed

This section offers a rationale for why a newly adapted theoretical model is needed and why Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Biological Systems Theory have been merged. The extensive literature review in Chapter Two outlined the existing models and theories relating to academic help-seeking and the broader academic context. While providing a useful framework to begin the discussion about academic help-seeking, the existing theories (e.g., Social Cognitive Theory) are not sufficient to explain the process of help-seeking and what broad set of factors may impact this process, especially for PGT students in the Scottish HE system. This study has added a new layer to the framework model by uncovering a more in-depth understanding of how seeking academic help occurs; it has then combined two existing theories into a new framework to help understand and inform practice to support academic help-seeking among PGT students.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Social Cognitive Theory already has a substantial basis of research data indicating the reciprocal interaction between students' help-seeking behaviour and the influence of factors like self-efficacy (e.g., Kiefer & Shim, 2016; Cheng & Tsai, 2011; Chyr et al., 2017; Williams & Takaku, 2011). However, as mentioned, academic help-seeking involves social interaction, which should be considered alongside environmental factors (Lau & Ng, 2014; Woolfolk et al., 2007). While a PGT programme is a type of time-transition involving individual development, these "largely" development elements are not included in Social Cognitive Theory, as the theory is particularly interested in personal behaviour and attitudes, which includes being self-driven. Thus, in order to theoretically conceptualise PGT students' academic help-seeking behaviour, and how the changes they undergo (e.g., environment change, timing duration influence, or personal changes due the new environment) would influence academic help-seeking. The theoretical framework proposed here then incorporates Bio-ecological Theory, seeks to understand the influence of individual development as well as how the environment surrounding the individual influences their behavioural outcome.

However, while Bio-ecological Theory can help to understanding the help-seeking from different angle by focus on individuals' bidirectional interactions take place within the system settings across time, and goes into great detail about environmental influences, this theory does not adequately capture the complex and dynamic changes in thinking, decision-making and self-belief that influence academic help-seeking. Thus, to understands more about the individual cognitive level of how students decide on and proceed with academic help-seeking, a more comprehensive theoretical framework needs to also incorporate the social cognitive perspective. Moreover, some would point out that Bio-ecological Theory was originally developed for children, whereas this study focuses on adults. To justify its applicability to older learners, this study considers the learning journey to be a period development; as it is not true that adults stop developing as they age, the concept of development is applicable throughout one's life (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). Additionally, adding Bio-ecological Theory into considerations of HE enables the consideration of several bio-elements that affect students' learning (e.g., personal values or personal factors) to help to understand more – with interaction with cognitive process – about help-seeking. As such, combing Bio-ecological Theory and Social Cognitive Theory as complementary components of a single framework provides a deeper understanding of academic help-seeking.

6.4.1.2. Implications of key findings for the newly adapted theoretical model

Following the argument that one theory alone is insufficient to explain PGT students' academic help-seeking behaviour, how do this study's key findings inform the newly adapted theoretical model? The following section will then discuss about this. The overall research purpose of this thesis is to understand Scottish PGT (both international and British) students' academic help-seeking behaviour. To this end, a new model will be introduced that is adapted from Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1991) and Bio-ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1977), informed by the key findings from this study. This section will discuss the implication of five key findings drawn from this mixed-methods study, which have been outlined in the previous sections with reference to the research aims (see Sections 6.3.1.2, 6.3.2.4 and 6.3.3.1). In addition, this section will discuss how the key findings led to the newly adapted theoretical model, attempting to explain how PGT students make decisions when they need academic help and how various factors influence these decisions in a Scottish context. By creating a newly adapted theoretical model, this study adapts the structure and assumptions of Bio-ecological Theory, which holds that human development exists in different system levels. The process of developing the newly adapted theoretical model occurred in four circle layers (individual → microsystem → exosystem → macrosystem) along with the chronosystem. Here should be noted that the chronosystem concept is aligned with the PPCT model's concept of time, which places more emphasis on the role time plays in a person's development and the person's interconnected involvement with processes over time. Others would say the chronosystem focuses on life transitions with socio-historical circumstances (Tudge et al., 2009), or that it represents dynamic transitions such as milestones and turning points, which produce new conditions that affect the development of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This study considers that the chronosystem refers to any time change involved in individual development, including milestones.

(1) Timing decisions are important in the academic help-seeking process

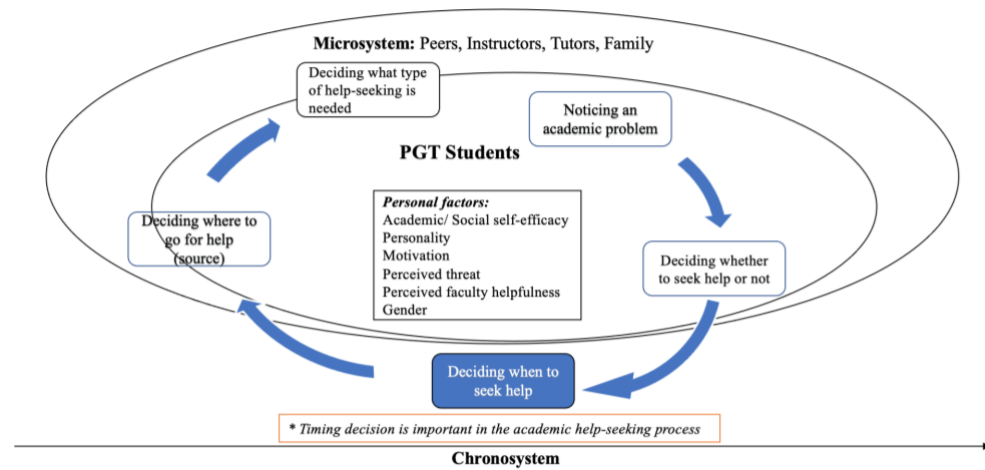


Figure 6-2. *The interaction between timing step and Bio-ecological Theory*

The first key finding is that timing is important in the academic help-seeking process. Drawing on previous studies on the help-seeking process (e.g., Karabenick & Dembo, 2011) and Bio-ecological Theory, this study has proposed timing – or ‘timing decision’ – as a new step in the help-seeking process, suggesting that the time influences how students ask for support. However, what does ‘time’ mean in this framework? Previous studies have suggested that time has an important influence on student’s educational transition (e.g., undergraduate to postgraduate), and also influences students’ academic experience or decision-making when they seek help; this indicates that the chronosystem is related to academic help-seeking behaviour. That is, as is shown in Figure 6-2, time influences students’ help-seeking actions, which aligns with Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), who indicate that the chronosystem involves time perspective variables that can be applied to students’ academic development.

For example, Winograd and Rust (2014) found that when students seek help early (as soon as they recognised they have a problem and determine to seek help), they are more likely to benefit in terms of improving their grade point average and improving their skills/knowledge. They also found that students who often experience limited social interaction do not seek help in a timely way and often feel threatened by the idea of seeking help from their educators. Additionally, Almeda et al. (2017) investigated help avoidance and suggested that time/timing is important for academic performance as well, demonstrating that students who need help would more likely benefit by immediately seeking help, rather than attempting to solve the problem on their own first. Consistent with the literature, participants in the current research emphasised the importance of ‘timeliness’ at many levels in underpinning their transitional experiences (transitioning from China to Scotland; undergraduate to

postgraduate; exam period to dissertation preparation), as well as the contextual /environmental supports required for the development of help-seeking decisions. The interview results also indicated that, over time, almost all the Chinese participants had overcome some academic problems through lots of practice through learning experience in Scotland. As such, the effect of the chronosystem was also evident with regards to concerns about the educational system environment, particularly in terms of timely decision-making, and overall improvement/ change. Thus, this study suggests that timing decisions (i.e., deciding when to seek help and the timeliness of academic-help-seeking) is critical in the help-seeking process to understand help-seeking behaviours, and this is incorporated into the theory through the inclusion of the chronosystem by understand the help-seeking trajectories among Chinese international students.

(2) Students may use the combination of help-seeking types

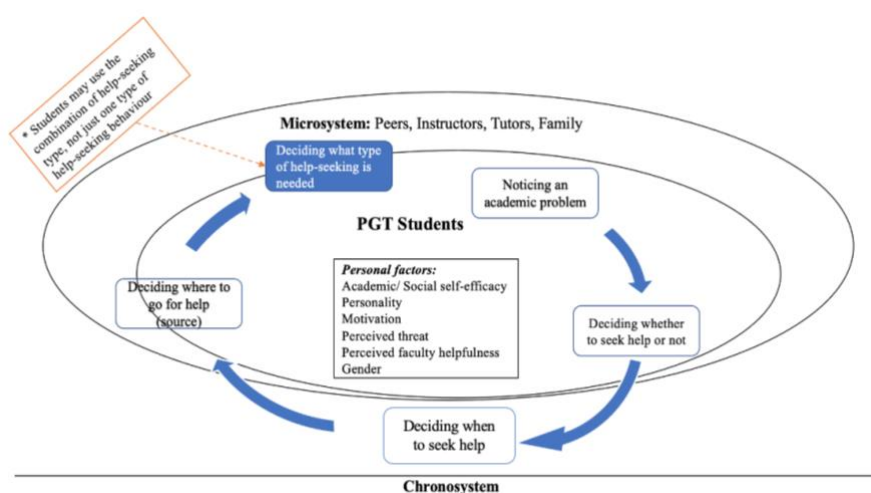


Figure 6-3. *The interaction between choosing a type of help and Bio-ecological Theory*

The second key finding from the study is that students might use a combination of different types of help, not just a single type of behaviour. Previous research on academic help-seeking suggests that when students decide to seek help, they must also decide which type of help they need or which approach to use. That is, generally, research suggests that students would prefer either the adaptive or expedient types of help-seeking when it is related to their academic achievement (e.g., Newman, 2008). However, this study has suggested that academic help-seeking behaviour is not that 'simple', based on the second key finding. This study has suggested that students might not only prefer one type of help-seeking but, in fact, would prefer a combination of them. When students decide which type of help to use, they determine it based on the type of problem and use different types of help simultaneously. As Figure 6-3 above shows, the decision to determine which type of help-seeking to use is

influenced bidirectionally by the microsystem and individual layers. For example, many participants mentioned in the interviews that they sought help from peers (as they were the easiest sources to approach) when they only needed to know whether their particular answer was right; at the same time, they would go to their dissertation supervisor to ask for more detailed guidance on, for example, methodology questions. That is, the help-seeking behaviour/process requires interaction with other people. Instructors/peers are often the people students encounter first on campus and establish useful relationships with (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995a, b). Thus, in the newly adapted model, the help-seeking type is included between the microsystem and the individual layer, as Figure 6-3 above shows. Although students would usually interact with their peers first, it is also important for the institution to recognise that the relationship between students and faculty members influences students' willingness to seek help directly and influences their decision on what types of help to use. For example, if the relationship is not good, students might choose to avoid seeking help, which would not be beneficial to their learning outcomes.

Moreover, previous studies contain some 'biases' or blind spots in their analysis of help-seeking; for instance, Nelson-Le Gall (1981) only focus on instrumental (adaptive) and expedient help-seeking, to the exclusion of all other types (i.e., ignoring the fact that students might use multiple types of help when they seek). Following that, researchers have generally focused on instrumental (adaptive) versus expedient help-seeking as they suggest that a student's preference for seeking help will fall somewhere between these two constructs. However, the preference for academic help-seeking types is not so simple, so it is important that when analysing the types of academic help-seeking, this study considers all of the complexity it entails, as help-seeking behaviour involves interaction with other people and also interaction with the individual him/herself. The second key finding shows that help-seeking types exist within the individual layer and interact with the microsystem, as students need to approach another person to get help, and the type of help-seeking they choose might also be influenced by their preference of helpers.

Here it is worth mentioning that students who use deep learning show intrinsic motivation for the subjects they are studying and focus on achieving an in-depth understanding of the content, learning by linking previous knowledge (e.g., Aharony, 2006; Marton & Säljö, 1976; Delgado et al., 2018). In contrast, students who use the surface approach tend to choose the quickest way of dealing with the problem or finishing the assignment since these students do not have a general interest in what they are studying (Aharony, 2006). That is, students' learning behaviours change in different contexts, and their behaviour changes

based on their needs, which parallels the idea of different types of help-seeking behaviours and types of help-seeking being based on different ‘motivations’, with differing approaches being preferable to different students.

Previous studies have already suggested that students have varying approaches, depending on their major and their particular problem (e.g., Aharony, 2006; Groves, 2005). These approaches (i.e., deep, surface and strategies) parallel the different help-seeking types (adaptive or expedient). Thus, understanding these learning approaches and their relationship with help-seeking types can suggest how they would impact students’ academic journeys (e.g., Delgado et al., 2018). However, this study does not consider learning approaches as the variety of majors among the participants means it is hard to identify the association between students’ learning approaches and majors (e.g., Groves, 2005). It should also be noted that individuals may present varying results within the same study population due to the influence of other variables, and the PGT programme is a type of intensive study journey, which would also influence their experience or learning approach types. Therefore, to fully understand students’ help-seeking types and their relationships with their learning approach, future studies should take a longitudinal approach to understand students’ decisions.

(3) Academic and social self-efficacy operated similarly for students and are both important for academic help-seeking

The third key finding that was constructed from the data is situated within the individual level because both academic and social self-efficacy were found to be important for PGT students’ help-seeking behaviour. Both types of self-efficacy have similar effects on students. As academic help-seeking is a self-regulatory learning strategy and a social interaction (Payakachat et al., 2013), students’ help-seeking decisions are determined and influenced by both social and academic self-efficacy.

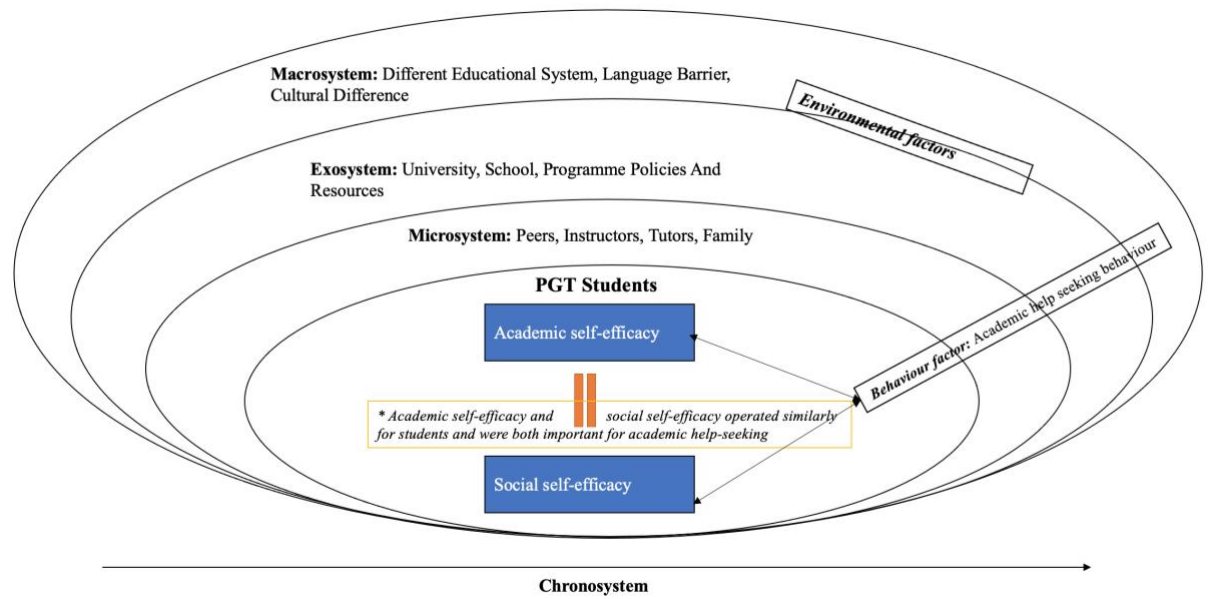


Figure 6-4. *The importance of the academic and social self-efficacy in terms of academic help-seeking*

Based on the previous research, level of self-efficacy was found to play an important role in the students' learning and achievement in the academic context (e.g., Newman & Schwager, 1993; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). In general, self-efficacy usually only focuses on the individual level, not considering the interaction with other systematic elements. However, this newly adapted theoretical model considers the influence of the individual layer and takes the bio-ecological layer into account. According to the third key finding, both types of self-efficacy are highly related to help-seeking, which is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Bandura, 1997) that have found that individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy have more willingness to ask for help.

To fully understand the PGT students' levels of self-efficacy and how they relate to help-seeking behaviour, the concept of self-efficacy must be considered within the context of the bio-ecological system by adding the different bioecological environmental layers to the comprehensive picture in this Scottish context. For example, the findings in this study suggested that students' perceptions of environmental elements (e.g., programme type, approachability of instructors) influence their levels of self-efficacy, which indicates that other layers of the system also influence students' levels of self-efficacy. A detailed discussion about the potential reasons for this has been provided above (see Section 6.3.2). In essence, the key information here is that the social elements in the academic help-seeking process, as well as the PGT students' development, are equally important to the academic

elements, which highlights the importance of considering social elements when trying to understand PGT students' behaviour in Scottish HE context, as in Figure 6-4 above. One thing that needs to be mentioned is that the chronosystem might also influence students' self-efficacy; as time moves on, students might increase their perception of their beliefs and obtain higher levels of self-efficacy. Thus, academic and social self-efficacy are placed in the middle of the newly adapted theoretical model to emphasise their crucial influence on academic help-seeking and the interaction between the different bio-ecological system layers.

(4) Academic help-seeking behaviour determined by complex interaction between personal demographic factor, personal psychological factors and contextual factors.

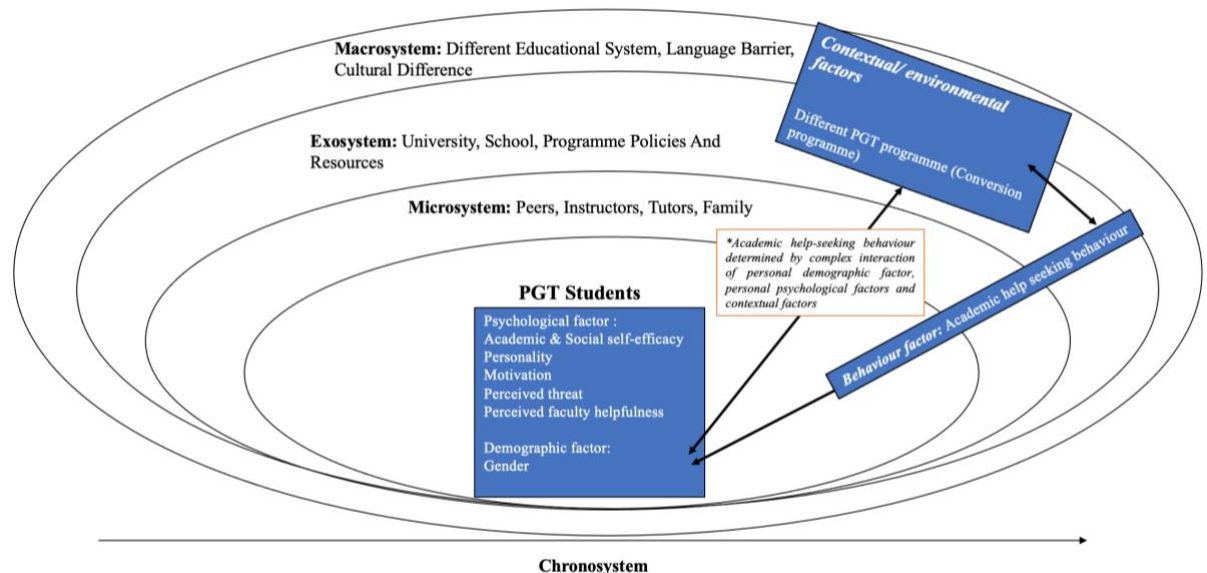


Figure 6-5. *The complex interaction of different influential factors and academic help-seeking behaviour*

The fourth key finding is that academic help-seeking behaviour is determined by the complex interaction of personal demographic factors, personal psychological factors and contextual factors. As Figure 6-5 above shows, the factors that were constructed in this study as influencing PGT academic help-seeking are placed at the centre of the newly adapted theoretical model and across the bio-ecological layers. This study has tried to cover the whole picture within Scottish HE context by not only focusing on the personal individual level but also considering other influential factors influencing students' help-seeking behaviour. In the majority of studies on help-seeking behaviour, the focus is largely on the personal factors (e.g., self-related factors, Newman, 2000), that influence help-seeking

decisions, specifically the personal psychology factor and the personal demographic factor (e.g., Karabenick, 2004; Makara & Karabenick, 2013; Newman & Goldin, 1990). In recent decades, other researchers have also indicated that external influences (e.g., classroom environment, Karabenick & Newman, 2009; Kitsantas & Chow, 2007; Mäkitalo-Siegl et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2001) also influence help-seeking behaviour. Thus, it can be seen that personal and external factors matter to academic help-seeking.

According to Bandura's (1977, 1989) Social Cognitive Theory, environmental factors can be seen as the factors that are physically external to the person and that provide opportunities and social support or an overall social norm, all of which are external to the individual; thus, environmental factors can be seen as an external influence (Zimmerman, 1989). This study also finds that environmental factors account for knowledge or behaviour differences because of different nationalities (i.e., national cultural differences cause students to think/behave in different ways) and different types of PGT programme (i.e., different learning environment). As a result, this study suggests that not only do personal factors influence students' behaviour, but contextual/environmental factors have an effect as well. That said, Figure 6-5 above depicts not just environmental factors from the Social Cognitive Theory perspective (i.e., environmental factors as external influences on the person), but also the bio-ecological environmental factors of the microsystem, exosystem and macrosystem from Bio-ecological Theory, which have complex interactions with academic help-seeking behaviour.

Critically, it should be noted that some personal factors are changeable (like self-efficacy) and others are more stable (like gender and personality), whereas some factors are academic-related (e.g., academic self-efficacy, motivation) and some others are social-related (e.g., social self-efficacy, perceived faculty helpfulness). As discussed in Chapter Two, studies related to help-seeking have discovered a great deal about some of the personal factors related to academic help-seeking (e.g., Karabenick, 2004; Newman & Goldin, 1990). In one sense, this research supports the understanding that personal factors are important contributors to help-seeking while suggesting that social-related personal factors are the other main mechanism controlling help-seeking behaviour. Although researchers recognise that help-seeking includes social activity, few studies have conducted investigations focusing on the social-relational factors involved in help-seeking, as was mentioned in the second key finding.

However, the fact that academic help-seeking is such a complex learning strategy means it is difficult for one explanation to explain how and why people engage in help-seeking behaviour. Some researchers largely acknowledge different personal factors (e.g., psychological or demographic factors) as predictors of help-seeking behaviours in students (e.g., Atik & Yalçin, 2011; Karabenick, 2004), while other researchers point to personal-contextual factors (e.g., Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Magnusson & Perry, 1992; Vermunt, 2005). In this study, the results suggest that academic help-seeking might not just be influenced by one single type of factor; in fact, it could be the complex interaction of personal demographic factors, personal psychological factors and contextual factors. For example, in this study, the British and international students reported that the environment influenced their personal factors. Specifically, “saving face” (Ervin-Tripp et al., 1995) was mentioned by the international Chinese students (environmental factor) as potentially influencing their personalities and motivations (personal factors). Among the British students, their conversion programme (environmental factor) was cited as influencing their personal thoughts about the faculty as well as their motivations (personal factor), which led them to seek or not seek help in time. As such, the decision to seek help or not is a dynamic interaction with numerous influential factors.

In this study, the participants expressed feelings about their statuses as British and Chinese international students potentially influencing their personal psychological and demographic factors. In one sense, such influences are likely developed bidirectionally (microsystem to exosystem; microsystem to macrosystem) and form students’ beliefs or decisions regarding their willingness to ask for academic help. The participants expressed their feelings about their experiences asking for academic help when they were studying in one-year postgraduate programme, and the results conveyed that not only did their cultures (personal factor and environmental factor) play a role in influencing their help-seeking behaviour, but the classroom/programme environment (contextual factor) also influenced their willingness and decisions. Consequently, as well as their culture, their willingness to ask for help might depend on environmental influences. All these reasons suggest that the psychological factor belongs the centre of the individual layer (as it is personal-related) but it interacts with the environmental factor across the microsystem, exosystem and macrosystem. Considering the perspectives above, perhaps academic help-seeking is not just influenced by one type of factor, but in fact, is based on the complex interaction among several, including personal and external (e.g., programme type, different classroom) factors.

(5) The programme/college environment around students has a stronger impact on their help-seeking decisions than their nationality

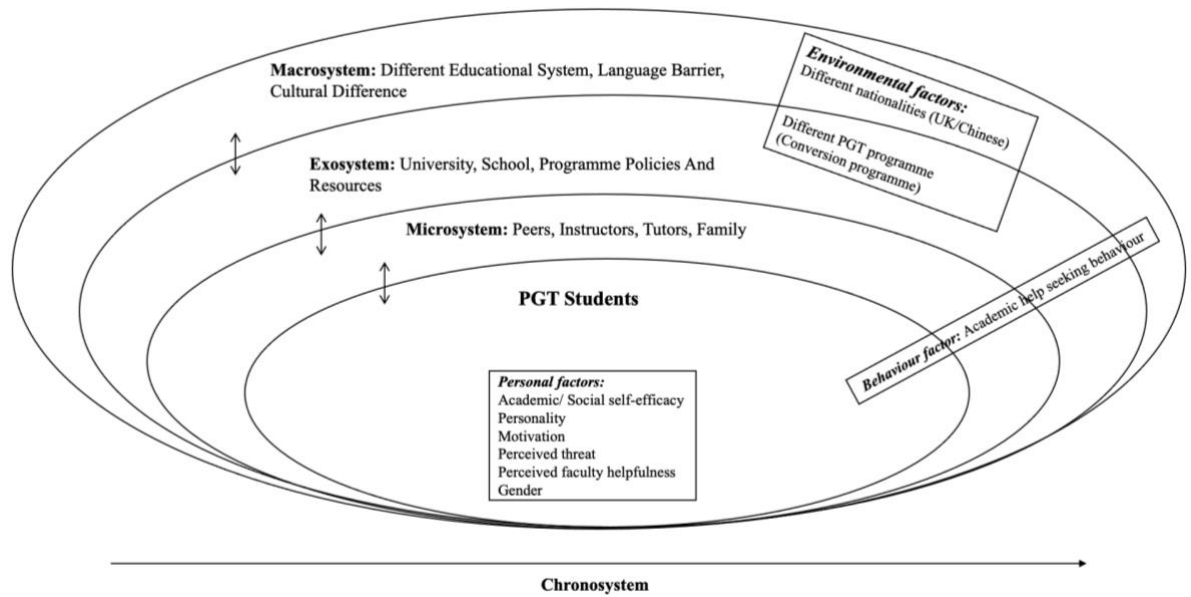


Figure 6-6. *The importance of bio-ecological factors to academic help-seeking*

The final key finding is that the programme/college environment around students has a stronger impact on their help-seeking decisions than their nationality does. In other words, it is not just the national culture that influences individuals' behaviour, but the broader environment has an effect as well. For this study, environmental behaviour interaction mainly focuses on how students' environmental (including culture, learning environment., etc.) background influences their academic help-seeking behaviour. As is known, international students who are away from their family and the social support networks available back home tend to have problems seeking assistance in an unfamiliar learning environment (e.g., Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). Chinese students who come to Scotland to study in a PGT programme might encounter some difficulties. As their cultural background is different from that of British students, it was assumed that the Chinese students would be more likely to avoid seeking help or more likely to turn to peers of the same culture for assistance. On the other hand, since they are more familiar with Scottish educational system, it was assumed that the British students would be more likely ask for help. However, these assumptions are not fully supported by the results (see Sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3). Indeed, during the interviews, the participants reported some differences in how and when they decided to seek help. For example, the Chinese students said they would feel more embarrassed to ask for help, whereas the British students focused more on their perception of the educator as a factor that would reduce their willingness to ask for help.

It is noteworthy that those differences they mentioned are not just related to culture, but are more likely to be related to context and environment (e.g., different ways of teaching, different educational systems, programme types, faculty helpfulness). For example, there is limited direct communication between the university support system and the academia source, and both students and faculty are challenged by regulations and policies regarding international students. Considering how the microsystem and exosystem interact with individuals, the findings show that students from the UK mentioned that the approachability of lecturers might influence their way of seeking help when the faculty members are hard to access. This might be due to the fact that the university over-recruits international student, and the educational system may not be able to handle these massive numbers of students, so the quality of the lectures may be affected.

Moreover, this study's theoretical model adapts Bio-ecological Theory to understand in a deeper way how development influences students' behaviour. More specifically, the macrosystem from the bio-ecological system was adapted to refer to the bigger picture of culture and subculture norms (i.e., culture, different education systems). Based on previous studies (e.g., Leong, 2015; Li & Kaye, 1998; Yan & Berliner, 2013), it is undeniable that Chinese students face a language barrier, which would potentially lead them not to ask for help, which means that cultural and language differences have an important impact on international students, and often, the differences create new challenges for both instructors/lecturers and students. Potentially, the factors that lead Chinese students not to seek help are most likely the language barrier, lack of familiarity with Scottish educational system, or that the way of teaching in Scotland is not the same as in China (e.g., Li, 2007; Lillyman & Bennett, 2014). In this case, Chinese students might have difficulty adapting to the different system in a British university. However, this study has shown that it is not only cultural differences that lead to decision-making differences when it comes to help-seeking, but it is also related to environmental differences, which fall into the layer of the macrosystem.

Meanwhile, the British participants who were studying in the conversion programme indicated that it could be the microsystem, exosystem and macrosystem (i.e., environment) that influence their help-seeking behaviour. As UK education systems tend to ask students to do critical thinking and "deep learning" (Biggs, 1996, for more information see section 6.4.1.2 above), the way of teaching they encountered in the conversion programme might have been dissimilar to what they were used to, and they found that they could not seek help when they needed it. Thus, the micro-, exo-, macrosystem layers show that the students are

not just influenced by cultural aspects, but that there are bidirectional influences that exist layer after layer that influence students' decisions and behaviour, as Figure 6-6 above shown. Additionally, as mentioned above in Section 6.3.3, international students should have a certain level of language ability to study abroad, yet Chinese students still encounter academic problem (e.g., writing skill, Poyrazli & Graham, 2007; Zhang, 2016), which suggests that international students' academic performance and help-seeking behaviour could also be related to contextual differences. This aligns with Edwards and Ran's (2006) understanding that international students may have a limited understanding of the Scottish academic system, which the present study suggests can influence their help-seeking. Thus, this study suggests that, to understand students' behaviour, it is necessary to examine the overall environmental system (i.e., exosystem and macrosystem) to see how Chinese and British students are influenced by the (contextual) environment and also the (national) culture.

6.4.1.3. PGT students' academic help-seeking model

This study's adapted framework recognises that people's behaviour at the individual level (Social Cognitive Theory) and factors at the environmental level (Bio-ecological Theory) both affect and influence the process of academic help-seeking. To better understand the help-seeking process, this study uses the newly adapted theoretical framework as a guide to focus on the individual-personal factors (e.g., self-efficacy, personality) as well as bio-ecological factors (e.g., peer, instructors, culture) that moderate help-seeking behaviour.

After some minor changes, the final version of the theoretical model was developed; it is presented in Figure 6-7 below. In order to achieve better clarity and conciseness, some minor changes were made to the shape of the elements in the model. The final version shows the influential process of academic help-seeking, taking into consideration the factors identified during both the quantitative and qualitative phases. It drew on the two potential influencing theories to help frame the individual and overall system factors in the final process theory. Different factors may influence academic help-seeking, and these have been highlighted previously in the literature review (see Chapter Two, Sections 2.2.5 and 2.2.6). These factors have been drawn together and developed into a framework in the above sections. This new framework, which is named 'PGT students' academic help-seeking model' (PGT AHS model), proposes to explore the interactions between personal factors of the individual and their behaviours within the context of academic help-seeking (Social Cognitive Theory).

Furthermore, the underlying assumptions and overall ways of viewing the world are considered (Bio-ecological Theory). All of these have the potential to influence the process of seeking academic help. Additionally, the PGT AHS model means to fit all PGT students with this Scottish university context, not just those of a particular nationality, by adding differentials into different layers, the aim being to cover as much as possible to provide a comprehensive model. To better understand the PGT AHS model, the subsections below will describe every aspect of the theoretical model, what each shape means, how all the components interact, and why it is presented the way it is presented (e.g., why some boxes overlap and others do not).

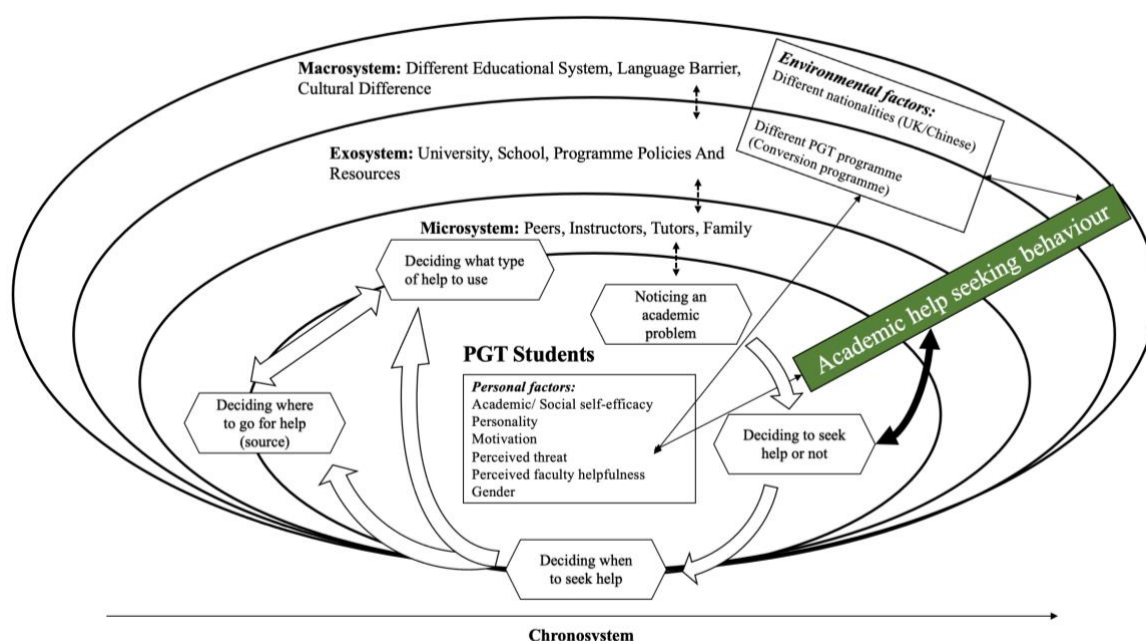


Figure 6-7. A newly adapted model – PGT students' academic help-seeking model

6.4.1.3.1. PGT students

First of all, let us focus on the circle layers and then discuss what the inside elements that relate to academic help-seeking are. As the theoretical model was adapted from Bronfenbrenner's model, all the circles in the new model mean the same as Bronfenbrenner's. The centre of the circle is the *individual* layer, which here represents *PGT students*. In this layer are the characteristics (or we can say the personal-related factors) of PGT students that were constructed in this study and are related directly to their academic help-seeking behaviour. Self-efficacy, personality, belief in one's own ability, motivation to finish the degree, and perception of the academic journey are the 'personal factors' in the rectangles

(which will be discussed later in detail). Generally, these are influenced by the other layers, for example, how family members, peers, and instructors respond to PGT students in the university, and the school, and home contexts. The interaction between an individual (PGT students) and other people leads to the microsystem in the next layer in this theoretical model.

6.4.1.3.2. Microsystem

The next layer in the PGT AHS model is the microsystem, which located at the inner core next to the individual layer. This study's microsystem represents the other individuals (e.g., peer, family, lecturers) that interact with the individual (i.e., PGT students) directly. The relationship here is bidirectional interaction; for example, the lecturer can influence the student's academic perception and also play a role in determining their academic performance. More specifically, in this study, it was found that student-instructor or student-peer communication relates to academic achievement, which itself is related to academic help-seeking behaviour.

After some minor changes, the final version is slightly different from Bronfenbrenner's original in that the PGT AHS model does not include the mesosystem but blends it into the microsystem and exosystem. The mesosystem refers to the connections between two or more systems, which are observed most often between two different microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 2001); it was hard to determine the exact equivalent of this for academic help-seeking. For example, the student's interaction with other people is more like the microsystem variable; while the university climate and school atmosphere are more like the exosystem.

6.4.1.3.3. Exosystem

The next outer layer is the *exosystem*: the environment that impacts students' help-seeking decisions even though they do not necessarily come into contact with it. The exosystem includes the surrounding environment (e.g., university, school, policy) that the students do not directly participate in but which still influence their experience and decision-making. In this study, the exosystem comprises the university, the college or school (please note that the college and school here refer to, for example, the College of Art, the School of XX), the programme type (e.g., conversion programme), and different available sources provided by different colleges. For example, different colleges have different policies that mean students

and instructors need to deal with different types of problems, which means that both students and faculty members are challenged by the university's regulations and policies. During the interviews, the British students mentioned that they thought the lectures' quality might be influenced because the university over-recruits students. The educational system may not be able to handle such a massive number of students, which ultimately influences the ways they can access available help. The international Chinese students also mentioned in the interviews that differing educational requirements compared to back home also influenced their ways of asking for help.

International or British students could be affected not only by the interaction with those in their social and academic networks, but also by the policy of the university and the country (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016, p.9). In this respect, what the students need is to have a full understanding of the rules surrounding them (e.g., programme policy, school policy, course requirements, etc.), as understanding the details of each rule or policy can significantly improve the quality of the students' help-seeking. Understanding the policy or the rules of different schools or colleges can also help the instructors/lecturers provide accurate information to help the students, which could both British and international students avoid making unintentional mistakes (e.g., feel the faculty member is not helpful then avoid asking for help) that may influence their study outcomes. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner (1979) mentions an assumption that there could be a two-step causal development, whereby the variable/interaction in the exosystem would affect the microsystem, which would then influence the person's development.

However, the causal interaction might not run in just one direction but be bidirectional; it could go through the microsystem to other layers of systems. As such, in this study, the theoretical model suggests a similar assumption that the microsystem and exosystem are functioning in two directions to influence PGT students in different ways. That is, the exosystem can influence the development of students in two ways: directly through the active involvement of others in their life (instructors, peers) or indirectly through decisions made by society, which ultimately affect the conditions of the university, school or even the policy that surrounds them. For instance, if instructors were to be given plenty of notice when major changes occur – for example, when a course is moved online – the instructors would have sufficient time to adjust their teaching method and approach, which would in turn help the students understanding, ultimately improving their academic achievement.

6.4.1.3.4. **Macrosystem**

The fourth layer is the macrosystem. Similar to the exosystem, this system has an impact on students' development, but not specifically through direct contact. In general, the macrosystem is similar to larger social norms such as the culture and economic characteristics that shape a particular social group. The macrosystem in this study essentially represents (national) cultural differences as well as other different social and cultural norms, including the different educational system (e.g., the Scottish HE sectors). As this study has tried to understand whether there is a difference between international and British students, the best way to address the question was to understand their different ethnic and academic backgrounds. According to the results, three main norms emerged related to the macrosystem: educational systems, language barriers, and different cultural backgrounds (e.g., national cultural differences; differing teaching approaches; different ways of thinking; different way of managing tasks). These norms fall into the macrosystem, including different education systems, with different curricula and teaching approaches and the lack of opportunities to access different cultures all impacting students. The findings of this study support previous research (e.g., Leong, 2015; Li & Kaye, 1998; Yan & Berliner, 2013) showing that cultural and language differences have an important impact on international students, and often, the differences create new challenges for both instructors/lecturers and students. The interview phase findings suggest that international students are likely to have different perceptions and expectations of academic achievements. For instance, one participant indicated that he chose to come to Scotland mainly because of this university's ranking and because he would like to experience a different culture's educational system. Aligning with previous studies (e.g., Leong, 2015; Poyrazli & Graham, 2007; Zhang, 2016), some issues that were identified in this study suggest that international students' academic performance and help-seeking behaviour are rooted in their limited understanding of the different academic system (Edwards & Ran 2006). This finding helps the field of academic help-seeking by showing that the differences between Chinese and British students do not just relate to culture, but include external factors (e.g., programme design, standardisation and approachability, and educational policies) that influencing their decisions to seek help.

The macrosystem does not just shed light on international students and their cultural differences; it also has meaning for British students. For example, one's national culture plays a role in determining one's attitude toward help-seeking, which is just as true for British students as it is for the Chinese. Yet, although students are characterised as the primary object in the educational system, they have little say in what they learn and how

they learn it. Rather, these decisions fall to the educational system: the university, the teaching staff or programme policy. In these examples, it can be seen that wider social norms influence the process layer by layer, resulting in different decisions being made by students.

6.4.1.3.5. Chronosystem

As the bottom of Figure 6-7 shows, the chronosystem is also included in the newly adapted theoretical model. It refers to the patterning of environmental events and transitions over the person's life-course (Bronfenbrenner, 1995a, b; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The students who participated in this study acknowledged the increase in international enrolment and the changing demands of students. They also expressed that the learning style is changing from traditional face-to-face to now being more likely to focus on blending learning, which can be regarded as a historical change. This may demand that students adjust their way of learning and may require instructors and lecturers to change their ways of teaching. For instance, international Chinese students may be used to learning in the traditional way; the Chinese educational system might not have an enormous digital system like "Moodle" to help students with their learning. Therefore, as they come to Scotland, the different educational system may require those students to adjust their way of learning and change their way of thinking. In addition to that, the participants from this study indicated that they recognised the importance of understanding their own experiential changes (their educational transition, from China to Scotland), including their own academic history (educational transition, from undergraduate to postgraduate), current experience (different educational system, language barrier, cultural difference, etc.), and future goals (what they can do after they have graduated), in order to 'help' them seek help.

In addition, the participating students recognised the importance of understanding their own experiential changes, including their own academic history, current experience, and future goals. That is, they recognised the time transition and that their experiences, understanding and requirements often change over time; for instance, they may not seek help during the first semester, but may find they need to during the second semester. It was noteworthy that both the Chinese and British students indicated 'time' would change their ways of seeking help (i.e., time transition); or they might say it was their experience that changed their willingness to ask for assistance. As such, the university should not just focus on the traditional definitions of "international students" and British students and the stereotypes associated with them, but should instead focus on learning about students' backgrounds, making an effort to understand the students' learning experiences so as to be able to provide

more help and facilitate help-seeking among students. In-depth knowledge of both British and international students' backgrounds or experiences could enhance instructors/lecturers' understanding of the students' needs and, then improve their ability to offer help, thus, institution and faculty members can gain a more complete perspective and provide academic help/support that capitalises on students' abilities and talents (He & Huston, 2018).

As mentioned, the chronosystem represents all the changes in the environment that occur over time, such as a child's upbringing, major historical or social events, life transitions, etc. (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Any milestones can affect students' academic growth and development. Within the PGT duration, previous experience, transition and changes in technology represent influential external factors happening within the chronosystem that potentially influence other subsystems associated with students' academic development and performance. For example, students' prior academic experience will work as the lens through which they understand their later academic journeys (Albarracin & Wyer Jr, 2000), and students' family environment/issues affect their academic motivation and approaches to help-seeking. Students will always experience different life events and different situations at different times, which inevitably over time often brings changes in life events and experiences, which impact the connections between others and their context, and therefore affect their decisions or experiences (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Therefore, future studies should emphasise the chronosystem to provide insight into the experiences of PGT students, as it focuses on historical events and is related to other systems, and as it has an influence on individuals' development.

6.4.1.3.6. Personal factors

In the centre of this theoretical model are the personal factors that influence PGT students' academic help-seeking, which are present as rectangular boxes in the centre. This study's findings suggest that academic and social self-efficacy operated similarly for PGT students and were equally important for help-seeking. Furthermore, as mentioned above in Section 6.3.2, academic help-seeking behaviour is determined by complex interactions; not just one type of factor has an influential effect, but there is dynamic interaction between psychological and demographic factors. The respondents in this study reported that they thought there were some other factors that would influence their decisions to seek help, and even their willingness to ask for help (e.g., personality, motivation, the perception of the faculty helpfulness, etc.) based on their own previous experience as PGT students at this university in Scotland. Previous studies have suggested that these factors affect academic

motivation and performance (e.g., Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2008; Komarraju & Karau, 2005), which are related to academic help-seeking. Thus, this study finds that personal factors influence academic help-seeking behaviour, which supports and extends the theoretical tenets of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Bio-ecological Theory.

6.4.1.3.7. Environmental factors

The rectangles across the macrosystem and exosystem indicate the environmental factors that influence PGT students' academic help-seeking. This study highlights that not just culture influences the student's decision to seek help, but so do other environmental or contextual factors. As the meaning of 'environmental factors' has been mentioned in reference to the macrosystem and exosystem, I will not repeat it here. In one sense, such influences are likely bidirectional, and they form and are influenced by the student's beliefs or decisions regarding their willingness to ask for academic help; however, in this study, considering those perspectives above, perhaps environmental factors, especially cultural norms and the classroom environment, have two-way influential relationships between layers and factors.

6.4.1.3.8. Academic help-seeking behaviour (green rectangle)

The green rectangle across the whole model represents academic help-seeking behaviour. Unlike other previous studies, this study suggested that four different layers actually influence academic help-seeking, and that all the layers/elements have more or less impact on it. Academic help-seeking behaviour does not just happen between the individual and the microsystem layer. It is not just a simple social interaction with people, but it is unconsciously influenced by social norms, people, environment, culture, etc. For example, using self-efficacy as an example, consistent with previous studies (e.g., Bandura, 1997), PGT students with a higher level of self-efficacy are more likely to ask for help. Simply put, people who believe that they have the ability to do well tend to be motivated to try and make the effort to succeed. That is an example of a relationship between a personal factor and academic help-seeking behaviour. This relationship can be referred to as 'reciprocal determinism' and is consistent with Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2006) description of 'person' characteristics that interact 'with particular features of the environment to generate successive levels of developmental advance' (p. 811). As such, there is a two-way interaction between self-efficacy and academic help-seeking behaviour. Self-efficacy belief

influences help-seeking decisions, but the perception of help-seeking also influences self-efficacy belief.

Again, for this study, the interaction between environmental behaviour mainly focuses on how students' environmental backgrounds influence their academic help-seeking behaviour. Aside from the influence of their own cultures, students' attitudes to help-seeking are likely to change as a result of their perception of the classroom/programme environment in which they find themselves; and, if this is the case, students are less likely to seek help when they are in the conversion programme, as they described it as harder to get help in that context. Several primary factors, such as self-efficacy and students' preferred types of help, affect the frequency with which help is sought, as discussed above.

6.4.1.3.9. Academic help-seeking process (hexagons)

Finally, the hexagons represent the academic help-seeking process from the first step of recognising the problem exists, then determine whether or not to seek help. If this happens, the academic help-seeking behaviour is initiated (as the dark two-side arrowed indicates). These initial steps occur within the personal layer, and thus they are contained within the individual layer.

Next comes the decision on whether or not to seek help directly, or just to wait and try self-helping first. As the third step is time-related, the hexagon box has been put across the individual and chronosystem layers; detailed reasons for this have been provided in Section 6.4.1.2. After the student has decided when to ask for help, he/she reaches the crossroad between deciding on the source and deciding on the help-seeking type. These two decisions are actually related: for example, students might base their choice of source on what type of help they want, or they might choose their type of help based on what sources are available. If they choose the source first, they need to decide on the source of help (e.g., lecturers, peers or online help). As mentioned before, academic help-seeking is a kind of social process, so the individual must engage in social interaction with others when obtaining help. In this case, the process of choosing a source does not just fall into the individual layer but also crosses into the microsystem. Keep in mind that it could be argued that students could also seek help from the outer layer (the exosystem), like the university. However, even if the students try to ask for help in the outer layer, they still just interact with the person they are dealing with; it is not the system, but a personal interaction. Thus, the two steps (deciding where to go for

help, and deciding what type of help to use) only cross the microsystem layer and individual layer.

Following that pattern, if they decide to choose the type of help later, the ‘final’ step in this process would be to decide what type of help to seek. Unlike other processes (e.g., Karabenick & Dumbo, 2011; Nelson-Le Gall, 1981), this model puts the decision of help-seeking type in the last step, not before the choice of sources. The reason to put it in this order is that the second key finding suggests that students would use a combination of help-seeking types, and the type of help-seeking is determined by the problem at hand. Additionally, students might adjust the type of help based on the source they turn to. For example, if the student decided to go to the lecturer for help, he/she might more likely seek the adaptive type of help as the educator would be less likely to just give the answer but would instead try to guide the student. Conversely, students might decide that they only need to seek expedient help (they only need the answer), and so they might only choose to ask a peer. This is why the arrow between the fourth and fifth steps is a two-way arrow, indicating that these steps can influence each other. Moreover, as deciding on a help-seeking type requires the student to interact with other people, the step has been placed across the microsystem and individual layers.

More importantly, as can be seen, the academic help-seeking process surrounds personal factors, which suggests that the process, along with each step, would also be influenced by the personal factors. For example, if the student perceives the faculty as unhelpful, they might be less likely to ask the faculty members for help, instead turning to peers or self-helping.

Pulling it together, in this study, the participants’ responses about how their academic help-seeking behaviour is experienced and how they think the factors would influence their decisions have informed this study’s framework, which combines Social Cognitive Theory and Bio-ecological Theory. In finalising the PGT AHS model, which has been detailed discussed in Chapter Two and above, it is also recognised that there may be factors in the external environment that influence the help-seeking process decisions, as represented in Figure 6-7. These factors are outside the bounds of the level of this study but are recognised to have the potential to influence the academic help-seeking process, hence, having the potential to influence the academic help-seeking process.

In general, the findings obtained from this study support Social Cognitive Theory and Bio-ecological Theory, suggesting that individual academic help-seeking behaviour is related to personal and environmental factors, and all three elements are associated with each other. What is clear is that the academic help-seeking behaviour of PGT students appears to also depend on development changes and environmental factors as well, to which previous research has paid less attention. Furthermore, again, the key point of this study is that the PGT AHS model emphasises the main individual behaviour of students and emphasises the importance of social interaction with others in relation to students' academic help-seeking behaviour. It also emphasises the range of possible factors involved in academic help-seeking at both the individual and nationality/cultural levels. Finally, the PGT AHS model suggests that this process takes place in a particular context, acknowledging the students' external environment as a possible influence, emphasising the contextual influence on academic help-seeking. As well as cultural differences, it should also be considered that the programme/college environment around students may more strongly impact their help-seeking decision. The findings of this study, in essence, enhance the literature on both British and Chinese international students' academic help-seeking by adding an environmental perspective to the theories of student self-efficacy and students' academic help-seeking behaviour. This study points out that not only is the experience of education different for all students, but engagement in educational experiences varies based on cultural background. However, the concept of academic help-seeking still needs a clear definition and measurement models sensitive to the existing educational context that are characterised by cultural diversity. This study's findings highlight the impact of cultural background and enhance the role of academic help-seeking practices that are not only culturally sensitive, but acknowledge that there are other environmental factors in both Social Cognitive Theory and Bio-ecological Theory.

6.4.1.4. Summary of theoretical contribution

This study offers a theoretical contribution to the research field of academic help-seeking behaviour by offering a more comprehensive framework for understanding the process of academic help-seeking among PGT students in one Scottish university context, and by comparing British and international Chinese students in terms of their decision-making when they need help. The extensive literature review in Chapter Two outlined the existing models and theories relating to academic help-seeking and the broader area of help-seeking. While providing a useful framework for beginning the discussion, the existing theory relating to academic help-seeking (e.g., Social Cognitive Theory, Bandura, 1991) is not sufficient to

explain how seeking help occurs and what may impact this process. Consequently, this study makes an original contribution to theory in the sense that it addresses the gaps in the knowledge of academic help-seeking by providing not only a more detailed explanation of how seeking academic help happens, but also by developing a more ‘in-depth’ model of academic help-seeking for overall Scottish PGT students, as well as providing a comparison by examining the similarities and differences among British and Chinese international students to inform practice. The broader, more comprehensive understanding of academic help-seeking that includes Bio-ecological Theory presented in this study is expected to provide a stronger theoretical foundation for further research on academic help-seeking among culturally different groups of students. Additionally, by including Bio-ecological Theory, it could be suggested that this study’s emphasis on development related to academic help-seeking behaviour in an academic context is more diverse than in the literature. There may be certain groups of students who are not prepared to learn through interaction or to willingly ask for help, not just based on their cultural background but also on other environmental elements that influence their behaviour. It should be noted that cultural background is an important factor in shaping approaches to learning and learning style preferences. Ultimately, students’ own experiences and their own behaviour could also influence their academic help-seeking behaviour, and that should be understood in the context of the Scottish educational system.

Furthermore, this study has shed light on two influential theories regarding individual academic help-seeking behaviour and how other factors influence their decisions, as discussed in Chapter Two. The PGT AHS model moves forward the existing theory of academic help in a novel way, as it is the first theoretical and comprehensive model to provide a comprehensive conceptualisation of Scottish PGT students’ academic help-seeking. At the same time, this study confirms the previous literature indicating that students’ help-seeking behaviour is influenced by personal and environmental factors (e.g., Bandura, 1991; Puustinen & Pulkinen, 2001). This study also evidences the importance of social self-efficacy (Li, 2002; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997; Payakachat et al., 2013), which is highly related to help-seeking behaviour and academic self-efficacy (Ng, 2014). However, much of the help-seeking literature is under-theorised and does not identify in full detail the different factors that affect help-seeking. This theoretical framework also addresses this need by identifying specific key factors by adding social aspects (e.g., social self-efficacy) at both the level of the individual and the overall environment necessary for the academic help-seeking process. This new PGT AHS model considers that the individual development at

different levels would also influence help-seeking behaviour, addressing one of the limitations of Social Cognitive Theory, which does not take such development into account.

In addition, this theoretical framework emphasises that the academic help-seeking process does not just occur in the individual layer. In fact, it more or less bidirectionally interacts with the other outer layers, including people, institutions and even culture. The academic help-seeking process proposed in this study makes an original contribution to the literature in that it addresses the gaps regarding the relevance of timeliness to academic help-seeking and the awareness that students' decisions will influence others. This study raised the awareness by demonstrating that the steps of academic help-seeking, specifically the decisions about source and type of help, have mutual interaction. In this regard, the help-seeking process in this study has been presented as a broad and more comprehensive process to address how and why students decided to seek academic help.

Additionally, by adding Bio-ecological Theory, which has not been previously applied regarding academic help-seeking in the Scottish PGT context, this study contributes to knowledge by demonstrating that Bio-ecological Theory can be used to achieve "in-depth" understanding of PGT students' help-seeking behaviour within one Scottish university context. Each layer's result suggests that academic help-seeking is not just individual behaviour but is also influenced by other elements. Taken together, the other main contribution to the theory made by this research is the recognition of academic help-seeking as a process that involves environmental factor and cultural influence, rather than just a single individual behaviour process. The model presented in this study shows the academic help-seeking process as it occurs to understand all postgraduate students' academic problem effectively. It also identifies the potential factors that may impact the process. That is, if the decision has not been made, academic help-seeking may take longer than if students actually seek help straight away. Thus, this framework could be used to more comprehensively understand the need of decision-making and the need of asking, not just emphasising the individual level of asking for help in the academic context (e.g., Puustinen & Pulkinen, 2001), but its impact towards the end of the academic help-seeking process. While Social Cognitive Theory still might be the main theory in this field, this study has shown that it is just as important to understand students' development and the environmental influence to ensure that the academic help-seeking process works effectively. For example, as international students have experienced different educational systems or classroom environments, that might potentially make them may fail to determine the right timing to seek help, but they will have learnt to ask for help by the middle of the academic year. One of this theoretical

model's strengths is that it also raised the need, while main focus is potentially on international students, the need to understand the neglected British students' need of supports, which is often less studied or overlooked in the existing literature. To achieve an integrated picture of PGT students' help-seeking behaviour, this study thus stresses the importance of capturing individual behaviour and accompanying potential influential factors.

While the PGT AHS model can be adjusted and applied in any HE context, one must be cautious when making recommendations to use this model, as this theory is based on two nationalities from one Scottish university, so it might be slightly different when applying it under other countries. Additionally, it is important to consider using this theoretical model with caution in two ways. Firstly, Bio-ecological Theory is not specifically designed to address how PGT students' behaviour changes, but it is meant to understand students' academic development. Although it is important to understand the fact that students' development would influence their behaviour, it is also important for future researchers to recognise the need to better understand the contexts in which students live and study, and perhaps the need to evaluate the impact of academic/social influence. What is under-studied, however, is not specifically the relations between the aspects of cultural and educational context, but the relationship between people and their surrounding environment.

The second point that needs to be stressed is that unlike other research mainly focused on the certain factors related to help-seeking in the academic context, this study has tried to capture the influential factors as deeply as possible. Thus, it is broad in scale but not precise enough to understand each factor's relationship with help-seeking behaviour. Moreover, many participants in this study expressed concern or negative experiences about their different programme types. With regards to this, in the context of the environment of the classroom or the programme in academic help-seeking, it is quite possible that the respondents only viewed asking for help as central to fulfil their competencies, values and goals, but gave less weight to the issues of how much other potential factors might be influential on their decisions and academic help-seeking process. Given the mixed feelings that many participants conveyed in this study, their expressions about how programme type influenced their help-seeking is not necessarily an indication that they fully understood the process of help-seeking. In many cases, the intention to ask for help may not only have depended upon how the participants described their experiences of seeking help.

6.5. Limitations

As with any study, this research has limitations that must be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. It is also important to ensure that readers appreciate the boundaries of the study. In particular, although cultural differences is one of the main focuses in this study, the cultural differences were assumed to exist based on the two different nationalities of the participants (British and Chinese), and do not include comparisons between international students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. There is great variability in culture and background experiences within each group, in addition to between the groups. Also, because this study just focuses on two groups, it is possible that due to the limited number of comparisons, the results might differ for students from other nationalities.

Additionally, in terms of research design, a number of limitations exist. First, it is recognised that in both phases, the use of self-reporting carries with its limitations in terms of bias and socially desirable responses. In particular, the study aimed to collect attitudinal data instead of observing actual behaviour, so if an individual's perceptions do not match their behaviour, the study could not identify this anomaly. However, this study aimed to counteract this limitation by reminding participants in both phases there were no right answers, and by using semi-structured interviews to give participants opportunities to freely reflect on and express their perspectives.

Additionally, there is the issue of potential bias or misrepresentation of academic help-seeking behaviour from the interview participants. The participants, though, had the opportunity to comment on their previous experiences, which at some levels did reach a certain level of trustworthiness within the sample examined. Nevertheless, some of the interviewees presented experiences that were mainly negative and linked these experiences to their academic failure. Thus, it would be useful to consider these extreme conditions in order to understand PGT students' help-seeking behaviour overall. However, Spender (1996, p.72) does warn that "we are threatened with endless regress when we search for underlying universal laws" and cautions about the widespread use of positivist research in areas such as academic help-seeking when the concept is context-dependent or individual-related. Whilst this viewpoint is acknowledged, others (Newman, 2002) call for a more integrated approach, combining both descriptive and prescriptive research, hence the use of the mixed-methodological approach to this research should reduce the bias.

Designing the research around the use of purposive convenience sampling can introduce issues in terms of the representativeness of the sample, and it is hard to be certain about how generalisable or transferable the findings are. Additionally, the designs of both Phases One

and Two used only one university, which is also recognised as a limitation of the study. Although this study collected data from only one university, I have a strong personal understanding of the context in which the data was collected and can thus interpret the results more meaningfully. As such, the findings from this study may not fully apply to other universities, as the experience of participants from the same university may not represent PGT students' experiences at other universities in the UK. However, despite the limitation that the findings may not be generalisable to the whole UK PGT context, the university in this study is relatively high-ranking among all UK universities; numerous international students compared it to other British universities, and it is reasonable to assume that the participants from this university had similar experiences to other Chinese international students who have attend other universities in the UK. Thus, the contextual details this university has provided shall be able to adjust to transferable to others' own contexts. Additionally, because I was a PGT student at the same university, I could better understand the participants' context, which helped inform the theoretical model as the guide for interpreting PGT students' experience based on this Scottish university context. At the same time, it also shed light on understanding the PGT student's help-seeking behaviour in this Scottish context. Finally, it is noteworthy that the aim of this study, particularly the qualitative phase, was not to make generalisations about all students in the PGT context, but to try to gain a more valuable and in-depth understanding of the academic help-seeking process from the students' perspectives in the Scottish context, and this may somewhat ease the limitations above.

6.6. Further follow-on study

The limitations of this mixed-method study suggest and provide a path to follow-on research. In order to increase the scope of the original study by considering the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to explore and expand an understanding of one of the key findings proposed in my original study – 'time' (e.g., time-transition from undergraduate to postgraduate) – a further follow-on study needs to be done to attempt to determine whether the PGT AHS model I proposed is suitable in the face of different teaching methods (i.e., online teaching during the pandemic). In addition, a follow-on study will be useful for improving the model for understanding PGT help-seeking behaviour. It will also be interesting to expand the research approach beyond questionnaires and individual interviews to gain more information, as the PGT AHS model may prove useful in future research in this area.

7. Follow-on study

This chapter presents the follow-on study undertaken in addition to my original research. The motivations for this study are to increase the scope of the original study and to explore and expand an understanding of the ‘timing’ component (e.g., time-transition from undergraduate to postgraduate) of the model proposed in the previous chapter – the PGT students’ academic help-seeking model (or PGT AHS model; see Chapter 6, Figure 6-7). Although previous studies have suggested that both home and international students face challenges when transitioning to a postgraduate taught programme as they need to adapt to a new learning environment with higher academic expectations (e.g., Coneyworth et al., 2019; Robb & Moffat, 2020), research has provided insufficient knowledge to fully understand this type of transition (e.g., McPherson et al., 2017; O’Donnell et al., 2009). It is therefore necessary to seek a better understanding of the transition to postgraduate studies faced for different student cohorts so that future cohorts may be best supported. This follow-on study also attempts to address whether the PGT AHS model (see Figure 6-7) I have proposed might also be applied under different teaching methods, such as the online teaching method practiced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

7.1. Introduction

Postgraduate taught students in the UK have an intense timeframe – typically one or two years – compared with other countries (e.g., US, Carpentier, 2018). This intense nature of their programmes might exacerbate the challenges faced by students (both home and international) as they transition to the postgraduate level, as they experience vastly different levels of demand/requirement (e.g., difficulty in adapting the new environment, Bownes et al., 2017; lack of confidence, Tobbell & O’Donnell, 2013). While researchers have noted that students’ transitional experiences influence their academic achievements (e.g., Newman et al., 2000; Reyes et al., 2000) and their ability to cope with different demands (e.g., Credé & Niehorster, 2012), they have also found that PGT students might notice the difference between undergraduate (UG) and PGT studies in different aspects as well (e.g., critical thinking, Melles, 2009), and that practice and time are required to develop the capabilities. Consequently, researchers have suggested that the transition experience is crucial to PGT students’ success, and it is important to understand this transition (Tobbell et al., 2010) in order to support them to smoothly fit in their programmes. Although there has been substantial growth in relevant research, there is still a lack of literature understanding or

acknowledging the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate studies in relation to help-seeking processes in Scotland (e.g., Jackson, 2003; McPherson et al., 2017).

The diversity within the postgraduate student cohort is another challenge for those providing support to students transitioning to PGT programmes. As part of the PGT cohort, Chinese international students face different challenges as well (e.g., Coertjens et al., 2017; Tian & Lowe, 2013). When international students move from their home countries' educational systems to the other (in this case the Scottish educational system), they may go through a range of cultural and language adjustments in order to adapt and integrate (e.g., Dawson & Conti-Bekkers, 2002; Menzies & Baron, 2014). Consequently, to fully understand the PGT cohort, there is an increasing need to understand both Chinese international and home students to gain a fuller picture of this diverse cohort and their processes of adaptation (in the case of both home and international students) and acculturation (in the case of international students only), and to understand how they impact their transition and learning experiences.

Although the timeframe is intense and PGT students face difficulty adjusting, as mentioned in Chapter Two, not all the PGT students ask for help when they need it (e.g., Karabenick & Berger, 2013; Pellegrino, 2012), but they might lack the awareness to be able to adapt and change their learning strategies without help (e.g., Bamber et al., 2019; Morgan & Direito, 2016). Commonly, university students do not ask for help during the transition until their problems are obvious or they cannot solve them on their own (Grebennikov & Skaines, 2008). This phenomenon potentially puts all PGT students at risk, leading to negative academic performance outcomes or even dropping out (e.g., Coates, 2014). Thus, in order to succeed during the transition and afterwards, students should employ some strategies to cope with the problem. Academic help-seeking behaviour, the key concept in this thesis, is arguably a good and important learning strategy that helps students succeed when they are unable to solve an academic problem on their own; it has been found to be related to students' academic success (e.g., Chowdhury & Halder, 2019; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Williams & Takaku, 2011), and has a positive impact on supporting their transition as well (e.g., Schrader & Brown, 2008).

Academic help-seeking works as a strategy or potential influential factor that can explain the trajectories of university students' experiences during their academic journeys (e.g., Karabenick & Berger, 2013; Won et al., 2021). As learning is "a process which is influenced by a learner's past and present experiences" (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013, p.1058), previous

experience influences subsequent experiences and individuals' behaviour, and that remains relatively unchanged throughout the academic journey (e.g., Lee & Kramer, 2013; Richards, 2020) unless there is a major event that changes their behaviour. For example, if students did not ask for help when they were in UG, they may not be used to it, which therefore can cause them to feel uncomfortable seeking help as PGT students. However, other researchers also indicated that academic help-seeking changes over time (e.g., Chowdhury & Halder, 2019), and have suggested the need to see how the facilitators and barriers of academic help-seeking change over time (e.g., Er & Orey, 2017). Thus, by gaining more in-depth information by looking at how students transition in PGT educational contexts in Scotland, as well as how their academic help-seeking behaviour experience has changed or remained constant in relation to academic performance or outcome, it will be more possible to provide support not only during PGT students' transition processes, but throughout their PGT studies.

After the data collection for my original study, PGT teaching delivery changed drastically as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Starting in March 2020, most universities moved to online teaching. Since the teaching method/environment was different from the situation pre-pandemic, this follow-on study aims to explore the different experiences of PGT students regarding online teaching or traditional blended teaching, using alternative qualitative "visual" perspectives to understand student's help-seeking trajectories. To help to gain more insight into the ways in which they understand how the time-transition (e.g., UG to PGT) reflects on students' help-seeking behaviour, their decision-making around seeking help and their help-seeking trajectories, this study aims to answer two research questions: 1) How different do PGT students perceive in their academic help-seeking behaviours as they transition from undergraduate to postgraduate study? 2) What are the similarities and differences between Chinese and British students' academic help-seeking trajectories?

This study demonstrates the potential benefits of understanding students' academic help-seeking behaviour from the PGT AHS model's perspective, which provides valuable in-depth knowledge into how this transition will influence their decision to seek help, and more insight into the extent to which PGTs influence (or are influenced by) their surrounding environment, and how this relates to their academic help-seeking behaviour. This study will also help uncover information regarding students' help-seeking, which might inform future teaching practice in PGT programmes that can help better facilitate students' academic help-seeking.

7.2. Theoretical Framework

To achieve a holistic and comprehensive understanding of PGT students' academic help-seeking behaviour, it has been suggested that a sound theoretical framework is important in foreseeing and designing the most appropriate ways to support students (e.g., Lau & Ng, 2014; Woolfolk et al., 2007). The PGT AHS model (see Section 6.4 for a more comprehensive discussion) could be used as a starting point to organise the study of multi-level dynamics involved in the understanding of PGT students' academic help-seeking behaviour. The PGT AHS model addresses the gaps in the knowledge of academic help-seeking by providing a more detailed explanation of how seeking academic help happens, and also by developing a more 'in-depth' model for understanding academic help-seeking among Scottish PGT students (more detailed information can be found in Sections 2.4 and 6.4). The PGT AHS model acts as a useful framework for a holistic understanding of PGT students' academic help-seeking experience, and highlights the bidirectional interaction within layers regarding academic help-seeking processes.

Specifically, the PGT AHS model consists of layered systems (shown in Figure 6-7) and stresses the interaction between the individual and these layers as contexts for development (see Section 6.4.1.3 for more details). Each layer is expected to play a different role in relation to an individual's academic help-seeking, which will impact their academic development. Within the PGT AHS model, the individual's behaviour is determined by complex interactions as there is dynamic interaction between psychological and demographic factors (e.g., Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2008; Komarraju & Karau, 2005). The microsystem is where the individual has direct contact with the systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). The exosystem is where the environment that impacts students' help-seeking which they may not necessarily directly interact with (e.g., university, school, policy). The macrosystem represents social and cultural norms that have impacts on experience or academic help-seeking behaviour (e.g., Leong, 2015). The individual's academic help-seeking behaviour and decision-making process are influenced by all four layers across the whole PGT AHS model with each of the layers/elements having more or less impact. The chronosystem – this study's focus – represents all the changes in the environment that happen over time (e.g., major historical or social events). All sub-systems are situated in time and can change over time, and the chronosystem acts on all layers; thus, the chronosystem will pass through all the other systems due to its time dimension and impact on different layers (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Within the PGT AHS model, chronosystem-level events can be conceptualised as transitions or the duration (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; White & Ingram, 2021). For both international and home PGT students, the decision of entering a PGT programme, transition and adaption are all rippled with changes in the academic life path; all can affect and be affected by the student's growth and development, leading to some potential challenges that will impact their academic journey (e.g., Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016). In this ongoing process, transitions and later experiences involve changes within and across all the system layers (e.g., Gale & Parker, 2014), with implications for help-seeking behaviour.

The chronosystem makes it possible to identify how interactions with other layers can support the understanding of influences on academic help-seeking in other systems (White & Ingram, 2021). For example, through the chronosystem, student transitions and PGT academic help-seeking experience can be understood at a microlevel through interactions and relationships with the micro- and exosystems. However, as mentioned in Chapter Six (Section 6.4), there is limited research on academic help-seeking that focuses on the chronosystem (e.g., Taylor & Ali, 2017). Consequently, the understanding of academic help-seeking among the PGT cohort is a largely underexplored element in examinations of the mechanisms of the academic help-seeking process. Moreover, considering the chronosystem from the perspective of the lifespan of the student, the COVID-19 pandemic represents a part of the chronosystem and also has influential impact on the chronosystem, while also potentially influencing other layers (e.g., Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Xu & Tran, 2021), as the timing of the pandemic may have quite individual effects on different help-seeking behaviours and academic experiences. Hence, the PGT AHS model focuses on just one element – the interaction between the chronosystem and other layers – and explores how PGT students perceive their academic help-seeking behaviours while transitioning and throughout the whole PGT journey. The aim is to contribute to an integrated picture to understand how the trajectory of PGT academic help-seeking has been impacted by the pandemic, and to expand the picture of how the PGT AHS model can be applied within different settings.

7.3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach, using the creative research semi-structured interview method. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because the process allows for focus through a series of open-ended questions and flexibility by permitting the responses to be explored in some depth (Ryan et al., 2009). This study uses a qualitative visually-

guided interview method – Rivers of Experience (RoE, Iantaffi, 2011) – which allows the participants' thoughts, feelings and experiences to drive the interview, but within the framework of the research aims/questions.

The RoE is the technique is used to promote individuals' reflection on critical events in the (academic) lives of participants, helping them explain some turning points related to the research focus – in this case, academic help-seeking (Cabaroglu & Denicolo, 2008). By using RoE, more details can emerge in the semi-structured interviews, providing far richer visual imagery, bringing the participants' sketches/thoughts to life during the interviews (Cabaroglu & Denicolo, 2008). Moreover, the RoE is chosen to work as the timeline that allows the PGT students to navigate their way through their challenging (particularly during the pandemic) academic journeys to the completion of their postgraduate degrees, and to voice their own reflections on different influences on their academic help-seeking during their UG and PGT learning experiences (Cabaroglu & Denicolo, 2008; Iantaffi, 2011; Sheridan et al., 2011). It also allows the participants to start at any chronological point (from UG to PG) and to set the pace and the extent of the dialogue.

7.3.1. Design

The RoE technique entails drawing a river (e.g., Cabaroglu & Denicolo, 2008; Iantaffi, 2011) and imagining each bend as a significant factor that has an impact on how the participant has sought help from UG to PGT. This method reflects on visual narratives with participants as they tell their story; it provides value by engaging the participants as they are not just responding to the questions but giving more information by telling the story (Iantaffi, 2011). In addition, visual rivers are used as tools to make the interview conversations themselves more in-depth and richer, and they provide help to understand more about the students, not just based on the researcher's own interpretations (Cabaroglu & Denicolo, 2008).

A pre-interview guide (see Appendix 8) was adapted from Iantaffi (2011) and Cabaroglu and Denicolo (2008). The language was amended to fit in the research purpose (i.e., changed to related to help-seeking trajectories in the PGT context). In constructing the two research questions for the interview question guide (Appendix 9), the PGT AHS model was employed as a framework, primarily considering the four broad themes: **microsystem**, **exosystem**, **macrosystem** and **chronosystem**. Of particular note, the individual layer in the PGT AHS model is the characteristics/factors of PGT students that are generally influenced by the other layers. The interaction between an individual and other people leads to the microsystem or

other outer layers in the PGT AHS model, so this study cross-combines the individual layer with the other layers reciprocally.

7.3.2. Participants

As this is a follow-on study, I decided to conduct it in the same university, exploring whether the PGT AHS model is applicable under different educational methods within the same university setting. Using the same university increases my ability to understand the educational context by keeping the institution the same as in the main study, meaning this follow-on study can focus on the other pertinent issues (especially the change of teaching method to online teaching). The eight participants (four each from the British and Chinese cohorts) were students in the University of Glasgow Masters PGT programme. The sample size was relatively small due to the exploratory and follow-on nature of this study (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). Recruitment took place via email using the purposive sampling strategy as a method of selecting only participants who were readily accessible, but also specifically targeted recruits from certain groups to facilitate the comparison (i.e., UK vs China, Bryman, 2012).

Table 7-1

Follow-on study's participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Nationality	Previous academic and work experience	Major	PGT Academic experience Timing
Ava	Female	China	UG – 8 years working	Psychology	PGT Just Graduated
Bella	Female	China	UG	Education	PGT (Online) Just submitted the dissertation
Cathy	Female	UK	UG – 5 years working	Language	PGT (Online)/working Second semester
Dora	Female	China	UG – 4 years working	Education	PGT (Online) Just submitted the dissertation
Ella	Female	China	UG – premaster	Law	PGT Second semester
Fiona	Female	UK	UG – PGT – 2 years working	Law	PGT / working Second semester
Gemma	Female	UK	UG – 7.5 years working	Law	PGT (part-time) / working Second year
Hannah	Female	UK	UG – 7 years working	Education	PGT (part-time) / working Second year

Note. Timing represents as the academic status of the students at the time of their interviews

The invitations for the study were posted on relevant postgraduate social media (e.g., Facebook groups, with permissions obtained from the group administrators). The invitation

was also shared widely by my supervisors and PhD colleagues through their personal and social networks and on relevant Facebook pages for UoG postgraduate students. Once the participants had indicated their interest, I followed up by providing them with relevant ethical information about the study, including the plain language statement, consent form and data privacy statement (See Appendices 10-12). I also sent them instructions for the RoE activity and made arrangements for the timing of the interview. A summary of the participants' profiles is provided above in Table 7-1.

7.3.3. Procedure

7.3.3.1. Piloting

Piloting was conducted to ensure clarity and suitability (Jaiarth et al., 2000). A total of three participants took part in this piloting: one PGT student and two PhD students. Following the piloting feedback, adjustments were made to the wording of interview questions and the structure of the pre-interview guide. The final versions of the interview question guide and pre-interview guide can be found in Appendices 8 and 9.

7.3.3.2. Main follow-on study

Ethics approval was granted for this study at the University of Glasgow (see Appendix 13). A pre-interview guide (see Appendix 8) with a river example and template (Kerchner, 2006, p. 128) was provided for participants to draw their own RoE before the interview (e.g., Cabaroglu & Denicolo, 2008; Iantaffi, 2011), or if they preferred, they could draw it on blank paper.

Due to concern about the virus, all the interviews were conducted online via Zoom. During the interviews, the participants were invited to explain and elaborate on each turning point in their rivers (e.g., Cabaroglu & Denicolo, 2008; Kerchner, 2006). After they had shared their RoEs, the participants were asked some follow-up questions if certain content had not emerged naturally through their responses, facilitating the further exploration of some of the issues mentioned. Questions included, for example, 'Of all the bends in your river, which do you consider the biggest turning point that radically influenced your attitude (and behaviour) towards help-seeking?'. To ensure confidentiality and security, the data was saved in a secure folder on a private laptop that only I could access; all the participants were assured anonymity and the use of pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality (Cohen et al., 2011).

7.3.4. Analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with oTranscribe (<https://otranscribe.com/>), with the total interview duration for each participant ranging from 20 to 50 minutes. The data were produced by the participants' RoE task and the discussion around their rivers (see Appendix 14 for some participants' drawings), and all transcripts were transported into NVivo 12 for deductive thematic analysis informed by the PGT AHS model to identify themes aligned with the research aims/questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Deductive thematic analysis was employed (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and took the four broad themes of the PGT AHS model into account (i.e., microsystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem). All the analysis processes followed the "six phases" of Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved: 1) Familiarisation with the data by reading the rivers and interview transcripts. 2) Generating initial codes based on the initial coding framework, which was theory-driven. As part of analysis, during this phase I specifically stepped back and compared Chinese and British students' rivers and interview responses (see Table 7-2 below for the initial coding framework). 3) Searching for themes among the codes to identify the patterns related to academic help-seeking and the PGT AHS model. 4) Reviewing the transcripts and themes by renaming and restructuring the layout in relation to the two RQs. 5) Defining and naming the themes. 6) Producing the report (see Chapter Three, Section 3.8.2 for more details).

Table 7-2
Initial coding framework

Category/Themes	Initial codes
Chronosystem	Prior (academic or work) experience Prior (academic help-seeking) behaviour pattern. Improvement Change in help-seeking Future thoughts
Microsystem	Support Feeling of disconnection
Exosystem	Online vs blended/ traditional
Macrosystem	British vs Chinese Unfamiliarity with the educational system

By repeatedly reading the river and interview data under each broad theme while making notes and cross-checking to ensure trustworthiness and reliability, I constructed the connections between themes and subthemes (see Table 7-3 for the list of themes). The further reviewing of all themes to make sure of the theme and sub-theme structure led to clearly defined final subthemes that extended the PGT AHS model's comprehension of academic help-seeking behaviour. The microsystem, exosystem and chronosystem themes

related to both research questions. By exploring while also comparing the (Chinese/British) PGT students' transition experiences and further PGT journeys, these three themes focused on the students' perceptions of their interactions with others, their perceptions of the teaching mode, their reflections on the academic journey in the pandemic, and their academic help-seeking behaviour. The macrosystem theme, which focused on the Chinese international students' trajectories of help-seeking behaviour, captured the experience of Chinese international students when they transitioned to different educational systems during the pandemic.

Table 7-3

List of themes

Theme	Sub-theme	Related to RQ
Microsystem: Changes in help-seeking behaviour compared to UG/pre-pandemic	Maintaining the same help-seeking behaviours as in previous learning Added propensity for exercising academic help-seeking Influential impact of key factors in the help-seeking source preference	RQ1 RQ2
Exosystem: Online teaching (pandemic) vs Traditional teaching (pre-pandemic)	N/A	RQ1 RQ2
Macrosystem: Unfamiliarity with the educational system	N/A	RQ2
Chronosystem: Reflection on UG to PGT journey within the pandemic	N/A	RQ1 RQ2

7.3.5. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was granted for this study to be conducted at the University of Glasgow (see Appendix 13). Consent was obtained from the participants for the interviews and to share the visual rivers they produced. To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, they were assured anonymity and the use of pseudonyms in the whole thesis as their data was analysed and presented (Creswell, 2014). During the study, I aimed to be open and honest in my procedures, followed the guidelines and recommendations with integrity.

7.4. Findings

The PGT AHS model's layer system informed the data analysis. Likewise, the findings from this study concurrently supplemented the PGT AHS model's applied scope. Being applied afresh in a new context (the PGT programme during a pandemic) led to the construction of subcategories for the PGT AHS model's four layers. These new subcategories/subthemes offered invaluable new insights, contributing to the extension of the PGT AHS model when considered in the understanding of PGT academic help-seeking behaviour. The findings will

be presented in chronological order, from before the PGT programme begins until the end or halfway point of the PGT journey, unveiling the students' insights from the transition process through the duration of the PGT programme. The discussion below will interweave some visual data to complement the narrative evidence in order to develop a clearer picture of the participants' academic journeys (for more details on visual data, please see Elliot et al., 2017, p.493).

7.4.1. Microsystem: Changes in help-seeking behaviour compared to UG/pre-pandemic

The microsystem is the location of the immediate interactions between individuals and their environments, which influence each other reciprocally (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to this study, COVID-19 has impacted how students interact with others in different ways. As academic help-seeking behaviour usually happens between the individual and the microsystem layer (since PGT students need to interact with others to ask for help), this theme captures participants' perception of changes regarding their academic help-seeking (e.g., help-seeking types, attitudes and source preferences).

Maintained the same help-seeking behaviours as in previous learning: All the student participants had developed strategies for seeking academic help based on their previous learning experiences. In general, their patterns of help-seeking behaviours were more related to adaptive help-seeking as they turned for help not only to discuss the answer but to actually discuss problems with others to figure out the potential causes of the problems and/or solutions. During their time in UG or until the beginning of the PGT period, the interviewees followed their behaviour patterns, even in the pandemic. For example,

I was more...reliant on myself...Self-help is ... a preference that I may have for myself... During the beginning of year [transition] ... I was not really going to people to ask questions when I encountered difficulties (Ava_China).

For myself, I feel I can do most of the stuff by myself. So all I did was keep [the problem] inside of me [myself] and just try by myself over and over again. I do think I still prefer[red] doing things by myself [before the semester two] (Cathy_UK).

In general, there was no apparent difference between the Chinese and British students regarding help-seeking types, as all eight of them stated that they would prefer self-helping or asking peers for discussion (but not for the answer) when they entered the PGT programme. As Bella stated regarding her transition process,

When I have problems, I will try to solve them by myself first. But if I cannot solve it by myself, I will then turn to my friends or classmates (Bella_China).

Similarly, Gemma stated that when she decided to take a PGT programme (pre-transition),

I did spend quite a lot of time self-reflecting and talking to my friends ... for guidance and to have a discussion ... during that [time]... I went to quite a lot of people for help (Gemma_UK, Figure 7-1).

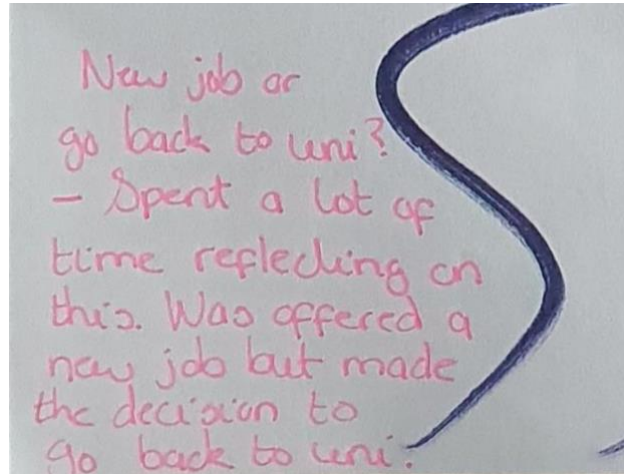


Figure 7-1. *Gemma's River*

The previous help-seeking behaviour patterns have been indicated by interviewees as remaining relatively unchanged during their transition processes to PGT, although the pandemic changed the teaching method (Aarts et al., 1998; Albarracin & Wyer Jr, 2000; Elias & MacDonald, 2007). The transition process reflects an individual's previous development/experience, current situation and potential challenges. These make transitions work as a lens through which to see their PGT education journey development; potentially, for example, Chinese students had negative experiences during their time in UG that led to self-help or asking peers for help, and they tended to behave the same way when they transitioned to PGT (e.g., Albarracin & Wyer Jr, 2000), suggesting that students base their future behaviour on past experience.

Added propensity for exercising academic help-seeking: One of the sub-themes developed by the all participants was the changes in their help-seeking attitudes. Although their prior academic help-seeking patterns from UG could help to understand the transition process to PGT (e.g., Aarts et al., 1998; Albarracin & Wyer Jr, 2000), the overall PGT learning process was based on the environments surrounding them and how they impacted the students (Li et al., 2010). Notably, they all indicated that they were becoming more willing to ask for help during pandemic and more comfortable interacting with others compared to their UG experiences or after the transition. For example,

I was more partial to studying on my own [in UG], but slowly, at that time [after transition, during pandemic] I was quite able to say that I would also ask for help from others (Ava_China).

I feel way more confident as a student and in myself... I'm really happy to ... ask them [others] for help (Hannah_UK).

This is illustrated by all the participants who found their attitudes changing during their time in the PGT programme. This sub-theme helped students notice the changes in their thought or recognition of the need to ask for help due to the intense nature of PGT or due to the pandemic's restrictions, and there was no apparent difference in attitudes toward help-seeking between the British and Chinese students from UG to PGT during pandemic, as all of them indicated an increased willingness to ask for help.

Influential impact of key factors in the help-seeking source preference: The other comment made by the majority of participants related to changes in their help-seeking sources. Within the core of the microsystem, interaction with other people (e.g., peers or instructors) plays an important part in the academic help-seeking process. The interviewees commented that their preferred sources of help changed compared to UG/pre-pandemic or after the transition during the pandemic. For example,

[After negative experiences from semester one] that was the time I realised... I really need to communicate with them [others]... So the next term I made use of this opportunity ... to use more resources (Dora_China).

I think the ... change [during the pandemic] might be the sources that I asked for help... [U]ntil now I think I was ... more likely ... to ask the tutors or colleagues... (Fiona_UK).

Interestingly, the helper sources changed due to the positive or negative experiences Chinese interviewees had had – not mainly related to pandemic – leading to changes in their preferences. As their perceptions of experience revealed that these adjustments were associated with some trajectories, most of Chinese interviewees commented that they had adopted different strategies to deal with the problem, or changed their help-seeking sources to gain more helpful support, as in Bella's response:

I believe the results of the module is another significant point and I decided to improve myself. I think I need to ... have more discussions with my peers ... so this [experience after transition] actually inspired me a lot and made me try to discuss with my classmates (Bella_China, Figure 7-2).

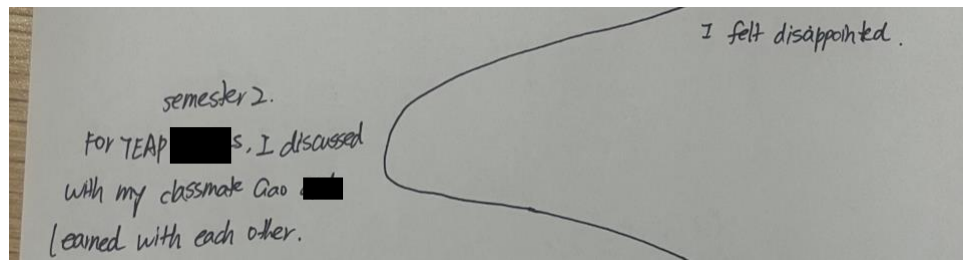


Figure 7-2. *Bella's River*

All the British participants reported changes through self-reflection/adjustment due to the environmental or contextual change – due to the pandemic that the lack of real social interaction – not based on the experiences they had had.

Because I was used to being able to go to the office [UG]...but now [PGT] like you have to send an email, which is fine as it is the only way [during the pandemic] so, I think I am now really happy with that (Hannah_UK).

Within the microsystem, these changes demonstrated that the participants' help-seeking decisions were based on their experiences (e.g., negative experience), ability and perception of the contextual environment (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic made the students get used to interacting with others without face-to-face), leading to different decision-making around seeking help. Although these students initially followed their personal help-seeking patterns during the transition process (e.g., Aarts et al., 1998; Albarracin & Wyer Jr, 2000; Becker et al., 2019), they still adjusted their approaches based on different aspects (especially during the pandemic) toward the help-seeking process to get much support. For example, by adjusting their willingness to ask for help (individual layer), the Chinese students were more able to ask peers for discussion (microsystem), facilitating their help-seeking behaviour by interacting with others. By accepting the low accessibility due to the COVID-19 pandemic (chronosystem and microsystem), the British students became more comfortable asking for help online. These findings support the PGT AHS model as the microsystem works as the immediate interaction layer, bidirectionally influencing their decision-making and help-seeking behaviour (Li et al., 2010).

7.4.2. Exosystem: Online teaching (pandemic) vs Traditional teaching (pre-pandemic)

In the PGT AHS model, the exosystem comprises the university and the college, school or programme type (e.g., conversion programme) as the environment that impacts students' help-seeking decisions but they might not necessarily directly contacts with (Bronfenbrenner,

1977). Since 2020, the world has been shaken by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced HE institutions to shift to online teaching methods. This sudden change raised some concerns and also presented massive challenges for PGT students (e.g., Lapitan Jr et al., 2021). As this study was conducted during the time of the pandemic, the students were included about their thoughts on online teaching and traditional teaching methods. This theme explores the influence of the environment on the type of study modes, while considering the differences between Chinese and British students.

This theme reflects upon participants' feelings and experiences regarding the different teaching modes before and during the pandemic. The majority of the participants (seven out of eight) indicated they preferred the face-to-face study mode, and they believe the COVID-19 pandemic had affected their academic lives and required adaptability to new teaching methodologies. Surprisingly, the challenges of the pandemic (e.g., loneliness, the lack of a sense of belonging, Arslan, 2021) were not mentioned by the students at all. Instead, in their focus groups and interviews, all the participants focused only on the impact of online teaching – an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, regarding online teaching, they mentioned that their interaction with others (e.g., peers or tutors) was reduced due to the restrictions of the pandemic, which could potentially “obstruct” their academic help-seeking behaviours (e.g., Lee et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2010), and might ultimately influence their academic performance.

I think I would feel more comfortable knowing people, and then that would make me more relaxed ... to ask them the question. I need to know and be familiar with other people (Cathy_UK).

But when we changed ... to online ... it was kind of difficult for me to fit into university life... This didn't fit me well [online teaching]. When I got my first essay back, I got notice of plagiarism (Emma_China).

However, there was a noticeable difference between British and Chinese students' comments about the online teaching method during the pandemic. The Chinese students all commented that online teaching would influence their source of preference, or source approachability. For example,

With online teaching we can just discuss with some of our classmates. You don't have many opportunities to discuss with your teachers [due to the inconvenience] (Belly_China).

[Online teaching] will make them total strangers to me. And I don't like to ask for help from someone I am not familiar with (Ava_China).

On the other hand, the British students commented that they did not have access to the same support as previously (UG/pre-pandemic) and they encountered different challenges in the PGT programme, resulting in the feeling of disconnection as a result of not being able to meet with other people physically. Also, because all the British participants needed to study and work at the same time, this difference was highlighted between them and the Chinese students. The British students talked about this when they discussed their feelings about how online teaching influenced their experience, as illustrated in the quotes below.

I have certainly found being part-time [I've] not really made any friends on the course ... I'm not getting a chance to get to know people... and can't discuss the work with them ... I think one because it's been online, two because I'm part-time as well ... (Gemma_UK).

The pandemic I think just changed the way of studying as well... which makes me struggle a bit as well because I'm working at the same time. So I needed more help to find the work-life balance basically (Fiona_UK, Figure 7-3).

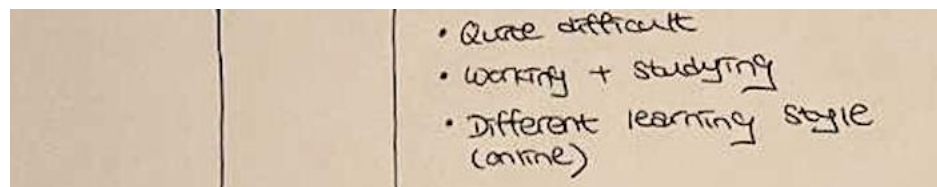


Figure 7-3. *Fiona's River*

Within the scope of this study, it is relevant that the pandemic has led to online teaching, reducing interactions with others (e.g., peers or tutors) due to the restrictions (i.e., lock-down or online teaching), and influencing their help-seeking behaviour. As academic help-seeking behaviour involves social elements (i.e., asking others for help), reducing social interaction through online teaching would potentially hinder help-seeking behaviours (e.g., Lee et al., 2021). While online teaching reduces the approachability of help sources for all PGT students, the change of teaching methods also puts extra weight on British PGT students. For example, in this study being a part-time student during the pandemic was found to require that students make greater effort to balance their work and studies, as the online teaching method reduced their relationship with others, leading to the British participants having more need for academic help during the pandemic. This finding has echoed the PGT AHS model's understanding that help-seeking behaviour does not just happen within the microsystem, but it is engaged in a dynamic process with the other layers. It also expands the understanding of the PGT AHS model by acknowledging the importance of considering the diversity of students and their academic help-seeking behaviour in the PGT context (e.g., Fetherson, 2015; Hall, 2010).

7.4.3. Macrosystem: Unfamiliarity with the educational system

In this study, the macrosystem essentially represents different social and cultural norms, including different educational systems. Under this main theme, *unfamiliarity with the educational system* was mainly reflected in educational thinking and educational methods. The theme was constructed as a specific cohort's (the Chinese) unfamiliarity with the system caused them problems, which affected their experiences and academic help-seeking behaviours during their PGT.

The impact of cultural differences and/or lack of understanding can lead to serious academic issues (e.g., Farahian et al., 2021). For example, a participant stated that she was not aware of self-plagiarism until she got a notice, which led her to realise the seriousness and potential consequences of the issue, prompting requisite actions – the need to seek help,

I got a notice...of self-plagiarism ... that's the time I realised, there is some knowledge that I'm not fully aware of regarding plagiarism and referencing skills ... (Dora_China, Figure 7-4).

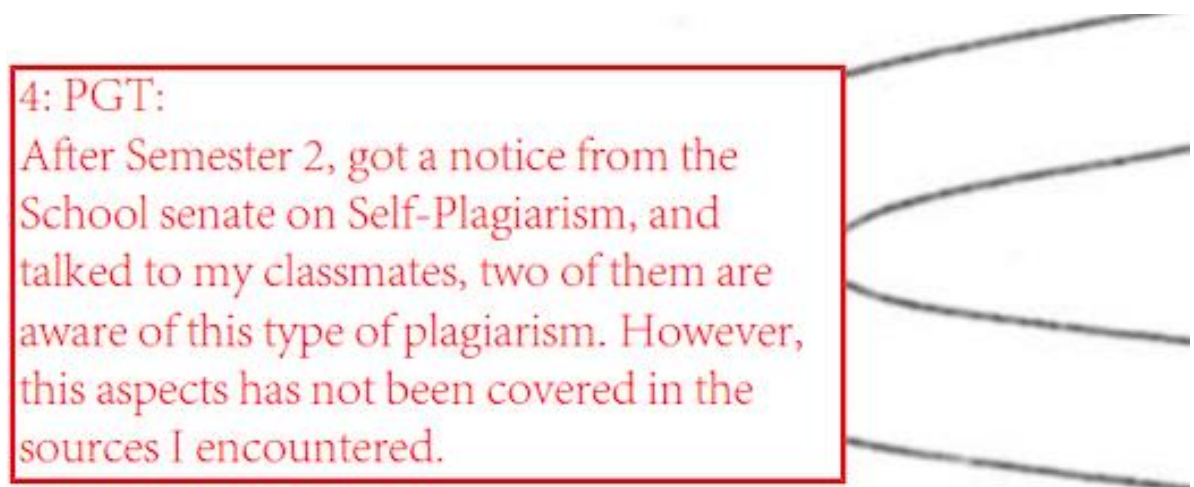


Figure 7-4. *Dora's River*

Another Chinese participant, who had had spent time in the UK and familiarised herself with the British educational system, still got notices of plagiarism, suggesting there was still a lot she needed to know about the system, and making her aware of the need for help:

I got the notice of plagiarism...I was not familiar with this [type] ... and the thing is I do know how to paraphrase and how to use the reference to write the essay... (Ella_China).

This implies a lack of understanding of the Scottish educational system – for example, the question of what plagiarism is – among international students (e.g., Farahian et al., 2021). In fact, some international students who are not familiar with the Scottish HE system have no clear idea of the requirements when it comes to academic writing, which underlines the deep gap between the academic norms and the student's perception, revealing the need for help-seeking.

Interestingly, although this theme is Chinese-specific, one of the British students, Hannah, also mentioned an experience when she thought the different system would influence her behaviour. She had the Erasmus programme experience of going on exchange to France for about a year, and she framed her experience as being difficult when it came to the “educational system” and “teacher attitude[s] and teaching method[s]”. She reflected on her experience and reported that,

I went there [France]... the teacher was very strict because the French way of teaching is much stricter than the way of teaching in the UK, it's really rigid ... he was really, really strict and really scary ... I didn't ask him for help (Hannah_UK, Figure 7-5).

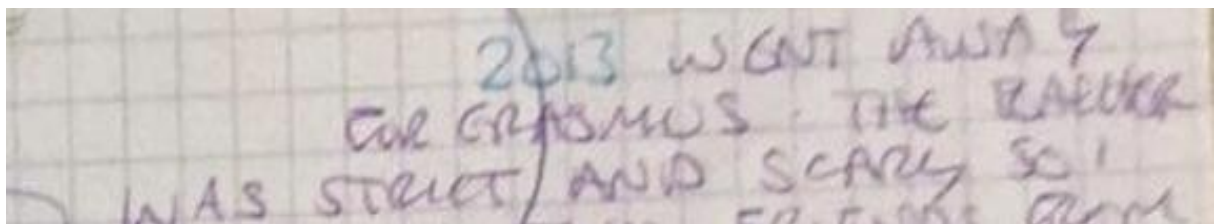


Figure 7-5. *Hannah's River*

Although some differences have been noted in relation to the Erasmus programme in previous studies (e.g., Brooks, 2018), this differential comparison was still surprising, as similarities are often identified among various elements of European and British higher education. Hannah's experience underscores the PGT AHS model's understanding that the environment and system play very important roles in one's personal experience and behaviour, even within western educational environments.

Within the macrosystem, the key difference between the international students and the home students is the problem of transitioning and adapting to a new educational system – e.g., from China to the Scottish system. International students face more significant issues because they are transitioning to a new country and educational system (e.g., Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016). This finding suggests that the educational system influences Chinese students' learning, as they might find it difficult to understand the norms, the requirements

and the teaching methods, all of which points to more potential help for need (e.g., Fatemi & Saito, 2020). During the pandemic, the online teaching method made it even harder for them to understand the educational system, a problem that may have been further exacerbated by the fact that some of the international students were studying in their home countries. Without experiencing the other culture in person, it would be harder to understand the norms properly and learn to understand the educational system as was necessary, which all suggest that more help would be needed. It also indicates that the chronosystem (e.g., the pandemic) also has an important influence on international students as their study abroad experience and pandemic are major life transitions or milestones (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Taylor & Ali, 2017). The transition and adapted environment indicate the interconnectedness between the macrosystem and chronosystem, supporting the idea that help-seeking is influenced by the contextual environment. However, it should be noted that although this theme was constructed to be Chinese-specific, the educational system might somehow influence the UK students as well, which may be particularly true given differences between English and Scottish PGT contexts; this calls for further research.

7.4.4. Chronosystem: Reflection on UG to PGT journey within the pandemic

As students experience different life events in different situations and at different times, the passing of time inevitably brings changes in life events and experiences, impacting the connections between people and their contexts, and therefore affecting their decisions or experiences (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 2005). During the pandemic, students were not able to interact with other people face-to-face and familiar teaching methods were changed. Within intense PGT journey, this pandemic (or online teaching) provided additional opportunities for students to spend more time self-reflecting while constructing their knowledge independently. Thus, self-reflection was identified as a theme based on the interview data.

All of the interviewees indicated the perception that undertaking the PGT course during the pandemic had helped develop their academic or social interaction skills, contributing to their academic development by enabling them to encounter different types of experiences. The interviewees described how their awareness of the need to upskill or to change their preferred pattern of behaviour would allow them to view and interact with "academia" differently – the awareness/reflection of need help:

I believe the result of the module was another significant point and I decided to improve myself. So [this experience made me] think I needed to reflect [on my study progress] frequently in the next semester (Bella_China).

Because of the pandemic, I think it just changed the way of studying as well... now I think I feel more comfortable ... because I know where I should go for help and stuff and what sort of people I can go to for help (Fiona_UK).

Interestingly, the British and Chinese students' reflection processes were apparently different as well. The Chinese students commented that their reflections were mainly related to academic writing or academic skills, which echoes back to the finding regarding the macrosystem – understanding the educational system:

The education and systems in China and the UK are different ... So, I changed. I have now learned to paraphrase and use some helpful software to help me to improve my academic writing (Ella_China, Figure 7-6).

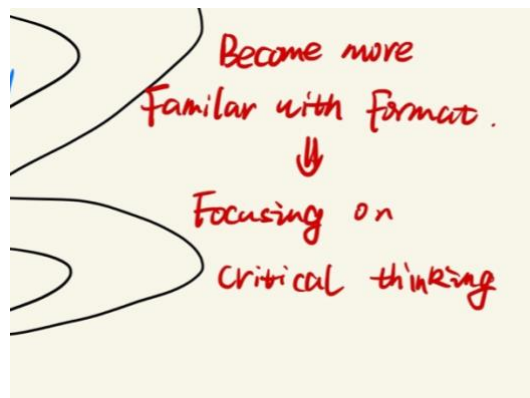


Figure 7-6. *Ella's River*

Among the British students, three emphasised that their reflections mainly focused on their motivation to study. For example,

The COVID pandemic came around ... I went through a big period of self-reflection... I've always had in the back of my mind that I wanted to do a Masters. So, I had a decision to make ... And I chose to go back to university [as that was her dream] (Gemma_UK).

As mentioned in Section 6.4, the chronosystem should envelop all systems and reflect the past, present and future of each system, with some remaining the same or being changed. As such, the chronosystem has been discussed in the above systems by comparing the UG and PGT experiences, as well as the pandemic experience. Under this main theme, the reflections arrived at regarding their academic experiences and help-seeking behaviours allowed the students to change their thinking based on their new situation (i.e., the pandemic). Their responses also indicated that the new academic environment (e.g., online teaching method) would likely influence students' behaviour and thoughts. For example, the Chinese students reflected on the educational system's requirements, especially during pandemic due to the online teaching methods, whereas the British students reflected on motivation, with the

pandemic providing them the time to do a PGT programme. All the participants saw the academic consequences of these approaches or behaviours as ultimately bringing about different levels of self-awareness and realisation, providing a foundation for their subsequent academic growth throughout their PGT during the pandemic (e.g., getting used to online teaching methods). The fact that the chronosystem caused the students to reflect on the temporal dimensions of education – to achieve their goals across settings, while adapting to different contexts (e.g., Jones et al., 2020) – indicates that the pandemic brought about changes in the individual, both directly and by the chronosystem's interaction with the other ecological layers surrounding the students (e.g., Neal & Neal, 2013), and by influencing the cognitive process (help-seeking process) thanks to the increased time available for reflection and adjustments (Goldstone & Zhang, 2021; Redmond, 2014).

7.5. Discussion

The current study set out to 1) understand the differences in academic help-seeking behaviours as students transition from undergraduate (pre-pandemic) to postgraduate (pandemic); and 2) understand the similarities and differences between Chinese and British students' academic help-seeking trajectories during the pandemic. To understand these questions, a qualitative visually-guided interview method (RoE) was employed. The results illustrated that all students identified that their help-seeking behaviour had changed, but their experiences during the pandemic varied. Comparing the pre-pandemic (UG) and pandemic (PGT) periods, the results suggest that students certainly experience difficulties adapting to the new experience during their transition. To adapt to the changed teaching methods and the restrictions, the PGT students in this study indicated that they would change their preferences for sources and become more willing to ask for help than UG (pre-pandemic). During the pandemic, the Chinese and British students had different experiences: while the Chinese students had more difficulty adapting to the new educational system and needed more help due to the online teaching methods and inability to interact in person, the British students needed to make more effort to balance their work-study lives and interactions with others.

Regarding research question one, the use of RoE interviews within this study has allowed it to illustrate the PGT students' academic help-seeking trajectories and make the comparison (e.g., Cabaroglu & Denicolo, 2008). The rivers and their narratives allow a focus on different aspects of a given student's learning experience, facilitating an examination of broader changes that influence learning experiences and help-seeking behaviour. During the

pandemic, the participants all experienced the rapid shift to online teaching, which brought a certain level of uncertainty. This shift was viewed as an important influential aspect of help-seeking, which is unsurprising based on the students' experience and the pandemic conditions. The findings indicate that this unanticipated transformation brought different levels of stress and burden for students, influencing students' help-seeking willingness and making it different from what they may have experienced during their UG (e.g., Gillis & Krull, 2020; Gourlay et al., 2021). That is, the students in this study indicated that they were becoming more willing to ask for help, and would change their preferred sources of help in order to gain more support as social interaction was lacking compared to pre-pandemic. This suggests that their experiences during the pandemic raised their awareness of the limitations of their knowledge or environment and prompted adjustment to their help-seeking behaviour (e.g., Goldstone & Zhang, 2021; Taylor & Ali, 2017). The change in preferred sources of help due to the environment and the students' problems (e.g., negative experiences) also mirrored the academic help-seeking process in the PGT AHS model, which indicates that students' decisions around help-seeking will be adjusted in order to solve the problem properly. This finding further contributes to the understanding that the academic help-seeking process will be adjusted according to context and is not fixed (e.g., Makara & Karabenick, 2013), providing the lens for further studies to understand more in-depth how the academic help-seeking process works in the Scottish PGT context.

In essence, the participants used this opportunity for self-reflection to adjust their academic help-seeking decisions in light of the changes brought by social distancing and online teaching (Goldstone & Zhang, 2021). The pandemic reflects the natural system principle of growth and development, and affected the students' interactions with others, which supports the understanding of the PGT AHS model that the different layers interconnect. The findings suggest that the participants demonstrated positive approaches toward help-seeking during the pandemic, such as expressing more willingness to ask help and self-awareness of the need for help, which previous studies have also confirmed (e.g., Zhang et al., 2020). This provides the extended knowledge that during the online teaching period of the pandemic, students were more willing to ask for help (Kitsantas & Chow, 2007), although the pandemic was a difficult period.

To understand the differences between British and Chinese students' help-seeking behaviour trajectories during the pandemic, the findings answered research question two; the findings indicate that both Chinese and British PGT students were challenged by pandemic regulations and policies. The British participants' emphasis on the impact of the pandemic

on their working-studying balance, their decreased interactions with others and their help-seeking aligns with Hall's (2010) findings, suggesting the difficulty of managing and coping with their work-life balance during the pandemic; this indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to PGT was a period of uncertainty that impacted their personal and academic lives (Tobbell et al., 2010). From this perspective, in this study, British students' difficulty balancing work and studies points to their need for more help during the pandemic, as they divide their limited time resources between their studies and work, especially given the new method of online teaching. This supports previous findings that working while studying can have negative effects on academic success, and that students who do both are likely to struggle (e.g., Callender, 2008). This finding expands the scope of the PGT AHS model by acknowledging that the British students' academic help-seeking was influenced by the pandemic conditions and providing more understanding that academic help-seeking is related to the chronosystem (pandemic), which interacts with other layers (e.g., the microsystem). However, there is limited evidence to understand the online learning and help-seeking behaviour of students who work and study in the PGT context (e.g., Fetherson, 2015). Although working-studying students have been one of the focus support groups in the tertiary context, universities may not know how to support them through different activities or interventions while teaching is online or blended. With this population of students already in the field, the further research in this area is recommended.

Chinese students' help-seeking behaviour during the pandemic was different from British students' in terms of their understanding of the educational system (e.g., Gu et al., 2010). The perception of transition and adaption to a new educational system during the pandemic was associated with students' ability to cope and their awareness of the need for help (Chowdhury & Halder, 2019). This finding confirms previous pre-pandemic research findings (e.g., Leong, 2015; Li, 2007; Yan & Berliner, 2013) that different educational systems will impact PGT Chinese international students. The Chinese students' realisation of their unfamiliarity with the educational system indicates their awareness of their barriers to achieving their academic goals. The more individuals understand the barriers, the better they can facilitate and navigate themselves to find the necessary support and get back on the right path (Chowdhury & Halder, 2019). The online teaching method makes it even more challenging to understand the educational system since it is not being experienced in person (Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2020), yet the motivation and the desire to achieve their goals during the period of online teaching greatly depends on students' motivation (e.g., Kirovska-Simjanoska, 2019). This finding supports the PGT AHS model's understanding that the macrosystem and exosystem influence students' help-seeking behaviour as the educational

system and teaching method differ, but it also shows the influence from the individual layer (e.g., motivation) out toward the other layer systems (seeking help from other). Thus, the students (no matter whether they are international or home) should make more efforts to keep themselves motivated by achieving their goals in the PGT programme through online teaching or even blended learning. To better prepare for the transition, international students should put greater efforts into understanding the system's differences to prevent unintentional academic malpractice actions (e.g., Fatemi & Saito, 2020) and understanding what aspects they need help with to assist with their own transition.

Overall, this study's findings align with previous research showing that the ability to function effectively in the new environment depends on short-term (direct – e.g., interaction with others, McPherson et al., 2017; Menzies & Baron, 2014) and long-term (indirect – e.g., overall academic performance, Li et al., 2010) factors, which shape how PGT (both home and international) students adjust their academic help-seeking processes in Scotland during the pandemic. Adopting the PGT AHS model from the cognitive and ecological perspectives to understand the students' transitions to the PGT programme and learning in a new environment (e.g., online teaching method) allows for an exploration of how their individual perspectives (e.g., willingness to ask for help) and environmental contextual factors (e.g., online teaching, pandemic restrictions) determine their experiences and behaviours (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002; Zusho et al., 2007). Based on the RoEs and their interview, along with previous studies' results (e.g., Aarts et al., 1998; Hall, 2010; Li et al., 2010; McPherson et al., 2017), this study has highlighted the key findings that academic help-seeking behaviour changes over time based on varied interactions with different layers and has expanded the understanding of PGT help-seeking behaviour during the pandemic. PGT students will self-evaluate and self-reflect according to their experiences and environments during the pandemic; while the online teaching method resulted in a lack of social interaction, this experience then improved their willingness to ask for help and adjust the source of help to better address their problems in this difficult time. This key finding makes the original contribution of using the PGT AHS model to understand the time – the COVID-19 pandemic nested in chronosystem – and academic development in relation to help-seeking behaviour in this Scottish context. This follow-on study has also raised and echoed the finding of the original mixed-method study in this thesis that there is a need to understand the diversity of PGT cohorts because it is not only international PGT students who struggle, but British home students also encounter different difficulties and need more academic help.

7.6. Recommendations and Study Limitations

This study suggests that in order for students to participate effectively within both their social and academic environments during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods, they need to construct a new recognition of the educational system they are in (i.e., be familiar with the educational requirements before transitioning, Featemi & Saito, 2020). For both international and home PGT students, understanding the environment surrounding them can encourage and enable them to build interactions with others (Kumari et al., 2019). The overall academic experience is constructed by the microsystem and outer system, involving different bidirectional relationship levels. This then encourages the international students to learn more about the culture and understand the educational system, and it encourages the British students to understand the programme setting to facilitate their understanding of the available sources of help when they need it. However, since the participants of this study originated from two different countries, it should be kept in mind that students from different areas might experience different challenges; thus, these recommendations need to be considered in line with the types of students being looked at (i.e., home or international; full-time or part-time).

This follow-on study has several limitations. First, the sample used in the present study (all-female PGT students) offers both strengths and limitations. Because all the participants were female, the results could be interpreted as suggesting that females are more likely than men to seek help, indicating that females have better attitudes towards help-seeking, have higher intentions to seek help, and seek more help in general (e.g., Al-Ansari et al., 2015). On the other hand, using all-female samples can limit our ability to determine whether the findings are gender-specific or relevant to the participants' adjustment abilities and educational backgrounds. This limitation calls for future comparative research among different groups of PGT students with different backgrounds, with varying lengths of experience and different educational system backgrounds to further unravel how help-seeking trajectories are shaped by personal connections, characteristics and developments, as well as by broader environmental changes.

The other key limitation is that the RoE can involve recall bias, as the participants might edit the truth of the events as they recall them (Back, 2013; Brinkmann, 2013). In this study, to minimise this type of bias, the participants were not asked to rate the influence of the bends, and I, as the interviewer, followed a standardised protocol across all interviews to minimise the bias (Morselli et al., 2016). A pre-existing framework was also applied in the data analysis to look for themes and do cross-checking to ensure trustworthiness and realisability, indicating the findings from this study are reliable. Therefore, for further research, it is

suggested that involving mixed study designs would be beneficial. Lastly, the use of the river as the timeline was restricted and did not include previous experiences (e.g., during adolescents) that might be important to the participants' development. As this study was aimed at comparing pre-pandemic and pandemic behaviours, only focusing on UG to PGT (pre-pandemic - 2022), it is suggested that future studies use general life course periods to guide the river interviews, which may enable researchers to reach a more in-depth understanding of help-seeking trajectories.

7.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the RoE interviews provided the critical elements in relation to the PGT programme from the interviewees' perspectives, helping me better understand their disclosed 'turning points' during the pandemic. In turn, this allowed this study to stand back and view how students' own stories were unfolding and how their present linked with their past in relation to solving their problems during the pandemic, as the COVID-19 pandemic was a "war" – a metaphor – that transcended all, and had a major impact on the growth and development of individuals. This study's findings show that PGT help-seeking experiences are related to the widespread rise of online teaching methods, the importance of interaction with others, and the awareness of understanding the educational system. Furthermore, these experiences have highlighted the importance of understanding the obstacles faced by the diverse student body. The application of the PGT AHS model has provided more insights into the ways in which they understand how this time-transition impacted their help-seeking behaviours, their decision-making around seeking help and their help-seeking trajectories, allowing for a holistic consideration of the multiple challenges that PGT students have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and making it possible to consider what can be done to help reduce these challenges and provide support for these students within both pandemic and post-pandemic conditions. The findings highlight the importance of recognising students' ability to adjust to the new environment (e.g., the pandemic) and their ability to determine the need to ask for help, which should not only be considered from the individual's own perspective but also with consideration of the various aspects of their environmental context. The PGT AHS model has provided a lens for understanding academic help-seeking within the PGT journey by highlighting the importance of understanding different but intertwined layers within the model. With further supporting practices implemented to support online teaching and to support the PGT students' understanding of the educational system, students' feelings of unfamiliarity with the environment (e.g., the educational system or teaching method) can be decreased, allowing PGT students to adapt to the programme by increasing

their academic engagement and their willingness to seek help, and thus improving their performance and achievement.

8. Conclusion

Through a sequential explanatory mixed-method study and later a follow-on study, this thesis has provided an in-depth investigation of PGT students' academic help-seeking behaviour, seeking to compare British and Chinese students' help-seeking processes within the context of one Scottish university. The key messages are threefold. First, when examining academic help-seeking behaviour, it is important to not only pay attention to the academic element; in fact, academic help-seeking involves social interaction; thus, studies in this area should also value the importance of the social elements. Second, when evaluating cross-cultural differences, it should be kept in mind that it might not be just their culture that leads students to behave differently; it is possible that the environment could have effects on the students' development of behaviour as well. Finally, students were found to engage in self-reflection based on their experiences and perceptions during their PGT programmes, and adjusted their behaviours and learning approaches as a result.

This chapter offers the concluding thoughts and some reflections on this thesis. First, it will summarise the contribution of this thesis to the literature (Section 8.1), then consider the implications of the study for HE institutions, staff supporting students, and students themselves (Section 8.2). Following that, this chapter proposes areas for future research (Section 8.3). Finally, this chapter concludes both studies in this thesis (Section 8.4), and provides some reflections and final thoughts regarding academic help-seeking and this thesis (Section 8.5).

8.1. Contribution to literature

This section will highlight two main contributions from this thesis in terms of methodological and knowledge aspects. The present research's findings contribute and extend previous research by providing a deeper understanding and comparing the relationship between British and international Chinese students in terms of their academic help-seeking behaviour to understand the PGT help-seeking behaviour as a whole.

One of the main contributions is the use of two approaches to understanding their help-seeking behaviour, and two studies. The sequential mixed-method study provides evidence suggesting that not only might culture be the main factor that influences the level of self-efficacy and academic help-seeking behaviour, but the environment also represents another important factor influencing help-seeking and self-efficacy. This thesis's findings also

uncover the factors that influence academic help-seeking. The RoE technique used in the follow-on study worked as a navigator for the interview (e.g., Kolar et al., 2015), allowing the participants to determine their timeline and construct their story. The interview also allowed the participants to go deeper and expand further regarding their personal understandings of the events and times that they highlighted on their rivers. The follow-on study suggests that the importance of recognising that students' ability to adjust to new environments and determine the need to ask for help are not only considered from the individuals' own perspectives, but also by the various aspects of their environmental context, which echoes the mixed-method study that was conducted before it. Therefore, educators and universities can provide interventions based on these factors and recognition, promoting more comprehensive competitiveness among students, and providing effective solutions for tutors and universities sectors to support students with learning dilemmas.

This thesis offers a methodological contribution to academic help-seeking research as most previous academic help-seeking studies have used self-reporting measures. Researchers have called for greater methodological diversity in these areas (e.g., Roussel et al., 2011), such as qualitative research on help-seeking (e.g., Türküm, 2005). However, Newman (2002) also argues that self-reporting research is still needed to study certain topics, as it is difficult to naturally observe most kinds of academic help-seeking or study academic help-seeking in a lab setting. Thus, to better understand the overall situation, this thesis first used an explanatory sequential mixed-method design to provide a 'complete' analysis and later used the visual method interview to gain insight into how participants' help-seeking behaviours developed over time. As Newman (2002) and Payakachat et al. (2013) suggest, there is a need to conduct more mixed-methods research on the academic help-seeking topics.

Both the use of explanatory sequential mixed-method and the qualitative follow-on study in this thesis could provide a model for subsequent research in the future, specifically in terms of data analysis. In noting the evidence of academic help-seeking from two different nationalities across all postgraduate students, this thesis supports the finding of the limited published study that has utilised qualitative methods in HE (e.g., Amador & Amador, 2017; Whipp & Chiarelli, 2004). The current research contributes a unique area to this field of enquiry by measuring the whole process rather than a specific aspect of academic help-seeking. The approaches to the analyses used in this thesis were guided by these two different theories and required a more 'innovative' viewpoint, and therefore for the purpose of this thesis, a mixed-method approach along with follow-on study and data analyses were used. Using both mixed-methods analysis and visual method interview added further aspects of

originality to the methodology within the academic help-seeking area, and this thesis adds more evidence to the limited identified published research that has not used these two approaches. This combination of two different approaches resulted in the collection of more comprehensive data to conduct a more in-depth analysis and cover the important aspects of both British and Chinese PGT students' academic help-seeking behaviour, which improves the overall quality of the research.

Additionally, this thesis contributes to knowledge by providing significant insights into the importance of social and academic elements to students' academic help-seeking behaviour. It provides some preliminary insight into the understanding of academic help-seeking, as help-seeking behaviour is not just an academic process but is also related to social interaction. The important elements for the students are not just the understanding of academic aspects, but also the interactions they have perceived or had. This thesis offers a fresh investigation, bringing together previous research on academic help-seeking, and exploring not just academic and social self-efficacy, but ecological elements that may shape both Chinese international and British students' help-seeking. To date, there has been minimal data on both academic and social aspects to understanding academic help-seeking among postgraduate students. Understanding both aspects is important; that is, recognising the close relationship between self-efficacy and academic help-seeking behaviour supports the importance of self-efficacy as an influence on students' learning. Understanding the importance of interaction and its role in students' help-seeking behaviour would help support their university adjustment (i.e., transition to PGT). Additionally, this thesis has shed light on the difficulties that both international students and home students encounter during the PGT programme. While the university tends to focus on international students' needs as they might not be able to adapt to the different educational systems, British home students also face challenges during their studies, and this thesis has underlined the importance of meeting those needs in the future. Therefore, these results can help students to get the help they need and lead to an overall positive academic outcome. To enhance academic help-seeking behaviour, the university or the lecturers could provide more help to assist the students in both academic and social parts. Helping increase or maintain students' high levels of understanding and self-efficacy might increase their willingness to seek help or reduce their perception of feeling threatened by seeking help (e.g., Schunk & Pajares, 2009)

Another crucial original feature of this thesis contribution is its focus is on HE students, specifically PGT students within one Scottish university context. There is limited previously published research that has addressed similar problems within the US or UK-based literature

(e.g., Brown et al., 2021; Dayne et al., 2016), but none exactly offering a comparison between international and British students or both academic and social aspects. Therefore, there are several ways that the findings of this thesis have demonstrated original contributions. First, in addressing its overall research purpose, this thesis sought to understand students' academic help-seeking behaviour during the PGT period, and the impact on students of facing a different educational system or environment (e.g., during the pandemic). These precise areas have not been addressed in previously published research.

Meanwhile, the importance of addressing this issue, as emphasised in the literature review and during the follow-on study, is that both international and home students in Scotland might be experiencing high levels of stress and need more self-regulation behaviours to help them achieve their academic goals within HE journeys. Since the postgraduate programme is just one-two years, it could quickly become problematic for students if they do not get the help they need. In addition, this thesis is the first that addresses an aspect of the issue of academic help-seeking within the HE system with the theoretical framework of Bio-ecological Theory, and it also uses Social Cognitive Theory to inform the newly adapted theoretical framework when examining the relationship between students' academic help-seeking behaviour and other elements (i.e., self-efficacy and time) in the context of different cultural backgrounds. Importantly, this thesis raises the issue of the need for further research regarding academic help-seeking within the Scottish HE context due to its potential consequences on teaching and learning. This thesis is unique in exploring the concept of academic help-seeking within the theoretical framework of Bio-ecological Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, to determine how students' academic help-seeking behaviour trajectories correlate with potentially influential factors.

Concisely, given the importance of knowing the need to understand when students have a problem and need help, attention needs to be paid to provide more sources of help (or lead students to know that help exists). As international students and British students need help during their studies, it is important to understand how to provide the help they need. For international students, the university could encourage them by setting up academic groups to increase their social interactions to provide more opportunities for students to discuss things together and provide mutual help. International students are responsible for acknowledging and familiarising themselves with the differences between what they are used to and the host educational system to prevent academic malpractice. Additionally, the university could provide more academic help for students in general, like having more teaching assistants in each programme, to help the students who are afraid to seek formal

help. Student services could make more efforts to help ease the transition for students from different countries, especially for students whose native language is not English or who are not familiar with the Scottish educational system. For students who are studying and working, the findings draw attention to the lack of interaction in student networks. This may pose some disadvantages to students, so the university could help to explore working-studying students' networks by providing more opportunities to engage with other students and widen their support systems so they are able to gain more help. As such, some interventions (e.g., academic, social, psychological) could help the students overcome the challenges and seek help in time to improve their academic experience.

8.2. Practical implications

This thesis's results have several implications for practice that could help students, educators and institutions better understand what motivates or impacts students to engage (or not) in help-seeking behaviours. The findings from two studies in this thesis have important implications for the delivery of education, enhancing support and resources for students, and refining the international students' understanding of the educational system policies and procedures to improve the experience of PGT students. Broadly, academic support services should be prepared to serve all, not just international students, regardless of academic performance and problems. Additionally, help services should provide more help at all levels of academic performance for various academic ability levels – for example, writing skills training workshops. This thesis's findings could provide implications for students themselves, educators (faculty members, instructors and lecturers) and the university. In addition to the traditional learning environment, this thesis also holds some implications for the post-pandemic, current pandemic and for future post-pandemic situation, which has brought about significant changes and challenges in almost all spheres of life, and made universities across the world move all teaching online.

8.2.1. PGT Students

PGT students studying in Scotland should be aware that academic help-seeking plays an important role in the way students engage in learning and their achievements in university. They should not just focus on the academic context, but consider social interaction as well. Students who have a positive and relatively good attitude will be more likely to ask for help, which leads to better academic achievement (e.g., Payakachat et al., 2013). The findings have some implications for students, especially those who are in one-year programmes, who

are experiencing academic difficulties, or who are taking a limited approach to their educational decisions. In addition, students should not over-rely on external coping strategies or blame external factors instead of taking responsibility for their own academic achievement. They should not just ask what the university can do for them, but also ask what they can do to improve their grades (e.g., Pintrich, 2004). Students should be aware that it is not someone else's responsibility to check and take care of their academic achievement. Students need to take a proactive and strategic role in academic help-seeking, even though it entails stress and pressure (e.g., Fryer & Elliot, 2008). Students need self-regulated learning skills, including being aware that they have a problem and need to seek help; they should be determined and have a strong will and self-motivation. Other people cannot be expected to realise that students have a problem unless they seek help actively. Thus, the best thing for students to do when they are struggling is to ask for help.

In addition, this thesis has revealed that the help-seeking process involves a number of steps (Karabenick & Dembo, 2011). The mixed-method study in this thesis has highlighted the importance of timeliness to seek help; students need to be quick to seek help when a problem first emerges rather than waiting too long, as they may otherwise not get help in time or suffer mental problems as a result of the stress of not having help. In addition, students could perhaps be more reflective and strategic about what type of help they need and where they might get help, but not just stick with one source or one type of help, as for example the instructors could be too busy or too difficult to access for every single student.

The follow-on study revealed that during the pandemic, the most common problems associated with online education, in general, have included time management and the lack of interaction between students and lecturers. In this unique context, to ensure that they can get help in time, students could recommend that schools provide platforms for online learning, or advise universities to provide material packages (e.g., textbooks). For students themselves, they need to realise that help-seeking behaviours would not only help their academic performance but also allow the educator (e.g., tutor) to become more engaged and more understanding of the students' needs, making them able to assess and provide the support that students need (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008). During online teaching or even after returning to traditional teaching settings, students should be encouraged to promote help-seeking behaviours within and outside the classroom, which could create an academic environment that is better able to meet students' needs. Additionally, students including both home and international students need to increase their own awareness of the need to seek help in a timely fashion as human interaction is less regular than before. Students need to

learn to more frequently use online sources to get help. Again, though, regardless of the pandemic, only students can be aware of their own need to seek help.

8.2.2. International students

The findings of this thesis indicate the importance of environment and educational system to students, especially international students. This implication is of utmost importance to international students, who undergo several adjustments and adaptations to cope with the unfamiliar educational system. The Chinese international students who participated in this thesis reported that they had experienced some challenges in their academic lives. In general, they may have academic writing problems, language barriers, and different thinking patterns informed by their culture. Although international students need to pass the required language entrance exams, they might still have difficulties in the academic journey. Thus, it is important to increase the awareness of international students that they will encounter some difficulties in their PGT studies and that they should ask for help if they need it. That is, international students should not hesitate to ask for help (e.g., Chowdhury & Halder, 2019). Their ability to cope with such challenges determined their academic success, which raises the need for students to be familiarised with the educational system prior to the transition process, as this could help them address their needs and obstacles. Additionally, as academic help-seeking involves social interaction that can increase the validity of behaviour, they should know that asking for help is also socialising and can be an opportunity to make friends as well. International students should know when to ask a question or how to ask for help when they need it, but not avoid asking for help to save face. For example, even if Chinese students have different academic thinking patterns, they could still ask for help from their university's Learning Services. Again, academic help-seeking is a learning process but also a social one. Thus, international students should be engaged in the community, including the activities or organisations within the university, which might help them gain more information for both their social and academic life. Additionally, only knowing their own country's educational system is not conducive to solving international students' challenges. It would be better if international students, especially those from non-English speaking countries, became familiar with what they might encounter when they arrive in a new academic culture (Wang, 2009). This can help them minimise academic problems when they encountered them.

Regarding the follow-on study focusing on the pandemic and post-pandemic eras, as most international students are unable to travel during this challenging period, most are currently

studying from their home countries. Similar to the suggestion for PGT students above, the convenience of using internet sources to get help is one of the main problems, which might require international students to be in closer contact with the university. Many students would not attend online classes as some of them might find that the instructions are not clear, but this should not be used as an excuse to miss class, as there are many guidelines on the internet. The other main problem that international students could face is ‘jet lag’, as they may be in different time zones. This issue calls for international students to learn time-management skills. Some courses or lectures are pre-recorded and can be easily assessed, and the online discussion boards are more functional than pre-pandemic, so students can simply click the mouse and access the help they want. While everything is online, international students need to learn how to use online sources smoothly in order to solve their problems, thereby getting help in time.

8.2.3. Educators (faculty members, instructors and lecturers)

Educators include the faculty members, instructors and lecturers that students interact with; students’ perceptions of their helpfulness are important to determine their willingness to seek help or not. This thesis has demonstrated that students’ help-seeking behaviour might be influenced by the perception of faculty members’ helpfulness. In reality, it would be hard for educators to observe every single student’s needs or notice which students need help (especially during online teaching!). Although the educators provide (online-)office hours and email access for students, many students who are struggling do not use it (e.g., Reeves & Sperling, 2015). In many PGT programmes, the number of students in the programme may be too large for instructors to be able to pay attention to students individually, so what can educators do differently to support students to seek help? For one thing, based on this thesis’s findings, PGT students are more likely to seek help before or after class, or via email or online platform during the pandemic, so it is recommended that instructors allow 20-30 minutes for students to ask questions after class rather than quickly leaving when face-to-face teaching, or have regular online meetings to ensure students’ wellbeing and support their academic processes.

Besides checking on the students, regular online meetings could be used to encourage students’ social and academic self-efficacy, which this thesis has shown to be linked to help-seeking, coaching and giving evaluative feedback on performances can be helpful (Klassen & Usher, 2010). Educators can have regularly scheduled student (online) conferences/meetings to discuss their progress on their dissertations, for example. By doing

so, the educators can review the students' strengths and weaknesses in a positive manner and help the students set meaningful goals that will stimulate purposeful learning, which would ultimately benefit the students' social (talking to others) and academic (getting feedback on work) self-efficacy, and let students know which parts they need help with, or raising problems in the conferences/meetings and learning to be each other's 'critical friends' (Elliot & Makara, 2021). By increasing interactions, students' perception of staff's support would improve, which would also potentially improve their willingness to ask for help, as this thesis indicated that interaction between students and staff/educators is crucial to fostering help-seeking behaviour (Makara & Karabenick, 2013; Payakachat et al., 2013).

With the pandemic or even post-pandemic, the transition from traditional teaching to online teaching has presented an entirely different experience for educators, which they must adapt to with few or no alternatives available. Although there have been overwhelming challenges for educators, using online platforms and social media and various group forums could help educators 'interact' more with students and provide assistance more frequently. For the online or distance learning methods, this thesis' results imply that educators could normalise and increase the use of online discussion forums or other platforms to support the students in their classes (Farrell et al., 2020). Furthermore, by providing extensive feedback and responding with help, they can let students know where they need to improve, which can help to create a bidirectional relationship between students and educators. Online learning has also provided the opportunity to teach and learn innovatively; for example, it allows students to raise questions via chat rooms, thus avoiding face-to-face judgement (e.g., Farrell et al., 2020). However, educators who are technologically backwards will require more professional training so they can provide more up-to-date resources for students (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

8.2.4. Universities

Under the circumstances of the pandemic (both pre- and post-), this thesis has also raised the considerations that universities should recognise the cultural and environmental influences on help-seeking behaviour among both British and international students. During the interviews, some participants gave clear suggestions for universities, wanting them to provide more teaching assistants to help students, as some instructors are hard to access, whereas Chinese students in particular hoped universities sectors could do more care about the approachability of resources. Those international students who are new to the Scottish educational system may feel overwhelmed and challenged by the high demand to deal with

heavy assignments and the particular requirements, resulting in failure to get their degree. In this regard, it is suggested that school/university administrators support and assist these students in fully understanding the programme requirements and their responsibility for their work and helping them get help when they need it. For example, the university may consider merging multicultural approaches in the teaching material or lecturing. For example, the university could improve their cultural comprehension by listening more “closely” to the students in need, as this is the first step in providing help in situations of cultural difference (Rice et al., 2009; Zhang & Dixon, 2001). Universities may consider developing an online helping system that could help students better understand their programme’s requirements in advance of the academic year. At the same time, the university policy should also consider the reality of educators’ workloads, providing manageable levels of work-life balance, as this could benefit the educators by allowing them to have more time for the students that they are teaching and supporting. By having a good teaching environment, educators could be more likely to provide a high quality of teaching and have more time to communicate with students. It should also be noted that students’ help-seeking behaviour is not just about students themselves but also includes other players like educators. For example, the university at which this thesis was conducted has many helping resources, like learning and academic help services, but these were not mentioned by the students in the interviews. Perhaps these resources and supports offered by the university need to work in different ways or find other ways to reach students more effectively. As some students in the interviews suggested, universities should better ‘advertise’ which sources are available for students. Students would then have more information about the sources they can turn to for help, thereby increasing their help-seeking behaviour.

Universities should also pay attention not just to international student cohorts, but also other cohorts like working-studying students. As the pandemic has affected students in various aspects, students have encounter various difficulties (e.g., Raaper et al., 2021). For example, working-studying students described feeling isolated during the duration of their studies (e.g., Hall, 2010; Reay, 2018). Universities then should provide different support groups (e.g., peer support groups for different types of students) in different formats (e.g., formal or informal; face-to-face or online) to expand availability to all types of students, as well as create opportunities for universities to partner to provide support workshops (Voth Schrag et al., 2021). Considering that the PGT programme has a diverse population and given the intensive nature of PGT studies, support is particularly important for students’ learning development, especially during the transition period. This thesis raises the need for differentiated suggestions adapted to the specificities of each group. Indeed, different student

groups within the same institution might benefit from different types and ways of help. However, even considering that different groups have different obstacles, the differentiated ways of support might not help meet students' individual needs.

By adopting the PGT AHS model and using different time-sections, this thesis has identified the different potential factors and, although these have been indicated in the current literature, emphasised that these factors differ from one person's help-seeking process to another. Following the study from Liu & Pullinger (2021), this thesis suggests universities could implement some resources and workshops for the transition process that are "designed to encourage student reflection and to provide students with access to a wide range of co-curricular support, selected by and tailored to, each individual" (Liu & Pullinger, 2021, p.111). There could be one workshop for all PGTs and another for international students to provide dual helping sources for the students to understand the system. In line with the importance of self-efficacy, the university could use peer support schemes/models to have students help each other (e.g., Pintrich & Schunk, 2002), as peers in the same groups can share common academic goals that will enhance both their social and academic efficacy, which in turn should then encourage students to seek more help. Echoing the above to help educators, the university should also set up more feedback loops, which would in turn help develop students' self-efficacy. Just as the feedback can work as a guide for struggling students and shows the path to achieving the goal (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2002), it can also show what problems the students have, which would ultimately link them or guide them to ask for help.

8.3. Recommendations for future research

In addition to the recommendations made in the previous chapters, the limitations of the studies provide a path to recommend future research. First, future studies could expand this thesis to a wider demographic as this thesis took place at only one institution; it is unclear if the difference in academic help-seeking behaviours found in this thesis could also apply to other contexts or cultures. The Post-hoc power analysis also provided a suggestion for future studies to reach the recommended .80 level power. Thus, future studies should be replicated across multiple institutions to consider participants' numbers while exploring the role of multiple factors such as different students' own backgrounds, beliefs, and attitudes towards help-seeking.

Apart from including participants from different universities, the students' individual personal factors should also be further investigated. For example, future research may focus on the interaction between gender and help-seeking behaviours as there appeared to be some gender differences that were constructed from the interview results, so this type of difference should be explored more in-depth in the future to better understand whether different and more gender-inclusive approaches might be used to understand and ultimately help encourage academic help-seeking. The participants from this thesis also suggested some potential questions around age and experience. Other potential factors should also be taken into account when trying to understand help-seeking behaviour, as help-seeking is a complex process involving dynamic interactions with each factor. Factors like intelligence might influence students' potential decision-making, whereas personality traits might influence the decision to ask for help as well (e.g., Cuvalo, 2021).

Additionally, reflecting on this thesis's PGT AHS model, there are some parts that need future exploration. First, as academic help-seeking is not just related to students' psychological factors, it might be necessary to focus on other aspects, specifically the factors relating to forming social relationships (e.g., with peers or with instructors). For example, in this thesis, the model appeared to demonstrate the importance of social elements as academic help-seeking involves social interaction; thus, the importance of relationships needs to be paid more attention to (Makara & Karabenick, 2013). Following that pattern, as it was constructed from both interviews that students' perceptions of faculty members are related to their help-seeking behaviour, it might be helpful that future research could include the perspectives of educators. This is important since educators have significant effects on their students' academic experience and academic achievement (e.g., Chetty et al., 2014).

Other recommendations regarding the PGT AHS model is that studies focus on external factors (e.g., the influence of environment, such as programme type) and perception of help-seeking on decision-making regarding help-seeking. Although the literature suggests that external factors could influence the decision to seek help, the findings from this thesis further show that the programme/college environment around students seems to have a stronger impact on their help-seeking decisions. Thus, it would be helpful to investigate further reasons for this and propose new coping strategies to address the issues that both educators and the students face. Moreover, although this thesis has suggested that the culture does not impact self-efficacy and only leads to differences in certain aspects of help-seeking, the participants in this thesis were only British and Chinese students. As other countries send larger numbers of students abroad, it would be beneficial for future studies to examine how

other countries' students' national cultures could affect their academic help-seeking in order to provide effective interventions.

Further research could also include a longitudinal mixed-methods study similar to the first study in this thesis, but following students across a year. That said, the first mixed-method study did conduct semi-longitudinal research by collecting data at two different times (i.e., the survey at the beginning of second-semester, followed by the interviews after the second-semester exams). Still, by using the Bio-ecological Theory and more deeply understanding help-seeking behaviour, Tudge et al. (2009) and Newman (2002) suggest that there is a need to conduct more longitudinal research on academic help-seeking, and to understand the role of the development during academic help-seeking. Although the follow-on study did ask the students to reflect on their experience throughout the year, it would be more coherent to understand students' behaviour by conducting a longitudinal study to see how the help-seeking behaviours develop as the year unfolds rather than in retrospect. Therefore, in order to more comprehensively understand the situation of academic help-seeking, further research should use a longitudinal design (e.g., data collection starting with international students' time in pre-sessional courses that follows through to examine how their help-seeking behaviours change throughout the study). Another good idea would be to conduct mixed-methods research at the beginning of the academic year, with a follow-up to be conducted again with the same participants at the end of the academic year to see how their academic help-seeking experience changed.

Moreover, Karabenick and Knapp (1991) suggest that online academic help-seeking is considered the spontaneous behaviour of requesting assistance from others through the internet, and previous studies have indicated that students have increased their preference for web-based learning environments (Chu & Tsai, 2009; Puustinen & Rouet, 2009). In the present research, during the mixed-method study, online help-seeking was combined with self-help, and it was grouped as one source – the internet – rather than differentiating between different sites or types of sites. For example, this thesis found that PGT students were more likely to ask for help before or after class or ask questions via email. This is a bit different from comparing online help-seeking generally to face-to-face help-seeking. Consequently, in order to investigate the various aspects of academic help-seeking more comprehensively, online help-seeking should be separated from “self-help” sources. In addition, online help-seeking is currently a fascinating topic given the context of COVID-19, unfortunately. Although the studies took place as the students were being subjected to a blended learning approach and later, during the pandemic, to an online teaching approach,

this thesis does not have the breadth to capture all the relevant information related to students' online learning experiences during the pandemic. While this thesis has investigated learning experiences and challenges from students' perspectives, it did not examine students' engagement or performance (e.g., academic tribes, Becher & Trowler, 2001). Also, despite identifying certain learning challenges, this thesis found that some students were able to develop effective learning strategies to cope with the difficulties of the online environment. Further investigation into learning strategies to reflect on help-seeking behaviour is needed. This thesis also wondered whether the learning approaches and the learning context (e.g., the difference between law students and business students) could be used to understand students' behaviour, as some present a shift in learning approaches (Delgado et al., 2018). The follow-on study only aimed to draw attention to the overall learning experience in the Scottish PGT context, thus a more in-depth exploration is needed to help better understand the nature of the teaching environment in various contexts in relation to students' academic help-seeking behaviour. With these in mind, future studies should not just consider the blended learning approach, but, unlike this thesis's (pre-)pandemic assumptions about learning contexts, should consider the fact that all learning has taken place online or blended for at least one year. Therefore, future research into online and hybrid environments may reveal different patterns of source usage to better understand which type of source, in particular, is the best fit for students, particularly to help students during this difficult time.

Last but not least, based on the two studies in this thesis, the importance of diversity has been revealed. As this thesis only focused on certain types of students, it was unable to directly address issues related to diversity, which suggests the need for future research to explore the diverse groups of students (e.g., working-studying students, disabled students) to be able to identify various interventions for helping the students. Influential factors to help-seeking may vary between cohorts, and between students from culturally diverse backgrounds, which echo the need to explore the diversity. In addition, the needs of first and second-year postgraduate students, which were not fully explored in the follow-on study, should be explored separately, and variables like the timing of the course and term length should be included in future research to determine their possible impact on student performance as well be different experiences and behaviours. The participants in this thesis were in one-to-two-year programmes, transitioning from undergraduate to postgraduate, but such a transition might be significantly different for someone who has taken ten years out of university and is now coming back; they may not be as familiar with the university's resources or processes. The follow-on study just focused on exploring the transition from UG to PGT; this suggests the need to explore students' prior experience in-depth.

Understanding different students' academic experiences with seeking academic help in PGT settings, as well as how prior education experiences shape these experiences, can further the literature on academic help-seeking.

8.4. Research summary and conclusion

As globalisation makes the world more interconnected than ever, the international student numbers have significantly increased, and the largest group of international students studying in Scotland come from China (HESA, nd). Consequently, international students who study in Scotland could face several academic problems due to potential cultural differences (e.g., the language barrier, as in Ruble & Zhang, 2013), which could lead them to differ from British students in their academic help-seeking behaviour. Additionally, the PGT programme only lasts one or two years, which raises another challenge: a lack of time to adapt to the system for both Chinese and British students (Arambewela & Hall, 2013). Thus, by comparing both British and Chinese students, this thesis has examined the challenges that both international and home students face and provided an in-depth understanding of all the students' help-seeking behaviour within the Scottish PGT programme context.

The findings of this thesis broaden the current literature on academic help-seeking. This thesis found that academic help-seeking is a “process [that] involves a complex web of nested intentional decisions influenced by factors” (Giblin, 2016, p. 81), and that the academic help-seeking process is not just reliant on personal factors, but also includes social interaction and environmental factors. This thesis has demonstrated the importance of social elements to academic help-seeking, since the participants' self-efficacy both in academic and social domains influenced their academic help-seeking behaviour, highlighting the academic help-seeking is both a social and academic process. Often, HE research focuses on the academic domain, but arguably less on postgraduate students' social skills, which may be important if students need to be comfortable reaching out to others for help during their studies. Thus, students' social skills and efficacy should therefore be regarded as an important context to understand students' help-seeking behaviour.

This thesis has also demonstrated that different categories of influencing factors have complex interactions in the academic help-seeking process. For example, surprisingly, the participants viewed contextual factors (perceived threat; perceived faculty helpfulness; conversion programme) as core factors influencing their decisions to seek help. Although

their experience concerning faculty helpfulness and programme-specific challenges might be individual and not necessarily widely generalisable, this still raises the point that contextual environments serve as an important part of students' academic experiences.

This thesis also explored newly proposed steps in the academic help-seeking process, indicating that within the help-seeking process, the type of help students decided to use was mainly based on the type of problem they had, which has not been mentioned in previous research. This process indicates that students' critical decisions of help-seeking are based on the availability of sources and the problem they have. Therefore, students might not be just one type of help-seeker (e.g., adaptive) but may be multiple types of help-seeker simultaneously, and they might choose the sources based on what results they are seeking (e.g., they may ask the instructor for confirmation of the answer). By and large, the results highlight that universities should consider the fact that students' interactions with instructors are important in the PGT context. This thesis has also explored the timeliness of help-seeking, which has received limited consideration in the academic help-seeking field. One important step in the help-seeking process is time, as students may choose to wait or ask for help directly. To further that point, this thesis also conducted a follow-on study to explore the "time/chronosystem" component in relation to students' help-seeking to understand how the transition and the academic journey related to students' behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. The visual interviews' results suggest that prior educational experience and habitus influence students, yet the environment of the PGT programme played the main role in influencing students' experiences during the pandemic. While the environment (e.g., pandemic, the difference in the educational systems, or PGT programme) influences students' decision-making, again, other influential factors also influence students' behaviour. As discussed, the earlier the PGT student starts developing and constructing positive interactions with others and the improving their understanding of the system's requirements, the smoother their transition and later adjustment to the PGT environment will be, particularly if they develop positive relationships with other individuals. However, again, these newly explored aspects of the help-seeking process were mainly constructed based on two of the qualitative phases; the mechanism of why and how the steps this thesis added work still need further investigation.

This thesis has meant to explore the differences and similarities among British and Chinese students. However, this thesis found no significant differences between Chinese and British students in terms of the relationship between both social and academic self-efficacy, which means that both forms of self-efficacy are equally important to help-seeking for both groups.

It could be explained that as previous literature indicates that studying abroad can increase self-efficacy (e.g., de Diego-Lázaro et al., 2020), during the period of their stay abroad, these students must set goals for themselves, determine their own life courses, and give meaning to their experiences abroad order to be successful. Therefore, studying overseas can provide opportunities to develop their abilities (Benson et al., 2013), thus explaining why Chinese students in the study reported similar levels of self-efficacy as British students. It is noteworthy that although this thesis expected that there would be several differences among British and Chinese students regarding academic help-seeking, the results suggest that there are a lot of similarities between the two groups, as well as some unique challenges for both Chinese and British home students. For example, in this thesis, personality was found to be important to both Chinese and British students in relation to the help-seeking process. However, 'saving face' was only mentioned by Chinese students which makes sense as this is an important concept in Chinese culture. For British students, the follow-on study indicated that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the mode of study and working-studying experience would be the elements that influence British students' motivation and ability during their PGT programme. Again, academic help-seeking is a complex behaviour that depends on students themselves, their interactions with others, and their perceptions of the circumstances that surround them, while it is also associated with other influential factors (e.g., contextual factors). One of the key findings determined that it could be that contextual factors have more effect on help-seeking in the PGT context. Thus, to understand more about the help-seeking between groups, this thesis suggests that future studies could also focus on considering different systems that may influence (and be influenced by) learners.

More importantly, this thesis has proposed a newly adapted theoretical framework to understand PGT students' academic help-seeking behaviour within one Scottish university's PGT programme context. The findings indicate that the proposed PGT AHS model needs to consider different systems that may influence (and be influenced by) the learner. The follow-on study further explored the students' help-seeking behaviour during different time-sections (e.g., pre-pandemic and pandemic) to expand the proposed PGT AHS model's scope. The application of the model to analyse PGT students' transition during the COVID-19 pandemic from UG to PGT allowed this thesis to reach a more comprehensive understanding and consideration of the multiple challenges that the students face and to offer potential suggestions of what can be done to help students reduce these obstacles. The results of the follow-on study continue to recognise the value of applying from cognitive and bio-ecological perspectives to analyse students help-seeking behaviour in order to understand the experience and decision-making of students in their new environments. The findings of

the follow-on study underpin the importance of acknowledging that students' abilities to adjust to a new environment and adjust their behaviour to achieve their goals are determined by the individuals' cognitive and environmental contexts. Extending the field of academic help-seeking, this thesis suggests that students' peers and instructors (microsystem), more distal factors such as university policies and support systems (exosystem), and broader cultural differences (macrosystem) all influence academic help-seeking. It has therefore emphasised the large interplay between the range of possible factors involved in academic help-seeking at both the individual and cultural levels to understand academic help-seeking among Chinese and British PGT students studying in the Scottish HE context.

In addition, the results of this thesis suggest the value of using different methodological approaches to study academic help-seeking behaviour. The sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach uncovered the influence of factors on academic help-seeking behaviour and offered a deeper understanding of how and why the students' help-seeking behaviour occurred. Furthermore, the sequential mixed-methods approach and qualitative follow-on study helped uncover previously unknown associations, specifically the importance of social interaction and the bidirectional interaction between the environments and different influences on academic help-seeking behaviour, as well as capturing the similar and different elements among the help-seeking of British and Chinese PGT students. In contrast to previous research in the field, which largely relies on quantitative methods alone, the mixed-methods approach and qualitative follow-on study contribute new understandings of the different steps of the decision-making process, the complex interaction among multiple influential factors, the possible combination of the different help-seeking types used by PGT students, the importance of social interaction to students' help-seeking behaviour, and, students' ability to upskill over time during their PGT journeys.

In conclusion, this thesis has examined the academic help-seeking of PGT students within one Scottish university's PGT programme education setting. It has demonstrated a new, blended academic help-seeking process suggesting the importance of the timeliness of seeking help and that the academic help-seeking process is not only related to individuals but also is also influenced by social interactions with others. The findings suggest that both academic self-efficacy and social self-efficacy are equally importantly related to help-seeking behaviour, while finding that there are no significant cultural differences between British and Chinese students in terms of self-efficacy and its relationship with academic help-seeking. This suggests that it is possible that students from different cultures might not be mainly influenced by their original culture, but their behaviour and beliefs could be

related to the environments surrounding them. That is, academic help-seeking behaviour could be influenced intricately by the complex dynamic interactions between demographic, psychological and contextual factors, suggesting that academic help-seeking behaviour is an interaction between both personal and environmental aspects. With the PGT AHS model being connected to social and bio-ecological layers in this thesis, it is understood that academic help-seeking behaviours are complex social-academic interactions. This thesis also suggests that with a diverse student body comes a diverse set of challenges that different students face when they transition to their programme and throughout their PGT journeys; the importance of social interaction plays a main role in helping PGT students. PGT students evaluate their learning experiences and outcomes through self-reflection, then adjust their learning approaches or help-seeking processes to help to achieve their goals. Therefore, deciding to ask for help is potentially related to how these students evaluate the cost and benefits of seeking help, and how they perceive the environment and the expected response to their help-seeking is probably crucial in the decision-making process behind academic help-seeking.

8.5. Reflections and final thoughts

This thesis was shaped by my Masters experience as an international student in the UK and later experience during pandemic from 2020-2022. Although my general PGT experience studying here was positive, I still sometimes felt lost and confused. Before my Masters academic year began, I had a 10-week pre-session course, which allowed me to become familiar with the UK educational system and the writing style here. Even with that, I still experienced some difficulties in understanding the course materials or the assignment requirements. I felt depressed and did not know when and where to ask for help. However, again, the PGT programme was only one year for my programme, and everything happened so fast, so I may or may not have actually learned the knowledge I wanted to. Altogether, my personal experience as an international student in the UK planted the seeds for me to further investigate the experience of PGT students in the UK.

Reflecting on my Masters experience, when analysing and interpreting the results, it was interesting to notice that it was not only the Chinese international students who reported difficulty seeking help, but the British students indicated the same feelings regarding help-seeking in the academic context. The participants' stories were interesting, and it was surprising to find that there were not that many differences between the British and Chinese students' experiences. For example, personally, I found that my Masters experience was

difficult, similar to some of the participants, but I generally did not have negative experience. As such, the participants who usually avoided seek help and gave up easily could be the individuals who struggled at some point or had negative experiences during their academic journeys. Moreover, by conducting this thesis, I have learned to use new methodologies, such as the qualitative design, which allowed me to more deeply understand PGT students' help-seeking behaviour from not just the numbers but also by being able to observe and analyse individual behaviour during the interviews. The results from this thesis were fascinating, with some unexpected findings and an overall picture of the comprehensive elements that have been outlined and discussed above. The results and the research related to academic help-seeking reminded me of how I was in the Masters programme or even later during the PhD journey how I got through it. Thus, it is my hope that this thesis could help the institution to better understand of the importance of students' help-seeking behaviour and offer better knowledge of how they can help students.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The online questionnaire

Section 1 – Academic self-efficacy

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe I will receive excellent grades/marks in my lectures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I'm certain I can understand the most difficult material presented in the readings for my lectures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I'm confident I can understand the basic concepts taught in my lectures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I'm confident I can understand the most complex material presented by the instructor in my lectures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I'm confident I can do an excellent job on the assignments and tests in my lectures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I expect to do well in my lectures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I'm certain I can master the skills being taught in my lectures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Considering the difficulty of my lectures, the instructor, and my skills, I think I will do well in my lectures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 2 — Social self-efficacy

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
It is difficult for me to make new friends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I see someone I would like to meet, I go to that person instead of waiting for him or her to come to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I meet someone interesting who is hard to make friends with, I'll soon stop trying to make friends with that person.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I am trying to become friends with someone who seems uninterested at first, I don't give up easily.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not handle myself well in social situations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have acquired my friends through my personal abilities at making friends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 4 – Perceived faculty helpfulness

	Disagree entirely	Disagree for the most part	Undecided or do not know	Agree for the most part	Agree entirely
Lecturers/Tutors are helpful when I ask for academic help.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lecturers/Tutors treat me with respect when I ask for help.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lecturers/Tutors are approachable and friendly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lecturers/Tutors are sincere and honest.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lecturers/Tutors seems to have a genuine interest in and concern for students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lecturers/Tutors are accessible to students outside of class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 5 – Help-seeking Threat

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Getting help in my programme is an admission of my own lack of ability or ignorance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I prefer to fail on my own rather than to succeed in my programme because I got help.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think less of myself when I cannot do my work without help.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People think less of me if I succeed in my programme only because I got help.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel uneasy about what people think if they found out I need help in order to succeed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I prefer that the instructors of the programme not find out that I am in a study group.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I prefer that my classmates not find out that I am in a study group.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 6 – Adaptive Help-seeking

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree/disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
If I do not understand something, I usually want someone to explain it to me and not just give me the answer.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If there is something I do not understand, I prefer someone give me hints or clues rather than the answer.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I do not understand my work, I usually want someone to show me the steps involved in answering the questions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I need help with my work I usually ask questions so the person will provide just enough information so I can figure it out myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I get stuck on a difficult problem, I usually ask someone for just enough help so that I can keep working through it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 7 – Avoidant Help-seeking

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
If I do not understand something, I prefer to guess rather than ask the instructor for assistance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I do not understand something, I prefer to guess rather than ask a teaching support for assistance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Even if the work is too hard to do on my own, I do not ask for help.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I prefer to do worse on an assignment that I could not finish, rather than ask for help.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 9 – Intention to Seek Help from the instructor / lecturer/ tutor

How likely am I to ask the instructor / lecturer/ tutor for help...

	Very unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Neither likely or unlikely	Somewhat likely	Very likely
...when I do not understand how to do a problem or activity?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...when I do not understand directions?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...when I need help with something that the instructor already explained how to do?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when I am having trouble and the instructor / lecturer/ tutor looks busy?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... help when I have done the problem but not sure of the answer?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when I think I might get a bad grade/mark if I do not get help?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when I cannot remember something that I need to know in order to do answer a question?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when there is something I do not understand and I cannot figure it out myself?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when I need help understanding how to do a problem?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 10 – Intention to Seek Help from peer

How likely am I to ask a classmates/peers for help...

	Very Unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Neither likely or unlikely	Somewhat likely	Very likely
... when I do not understand how to do a problem or activity?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when I do not understand directions?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when I need help with something that the instructor / lecturer/ tutor already explained how to do?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when I am having trouble and the instructor / lecturer/ tutor looks busy?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when I think I might get a bad grade/mark if I do not get help?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when I cannot remember something that I need to know in order to do answer a question?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when there is something I do not understand and I cannot figure it out myself?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when I need help understanding how to do a problem?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 11 – Intention to Seek Help from the online discussion board/ Moodle

How likely am I to post a question on the online discussion board/ Moodle for help...

	Very unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Neither likely or unlikely	Somewhat likely	Very likely
... when I do not understand how to do a problem or activity?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when I do not understand directions?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when I have done the problem but not sure of the answer?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when I think I might get a bad grade/mark if I do not get help?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... when I cannot remember something that I need to know in order to do answer a question?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
.. when there is something I do not understand and I cannot figure it out myself?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 12 – Demographic Questions

- Nationality
- If you are an international student, have you ever lived (more than 2 months) abroad before starting your PGT programme?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Not applicable
- University name
- Programme of study
- Gender
 - Female
 - Male
 - Prefer not to say Other
- Age

Appendix 2: Interview guides

RQ1: 1) why do PGT students would prefer peer when they need help? 2) Were all the PGT students really not different with regards to the sources they chose to seek help from? 3) Or is there any other source that they would turn for help? 4) How about other type of help-seeking? How did they made the decision to use the certain type of help? 5)Why still some of them would avoid seeking help?

RQ 2: What factors do the PGT students think would influence their help-seeking behaviour/ decision? why?

RQ 3: How and why might the difference in terms of each step of the help-seeking process between Chinese and British PGT students?

RQ 4: How does studying abroad influence academic help-seeking? 2) How does adapting to an educational system in a new cultural context influence academic help-seeking?

Introduction

Opening questions:

- Could you tell me about yourself?
- Please describe what being a student in the University of Glasgow is like
- Please describe what learning in Scotland is like. Could you comment on your personal experience? Academic experience? Social experience?

Main questions:

- What is your understanding of academic help-seeking or simply getting useful information as a strategy for learning?
- Please describe your academic performance.
- As a XX student, have you ever asked for academic help (or sought useful information as a strategy for learning)?
- Based on your previous experience, are you likely to ask for academic help (or seek useful information as a strategy for learning) again?
- Could you tell me about what happened when you first asked for academic help at XX?
- When did you first experience getting academic help from someone?
- Could you cite an example of your experience to seek academic help and its outcome?
- What types of academic support have been the most helpful to you to date?
- What are the specific examples of academic support from the institution that are available to you?
- Overall, what factors generally influence your decision to seek academic help?

- Of these factors, what do you consider to be the most important reason for seeking academic help?
- Has your experience at university changed how you go about seeking academic help?

Additional questions for international students:

- In your view, does being an international student influence whether or not you seek academic help? Please explain your answer.
- After your experience to date as a UofG student, would you be able to know (or advise another student) how to go about seeking academic help?
- Also, have your views changed about seeking academic help? If so, how? What influenced this change?

Ending Questions:

- With regard to seeking academic help, is there anything you might not have thought about before but occurred to you during this interview?
- Is there anything else you think I should consider exploring in order to understand the concept of academic help seeking better?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me concerning my research topic or research in general?

Chinese version

- 你選擇格大後，你覺得在這裡容易交到朋友嗎？那出了大學呢？
- 你覺得在蘇格蘭學習是怎樣的一種體驗？個人經驗，學習過程，社交活動

Main questions:

- 在你的理解中，你覺得什麼是學業求助？
- 或者說，你覺得哪種學習策略對你來說是有用的？
- 前面提到你是因為_____來到了格拉，那在你來之前，你對於來這裡讀碩士保有怎樣的期待？
o Could you comment and provide examples on the following?
- 那在這半年接近快一年左右的時間，你的期望有沒有落差？
- 你可以根據者幾個月的經驗，告訴我一些想法嗎？
- 作為一個 XX 的學生，你有沒有在學業上面尋求過幫助？
- 那你會在求助嗎根據前次經驗
- 對於你來說，你覺得什麼原因會影響碩士生尋求幫助呢？是因為求助會有 challenge？
- 接下來，請你回想你曾經發現課堂你跟不上的情境；當你發現後，你做了什麼決定？
- 你感覺怎麼樣？
- 再此過程中，你覺得哪種人或者是誰，會影響你尋求幫助
- 怎樣影響你
- 那你怎麼解決你的問題？
- 可以告訴我一個你曾經求助後的結果嗎 一個好的 / 壞的結果
- 哪個學業支持你覺得對你來說最有用？
- 哪種資源你覺得在個格大最夯？最流行
- 總得來說，你覺得到底是什麼會影響你去尋求幫助？
- 哪種對學業求助最有關
- 在 XX 大的經歷你覺得有影響你的學業生活嗎？跟你本科時候相比。請解釋。

Additional questions for international students:

- 在你的觀點裡，作為一個國際留學生會影響你求不求助嗎？為何？
- 在 XX 大的這幾個月裡，你求助能力 / 認知有提高嗎？
- 跟在國內相比，你學業求助的方法有變化嗎？

Ending Questions:

- 有什麼要補充的嗎
- 你覺得對於學業求助我還可以補充一些什麼問題嗎？
- 你有什麼想問我的嗎？

Appendix 3: Ethics committee approval letter



College of Social
Sciences

11 September 2017

Dear Hsin-Yi Shih,

College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Project Title: A cross-cultural study of the relationship between self-efficacy and academic help-seeking among UK PGT students.

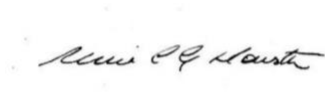
Application No: 400170006

The College Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Start date of ethical approval: _____01/09/2017_____
- Project end date: ___01/09/2020_____
- Any outstanding permissions needed from third parties in order to recruit research participants or to access facilities or venues for research purposes must be obtained in writing and submitted to the CoSS Research Ethics Administrator before research commences. Permissions you must provide are shown in the *College Ethics Review Feedback* document that has been sent to you.
- The data should be held securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project, or for longer if specified by the research funder or sponsor, in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research: (http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_227599_en.pdf) (Unless there is an agreed exemption to this, noted here).
- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups and using the methods defined in the application.
- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The *Request for Amendments to an Approved Application* form should be used:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduate/ateresearchstudents/>

Yours sincerely,



Dr Muir Houston
College Ethics Officer

Muir Houston, Senior Lecturer
College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer
Social Justice, Place and Lifelong Education Research
University of Glasgow
School of Education, St Andrew's Building, 11 Eldon Street
Glasgow G3 6NH
0044+141-330-4699 Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix 4: Plain Language Statements

Questionnaire PLS

Participant Information Sheet



College of Social
Sciences

Study Title: A cross-cultural study of the relationship between self-efficacy and academic help-seeking among UK PGT students

Researcher: HSIN-YI SHIH

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

Previous researchers have highlighted the importance of academic help-seeking behaviour, and indicated that self-efficacy may be related to academic help seeking. This broader mixed-method study contains both surveys and interviews and you are currently being invited to participate in the survey. The purpose of this study is to understanding the extent of self-efficacy influence individual academic help-seeking behaviour among postgraduate student and the associations between self-efficacy and academic help-seeking between cultures. It is hoped that the results of this study may contribute to a better understanding of academic help seeking among an underexplored student population and to inform universities about how they may improve their provisions for postgraduate students.

Why have I been chosen?

The participants who are chosen to participate in this study are those who are currently postgraduate taught students in the UK and are at least 18 years of age. This study aims to recruit 200 participants.

Do I have to take part?

No, this is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw from participating in this survey at any point.

What will happen to me if I take part?

This research project has three aspects, survey one, follow-up interview and survey two. You may elect to participate in both the survey and interview, just the surveys, or decline participation.

This online survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. The survey will require you to answer a set of standardised questions relating to your self-efficacy, academic help-seeking behaviour and a set of demographic questions. At the conclusion of the first online survey, participants will be invited to leave their email to be contacted in the future for possible participation in a follow-up interview. You are free to decide not to participate, or to stop taking the survey at any time, for whatever reason, and to withdraw from the study. All information that you will answer in the survey will be kept strictly confidential.

If you responded to the survey, you would be entered into a draw for a £5, £10, £15, or £20 gift certificate to the online retailer Amazon.co.uk.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Taking part in this study is completely confidential. Any personal data that you provide will be replaced by a code and no identifiable information is requested from you except email for further interview/surveys. All data will be stored in a password-protected file.

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The result of this study will be used for the researchers' thesis for the PhD in Education. Personally- identifying information will be deleted at the end of study. The anonymous research data will be stored for up to ten years for possible future research purposes. If you wish to know about the results you may contact the researcher to obtain a summary of the results. Please take a screen shot of this plain language statement to save the information so you contact the researcher later if you have any questions.

Who has reviewed the study?

The School of Education Research Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow has reviewed this project.

Contact for Further Information

If you have any questions, if you would like an additional copy of this statement, or if you would like a summary of the results after taking the survey, please feel free to contact the researcher, HSIN-YI SHIH (email: h.shih.1@research.gla.ac.uk). If you have any questions you may also contact her supervisors, Dr Kara Makara (email: kara.makarafuller@glasgow.ac.uk), or Dr Dely Elliot (email: Dely.Elliot@glasgow.ac.uk). If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research, please contact College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Interview PLS



College of Social
Sciences

Participant Information Sheet

Study Title: A cross-cultural study of the relationship between self-efficacy and academic helpseeking among UK PGT students.

Researcher: HSIN-YI SHIH

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

Previous researchers have highlighted the importance of academic help-seeking behaviour, and indicated that self-efficacy may be related to academic help seeking. This broader mixed-method study contains both surveys and interviews and you are currently being invited to participate in the interview. The purpose of the interview portion of the study is to better understand self-efficacy and individual academic help-seeking behaviours and how this is experienced among international postgraduate students, exploring similarities and differences across cultures. It is hoped that the results of this study may contribute to a better understanding of academic help seeking among an underexplored student population and to inform universities about how they may improve their provisions for postgraduate students.

Why have I been chosen?

This study focuses on participants who are postgraduate students and are at least 18 years of age. This study aims to recruit approximately 4-5 people from 3-4 different countries of origin.

Do I have to take part?

No, this is entirely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate, or to stop taking the interview at any time, for whatever reason, and to withdraw from the study.

What will happen to me if I take part?

This interview will take about 30 minutes to complete and will be completed either in person or over videoconference software (e.g., Skype). The interviews will ask you questions about your academic help-seeking behaviour (such as what type of help you seek, how self-efficacy may influence your decisions to seek help), your experience of your motivation and academic performance, and whether you think cultural factors may influence your

approaches to help seeking. All information that you will answer in the interview will be kept strictly confidential. The researcher requests that the interviews be recorded (audio only) in order to facilitate data gathering and subsequent data analysis. Interviews will take place during the 2017/2018 academic year.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Taking part in this study is completely confidential. With your permission, pseudonyms will be used for any quotes that are shared, and no identifiable information will be shared with others. Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The result of this study will be used for the researchers' thesis for the PhD in Education. Any personally-identifying information that is collected will be deleted at the end of study. The anonymous research data will be stored for up to ten years for possible future research purposes, such as conference presentations or publications. If you wish to know about the results you may contact the researcher to obtain a summary of the results. Please contact the researcher if you have any questions.

Who has reviewed the study?

The College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow has reviewed this project.

Contact for Further Information

If you have any questions or if you would like a summary of the results, please feel free to contact the researcher, HSIN-YI SHIH (email: h.shih.1@research.gla.ac.uk). If you have any questions you may also contact her supervisors, Dr Kara Makara (email: kara.makarafuller@glasgow.ac.uk), or Dr Dely Elliot (email: Dely.Elliot@glasgow.ac.uk). If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research, please contact College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix 5: Consent Forms

Questionnaire consent form



College of Social
Sciences

Consent Form

Title of Project: A cross-cultural study of the relationship between self-efficacy and academic help-seeking among UK PGT students.

Name of Researcher: HSIN-YI SHIH

I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement/Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

- The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research
- The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.
- I agree to waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.
- I understand that other authenticated researchers may have access to the anonymised data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

I agree to take part in this research study

I do not agree to take part in this research study

Name of Participant Signature

Date

Name of Researcher Signature

Date

Interview consent form



College of Social
Sciences

Consent Form

Title of Project: A cross-cultural study of the relationship between self-efficacy and academic help-seeking among UK PGT students.

Name of Researcher: HSIN-YI SHIH

I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement/Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I consent / do not consent (delete as applicable) to interviews being audio-recorded.

I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.

- All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.
- The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research
- The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.
- I agree to waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.
- I understand that other authenticated researchers may have access to the anonymised data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

I agree to take part in this research study

I do not agree to take part in this research study

Name of Participant Signature

Date

Name of Researcher Signature

Date

Appendix 6: Extract of a coded transcript

<p>P: For any academic help at all? Yes, I have! I ask mostly for clarification, I guess, more than anything. I've never asked, well, because I don't like to ask ... like I don't understand how to do this. Maybe ask the lecturer for a clarification ... but I wouldn't like to see our lecturer think I don't understand how to do this. Or I would start to try to think myself how I should do this. And then ask the lecturer for a clarification, I guess. As to whether or not that was the right thing to do, and I guess because there's ... I don't see much point in asking for help like asking how to do something because then you are, well I don't know if you're less likely to remember it. I feel like you're less likely to remember if you're just asking somebody else to do something. So, I would always make an attempt at something first. So, this year, there were various times when I was slightly unsure what to do in the course, mostly course work. But I would like to make sure to try something first and then ask a lecturer for clarification and then they would see yes or no or whatever. And the clarification also extends beyond yes or no answers, and so I did ask, on several occasions like "is this what you mean". "Do you mean to do this or to do this instead that" sort of things.</p>	<p>Initial code</p> <p>Self-helping</p> <p>Avoidance</p> <p>Personality</p> <p>Expedient HS</p> <p>Adaptive HS</p>
<p>I: So, what did you learn in that experience?</p>	<p>Instructor</p>
<p>P: I don't know, I guess. Good question. (Thinking...) I guess learning how to take.... Like learning to take the advice that you've been given and apply it correctly to whatever the thing was that you were asking of in the first place. I think sometimes, it's easy to just like try and get the help and then apply that to whatever it was you were doing and not really do much about it or thinking about what they've said before applying it to whatever it is you're asking about. And so, I guess like the important skill will try to analyse first before you apply to the learning. Because, I mean, in one example I won't say who it was, but the lectures here don't like to give you the straight answer. So, they give you a kind of wrap to answer you see to think more. But they did on purpose. So, I guess like that sort of critical approach to the advice you've been given as well as just not taking at face value.</p>	<p>AHS meaning</p>

Appendix 7: Coding framework

Main categories	Categories	Codes	Subthemes	Themes
Personal factor (S)	Academic context experience	Hard/easy	Variation in perceived difficulty of their academic programme	Students' experiences of their PGT education
		Can/Cannot approach	Variation in approachability of tutor/instructors	
Behaviour factor (S)	Definition understanding	Three types of understanding of academic help-seeking	Different types of understanding of academic help-seeking	Different students' understanding and decisions during help-seeking process
		Two types of help-seeking students use	Different types of help-seeking students use	
Environmental factor (S)	Steps in the help-seeking process	Noticing the problem	Different decision making during academic help-seeking	
		Ease of help-seeking execution		
Individual layer		Timing for help-seeking		
		Identifying potential helpers		
Micro-		Family environment	Personal demographic factors	
		Gender		
Exo-	Influential factors	Social self-efficacy	Personal psychological factors	Different factors related to PGT students' help-seeking process
		Personality		
Macro		Motivation	Contextual factors	
		Perceived threat		
		Perceived faculty helpfulness		
		Conversion (Challenges of a conversion programme)		
	Chinese international students' experience	Cultural influences	Cultural influences	Chinese international students' perception in the UK/Scotland
		Other barriers	Learning ability change/improve	
		Thoughts about Learning abilities changing		

Appendix 8: Pre-interview guide (Follow-on study)



Pre-interview Guide

A cross-cultural study of academic help-seeking among postgraduate-taught students at a Scottish university.

Researcher: HSIN-YI SHIH (PhD in Education)

Supervisor: Dr Kara Makara; Dr Dely Elliot

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this research. In compliance with the ethical use of visual drawing images for research purposes, please consider the following points when drawing your river. This will allow the researcher to use the drawings during interviews and for future publications.

Before interview

Before the interview, there is a pre-interview activity called 'the River of Experience' which will take approximately 10-15 minutes to do.

Understand what academic help-seeking is first:

Academic help-seeking is a learning strategy which students seek information or assistance from others that they cannot provide for themselves to meet academic goals (Karabenick & Dembo, 2011).

Example: What is the turning points/ significant moment means to have the impact on your help-seeking?

1. *I had a bad experience during undergraduate when I sought help from my tutor, which made me prefer self-help afterwards.*
Or
2. *During semester 1 in PGT duration, I found that the peer is much more accessible than the instructor if I need help, so I started to seek help from peers only!*

Please refer to the **NEXT PAGE** in which you will also find **Instructions when drawing the river.**
(Do not worry about your drawing skills, this activity does not require you to produce any artwork!!)

Contact Details

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the researcher, HSIN-YI SHIH (email: h.shih.1@research.gla.ac.uk) or my supervisors, Dr Kara Makara (email: kara.makarafuller@glasgow.ac.uk), or Dr Dely Elliot (email: Dely.Elliot@glasgow.ac.uk). If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research, please contact College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer.

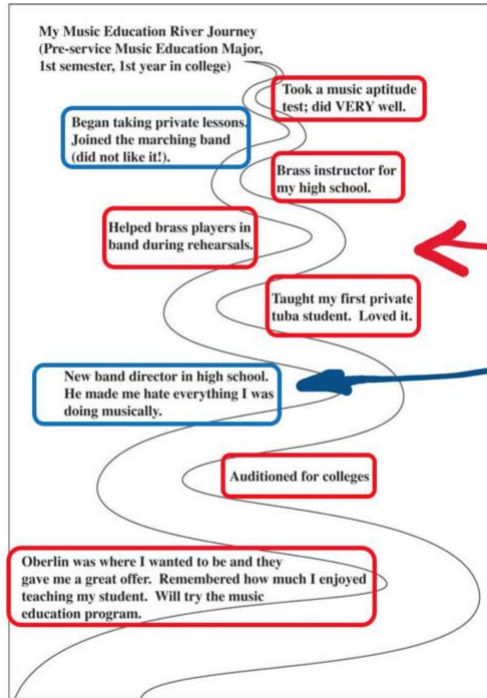
Instructions when drawing the river

The "River of Experience" is aimed at encouraging you to reflect on your experiences as PGT student at the University of Glasgow. It may inspire reflection when drawing the rivers that best represent your experience or thoughts and serve as conversation-starters during interviews.

Please imagining your academic life (from after UG to PGT) as a river and to imagine each bend in the river to be a significant moment, person or object that had an impact on how you seek academic help.

To prepare for this task (you can draw it before interview, or draw it during the interview section):

- Please refer to the **page 3** as the example 'river' guide
Prepare some materials, e.g.: Coloured Pencils / Crayons / Paper (A4 or equivalent)
Or can draw on the example format of river on the computer on Page 4.
- Draw a picture of a river on a blank piece of paper (**or use the page 4 as an example format**) to reflect your overall help-seeking journey as a student from after UG to PGT.
If you do not understand, please again refer to the example on **page 3** of the example 'river' guide.
- In your drawing:
 - a) Each river's bend/ turning point reflects a **significant moment** in your journey that influence your experience or decision when you need help or seek help, or even relate to your academic experience.
 - b) Please also **write a brief explanation** for each river bend - it can be a milestone or a moment significant to you in this personal journey that influence your experience or decision when you need help or seek help.
 - c) You are also being encouraged to and use **as many colours as** necessary to express your experience.
 - d) The river should (but not limited to) start with where they are coming from and end with where they are going.
- Be prepared **to discuss** what is in each of the bends and what makes each of them important to your journey when you need help or seek help.
- Please **take a photo** of your drawing as we will use this during the interview, or, share screen if you prefer.
If you are **unable to take a photo**, do not worry, you can hold up your image to the screen :)
- If possible, please **send the picture of your drawing to my email** before/after the interview meeting.



'River of Experience' example

Each bend represents milestone or significant moment.

Kerchner, J. L. (2006). Tools for developing reflective skills. In *Reflective practices in arts education* (pp. 123-136). Springer, Dordrecht.

River of Experience: A critical moment river journey

(Adapted from Kerchner, 2006, p. 128)

This just an example of river, you can draw any type of river if you prefer ©

Name:

Date:



Appendix 9: Interview question guide (Follow-on study)

Interview questions

(*Interview questions are intended to probe participants' River of Experience drawing activity.)

A. River

- Can you tell me about your river (reflect on your river)?

After the visual tour of the river....

B. Help-seeking/with time/with experience

These might also come naturally through their response. If I need more info to understand participants' experience better, then I will probe further.

- What/ why are the turning points that influence your help-seeking?
- Why are these moments 'turning points'? → What makes these moments important to you?
- How did these moments influence your help-seeking attitude (and behaviour)?
- Of all the bends in your river, which do you consider as the biggest turning point that radically influenced your attitude (and behaviour) towards help-seeking?
- Has employing help-seeking been beneficial during your PGT course? Please explain.
If so, how did your PGT experience compare with your UG experience? → Please give me an example.

C. Pre-pandemic/ pandemic

- How has learning in an online environment influenced your help-seeking behaviour?
→ e.g., Please give me an example
How has learning during the pandemic affected your help-seeking behaviour?
→ e.g., Please give me an example
How does your learning compare with your pre-pandemic experience?

D. Further questions?

- On reflection, what do you think are the lessons you have learned from employing help-seeking behaviour?
Based on your reflection, what advice can you give other PGT students?

Appendix 10: Participant information sheet (Follow-on study)

College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee



College of Social
Sciences

Participant Information Sheet

Study Title: A cross-cultural study of academic help-seeking among postgraduate-taught students at a Scottish university

Researcher: HSIN-YI SHIH

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Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to understand what differences PGT students perceive in their academic help-seeking behaviours as they transition from undergraduate to postgraduate study. This study intends to explore how different factors have influenced PGT students' academic help seeking over time, and how different events, people, or experiences may have served to be a barrier or facilitator of seeking academic help. Additionally, the study intends to explore whether there are differences in Chinese and British students' academic help seeking trajectories. It is hoped that the results of this study may contribute to a better understanding of academic help seeking among an underexplored student population and to inform universities about how they may improve their provisions for postgraduate students.

Why have I been chosen?

This study focuses on participants who are postgraduate students and are at least 18 years of age. This study aims to recruit approximately 3-5 students each from 2 different countries of origin.

Do I have to take part?

No, this is entirely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate, or to stop taking the interview at any time, for whatever reason, and to withdraw from the study.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The study involves a drawing activity that you will complete on your own, followed by a Zoom interview.

You are encouraged to supply a drawing of a river as a metaphor for sharing significant factors that have an impact on your experiences regarding academic help seeking. You may draw the river at any time before the interview. Please send electronic copies of your drawing to the researcher via email at h.shih.1@research.gla.ac.uk. Afterwards, the researcher will save all acquired drawing in the

University's secure OneDrive and remove them from the email system. (For further information and instructions for the drawing activity, please see *Pre-interview instruction*).

The researcher will conduct the interview (based on your river) to discuss your perception of academic help-seeking behaviours experience from undergraduate to postgraduate study; any change or difference regarding the trajectories of academic help-seeking behaviour, and, your experience of life events or turning points (major things that happen) in relation to your help-seeking behaviour. Discussions will include your experiences before and during the lockdown in Glasgow, particularly your experience related to help-seeking. I am interested in your experience, perspectives, and feelings, and you are free to ask questions at any time during the interview. The interview will take up a maximum of one hour (including 10-15 minutes for the river drawing during the pre-interview, and the interview for around 45 minutes). The whole interview will be audio-recorded, and I will make an effort to ensure data confidentiality. You can request a copy of the transcription if you wish, to ensure you are happy with it.

When can I withdraw from the study?

You have the freedom to refuse to answer any question and withdraw from the interview at any time without giving a reason. You also have the right to ask the researcher to remove your data up until the point when the research analysis begins.

What are the risks and benefits in participating?

There are certain risks entailed by participating in this study. While the study is not expected to cause distress, revisiting past academic experiences may sometimes lead some students to feel upset. It is important to remember that we will not judge you for your answers or shared feelings. Please also keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers that we expect from you. You may only share what you are comfortable sharing. You have the right to leave out any questions that you would prefer not to answer and stop the conversation at any time you want. You may take breaks and pauses as necessary and as often as you want.

In case you become distressed by any of the issues raised in the conversation, we will provide you with the contact details of the research supervisor (offered at the end of this document) as well as the **University of Glasgow Counselling and Psychological Services**: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/counselling/>

This research offers opportunities for self-reflection of your educational experiences. Finally, all your efforts may inform and improve existing university policies and practices.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Taking part in this study is completely confidential. With your permission, pseudonyms will be used for any quotes that are shared, and no identifiable information will be shared with others. Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The result of this study will be used for the researchers' thesis for the PhD in Education. Any personally-identifying information that is collected will be deleted at the end of study. The anonymous research data (transcription and drawing) will be stored securely for a minimum of ten years for

possible future research purposes, such as conference presentations or publications. The de-identified data may also be available to other researchers upon request. If you wish to know about the results you may contact the researcher to obtain a summary of the results. Please contact the researcher if you have any questions.

Who has reviewed the study?

The College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow has reviewed this project.

Contact for Further Information

If you have any questions or if you would like a summary of the results, please feel free to contact the researcher, HSIN-YI SHIH (email: h.shih.1@research.gla.ac.uk). If you have any questions you may also contact her supervisors, Dr Kara Makara (email: kara.makarafuller@glasgow.ac.uk), or Dr Dely Elliot (email: Dely.Elliot@glasgow.ac.uk). If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research, please contact College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix 11: Consent Form (Follow-on study)

College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee



College of Social
Sciences

Consent Form

Title of Project: A cross-cultural study of academic help-seeking among postgraduate-taught students at a Scottish university.

Name of Researcher: HSIN-YI SHIH

I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement/Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

Research Method

- I consent to interviews being audio-recorded.
- I consent to my drawing being included in the study.
- I acknowledge that copies of transcripts will be returned to participants for verification by their request.

Confidentiality & Anonymity Clauses

- I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.
- All names and other data likely to identify individuals will be de-identified.
- All data will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- Personal data will be destroyed once the project is complete (expected end date of project is 5th May 2022).
- De-identified research data and pictures supplied by me will be retained in secure storage for academic purposes for 10 years after the completion of the project.
- The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

No Effect on Grades

- I acknowledge that there will be no effect on my grades arising from my participation or non-participation in this research.

Copyright

- All de-identified data and pictures supplied by me may be used in future publications, both print and online.
- I agree to waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project, including the pictures draw by me that I have provided to the researcher.

I agree to be audio recorded I do not agree to be audio recorded

I agree to take part in this study I do not agree to take part in this study

NOTE: Consent will be sought verbally when we meet and prior to the interview starting. You do not need to return this page but please keep a copy for your own records.

Name of Researcher: [REDACTED]

Signature [REDACTED]

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Appendix 12: Data Privacy Statement (Follow-on study)

PRIVACY NOTICE

Privacy Notice for Participation in Research Project: A cross-cultural study of academic help-seeking among postgraduate-taught students at a Scottish university.

The researcher: HSIN-YI SHIH

Your Personal Data

The University of Glasgow will be what's known as the 'Data Controller' of your personal data processed in relation to your participation in the research project (A cross-cultural study of academic help-seeking among postgraduate-taught students at a Scottish university). This privacy notice will explain how the University of Glasgow will process your personal data.

Why we need it

We are collecting basic personal data such as your name and contact details (e-mail) in order to conduct our research. We need your name and contact details to arrange interviews and potentially follow up on the data you have provided.

We only collect data that we need for the research project and will de-identify your personal data from the research data (i.e., your answers given during the interview) through pseudonymisation.

Legal basis for processing your data

We must have a legal basis for processing all personal data. As this processing is for academic research we will be relying upon **Task in the Public Interest** in order to process the basic personal data that you provide. For any special categories data collected we will be processing this on the basis that it is **necessary for archiving purposes, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes**.

We follow the UofG GDPR guidance and ICO guidance as the lawful basis for processing the personal data. Here are links available on ethics websites:

For the UofG GDPR guidance: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/dpfoioffice/gdpr/>

For the ICO guidance: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/lawful-basis-for-processing/>

Alongside this, in order to fulfil our ethical obligations, we will ask for your **Consent** to take part in the study. Please see accompanying **Consent Form**.

What we do with it and who we share it with

All the personal data you submit is processed by me, a postgraduate research student at the University of Glasgow. In addition, security measures are in place to ensure that your personal data remains safe: pseudonymisation, secure storage and encryption of files and devices.

- Changing your name, and the names of other people, places or organisations you mention during the interview;
- All transcribed interviews will be securely stored for up to ten years and only made accessible to future researchers or used in future publications in a form which protects individual, personal information;
- All personal and research data will be stored securely on University of Glasgow's secure OneDrive facility and all personal data will be destroyed once the project is completed in May 2022.

Please consult the **Consent form** and **Participant Information Sheet** which accompanies this notice.

Due to the nature of this research it is very likely that other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. We will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way.

We will provide you with a copy of the study findings and details of any subsequent publications or outputs on request.

What are your rights?*

GDPR provides that individuals have certain rights including: to request access to, copies of and rectification or erasure of personal data and to object to processing. In addition, data subjects may also have the right to restrict the processing of the personal data and to data portability. You can request access to the information we process about you at any time.

If at any point you believe that the information we process relating to you is incorrect, you can request to see this information and may in some instances request to have it restricted, corrected, or erased. You may also have the right to object to the processing of data and the right to data portability.

Please note that as we are processing your personal data for research purposes, the ability to exercise these rights may vary as there are potentially applicable research exemptions under the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information on these exemptions, please see [UofG Research with personal and special categories of data](#).

If you wish to exercise any of these rights, please submit your request via the [webform](#) or contact dp@glg.ac.uk

Complaints

If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact the University Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter.

Our Data Protection Officer can be contacted at dataprotectionofficer@glasgow.ac.uk

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) <https://ico.org.uk/>

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee or relevant School Ethics Forum in the College.

How long do we keep it for?

Your **personal** data will be retained by the University only for as long as is necessary for processing and no longer than the period of Project conduction duration (May 2022). After this time, personal data will be securely deleted.

Your **research** data will be retained for a period of ten years in line with the University of Glasgow Guidelines. Specific details in relation to research data storage are provided on the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form which accompany this notice.

End of Privacy Notice _____

Appendix 13: Ethics Committee Approval Letter (Follow-on study)



College of Social
Sciences

College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

28 November 2021

Dear Hsin-Yi Shih

Project Title: A cross-cultural study of academic help-seeking among postgraduate-taught students at a Scottish university

Application No: 400210050

The College Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Start date of ethical approval: 28/11/2021
- Project end date: 05/05/2022
- Any outstanding permissions needed from third parties in order to recruit research participants or to access facilities or venues for research purposes must be obtained in writing and submitted to the CoSS Research Ethics Administrator before research commences. Permissions you must provide are shown in the *College Ethics Review Feedback* document that has been sent to you as the Collated Comments Document in the online system.
- The data should be held securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project, or for longer if specified by the research funder or sponsor, in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research: (https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_490311_en.pdf)
- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups and using the methods defined in the application.
- Approval is granted for virtual methods outlined in the application however restrictions noted below should be followed for any face to face data collection methods.
 - ◆ **Approval has been granted in principle:** no data collection must be undertaken with the exception of methods highlighted above until the current research restrictions as a result of social distancing and self-isolation are lifted. You will be notified once this restriction is no longer in force.

Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The **Request for Amendments to an Approved Application** form should be used: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/>

Yours sincerely,

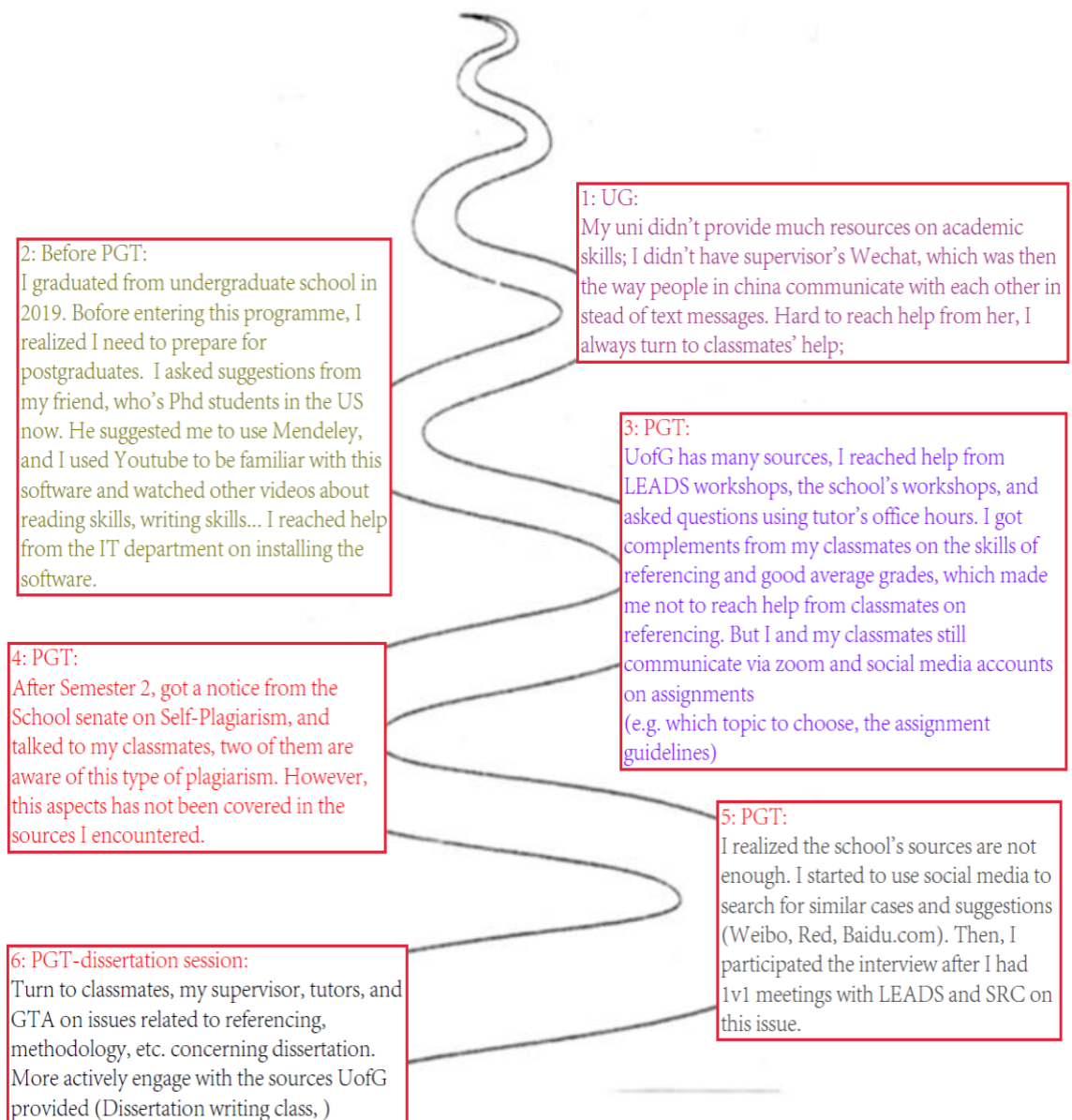
College Research Ethics Committee

University of Glasgow
College of Social Sciences
Glasgow G12 8QQ

The University of Glasgow, charity number SC004401
E-mail: socsci-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix 14: Example of Participant's River (Follow-on study)

Chinese interviewee's RoE



British interviewee's RoE

