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Acknowledgements

Biographies

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Contents

1

Introduction

The use of English as a language of international communication has expanded the global job market in English language teaching (ELT) and encouraged an increasing number of students to pursue postgraduate education in ELT and related areas. There are a large number of UK master's programmes in ELT, which are variously named: teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), teaching English as an additional language (TEAL) and applied linguistics (where there is an ELT component). There are also more specialised and diversified degrees, including teaching English to young learners (TEYL), teaching English for academic purposes (TEAP), computer-assisted language learning (CALL), information and communications technology (ICT) and materials development. Some programmes are designed for experienced teachers, while others target novice teachers. Many attract both. As well as full-time and part-time modes of delivery, some courses are offered online or in blended formats. A notable feature of most of these programmes is their international dimension, and many of the students are from overseas, often from Asia, and paying full fees. They are therefore an important source of income for UK higher education (HE), though this reality is not always celebrated or even recognised.

While such courses proliferate, a review of what programmes exist and exactly what they offer does not appear to have been carried out until now. Internet search engines such as Find a master's (www.findamasters.com) identify programmes but tend to replicate the webpages of universities and do not always provide the kind of detail students find useful; the EL Gazette provides a regularly updated and valuable overview of UK ELT master's programmes but does not include much detail. It has therefore been difficult to compare important features of these programmes, such as their content and structure, and whether they cater for novice or experienced teachers.

It is also the case that, to date, there has been no comprehensive examination of students' expectations of and experiences on UK master's programmes in ELT. For example, why do international students choose to come to the UK to study? And do the programmes on which international and home students enrol meet their expectations or not?

This project was designed to provide a comprehensive overview of TESOL provision. It aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What master's courses in ELT are currently offered in the UK?

2. What are the modes/formats (including online and blended), components (including dissertations) and target students of the different programmes?

3. What are the key factors influencing students' decision to enrol on one of these programmes?

4. What are students' desires and expectations regarding their chosen programmes?

5. In what ways do the programmes fulfil (or fail to fulfil) their desires and expectations?

To respond to research questions 1 and 2, we have produced a master's ELT audit document, which we hope will assist prospective students to select appropriate courses. As well as providing essential information, such as course length, modules, approximate cost and entry requirements, it also includes each programme's distinctive features, as identified by the programme directors.

The audit document is available on this website, but it has not been formatted: www.teachingenglish.org. uk/sites/teacheng/files/Audit%20Final%2010.pdf

In order to respond to research questions 3 to 5, two questionnaires were administered to ELT master's students between September and November 2015 and between April and September 2016. The questionnaire covered a range of topics including the factors that influenced students' choice of university and programme, the modules they thought should be offered and whether the programme had met their expectations. In addition, four focus groups were conducted: two in England, one in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland. These focus groups were designed to explore some of the responses given in the questionnaires and to provide students with the opportunity to explain their thoughts and ideas in greater detail. This report presents the findings from these two research instruments.

The report is divided into six sections. Following this introduction there is an overview of the research literature pertinent to the area. It focuses on graduate students' expectations and experiences of graduate study in general and of their expectations and experiences of ELT programmes in particular. We then describe our research methods before presenting and discussing our findings. The conclusion identifies limitations with the research design and suggests areas that other researchers and programme directors might be interested in exploring.

2

Literature review

The focus of this project is the different types of ELT master's offered within the UK and students' expectations and experiences in those programmes. To put this present study in context, in this section we briefly review research into ELT course provision and then provide a more detailed discussion of research into the experiences and expectations of master's students. More specifically, we begin by looking at surveys on ELT course provision. We then move on to discuss research that deals with students' experiences in various master's programmes around the world and, more specifically, in the UK. In the following two sub-sections, we examine the literature on the experiences and expectations of students who attend master's programmes in ELT around the world and in the UK in particular. This section ends with a summary of its main points.

2.1   Research into ELT provision

By researching 'ten well-known TESOL programmes in the United States, and several in Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom', the TESOL organisation has produced a report that provides prospective students with some key factors to consider before deciding which master's programme is appropriate for them (Bagwell, n.d.). Also, a number of US surveys on TESOL master's have been conducted with the focus ranging from the number of foreign students enrolled (England and Roberts, 1989) to the teaching of individual courses in TESOL programmes (Grosse, 1991; Murphy, 1997; Nelson, 1998; Vásquez and Sharpless, 2009).

Online master's programmes in TESOL have also received some recent attention. Hall and Knox (2009) conducted an international survey of distance TESOL programmes and have been able to identify 14 online master's programmes (four of which were UK programmes) while Murray (2013) provides case reports of ten institutions offering online master's programmes in TESOL.

To our knowledge, however, there is no previous attempt to compare the various ELT master's programmes offered within the UK. The current project addresses this gap by conducting an audit of all the online and on-campus ELT master's

programmes that are currently on offer in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. More specifically, by conducting online document analysis and by contacting ELT master's programme directors, we have been able to identify and provide information about 141 ELT master's programmes offered by UK universities. The audit document is available on this website, but it has not been formatted: www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Audit%20Final%2010.pdf

2.2   Research on master's students' experiences

This section examines the research on master's students' experiences in a range of contexts.

2.2.1   On (international) students' experiences in master's programmes around the world

Several studies have investigated (international) master's students' experiences and perceptions in various programmes run by universities around the world, ranging from New Zealand (Bitchener and Basturkmen, 2006; Chang and Strauss, 2010) to Canada (Myles and Cheng, 2003; Fang et al., 2015) and the US (Holzweiss et al., 2014). As will become clear in this section, previous research has examined both academic and social aspects of master's students' experiences.

Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006) focused on the academic aspect of the master's experience of students for whom English is a second language (L2) in two New Zealand universities. The students were from mainland China, Korea and Eastern Europe and were enrolled in various master's programmes such as applied linguistics, art and design, and business. By conducting in-depth interviews with supervisor-student pairs, the researchers explored the difficulties faced by master's students in writing the discussion of results sections (DRS) of their dissertations. The study revealed that L2 students had a limited understanding of the functions and the content parameters of the DRS (*ibid.,* 14). It became apparent that supervisors and their respective students did not share the same views concerning the actual difficulties faced by students in writing the DRS and the causes of the students' difficulties (*ibid.,* 14).

Another finding is that students considered their limited proficiency in English as the main cause for the difficulties they experienced while the supervisors offered other types of explanations (such as lack of knowledge about DRS as a genre), which were not related to the students' proficiency in English (*ibid.*). The researchers highlight the role that supervisors can play in 'helping their students identify the underlying cause(s) of particular difficulties' (*ibid.,* 13).

In another study, Chang and Strauss (2010) focused on the experience of the dissertation writing process of Mandarin-speaking master's students attending a New Zealand university. The participants belonged to various disciplines such as Applied Humanities/ Arts, Business, Creative Arts, Engineering, Health, Management and Science (*ibid.,* 420). The researchers' analysis of the data collected through an online survey and follow-up interviews with the students shows, among other findings, that Chinese students resisted the stereotype of being unable to engage in critical thought (*ibid.,* 422). More specifically, four key themes emerged from the data. First, the students reported that they had difficulty in writing critically, but these had to do with their limited English proficiency (*ibid.*). Second, the students said they appreciated the linguistic support they received from their supervisors, but some of them found it problematic that supervisors changed their written use of language without any prior discussion (*ibid.,* 424). Third, the students stressed the fact that they needed a relationship with their supervisors in which they 'were acknowledged as individuals and not just as students' (*ibid.,* 425). Finally, some of the students who had difficulties with their supervisors were concerned with issues of agency – i.e. they felt powerless to change those aspects of the supervision they found problematic (*ibid.,* 426). The researchers concluded by highlighting the important duty of supervisors to promote student agency in the supervisor-supervisee relationship (*ibid.*).

Moving on to the Canadian context, Myles and Cheng (2003) investigated through semi-structured interviews the social and cultural experiences and perceptions of international postgraduate students attending a Canadian university. The 12 participants of this study originated from China, East India and Europe and, among them, nine were enrolled in master's degrees and three in doctoral degrees (*ibid.,* 251). These students belonged to disciplines ranging from Engineering and Social Sciences to Urban and Regional Planning (*ibid.*). Four major themes emerged from their data analysis: (a) students' relationships with supervisors and instructors; (b) students' experiences as teaching assistants; (c) students' communication with colleagues and friends; and (d) students' social life. With regard to the first theme, students reported that they got on well with their supervisors and instructors (*ibid.,* 252). As far as the second theme is concerned, students who worked as teaching assistants felt that their oral proficiency in English and particularly pronunciation was a problem (*ibid.,* 255). Moving on to the third theme, the students interviewed felt they did not have any difficulties communicating with colleagues and friends who were native speakers of English but they did report difficulties in using English to communicate with other international students (*ibid.,* 256). Finally, when it came to their social life, students for whom English is not a first language said they felt better socialising with students with similar ethnic backgrounds or with students who could also be considered 'outsiders' (*ibid.,* 258). The researchers concluded that the focal students had adjusted well to university life by creating a network of international friends rather by making contact with their colleagues who spoke English as a first language (*ibid.,* 259).

In another Canadian study, Fang et al. (2015) explored – through interviews, questionnaires and final programme evaluations – the study abroad experience of Chinese students who attended a master's programme in Education run by a Chinese university in collaboration with a Canadian one (*ibid.,* 1). More specifically, the researchers investigated these Chinese students' expectations, feelings, attitudes and experiences (*ibid.,* 7). Four major themes emerged from students' responses: (a) in Canada the Chinese students were reluctant to speak and participate in the classes; (b) the students' visits in Canadian schools led them to make comparisons between the Chinese and the Canadian educational system; (c) the students benefited from the collaborative nature of their classes in Canada although that was not an explicit part of the master's programme; and (d) the students' engagement with the local population was more limited than the students had thought (*ibid.,* 8–14). With regard to students' expectations, it became clear that the students were hoping to get a teaching qualification and some teaching practice, but it did not happen since it was not the intended aim of the programme (*ibid.,* 17). It is in that respect that they concluded that the master's programme was an 'empty success' (*ibid.*); that is, students did get a degree but not the expected teaching qualification. Further, the researchers argued that the programme can also be seen as a 'brilliant failure' in that academic members of staff failed to recognise the opportunities the master's students were provided with that 'enriched their study abroad experience' (*ibid.,* 18).

As the researchers put it: 'in unexpected ways, the programme allowed the students to stretch their wings and explore possibilities that went well beyond what the programme offered' (ibid.). For example, some of the students pursued volunteer part-time work offered on campus while others travelled across Canada or to the US (ibid.).

Finally, a US study explored through an online survey the experiences of international and home students enrolled in an online master's programme in Higher Education Administration in a US university (Holzweiss et al., 2014). Among the participants, 53 per cent were white, 24 per cent were African-American, 15 per cent were Hispanic, six per cent were Asian, one per cent were Native American and one per cent were multi-racial (ibid., 314). The focus of this study was on the best learning experience that the students had in the programme and what they learnt from it (ibid.). The analysis revealed five major themes. First, the students valued the critical-thinking assignments in the programme (ibid.). Second, the students highlighted the importance of instructional technology and, more specifically, that of online discussion forums, podcasts created by instructors, video-conferencing and online library tools (ibid., 316). Third, they appreciated the degree of engagement on the part of the faculty (ibid., 317). Further, they valued the type of interaction they had with members of the faculty and with their peers while they highlighted their preference for peer-group assignments (ibid., 318). Finally, the students emphasised the importance of assuming personal responsibility for their work (ibid.). The researchers concluded by stressing the significance of creating a community of practice for online master's students, which will allow them to 'become active participants in the creation of knowledge' (ibid., 319–320).

2.2.2 On (international) students' experiences in master's programmes in the UK

Having surveyed research on master's students' experiences conducted in a few countries around the world (i.e. New Zealand, Canada and the US), we now turn to studies dealing with master's students' experiences in the UK context. As becomes clear below, the majority of these studies focus on international rather than home students, though with some exceptions (see, for example, Sun and Richardson's 2012 study discussed below).

Wu and Hammond (2011) employed interviews to explore the master's experience and adjustment of a group of East Asian students attending a UK university. The students were doing master's

degrees in various disciplines (such as Economics, Mathematics, Engineering and English Teaching). The main aim of their study was to investigate how satisfied the students were with their master's programme and to identify the challenges they were experiencing (ibid., 423). Their findings show that the students found their stay in the UK 'largely enjoyable and academically successful' (ibid., 434). However, there were criticisms that the content of teaching and learning was not international enough (ibid., 435). Also, there was some kind of disappointment stemming from the fact that there was little interaction with British nationals (ibid., 435). If adjustment is seen as the feeling of wellbeing and satisfaction and 'the ability to "fit in" and negotiate the interactive aspects of a new culture (Searle and Ward, 1990, cited in Wu and Hammond, 2011: 435), then most of the students in this study adjusted well (ibid., 435). It needs to be highlighted though that this adjustment was not adjustment to the host (British) culture, but adjustment to what the researchers refer to as the 'international student culture' (Wu and Hammond, 2011: 435). Such a culture is defined by 'its widespread use of English; participation of students from a range of national backgrounds; and a focus on achieving academic success' (ibid.). Overall, the findings of this study challenge the so-called U-curve hypothesis according to which sojourners initially experience a happy honeymoon phase followed by disillusionment[1] (Lysgaard, 1955). As the researchers argue, although there was some disappointment at the lack of contact with British national students, the participants experienced neither a sense of initial excitement nor a sense of disillusionment (Wu and Hammond, 2011: 435).

Another more recent UK study has also focused on international master's students' experiences and adaptation to their new UK learning and living environment (Busher et al., 2016). Out of the 25 participating students, 15 were mainland Chinese and ten were from various other countries[2] (ibid., 51). For the purposes of this study, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with the focal students. Their findings show that the students' limited proficiency in English made their initial academic adaptation and socialisation more difficult (ibid., 54 and 60). Also, through the interviews, it became apparent that the students were not used to independent learning or group work but were grateful to have received 'extensive support [...] from approachable tutors' (ibid., 61). Another important finding is that the students managed to overcome

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1 According to Lysgaard's (1955) U-curve model, a frequently cited model in cultural adjustment research, foreigners in adapting to a new culture go through the following stages: a) the happy 'honeymoon stage' which is characterised by excitement with the new culture; b) the 'culture shock' or disillusionment stage; c) the 'recovery stage' which is characterised by adaptation to the new culture and d) the 'adjustment stage' which is characterised by effective functioning in the new culture.

the initial feelings of isolation by creating a network of friends who had the same linguistic or cultural background. As in Wu and Hammond's (2011) study, Busher et al. (2016) have also challenged Lysgaard's (1955) U-curve hypothesis. As they put it, 'several students in this study never appeared to have a happy honeymoon period at the start of their sojourn in England' (Busher et al., 2016: 61).

International master's students' experiences and adjustment have also been the focus of another research study conducted in England by Sercombe and Young (2015). The nationalities of the participating students varied and included 'three mainland Chinese, one German, one Liechtensteinian, one dual-national French-Canadian and one USA citizen (an L1 English speaker)' (*ibid.,* 39). This study differs from the ones previously discussed in this section in so far as the issue of adaptation has been approached from a diachronic perspective. More specifically, by conducting semi-structured interviews at three separate points of the academic year, the researchers wanted to gain insights into the perceptions of these international students who were attending a Cross-Cultural Communication master's course at a UK university as well as to find out whether their expectations had been met and how satisfied they were with their study abroad experience. Their overall findings show that people and relationships with people played a key role in shaping students' impressions, which were in most cases positive (*ibid.,* 40 and 49). Quite importantly, what became apparent was that social non-academic networks 'interacted with or affected academic work' (*ibid.,* 40). For example, a good relationship with flatmates could have a positive effect on academic experiences and work (*ibid.,* 50). Their study also indicates 'an association between the passage of time and a gradual decrease in acculturative stress' (*ibid.,* 40). In relation to previous theoretical models, the researchers 'found the U-curve model's claim of the likelihood of psychological distress being greatest early on in a sojourn' (*ibid.,* 40 and 50–51). However, the researchers highlight the fact that the process of adaptation is not linear as the U-curve model suggests, since psychological distress may recur at times of particular demand or pressure (for example, during the exam period in January) *(ibid.).*

Another UK study investigated the experiences and perceptions of British and mainland Chinese students enrolled in Business and Management master's programmes in six UK universities (Sun and Richardson, 2012). This study differs from the

ones previously discussed in that it includes home (British national) students as participants, who are compared with their international colleagues in the master's programmes they are attending. Based on the data collected through a course-experience questionnaire, the researchers show there was little difference between the two national groups studied in terms of the way they perceived the quality of their master's programmes and they thus conclude that cultural factors seem not to play a role in students' perceptions of the academic quality of their master's programmes (*ibid.,* 311). Further, based on data gathered through an 'approaches to studying inventory', the researchers demonstrate that there is no distinctive approach to studying (i.e. an approach that combines understanding with memorisation) associated with the Chinese learners (*ibid.,* 303 and 312). More specifically, with regard to the scores obtained in relation to a surface versus deep strategic approach to studying[3], the researchers highlight the fact that there is no evidence that the Chinese learners' 'unfamiliarity with higher education in the UK had driven them to adopt a surface approach' (*ibid.,* 313). These findings therefore provide counter evidence to previous stereotypical views of the Chinese learner and show that one has to be cautious when making pedagogical assumptions based on such views *(ibid.).*

Finally, another UK study that has focused on Chinese master's students is that conducted by Wu (2015) at three UK universities. Similar to Sun and Richardson (2012), the majority of the participants in Wu (2015: 756) were doing master's programmes related to Business and Management. By conducting semi-structured interviews with the students, the researcher's aim was to identify: (a) the academic challenges that the Chinese students faced in their master's studies and (b) the strategies they developed to address these challenges (*ibid.,* 756). Wu's findings show that the Chinese master's students faced four types of challenges: (a) they had problems with participation in classroom discussions; (b) drawing on their Chinese academic experience, when it came to group-work projects, they tended to rely on the stronger members of the group, who were expected to do most of the work; (c) they struggled to cope with the teaching and learning modes of British universities, which are student-centred rather than teacher-centred; and (d) they struggled in meeting essay-writing criteria and realised that what worked in the Chinese academic context (memorisation and repetition) was not enough to do well in the British academic context

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2   These ten other countries are not further specified in the paper.
3   The surface approach to studying is characterised by lack of purpose, unrelated memorising, syllabus-boundness and fear of failure (Sun and Richardson, 2012: 304). On the other hand, the deep strategic approach involves seeking meaning, relating ideas, using evidence, and is characterised by organised studying, having interest in ideas, time management, alertness to assessment demands and achieving monitoring effectiveness (*ibid*).

(*ibid.,* 757–761). To address these challenges, and 'instead of conforming to the stereotypical image of Chinese students', the interviewed students reported that they had developed various approaches and techniques to deal with the problems that they faced in their new academic environment (*ibid.,* 762). More specifically, they tried out 'different learning modes, practise[d] newly adopted skills, and observe[d] others at the host university' *(ibid.)*. Based on these findings, Wu concluded that, although the learning conflicts experienced by the Chinese students seem to provide evidence for the Chinese learners' stereotypical image, the strategic approach adopted by the students to deal with these conflicts shows that the problems they face are not permanent and that continuous development and transformation take place during the master's study abroad year (*ibid.,* 764).

2.2.3   On (international) students' experiences and expectations in master's in ELT programmes around the world

We have so far surveyed studies that have dealt with the experiences and perceptions of students working towards master's degrees in various disciplines but not in ELT. Since the focus of this study is on the experiences of master's in ELT students, in this section we move on to review studies that deal with the experiences and perceptions of postgraduate students attending master's in ELT programmes in some parts of the world, namely, the US (Johnson, 2001; Lee and Lew, 2001; Baecher, 2012; Tseng, 2013), Australia (Phakiti and Li, 2011; Hughes and Bruce, 2013) and New Zealand (Li and Tin, 2013).

A US interview-based study focused on the perceived needs and expectations of pre-service international students attending a master's programme in TESOL in two US universities (Johnson, 2001). The participating students came from Japan, China, Lebanon, Mexico and Angola (*ibid.,* 15). The major finding of this study is that, although all the participants emphasised the significance of improving language proficiency, they did not see that as being the responsibility of the master's programme, which they considered to be designed for native speakers (Johnson, 2001: 24–25).

Another US study focused on the experiences of international students attending a master's programme in TESOL in California (Lee and Lew, 2001). The participants were of various ethnic backgrounds: one was from Taiwan, one from Korea, one from Panama and one from Paraguay (*ibid.,* 140–141). Based on an analysis of students' diaries, four major themes emerged. First, the participants suffered a

great deal of language anxiety due to the fact that English was not their first language (*ibid.,* 143). Second, they felt inferior to their English L1 speaking peers (*ibid.,* 145). Third, the students struggled to cope with the language requirements particularly in the area of reading and writing *(ibid.)*. And, finally, they saw their experiences as learners of English as an invaluable asset for the master's programme they were attending (*ibid.,* 145–146). The researchers concluded by stressing the fact that 'regardless of the differences in their backgrounds, the participants had common feelings and experiences as NNES [non-native English speaker] students enrolled in an MA TESOL programme' (*ibid.,* 146).

In another recent study in the US context, Baecher (2012) examined the post-study experiences of graduates[4] of one master's programme in TESOL offered by a large north-eastern US university. Through online surveys, interviews, site visits, questionnaires and a focus group, the research investigated whether and how this master's programme the teachers had attended supported the demands they faced in their US state schools working environment and revealed mismatches between the master's programme preparation and the teachers' workplace demands (*ibid.,*: 579). The findings show that participants believed there were certain aspects and activities that could be better covered in the master's programme in TESOL. More specifically, the teachers felt the following activities should be incorporated in the programme: (a) dealing with learners with learning disabilities or with low-literacy students; (b) preparing or 'co-planning content-based ESL lessons'; and (c) checking compliance of school with state mandates (*ibid.,* 583). It needs to be highlighted, though, that the majority of the participants thought the TESOL programme they had attended prepared them well for their current teaching job (*ibid.,* 584).

Moving on to more recent US studies, Tseng (2013) investigated the experiences and perceptions of Mandarin-speaking postgraduate students attending a master's programme in TESOL in California (US). By conducting pre- and post-study interviews with the focal students, and by asking students to provide her with self-narratives, Tseng (2013: 56) investigated the students' academic writing experiences in the programme. Her findings reveal the struggles that international students faced in the process of becoming a member of the written community of TESOL (*ibid.,* 151). More specifically, the major struggles faced by the students were: (a) taking on professional identities as scholars and writing with authoritative voices; (b) balancing conflicting selves

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4   Baecher (2012) does not specify whether these were home (US national) or international students.

– i.e. trying to be an authoritative writer on the one hand and writing papers as a student on the other; and (c) reconciling 'competing voices on how one should write' (*ibid.*). Quite importantly, the students saw these struggles as opportunities for learning 'in a way that helped them to shape their sense of self as TESOL professionals' *(ibid.)*.

Moving on to the Australian context, Phakiti and Li (2011) investigated the experiences of Asian postgraduate students who were completing a master's degree in TESOL at an Australian university. Using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, Phakiti and Li explored the general academic difficulties and the academic reading and writing difficulties these international students faced during their master's degree. With regard to general academic difficulties, the participants highlighted their difficulty in orienting themselves to academic expectations and tasks, coping with assignment workload, acquiring subject knowledge and managing assignment completion time (*ibid.,* 240). As far as academic reading difficulties are concerned, the students mentioned the following key problems: (a) TESOL-specific vocabulary and (b) extracting and synthesising information from various academic sources to learn and respond to assignment tasks *(ibid.)*. Finally, with regard to academic writing difficulties, various key problems were identified such as plagiarism, lacking a voice in one's own writing, understanding the nature of academic writing, synthesising ideas from various academic sources for writing, coherence and linking theory to practice (*ibid.,* 243–244). The researchers concluded by highlighting the fact that: (a) master's students in TESOL experience similar difficulties as those experienced by students in different fields of study (*ibid.,* 253) and (b) the students' International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores and their experience in the course (first or second semester students) did not have an impact on the nature of the academic difficulties they faced (*ibid.,* 252).

Another Australian study focused on the experiences of international postgraduate students attending an elective course (entitled Personalised Language Development) in the master's programmes in TESOL and in TEFL offered at an Australian university (Hughes and Bruce, 2013: 106). The majority of the participating students were from China while the rest were from India, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Taiwan. Based on the students' own written reflections and on data collected through semi-structured interviews, it became apparent that the overall experience of this course was a positive one for the students as it helped them to deal with the challenges they faced in the Australian academic context such as linguistic or 'information using'[5] challenges (*ibid.,* 117).

Moving on to the New Zealand context, Li and Tin (2013) investigated the expectations and perceptions of Asian students who attended a master's programme in TESOL at a New Zealand university. Through semi-structured interviews, the researchers examined what the students expected from their master's programme in TESOL and their perceptions of the strengths and the weaknesses of the programme (*ibid.,* 24). With regard to students' expectations, the participants anticipated improving their English language proficiency, improving their teaching skills and methods, and taking or observing teaching practice (*ibid.,* 26–29). In relation to the strengths of the programme, the participants mentioned: (a) the acquisition of Applied Linguistics knowledge; (b) the improvement of English writing and reading skills; (c) the development of their ability to do research; (d) cultivation of their awareness that teaching involves continual learning; and (e) 'the promotion of reflection and self-evaluation' (*ibid.,* 29–30). With regard to the weaknesses of the programme, the participants identified the lack of teaching practice and the fact that the programme did not take into consideration the socio-cultural context where the participants would be called upon to teach after the programme (*ibid.,* 31–32). The researchers concluded that the most obvious gap between the students' expectations and perceptions was the master's programme's lack of teaching practice (*ibid.,* 32). Another mismatch between students' expectations and perceptions was the fact that students expected to improve their all-round English proficiency, but the master's programme did not provide them with any opportunities for improving their speaking skills (*ibid.,* 33).

2.2.4 On (international) students' experiences and expectations in master's in ELT programmes in the UK

In the previous section we discussed studies that dealt with master's in ELT students' experiences and expectations in some parts of the world. In this section, we review research that focuses on students' experiences in UK master's programmes in ELT.

Fordyce and Hennebry (2013) investigated students' expectations and experiences in an MSc in TESOL programme offered at a UK university. Out of the 87 participants, 59 were from China and 28 from ten other countries (such as Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia,

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5   Information-using challenges refer to challenges related to using information in a critical, creative, reflective and ethical manner for the purposes of learning and doing research (Hughes and Bruce, 2013: 109).

Japan, Greece and the US). The aims of their study were: (a) to examine to what extent students' expectations (concerning overall programme content, contact hours, language skills demands, modes of assessment and modes of learning) corresponded to their actual experiences and (b) to explore whether the Chinese students' expectations differed from those of other international students who were on the same programme (Fordyce and Hennebry, 2013). To address these issues, students were asked to complete a questionnaire and to keep a diary for nine weeks while researchers also conducted focus groups with seven of the focal students. With regard to overall programme content expectations, both groups reported that the course demanded more critical thinking than they had expected. As far as contact hours are concerned, students expected more individual contact time with members of staff, and this was higher with the non-Chinese group of students. Moving on to language skills, the Chinese group was taken aback by the reading demands while the non-Chinese group was surprised by the writing demands. When it came to the modes of assessment, both groups expected more exams and fewer written assignments. In terms of the modes of learning, most students from both groups had hoped for more small-group tutorials. Finally, with regard to overall impressions, the Chinese learners seemed to be happier with the programme but perhaps not so much with the practical application of what they were learning. The researchers concluded that, overall, students were challenged in the areas of academic reading, writing and critical thinking. Further, the comparison of the two groups of students showed that they both had similar expectations. However, there were some areas mentioned by the Chinese learners that required further attention, such as speaking in class, reading journal articles and critical-thinking skills.

Another recent UK study on ELT master's students focused more on the early sojourn experiences rather than on the students' expectations (Schartner and Young, 2015). More specifically, Schartner and Young (2015: 19) investigated the early sojourn stage of international students doing a master's in Cross-cultural Communication or in Applied Linguistics and TESOL at a UK university. The majority of the participants came from China while the rest came from various countries and territories such as Europe, the Americas/Caribbean, East Asia, the Middle East and Africa (*ibid.*). Two questions were explored in this study: (a) how intercultural

competence, English language ability and knowledge about the host country relate to self-determined motivation for study abroad (*ibid.,* 15) and (b) how all the aforementioned variables interacted with psychological wellbeing and satisfaction with life in the early stages of the master's study abroad experience (*ibid.,* 16). To explore these issues and to gain insights into the early sojourn experiences, the students were asked to complete a self-report survey in the first two weeks of their master's programme. With regard to the first question, their findings show that one's level of determination to study abroad strongly correlates with 'pre-departure knowledge about the host country as well as high cultural empathy, social initiative and flexibility' (*ibid.,* 26). With regard to the second question, their results show that international students' satisfaction with life in the early stages of their study abroad experience was 'associated with English language ability, cultural empathy, social initiative, pre-departure knowledge about the UK and degree of self-determination in the decision to study abroad' (*ibid.,* 27). The researchers concluded by highlighting the importance of pre-departure knowledge and of students' autonomy in the choice to study abroad, and they made recommendations on how institutions could help prospective students through orientation sessions and support services (*ibid.,* 28). Finally, similar to Wu and Hammond (2011) and Busher et al. (2016), Schartner and Young (2015: 29) also challenge Lysgaard's (1955) U-curve model of adjustment by stressing that actual 'adjustment trajectories are much more complex and dynamic' than the model suggests.

Finally, Copland and Garton (2012) investigated the post-study experiences and perceptions of students who had completed either an online or an on-campus master's programme in TESOL offered by a UK university. Through the administration of three questionnaires, the aim of their research was to explore what were the perceived benefits gained from each programme (online or on-campus) and whether the online and on-campus students thought they had gained the same benefits (*ibid.,* 67). Their results show that the online students thought they had benefited from their studies in three major ways: (a) they had better career prospects; (b) they had acquired research skills; and (c) they had developed their personal and professional confidence (*ibid.,* 73). A comparison between the perceived benefits of online and on-campus students shows that there are similar benefits when it comes to promotion/getting a job (*ibid.*). With regard to the development of a

research profile, although several on-campus students also claimed that they had developed research skills through the programme, their level of participation in research activities was much more limited compared to that of the online students *(ibid.)*. The researchers suggest that this difference can be explained in terms of the 'situated learning' aspect of the online programme, which allowed teachers to conduct research in their own educational contexts and further 'gain practice in writing about research' *(ibid.,* 73–74). In terms of confidence, both groups reported having gained confidence through their respective programmes *(ibid.,* 74). However, unlike the on-campus students, the online students had also gained the confidence to share and present their work to the TESOL community *(ibid.)*. Again, the 'situated learning aspect of the distance learning programme' *(ibid.,* 73) seems to play a role here. By doing research for their assessed work in their own real classrooms, the distance learning students have plenty of data they can use for presentations and publications and they believe that they have something important to contribute to the TESOL field *(ibid.,* 74). This gives them the confidence to share their work with the TESOL community. In contrast, the on-campus students engage for assessment purposes in analyses of classroom practices 'against remembered contexts, rather than actual ones' *(ibid.)*. They therefore have 'fewer skills in designing and writing up research', 'have collected fewer data for potential publications' *(ibid.)* and thus have less confidence in sharing their work with the TESOL community. In relation to the 'most significant things learned' through their respective programmes, both groups identified approaches to teaching and teaching practice as being key components of their courses *(ibid.,* 74). However, there were differences in the area of research with on-campus students talking about 'learning *about* research skills rather than their application' *(ibid.,* 75; emphasis in the original).

As the researchers put it, none of the on-campus participants connected knowledge of research skills with 'investigating their teaching or (to) developing their practice' *(ibid.)*. Copland and Garton stress that the sample of on-campus students was limited and that there are important differences in the characteristics of the two groups of teachers and therefore one should be cautious in concluding that the online programme affords better professional opportunities *(ibid.)*. One can, however, conclude that the online programme 'was successful in its goal of promoting professional development through situated learning' *(ibid.,* 76).

2.3 Conclusion

As the discussion above shows, some research has been conducted on international students' experiences during their master's programmes in various countries around the world (New Zealand, Canada and the US) (Bitchener and Basturkmen, 2006; Chang and Strauss, 2010; Holzweiss et al., 2014; Fang et al., 2015; Myles and Cheng, 2003) but also in the UK (Busher et al., 2016; Sercombe and Young, 2015; Sun and Richardson, 2012; Wu, 2015; Wu and Hammond, 2011). With the exception of Sun and Richardson's 2012 study where British national students were compared to their Chinese colleagues, British national master's students have overall received less attention. Thus, British national students' experiences and expectations during their master's year remain largely underexplored. Our study constitutes a first step towards addressing this gap by examining both British national and international students' experiences and expectations during their ELT master's degrees in the UK.

Further, we have seen that some research has been conducted on international students' experiences and expectations in ELT master's around the world (USA, Australia and New Zealand) (Baecher, 2012; Hughes and Bruce, 2013; Johnson, 2001; Lee and Lew, 2001; Li and Tin, 2013; Phakiti and Li, 2011; Tseng, 2013). In the UK, however, this type of research remains limited and the few studies (Copland and Garton, 2012; Fordyce and Hennebry, 2013; Schartner and Young, 2015) that we have been able to identify focus on single universities. This scarcity of UK research shows that students' experiences and expectations in UK ELT master's constitute an area that remains largely under-researched. The current study addresses this gap by exploring home and international students' experiences and expectations in ELT master's programmes offered by several institutions that host such programmes across the UK.

3

Research methods

This research project aimed to (a) map the current UK-based master's provision in ELT, (b) investigate students' desires and expectations at the beginning of their master's programmes, and (c) research their experiences by the end of these programmes. To this end, three data collection procedures were adopted: document analysis (to fulfil aim a) as well as questionnaires and focus groups (to fulfil aims b and c). Each of these procedures will be explained in the following sub-sections, which will also indicate how data triangulation helped strengthen the project design.

3.1   Document analysis

The starting point for the document analysis was a list of higher education institutes (HEIs) in the UK, which included primarily but not exclusively universities. Each HEI website was checked with a view to identifying any taught postgraduate provision in ELT irrespective of the terminology used for the degree (e.g. MA, MSc and MEd) and for the field (e.g. ELT, TESOL and applied linguistics). These documents were chosen since they are generally a first port of call for applicants who want to find out details of these programmes. This list was doubled-checked with information found online, especially in portals such as MastersPortal.eu, MATESOL.info and FindAMasters. All of the 161 postgraduate programmes which had at least an ELT-related module were included in the initial list.

Publicity documents available on HEI websites were scrutinised, and a spreadsheet was compiled with key information about all the ELT master's programmes available in the UK. For each programme, 13 aspects were investigated, as listed below. These aspects are seen as key in students' decisions to choose where to undertake a UK-based ELT master's.

1.   University name
2.   Programme title
3.   University location (whether a campus or a city centre university)
4.   Division (name of faculty, school and/or division where the programme is based)
5.   Mode of study (i.e. full or part time, with an indication of length of time for programme completion)
6.   Format (on-campus or online)
7.   Modules (a list of both core and optional modules)
8.   Types of assessment
9.   Target audience (pre- and/or in-service teachers)
10.   Entry requirements (academic qualifications, English proficiency level and/or professional experience)
11.   Cost (for home, European and international students)
12.   Funding opportunities (whether or not scholarships are available)
13.   Website

The results of the document analysis were supplemented with information gathered from programme directors. In total, 127 programme directors were contacted between March and October 2016; 76 replied to our request. The directors were asked to check the accuracy of the details for their respective programmes and to provide a 100-word description of the master's they lead.

Some of the initial 161 programmes were omitted from the audit upon request from programme directors. The most frequent reasons for omission were the discontinuity of some programmes or the directors' belief that their programmes are not ELT-related. The ELT master's audit presents 141 programmes[6]: 97 have been cross-checked with the programme directors and 44 contain only the information that could be found online. For the sake of comprehensiveness, it was decided to include all the available information for these programmes in the audit irrespective of whether the programme directors had cross-checked them.

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6   Separate entries in the audit have only been created when there were separate websites for the programmes.

3.2 Pre-study questionnaire

As indicated in Section 1, research questions 3 and 4 focus on the factors influencing students' choice of master's programmes and their desires and expectations regarding these programmes, respectively. In order to answer these questions, a questionnaire was administered to all students enrolled in ELT master's programmes across the UK in the 2015–16 academic year. Informed by the scarce literature in the field (cf. Section 2), the questionnaire was collectively designed by the project team members and contained six main parts as indicated in Table 1 (see Appendix A for a full version of the questionnaire).

Table 1: Pre-study questionnaire

Part	Explanation
Introduction	Brief introduction to the project and request for collaboration
About you	Background information about the participants, their programmes and their motivations to undertake a master's in ELT
Choosing the UK	Main factors attracting students to study in the UK (as opposed to other English-speaking countries and/or participants' home countries)
Choosing your institution	Key reasons in students' choices of a UK university and a master's programme
Your expectations	Students' anticipations in relation to modules, delivery formats, assessment types and other academic/personal matters
Prize draw	Thank you token incentive for students to complete the questionnaire

The questionnaire contained 25 questions: 16 closed and nine open-ended. The former group encompassed both multiple-choice (requiring either one or more than one answer) and Likert-scale questions (probing on perceived importance, frequency or agreement). Most of the open-ended questions required straightforward answers (e.g. country of origin and title of master's programme). There were only three questions that required longer replies from participants: questions 9 (participants' reasons for taking a master's in ELT), 17 (participants' rationale for choosing the UK as a study destination) and 25 (participants' top three expectations for their master's). The reduced number of these questions was an attempt not to make the questionnaire overly long, which could potentially discourage participants from completing it.

Once the questionnaire had been designed, it was piloted by the researchers and by recent master's graduates, who were similar to the target group. The former checked that the technology worked; the latter group consisted of ELT master's students who had been taught in 2014–15 by the researchers. Convenience sampling was adopted for the selection of pilot participants, who answered the questionnaire online. The feedback informed some specific changes made to the questionnaire – mostly in relation to the wording of a few questions (e.g. use of 'first degree', 'undergraduate', 'bachelor's' in question 5 and the inclusion of examples in questions 8 and 10).

The final version of the pre-study questionnaire was administered to 2015–16 ELT master's students in the UK from September to November 2015. Access to these students was facilitated by programme directors, a list of whom had already been compiled for the audit document (cf. Section 3.1). Emails were sent to the directors asking whether they could publicise the questionnaire among their student cohorts, and incentives were offered to the students who completed the questionnaire (four Amazon vouchers: one worth £50 and three worth £15 each).

In total, 502 students answered the questionnaire. Their demographics are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Pre-study questionnaire respondents' background

Criterion	Breakdown
Sex	Male: 22.6% Female: 77.4%
Age	Minimum: 20 years old Maximum: 61 years old Mean: 30 years old
Country	China, Hong Kong and Taiwan: 43.3% UK: 24.3% Europe: 10.6% South and East Asia: 7.6% Other: 14.2%
First degree	English: 38.7% English and Education: 14.3% Other language-related majors: 17.2% Other majors: 29.8%
Pre-sessional programme	Not attended: 73.1% Attended in the UK: 25.5% Attended in the participant's home country: 1.4%

Figure 1: Pre-study questionnaire respondents' teaching experience
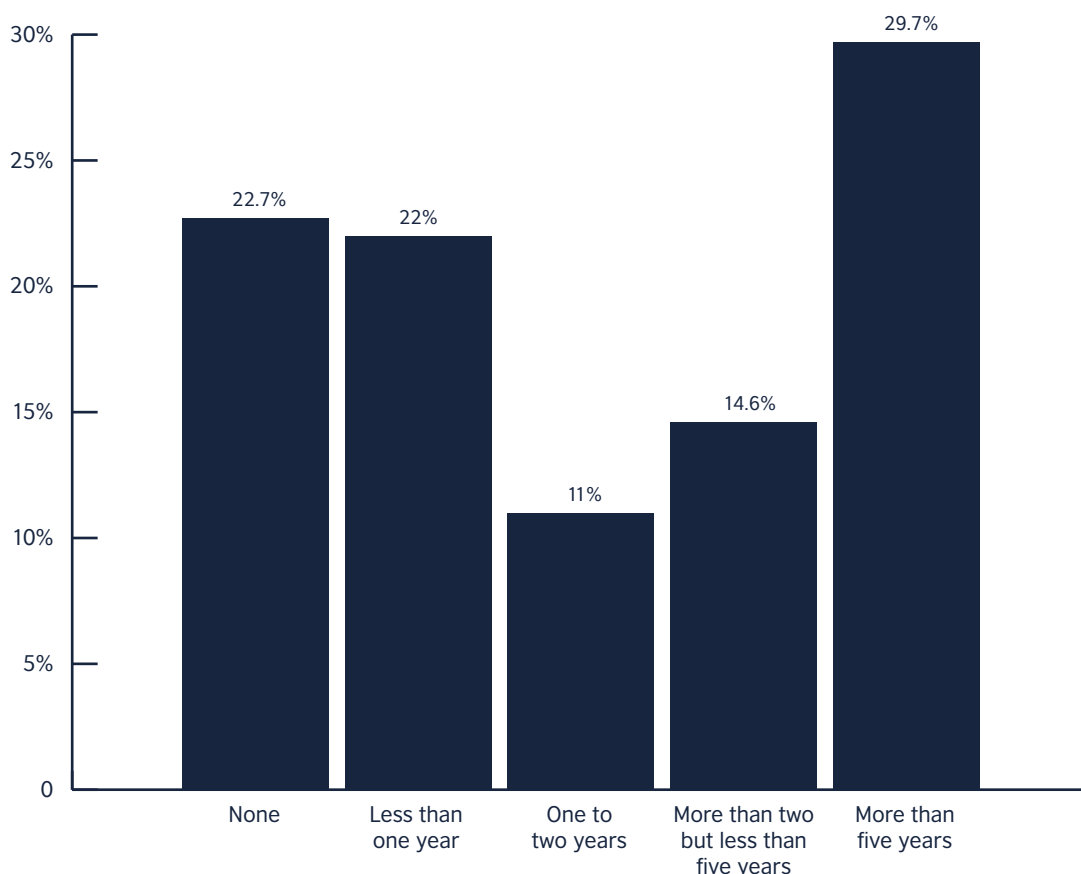
Some of the results included in Table 2 are not surprising to those who are involved in the delivery of ELT master's programmes in the UK: most of the students are female, and they come primarily from China and the UK. More interesting is the respondents' educational background: while half of the participants (53 per cent) have an undergraduate degree in a closely related area (i.e. English or English and education), a considerable group (29.8 per cent) studied completely different subjects (e.g. business, media studies and psychology). This indicates that a master's degree in ELT represents an academic and/or a career change for these participants, which is reinforced by their lack of previous teaching experience (see Figure 1).

Experienced teachers (i.e. those with more than five years of teaching practice) are the largest single category (29.7 per cent). However, there are also two other similarly large groups, each accounting for nearly one-quarter of the respondents: those who have no teaching experience (22.7 per cent) and those who have less than one year of teaching experience (22 per cent). This distribution highlights the heterogeneous nature of the students who undertake ELT master's.

The participants were also asked about their current studies, and their answers are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Pre-study questionnaire respondents' current studies

Criterion	Breakdown
University location	England: 81.1% Scotland: 15.1% Northern Ireland: 3.8%
Master's programme	ELT: 64.7% ELT and Applied Linguistics: 15.1% Applied Linguistics: 12.4% Education (other than previous): 3.4% Other: 4.4%
Mode of study	On-campus: 78.8% Online: 20.8% Other: 0.4%
Funding	Self-/family-financed: 82.8% Scholarship from the UK: 5.4% Scholarship from an overseas country's government: 4.8% Scholarship from an overseas non-government organisation: 2.2% Other: 4.8%

Table 3 reveals that the prototypical profile of our respondents is a student enrolled in an on-campus ELT master's programme in England, who pays for his/her studies. It should be noted that, despite our efforts to engage master's students based in Wales, we were unsuccessful in capturing their voices in the pre-study questionnaire.

The answers given to the pre-study questionnaire were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively depending on the nature of the question being asked. Closed questions were quantified initially by Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) and later by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Open-ended questions were first coded by two researchers and then quantified accordingly.

3.3 Post-study questionnaire

The aim of the post-study questionnaire (see Appendix B) was to collect relevant data to research question 5: 'In what ways do the programmes fulfil (or fail to fulfil) their [i.e. students'] desires and expectations?' The size of the post-study questionnaire was similar to the pre-study one, and it also employed a mix of closed and open-ended questions (i.e. 15 and eight, respectively). Out of the 23 questions in the post-study questionnaire, 16 were only slightly reworded from the pre-study questionnaire (e.g. 'How important do you think each of these modules is for an ELT master's course?' became 'Having completed the taught part of your master's, how important do you think the following are for an ELT master's course?') and two were modified (e.g. items from different questions were combined). Only five new questions were added to the post-study questionnaire (i.e. questions 11, 12, 21, 22 and 23 in Appendix B).

After piloting this research instrument with 2014–15 master's graduates, the final version of the post-study questionnaire was circulated among the 2015–16 cohort of ELT master's students in the UK. Once more, the research team relied on the generous collaboration of programme directors across the country to ensure that the questionnaire reached the target population.

The data was collected over approximately five months, between April and September 2016. When compared to the first round of data collection, the post-study questionnaire was administered for a longer period of time because there is considerable variation in the final month of classes in ELT master's programmes in the UK.

In total, 346 participants responded to the post-study questionnaire. Table 4 profiles the respondents' background and their current studies.

Table 4: Post-study questionnaire respondents' profiling

Criterion	Breakdown
Sex	Male: 25.3%
	Female: 74.7%
Age	Minimum: 21 years old
	Maximum: 62 years old
	Mean: 32 years old
Country	China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan: 32.2%
	UK: 25.8%
	Europe: 13.6%
	South and East Asia: 9.3%
	Other: 19.1%
University location	England: 79.2%
	Scotland: 17.6%
	Northern Ireland: 2.9%
	Wales: 0.3%
Master's programme	ELT: 71.5%
	ELT and Applied Linguistics: 14.4%
	Applied Linguistics: 8.5%
	Education (other than previous): 2.7%
	Other: 2.9%
Mode of study	On-campus: 77.4%
	Online: 22.3%
	Other: 0.3%

The description provided in Table 4 is similar to that of the pre-study questionnaire respondents in Section 3.2: most respondents are female with an average age of 32 and they are primarily from China and the UK. Although there was a reduction of ten per cent in the Chinese respondents, they are still the majority group. Other demographics are similar. Although there is Welsh take-up of the questionnaire, 0.3 per cent represents only one respondent, which means that more representation from Wales-based ELT master's students is needed.

Some minor variation can also be observed in the previous teaching experience of the pre-study and post-study questionnaire respondents. Figure 2 shows the distribution for the latter group.

Figure 2: Post-study questionnaire respondents' teaching experience
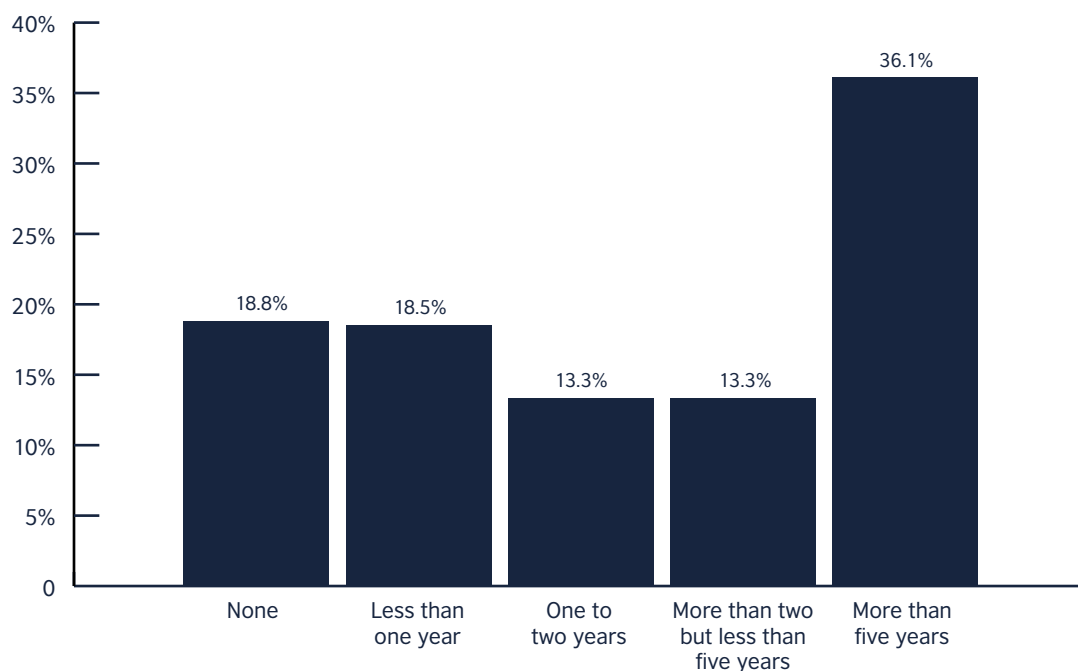
When Figure 1 and Figure 2 are compared, it becomes noticeable that the overall number of respondents with more than five years' experience increased at the expense of the inexperienced ones, especially those with no or less than one year of teaching practice.

The analysis of the post-study questionnaire answers followed the same procedure described in Section 3.2. The answers to closed questions were analysed quantitatively through BOS and SPSS. The answers to open-ended questions were first scrutinised qualitatively and later quantified.

3.4   Focus groups

In terms of data collection, the online pre- and post-study questionnaires were extremely useful: they provided a straightforward and cost-effective way of gathering data from a large number of participants. Nevertheless, questionnaires provide respondents with inherently limited space to explain their answers or to offer their own insights. In an attempt to overcome this limitation, the questionnaires used in this study contained a few open-ended questions (see Appendices A and B). In addition, it was also decided to use another research instrument – namely, focus groups – which allowed selected groups of students to discuss certain topics at greater length.

Developed by the researchers collectively, the focus-group guide (see Appendix C) was divided into five main parts. The design of the guide was informed by the results of the pre-study questionnaire, which had been analysed by this time, and the initial responses of the post-study questionnaire, which was already open at that time. The description in Table 5 highlights these cross-references between the focus group and the questionnaires.

The first focus-group guide was piloted with a group of six students (three male and three female) who were taking an ELT master's in the 2015–16 academic year at a Scottish university. The participants were recruited only for the purpose of the pilot and did not take part in the focus groups conducted for the study. Two researchers (one of whom was the moderator) reviewed the pilot focus group and made a few changes in the guide. These modifications centred on moderator's guidance (e.g. the need for further probing in relation to the concept of academic/ student support), language use (e.g. first language was adopted instead of language background) and the questions to be asked (e.g. rather than asking for three advantages and disadvantages, the participants were asked to talk about them in a freer way). The final version of the focus group guide can be found in Appendix C.

Four focus groups were conducted for the present study. The original plan was to hold one focus group in each of the countries in the UK. However, because Wales-based students did not participate in the questionnaires, it was decided to hold one focus group in Northern Ireland and Scotland, and two in England, thus accounting for the fact that the latter has the largest ELT master's student population.

Table 5: Focus group guide

Part	Description
Participant information	Participants were requested to introduce themselves based on pre-set criteria (e.g. name, country, first language) and to describe the cohort at their university in relation to the number of students, breadth of nationalities, first languages and previous teaching experiences.
Choice of destination and course	This part probed into aspects of relevance to research question 3. First, participants were asked which element in their choice of master's they had found most difficult to choose: the country, the university or the specific programme. This was designed to shed light on the relative weight of these elements in the participants' choice of destination – something that was not addressed in the initial questionnaire. In the following part, participants were introduced to the three most frequent reasons given in the pre-study questionnaire for studying in the UK and/or a specific university, and were asked to discuss the importance of each factor. Finally, participants were invited to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of doing a master's in the UK, a question which had already appeared in the questionnaires.
Expectations and experiences	This part relates to research question 4. It started with a question on the initial personal and academic challenges faced by the participants at the beginning of the academic year. The 15 expectations listed in question 24 in the pre-study questionnaire (see Appendix A) were handed to participants, who had to categorise them into fulfilled or unfulfilled. This part ended with participants' suggestions on the potential improvements that could be made to the student experience.
Course specificities	This part aimed to collect relevant data to research question 5. The questions asked students to consider their ideal choice of modules (see question 14 in Appendix B), to contrast real and ideal balances of delivery modes (see questions 16 and 17 in Appendix B), to compare teaching practice and microteaching, and to reflect on the ideal student cohort.
Closure	At the end of the focus group, the moderator summarised what had been discussed and provided participants with a chance to add anything else they wished to discuss.

Table 6: Focus groups

Focus group	Researcher	Date	University	Length	Participants
1	A (Female)	21 June	Scotland	1:35	Sex: Female (4); Male (2) Country: China (5); South Korea (1)
2	B (Male)	23 June	Northern Ireland	1:50	Sex: Female (2); Male (3) Country: Ireland (2); Northern Ireland (1); Saudi Arabia (1); United States (1)
3	C (Male)	29 June	England	2:02	Sex: Female (4); Male (2) Country: China (4); UK (1); US (1)
4	D (Female)	1 July	England	1:17	Sex: Female (4) Country: Brazil (1); China (1); Indonesia (1); South Africa (1)

The focus groups were conducted in June and July 2016 after the student participants had already completed the taught part of their master's degree and were already working on their dissertations. Data collection involved four researchers, each in charge of a geographical area, as can be seen in Table 6.

Access to the student participants was once more facilitated by the programme directors, who also arranged the physical space in their own universities for the focus groups to be conducted. An invitation was sent out to the students, and self-selection was used as a means of gathering participants. Table 6 shows the varied composition of each focus group, the most diverse of which was the one conducted in Northern Ireland: there was an even distribution of male and female participants, and they came from four different countries. Homogeneity was observed in two focus groups: Focus Group 1 had a concentration of Chinese participants, and Focus Group 4 only had female students. However, we believe this homogeneity mirrors the population under investigation here (cf. Table 2).

The four focus groups were audio and/or video recorded to assist with the process of transcription. The files were then transcribed in such a way that the content of the discussions was maintained. However, the transcribers did not include all instances of repeated words, hesitation markers and fillers in the final outputs, as the objective was to conduct a content analysis.

The transcriptions were then analysed qualitatively with the intention of using participants' individual comments and group interaction to add depth to the questionnaire data. This was a particularly useful way of uncovering participants' understanding of some of the questionnaire items, although, of course, comments cannot be taken as representative of the much larger questionnaire cohort.

4

Results

In this section, we present our research findings in an integrated way. We draw on the relevant data collected through document analysis, pre- and post-study questionnaires and post-study focus groups to address the questions that guided our study. The results included in the report account for the answers given by all the participants, without breaking them down into sub-groups (e.g. nationality, age or teaching experience). Sections 4.1 and 4.2 draw on document analysis to answer the first two research questions. The remaining sections present data from the questionnaires followed by relevant findings from the four focus groups. The aim of this report is to present the general findings to a wider and general readership, making it as accessible as possible to different stakeholders.

4.1   What master's courses in ELT are currently offered in the UK?

There are currently 141 ELT-related master's programmes (e.g. MA TESOL, MA TESOL and Translation Studies, MA Applied Linguistics for TEFL, MA Language Teaching, MPhil Applied Linguistics) on offer across the UK. As expected, the range of these programmes varies with regard to:

a. The mode of study (full-time and/or part-time options) and duration (generally one or two years, but there are some longer programmes).

b. The format in which the programme is offered (on-campus or online).

c. The types of modules offered (e.g. ELT Methodology, Research Methods, Second Language Acquisition) depending on the programme.

d. The different types of assessment followed (e.g. dissertation or portfolio, essays, exams, observed teaching practice, presentations, written assignments).

e. The target audience (pre- and/or in-service teachers).

f. The entry requirements (e.g. first degree required, years of teaching experience, IELTS score).

g. The cost for the completion of the programme (fees for home/EU and international students).

h. The funding opportunities offered (whether scholarships are on offer for the completion of the programme).

i. The programme distinctiveness as specified by the director of each of the programmes identified.

The specificities and basic characteristics of each of the 141 master's programmes that we have identified can be found in the master's ELT audit document, which is available on this website, but it has not been formatted: www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Audit%20Final%2010.pdf

4.2   What are the modes/formats (including online and blended), components (including dissertations) and target students of the different programmes?

The 141 ELT-related master's programmes we have identified are delivered in two modes: either full or part time. What varies is the duration for the completion of each programme.

With regard to the format in which they are delivered, there are two possibilities:

a. (Mostly or solely) face-to-face delivery (on campus): 124 programmes fall under this category.[7]

b. Online delivery (distance learning): 23 programmes fall under this category.[8]

With regard to the different components (core and optional modules offered and types of assessment), these vary considerably depending on the master's programme (cf. the details included in the master's ELT audit document).

Finally, as far as the target students are concerned, there are three possibilities:

a. Programmes that target only pre-service teachers (students with no or little previous English language teaching experience): nine master's programmes fall under this category.

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7   It should be noted that the total here does not equal 141 (the total number of master's programmes we identified) since one programme can be delivered through more than one means (on-campus or online).

8   In the master's ELT audit document, online master's programmes have been presented in separate entries from their on-campus counterparts when they had their own websites. In all other cases, there is a single entry specifying the option of doing the master's programme face-to-face or online.

b. Programmes that target only in-service teachers (students who have some teaching experience; note, though, that the amount of experience required in each of the programmes varies): 43 master's programmes fall under this category.

c. Programmes that target both pre- and in-service teachers: 89 master's programmes fall under this category.

4.3 What are the key factors influencing the students' decision to enrol on one of these programmes?

In the pre-study questionnaire, the respondents were given a list of 11 potential factors influencing their decision to study in the UK and were asked to choose the three most important ones. Figure 3 indicates the importance of each factor.

Together, the top three factors chosen by the participants account for more than half of the reasons attracting students to come and/or stay in the UK (58.4 per cent). The top three reasons reveal students' evaluative, pragmatic and academic concerns in choosing to study in the UK. As can be seen, studying in well-regarded HEIs is the most important factor in attracting students to the UK. Course length appears as the second most important factor (18.8 per cent), and this is especially relevant for EU and international students. When compared to master's degrees offered around the world (e.g. China and the United States), UK master's degrees

are considerably shorter: they require just one year of full-time study. Studying in the UK means students can save time (and, as a result, money). Academic support is in third position, totalling 17.2 per cent of the factors identified by the participants in their decision to study in the UK.

It should be noted that overall cost appeared in fourth place. Cost was identified as a key factor in 11.5 per cent of the top three choices made by the participants, which is nearly half of the percentage for reputation. This seems to suggest that ELT master's students are willing to compromise in terms of how much they will spend on their education – provided that they believe the university is worthy of their financial investment.

The respondents were additionally asked an open-ended question on why they chose to study in the UK as opposed to their own or another country. As with the closed question, the focus was on the strengths of the UK, and the aim was to identify what the respondents perceived as the most important gains of studying in this country. Methodologically, this open-ended question provided the participants with room to personalise their answers and provided the research team with a way of identifying any other factors that had not been conceived by the time the pre-study questionnaire was designed. The open-ended questions were manually coded into 13 categories and later quantified. Figure 4 presents a breakdown of the findings.

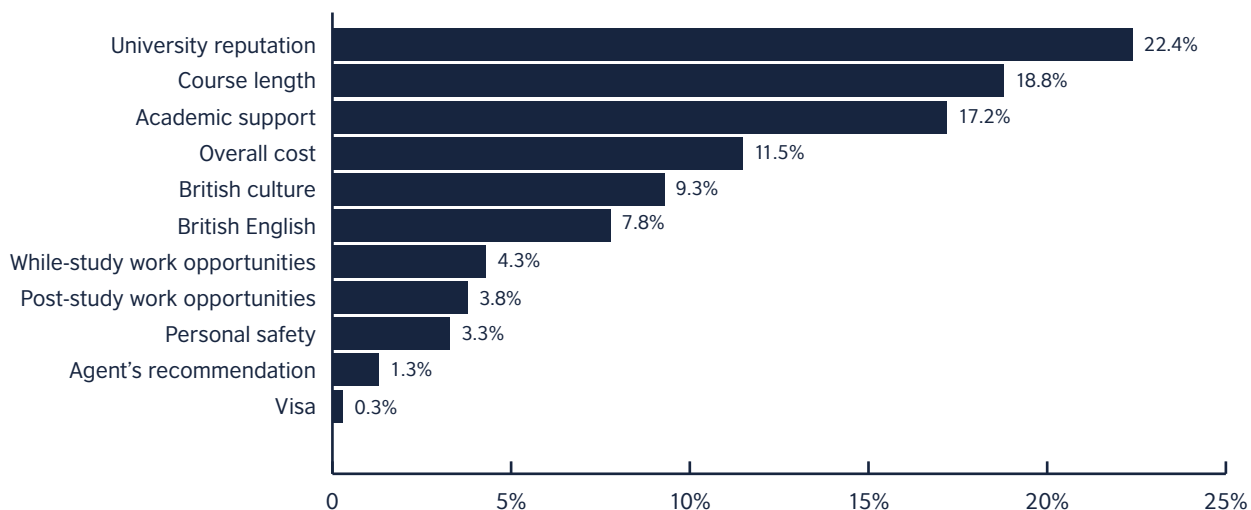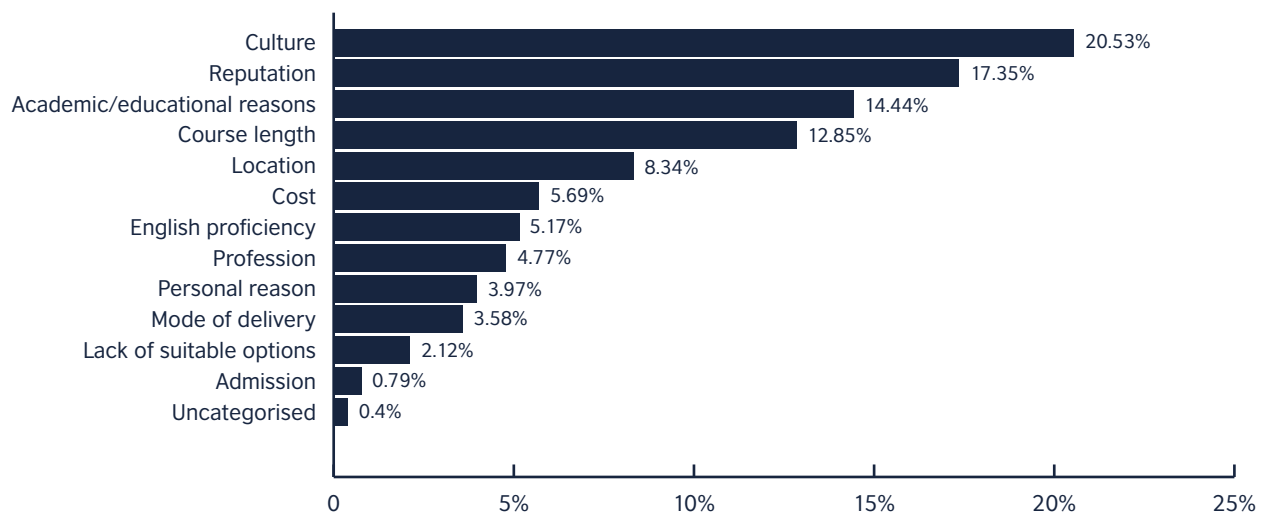**Figure 3:** Factors attracting ELT master's students to the UK

Figure 4: ELT master's students' reasons for studying in the UK rather than in their own or another country

Factor	Percentage
Culture	20.53%
Reputation	17.35%
Academic/educational reasons	14.44%
Course length	12.85%
Location	8.34%
Cost	5.69%
English proficiency	5.17%
Profession	4.77%
Personal reason	3.97%
Mode of delivery	3.58%
Lack of suitable options	2.12%
Admission	0.79%
Uncategorised	0.4%

The categories created from participants' answers to this specific open-ended question reveal that there is considerable overlap between the factors foreseen by the research team and the factors freely identified by the respondents. The first six categories in Figure 4 can be directly or indirectly related to those in Figure 3:

a. Culture encompasses both British culture and British English.

b. Reputation equates to university reputation.

c. Academic/educational reasons encompass academic support.

d. Course length appears in both figures as a standalone factor.

e. Location could entail concern for personal safety as well as a preference for a particular area of the UK.

f. Cost corresponds to overall cost.

Together, these six categories total 79.2 per cent of the data collected on why the respondents decided to study in the UK. The overlap between the closed and open questions can be interpreted in two ways: either that the researchers' predictions were accurate or that the participants were influenced by the options given in the closed question. However, as the participants were free to word their answers in any way they wished, which also included the possibility of not answering the question at all, it is likely that they perceived these as important factors irrespective of whether they thought of these factors independently or whether they identified these in the questionnaire.

The other reasons identified by the respondents totalled about five per cent (or less) each. Among these factors, the participants indicated that pursuing their master's in the UK would improve their command of the English language ('Because I thought I need to improve my English without people from my country.'[9]) and increase their employability ('Getting a[n] MA degree from a British institution will help my career back home.'). These two reasons are similar in that a UK ELT master's degree is seen in a pragmatic way: it will provide the participants with the linguistic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that they need to become (more) fluent users of English and/or get a (better) job.

Another key choice students have to make relates to the specific university where they will undertake their ELT master's programme. One closed question in the pre-study questionnaire probed the perceived importance of 17 factors that could potentially influence students' selection of a UK university. In this case, the respondents were asked to rate on a Likert scale whether each of the factors was very important, quite important, not very important or not at all important. While the scale did not contain a neutral option, thus forcing the respondents to make a decision, it contained a not-applicable option. This was needed because some of the factors would only be relevant to certain groups of students (e.g. 'recommendation from agent' is a factor that would not affect home students). Table 7 indicates all the 17 factors presented in the questionnaire as well as their respective means and standard deviations. The higher the mean value, the more importance the participants attributed to a specific factor.

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9   The excerpts written by ELT master's students included in the present report have not been edited in any way. They are reproduced here as they appear in the participants' answers to the questionnaires.

Table 7: Factors in choosing a university

Factors	Mean	Std deviation
University's reputation	3.54	0.640
Study facilities	3.31	0.771
Published university ranking	3.20	0.814
Safety	3.16	0.979
Student support	3.07	0.852
Cost of fees	3.05	0.869
Location within the UK	2.98	0.916
Cost of accommodation and/or living expenses	2.98	0.917
Recommendation from former or current student	2.87	0.863
Availability of scholarship or other financial support	2.78	1.014
Recommendation from teacher	2.75	0.847
Application process	2.72	0.963
Other recommendation	2.39	0.819
Recommendation from agent	2.34	0.881
Entertainment and social life	2.31	0.886
Opportunity to join someone you know	2.21	0.923
Sports facilities	2.19	0.920

The first and the third factors are similar in that they indicate the relevance the participants ascribe to third-party evaluations of their chosen university. These evaluations may be in the realm of reputation, which is a perceptual factor, or in the numerous metrics-driven university rankings and league tables that are common in the UK (e.g. *Times Higher Education World University Rankings, The Complete University Guide League Tables and the Guardian University League Table)*. Students' choice of university is primarily guided by the same factor that informs their decision to study in the UK (cf. Figure 3 and Figure 4), that is, reputation influences both decisions.

Academic matters are also a concern for ELT master's students. They regard study facilities and student support as quite important. They view the venues, equipment and resources available to them as the second most important factor. The facilities are more highly rated than student support, which appears as the fifth most frequent factor.

Students' choice of university is also guided by considerations about the local environment. More specifically, safety appears as a salient factor – the fourth most important one – in a student's decision of where to study. This highlights the fact that the university choice is not solely guided by evaluations and/or academic matters.

The fact that cost of fees appears as the sixth most important factor underlines a point that has been made earlier in relation to the choice of the UK as a destination country: students are not primarily guided by the cost of their education. While this practical matter is undoubtedly relevant in ELT master's students' decisions in which country and university to study, other factors seem to be more pressing and/or relevant in the decision of where to undertake a master's in the UK. The ranking of cost of fees may be linked to the length of master's programmes in the UK: because respondents know they will only study for a year, they might be more flexible in terms of their budget. It is likely that the overall investment needed for a one-year master's will be lower than that needed for a two- or three-year master's degree.

Prospective ELT master's students additionally have to make a decision with regard to the postgraduate programme itself. As indicated in the master's ELT audit document (see also Sections 4.1 and 4.2), there are 141 ELT-related master's programmes on offer in the UK. Several universities offer more than one master's programme to suit the needs of different students. For this reason, one of the questions in the pre-study questionnaire probed into the potential factors that guide choice of programme. The respondents were asked to evaluate 13 factors on a four-point Likert scale of importance. The factors as well as their mean scores and standard deviations are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Factors informing ELT master's students' choice of programme

Factors	Mean	Std deviation
Course content	3.63	0.573
Reputation of the course	3.56	0.622
Reputation of academic/teaching staff	3.46	0.680
Degree title	3.46	0.695
Course structure	3.34	0.760
Dissertation requirement	2.97	0.881
Types of assessment	2.89	0.880
Number of teaching hours	2.82	0.933
Course starting and finishing dates	2.81	0.921
Amount of teaching experience required	2.74	1.006
Opportunity for teaching practice	2.68	1.109
English language level required	2.67	1.155
Number of students on the course	2.39	0.972

The findings show that students' choice of ELT master's programme is first and foremost informed by academic matters. The participants indicate that course content is the most important factor they will take into account. This means they will examine which modules are on offer and consider whether these suit their needs and/or wants.

Academic concerns about the programmes are followed by evaluations of the course and the teaching staff. The results in Table 8 indicate that reputation is relevant in one's choice of master's programme, reinforcing the findings for one's decision to study in the UK as a country (cf. Figure 3 and Figure 4) and for one's choice of university (cf. Table 7).

The top five factors in Table 8 include two more practical factors: degree title and course structure. Similar to the other three factors, these two also have a mean score above three, meaning that they have been regarded as quite important overall. Students' concern with the degree title is likely to be linked to their future aspirations: the type of degree awarded (e.g. MA, MEd, MSc, MPhil, MRes) and the named degree (e.g. Applied Linguistics, ELT, TESOL) might be perceived differently across the globe.

Finally, students also indicate that the structure of their future master's programme plays a role in their decision of which programme to undertake. Here, they consider aspects such as the balance between required and optional modules.

The focus-group data sheds additional light on students' choices. The participants were first asked to reflect on which choice had presented them with the most difficulty: country, university or programme. Country was rarely mentioned: most of the students focused on the difficulty of selecting the university or programme.

The participants were then asked to reflect on the importance of reputation, course length and academic/student support in their choices. As shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4, these had featured in the pre-study questionnaire results as key factors in students' choice of country and university, so the purpose of this question was to uncover some of the reasons for this.

Some students emphasised the importance of reputation in their choices:

> In China we focus on the ranks … the Times, QS … the Guardian. (3, China)[10]

The same student explained that having a master's degree from a highly ranked university was important in securing an interview in a Chinese company:

> They maybe do not care very much about the major you are learning, but the reputation is more important. (3, China)

A Chinese student at a different university also ascribed the importance of reputation to future employment prospects:

> What the employers really care about is the reputation. (4, China)

One student admitted that he did not qualify for one of the top universities, so his priority was to avoid one that was ranked low:

> There are a lot of universities in between … [A friend suggested that] education quality is more or less the same, so I just chose randomly. (1, China)

For some students, a good reputation appeared to be necessary but not the most salient factor when making their choice. When presented with reputation, course length and academic support, a US student stated:

> UK schools in general have a good reputation back home, so that was also kind of a factor. (2, USA)

Similarly, another US student at a different university responded to a question about reputation in terms of its necessity, without having mentioned it previously as a factor in her choice:

> I did look to see rankings because if I'm going to go half way around the world to school, I need to have a reputable school to go to. Otherwise the degree means nothing. (3, USA)

A Chinese student went further, playing down the importance of reputation in her decision making:

> Yeah, I think reputation is important, but I still will pay attention, more attention to the content, the module content. (3, China)

An Irish student, who had not enjoyed her time at a previous university with a good reputation, expressed scepticism about reputation:

> A school can have a really good reputation but each individual course is run by different people so that may or may not fit in with the reputation of the school. (2, Ireland)

Course length was commented on positively by most students in the focus groups. Some practising teachers saw the advantage in being able to get back to earning money:

> The course length is very important for me because to leave my job in Saudi Arabia they will substitute me immediately and they can't substitute me more than 12 months, so it was very important to have a TESOL master's within 12 months. (2, Saudi Arabia)

> I wanted something that would facilitate me going back to work and something that would set me up for another place and then be finished in September roughly. (2, Ireland)

One student was pleased to be able to return home after one year with her degree completed:

> For me the course length was the most enticing thing because I felt getting away from my home for just one year, it was a good thing, I felt, to be just done and over with and go back and do work back in my country … I felt if it's just one year, well, it should be just do it once and then you're done with it. (4, South Africa)

Saving time and money were mentioned by some students:

> It can save a lot of time for me. If I go to another country or just stay in China, maybe I should spend more than three years or two years. (3, China)

> One-year master's is intensive but we are not wasting too much money on accommodation, food and other things like transportation. (4, China)

The shorter course length was clearly an important factor in students' choices. The focus groups also provided the opportunity to explore how some of the students interpreted academic/student support and whether this had featured in their choice of country and university. Support is a less straightforward term than reputation, which is linked to specific rankings, and course length, and students interpreted it differently. Some mentioned help with study skills, academic writing, referencing and use of the library. Others interpreted it as having supportive tutors:

> It means having a good rapport with your tutors, you know, if you've any difficulties that they're accessible, you can talk to them, that they're approachable. (2, Ireland)

Some referred to teaching in general:

> The tutors, how they teach generally, teaching style, how they gave tasks and assignments. (2, China)

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10 The number in parentheses after each extract refers to the focus group, as described in Table 6. This is followed by the speaker's country.

Not only are these terms interpreted differently, but it was difficult in the focus groups, which were conducted after the teaching component of the master's had ended, to establish the extent to which academic/student support had featured in students' pre-course decision making. A clear example of where it was a factor came from a scholarship student who had three universities to choose from:

I think the one that was most accommodating was here, especially [name]. He helped me throughout the whole process including finding accommodation and visa! I didn't even get information on the programme booklet from the other two universities. So this was a huge factor for me. (4, Indonesia)

Some students were explicit that this was not a factor in their choice. Explaining what she understood by academic support, one student said:

I dunno, like getting settled in and everything. Like, for me, being an international student. I mean it had good support, but initially I didn't really think about that. (2, USA)

Some students assumed a university with a high reputation would have good academic support:

Out of those three [factors] I didn't necessarily consider it. I mean, I know [this university] has a good reputation for education courses so I think that goes hand-in-hand then that you would presume there would be good academic support, the level of teaching from the lecturers would be supposedly of a high standard, so you would get the necessary support. (2, UK)

Before I came here actually engaging to this major I didn't know anything about academic support, about the system, the teaching style here, so it's not very very essential factor for me. It didn't affect my decision, but generally speaking I know something about the teaching style or the academic support also the reputation of academic study in the UK is overall good so … I didn't worry too much. (1, China)

Some students talked about the difficulty of finding out about academic support:

All you know is just the ranking, and if [applicants] are willing to investigate it fully they might, but it's actually quite difficult at this stage of planning to find detailed information. (1, Korea)

Three students in one focus group mentioned both the slipperiness of the term and the difficulty of finding out about it:

It's too ambiguous a term for me to know what that means, to be more explicit. I don't know – for me, student support is something, a last resort if you're in crisis of some sort, you'd contact someone in the faculty, that's what it means to me … Academic support, I don't know what that means, I mean … I dunno. But it wasn't, so therefore it wasn't something that I considered, it wasn't part of my choice. (3, UK)

You can just see some description on a website but you don't know what they will do. (3, China)

Like you said, I can look at that and I can think of a million things that that could mean. (3, USA)

Overall, the focus group data reveals the diversity of perspectives that had been captured in the pre-study questionnaire findings.

Figure 5: Students' reasons for doing an ELT-related master's
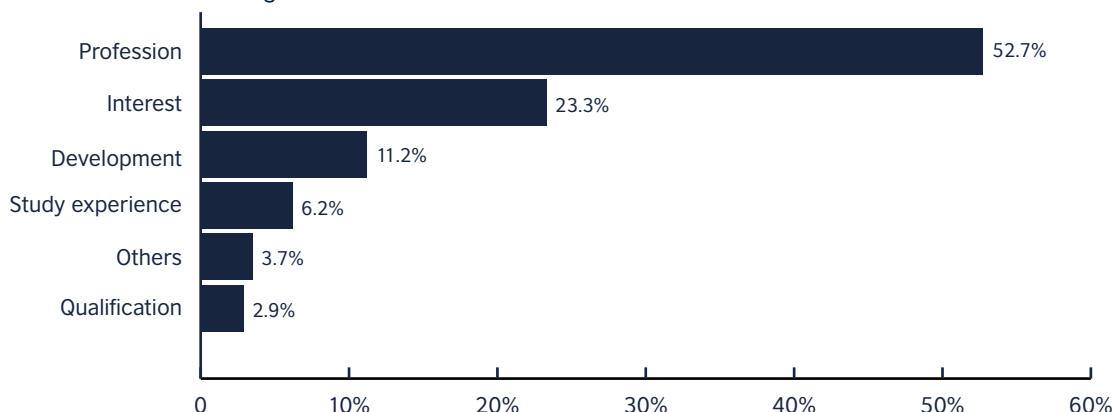
4.4 What are students' desires and expectations regarding their chosen programmes?

In order to address our fourth research question, we first asked the participants why they chose to do a master's degree in the subject. The wording of the question was intentionally general because we anticipated that ELT-related master's would take different forms (e.g. Teaching English to Young Learners, Teaching English for Academic Purposes, TESOL and Translation). The participants' answers were categorised qualitatively and subsequently quantified. Figure 5 shows the breakdown of the reasons given by the participants.

More than half of the reasons (52.7 per cent) given for undertaking an ELT-related master's relate to a pragmatic concern of the respondents. They see this postgraduate degree as a natural choice from their own current professional experience ('Because I was working as a teacher in an education institute before I came here and I want to improve my academy so that I can better teach my students after graduating.'), as a way of getting the job they wish ('I want to be a better qualified English teacher and pursue my goal of becoming a lecturer or head professor.'), or as a means to be promoted ('Current ESL teacher, looking to career progression').
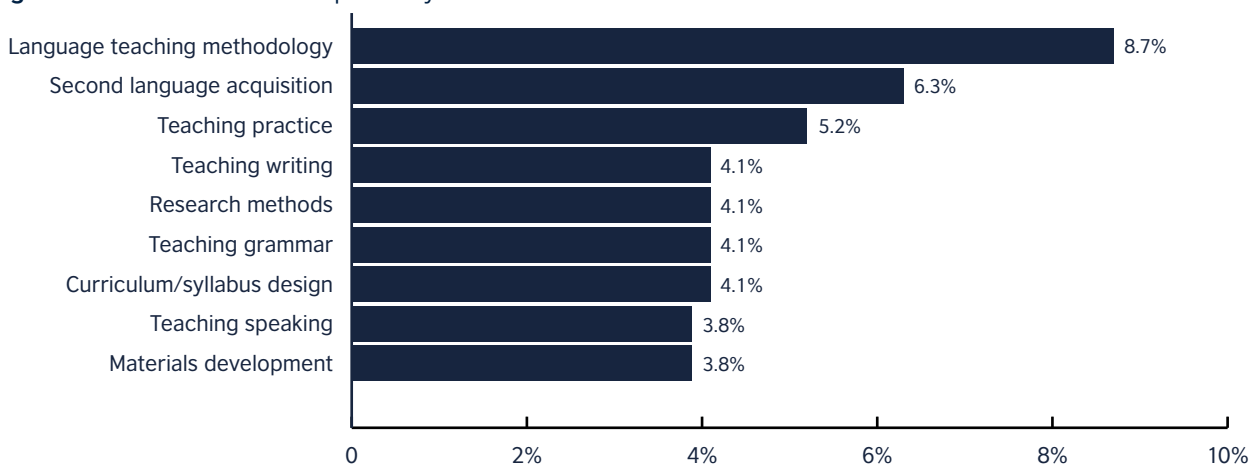
The second most frequently given reason, which accounted for nearly one-quarter of the data (23.3 per cent), corresponds to students' interest in the subject. This category encompassed answers through which the respondents explicitly positioned themselves positively towards the content that they

had just started (or were about to start) studying when they answered the pre-study questionnaire. The answers given include: 'I would like to learn more about teaching methods and broaden my horizon,' 'I have always loved English, however I liked the idea of teaching to non-native speakers,' and 'I am very interested in second language acquisition (SLA) and keen to develop effective English teaching methodologies.'

The remaining categories were somewhat infrequent, containing generally less than one-tenth of the data analysed. These are briefly explained and exemplified below.

- Development: the choice of master's degree is related to students' wishes to advance either personally or academically.
  - 'To give me the background I need to do a PhD.'
- Study experience: the chosen degree was a way of continuing what the respondents had studied prior to enrolling in their current master's programme.
  - 'To continue research I conducted back in undergraduate school.'
- Others: this encompassed ten extremely infrequent sub-categories relating to culture, English proficiency, programme matters, cost and recommendation, to cite just some examples.
  - '1. It is rare in my country. 2. It is about teaching and AL (2in1). 3. Has no exams.'
- Qualification: students' choices were led by their willingness to have a diploma.
  - 'Because it will lead me to the TEFL-Q qualification.'

Figure 6: ELT master's students' pre-study choice of modules

Module	Percentage
Language teaching methodology	8.7%
Second language acquisition	6.3%
Teaching practice	5.2%
Teaching writing	4.1%
Research methods	4.1%
Teaching grammar	4.1%
Curriculum/syllabus design	4.1%
Teaching speaking	3.8%
Materials development	3.8%

One key aspect of our research was to investigate students' desires and expectations with regard to the modules they would like to take as part of their master's. One closed question required the respondents to select the modules that would make up their ideal master's programme. The participants could choose up to eight modules reflecting the maximum number usually required for a one-year master's programme in the UK. They had to consider a detailed list of 31 modules (see Question 21 in Appendix A) that had been prepared by the researchers, informed by the initial findings of our master's ELT audit document. Figure 6 indicates the top nine modules chosen by all participants (an extra module was included because the last two had the same percentage – 3.8 per cent).

The modules chosen by the participants at the start of their ELT master's programme show that they would like to have practical input on how to perform their (future) roles in the language classroom. This explains the fact that the most frequently selected module is language teaching methodology. It also explains why there are six other methodology-focused modules in the top nine selections. Among the several options they had been given, the participants seem to be specifically concerned about one language level – grammar – and two productive skills – writing and speaking.

The appearance of second language acquisition as the second most frequently chosen module acknowledges the nature of the subject matter the participants will teach. Not only do they wish to learn how to teach, they are also interested in the scientific foundations that will inform their (future) pedagogical practice. The participants realise that ELT is not simply a matter of teaching the language and/or about the language, but also learning about the processes that students experience in their language-acquisition journey.

The specific nature of an ELT master's is highlighted in the appearance of teaching practice as the third most frequently chosen module. Different from other master's (e.g. Linguistics, Literature), an ELT master's usually has a strong practice-oriented component: the students also have to learn how to perform their pedagogical role in the classroom. Therefore, in addition to learning how to teach languages and how a second language is acquired, the participants indicate that they would like to put their methodological and theoretical knowledge into practice. Although students' choice of programme was not primarily guided by the availability of opportunities for teaching practice (cf. Table 8), the results show that this module is welcomed in the respondents' ideal master's programmes. It might be the case that the respondents take for granted that ELT master's will provide them with opportunities for teaching practice, which would help to explain why this aspect features prominently in Figure 6 but not so much in Table 8.

Table 9: ELT master's students' preferred delivery modes

Factors	Mean	Std deviation
Seminars or workshops	3.69	0.822
Lectures	3.54	0.934
Independent study	3.53	0.862
Teaching practice	3.27	1.108
One-to-one tutorials	3.23	1.088
Observations of classroom teaching	3.14	1.057
e-learning	2.92	1.070

Another aspect to be noted is that the respondents selected a module on teaching practice (teaching students who are indeed learning English as a foreign language) over a similar type of module – namely, microteaching (teaching their master's peers who pretend to be language learners at a certain proficiency level). When given the choice between an environment which might resemble their future working locus and one which is more controlled, the participants prefer the former despite its inherently more challenging nature.

The appearance of research methods in the list of preferred modules highlights the academic nature of a master's. The participants know that most master's programmes in the UK require the undertaking of a research project whose findings have to be reported in the form of a dissertation. The dissertation is a substantial piece of work and is worth most credits of a master's programme. For most of the students (if not all), writing a dissertation will probably be a completely novel genre. In addition, conducting research is likely to be an activity with which most student/teachers are unfamiliar. Their selection of a module on research methods can be seen as a request for support in this area. This interpretation would reinforce the previous discussion on the factors informing students' choice of the UK as a destination and of their specific university. In both cases, the respondents indicated academic support (cf. Figure 3) and student support (cf. Table 7) as relevant factors. Research methods could therefore be seen as these students' requests for support at the curriculum level.

The list of modules reproduced in Figure 3 also shows the participants' interest in developing their knowledge in curriculum/syllabus design and materials development. When compared to other practice-oriented modules (e.g. teaching writing, teaching grammar and teaching speaking), the former two modules show the participants' concern about general aspects in relation to their (future) day-to-day pedagogical practice. They wish to master the skills of planning a course themselves and to create materials for it – irrespective of its language level and skill foci.

The participants' desires with regard to delivery modes were also investigated in the pre-study questionnaire. They were provided with a list of seven modes (cf. Table 9) and were asked to decide how frequently they would like each to appear in their master's programme. This closed question was answered on a five-point Likert scale of frequency, ranging from none to all. A higher mean in Table 9 indicates that the respondents would like to have their classes delivered in that specific delivery mode more often.

The findings show that, if they were given the choice of choosing how their classes are delivered, ELT master's students would welcome seminars or workshops – delivery modes that combine tutor input with student activities.

The practical nature of ELT master's becomes noticeable in the mean observed for teaching practice and observations of classroom teaching. While the participants would welcome both delivery modes as part of their postgraduate education, they would prefer to have more of the former than the latter. This is consistent with our earlier point that the respondents are not entirely happy to take a backseat in their learning journey: they wish to be involved in more active ways of learning too. In addition, this delivery mode also reinforces the respondents' choice of modules (see Figure 6) where they had expressed their willingness to undertake an entire module on teaching practice.

An unforeseen result was the fact that e-learning was rated as the least frequently preferred of all delivery modes. This is somewhat surprising, as technology is probably integrated in the lives of these (mostly young) respondents (see Section 3). While they have indicated that they would like to have some e-learning as part of their courses, a comparative analysis of the results presented in Table 9 shows that the respondents prefer their study to be delivered through all the other six means more often.

The respondents' desires in relation to assessment practices were also examined in the pre-study questionnaire. The participants were given a list of 13 assessment types (cf. Figure 7) and asked to choose all the forms they would like used in the course of their master's programme. They could also add other forms if they so wished under other.

Figure 8 shows that the two most frequently chosen assessment types correspond to the prototypical ways in which master's students are assessed at UK universities: essays and dissertations. This result should not be interpreted as a consequence of the status quo. In other words, there is no evidence in the results that the students chose these two types because they know about the frequent use of essays and dissertations at university level. Should the participants' answers have been biased, exam/test, another prototypical way through which university students are evaluated, would also have featured high in Figure 7, which is clearly not the case.

The final piece of assessed work that ELT master's students have to produce is, in most cases, a dissertation. Despite the fact that this genre is unknown to most students, they appreciate it and welcome having their knowledge evaluated through this form. Some master's programmes replace the dissertation with a portfolio, which, according to the findings in Figure 7, is among the wants of fewer students overall. It is also worthy of note that the viva – the spoken genre that would correspond to a dissertation – is not as popular as the dissertation. While vivas are part and parcel of the experience of being a master's student overseas (e.g. Brazil and Japan), they are not a requirement in the UK.

The participants welcome a variety of spoken assessment types (other than vivas): class participation, presentation and teaching practice/ peers. They would like to have their performances evaluated either as master's students or as student teachers. The frequent selection of teaching

practice/peers as a desired assessment type reflects a common thread in the findings discussed so far: the students welcome ways in which their pedagogical practice is integrated into their learning experience (see also Figure 6 and Table 9).

Other forms of pedagogically oriented assessment types can be found in Figure 87: written reflection on teaching and lesson plan. Although they have been chosen by comparatively fewer students, these written types of assessment are also in line with students' willingness to be assessed not only in terms of their knowledge of teaching/learning matters but on their application of these matters to their practice.

In the final question in the pre-study questionnaire, the respondents were requested to identify in an open-ended way their top three expectations of their master's programme. Their answers were categorised into thematic groups. The final taxonomy totalled 12 groups (cf. Figure 8). The frequency of each was later quantified.

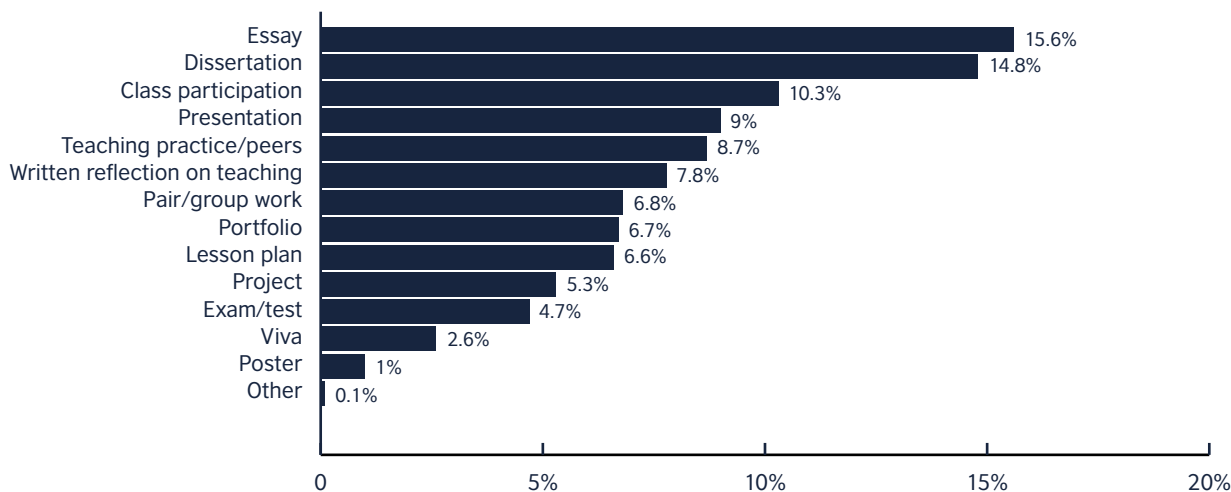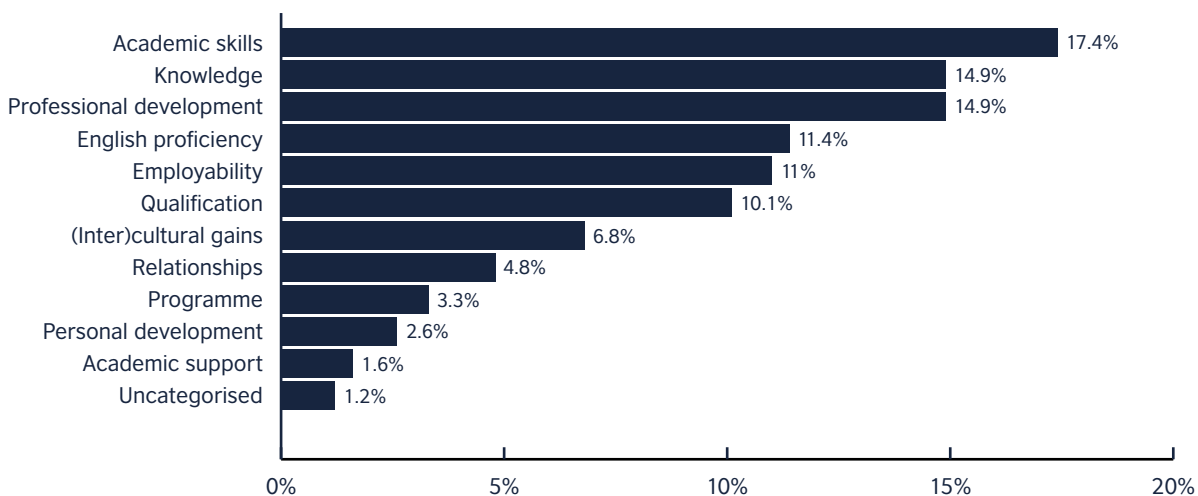**Figure 7:** ELT master's students' desired assessment types

Figure 8: Students' expectations of their master's

As can be seen in Figure 8, most of the expectations (17.4 per cent) relate to the respondents' desire to advance their academic skills. This could be achieved through a variety of ways such as academic development ('My MA TESOL will assist and support me to be ready for my PhD'), sharpening of critical/ analytical skills ('Develop critical ways of reading and writing papers'), enhancement of research skills ('Able to conduct my own research and publish it') and writing improvement ('My academic writing will improve'). It is worthwhile pointing out that development had also been referred to as a reason for undertaking a master's in the field (cf. Figure 5).

In joint second place (14.9 per cent), the participants identified knowledge and professional development as their expectations of the master's. The former category relates to the fact that this postgraduate degree is seen as a way of allowing students to study a wide variety of topics ('Learn about the education system'/'To become an expert on teaching and translation methods'). The latter reveals that the students perceive the master's as a form of continuous professional development, one which will allow them to improve their teaching (or occasionally translation) skills and gain experience/ practice ('To incorporate what I've learnt into my teaching practice'/'Get a lot of experience for teaching English to young learners').

The participants, especially those for whom English is not a first language, also list an enhancement of their English proficiency (11.4 per cent) among their top expectations. They believe that their command of the English language will improve as a result of taking the master's course in an English-speaking country ('Make me more confident with using the English language in academic ground'/'Fluency in language').

The fifth most frequent expectation (11.0 per cent) is employability. A master's programme in ELT is seen as a way of securing a (better) job in the future ('I can get a good job with high salary when I go back to my own country'/'I will be the first phonology teacher in my university'). This is coherent with the responses given to the question on why the students decided to undertake an ELT-related master's (cf. Figure 6): in both cases, professional aspects were frequent.

The remaining seven expectation categories totalled ten per cent or less. Each of these categories is summarised and illustrated below.

■ Qualification: this is a utilitarian expectation – the students hope to get the degree, to pass the course and to complete the dissertation, for instance (see also the same category in Figure 5):

  – 'Achieve distinction in my MA degree.'

■ (Inter)cultural gains: the students expect to travel around the UK/Europe, to learn about local habits/ people and to develop their intercultural skills:

  – 'I can learn intercultural perspectives by communicating with people who have different cultural backgrounds.'

■ Relationships: the students expect to make (international/local) friends or acquaintances and to develop a useful network of contacts:

  – 'To make long-term friends and colleagues from peers, tutors and professors.'

■ Programme: this set of expectations relates to the master's itself or to an evaluation of it:

  – 'It will drive me nuts.'

■ Personal development: the master's course is expected to improve various aspects of the students' lives such as time management, confidence, horizon broadening and reading enjoyment:

  – 'To feel empowered in the process.'

■ Academic support: the students expect to receive dedicated attention from their tutors in the course of the master's:

  – 'I will receive a lot of individual attention from my tutors.'

■ Uncategorised: the responses included in this category were unclear, did not specify what they referred to or did not fit any of the previous categories:

  – 'Get married to a millionaire.'

Having explored students' desires and expectations of their ELT master's programmes, the next section is dedicated to an exploration of these students' experiences of such programmes.

4.5 In what ways do the programmes fulfil (or fail to fulfil) students' desires and expectations?

As explained in Section 3.3, ELT master's students' experiences were investigated at the end of the taught component of their postgraduate degree by means of a post-study questionnaire and focus group. One of the questions in the former instrument asked respondents if they would recommend the UK as a place to do a master's degree on a six-point scale ranging from definitely no to definitely yes. Responses suggest a very positive overall experience (mean=5.13, SD=.94). These respondents are quite clearly very satisfied with their educational experience in the UK up to the end of the taught component of their degrees.

While this is very encouraging, the question asked was intentionally broad, and it is possible that satisfaction with specific aspects of the course or life in the UK would not be so positive. For this reason, we decided to break the overall experience of the course and life in the UK into 18 specific aspects as can be seen in Table 10. Respondents evaluated their satisfaction with these aspects on a four-point scale of satisfaction. Means and standard deviations of responses were calculated on the basis of the scores given here. Respondents additionally had a choice of not applicable, and these responses were not included in calculations of means.

Table 10: ELT master's students' satisfaction with their course and life in the UK

Aspects	Mean	Std deviation
Location within the UK	3.43	0.661
Personal safety	3.43	0.672
Study facilities	3.40	0.661
Sports facilities	3.25	0.706
Life in the UK	3.24	0.659
English language level required	3.22	0.703
Dissertation requirement	3.21	0.643
Course content (modules offered)	3.20	0.697
Course structure (e.g. number of required/optional modules)	3.18	0.697
Course length	3.17	0.788
Academic support	3.16	0.769
Types of assessment	3.08	0.727
Number of teaching hours	3.06	0.784
Other university support	3.01	0.808
Entertainment and social life	2.91	0.803
Possibilities for paid employment while I study	2.73	0.913
Cost of fees	2.33	0.780
Cost of accommodation and/or living expenses	2.16	0.873

Broadly speaking, aspects fall into three categories: aspects of university life that form the context for study, such as location, personal safety, and facilities for study and sports score the most highly. The UK is marketed as a safe destination for students, while universities feature their study and sports facilities prominently in their own marketing materials. These responses suggest respondents have experienced a high level of personal security and a very good quality of life while they have been studying.

Factors more directly related to experience of the course such as course content, course structure, course length and assessment all achieve mean scores above three (quite satisfied), indicating overall respondent satisfaction with these. These aspects could be regarded as the core of the student experience as they are here to complete the course and gain a master's degree. This finding therefore suggests that students perceive their programmes to be of good quality.

Aspects of the postgraduate experience related to daily living such as entertainment and social life, opportunities for employment while studying, tuition fees and living expenses form the third and lowest category. Although life in the UK featured highly (mean=3.24), this lack of satisfaction with specific aspects of living in the UK is understandable considering that postgraduate students' workloads are not conducive to social life, alongside the visa restrictions on Tier 4 students' working. Lastly, it is unlikely that most people will express satisfaction with paying the high cost of tuition or living expenses.

There is some degree of coherence between this data and responses to similar items in the pre-study questionnaire on why respondents chose to come to the UK and why they chose specific universities, but there are also interesting differences. For example, if we consider two factors, study facilities and personal safety, study facilities was the second most important factor in choice of university and ranked third in degree of satisfaction. Personal safety was the fourth most important factor in choice of university and second in level of satisfaction. On the other hand, location in the UK was the seventh ranked factor in choosing a university, but scored the highest for satisfaction after students had experienced living in the UK. Sports facilities ranked bottom of the list as a factor in choosing a university, but was fourth in level of satisfaction.

Having finished their taught courses, students were asked in the focus groups to reflect on what they perceived as the advantages and disadvantages of doing their master's in the UK rather than in their home country or another country. In one group, students began by saying that their lack of experience of master's in other countries made it difficult to compare, but the shorter course length was again mentioned as an advantage, because it was in another group. However, by the time they had finished the taught part of their programmes, some students were also aware of the price to be paid in terms of the opportunity to go into subjects in more depth:

> *I was talking to a couple of course mates about this and they were saying that the year's gone by really quickly and that one year didn't seem enough. And so I can see … how a two-year course is more suitable. I think one year you're introduced to a lot [of] things but you don't get to know them in depth, and I suppose a second year would allow that.* (3, UK)

This student did, however, admit that he would still choose a one-year programme. Another student also recognised this dilemma:

> *You run into the problem that everybody wants it short and so you're going to lose students coming to the programme as soon as you lengthen it out. And so it's the balance.* (3, USA)

Assessment by coursework rather than exams was also mentioned as an advantage in two focus groups. One student explained this in terms of being forced to read more widely:

> *In my country when you're doing master's degree, you write an exam, but here we are assessed through assignments … [When I] studied … for an exam … you cram and then it's forgotten. But now here you are given a question which forces you to read extensively on that module, which then expands your knowledge.* (4, South Africa)

Another perceived advantage of studying in the UK was the development of independent study habits and critical thinking:

> *I think one of the more important things here is that we can do something by [ourselves] … What we learn in the lecture doesn't mean that we can apply it exactly in our assignments, because we had to choose the topic we are interested in and to search other papers and then to study other papers and … so I think what we learn is different from China. In China, well, compared with my undergraduate [course], we really learn just what the teachers [tell] us and we do what teachers ask [us] to do, and it's not that practical or not that autonomous like here, so I think I learned more new stuff in just one year, much more than I learned in the last four years.* (3, China)

As this student acknowledges, this may be partly a result of the difference between undergraduate and postgraduate degree requirements and expectations. Another student in the same focus group developed this theme in relation to academic writing and learning to acknowledge sources:

So I think this is really important, to improve our attitude to the copyright … and what I learnt here, and especially for the references or assignments, I think, yeah, it's very good to develop a right attitude and have it here. (3, China)

However, the same student later mentioned the difficulty of accessing online materials in the UK in contrast to China, where copyright restrictions were not so strong.

One perceived disadvantage of being away from home was the difficulty of getting a part-time job while studying:

If we are studying in our home-town university I think we are more easily able to get a part-time job, but if we are studying in the UK, as a non-native speaker … it's very difficult for us to get a part-time job. (3, China)

Another problem mentioned was having access to English language learners, both to teach and to research for a dissertation:

The disadvantage is that when it comes to dissertation writing I'm far away from my context and getting access to actual students is quite hard because we don't get time to actually teach during the programme. (4, Indonesia)

However, the same student valued the opportunity to study with like-minded, highly motivated students:

For me, I guess it's the atmosphere. It's very academic and research based and we're all very interested, intrinsic motivation to find out about these things or to learn about these things or write about them, whereas maybe back home it's more like goal-oriented or I just want to get published or I just want to finish this degree, not for the sake of personal satisfaction. But here I really feel the atmosphere like that. (4, Indonesia)

A student in the same group was initially discouraged by the repetition of some topics from her first degree, which she ascribed to the diversity of the student cohort. However, she explained that she then came to see this as an advantage, as the opportunity to compare experiences with students from different backgrounds helped her to develop a deeper understanding:

When I first started the course I could see lots of disadvantages, because as there are different backgrounds, the first disciplines that I was doing here I had already taken in my undergrad, so that was really shocking. But now I can see lots of advantages, because even though I had already taken those disciplines, I could re-learn and compare it with the reality of other countries … So I think that the disadvantage is that as students come from different backgrounds the teachers have to adapt to take everybody, but the advantage is that you learn deeply all the content. (4, Brazil)

One student mentioned as an advantage the fact that she would be able to talk to her students about the UK from first-hand experience:

I was exposed to the native language, the native culture, so when I [go] back to my country, if students ask me [about] the environment and what do you feel [about] studying in the UK, then I can tell more about it. (3, China)

However, a student in the same group explained that she had not been able to benefit fully from her stay in the UK because of the pressure of work on the master's programme:

The time is limited for me, I don't have enough time to go outside. Because sometimes the homework is heavy for me, when I should write some essays, where you just choose one topic from lectures and then study by myself. (3 China)

Finally, academic support was mentioned positively a number of times, though ascribing this to studying in the UK rather than elsewhere was not made explicit.

The post-study questionnaire elicited respondents' evaluations of specific aspects of their academic experience and also asked what the ideal would be in the light of this experience. Figure 10 shows responses to what respondents, having completed the taught part of their course, would consider to be the content of an ideal master's degree. The purpose of this question was to compare the list of subjects given by respondents after the course with their overall preferences for subjects as indicated by their choice of modules stated in the pre-study questionnaire (see Figure 6). Percentages were calculated on the total number of times a specific subject was specified by respondents divided by the total number of choices made.

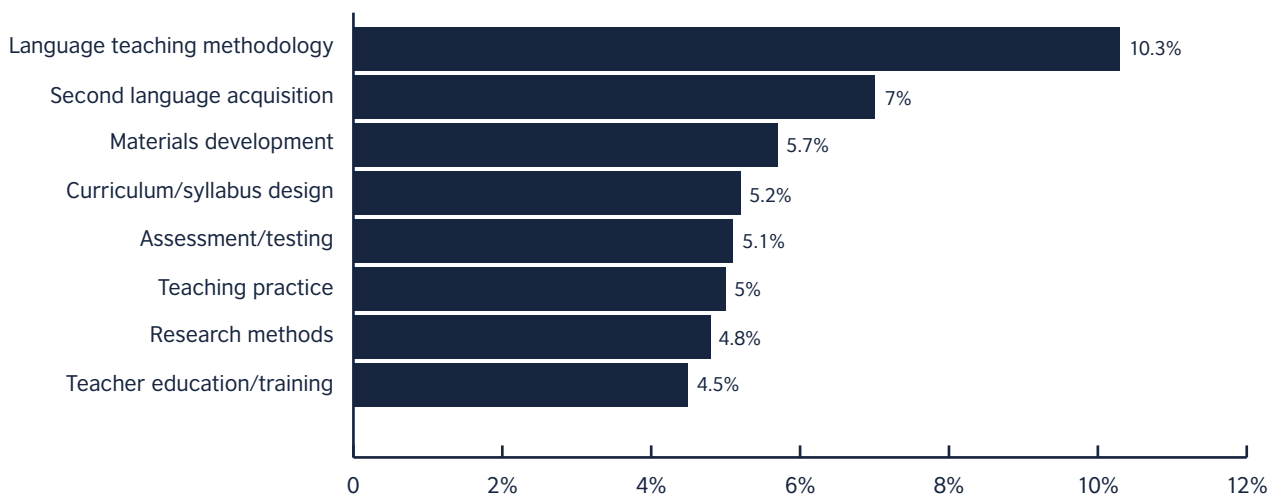**Figure 9:** ELT master's students' post-study choice of modules

Figure 9 shows that respondents prefer language teaching methodology over second language acquisition (SLA) theory in an ideal course. There is possibly an awareness, perhaps resulting from having undergone the taught course, of the importance of modules that give students an overall perspective on teaching and learning. For example, rather than learn about teaching the four skills, they now want to learn about assessment, which, in turn, may encompass assessment of those skills. Perhaps, having learned through experience the need to be able to design materials and syllabi and to assess learners, the respondents now see the necessity of these skills for professional teachers.

Table 11 shows which delivery modes respondents perceived they had experienced and which ones they would prefer. Delivery modes were rated on a five-point scale from none to all. Higher means for actual delivery mode are taken to represent higher perceived amounts of input for a given delivery mode. Higher means for desired delivery mode are taken to represent a higher perceived value put on a given delivery mode relative to other delivery modes. In comparing means for actual and desired delivery modes, higher means for desired modes are taken to represent a desire for a greater amount of input through this method. Unsurprisingly, Table 11 shows that respondents stated that the most commonly perceived actual delivery modes were independent study followed by lectures and then seminars. Teaching practice and observations were at the bottom of the list of delivery modes. Regarding what they desired, these respondents want more of everything apart from independent study. This is interesting in that, traditionally, UK higher education puts a premium on students' abilities to study independently, spending time preparing for or following up on classes.

Table 11: Delivery modes – actual versus desired

Delivery modes	Actual		Desired	
	Mean	Std deviation	Mean	Std deviation
Independent study	4.22	0.667	3.85	0.753
Lectures	3.04	1.272	3.22	1.005
Seminars or workshops	2.94	1.136	3.41	0.898
e-learning	2.37	1.163	2.69	1.071
One-to-one tutorials	2.12	0.987	3.00	1.019
Teaching practice	2.02	1.104	3.02	1.227
Observations of classroom teaching	1.95	1.073	2.88	1.082

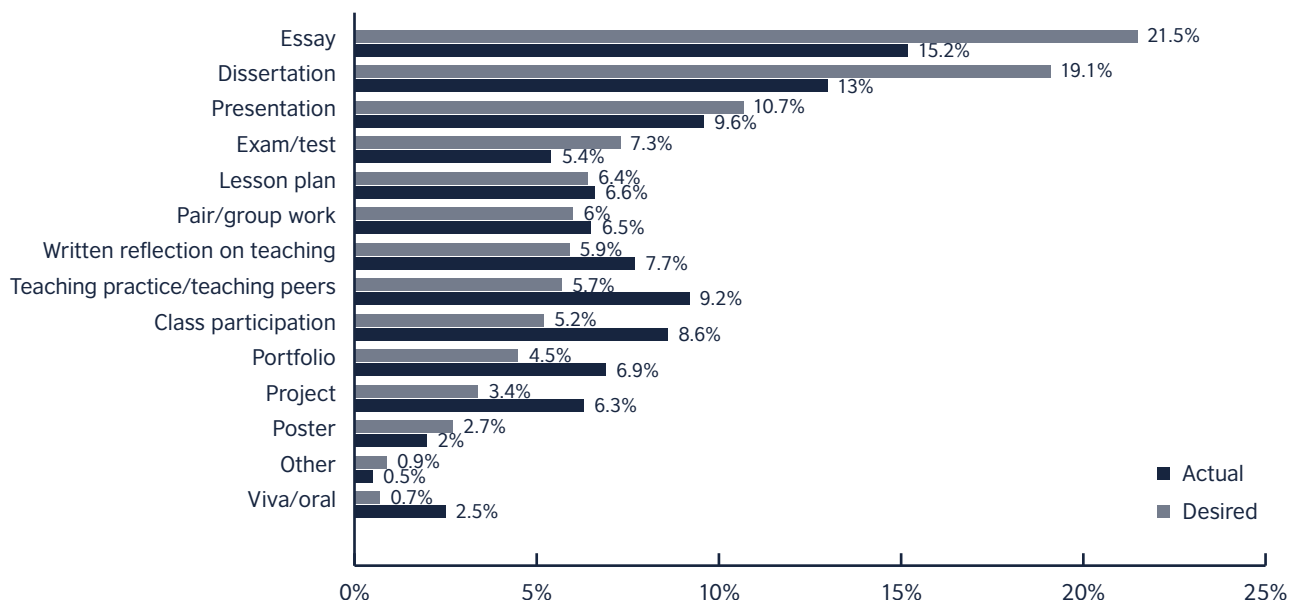**Figure 10:** Assessment forms – actual versus desired

Figure 10 shows respondents' evaluations of forms of assessment they have experienced and forms of assessment they would prefer to be used if they did the same course again. We can see that traditional assessment forms – essays, dissertations, presentations and exams – are the most common and, with the exception of exams, still the most highly favoured. However, there is also a clear distinction between these and other assessment forms such as teaching practice, class participation, portfolios and projects. Responses suggest that students would prefer greater use of assessment that reflects professional practice and effort invested in class or set tasks. Therefore, we see that, although teaching practice or teaching peers can be assessed, respondents would like to see them used to an even greater extent. There is also a clear indication that

class participation and portfolios of tasks, which could be taken to reflect continuous investment of effort, are also preferred by some.

Table 12 shows mean responses and standard deviations for students' perceived gains (or otherwise) made during the period of the taught course. This table consists of a diverse range of items related to language, culture and friendship, and academic matters. The distribution of means suggests an overall high evaluation of gains. Overall, six items, representing academic skills, language, and culture and friendship, score over 3.00 (i.e. agree) and nine items, representing a similar range of factors, cluster between 2.51 and 2.98. Examples of gains in each of these categories are discussed in turn below.

Table 12: Students' perceived gains after the taught component of their ELT master's

Gains	Actual	Desired
I have spent many hours studying independently	3.67	0.536
My English proficiency has been sufficient to follow the course	3.42	0.647
My academic writing has improved	3.35	0.702
I have made friends from other countries	3.03	0.943
I have developed my intercultural skills	3.03	0.867
I have become a better teacher	3.02	0.763
My English proficiency has improved	2.98	0.848
I have gained the skills to get a relevant job	2.93	0.747
My tutors have presented all the content I need to write my assignments	2.85	0.782
I have experienced UK local life	2.76	1.040
My presentation skills have improved	2.74	0.824
The coursework has been difficult	2.71	0.741
I have received a lot of individual attention from my tutors	2.68	0.808

Table 12: Students' perceived gains after the taught component of their ELT master's (continued)

Gains	Actual	Desired
I have become a more skilled computer user	2.62	0.852
I have made British friends	2.51	1.031
I have spent a lot of time working in pairs and groups	2.46	0.885
I have travelled around the UK/Europe	2.36	1.099

Taking academic-related factors first, there is agreement that students have spent a lot of time studying independently, their academic writing has improved and they have found the coursework to be moderately difficult. Other academic-related factors show encouraging levels of agreement, such as the item on individual attention from tutors and the item on time spent working in pairs and groups.

Looking at language-related factors, respondents are very positive about the sufficiency of their English to follow the course and the improvement in their English proficiency. Two items in Table 15 are related to professional development and employability, which ranked third and fifth as categories of expectations in the pre-study questionnaire. Respondents were quite clear that they had become a better teacher and that they had gained the skills necessary to get a relevant job.

Regarding culture and friendship, the data is somewhat dichotomous. Respondents agree that they have made friends from other countries and have developed intercultural skills. However, they do not agree as much that they have made British friends and have travelled around the UK or Europe. Intercultural gains and friendships account for approximately 11 per cent of the expectations stated in the pre-study questionnaire, so this is a relatively important area. This finding may be related to the multicultural nature of universities in the UK and also to the cultural mix in TESOL master's degrees. Students coming to the UK will meet students from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds in universities, while postgraduate TESOL courses have relatively few UK students. For example, data from the pre- and post-study questionnaires show that 24.3 per cent and 25.8 per cent of respondents are from the UK (Table 2 and Table 4 respectively). Moreover, universities are often quite separate from the communities in which they are set and, with the high workload that postgraduate students have, they are less likely to have the time to make friends in these communities.

Students' perceived gains at the end of the taught component of the master's were also investigated in the focus groups. A card-sorting task was introduced where the participants worked with the expectation statements from the pre-study questionnaire. They were asked to decide together which of their pre-study expectations had been fulfilled. The task engendered less discussion than hoped, but there were a few issues raised.

The statement 'My tutors will present all the content I need to write my assignments' was designed to gauge the extent to which students expected to derive assessed content from lectures rather than from their own independent study. However, the students in one group focused on the (lack of) explicit guidance they were given for their assignments. One student said:

> I feel like we've kind of just got icing, but then we were expected to write deep … I mean they would give us this, kind of, 'Write a paper on' whatever, but it would be very vague, as to really what they were looking for, and then as you go back and look through the PowerPoints and your notes, you didn't find a lot of meat to work with either, and so you're like, 'I'm not exactly sure what it is you want me to write and I'm not exactly sure what I'm supposed to be using to write it.' (3, USA)

In relation to this, a home student (with a previous master's degree) made this comment:

> I mean we're expected to interpret that in the best way we can and I think in other countries the onus is on the teacher to explain exactly what they want; in this country the onus is on the student to interpret what the teacher wants. (3, UK)

With regard to the statement 'I will receive a lot of attention from my tutors', the same group discussed the need for students to take the initiative in approaching or emailing tutors if they had a problem, and that persistence was sometimes needed. Some students felt this expectation had been unfulfilled, with emails sometimes not replied to promptly, and help unforthcoming. The same home student, however, was happy to pursue offending tutors:

> I'm not sure how much you really pushed it. If it's me, if I don't get the help, I just go and see them. Or I just email them. I'll bombard them like two or three emails until I do. Or I get their phone number. (3, UK)

5

Discussion

The findings from the study suggest a number of interesting areas for future exploration by researchers and discussion by programme directors.

The first concerns the importance of a university's reputation in attracting students. Course reputation and the credentials of teaching staff also feature in students' decision making. In slight mitigation, students in the focus groups suggested that the reputation of UK universities as a whole is strong and so students have confidence that a programme delivered in Britain will be of good quality, whatever the ranking of the university. Nevertheless, should UK universities wish to continue to attract students (or attract higher numbers of students), effort must be put into maintaining or increasing their overall reputation, the course reputation and the academic credentials of their teaching staff.

Furthermore, course content is important, and generally students want to follow pedagogic modules that will support them with their professional needs. Universities that do not offer a range of such modules may wish to consider their inclusion.

Students are also concerned about the degree title (e.g. MA, MEd, MSc, MPhil, MRes) and the named degree (e.g. Applied Linguistics, ELT, TESOL). We cannot from the evidence presented here suggest which is the most popular; nevertheless, titles are important to students and deserve our attention, especially given the multicultural nature of the student cohort in ELT master's programmes in the UK.

Most factors rated by participants regarding their choice of university are outside the control of the programme team (e.g. reputation, study facilities and published university ranking). However, student support, which was the fifth most frequent factor influencing students' choice of master's programme, falls within their remits. During the focus groups, students highlighted the impact that individual team members had had on their decision to choose one university over another. These team members had developed a personal relationship with the potential students, had offered them advice and had solved problems that the students were having with other services such as accommodation. TESOL teams that leave recruitment wholly in the hands of registry and enrolment sectors might reconsider their approach in light of this evidence.

The preference for a one-year programme over longer modes of study is strong, despite some students in the focus groups stating they felt there was too much to cover in a short space of time. Universities looking to diversify their offers might consider the advantages to be had in providing even shorter, more intensive master's programmes. These may attract experienced teachers with limited time but a strong background in ELT. Semester breaks and weekends could provide additional time for study.

In terms of assessment, students are generally happy with essays and dissertations as methods of evaluation. Examinations are less popular. However, as also indicated in research by Holzweiss et al. (2014), students in this study suggested that they would like to be assessed in other ways, such as through contributions made in class and through their teaching. Going forward, universities that provide different modes of assessment might want to advertise this strength to students who are considering taking up the offer of a place.

Teaching practice featured in both the online questionnaires and in the focus groups. Students welcome microteaching but also a more authentic experience teaching 'real' students. And, as described above, students believe teaching should be assessed.

As we discussed in Sections 4.3 and 4.5, an unforeseen finding was the fact that e-learning was rated as the least frequently preferred of all delivery modes. Students indicated that they would like to have some e-learning as part of their courses. However, a comparative analysis of the results shows that the respondents prefer their study to be delivered through the other six means more often. Although this finding contrasts with Holzweiss et al. (2014), who found that students valued online modes of delivery, the contexts are different. The Holzweiss study was conducted with home students at a private university in the USA with environmental science students. In the UK ELT context, where many of the students are from overseas, for e-learning to be effective it needs to meet students' needs, engaging students in their learning and contributing positively to their educational journey.

The findings suggest that their experiences of British life and their opportunities to make British friends were not as satisfactory as they had hoped. This finding chimes with those of Myles and Cheng (2003), Wu and Hammond (2011) and Fang et al. (2015). As universities in the UK look to internationalise their campuses and programmes, they may wish to consider how they integrate international students into local life – in terms of both students and community. Universities with vision might consider this issue an opportunity. International students in the focus groups explained how difficult they found routines of opening bank accounts, registering with services and so on. Home students and local community members could be recruited to support international students with these tasks.

6

Conclusion

Our research has provided our TESOL team with food for thought in many areas. In particular, in months to come, we hope to address the following questions:

a. How can assessment be extended to examine students' contributions in a range of tasks?

b. What is the role of teaching practice/microteaching in our programmes? Can we better meet students' desires and expectations in this area?

c. What can we do to ensure that international students gain further experience of British life, including making British friends, while studying in the UK?

d. Should we be concerned about the instrumental nature of students' learning on master's programmes? What role should linguistics have?

e. How can we guard against a sudden drop in student recruitment from certain countries (e.g. China)?

f. How can we continue to develop our online support to ensure it is pedagogically useful?

There are limitations to discuss regarding the study. The first is the numbers completing the two questionnaires. Although these were reasonable at 502 (pre) and 346 (post), higher numbers would have ensured that more voices were heard. It was also unfortunate that there were fewer responses to the post-study than the pre-study questionnaire and that overlap between the two was not high: only around 100 students answered both questionnaires. We hope to examine this data in future to provide a more nuanced description of the students' expectations and experiences.

It is also disappointing that no Welsh university took part in either the pre-study questionnaire or the focus-group study. Although there are only a few Welsh universities offering ELT-related programmes compared to either England or even Scotland, representation would have been welcome and would have enriched the data.

The research presented in the audit document of ELT-related master's programmes, (www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Audit%20Final%2010.pdf) and in this report show that provision is extensive, diverse and strong. Given the high number of programmes and the information presented in the report, it also begs the question of how students can ascertain whether programmes are of good quality or not – at present it is the reputation of the university that students consider. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), for example, offers no guidance on quality. We would suggest, therefore, that programme directors should consider developing benchmarks for master's in TESOL to ensure quality is maintained and that students have the information they need to make an informed choice. Benchmarks would be in the interest of all universities that offer excellent programmes, and would be particularly useful for those that traditionally do less well in university rankings. They would also be useful for those who support students with making their choices, such as agents. We look forward to working with colleagues across the UK to develop standards for the sector.

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Appendix A

Pre-study questionnaire[11]

ELT Master's student survey

Dear Master's student,

Thank you very much for doing this questionnaire. Our aim is to find out why you have chosen the UK for your studies, and why you have chosen the course on which you have enrolled. We are also very interested in finding out what you hope to learn.

The answers you will give are anonymous. They will be used in a report commissioned by the British Council called, **Master's programmes in ELT: a survey of UK provision and student experiences**. By completing the questionnaire, you are agreeing that we can use your answers for research purposes.

We know Master's students are very busy and so we would like to say thank you for your time by offering to enter your name into a prize draw. Please leave an email address in the final section if you would like to take part in the draw for four Amazon vouchers (one worth £50 and three worth £15 each).

In June 2016, we will ask you to complete another questionnaire to find out if your expectations have been met by the programme you are on. Thank you in advance for doing so.

If you have any questions, please contact us at eltra@stir.ac.uk

Many thanks,

Professor Fiona Copland
Dr David Bowker
Dr Eddy Moran
Dr Marina Shapira
Dr Vander Viana
University of Stirling

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11 Because the pre- and post-study questionnaires were administered through Bristol Online Surveys, their layouts differed from the ones included in this report.

About you

1. I am

    ☐   male.

    ☐   female.

2. How old are you (age on your last birthday)?

3. Which country are you from?

4. Please give the last five numbers of your student identity number. We will use these numbers to match this questionnaire to the one you complete at the end of your course.

5. What was the main subject (major) of your first degree (undergraduate/bachelor's)?

6. I am a(n)

    ☐   home student.

    ☐   EU student.

    ☐   international student.

7. How are you funded?

    ☐   I am self-financed or supported by my family.

    ☐   I have a scholarship from a UK organisation (including university funding).

    ☐   I am funded by my country's government.

    ☐   I have a scholarship from a non-government organisation in my country.

    ☐   Other – If you selected Other, please specify:

8. What is the title of the Master's programme you are enrolled on in the UK (e.g. MA TESOL)?

9. Why did you choose to do a Master's degree in this subject?

10. What is the title of the Department or School in which you are studying in the UK (e.g. School of Education)?

11. Where is your university?

    ☐   England

    ☐   Northern Ireland

    ☐   Scotland

    ☐   Wales

12. I am studying

    ☐   on campus.

    ☐   online (distance learning).

    ☐   Other – If you selected Other, please specify:

13. Did you study on a pre-sessional programme before enrolling on your Master's?

    ☐   No.

    ☐   Yes, in the UK.

    ☐   Yes, in my home country.

14. How much teaching experience do you have?

- ☐ None.
- ☐ Less than 1 year.
- ☐ 1–2 years.
- ☐ More than 2 years but less than 5 years.
- ☐ More than 5 years.

Choosing the UK

15. How important were the following in attracting you to study in the UK (or on a UK programme)? Please choose the last column if the option does not apply to you. Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Very important	Quite important	Not very important	Not at all important	Not applicable
Course length					
Overall cost					
Academic support					
Visa application procedures					
Personal safety					
British culture					
The reputation of UK universities					
British English					
Possibilities for paid employment while I study					
Possibilities to stay and work after I graduate					
My agent's recommendation					

16. Please choose **the top 3 factors** that influenced your choice to come to the UK (or to study on a UK programme).

Please select no more than 3 answer(s).

- ☐ Course length
- ☐ Overall cost
- ☐ Academic support
- ☐ Visa application procedures
- ☐ Personal safety
- ☐ British culture
- ☐ The reputation of UK universities
- ☐ British English
- ☐ Possibilities for paid employment while I study
- ☐ Possibilities to stay and work after I graduate
- ☐ My agent's recommendation

17. Please briefly explain why you chose to study in the UK rather than your own or another country.

Choosing your institution

18. How important were each of these factors in your choice of university? Please choose the last column if the option does not apply to you. Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Very important	Quite important	Not very important	Not at all important	Not applicable
Location within the UK					
Safety					
Student support					
Study facilities					
Sports facilities					
Entertainment and social life					
Published university ranking					
University's reputation					
Recommendation from agent					
Recommendation from teacher					
Recommendation from former or current student					
Other recommendation					
Opportunity to join someone you know					
Cost of fees					
Cost of accommodation and/ or living expenses					
Availability of scholarship or other financial support					
Application process					

19. How important were each of these items in choosing the master's course you are on now? You may add a comment or explanation if you wish.

	Very important	Quite important	Not very important	Not at all important	Comment
Reputation of the course					
Reputation of academic/ teaching staff					
Degree title					
Course content (modules offered)					
Course structure (e.g. number of required/optional modules)					
Number of teaching hours					
English language level required					
Amount of teaching experience required					
Number of students on the course					
Opportunity for teaching practice					
Types of assessment					
Dissertation requirement					
Course starting and finishing dates					

Your expectations

20. How important do you think each of these modules is for an ELT Master's course? (6= extremely important, 1 = not at all important.) Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	6 (extremely important)	5	4	3	2	1 (not at all important)
Language teaching methodology						
Practice in teaching (real students or peers)						
Language analysis (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, phonology, discourse)						
Assessment/testing						
Educational technology						
Corpus linguistics						
Course/materials design						
Educational management						
Research methods						
Second language acquisition/learning						
Sociolinguistics						
Teacher education/training						
Teaching English for specific purposes						
Teaching English to young learners						
Translation						
Other – If you selected Other, please specify:						

21. On an ideal master's course, which of these modules would you like to study? **Choose up to 8**.

☐ Language teaching methodology	☐ Curriculum/syllabus design
☐ Teaching listening	☐ Discourse analysis
☐ Teaching reading	☐ Educational management
☐ Teaching speaking	☐ Materials development
☐ Teaching writing	☐ Micro-teaching (teaching my peers)
☐ Grammar	☐ Teaching practice (teaching 'real' students)
☐ Teaching grammar	☐ Pragmatics
☐ Pronunciation/phonetics/phonology	☐ Research methods
☐ Teaching pronunciation	☐ Second language acquisition/learning
☐ Vocabulary	☐ Sociolinguistics
☐ Teaching vocabulary	☐ Teacher education/training
☐ Stylistics	☐ Teaching English for academic purposes
☐ Using literature to teach English	☐ Teaching English for specific purposes
☐ Assessment/testing	☐ Teaching English to young learners
☐ Computer-assisted language learning	☐ Translation
☐ Corpus linguistics	

22. How much of your programme would you like to be delivered in each of these formats?
Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	All	Most	Some	A little	None
Lectures					
Seminars or workshops (classes that combine tutor input with student activities)					
Observations of classroom teaching					
Teaching practice					
One-to-one tutorials					
E-learning (e.g. blogs, forums)					
Independent study					
Other – If you selected Other, please specify:					

23. Please tick the options that you would like to be used as a way of evaluating your academic performance in a master's programme.

☐ Class participation	☐ Presentation
☐ Essay	☐ Project
☐ Exam/test	☐ Teaching practice/teaching peers
☐ Dissertation	☐ Viva (oral exam)
☐ Lesson plan	☐ Written reflection on teaching
☐ Portfolio (collection of tasks/ materials, etc.)	☐ Pair/group work
☐ Poster	☐ Other – If you selected Other, please specify: Page 7: Your expectations (continued)

24. To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements? During the course, I expect that… Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
my English proficiency will improve.				
my academic writing will improve.				
my presentation skills will improve.				
my tutors will present all the content I need to write my assignments.				
I will make friends from other countries.				
I will develop my intercultural skills.				
I will become a better teacher.				
I will spend many hours studying independently.				
I will receive a lot of individual attention from my tutors.				
I will spend a lot of time working in pairs and groups.				
the course work will be difficult.				
I will travel around the UK/Europe.				
I will experience UK local life.				
I will make British friends.				
I will gain the skills and qualifications to get a relevant job.				

25. What are your top three expectations of your Master's course?

(1st) _____

(2nd) _____

(3rd) _____

Enter prize draw!

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. If you would like to be entered into our prize draw for four Amazon vouchers (one worth £50 and three worth £15), please leave your email address here.

The survey is now complete. Thank you for taking part.

Appendix B

Post-study questionnaire

ELT Master's student survey

Dear Master's student,

Thank you very much for doing this questionnaire. Our aim is to find out how satisfied you have been with your experience of studying ELT in the UK. We are also very interested in finding out what you have learned.

This is the second questionnaire on UK Master's in ELT. We are interested in every student's answers whether you completed the first one or not.

The answers you will give are anonymous. They will be used in a report commissioned by the British Council called, Master's programmes in ELT: A survey of UK provision and student experiences. By completing the questionnaire, you are agreeing that we can use your answers for research purposes.

We know Master's students are very busy, so we would like to say thank you for your time by offering to enter your name into a prize draw. Please leave an email address in the final section if you would like to take part in the draw for an Amazon voucher worth £50.

If you have any questions, please contact us at eltra@stir.ac.uk

Many thanks,

Professor Fiona Copland
Dr David Bowker
Dr Eddy Moran
Dr Marina Shapira
Dr Vander Viana
University of Stirling

About you

1. I am

   ☐ male.

   ☐ female.

2. How old are you (age on your last birthday)?

3. Which country are you from?

4. Please give the last five numbers of your student identity number. If you completed the first questionnaire, we will use these numbers to match this questionnaire to the first one.

5. I am a(n)

   ☐ home student.

   ☐ EU student.

   ☐ international student.

6. How are you funded?

   ☐ I am self-financed or supported by my family.

   ☐ I have a scholarship from a UK organisation (including university funding).

   ☐ I am funded by my country's government.

   ☐ I have a scholarship from a non-government organisation in my country.

   ☐ Other – If you selected Other, please specify:

7. What is the title of the Master's programme you are enrolled on in the UK (e.g. MA TESOL)?

8. Where is your university?

   ☐ England

   ☐ Northern Ireland

   ☐ Scotland

   ☐ Wales

9. I am studying

   ☐ on campus.

   ☐ online (distance learning).

   ☐ Other – If you selected Other, please specify:

10. How much teaching experience do you have?

    ☐ None.

    ☐ Less than 1 year.

    ☐ 1–2 years.

    ☐ More than 2 years but less than 5 years.

    ☐ More than 5 years.

Satisfaction with your course and life in the UK

11. Based on your experience, would you recommend the UK as a place to do a Master's degree? Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	6	5	4	3	2	1	
Definitely yes							Definitely no

12. Please give a reason (or reasons) for your response.

13. How satisfied have you been with the following?

	Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Not very satisfied	Not at all satisfied	Not applicable
Life in the UK					
Personal safety					
Cost of fees					
Cost of accommodation and/or living expenses					
English language level required					
Course content (i.e. modules offered)					
Course structure (e.g. number of required/optional modules)					
Course length					
Number of teaching hours					
Types of assessment					
Dissertation requirement					
Academic support					
Other university support					
Study facilities					
Sports facilities					
Location within the UK					
Possibilities for paid employment while I study					
Entertainment and social life					

Your views on course content

14. Having completed the taught part of your Master's, how important do you think the following are for an ELT Master's course? (6= extremely important, 1 = not at all important. *Select the last column if you don't know the module.*) Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	6 (extremely important)	5	4	3	2	1 (not at all important)	I don't know what this is
Language teaching methodology							
Practice in teaching (real students or peers)							
Language analysis (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, phonology, discourse)							
Assessment/testing							
Educational technology							
Corpus linguistics							
Course/materials design							
Educational management							
Research methods							
Second language acquisition/learning							
Sociolinguistics							
Teacher education/training							
Teaching English for specific purposes							
Teaching English to young learners							
Translation							
Other – If you chose Other, please specify:							

15. Now that you have completed the taught part of your Master's course, which of the following would make up the ideal Master's course? **Choose up to 8**.

- ☐ Language teaching methodology
- ☐ Teaching listening
- ☐ Teaching reading
- ☐ Teaching speaking
- ☐ Teaching writing
- ☐ Grammar
- ☐ Teaching grammar
- ☐ Pronunciation/phonetics/phonology
- ☐ Teaching pronunciation
- ☐ Vocabulary
- ☐ Teaching vocabulary
- ☐ Stylistics
- ☐ Using literature to teach English
- ☐ Assessment/testing
- ☐ Computer-assisted language learning
- ☐ Corpus linguistics

- ☐ Curriculum/syllabus design
- ☐ Discourse analysis
- ☐ Educational management
- ☐ Materials development
- ☐ Micro-teaching (teaching my peers)
- ☐ Teaching practice (teaching 'real' students)
- ☐ Pragmatics
- ☐ Research methods
- ☐ Second language acquisition/learning
- ☐ Sociolinguistics
- ☐ Teacher education/training
- ☐ Teaching English for academic purposes
- ☐ Teaching English for specific purposes
- ☐ Teaching English to young learners
- ☐ Translation

Your views on how time was spent on your course

16. How much of your study time **has been spent** in each of the following? Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	All	Most	Some	A little	None
Lectures					
Seminars or workshops (classes that combine tutor input with student activities)					
Observations of classroom teaching					
Teaching practice					
One-to-one tutorials					
E-learning (e.g. blogs, forums)					
Independent study					
Other – If you selected Other, please specify:					

17. How much of your study time **would you like to have spent** in each of the following?
Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	All	Most	Some	A little	None
Lectures					
Seminars or workshops (classes that combine tutor input with student activities)					
Observations of classroom teaching					
Teaching practice					
One-to-one tutorials					
E-learning (e.g. blogs, forums)					
Independent study					
Other – If you selected Other, please specify:					

Your views on assessment

18. Which of the following have been/are being used to evaluate your academic performance?
Select all that apply.

- ☐ Class participation
- ☐ Essay
- ☐ Exam/test
- ☐ Dissertation
- ☐ Lesson plan
- ☐ Portfolio (collection of tasks/ materials, etc.)
- ☐ Poster

- ☐ Presentation
- ☐ Project
- ☐ Teaching practice/teaching peers
- ☐ Viva (oral exam)
- ☐ Written reflection on teaching
- ☐ Pair/group work
- ☐ Other – If you selected Other, please specify:

19. If you did the same course again, which of the following would you like to be used to evaluate your academic performance? Select as many as appropriate.

- ☐ Class participation
- ☐ Essay
- ☐ Exam/test
- ☐ Dissertation
- ☐ Lesson plan
- ☐ Portfolio (collection of tasks/ materials, etc.)
- ☐ Poster

- ☐ Presentation
- ☐ Project
- ☐ Teaching practice/teaching peers
- ☐ Viva (oral exam)
- ☐ Written reflection on teaching
- ☐ Pair/group work
- ☐ Other – If you selected Other, please specify:

Your overall experience

20. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Since starting the course, I have found that… Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
my English proficiency has improved.				
my English proficiency has been sufficient to follow the course				
my academic writing has improved.				
my presentation skills have improved.				
my tutors have presented all the content I need to write my assignments.				
I have made friends from other countries.				
I have developed my intercultural skills.				
I have become a better teacher.				
I have spent many hours studying independently.				
I have received a lot of individual attention from my tutors.				
I have spent a lot of time working in pairs and groups.				
the coursework has been difficult.				
I have travelled around the UK/Europe.				
I have experienced UK local life.				
I have made British friends.				
I have become a more skilled computer user.				
I have gained the skills to get a relevant job.				

21. What was the most important thing you gained from the taught part of your master's course?

22. If you could propose a change to your master's programme, what would it be?

23. What advice would you give to a prospective student considering doing a similar master's course to yours?

Enter prize draw!

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. If you would like to be entered into our prize draw for an Amazon voucher worth £50, please leave your email address here.

The survey is now complete. Thank you for taking part.

Appendix C

Focus group guide

I'm going to ask you to discuss:

- your decisions to do this course, the choices you made
- the expectations you had when you started the course
- specific aspects of the course content and structure, and the composition of the group

Most of these questions were in our two online surveys, but we're trying to get a fuller picture of students' opinions through these focus groups.

1. Participant information

- List of email addresses.
- To establish details and voice, ask each participant to describe themselves in response to these prompts on a card:
  - Name
  - Country
  - First language
  - Language teaching experience before the course
  - Relevant study (TESOL, Applied Linguistics, Education, etc.) before the course
  - Pre-sessional English course
- Ask the group:
  - How many students were on your programme/course?
  - What was the balance of nationalities/first languages on the course? Did most people come from the same country? Were there many who shared the same first language?
  - What about teaching experience? Did most students have none/some?

2. Choice of destination and course

2.1. Country, university, master's programme?

- Lay out cards.
  - When you were making your decision to study a master's programme, which was most difficult to decide on: the country, the university or the master's programme? **Why?**
  - **Make sure everyone gets the chance to speak** – **go round if necessary**.

2.2. UK and university

- Lay out cards: Reputation, course length, academic/student support
  - These are three factors that a lot of students who completed the first survey said were very important factors in their choice of the UK or of a specific university. Were they important for you? Why? If not, why not?
  - **Make sure all 3 get discussed** – **probe what they understand by academic/student support**.

2.3. UK master's programmes

  - What do you **now** think are the **advantages** and **disadvantages** of doing a master's in the UK rather than your own country or another country such as USA, Canada, Australia?

3. Expectations and experiences

3.1. First impressions

■ Thinking back to the beginning of the year, what did you find difficult to adjust to about:

– Living in the UK (if from elsewhere)

– Studying on a master's programme

3.2. Expectations and suggestions

■ Cards of expectations from Survey 1, plus some extra blank cards.

– As a group, choose the expectations **you had** and put them into two groups, according to whether they were (more or less) **fulfilled** and **not fulfilled** (i.e. did what you expected [to] happen or not?).

– Put the expectations **you didn't have** to one side.

– When you've finished I'll take a photo of your arrangement of the cards.

■ Take photo of final arrangement.

■ For the benefit of future students, what **suggestions** to improve the student experience would you give to:

– The university

– The programme director(s) [**mention both in the question but discuss each in turn**]

4. Course specificities

4.1. Content

■ Cards of content areas from Survey 2 p. 5.

■ As a group, select **6** of these that you think should definitely be included on an ideal Master's programme? **Give reasons**.

■ Take photo of cards selected.

4.2. Structure

■ Chart of 'study mode' types from Survey 2 p. 6. Twenty '5%' cards.

■ As a group, decide roughly what percentage of your course time was spent on each type of study.

■ Photo.

■ Now do the same to represent how much time you would like to spend on each.

■ Photo.

4.3. Teaching practice and microteaching

■ Did you take a module involving teaching your peers (microteaching) or teaching real students (teaching practice)?

■ Did having a teaching practice or microteaching module affect your choice of programme? I.e. when you were choosing a programme, was it important that it included this?

■ Which of these two types of module do you think is better and why?

4.4. Cohort

■ What do you think is the ideal number of students on this type of course? Give reasons.

■ What's the ideal mix of teaching experience? Should all students have some teaching experience? etc. Give reasons.

■ What's the ideal mix of nationalities/language backgrounds? Give reasons.

■ What should the minimum English language level be?

5. Closure

■ We've talked about:

    – your decisions to do this course, the choices you made

    – the expectations you had when you started the course

    – specific aspects of the course content and structure, and the composition of the group

■ Is there anything else you'd like to say?