International Postgraduate Students' Perspectives of their Scholarly Experience at an Australian University

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Abstract

The doctoral investigation delves into the intricate relationship between two modes of educational delivery and the academic experiences of international postgraduate students at Victoria University. Utilising a mixed-method approach, the study integrates qualitative and quantitative analyses to offer a comprehensive exploration of this dynamic interaction.

The qualitative study (Study 1) examines international postgraduate students' educational experiences, aiming to understand the influence of Block Mode on student engagement and academic performance. Using a phenomenological approach, perceptions of eight students enrolled in both traditional and Block Mode units of study were analysed. Thematic analysis reveals 11 themes, such as Non-academic Commitments, Staying Focused, Information Assimilation Time, Intensive Learning and Teaching, and Students' Study Mode Preferences. The study highlights the impact of assessment structure on academic outcomes and personal wellbeing. Despite the accelerated pace, small class sizes positively influence student engagement. While the Block Mode was generally favoured by students, individual preferences varied. The findings provide critical insights into the effects of delivery modes on international postgraduate students' learning experiences.

In parallel, the thesis incorporates insights from ten academic staff members who were invited to share their opinions on how international students' experiences in Block Mode compare with those of domestic students (Study 2). The results of this qualitative study offered a multifaceted exploration of Block Mode education, unveiling both its challenges and opportunities when compared to traditional semester teaching. The benefits of this accelerated approach include closer student-teacher relationships, reduced time spent on content revision, and higher attendance rates in Block Mode education. However, they coexist with concerns about assessment adaptation, balancing study and work, differences in student engagement, and staff workload. The findings emphasise the importance of personalised support for international students, alignment of expectations, and effective use of the Learning Management System.

Quantitative data (Study 3), extracted from university records, complements these qualitative insights. It presents an examination of how changes in coursework delivery modes impact the academic performance and unit satisfaction of international postgraduate coursework students across a diverse

set of disciplinary cohorts. The quantitative analysis examined the academic success (phase 1) and student satisfaction (phase 2) within the context of different educational delivery modes. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to provide insights into the data, with international students with zero marks excluded to ensure the integrity of the findings. Phase 1 data revealed significant associations between academic success indicators (pass/fail rate, mean marks, and grade distribution) and various educational delivery modes across disciplines. Phase 2 results focused on student satisfaction with overall levels differing marginally between traditional and Block delivery modes, and workload satisfaction levels showing more pronounced variations. Subsequent analyses by delivery mode and academic discipline provided further insights into these differences, highlighting the nuanced relationship between delivery mode, student satisfaction, and disciplines.

The research findings from Studies 1, 2, and 3 were aligned with the themes and perspectives that identified within the literature review. These themes include international postgraduate student engagement, satisfaction, academic achievement, and the impact of different educational delivery modes. Outcomes of the three studies emphasise the importance of effective assessment structures and small class sizes in enhancing student engagement and reducing stress levels. The findings also reinforce the VU Block Mode as an effective learning and teaching approach across multiple academic disciplines, particularly in improving student outcomes and supporting the transition to higher education. The research findings will contribute new knowledge to support innovative delivery modes in higher education, with a particular emphasis on the international student experience. Additionally, it is poised to enrich the academic discourse surrounding the academic experiences of international students, offering unique insights into the interaction between delivery methods and academic outcomes. The major findings of this research prompted several recommendations for practice and future research. These include the need for careful alignment of expectations between students and educators, the optimisation of Learning Management Systems to facilitate student engagement, and that institutions provide a stable and consistent learning environment for students.

Declaration of Authenticity

I, Chunxiao Liu, declare that the PhD thesis entitled International Postgraduate Students' Perspectives of their Scholarly Experience at an Australian University is no more than 80,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures.

Ethics Declaration

All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)' by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee. Application ID: HRE22-120, and HRE21-091.

Signature: 

Date: 5 Dec 2024

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experiences, built on mutual care and camaraderie, turned challenges into opportunities for growth and created memories that I will always cherish.

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4WK12CP	4 Week 12 Credit Point
8WK12CP	8 Week 12 Credit Point
8WK24CP	8 Week 24 Credit Point
BIS	Business Intelligence System
C	Credit
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease / pandemic
D	Distinction
F	Fail
GD	Grade Distribution
HD	High Distinction
M	Mark
P	Pass
pp	Percentage point
SEU	Student Evaluation of Unit
SEUR	Student Evaluation of Unit Result
SMS	Student Management System
Traditional	Traditional mode of delivery
USG	Unit of study grade
VU	Victoria University

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

International students are a critical part of the global higher education landscape, bringing cultural diversity and fostering intercultural exchange (Lee & Rice, 2007). However, despite their significance, international students often face challenges that affect their academic experience, including adjusting to different educational delivery models. These challenges can be amplified in postgraduate programs, where the demands on academic performance and research skills are higher. This study focused on the impact of educational delivery modes, in particular a newer approach titled the 'Block Model®', on the experience of international postgraduate students at Victoria University (VU), located in Melbourne, Australia.

Since 2018, VU has implemented the Block Model® as a delivery mode, an innovative educational approach where students undertake one course intensively over four weeks before moving on to the next. The Block Mode of delivery has been designed to enhance student engagement and improve academic outcomes by allowing for more focused study (McCluskey et al., 2019). While initial research indicates positive impacts on student performance, especially in undergraduate programs, less is known about how the Block Mode affects the experience of international postgraduate students. This study sought to address this gap by exploring the factors influencing engagement, satisfaction, and academic success for this unique student cohort.

Impact of COVID-19 on Learning and This Doctoral Study

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly influenced higher education worldwide, reshaping teaching delivery, student engagement, and overall learning experiences (Marinoni et al., 2020). This study was conducted during and after the pandemic, with data collection spanning different phases of COVID-19's impact.

Specifically, Study 1, which involved international student participants, was conducted in mid-2021 when Australia still had travel restrictions in place. Some students had returned to their home countries due to the pandemic and were unable to re-enter Australia, leading them to compare their Block Mode

learning experiences during COVID-19 with their prior experiences in the traditional semester system before the pandemic. Their reflections provided valuable insights into how international students navigated academic challenges in different delivery modes under unprecedented circumstances.

Study 2, involving academic staff participants, was conducted between late 2022 and mid-2023, after the peak of the pandemic. Although in-person activities had largely resumed, the convenience of online meetings and the residual shift towards virtual interactions meant that all interviews were conducted online. This mode of data collection not only facilitated participation but also reflected the evolving norms of academic engagement post-pandemic. The pandemic thus served as a contextual backdrop that shaped both students' and educators' experiences of Block Mode learning, highlighting shifts in learning preferences, engagement patterns, and institutional support mechanisms. By acknowledging these contextual factors, this doctoral study provides a nuanced understanding of how Block Mode functioned for international postgraduate students across different stages of the pandemic.

Research Context

Student engagement and satisfaction are key determinants of the learning experience and are influenced by personal attributes and institutional practices (Thomas, 2020). Educational delivery modes, such as the Block Model, have been identified as a factor that can significantly impact these outcomes (Dempsey, 2023), particularly for international students. Intensive modes of education, like the Block Model, offer a fast-tracked and modularised approach to learning, which has shown to positively influence student academic performance (Austin & Gustafson, 2006; Fry et al., 2017; Samarawickrema & Cleary, 2021). Several Australian universities have applied intensive modes to summer programs and accelerated courses (Burton & Nesbit, 2008; Ellis & Sawyer, 2009; Ho & Polonsky, 2009; Ramsay, 2011), others have implemented similar immersive delivery modes across the whole institution (Goode, Syme, et al., 2024; Roche et al., 2024; Samarawickrema & Cleary, 2021). In addition to Australian universities, immersive and intensive educational models have been increasingly adopted internationally. Institutions in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom have implemented Block or modular systems to enhance student engagement and accommodate the diversity of learning needs (Davies, 2006). For example, Quest University in Canada pioneered a Block-based structure for its entire undergraduate curriculum, offering students the opportunity to focus on one course at a time, leading to deeper engagement and improved academic outcomes (Helfand, 2013). Previously, Colorado College in the United States in 1970 applied intensive

teaching methods in specific programs, demonstrating significant benefits in terms of student retention and satisfaction (Helfand, 2013). Since then, other institutions globally have adopted alternative structures of the immersive delivery (e.g., Buck & Tyrell, 2022; Konjarski et al., 2023; Roche et al., 2024).

Based on the effectiveness of intensive model delivery courses and similar international success precedents (Samarawickrema & Cleary, 2021), VU in Melbourne, Australia, decided to redesign all first-year subjects utilising intensive curriculum design (Klein et al., 2019; Samarawickrema & Cleary, 2021). Initially, the First Year Model was introduced as a form of intensive mode delivery in 2018 in an attempt to improve the quality of student learning outcomes through enhanced educational design and provision of support (McCluskey et al., 2019; Tripodi et al., 2020). In the following years, the entire institution shifted to the VU Block Model® delivery. In this model, a semester is divided into four Blocks, each focusing on a single course that students complete in four weeks. This shift from the traditional semester system to the Block Mode of delivery reflects broader trends in higher education towards more flexible and student-centred learning environments (Helfand, 2013; Lipsky & Cone, 2018). However, research on the experience of international postgraduate students in these types of intensive delivery modes remains limited, particularly in the Australian context.

VU is a dual-sector institution, offering both higher education and vocational training across multiple campuses in Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane, serving over 40,000 students (Victoria University, 2024b). The number of international students in Australian higher education has grown significantly in recent years, from 230, 345 in 2012 to 399,078 in 2018, reflecting a 73% increase over this period (Australian Trade and Investment Commission, 2018). Given the importance of international students to institutional diversity and sustainability, understanding how they experience new educational models like Block Mode is crucial for both university policy and practice (Hellstén & Prescott, 2004).

Research Design

This doctoral research employed a mixed-methods methodology (Östlund et al., 2011) within a case study framework (Merriam, 1988), positioning VU as the case study site. The rationale for using a mixed-methods approach lies in its ability to integrate the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research designs, providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of international postgraduate

students' academic experiences within the Block Model higher education delivery mode. The pragmatic worldview was applied in the research. Pragmatism provides researchers with a philosophical basis (Cherryholmes, 1992; Morgan, 2007) that it is important to apply mixed methods. Pragmatists apply qualitative and quantitative methods in order to seek the best understanding of a research question, statement, or problem. On the basis of their intended consequences, they conduct the research from *what* and *how* perspectives. By combining these methodologies, the study offers a holistic examination of student performance, engagement, and satisfaction, shedding light on both individual perspectives and institutional-level outcomes (Bamberger, 2012).

The qualitative component (Phases 1 and 2) adopted a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of both students and staff. This approach allowed the study to explore how international postgraduate students and academic staff experience and perceive the impact of the Block Model, emphasising the participants' subjective perspectives on teaching and learning (Creswell, 2008). The open-ended interviews conducted with eight international postgraduate students majoring in teacher education, along with ten academic staff, provide rich, descriptive data that inform the study's themes. Thematic analysis was applied to identify key patterns and insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of how Block Mode education affects learning engagement, workload management, and the overall academic experience (Kvale, 2008). This phenomenological focus on first-hand experiences aligns with the study's intent, aiming to influence future educational practices by reflecting the authentic voices of those directly involved.

The quantitative component (Phase 3) focused on institutional data analysis within a realism perspective (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010; Sayer, 2010), emphasising the objective realities that quantitative outcomes reveal. This phase investigated academic performance, measured by Unit of Study Grades (USG), and student satisfaction, measured by Student Evaluation of Unit Result (SEUR) scores. Data were sourced from the university's Student Management System (SMS) and Business Intelligence System (BIS). The analysis explored whether significant differences exist in academic outcomes and satisfaction between international students studying in Traditional versus Block Mode. Specifically, SPSS software was used for statistical analysis, while graphical representations of the trends and findings were generated using both SPSS and MS Excel to provide clear, visual summaries of the data (Norris et al., 2012; Singh et al., 2008).

In this phase, a set of independent and dependent variables were examined, including overall satisfaction and workload satisfaction, using data from the Student Evaluation of Unit (SEU) survey, an internal survey administered to students after each teaching period. The survey's five-point Likert scale was selected for its relevance in gauging student perceptions of course delivery and workload (Rea & Parker, 2014). By analysing these variables, the study sought to uncover any correlations between the delivery mode (Traditional vs. Block) and student satisfaction levels across different disciplines. The decision to focus on specific survey items of the SEU was made to ensure the most relevant aspects of student satisfaction were analysed in relation to the research objectives.

The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings offered a more robust analysis than either method could provide alone. By weaving together personal insights from interviews with statistical trends from institutional data, this mixed-methods approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of how the Block Mode impacts international postgraduate students' experiences at VU. The findings from three phases will be synthesised to provide actionable recommendations for future policy and practice, particularly in refining course design, workload management, and student support services to better accommodate the needs of international students.

This research contributes to the broader discourse on educational delivery modes in higher education by providing a detailed, context-specific exploration of Block Model's effectiveness. The insights gained from both qualitative and quantitative data offer valuable implications for universities considering similar immersive learning models, particularly in catering to diverse and international student populations.

Aims

Based on the proposed research design, this doctoral research aimed to identify and examine the factors that significantly influence the academic experience of postgraduate international students who engage in the different educational delivery modes at VU, with a particular focus on the Block Mode. As universities globally have revised their delivery modes in response to changing institutional needs and external factors, this study explored the key aspects of the Block Mode of delivery that affect international students' academic performance and satisfaction.

The study was guided by the following sub-aims:

Sub-aim A: To explore the perspectives of both students and academic staff on the changes in delivery mode and how these have affected international postgraduate students' engagement in different discipline cohorts.

Sub-aim B: To investigate how changes in educational delivery mode, particularly from traditional to Block Mode, influence the academic performance and unit satisfaction of international postgraduate students across a range of disciplines.

Sub-aim C: To investigate how Block Mode impacts the teaching and learning experiences of international postgraduate students. This sub-aim focused on identifying areas for improvement in the delivery mode, helping to inform future university policy and practice.

This research will contribute new knowledge to the field of higher education by addressing the gaps in understanding the international student experience in Block Mode, with implications for improving academic outcomes and institutional practices. The findings of this study have the potential to influence the future design and implementation of Block Mode at VU and other institutions globally.

Thesis Structures and Chapter Organisations

This thesis is structured into seven chapters, each addressing a key component of the research project. Below is an overview of the content covered in each chapter:

Chapter Two contains a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, focusing on educational delivery modes in higher education, particularly in the context of intensive and Block Modes. This chapter critically examines Australian and international literature on the development of higher education, innovations in delivery modes, and the shift towards intensive educational practices. The evolution of higher education and its progression to more intensive formats are presented. Theoretical perspectives on student experience, emphasising the relationships between performance, engagement, and satisfaction are discussed. This is followed by an exploration of various factors influencing student engagement and satisfaction, categorised into internal and external influences. The student experience

was discussed in comparison between the international and domestic cohorts, highlighting the importance of international students and strategies to enhance their educational journey. Finally, the chapter focuses on research concerning international student experiences, intensive education modes, and Block Mode at Victoria University. The literature review provides a foundation for the three studies (discussed in Chapter Two), offering insights into existing research and identifying gaps that this thesis aims to address.

Chapters Three and Four present the qualitative studies (Study 1 and Study 2, respectively), which explore the experiences and perspectives of international postgraduate students and academic staff in relation to Block Mode delivery at VU. These studies addressed the overall research aim and the sub-aims through the qualitative data gathered from in-depth interviews. In particular, Chapter Three presents student participant perceptions of their experience when transitioning from traditional mode to Block mode. And Chapter Four explores academic participants views on the international student teaching and learning experiences. The insights drawn from these interviews highlight the lived experiences of both students and staff and their unique viewpoints on learning and teaching in the intensive Block Mode. The findings are considered in relation to Study 3 and the relevant literature.

Chapter Five, or Study 3, presents the quantitative study, which examines large institutional survey data collected from international postgraduate students across various disciplines at VU. The study addressed the overall research aim and sub-aims through a two-phase analysis. Phase 1 focused on academic success, evaluating student academic results across different delivery modes and disciplines, while Phase 2 explored student satisfaction with their educational experience, particularly in relation to Block Mode delivery. The findings from both phases were discussed in relation to the existing literature, providing a comprehensive understanding of the quantitative aspects of student academic results and satisfaction in Block Mode.

Chapter Six (General Discussion) integrates the findings from all three studies, presenting a comparative analysis of both qualitative and quantitative components. This chapter examined the results in relation to the overall research aim and sub-aims, drawing connections between the experiences of international postgraduate students and academic staff, as well as the institutional survey data on student performance and satisfaction. By synthesising the data from both the qualitative

interviews and the quantitative analysis, this chapter provides a holistic understanding of student experiences in Block Mode education at VU.

Chapter Seven (Summary, Recommendations, Limitations, and Conclusion) presents a comprehensive summary of the research findings in alignment with the overall research aim and sub-aims. Based on the major findings discussed in Chapter Six, this chapter offers practical recommendations for improving international postgraduate student experiences in higher education, particularly in the context of Block Mode delivery. Additionally, it provided suggestions for future research avenues, emphasising areas that require further exploration. The limitations of the study, both in terms of its design and scope, were also addressed. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the contributions this research has made to the field of higher education, particularly regarding the scholarly experience and satisfaction of international students in innovative educational delivery models. Further, this chapter reflects on the broader implications of these findings, exploring how they contribute to current literature on educational delivery modes and international postgraduate student experiences.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The goal of this literature review is to examine key theoretical perspectives, higher education operational and pedagogical practices, and research related to the experiences of international graduate students within Australian higher education settings. The review is organised in relation to several key areas, including the student experience, higher education considerations of international student engagements, and the examination of research relating to international students and higher education delivery models.

Specifically, this chapter critically reviews Australian and international literature related to higher education theory, practice, and policy, particularly in the context of student engagement and satisfaction within different educational delivery modes. Key areas of focus include traditional and Block Mode delivery in undergraduate and postgraduate programs, with a special emphasis on international students' experiences. The literature on theoretical perspectives of student experience provides an understanding of how universities can enhance student performance, engagement, and satisfaction, which are core to this study's research aims.

The review also examines factors influencing student engagement and satisfaction, with attention to how these factors manifest differently for domestic and international students. Literature pertaining to intensive delivery modes, such as the VU Block Model®, is reviewed to highlight how these impact international students' academic journeys.

Through the analysis of previous research on international student experiences in higher education, the literature reveals insights into effective strategies for improving academic outcomes, particularly for those from diverse backgrounds. Further to this, interrogating research regarding the student experience, both domestic and international, within higher education intensive delivery models, contributed to the platform from which to establish a research design for the current thesis.

Overall, this critical exploration of the literature provides a foundation to identify gaps in existing knowledge, highlight emerging trends in educational delivery, and offer insights into the challenges and opportunities for improving the academic experience of international students. The review also

contributes to situating the current research within higher education discussions of international students' academic performance and satisfaction, and the efficacy of new modes of intensive delivery such as the VU Block Model®.

Definitions

The following definitions clarify key terms and concepts that provide context to this doctoral research study's focus on the postgraduate international student experience within Block Mode education at Victoria University (VU):

Block Mode

Block Mode is a distinctive educational delivery mode which allows students to focus on one unit at a time. This model divides the traditional semester into shorter, discrete periods known as "Blocks." Each Block allows students to focus on one subject at a time, fostering deep immersion and intensive engagement in their studies. For example, one structure previously adopted is a 4-week Block, where students concentrate on a single subject over a four-week period that involves 11 teaching session each of three hours duration. This contrasts with a traditional delivery, referred to as Traditional mode in this thesis, where multiple units are studied concurrently, usually over a 12-week semester, followed by an exam period for some disciplines (McCluskey et al., 2019; Samarawickrema & Cleary, 2021; Tripodi et al., 2020). VU introduced a Block Mode in 2018, coined the VU Block Model®, designed to provide an innovative approach to higher education pedagogy. As the context of the current doctoral research, the VU Block Model® has since grown rapidly, positioning the university as the largest provider of this innovative approach both in Australia and globally.

The structure of Block Mode allows for enhanced learning outcomes by reducing cognitive load, as students are no longer required to juggle several subjects simultaneously. This focused immersion offers pedagogical benefits for both students and staff, including improved time management and more targeted teaching strategies.

Block Mode at VU presents as different distinct 'structures'. These Block Modes are examined to assess their impact on academic performance and student satisfaction:

4-Week 12-Credit Point (4WK12CP) Block. This is the most commonly used Block Mode, where students focus on one subject for four weeks. This format encourages intense engagement with course material and greater interaction with instructors and peers, which is particularly beneficial for international students who may face cultural and academic adaptation challenges.

8-Week 12-Credit Point (8WK12CP) Block. In this variation, students take two subjects concurrently over an eight-week period, allowing for the completion of two units by the end of the Block.

8-Week 24-Credit Point (8WK24CP) Block. This mode focuses on one larger, more comprehensive subject over eight weeks, providing students with more in-depth engagement in a single area of study.

These different Block Mode structures offer varied levels of intensity and pacing. The 8WK12CP model allows students to balance two units over a longer period, providing a more gradual progression through coursework. In contrast, the 8WK24CP model involves deeper study in one subject area, encouraging sustained academic focus. This flexibility caters to the diverse needs of postgraduate students, including those balancing work and study commitments. The quantitative analysis evaluates how each of these Block Modes influences student outcomes, particularly in terms of academic performance and satisfaction.

Intensive/immersive Mode Delivery

Intensive/immersive mode delivery refers to a teaching method where the entire content of a course is delivered within a shortened time frame, rather than the traditional 12-16 week semester (Davies, 2006). Block Mode is an example of intensive delivery, where courses are compressed into four-week periods. This format demands high levels of student concentration and engagement but also offers the potential benefit of allowing students to focus on one subject at a time. Intensive delivery is often used in professional and postgraduate education to accommodate the needs of students with external commitments such as employment. The study will assess how international students, in particular, navigate this intensive and immersive learning structure, including its impact on their academic performance and overall educational experience.

International Students

In the context of this study, international students are defined as individuals who choose to pursue all or part of their higher education outside of their home country. In Australia, this term specifically refers to students studying on a student visa, enrolled in institutions offering programs that cater to international students (Clyne et al., 2001). These students typically face distinct academic, cultural, and social challenges that differ from those of domestic students, particularly in adapting to a new educational system and overcoming language barriers (Briggs, 2016). Additionally, international students are often confronted with unique visa-related constraints that may influence their study patterns and access to support services, making their experiences in the Block Mode particularly pertinent to this research.

International Student Experience

The international student experience is multidimensional, encompassing academic, personal, and social factors that shape the journey of studying abroad. Key influences include adapting to different cultural norms, academic expectations, and social environments, which can vary significantly from the students' home countries (Van Horne et al., 2018). According to Astin's (1970a, 1970b, 2012). Theory of Student Involvement, the environment plays a critical role in shaping student experience, including factors such as academic programs, institutional policies, instructional quality, support systems, infrastructure, and peer interactions. For the purposes of this study, the international student experience is framed through the lens of both academic engagement and broader social and personal integration, with a specific focus on how these factors interplay within the Block Mode framework. Furthermore, the unit of study experience refers to students' feedback, thoughts, and feelings regarding the curriculum, learning activities, and subject delivery within a specific Block. This research explores how these experiences contribute to student satisfaction and performance in different delivery modes (e.g., traditional mode and Block Mode).

Scholarly Experience

For the purposes of this study, scholarly experience refers to the full spectrum of academic and research training experiences encountered by postgraduate international students. This encompasses not only the formal aspects of teaching and learning, such as lectures, assignments, and assessments, but also the broader engagement with academic staff, peers, and the research community. The study examines

how these scholarly experiences are shaped by the Block Mode format, particularly with regard to students' academic development and research output.

Academic Performance

In this study, academic performance is a term with broad implications in the qualitative studies, where it refers to students' general performance or achievement without necessarily focusing on specific scores. Descriptions including High Distinction (HD), Distinction (D), Credit (C), Pass (P) and Fail (F) are used to represent different levels of academic achievement in a more holistic sense. This broader interpretation captures various aspects of students' engagement and success in their academic endeavours, offering a qualitative insight into academic achievement in the learning environment.

Additionally, academic performance is defined more precisely in the quantitative study, using the Unit of Study Grade (USG), which serves as the key metric for assessing student achievement within specific courses or units. The USG is broken down into three primary components:

USG-Pass/Fail (P/F). A binary measure indicating whether students have successfully passed or failed a given unit.

USG-Mark (M). The specific numerical score students receive, providing a direct reflection of their performance in the unit.

USG-Grade Distribution (GD). A breakdown of how students' grades are distributed across the cohort, which includes distinctions such as HD, D, C, P and F. This distribution offers insight into broader trends in student performance across different modes.

By integrating both qualitative and quantitative perspectives on academic performance, this study aims to provide a comprehensive view of how international students engage with the Block Mode. The qualitative data offers nuanced reflections on student experiences, while the quantitative data, including USG metrics, provides a measurable evaluation of how Block Mode supports academic success compared to traditional models of education.

Unit of Study Satisfaction

Unit of study satisfaction refers to students' subjective evaluation of their learning experiences within a specific course or unit. In this study, satisfaction is measured through the Student Evaluation of Unit (SEU) survey, with a focus on the first survey item, which gauges overall student satisfaction. The SEU is administered at the conclusion of each unit, enabling students to provide feedback on the course content, teaching quality, workload, and other key factors. By exploring how postgraduate international students respond to these evaluations, the research explores trends in student satisfaction and their relationship to academic performance.

Change in Delivery Mode

Change in delivery mode pertains to the shift in course structure from traditional to Block Mode at VU, particularly the adoption of the VU Block Model®. It also encompasses other shifts in delivery formats, such as eight-week courses with varying credit points. These changes reflect broader trends in higher education toward more flexible and adaptable learning environments, driven by the needs of a diverse student body, including international students. The research explores how these changes impact international postgraduate students, particularly in terms of academic outcomes and student engagement.

Educational Delivery Modes in Higher Education

In the rapidly changing field of higher education, there has been a significant shift in the way knowledge is imparted to students. As universities endeavor to meet the diverse needs of students across the globe (*The future of higher education in a disruptive world*, 2020), exploring and adopting various modes of teaching and learning has become crucial. These modes not only influence the effectiveness of teaching and learning, but also play a pivotal role in shaping the overall student experience.

Higher Education and its Development

Higher education performs a vital service for society including the education of communities, contributing to workforce development to support future employment and economic growth, and fostering industry partnerships for research and training (Wood & Breyer, 2017). While innovations

are reported in learning and teaching across all student groups at many institutions, there have been only limited fundamental changes in practice across the industry within the preceding decades (Davies et al., 2017). The implementation of an accessible and demand-driven funding system is one of these modifications to stimulate mass participation, technological change, and address the changing needs/expectations of newer generation of students relative to the role the university plays in their lives (Baik et al., 2015; James et al., 2017).

It is evident from the literature and previous research that the sector has focussed on equity changes in areas that address the diversification of the student population as a result of widening participation and from increases in international student enrolments (James et al., 2017). Students are now entering higher education from non-traditional pathways, with a range of different learning needs that require changes in how education is designed and delivered to engage students and support their success (Dixon & O'Gorman, 2020). Most institutions today recognise that the definition of success goes beyond good academic grades within the completion of units of study (Naylor, 2017). Many institutions now embrace an ever-changing concept defined by their students at different stages of their journey (Wood & Breyer, 2017). This includes students' satisfaction with their education and the wider university experience; their engagement within university both socially and academically (Naylor, 2017); and their ability to persevere and have self-belief (Tinto, 2017) to remain in study and successfully achieve their qualification.

Innovation in Educational Delivery Mode

In recent decades, the university landscape has been significantly influenced by technological advancements, leading to innovative teaching and learning methods. Such innovations have been crucial in enhancing student academic efficacy (Bayramova & Aliyev, 2019). Kettunen et al. (2013) explained learning outcomes as aligned with innovative pedagogy and the different ways in which innovative teaching and learning can be achieved. The different learning paths offered to students represent individual, group-based, and network-based learning. Innovation in higher education can also be harnessed in the form of technological applications. Computers and the Internet are used as digital tools for teaching and learning so therefore, can serve important functions in the development of new delivery modes in higher education (Bayramova & Aliyev, 2019). Bayramova and Aliyev conducted mixed-method research by retrieving information both qualitatively and quantitatively, that provided substantial evidence of teaching and learning needs at Azerbaijani universities and the

efficacy of the MOODLE (modular object-oriented dynamic learning environment) platform they employed. The study was conducted online and was completed by 345 respondents from eight partner universities and one non-partner university in Azerbaijan. The researchers reported that higher education institutions must develop new strategies, policies and innovative approaches in the teaching and learning process in order to engage students; and students in higher education must actively engage in technological and pedagogical innovations to progress quality in higher education delivery.

Progression to Intensive Educational Delivery Modes

Education globally has evolved to meet the diverse demands of both industry and educational sectors, leading to a variety of pedagogical approaches. These included the semester scheme, student-centered learning approaches, blended learning, where the time duration, the course structure, content, syllabus and pedagogical stances differ (Ball, 1994).

For the purposes of discussion within this thesis, the theoretical and conceptual perspectives associated with intensive educational delivery mode have broadly focused on student engagement, active learning, and curriculum design. McCluskey et al. (2019, p. 10) describe block pedagogy as "student-centred, active and engaging", while Roche et al. (2024, p. 18) emphasise "focused, guided, active learning" as central to its structure. These descriptions align with contemporary pedagogical frameworks, including constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011), which highlight the importance of structuring teaching, learning, and assessment experiences to facilitate deep understanding and sustained engagement.

Allied to this paradigm, high-impact teaching practices (Wilson et al., 2024) and student-centred learning approaches (Klein et al., 2019) are fundamental. Intensive mode delivery fosters concentrated learning through small, interactive groups, reinforcing pedagogies of engagement and ensuring that learning activities are directly aligned with intended outcomes (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Smith & Baik, 2021). The use of immersive and active learning strategies within Block Mode further supports learning gain, creating conditions conducive to both academic progression and student satisfaction (Gibbs, 2010; Klein et al., 2019).

From a ‘systems thinking’ perspective, a valuable lens for understanding how curriculum organisation, pedagogy, and institutional structures interact in intensive modes of delivery was discussed by Solomonides et al. (2024). The interconnected nature of these elements requires a holistic approach to designing learning environments that optimise student outcomes. This perspective aligns with Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) ‘Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,’ which emphasise student-faculty interaction, active learning, and prompt feedback—elements that are integral to intensive mode pedagogy (Smith & Baik, 2021). This approach underscores the evolving nature of pedagogies and their application for maximising impact in higher education, positioning Block Mode as a framework that not only enhances immediate learning outcomes but also aligns with broader institutional goals of retention and student success.

Among these, fast-tracked, concentrated, and modularised programs, also seen as intensive delivery modes, gained popularity in the UK, the US and Australian higher education systems in the 20th century (Fry et al., 2014; Samarawickrema & Cleary, 2021). Such modular educational delivery is appreciated for its phased approach to learning through imparting knowledge in small structured chunks (Hodgson & Spours, 2014).

Intensive mode delivery, which involves complete teaching within a shortened time frame, in contrast to the traditional 12-16 week semester, has shown notable academic benefits (Davies, 2006). Austin and Gustafson (2006) examined the effect of course length on student learning using a database of 45,000 observations. They found that students in shorter courses achieved higher grades, indicating positive academic outcomes compared to traditional longer semesters. This model has been applied to intensive summer school frameworks and accelerated course designs in a range of subject areas, including graduate business and management (Burton & Nesbit, 2008), second-year pharmacology (Karaksha et al., 2013), and undergraduate science (Harvey et al., 2017). In a similar model adopted at Quest University of Canada students attended class a minimum of three hours a day, five days a week, and were expected to do five hours of work per day outside of class (Helfand, 2013). Helfand further acknowledged the positive impacts of the new model in stating, “the intensity of student engagement and the depths a class can plumb in this model are stunning” (p. 48).

The success of these intensive delivery models led to the 2017 redesign of first-year units at VU in Melbourne, Australia (Klein et al., 2019; Samarawickrema & Cleary, 2021). The Block immersive

mode was subsequently introduced in 2018, marking the first university-wide reform in Australia that allowed students to focus on one subject at a time, completing each subject over a four-weeks period within a 16-week semester (McCluskey et al., 2019; Samarawickrema & Cleary, 2021; Tripodi et al., 2020). It was also highlighted that this immersive approach of delivery mode aimed to enhance educational quality and student preparedness for future endeavors (McCluskey et al., 2019).

Theoretical Perspectives of Student Experience—Performance, Engagement, and Satisfaction

Perceptions of the student experience at different institutions can vary greatly, as concepts are influenced by factors such as the composition of different student groups and the special needs of different students (Benckendorff et al., 2009; Shim & Lee, 2020). Burrows et al. (1992) are believed to have coined the term "student experience" for the first time, which is defined as, "not restricted to the student experience in the classroom but to the total student experience" (p. 1). A systematic review conducted by Tan et al. (2016) detailed that research on the quality of student experience in higher education related to five prevailing research streams, including exploration of learning experience; exploration of student experience; gender differences in assessment of higher education experience; improvement in quality of student experience, and student satisfaction with higher education experience. Previous literature also outlines that student experience is influenced by a range of interacting personal and social attributes (e.g. employment; family support), as well as institutional practices (Thomas, 2002).

A growing body of research has focused on how universities and staff can better manage the learning experience, which is by far the largest focus of research on the student experience (Krause et al., 2005; McInnis, 2003; McInnis et al., 2001; Reason et al., 2006). The understanding of a student's experience has evolved from one that considers primarily teaching and learning to one that increasingly includes the student's exposure to administrative and support services provided by higher education institutions (Baranova et al., 2011). For these reasons, the student experience can be defined as, "the experience of teaching, learning and assessment in higher education and their experience with other ancillary services of the University, i.e., in and out of the classroom" (Douglas et al., 2008, p. 19). The student experience is also defined with the focus on the student life experience, encompassing academic and non-academic student experiences student (Arambewela & Maringe, 2012; Baird & Gordon, 2009).

Bird (2017) explored international students' academic experiences, and their personal and social experiences through a series of interviews, subsequent coding and the development of themes. The purpose of Bird's article is to understand students' and staff perceptions of the academic, personal and social factors that influence the experiences of international graduate students at a university in the UK. Thirty-one international master's students majoring in Public Health were invited to take part in the study. In Bird's study, five themes (adjusting to academic expectations; adjusting to academic conventions; program internationalization; and adjusting to the local culture and future plans) were analysed under the two categories. It was found that student and staff perceptions were broadly similar from the international student experience perspective.

Student Performance

Student performance, traditionally measured by academic achievement, has been increasingly understood as a reflection of a broader range of outcomes. According to (Rubin et al., 2022), student success in higher education is influenced by sociocultural and contextual factors, and goes beyond mere academic grades. Modern universities are increasingly acknowledging that student success includes individual beliefs about achievement, personal growth, and long-term outcomes both during and after their studies (Naylor, 2017; Shah et al., 2021). This expanded view is essential for catering to international student populations in contemporary higher education settings.

Lowe (2024, p. 91) stated that, "the term 'student success' has increasingly been used as the catch-all term for focusing on the student outcomes measures in higher education". A list of student outcomes presented by Lowe include, "retention, employability, access, widening participation and student satisfaction" (p. 91). Tinto (2017) further emphasises that fostering student success requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the diverse needs of students. This includes providing adequate academic support, ensuring access to resources, and creating an inclusive environment where all students feel valued and supported. Additionally, the Higher Educational Learning Framework (University of Queensland, 2022) highlighted the interrelated themes of learning that supports student success, including the roles of social dynamics, contextual learning, higher order thinking, and emotional aspects in students' learning. Student performance is not only an outcome of the education process but also a significant predictor of future success, influencing career opportunities and life trajectories (Lowe, 2024; Tinto, 2017).

Student Engagement

Engagement is widely recognised as a critical component of the student experience, influencing both academic performance and overall satisfaction. According to McInnis et al. (2001), student engagement encompasses not only participation in academic activities but also involvement in the broader university community. This includes extracurricular activities, social interactions, and engagement with institutional resources and support services. Four pillars of student engagement were reported by Bowden et al. (2021). They argue that these include affective, social, cognitive and behavioural dimensions of an 'invisible tapestry' of engagement. Specifically, Bowden et. al stated, "they are closely interrelated and when stitched together and constitute critical factors for institutional and student success" (p. 1218).

Krause and Coates (2008) proposed that student engagement is closely linked to perceptions of the learning environment and the quality of interactions with academic staff. Engaged students are more likely to develop a sense of belonging, which is crucial for their persistence and success in higher education. The importance of engagement is further highlighted by Trowler (2010), who notes that strong relationships within the university community can lead to more favourable outcomes in terms of both satisfaction and academic performance. More recent research by Chen et al. (2023) expands on these findings, demonstrating that social support significantly and positively predicts academic engagement. Chen et al. further explain that this relationship is mediated by life satisfaction and academic motivation, indicating that universities can improve engagement by fostering supportive environments that enhance students' well-being and motivation.

Student Satisfaction

Student satisfaction is another key dimension of the student experience, reflecting how well universities meet the needs and expectations of their students. According to Hornstein (2017), satisfaction is a complex and multi-faceted construct, influenced by various factors such as teaching quality, support services, and the overall learning environment. Student satisfaction is not only an indicator of the quality of the student experience but also a predictor of retention and success in higher education.

Moreover, satisfaction levels can vary across disciplines. Research by Radloff and Coates (2010) found that Australian students in science and agriculture programs reported the highest satisfaction levels, whereas psychology students exhibited only average levels of satisfaction. Similarly, Wiers-Jenssen et al. (2002) observed that Norwegian students in social sciences and medical fields expressed higher satisfaction compared to those studying natural sciences and technology. These findings suggest that disciplinary differences play a role in shaping students' overall satisfaction, likely due to variations in teaching approaches, curriculum structure, and available academic support.

Ammigan and Jones (2018) conducted a comprehensive study across 96 institutions in Australia, the UK, and the US, examining the experiences of over 45,000 international students. Their findings revealed that satisfaction with the learning experience has the most significant impact on the overall student experience, while satisfaction with support services had the least impact. This highlights the importance of ensuring high-quality teaching and learning environments, as these are critical to student satisfaction.

Furthermore, satisfaction is closely tied to the concept of student engagement. As noted by Senior et al. (2017), institutions that understand and respond to students' needs and expectations are more likely to achieve high levels of satisfaction. This requires ongoing monitoring and evaluation of student satisfaction across various dimensions, including academic support, learning resources, and campus facilities (Cheng et al., 2016; Elliott & Shin, 2002).

Universities operate within competitive and globalized higher education market, therefore, maintaining high levels of student satisfaction is crucial for attracting and retaining students (Schertzer & Schertzer, 2004; Wong & Chapman, 2023). Individual universities should engage in the evaluation of, "the factors which predict their own students' satisfaction levels, ideally, as an element of regular, ongoing quality improvement efforts" (Wong & Chapman, 2023, p. 975). Furthermore, institutions must be proactive in implementing change to address the factors that influence satisfaction, ensuring that their offerings align with the expectations and needs of a diverse student body.

Factors Influencing Engagement and Satisfaction

Understanding the factors that influence student engagement and satisfaction in higher education is crucial for enhancing the overall academic experience, particularly for international students who face unique challenges. The literature reveals a complex interplay of individual and external factors that contribute to students' academic performance, engagement, and overall satisfaction. These factors are in two main categories: a) related to the students themselves (e.g., Buck, 2016; Zembylas et al., 2018), and b) stemming from the broader institutional environment (e.g., Poon, 2018).

Factors Related to Students Themselves

Student engagement and satisfaction in higher education are influenced by various personal factors that are closely related to students' individual circumstances and their ability to manage these effectively. Fredricks et al. (2004) highlighted the multifaceted nature of engagement, pointing out that it is shaped by the complex interplay of personal and contextual factors. Key elements include time management skills, the ability to balance the competing demands of work, family, and study, and the establishment of a sense of belonging within the academic community. These factors are especially crucial as students must navigate the challenges of managing their own learning schedules (e.g., Blackmon & Major, 2012; Brown et al., 2015; Holder, 2007).

Research completed by Redfern (2016) emphasised that international students are particularly prone to experiencing anxiety and stress due to academic elements such as study workload and the complexity of assessment tasks. This stress is further exacerbated by the pressures of meeting concurrent study and assessment deadlines and fulfilling commitments outside of their studies, which can significantly impact their level of engagement (Muir et al., 2019). All postgraduate students, regardless of their background, face considerable pressure as they attempt to juggle multiple roles and find a balance between their careers, family, social life, and academic responsibilities (Brown et al., 2015; Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Stone & O'Shea, 2019).

Resilience is another critical factor that has been identified in the literature as essential to the learning process (Gilmore et al., 2019; Schmid & Haukedal, 2022). Resilience supports both motivation and focus, enabling students to persist in their studies despite encountering difficulties. Hobfoll et al. (2003) defined resilience as a psychological and mental state that involves one's ability to cope with stress

and navigate complex, challenging, and unfavorable situations. Alva (1991) also reported that academic resilience specifically refers to a student's capacity to maintain motivation and focus in the face of stress and adverse circumstances in learning. This view of resilience is strongly aligned with the perspectives of Dewey (1913) regarding the importance of an attitude of continuous effort, grounded in the belief that perseverance will ultimately lead to success.

For international students, additional factors such as language proficiency and cultural adjustment play a significant role in their academic outcomes. Briggs (2016) and Gong et al. (2021) note that these students often face challenges in adapting to a new academic environment, which is often conducted in a language different from their native tongue. The expectations of adaptation can impact their ability to engage with the course material and succeed academically. The transition to a new educational system requires international students to quickly adapt to unfamiliar academic cultures and expectations, which can further compound their stress and affect their engagement and satisfaction (Andrade, 2006; Bista, 2016; Perrucci & Hu, 1995).

External Factors Influencing Engagement and Satisfaction

External factors, particularly those related to the institutional environment and teaching quality, can influence student engagement and satisfaction. The quality of course teaching has been identified as one of the most significant determinants of student satisfaction. Petruzzellis et al. (2006) assert that teaching quality is the ultimate factor of student satisfaction, a view supported by previous studies that emphasise the importance of teaching activities and the resources used in course delivery (Munteanu et al., 2010). Poon (2019) highlighted that teaching performance is especially critical for international students, who often rely heavily on the clarity and effectiveness of instructional methods to succeed in a foreign academic environment.

Class size is another external factor that has been extensively studied, with research consistently showing a negative correlation between large class sizes and student satisfaction (Cleary et al., 2024; Coles, 2002; Douglas et al., 2006). Smaller class sizes, such as those found in seminars, have been shown to facilitate more personalised interactions between students and instructors, leading to better student outcomes and higher levels of satisfaction (Anderson et al., 2005; Arias & Walker, 2004; Cuseo, 2007; Ferreri & O'Connor, 2013; Gibbs et al., 1996; Kokkelenberg et al., 2008; Preszler, 2009). The ability to engage directly with the instructor and peers in a smaller class setting enhances the

learning experience and fosters a deeper understanding of the course material. Furthermore, a study conducted in Malaysian private higher education institutions identified class size as one of twelve key factors influencing student satisfaction, alongside aspects such as student support, staff responsiveness, and the learning environment (Bradford, 2011; Ikram & Kenayathulla, 2022). This reinforces the critical role of manageable class sizes in shaping the overall student experience, particularly in competitive academic environments where personalised attention and interactive engagement are valued.

In addition to class size, the availability and quality of university resources and support services are significant components of student satisfaction. Poon (2019) notes that these resources, including library facilities, administrative support, and academic advising, are essential for providing a comprehensive academic experience. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) underscore the importance of students being actively engaged with course materials and building meaningful connections with their teachers and peers, as these are key factors that contribute to effective learning and overall satisfaction.

The relationship between students and lecturers is another external factor that heavily influences student engagement and satisfaction (Thomas et al., 2023). Hagenauer and Volet (2014) and Uleanya (2020) highlighted the importance of fostering positive student-lecturer relationships, which can greatly enhance students' learning capabilities and contribute to their academic success. A supportive relationship with lecturers allows students to feel more comfortable expressing their ideas, asking questions, and seeking help when needed. This open communication is critical for creating a learning environment where students feel valued and supported.

Furthermore, the intentions and practices of educators play a vital role in shaping the student learning experience. Martin et al. (2002) argued that the quality of teaching, and by extension, the quality of learning, is closely linked to the aims that teachers express as achievable goals for their students. Effective teaching practices that are aligned with clear educational objectives contribute to a more engaging and satisfying learning experience for students.

Finally, the provision of timely and constructive feedback is a key aspect of teaching quality that directly impacts student satisfaction. Almuntashiri et al. (2016) identifies prompt feedback as an

important ‘Teaching Quality Indicator’, noting that it helps students manage their time effectively and bridge the gap between theory and practice. Timely feedback enables students to gain practical insights and apply their knowledge in real-world situations, thereby enhancing their overall learning experience (Gilde, 2023; Male et al., 2016).

International Student Context in Higher Education

Globalization and the increasing demand for premium education have led to a substantial rise in the number of students pursuing higher education across borders (Bound et al., 2021). International students are key contributors to the financial stability and cultural diversity of higher education institutions (e.g., Chellaraj, 2019; Hegarty, 2014). Their presence facilitates the exchange of diverse perspectives, fostering global competencies, leadership skills, and intellectual growth among all students on campus (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). In Australia, where the higher education curriculum has been significantly internationalised, international students are now an integral part of the educational ecosystem (Hellstén & Prescott, 2004; Uzhegova et al., 2021). Understanding their experiences is crucial for universities aiming to promote institutional diversity and intercultural awareness (e.g., Lee and Rice, 2007).

The Importance of International Students in Higher Education

The pivotal role that international students play in higher education goes beyond their economic contributions through tuition fees and living expenses, but also through their impact in the enhancement of the academic, cultural, and social fabric of universities (Loonurm et al., 2023). As noted by Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2013), their interactions with domestic students contribute to enhancing global competencies, leadership, and intellectual development. This integration is not just limited to academic interactions but also extends to their engagement within social and cultural forums within the university that enrich the entire campus environment (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013).

The significance of international students in Australian universities was originally underscored by the work of Hellstén and Prescott (2004), who highlighted the integral role these students play in the internationalization of the curriculum. Further to this, Bound et al. (2021) reported growth in the international student market in Australia between 2000 and 2017 of approximately 3000 percent. The increase in the size of this cohort has transformed the role of international students into ‘critical

stakeholders' within the Australian higher education system, influencing both teaching practices and the overall academic culture. Lee and Rice (2007) previously argued that international students are crucial for maintaining institutional diversity. Their diverse cultural backgrounds and perspectives help cultivate intercultural awareness and foster engagement, both on campus and within the broader community (Lee & Rice, 2007).

However, the transition to a new academic environment presents numerous challenges for international students, many of which can influence their sense of belonging—a crucial factor in student retention, satisfaction, and success. According to Crawford et al. (2024), the sense of belonging is strongly tied to students' overall educational experience, their ability to connect with peers, and the support they receive during their initial adjustment. These initial experiences on campus are particularly crucial, as they can significantly impact their persistence in higher education (Crawford et al., 2024; McInnis et al., 1995). Moreover, when students feel supported in their new environment, they are more likely to engage with the academic community, leading to enhanced satisfaction and academic success. Creating an inclusive and welcoming environment is essential for fostering this sense of belonging, which ultimately determines how well students adapt and thrive in their new academic surroundings.

The vulnerabilities of international students have been further highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The global health crisis exacerbated existing challenges, particularly in terms of accessing equitable educational experiences and necessary support services. Gallagher et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia, exploring how staff and students in the School of Human Services and Social Work responded to the challenges posed by the pandemic. Their findings emphasised the need for a deeper understanding of international student needs and the barriers they face in accessing support. The study concluded that universities must remain vigilant against structural discrimination, foster closer relationships between staff and students, and establish credible communication channels to respond effectively during crises.

Moreover, the pandemic has tested the organisational flexibility of higher education institutions worldwide. Crawford et al. (2020) discussed the various types of responses adopted by universities, focusing on the transition from traditional in-person classes to online learning environments. This shift, although necessary, posed significant challenges, particularly for international students who had to navigate new technological platforms while dealing with the uncertainties of the pandemic. The rapid

shift to online education highlighted the need for institutions to not only transition content online but also to ensure that online instruction is as effective and engaging as in-person teaching.

International students in higher education are key members that contribute to the intellectual, cultural and economic fabric of universities. The challenges they face, particularly in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, highlight the need for institutions to take a flexible, inclusive and responsive approach to supporting the diversity of their needs. As higher education continues to evolve, understanding and responding to the unique requirements of international students is critical in the creation of a truly global and inclusive academic environment.

Strategies to Enhance International Student Experience

Improving the international student experience requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the challenges these students face. Bird (2017) emphasised the importance of fostering peer group interactions and encouraging active participation from international students. This is particularly important in creating a supportive learning environment where students feel valued and engaged. Timely and constructive feedback is another crucial aspect of enhancing the student experience. According to Rogers (2007), feedback serves as a valuable tool for self-evaluation, especially for senior students who rely on it to gauge their academic progress and identify areas for improvement. However, delayed feedback can have negative consequences. Studies by Aspden and Helm (2004) and Welker and Berardino (2005) have shown that when feedback is delayed, students become anxious and demotivated, which can hinder their academic performance and overall experience. This highlights the need for institutions to ensure prompt and effective feedback mechanisms to support student learning.

Effective feedback plays a crucial role in enhancing student learning, particularly for international students who are adapting to new academic environments. Timely, clear, and relevant feedback not only helps students meet academic expectations but also aids in their overall adjustment and success (Smyth et al., 2012). Recent research underscores that feedback should be actionable throughout the learning process, allowing students opportunities to apply and improve before final assessments. Emerging practices such as peer feedback, the use of innovative tools, and diverse feedback forms further enhance the feedback process, ensuring it is more engaging and responsive to student needs

(Haughney et al., 2020). By incorporating these strategies, institutions can better support students' academic journeys and promote a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

Furthermore, educational institutions must consider the scheduling and organisation of learning activities to accommodate the diverse responsibilities of international students. Andrews and Tynan (2012) and Buck (2016) pointed out that flexible scheduling is essential for students who juggle academic work with other commitments. A conducive learning environment, characterised by a sense of social presence and interaction, is also vital for fostering a sense of community and belonging among international students (Buck, 2016; Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2012).

Additionally, the role of social support networks cannot be overlooked. The support from family and friends in facilitating effective engagement and participation in classroom activities is important (Kahu et al., 2014; McGivney, 2004). These support networks provide the emotional and practical support that international students need to manage the demands of their academic and personal lives.

An important strategy that serves as a response to the growing diversity of the student population, requires higher education institutions to experiment with various educational delivery methods. For instance, blended or hybrid learning, which combines online and face-to-face instruction, has become increasingly popular (Aguti et al., 2014). Similarly, the VU Block Model® has been highlighted as a pivotal strategy for fostering student success, particularly in navigating the challenges faced by a diverse student body. By enabling students to focus on one unit at a time, the Block Mode promotes deeper learning and engagement, aligning with broader institutional efforts to enhance retention and success (McCluskey et al., 2021). These approaches offer flexibility and accessibility, making it easier for international students to engage with their studies while managing other aspects of their lives.

Differences in the Academic Experience of Domestic and International Students

The experiences of students in higher education can vary greatly depending on whether they are domestic or international students. Both groups face stressors such as academic demands, financial difficulties, and relationship challenges, however, the nature and intensity of these stressors often differ

(Amanvermez et al., 2024; Andrews & Wilding, 2004; Bewick et al., 2010). Stress perceptions are influenced by individual appraisals of situations and available resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). While some students may perceive stress as a motivator for growth and learning (Everly et al., 2002), others may experience it as a significant psychological burden, especially when they feel overwhelmed by the challenges they face (Cohen et al., 2007). Positive experiences for international students are also represented within the literature in the areas of academic performance development, satisfaction with their learning experience, and opportunities for social connections.

Factors Related to Academic Experience

Financial stress is a particularly salient issue for international students, who often face higher tuition fees, limited opportunities for cocurricular work due to visa restrictions, and additional expenses related to relocation (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000; Uzhegova et al., 2021). Research outlined that international students may experience academic challenges more acutely than their domestic counterparts, as they navigate different educational systems and face language barriers (Burns, 1991; Hashim & Yang, 2003). These challenges can lead to higher levels of stress and potentially hinder their academic success (Amanvermez et al., 2024; Sümer et al., 2008).

Moreover, international students often encounter unique stressors related to cultural adjustment, such as loneliness, homesickness, and conflicts arising from cultural differences in communication and teaching styles (Alharbi & Smith, 2018; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The pressure of adapting to a new cultural environment can exacerbate the stress associated with common academic and social challenges, making international students more vulnerable to mental health issues compared to domestic students (Acharya et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019). However, it is important to note that not all studies report significant differences between these two groups in terms of emotional problems or academic difficulties, indicating that individual and contextual factors play a crucial role in shaping these experiences (Clough et al., 2024; Fritz et al., 2008).

Language barriers add a layer of complexity to the social and academic experiences of international students. Although they might have a strong command of English for academic purposes, a lack of fluency in the local language can contribute to a sense of isolation and challenge their social interactions outside the classroom (Amanvermez et al., 2024; Masgoret, 2006; Yeh & Inose, 2003). This linguistic barrier not only hampers their ability to integrate socially but also restricts their

opportunities for part-time employment, which in turn heightens financial pressures (Rienties et al., 2011).

Despite the many challenges international students face, some studies have noted that they can also exhibit higher motivation and engagement in their studies compared to domestic students. For instance, Han (2023) found that international students in blended learning environments showed greater cognitive engagement and a more positive attitude towards technology adoption. Adopting an ecological perspective on student learning, Han's study compared cognitive, social, and material elements of the learning experience between 193 domestic and 120 international students. While domestic students employed deeper approaches to learning, international students demonstrated stronger engagement with the blended learning environment and reported higher ratings on their use of online learning systems. Furthermore, international students expressed a stronger intention to continue taking blended courses and anticipated higher academic performance in these courses compared to their domestic peers. These findings align with the general trend observed by Dang et al. (2020), where international students reported more positive learning experiences than domestic students in blended learning environments. An earlier study undertaken by He and Banham (2009) concluded that although the "domestic student academic performance is generally better than the international student performance but the gap is significantly narrowing as the international student performance is improving overtime"(p. 100) . More recently, Ammigan and Drexler (2022) reported that GPA as a measure of academic performance was positively associated with international students satisfaction scores for their overall learning experience and access to support services and overall learning. Generally, the higher levels of engagement and academic performance among international students highlight their capacity to excel, despite facing distinct challenges, and indicate the potential for targeted support strategies to further enhance their collaborative learning experiences, such as mixing domestic and international students in group work and providing intercultural communication training (Han, 2023).

Overall, the literature regarding factors related to academic experiences has highlighted that, while international students may struggle with certain aspects of their transition, they may also possess a strong drive to succeed academically, which can serve as a protective factor against some of the stressors they encounter. Trends associated with patterns of academic performances are indicative positive change and the importance of the influence of the university learning environment.

Factors Unrelated to Academic Experiences

The social domain presents another area of significant difference between domestic and international students. University life often involves substantial changes in social relationships, with many students moving away from home for the first time. For international students, this transition can be particularly pronounced, as they must navigate not only physical separation from their families but also cultural and geographical differences that may impede communication and support (Amanvermez et al., 2024). Additionally, international students may report feeling more isolated and less supported than their domestic peers, which can further impact their well-being and academic performance (Wilson et al., 2023). Goode, Roche, et al. (2024) examined satisfaction characteristics of international students and reinforced the importance of social connections to their overall experience, noting that a university curriculum adopting immersive intensive models needs to ensure social experiences are integrated within the early phases of delivery.

Furthermore, the difference in expectations and perceptions of university services between international and domestic students can significantly impact their overall adaptation to university life. International students often enter higher education with high expectations, particularly regarding the quality of services and academic support. When these expectations are not met, it can lead to dissatisfaction and poor socio-cultural adaptation (Uzhegova et al., 2021). The discrepancy between what international students anticipate and what they actually experience in terms of academic support and social integration can exacerbate feelings of isolation and stress.

Information needs also vary between domestic and international students. International students often have more pressing information needs related to finance, housing, health, and daily life logistics, reflecting their less familiar environment and the acculturative stress they experience (Oh & Butler, 2016; Sin & Kim, 2018). For example, while most students do not report major health issues, international students may face additional challenges due to unfamiliarity with the host country's healthcare system and differences in health practices between their home and host countries (Russell et al., 2008). These disparities can lead to increased stress and anxiety, particularly when dealing with health issues or navigating medical services. Additionally, technological and language barriers can hinder their academic information-seeking behaviour, making it more challenging for them to access and utilise academic resources effectively (Liao et al., 2007; Zhao & Mawhinney, 2015).

While domestic and international students face common pressures in higher education, the pressures of these two groups differ significantly in intensity and nature. The additional challenges faced by international students include financial pressures, cultural adjustment, language barriers and differences between expectations and experiences (e.g. Bender et al., 2019). These factors contribute to higher stress levels and potentially greater mental health difficulties for international students. However, their higher levels of motivation and engagement, particularly in academic settings, highlight their resilience and determination to overcome difficulties and succeed (e.g. Han, 2023).

Research Regarding International Students' Experience

Research regarding international students' experiences often utilises various methodologies, highlighting the importance of understanding not just the outcomes, but the approaches used. Such studies aim to capture the multifaceted nature of international students' academic and cultural adaptation processes, which are shaped by institutional practices, personal circumstances, and socio-cultural dynamics. By integrating diverse methodological approaches, these investigations offer valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities international students encounter within different educational contexts.

Bird (2017) explored the academic, personal, and social experiences of international postgraduate students at a UK university using qualitative methods. Bird's study employed purposive sampling, which was particularly suitable given the specific emphasis on international students. Focus groups were conducted with 10 international students enrolled in a Master of Public Health program, while 12 staff members completed an open-ended survey. The data, analysed using Thematic Analysis, provided a comparison between student and staff perceptions. Five key themes emerged, such as programme internationalisation, adjustment to academic expectations, academic conventions, and local culture, a result that reflects the multidimensional challenges faced by students. Notably, a discrepancy was found between student and staff perceptions of students' academic writing abilities and understanding of plagiarism. While staff identified plagiarism as a major academic challenge for international students, many noting cultural differences in understanding academic integrity and insufficient guidance on the issue, none of the students raised plagiarism as a concern. This gap in perceptions highlights a critical area for development in terms of clearer communication and support from staff to address these academic conventions effectively. The mixed-method approach of

combining focus groups with staff surveys allowed for a deeper understanding of both sides of the student-staff dynamic. This method aligns well with the aim of the current study, as it presents a structured yet flexible approach to understanding how international students adapt to academic and cultural environments.

Hsieh (2020) conducted a quantitative study to examine how international student support systems, represented by the administrative interaction at the faculty and institutional level, impact the learning outcomes, educational experiences, and grades of students. Using a stratified random sample of 3,405 international and U.S. domestic students from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), his study employed one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and regression analyses. The study found that while demographic characteristics such as gender and first-generation status did not significantly influence the overall educational experience, these characteristics did have an impact on students' grades. Furthermore, race and gender affected the interaction with faculty, though there was no direct correlation between the frequency and quality of interactions with faculty and subsequent student outcomes. The study's stratified sampling method was critical in ensuring a balanced representation of international students, particularly Chinese and non-Chinese students, as they made up a small percentage of the NSSE population. By focusing on senior-year students at U.S. institutions, Hsieh was able to compare the experiences of international and domestic students in terms of faculty interaction and institutional support. Through hierarchical linear regression, Hsieh's research demonstrated that frequent interaction with faculty was the strongest predictor of academic success, followed by the quality of faculty interaction and the perceived institutional support. This quantitative approach provided robust evidence for the significant role of faculty engagement in shaping international students' academic experiences.

Research Regarding Students' Experience in Intensive Mode

Research into students' experiences in intensive or immersive educational modes has increasingly relied on both qualitative and quantitative approaches to assess various aspects of student satisfaction, academic success, and engagement. These studies focus on understanding how different delivery models, such as Block and blended formats, impact student learning outcomes, staff effectiveness, and overall performance. The growing body of literature highlights the importance of considering both student and staff perspectives, as well as the need to adapt teaching methods to suit diverse student populations. This section reviews key studies that utilise both qualitative and quantitative

methodologies to explore these dimensions, offering insights into the benefits and challenges of immersive learning environments.

In exploring the student experience within intensive mode delivery (IMD), qualitative research by Czaplinski et al. (2017) offers valuable insights. IMD refers to a learning format where traditional semester-long courses are condensed into shorter, high-intensity Blocks, typically ranging from a few days to several weeks. In Czaplinski et al.'s study, the course was divided into four thematic modules, each featuring a one-day intensive face-to-face session, which included lectures, workshops, and lab classes. These sessions were preceded by two to three weeks of self-paced online study. The total instructional time, similar to a traditional course, included around 8 hours per week of online study and 32 contact hours. Each module concluded with a major assessment task completed at the end of the in-person session. The study employed in-depth interviews and written responses from eight of the nine teaching staff to examine their perceptions of IMD's effectiveness, including benefits, challenges, and student engagement. The methodology followed a discursive psychology language analysis approach, which allowed the Czaplinski et al. to analyse recurring themes in staff interviews and categorise their insights using a color-coded system. This detailed approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of the perceived benefits and shortcomings encountered during IMD implementation.

The findings in Czaplinski et al.'s study revealed that despite initial concerns about the feasibility of IMD, the staff expressed a preference for this model over traditional delivery methods. Notably, the study reported exceptionally high student engagement, with nearly 100% attendance throughout the intensive modules, surpassing staff expectations. Staff also observed that students demonstrated deeper learning and greater enthusiasm, particularly during practical sessions like laboratory work. However, some challenges were identified, including difficulties with student preparation for online, self-paced activities prior to the face-to-face sessions, as well as issues related to time management and online learning skills.

Czaplinski et al. (2017) concluded that IMD offers significant potential for increasing student engagement, especially in hands-on, practical settings, though further improvements in pre-session preparation and online learning strategies are required. These findings contribute to the broader understanding of how flexible, intensive learning formats can positively impact both staff and students,

aligning with similar studies that highlight the benefits of IMD in higher education (Davies, 2006; Harvey et al., 2017).

More recently, Goode et al. (2023) conducted a comprehensive quantitative study of student satisfaction by analysing institutional feedback surveys from an Australian public university (Southern Cross University) following the introduction of a 6-week immersive learning model, termed the Southern Cross Model (SCM). The study utilised two distinct strands of quantitative analysis. The first strand (N = 4,157) compared student satisfaction ratings between units delivered in the immersive model in 2021 and those from the traditional trimester model in 2019. The second strand (N = 1,925) examined correlations between individual survey items and overall teaching and unit satisfaction in the immersive model. This quantitative approach provided valuable insights into how students responded to the immersive model, with findings showing statistically significant improvements in five out of seven unit satisfaction indicators, and all six teaching satisfaction indicators. Notably, the research highlighted that students' overall satisfaction with their units was most strongly tied to their satisfaction with teaching, particularly when teaching staff presented content clearly and demonstrated concern for student learning. Interestingly, although students reported a reduced satisfaction with workload in the immersive mode, this factor had a relatively weak correlation with overall unit satisfaction.

Additionally, Buck and Tyrrell's (2022) study at the University of Suffolk provides a comprehensive analysis of the pilot implementation of a block and blended delivery model, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to evaluate its impact on student performance and engagement. The study gathered qualitative data from 94 students across 22 modules through a survey. The survey included a combination of 5-point Likert scale questions, gauging students' agreement with statements about their experience in the block and blended learning model, as well as seven open-ended questions that invited students to elaborate on the advantages and disadvantages of both the block and blended approaches. Furthermore, secondary quantitative data, including student attainment and deferral requests, were analysed to provide a robust comparison between the block and blended delivery and the traditional semester-based format. These quantitative data were analysed using SPSS, employing paired samples t-tests and chi-square tests to assess differences in student performance and deferral requests between the two formats. The qualitative survey responses were analysed through thematic analysis, following an inductive approach where themes emerged directly from student feedback (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Key themes, such as 'focus', 'learning styles', and 'convenience', were identified and refined through

multiple rounds of coding, highlighting patterns in students' experiences. This dual-method approach provided a robust comparison of the pilot program's effectiveness, integrating both statistical outcomes and the thematic insights that emerged from student reflections on the hybrid educational model.

The qualitative findings of Buck and Tyrell's (2022) study illuminated key student experiences, with many respondents highlighting the enhanced focus and flexibility that the block and blended format offered. The structure of a block and blend delivery enabled them to concentrate intensively on one module at a time, which some felt led to a deeper understanding of the content. Moreover, the blended learning component allowed for greater adaptability, particularly for students juggling other commitments such as work or family responsibilities. This flexibility was particularly beneficial for commuter students and those with caring responsibilities, who found the combination of online and face-to-face teaching to be more manageable. Students also reported a sense of accomplishment, as the focused nature of the block and blend format allowed them to see tangible progress in their studies. However, the accelerated pace of block and blend teaching was not without its drawbacks; some students expressed concerns about the, "narrow margin for error" feeling that the intense pace left little room to catch up if they fell behind (p. 1086).

Buck and Tyrell (2022) also presented quantitative results that substantiated the qualitative data regarding student perceptions, showing a significant improvement in academic outcomes for students in the block and blend format compared to the traditional delivery model. On average, students in the block and blend format achieved higher assessment grades ($M = 66$) than those in the traditional format ($M = 55$), with the difference proving statistically significant ($t\,(11) = -3.966$, $p = 0.002$) and reflecting a large effect size ($d = 1.13$). The data also pointed to greater variability in student performance under the block and blend model, indicating that while the average grades were higher, the performance range was broader. The analysis of deferral requests also showed a significant reduction under the block and blend model. When the new delivery mode was implemented, there were only 18 deferral requests, compared to 47 and 65 in the traditional delivery formats of previous years. This pattern of results showed that the block and blended approach contributed to alleviating the pressure experienced by students that typically lead to deferrals through improved time management, and minimising assignment overload. Overall, the study's findings underscore the potential of a block and blend delivery model to enhance student engagement, improve academic outcomes, and reduce deferral rates, though careful consideration of pacing and implementation of support mechanisms to address the concerns of students regarding the intensive nature of this teaching approach.

Overall consideration of literature pertaining to immersive delivery with domestic and international cohorts reinforces their need to consider data from a variety of sources. Quantitative data, such as institutional feedback surveys and academic performance metrics, provide critical insights into the measurable outcomes of such models. In parallel, qualitative data from interviews and extended response survey items offer a nuanced perspective on the effectiveness of these immersive models, helping to highlight areas for improvement and the potential for increasing student engagement and success. Together, these data sources emphasise the value of flexible and adaptive learning formats in meeting the diverse needs of students in higher education.

Research about VU Block

Research into the Block Mode of delivery at VU has gained increasing attention in recent years, particularly as this innovative approach to higher education continues to shape students' academic experiences. The VU Block Model® condenses traditional semester-long units into shorter, more intensive periods of study, allowing students to focus on one subject at a time. This shift in teaching and learning structure has prompted recent studies exploring the effectiveness of the Block Model from various perspectives, including student performance, satisfaction, and teaching practices. Researchers have used a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to evaluate the outcomes of the Block Model®, highlighting both the potential benefits and challenges associated with this mode of delivery.

Ambler et al. (2021) investigated the learning experiences of first-year students in higher education by examining their perspectives of the newly implemented First-Year Block Model (FYBM) curriculum at Victoria University in Australia. Using focus groups and an online questionnaire, their study found that elements such as familiarity within the new environment, curriculum leadership, teaching quality, and curriculum customisation significantly influenced student engagement and achievement.

The study involved 18 students in focus groups and 107 questionnaire respondents. Thematic analysis of focus group data, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide, revealed that familiar aspects of the curriculum, small class sizes, and peer support helped students, especially those from diverse backgrounds, to transition smoothly into university. The researchers reinforced an alignment

with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory (Vygotsky, 1978) by their suggestion that drawing on familiar experiences aids students' learning in new environments. Ambler et al. (2021) also found students valued teacher care and engagement, indicating that both teaching quality and teacher characteristics were crucial for their learning. In line with national and international research, quality teaching was identified as a significant factor in student success. Complementary and extracurricular activities integrated into the curriculum also contributed to positive learning experiences, though students varied in their utilisation of these opportunities. The research highlighted the importance of staff expertise in the delivery of a first-year curriculum to facilitate a positive impact on student learning and success.

Loton et al. (2022) conducted a large-scale quantitative study to examine the impact of the Block Model on student performance and satisfaction at an Australian university (Victoria University). The study focused on first-year students and compared their experiences in Block Mode with those of prior cohorts who studied in traditional mode. The quantitative data was collected from institutional records, including student enrolment, gradebook data, and satisfaction surveys, resulting in a robust sample size of 86,545 assessment observations and 15,989 satisfaction responses.

Their study employed cross-classified linear mixed effects models to analyse the data accounting for the hierarchical structure of students nested within units and teachers. This statistical method allowed the researchers to control for variability across different disciplines, student demographics, and unit designs, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing student outcomes. The model design was also used to evaluate performance and satisfaction differences between individual units, teachers, and students, which added reliability to the findings.

Loton et al. (2022) found that students in the VU Block Model® demonstrated a significant improvement in academic performance, with students achieving over 10 marks higher than those in traditional mode. The most substantial performance gains were observed in equity groups, particularly among students from low socio-economic backgrounds and non-English-speaking students, reinforcing the Block Model's potential to address disparities in academic achievement.

However, the effects on student satisfaction were more nuanced. The study by Loton et al. showed an increase in teaching satisfaction but a slight decline in course satisfaction, especially concerning the perceived workload. Interestingly, discipline played a moderating role, with business students reporting the highest satisfaction with the Block Model®, while arts and education students were less satisfied. Despite the initial improvements, Loton et al. (2022) suggested that further adjustments to unit design and workload could enhance the overall satisfaction of students.

This quantitative study highlights the effectiveness of the VU Block Model® in improving academic performance, particularly for equity groups, while also illustrating the challenges in balancing workload and satisfaction across disciplines. By employing rigorous statistical analysis and large-scale data, Loton et al. (2022) provide important insights into the benefits and limitations of Block Mode education.

Additionally, Muscat and Thomas (2023) conducted a qualitative study that explored the pedagogical benefits of teaching in the VU Block Model® from the perspective of university educators. The research focused on uncovering effective teaching strategies and pedagogical principles in Block delivery by examining the experiences of two university educators. Through a collaborative practitioner research approach, the study engaged educators in a systematic reflection on their teaching practices, allowing for an in-depth understanding of how Block teaching influenced their pedagogy. Their research aimed to examine what approaches and strategies worked effectively in Block Mode and why, while identifying areas for further refinement.

The findings from Muscat and Thomas (2023) revealed several key benefits of Block teaching. The immersive nature of Block delivery fostered a strong sense of belonging among students, enhanced student agency, and facilitated scaffolded instruction. This instructional model allowed students to take more ownership of their learning, while teachers supported the learning process through structured guidance and scaffolding. Furthermore, the longer and concentrated class periods enabled deeper exploration of topics, encouraging higher-order thinking and active learning.

This qualitative research contributes to understanding Block delivery by illustrating how the structure of the VU Block Model® promotes an engaging and student-cantered learning environment. The

insights gained from educator experiences highlight the importance of a shift in pedagogical mindset, where active learning, collaboration, and ongoing feedback become central to effective Block teaching.

The review of current research on the VU Block Model® highlighted the value of using a variety of research techniques. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used to explore its efficacy as a higher education delivery mode. Quantitative studies offer large-scale data that reveal performance improvements, particularly among equity groups, while qualitative research provides a more in-depth examination of teaching practices and student engagement. Together, these Block Model® studies generate evidence to highlight its potential to enhance academic outcomes while identifying areas that require further refinement, such as managing workload and increasing satisfaction across different disciplines.

Summary

In summary, the existing literature provides a comprehensive examination of various themes related to educational delivery and student experience in higher education, particularly for international students. First, studies on educational delivery modes highlight the comparison between traditional, semester-long courses and more intensive, fast-tracked models, such as the VU Block Model®, emphasising how these different structures impact student engagement and satisfaction. Next, the theoretical perspectives of student experience, including performance, engagement, and satisfaction, explore how universities and staff can enhance students' academic journeys, focusing on factors such as teaching quality, curriculum design, and the role of extracurricular activities.

Further, factors influencing engagement and satisfaction are discussed, with particular attention to time management, the ability to balance study, work, and personal life, and the impact of support services. Within the international student context, research illustrates the vital role international students play in the cultural and academic fabric of universities, while also examining the unique challenges they face in adapting to new educational systems. The differences between domestic and international students in terms of academic experience are explored, noting the variances in engagement levels, expectations, and overall satisfaction, particularly in adjusting to different learning environments.

Research specific to international student experiences uncovers both beneficial and challenging factors in academic success, with an emphasis on resilience, language barriers, and the quality of teaching

support. Studies on student experience in intensive mode delivery, such as Block teaching, provide insights into how condensed courses impact learning outcomes, highlighting both the benefits of focused attention on single subjects and the potential drawbacks related to workload and time pressure. Finally, research about the VU Block Model® demonstrates how this innovative approach has positively influenced student performance, particularly among equity groups, while also identifying areas for improvement, such as adjusting unit designs and ensuring workload balance. Overall, the literature in the current research provides valuable insights into the diverse factors influencing student engagement and satisfaction in different educational delivery modes, offering a foundation for understanding the international student experience in both traditional and Block Modes of learning.

Chapter 3: Study 1- International Postgraduate Student Perspectives and Experiences of Block Delivery

This chapter presented the findings of Study 1, which aims to explore the experiences of international students in the Block Mode of learning at VU. The study utilised qualitative research methods, specifically semi-structured interviews, to gather in-depth insights from international students enrolled in postgraduate programs. The research investigated key themes such as academic engagement, challenges faced in Block Mode, and students' perceptions of their academic performance and satisfaction. It provided a detailed explanation of the method, participants, recruiting procedure, interview design, data collection and analysis. In this chapter, the results were presented and discussed, highlighting the main themes that emerged from the interviews, followed by an analysis of the implications these findings have on the academic experiences of international students in intensive learning environments. Through this qualitative exploration, the chapter aimed to contribute to the understanding of how Block Mode affects international students' engagement, performance, and overall educational satisfaction.

Method

This study applied a qualitative research design to explore the academic experiences of international postgraduate students studying in Block Mode at VU. The research focused on understanding how these students perceive and engage with their academic environment, particularly in relation to the delivery mode of their courses. A phenomenological approach was adopted, which is well-suited to investigating the lived experiences of individuals and gaining insights into how they make sense of their academic experiences (Creswell, 2008). Examining the lived experiences of the participants through a series of interviews supported the consideration of the experiential circumstances of postgraduate international students majoring in teacher education.

To collect rich, descriptive data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a small sample of postgraduate students majoring in teacher education. This approach allowed participants to share their personal experiences in depth, focusing on key aspects such as academic performance, class engagement, use of learning management systems, and study preferences. Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to analyse the interview data, enabling the

identification of common themes and patterns across participants' experiences. The following sections outline the details of the participant selection, recruitment procedures, interview design, and data analysis techniques employed in this study.

Participants

A sample of 10 was suggested by Creswell (2008) as a suitable number for a qualitative study containing interviews. Additionally, the unique characteristics of this sample contribute to confidence in recruitment of this sample size. For the purpose of the qualitative study in the current thesis, taking time frame and COVID-19 constraints at the time of this research into consideration, a smaller sample of eight supported satisfactory sourcing of data to ensure the attainment of the overall research aim.

The research is a small case study of the academic experience of international postgraduate students majoring in teacher education. Course chairs of the Master of Teaching Primary and Master of Teaching Secondary were asked for permission to provide an email invitation, including the information to participants form. The enrolment list of the two courses were obtained with the assistance from course chairs and one of the supervisors of the student researcher. The shortlist of participants was generated according to two factors: a) being an international student and b) having finished units in both Block Mode and traditional mode.

Recruiting Procedure

The study was conducted with the approval of the Victoria University (VU) Ethics Board (see Appendix A). The recruiting procedure commenced with an initial email sent to course chairs to seek approval in conducting research (see Appendix B). This email was sent with a short introduction to the student researcher and the proposed research and attached with information to participants (see Appendix C) and consent form (see Appendix D). After the approval, the invitation email was sent to potential participants enquiring of their intention in joining the research. When a response email was received indicating interest, the student researcher booked a time for an online interview, and the consent form was sent back to the prospective participant. Additionally, a copy of the interview question list was also sent to the international student participants before the interview for their reference and understanding of the topics that would be covered.

Given the response rate, the invitation email with the information to the research was sent to the first four students on the list. A follow up email was be sent if no response received. The interview time was arranged at a mutually convenient time if a positive reply was received. After one week of the initial contact, invitation emails were sent to the second four students on the list, and a subsequent follow up email sent where applicable.

Interview Design and Data Collection

It was previously clarified that the purpose of the interviews was to gather data for the qualitative study with international students, and an information and consent statement were provided before the commencement of the interview. Participants first provided basic demographic data, such as their country of origin (Kracker & Pollio, 2003), before sharing details about their academic experience. Data was collected during the second semester of the 2021 academic year.

Below is the list of questions in the interview (Table 1):

Table 1

List of Questions (International Students)

Topic	No.	Questions
Casual questions	1	What is your country of origin? What city?
	2	How long have you been in Australia?
	3	Why did you decide to study in Australia?
Academic performance	4	How many units have you finished in Block Mode?
	5	How has your academic experience been in your Master of Teaching studies?
	6	Did you study units in standard 12 weeks semester mode? How did you find that?
	7	Did you study units in Block semester mode? How did you find that?
	8	Could you outline your academic performance in Block Mode? And how about that under traditional mode?
	9	How would you compare your academic result in Block Mode and traditional mode?
	10	From personal perspective do you think you perform better in Block Mode or traditional mode, why?
	11	Do the results from your academic studies resonate with your student experience under the Block Mode delivery?
Engagement in class	12	What do you think your engagement in class under Block Mode?
	13	Compared with the engagement under traditional mode, do you think you engaged more or less in the class activities? And why?
	14	Could you describe any difference in class activities between the two modes? Let's say time length, or your interaction opportunities.
	15	Do you think there is adequate engagement opportunities in class in Block Mode? How about that in traditional mode?
Learning management system	16	How often do you log in the learning management system in Block Mode, how often that in traditional Mode?
	17	Do you think it is helpful or not in connecting to the unit content, why?
	18	Do you find it easier or harder to manage the VU learning system under Block Mode? Any examples to explain why?
Content connection	19	Do you feel you get more or less connections to unit content if compare the traditional mode and Block Mode?
	20	Do you think it's out of the impact of the different delivery modes?
Preference	21	Which mode do you prefer?

All data collected was in verbal form and typed before being analysed. The interview was designed as a semi-structured short response discussion which lasted approximately twenty to thirty minutes. It was audio-recorded and transcribed into an individual file for each interviewee. To ensure methodological rigor, the interview questions were developed to align with the research aims, following best practices in qualitative research design (Dörnyei, 2007). They were structured to be open-ended, logically sequenced, and free from ambiguity or leading phrasing to encourage reflective and contextually rich responses. The key areas for consideration in the interview items were academic performance, engagement in class, use of learning management system, connection to unit content and personal study preferences. Each participant was asked the questions in the same order. One or two follow-up questions were asked when the answer was not clear.

Trustworthiness Procedures

Trustworthiness is an important reference as to whether the results of a study are worthy of the attention of readers and researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). They proposed five strategies for establishing trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmability, which are interrelated and interdependent. Similarly, Shenton (2004) suggested several approaches to improve trustworthiness, such as well-designed research methods and tactics to encourage honesty in interviews.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used for analysing and interpreting the qualitative data. This analytic method can be an approach that reports on the experiences, meanings, and realities of participants, or it can examine how events, realities, meanings, experiences, etc. are perceived (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can be a method that not only reflects and uncovers reality, but also unveils the surface of "reality" (what the reality looks like). Thematic analysis is considered as a basic method for qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017), because it helps researchers to build up the fundamental skills for conducting other kinds of qualitative data analysis.

Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined six steps for applying this thematic analysis method. The first step is to transcribe data, read and re-read it, to get and note down the initial ideas. The second step is to code data characteristics in a systematic fashion across the data set. The third step is to gather the data

all together and examine them into potential themes. The fourth step is to check the themes. The fifth move is to define and name these themes for a clear definition on each theme. The last step is to produce and generate the report.

The student researcher worked to identify different themes based on the transcriptions of all interviewees. Two supervisors also analysed two complete participant transcriptions with the purpose of checking the themes identified by the student researcher. The outcomes of all three of these thematic analyses were contrasted and discussed by the research team. Final consensus commentaries reflecting agreement of the linking of themes to transcript were combined and filtered to generate the most frequent seven or eight themes for complete analysis of all participants.

When relating the themes to the interview transcription, different colours were adopted to label each theme. One transcription was randomly selected for inter-rater reliability between the student researcher and the supervisors (the reliability is 85%). Then the rest of interview transcripts are decoded by the student researcher and presented in the results section.

Results

The results of this study provide insights into the learning experiences of international postgraduate students in Block Mode compared to traditional semester-based delivery. The qualitative data highlight the complexities of student engagement, academic performance, and personal study experiences across these two educational delivery modes. Key themes emerging from the interviews include the sequencing and intensity of assignments, the impact of non-academic commitments, and the role of focused learning in fostering academic clarity. Additionally, student participants discussed the importance of timely feedback, the influence of lecturers and subjects on engagement, and their perceptions of intensive teaching and learning. The findings also shed light on students' interactions with the Learning Management System (LMS) and their overall preferences regarding delivery modes. Together, these results offer a comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping international students' academic experiences and provide valuable insights for enhancing teaching and learning practices in Block Mode.

The intent of the present analysis was to identify the contributing factors that influence international students' learning experience under Block Mode at VU. The 16 questions focus on key areas of participants' learning experience in both Block Mode and traditional mode, and are consistent with the 11 themes identified in the data analysis. The following sections described the results associated with each theme.

(Traditional) Assignments/Subjects' Sequence/Mixture

When prompted by the interviewer to share on their thoughts about how they feel when studying in a traditional semester mode, five out of eight (Student Participant S01, S02, S03, S05 & S08) noted that their learning experience is influenced by one or both of the sequences of assignments and units. Participant S01 indicated that severe anxiety could arise when multiple assignments were due at the same time in traditional mode. The students indicated a level of pressure related to completing assignments 'at the last minute' (Participant S05). The challenge of studying three or four units at the same time in traditional mode delivery was noted by Participant S02 and S03. They also noted this in contrast to the weekly assignment requirement of Block Mode. Compared that "assignments moved around across three or four months (S03)" in traditional mode, Participants (S03 & S05) indicated that it can be a struggle when having all the assessments due in the same week in traditional mode ("when all the assessments due in the same week, that's a bit of struggle (S05)"). However, in contrast, Participant S08 pinpointed that having different kinds of assessment tasks from different subjects in traditional mode can support a high level of course interest and stated that:

> "we would have two different subjects and then we can switch between the assessment tasks…… if one is presentation and another is just writing base. So in case we are getting a bit bored with one assessment task we can just switch to another one. So it was a kind of mixture and interesting."

Among the eight student participants, five referred to assignment or subject sequences when discussing their learning experience in traditional semester mode. Most of this sub-cohort (S01, S02, S03 & S05) identified the negative impacts of the sequence and mixture, highlighting the anxiety caused by the due date of different assignments. Participant S01 emphasised that

> "when we were doing the 12 weeks regular semesters, we have to give our assignments that all of them are due at the same time after every three weeks, so what happens is (that) we tend to procrastinate a little bit, keep it till the end. And in the end, you have that really

bad anxiety of completing everything on time and submitting it. I think that was one thing that I found better when we're in Block Models."

These results related to the theme of assignment or unit sequence demonstrated that the sequence and mixture are important influencing factors related to learning anxiety and struggle that can arise in a traditional semester mode. Only one participant identified positive outcome for having different types of assignments due at the same time, which was the academic variety that simultaneous assessments provided ("if one is presentation and another is just writing base, in case getting a bit bored with one assessment task, we can switch to another one").

Non-academic Commitments

Interview questions prompted student participants to describe their learning experience in their Master of Teaching studies. The responses indicated that most participants (S01, S03, S04, S05 & S06) appeared to hold the belief that non-academic commitments have an impact on their learning. Participant S01 twice outlined that the traditional semester 12-week mode provides personal time benefits if the students need to work while studying:

> "I think people only wouldn't like Block Model if they are working full time…… Because I saw my friend struggle with it (in Block Mode), who are working and trying to attend the classes and trying to finish the assignment. We're all together in one week which really took a toll on them."

The influence of non-academic expectations was also mentioned twice by Participant S03, who detailed that in traditional mode she would have time to plan the tasks in relation to her study commitments:

> "In the traditional mode I get time to plan…. I can somehow figure it out and do it. But if the units will be in Block Mode, I might have assignments each week. So, I will not have enough time to do all of the things that I have to do."

Further to this, Student Participant S04 stated in a different way, that if they missed the class in Block Mode because of placement commitment, then "you miss it already, and it's gone." Additionally,

homesickness could be another factor that impacts students' learning experience as indicated by Participant S05: "last semester (in Block Mode) I was really struggling with one unit……I was in a very difficult place. Because I have been away from my family."

Further to this, academic engagement could be influenced negatively. Student Participant S05 stated "I wasn't that engaged, mentally I was not in a good place. It's not because of study, it was a personal thing". However, Participant S06 raised an interesting argument about the reverse impact from Block Mode learning to other social life. S06 commented that

> "Because we really had like 5 days, and I was just focusing on my studies. And I didn't have social life at all…… I'd like to spend time to play the music, or I to go dance, all that kind of things. For that semester, that wasn't really possible."

Results indicated that the traditional semester learning mode provides students with more flexibility to plan, arrange and adjust their study tasks and other commitments in life. However, it is too focused in the Block delivery mode to spend some time in other social life activity.

Staying Focused

During the interview, attempts were made to elicit international students' perceptions about the more profound reasons that influence students' engagement and participation in their Master of teaching studies. Based on the interview data, it could be inferred that Block Mode delivery plays an important role in positively affecting the learning experience. Seven of the eight student participants (S01, S02, S03, S04, S05, S07 & S08) have mentioned the theme "staying focused", 14 times in total. Student Participant S01 noted that focusing on one thing at a time in Block Mode feels better. Participants noted that their academic results improved to some extent under Block Mode because "I was just doing one thing at a time…… focusing one subject one time". Participant S01 further emphasised Block Model as a better learning model, reporting that "I wasn't trying to do two three things at a time and forgetting what the main focus was. So that way, I would say, it was a good thing."

Although it was a little difficult to "push out an assignment every weekend", Student Participant S02 expressed that she liked the new Block Mode of teaching, remaining "a lot calmer and in a cooler mind frame" because "you just have to write down one unit's requirements." Further to this, Participant S02

noted that Block Mode is better for teachers to understand their students, and for students to meet teacher expectations and follow their instructions. S02 commented that "because it's one teacher who I have to listen to, it's one teacher's instructions that I have to remember. And it's one kind of expectations that I have to meet."

Student Participants S03, S04 and S05 echoed the idea of "a lot calmer and a cooler mind frame", among which, S03 stated that from a "confusion" point of view between units that: "because we had one unit to focus on at one time…… there was no confusion between the assessments, or between what we were learning between two different things". Participant S04 highlighted their perspective of a reduction in "distractions", commenting that "I won't get distracted easily. I have one thing to finish, and I put my all into it". Participant S05 also detailed with an example, when having teaching placement in between two Blocks of units by commenting that:

> "Because they had separated that block only for teaching placements…… And I really appreciate the fact that I could only focus on one thing at a time assessment without thinking about all the assessments".

The issue of having assignments arranged week after week making the study in Block "less busy", was mentioned by Participant S07. The participant reported that "because you're given these (assignments) at end of week one, then week two, and week three, the block is over quickly". Further to this, because "your whole emphasis and focus is on one unit", there is more connection to unit content in Block Mode than that in traditional mode. Participant S08 also identified benefits for studying in Block Mode that "it would help me kind of practice concentration and focus in the classroom", and "it would give you more time for other life activities".

Overall, staying focused were considered two of the key beneficial factors connected to student engagement and study in Block Mode. Most of the participants acknowledged the positive influence of focusing one assessment and unit at one time.

Better Feedback/Outcomes

Included in the interview were questions that related to the learning experience in Block Mode. Having better feedback/outcomes was a strong theme throughout interviews with all participants. Specifically,

five of eight student participants (S01, S02, S03, S04 & S05) noted that they have better academic results in Block Mode than that in traditional mode.

Participant S01 indicated that they received results and feedback in a short period of time in Block Mode ("the results were given very quickly"), providing better engagement given "the quick resolutions of doubts". Besides, the idea that it was easier to "achieve a better result" in Block Mode was mentioned by Participant S01, S03 and S04. Compared the academic results in both delivery modes, Participant S02 and S05 achieved better and stable results, with details that "Block Model all my units have a HD but traditional model all my units are going up and down (S02)". Benefiting from better grades, S02 was also awarded a scholarship that gives her "a boost and clearer mind frame" to do even better for the final semester.

> "All three units gave me an HD. And because of that I got a scholarship for my final semester. So, it's giving me such a boost and it's giving me such a clearer mind frame. I know the final semester is very challenging, very difficult and very arduous. But I'm ready for it because of what happened in the previous Semester, which was Block Mode."

Participant S05 pointed out the difference between feelings and facts: "I struggled a little bit last semester. But surprisingly, my results were better (in Block Mode) than the previous ones". S05 surmised that "probably there were more lenient when it came to marking" under Block Mode. Or maybe she could do well because the focus was on one thing at a time ("probably I work better under pressure…… because I was concentrating one thing at a time"). Further, the participant highlighted the fact that "I got better results because I was focused" despite some negative subject feelings that "I didn't have to look at everything……I was stressed out".

Generally, more than half of all the participants responded that studying in Block Mode is easier to achieve better and stable academic results if compared that in traditional semester mode. The quick feedback is also favorable for students to feel greater connections to the unit content.

Information Assimilation Time

Interviewer prompted student participants to describe their learning experience in their Master of Teaching studies in two different education delivery modes. The interview responses indicated that

five of eight participants (S01, S02, S03, S04 & S05) noted that longer information assimilation time is one beneficial factor for studying in traditional semester mode.

It was outlined by Participant S01 that the long-time duration in traditional mode could enable students to understand, reflect and engage more on the unit content. Participant S01 commented:

> "you have enough time to engage yourself with the subject over 12 weeks. But in the Block Model, you just have three weeks to finish it off…. So I think in the sense of connection, the traditional one would outweigh the Block one."

Participant S02, S03, S04 and S05 showed a similar understanding that "I tend to feel, as a student, that if it's 12 weeks, I will get more knowledge, more content and more information (S02)". One example was shared by Participant S03 with this idea that

> "I think the normal mode, I had more time to put towards my studies, with other life work and life commitments…... even if one month I mockup, I have three more months to work on it. Whereas in the Block Mode, if there's one month, I got really sick for two weeks, that's all gone the whole unit".

Further to this, comments were given that thanks to long time period of study, "I have time to digest what the lecturer taught us……I read through all the readings" by Participant S04; and "you have a bit of time to adjust yourself understand the concepts…… think about it, ask questions, look at the exemplar……learn about things, look at all those videos" by Participant S05. But one shortcoming in traditional mode was pointed by S04 that "there are four subjects at the same time", which was rush to some extent.

Additionally, Participant S03 and S05 indicated that because more focus was put on the assignments each week there was less learning happened in Block Mode. Participant S05 pointed that "it's more about getting assessments done." Participant S03 further commented:

> "the normal mode, we had time to learn the theories, and the lecturers set time to put through the theories and stuff like that. I think the learning on Block Mode was really low compared to the normal mode."

From a different point of view, Participant S05 noted that traditional mode facilitates their understanding and interaction between classmates and teachers, commented that "I think in terms of interaction engagement, 12 weeks mode allows you a bit of time to get to know your classmates, your lecturer, you are working in collaborative mode".

However, Participant S05 suggested that more time could promote less gain because of procrastination. She detailed with an experience example in traditional mode "now that we have time, it looks like we are engaging, we are talking more and discussing more. But the amount of work that we're doing probably be less." Whereas in Block Mode, given the short time period, "we have to do things like in 1 or 2 days and then probably the next weekend is due. But it was easy to focus."

Results from interviews depicted that most participants acknowledged longer information assimilation time in traditional mode, during which students could understand, reflect and engage more on the unit content. The feeling of struggle and rush is likely to arise because of different and parallel subjects. It was also noted that long time does not equal high efficiency.

Impact of Lecturer and Subject

When prompted by the interviewer to describe engagement in class activities with regards their learning experience under two different modes, every student participant acknowledged the impact of lecturer or subject.

Most participants found that there was adequate engagement in both modes. "No difference between the engagement levels in Block Mode versus the normal mode" was commented by Participant S03. Because of the same content to deliver in two modes, Participant S07 also indicated that "there's no difference in the level of engagement".

The nature of the subject as promoted by the lecturer played a vital role in affecting students' engagement in class and connection to the unit content, raised by Participant S04 and S06. "The

engagement really depends on the lecturers" with no relation to the education delivery mode, Participant S05 reiterated:

> "I think if it's a good lecturer, no matter it's Block or 12-week mode, engagement will still be there. Because there is one lecturer, I really liked her lectures. I had it in Block Mode last semester. I am having her this time for traditional mode. No matter the mode is, I like her lectures. Because she somehow engaged everyone."

Student Participant S01 also shared her thoughts from the same perspective and commented that better activities in class could be benefited from the teacher because "they were conscious that to get to the understanding of the topic really quick in a better and an effective way. So, they planned on for better activities." To illustrate this further, S01 added that

> "what our teachers would do is streamline various resources from various databases, make it concise and direct us to particular topics and send out links about where to find those readings, and stuff like that….. when we already had it there, so we could just click on it and have it at our disposal, instead of just wasting time checking out 10 different sites and finding one particular item."

Similarly, "the engagement has less to do with the type of model than the teacher and the subject" was noted by Participant S07 to emphasis the impact of lecturer and subject. To better illustrate, she added that

> "if a teacher knows how to engage the students through zoom, you're engaged…… For example, in Block Model we had a teacher who was able to engage all students turn on the cameras and talk…… Sometimes because of the teacher, you are not very much interested in the content, so you are not engaged."

Further to this, teacher's attitude and sense of responsibility are of great importance in providing an amicable learning experience. Student Participant S05 explained that the lecturer did not have enough time to answer all the questions in class. In order to learn more, S05 commented, "as students, we're sort of desperate to get answers…...We end up sending emails. And probably some lecturers are not full-time. They won't respond as much as another lecturer." Additionally, Participant S06 shared another example that if the lecturer was "rushing the lesson and everything, in the end, on one subject,

I didn't remember anything from this subject. My brain didn't have time to memorise." Moreover, students' emotional preference about their teachers could be a factor to positively or negatively impact the learning journey, as indicated by Participant S03 with comments that

> "if you like the lecturer, it's really good to have a Block unit. But if the lecturer is not really good, it becomes really hard….. Because having back-to-back sessions with one person who is not really good at what they're doing really affects the quality and the result of learning".

Student Participant S02 appreciated that the teachers are making efforts in "delivering so much content in such less time, strike a chord with students, and mark everything really quickly" in Block Mode. Moreover, it is a new mode not only to students and lecturers. "I think from university side, there was more effort putting into to make it accessible to students" commented by Participant S08.

The findings demonstrated that engagement in class activities is deeply influenced by the lecturer and subject. All participants acknowledged that the better and efficient learning could benefit from the efforts of the teacher before, during, and after the lesson. The nature of a subject could be another factor that has an impact on the learning experience.

Intensive Learning/Teaching

When asked to report upon the Block Mode learning experience about engagement in class and connection to the unit connect, every student participant shared a mutual understanding with the theme "intensive learning and teaching".

In Block delivery mode, Participant S01 noted that each unit was "a bit compressed", which allows students to "complete one whole subject at once, and then forget about it and then start a new one". Because each week, every student needs to finish and submit one assignment, with which "understanding of the task and assignment was much clearer". So "you keep getting validated on your work quickly", added by S01, who credited it as "the advantage with the Block one".

The teaching pace is a bit fast in Block Mode, Participant S02, S04 and S05 indicated, among which S02 commented from lecturer perspective that:

> "there's so much content. The teacher can't afford to waste time. So, in the Block Mode we didn't really have breaks in between classes….. So teachers were like, whether somebody answers (the questions) or not, I just have to keep going."

A more visualised depiction illustrated by S04 that "in the Block Mode I start the lesson. After a week, we need to submit assignment already. It's like bang, bang, bang, and finish it". And because of the intense learning frame, the memory remains fresh. Participant S04 explicated that "I can follow up from what I learned the day before the next day. So that I won't forget. So, I would say compared to traditional mode, the memory that I retain from the learning is way better."

Student Participant S03 raised the understanding that closer relationship with their classmates and lecturer in Block Mode because "you have the same people in the class for one month. And you get so close (to) them…… the lecturer had more sessions with us each week. In that sense the engagement was higher in Block more than the normal mode."

Mental health concerns could arise when studying intensively. The mental stress may have affected student academic performance in some way. Student Participant S06 continued that "there was one subject (on a very sensitive topic) where I was running out of time…..I realised that I didn't put enough effort. So, in the end, I didn't get a really good grade. I passed obviously."

On the contrary, with "good Distinctions and High Distinctions in both the models" Participant S07 figured that studying in Block Mode was less stressful. She commented that "I did feel that in Block Model achieving that grade was with less stress. While in the other semester, or this semester are in a traditional model, there was more stress".

However, Participant S08 pinpointed that the intense learning frame is beneficial with more connections to the content, noted with explanation that

> "because when there is less gap between the information delivered and received, we can take more on the previous concepts and apply new learning……I was more interacting with the VU platforms…… So, it's more connected learning. That could be the reason that I like Block Model more and I can perform better even in intense and with limited time."

The findings revealed that the intensive learning and teaching in Block Mode is significant to the engagement and connection. Both positive and negative factors were recognised.

Management of Learning Management System (LMS)

Each participant was asked to describe the usage of and reflection on the Learning Management System (LMS), which is the VU Collaborate system. Among all the student participants, seven of the eight (S01, S02, S03, S04, S05, S07 & S08) indicated that they log in the VU Collaborate more in Block Mode than that in traditional mode. To better explain why, S01 continued that:

> "Because you have to finish the assignment in a short time, so you had to keep referring back to resources on VU Collaborate……I have to really be charged up to complete and read the resources really quick and get everything done in time in Block Mode".

Student Participant S07 also shared an identical understanding with S01 with regards the reason.

In Block Mode, S02 and S05 logged at least "once a day", and S08 "twice a day". Among them, Participant S03 kept herself logged in to avoid "missing out so much, because there was so much happening". Participant S04 pointed out frankly that the reason why she logged in the system more frequently was that she had more classes every week in Block Mode. While Participant S06 commented the same frequency in both modes.

The majority (S02, S03, S04, S07 & S08) noted managing VU Collaborate in Block Mode is easier compared to the traditional mode. The main reason is "you have one thing and one teacher at a time" and will not be swamped by the information "coming in from all teachers, from your course chair, from your course or unit advisor" commented by S02. Similarly, Participant S03 and 07 agreed with the same understanding.

An opposite idea raised by Participant S05 that the VU Collaborate information in traditional mode "doesn't look so much", so "you feel like you control it". But Participant S01 and S06 figured the same management level in both modes. And S01 pointed out that it is because "all the content was very similar to what it was in the previous model".

Based on the "management of VU Collaborate" theme, six student participants (S02, S03, S05, S06, S07 & S08) acknowledged that high frequency in logging in the system helps to connect with the unit content. To better explain, S07 gave a very apt analogy to describe the idea that "it's like as simple as the more often you open the book, the more you learn. For us the book is VU Collaborate".

Additionally, much valuable information could be discovered in VU Collaborate. Student Participant S02 added that "we have so many opportunities, so many scholarship things that information that's put up over there. So, unless you really go back to the Collaborate space and read things that have been posted, you are at a loss".

The current study findings indicated that the log-in frequency to the learning management system is much higher in Block Mode than that in traditional semester mode, which is instrumental in connecting to the unit content, as most student participants commented. The results also showed that it is easier to manage the VU Collaborate system in the Block Mode.

Students' Study Mode Preferences

During the interview, attempts were made to draw out student participants' perceptions about their Master of teaching study experience in both Block Mode and traditional mode. Students' study mode preference was indicated by each of them. Among whom, six participants noted they prefer the Block learning mode, while two of eight (S03 & S06) have a disposition to the traditional delivery mode.

Student Participant S01, S05 and S08 reiterated that focusing on one subject at a time is one advantage for studying in Block Mode, which stretched S01 "towards a better result" and harness her motivation to "complete it, then forget about it, and go to the next one and complete it". To further explain, S01 noted that "if I was given so much time to do one assignment, then I would early procrastinate and

keep it till the end" in traditional mode. Even the assignment pace is fast and the time to engage with different units is short, Participant S02 still thought the Block Mode was easier if comparing to the traditional one. Similarly, S08 also expressed the contrasting feeling that "I may have felt a bit uncomfortable in terms of how much I needed to focus at the same time, but I would prefer Block Mode more than the semester one." In-depth learning was acknowledged by Participant S07 when "there is the only one subject that you are doing at the time". She continued that: "I would prefer Block Mode because get more time on one unit." Student Participant S03 showed her preference to the traditional mode because "it was very intensive" in Block learning. That several subjects are provided at the same time is the reason why Participant S06 preferred the traditional mode. Results indicated that the new learning mode is favored by most student participants. The main reason is that the Block Mode leads to a better result because of high level in focusing on one thing at a time.

Efficiency of Online/Offline Learning

The interviewer prompted student participants to comment on their engagement and interaction opportunities in the class in Block Mode and traditional mode. Half of them (S02, S03, S04 & S07) noted differences in the efficiency of online versus offline learning. However, these differences were not specifically related to the two educational delivery modes.

Student Participant S02 recalled the experience in traditional mode. When it was in a face-to-face basis, S02 described having more time to engage with "teachers, students, classmates, and the unit". The interaction within the activities was negatively impacted by remote learning. She believed that "the level of interaction within the classroom activities, or with the unit, with the teacher was way, way, way, way less". In her online classroom "when a teacher used to call out of a specific student and the student wouldn't answer", making it hard to tell whether the student was there online. She also noted that such situations also happen in traditional mode, but "it was even more evident in the Block Mode" during online classes. Similarly, Participant S04 stated that she got distracted easily in an online learning environment.

Three student participants (S02, S03 & S07) expected that the engagement and interaction would be better if sitting face-to-face in a classroom with the teacher and all learners. "Zoom (online class tool) is the main factor that is responsible for engagement", S07 noted. Turning off the camera definitely affected the efficiency of classroom interaction, because "nobody knows what I'm doing", S07 added.

Further to this, S03 pointed out that students tend to "switch off cameras". It was even worse if students do not like a particular class. However, if everyone is sitting in a real classroom, students "wouldn't stand up and go out for the sake of not disrespecting the lecturer". To avoid misunderstanding, Participant S03 acknowledged the enough and adequate engagement opportunities in both modes.

The interview analysis demonstrated that offline learning is more engaging with people in the classroom and the content of a unit. However, studying online could lead to less connections and interactions.

Effort and Impact from Students

During the interview, attempts were made to elicit participants' perceptions about engagement and class activity interaction during their Master of teaching studies. All eight student participants acknowledged one of the significant factors—effort and impact from students.

Participant S01 kept a good learning habit, which enabled her highly engaged. S01 noted that:

> "whenever I attended one class and then went back and studied about it. I jot down my doubts. And then the next class I asked those questions and then it was easier to get those answers and doubts rather than that been stretched for a little while."

Self-learning is considered by Participant S03 as an important ability. She indicated that self-learning "happens in master's studies anyway, but in Block Mode, it was so much more".

Participant S04, S05, S07 and S08 identified class-size as a factor that influences engagement. They noticed that a small class in Block Mode enabled students with more interaction, communication and engagement. S05 explained that "we could easily ask questions and the lecturer had time to talk to everyone". There could be "a strong bond" easily developed for better collaboration and learning in Block Mode, because they are "meeting the same people again and again", indicated by S08. So, she believed that "the classes were more interactive in terms of content and peers" in Block Mode learning.

There could be some factors that negatively impact the engagement and interaction from the student perspective. A herd mentality among students was pointed out by Participant S02. When prompted to

answer questions from the lecturer, “the same people talking in the class all the time”. She commented that:

> “I know the answer to the question that he or she is asking me, but nobody else volunteers in the class and I’m like, ‘why should I unmute myself and talk? What if I’m saying something wrong and I’m making a fool out of myself?’ So, different reasons behind that, but there are so many times, where people just don’t want to volunteer an answer… it’s our responsibility to take what’s been given”.

Student Participant S05 confessed a bad habit—procrastination. She tends to “do everything the last week or last minute, no matter how much time I have”, which increases the pressure and anxiety when it is due. Overall, effort and impact from students play a pivotal role in the whole learning process, and largely influence the engagement in class and connection to the unit content.

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore perceptions held by international students of factors that influence their academic experience in a postgraduate education program; specifically, the academic experience of international postgraduate students enrolled in a Master of teaching degree. The results of the qualitative analyses highlighted a variety of themes regarding the barriers and motivators for international student engagement and participation in the Master of Teaching studies.

A key contrast was represented through students’ reflection of their traditional mode of delivery experiences. Subsequently, it was found that international students tend to feel they perform better and get higher results in an intensive learning environment, that their level of focus is amplified as they only learn one unit at a specific period, and that differences in influence of the teacher and student play a major role in their learning. Additional considerations were that non-academic commitments during the study and the efficiency of online or offline learning have had an extraordinary impact on international student learning.

Beyond these academic factors, psychological aspects also played a crucial role, with students reporting both benefits and challenges in adapting to the intensity of Block Mode. The importance of

timely feedback was another major theme, as students noted that the rapid turnaround on assessments influenced both their engagement and overall satisfaction. Furthermore, differences in academic practices between teachers and students were evident, particularly in relation to instructional strategies, class participation, and student self-regulation.

Technological engagement also shaped students' experiences, as interactions with the Learning Management System (LMS) varied between delivery modes, affecting resource accessibility and engagement levels. In terms of personal mode preference, while most students favored Block Mode due to its structured focus, some expressed a preference for traditional delivery, citing the ability to engage with multiple subjects simultaneously. Finally, the efficiency of online versus offline learning emerged as a critical factor influencing engagement and participation, with many students identifying challenges in remote learning that impacted their ability to interact effectively with peers and lecturers. The interview data explores the engagement and participation of international students through the two education delivery modes—Block Mode and traditional mode. These findings are discussed in relation to the current literature below.

Traditional Mode of Unit Delivery

Results from the present study indicated that for international students, how units and the submission of associated assignments are sequenced could be considered key factors that influenced their study experience. Redfern (2016) indicated certain academic factors such as academic workload and the intricacy of assessment tasks are likely to be major sources of anxiety and stress for international students. This was consistent with a comment made by Participant S05 who expressed that in traditional mode "when you have all the assessments due in the same week, that's a bit of struggle". Previous research reported that competing demands (including concurrent deadlines and commitments to life outside of college studies) can influence the level of student engagement (Muir et al., 2019).

Studying different things at the same time makes the study less boring as their focus could be changed from one to another. In the present study, it was the Participant S08 whom explicitly noted that she as one of the international students who studied in traditional mode and had different assignments in one period of time enjoyed and acknowledged a high level of course interest. Park and Choi (2009) noted that interest-stimulating teachers and disciplines had a positive impact on engagement.

Student Participant S02, S03, S04 and S05 showed a shared understanding that "if it's 12 weeks, I will get more knowledge, content and more information" (S02). One example was commented by Participant S03 with this idea that "in normal mode I had more time to put towards my studies with other life work and life commitments….. whereas in the Block Mode, if I got really sick for two weeks, that's the whole unit all gone". Such predicaments as illness have a domino effect on students' ability to maintain learning because their time was deficient (Farrell & Brunton, 2020). Participants in the current research demonstrated different levels of engagement, which aligned with the understanding that the factors influencing engagement are multifarious (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Non-academic Commitments

The international student participants in the study reported that they tend to be affected in their learning by certain non-academic commitments. Students in similar studies have reported that juggling work, family and caring responsibilities while studying are the biggest challenges for an online student (Farrell & Brunton, 2020). Furthermore, most of whom have struggled to keep on a regular study plan (Blackmon & Major, 2012; Brown et al., 2015; Buck, 2016; Zembylas et al., 2008).

Postgraduate students face immense pressure as they attempt to fulfill multiple roles and strike a balance between career, family, social life and studies (Brown et al., 2015; Stone & O'Shea, 2019; Zembylas et al., 2008). Participant S01 illustrated that within the Block Model "I saw my friend struggle with it, while working and trying to attend the classes and trying to finish the assignment". This kind of struggle was regarded as one key element affecting student engagement, and illustrated as "the sum of all the pressures a student has in their life" (Kahu, 2013, p. 767). Student Participant S05 confessed that "I wasn't that engaged, mentally I was not in a good place…… because I have been away from my family". This highlights the importance of support from family and friends, as such resources enable international students to better engage with and participate in classroom activities (Kahu et al., 2014; McGivney, 2004).

The structure of the delivery mode plays a pivotal role in how students manage these commitments. When comparing their experiences in two education delivery modes, Participant S01 stated that the traditional semester 12-week mode provides personal time benefits if the students need to work while

studying. “In the traditional mode I get time to plan” Participant S03 opined. Additionally, Participant S04 stated that if they missed the class in Block Mode because of a teaching placement commitment, then “you miss it already, and it’s gone.” These insights align with Andrews and Tynan (2012) and Buck (2016), who emphasised the necessity for institutes to schedule and arrange students’ learning around their other responsibilities.

Furthermore, Buck and Tyrell’s (2022) findings reinforce the importance of students having a balanced life, underscoring how the Block and blended learning formats provided some students with enhanced flexibility to adapt to external commitments, such as work and family responsibilities. This flexibility allowed students to concentrate more intensively on one module at a time, which for many facilitated a deeper understanding of the content. These findings highlighted the importance of considering both the demands of academic schedules and the broader life responsibilities of postgraduate learners to optimise engagement and satisfaction.

Psychosocial Impact

Results indicated that psychological impact has played a salient role for the learning experience of international postgraduate students. Previous research has reinforced that student resilience is critical within the learning process, to support both motivation and focus (Alva, 1991; Hobfoll et al., 2003). Most student participants in the current research noted that their academic results improved to some extent under Block Mode because “I was just doing one thing at a time” even though the anxiety could be caused from the intensive learning arrangement.

Seven of the eight student participants (S01, S02, S03, S04, S05, S07 & S08) had mentioned the theme “staying focused” as in Block Mode they just focus on one unit at a time. Mindfulness -- the practice of focusing on the present in a non-judgmental way -- has exploded in popularity in recent years, especially in education, where studies have shown it can benefit students who experience high rates of psychological distress (Cavanagh et al., 2013). Although it was a little difficult to “push out an assignment every weekend”, Participant S02 expressed that Block Mode is better for teachers to understand their students, and for students to meet teacher expectations and follow their instructions.

The more engaged and empowered students were in the learning community, the more likely they were to transfer that energy into learning, linking up with a range of short - and long-term outcomes that can also further promote participation (Bond et al., 2020). Participant S03 acknowledged that closer relationships with their classmates and lecturer in Block Mode because "you have the same people in the class for one month. And you get so close them…… the lecturer had more sessions with us each week." Academic research also underlined that people who engage in jobs, tasks, roles and/or assignments are more likely to achieve better outcomes (Ahmed et al., 2018).

Kent et al. (2016) also found that superior classroom performance was associated with more interaction and engagement in online discussions. Student Participant S04 explicated that "I can follow up from what I learned the day before the next day…… I would say engagement was [better] compared to traditional mode." Staying focused and high engagement might facilitate improved academic outcomes. It could be acknowledged that international postgraduate student learning experience is likely to be influenced by psychological factors.

Timely Feedback and Subject Outcomes

Participants in the present study reported that international students tend to get prompt feedback and achieve better outcomes within their Master of teaching subjects under Block Mode. Feedback that is timely and provides useful information is especially important for senior students, who usually regard feedback as a tool for self-evaluation (Rogers, 2007). "The results were given very quickly" was a comment provided by Participant S01. She further indicated that students received results and feedback in a short period of time in Block Mode, which provided superior engagement given "the quick resolutions of doubts". Smyth et al. (2012) concluded that if the assessment expectations are clearly stated and feedback provided in a timely manner, the student's learning experience will be strengthened. Studies by Aspden and Helm (2004) and Welker and Berardino (2005) have also shown that when feedback is delayed, students become anxious and depressed. If a module has multiple assessment tasks and the assessment is based on the previous module, the delay in providing feedback to the student may also have an impact on the student's overall performance (Poon, 2019). This was evident in the results of the current study as Participant S01 noted that within Block Mode "the results were given very quickly, so you keep getting validated on your work very quickly".

Five of eight student participants (S01, S02, S03, S04 and S05) in the current study noted that they achieved improved and stable results in Block Mode when compared with their academic performance in the traditional mode. Poon (2019) acknowledged that the connection between assessment and timeliness of results could be a key factor supporting student satisfaction. The importance of timeliness of results to student satisfaction was also noted by Aspden and Helm (2004) and Welker and Berardino (2005). Research by Fernandes et al. (2013) indicated that the quality of assessment is positively and significantly related to student satisfaction with the quality of the subjects. The consideration of the current students' recognition of the positive value in timely feedback aligns strongly with existing literature and serves as a relevant indicator of the quality of Block delivery.

Academic Practices of Teacher and Student

Results indicated that the academic practices of teachers and students has an increasingly important impact on student engagement in class activities. Students clearly indicated the importance of the professional endeavour of teachers in relation to their development and delivery of course materials and capacity to interact with students. Furthermore, variation in regards to the learning experiences and satisfaction of students was identified within the two modes based on the influence of the teacher.

Academic Practices of Teachers. Petruzzellis et al. (2006, p. 355) asserted that the quality of course teaching is the ultimate determinant of student satisfaction, stating that "as regards student satisfaction, the main factors which give rise to a positive judgment are a good response to the student needs in general", which ensures classroom interaction and facilitates participation in teaching activities. The majority of participants in the study noted that their engagement in the classroom depends heavily on the teacher, as teaching performance is cardinal for international students (Poon, 2019).

One of the principal indicators to measure student satisfaction based on teaching performance relates to the teaching activities and the resources applied in delivery (Munteanu et al., 2010). Results reinforced that it is the teacher who formulates the plans for more effectual activities. Participant S01 illustrated that "what our teachers would do is streamline various resources, make it concise and direct us to particular topics……it cut down on a lot of wasted time just browsing to get there". Previous research has reported that international students studying in Australia believe that teaching

performance and the role of teaching staff have the greatest impact in terms of student satisfaction (Arambewela & Hall, 2009).

Teacher's attitude and sense of responsibility were revealed to be of great importance in providing an amicable learning experience. According to Participant S05, the lecturer may not have enough time to answer all the questions in class. S05 commented, "we're sort of desperate to get answers…...We end up sending emails. And probably some lecturers are not full-time lecturer. They won't respond as much as another lecturer". The opportunity for students to participate in class and get answers to questions and resolve doubts from teachers is an important factor in student satisfaction (Gibson, 2010). Teachers who remain enthusiastic contribute to creating a supportive learning environment, which further positively affects student satisfaction (Poon, 2019). A staff member's genuine interest in student work can be shown in a variety of ways, including an encouraging and supportive attitude, commending students' good work and providing further aid to students who need it (Arambewela & Hall, 2009; Keeley et al., 2006). This was exemplified by the comment from Participant S02 who stated "it's okay. Because you've come from another country, you don't know about it. It's just a learning curve" when her teacher set up another meeting with her alone to try to solve the problem.

Academic Practices of Students. Findings from the current study showed that participants were aware of the importance of effort and impact regarding their studies and considered these as significant factors that influencing engagement and satisfaction. Student Participant S01 highlighted their own good learning habits, which enabled her to remain engaged. S01 noted that:

> "whenever I attended one class and then went back and studied about it. I jot down my doubts. And then the next class I asked those questions and then it was easier to get those answers and doubts rather than that been stretched for a little while".

To be an effective online learner, equitable organisational skills and the ability to complete tasks are key factors (Buck, 2016). Students should be responsible to build a favorable learning environment. Creating an auspicious learning environment with a focused and quiet study space is an important aspect for online learners (Buck, 2016; Çakıroğlu, 2014).

Student Participant S05 confessed a bad habit—procrastination. She tends to "do everything the last week or last minute, no matter how much time I have", which increases the pressure and anxiety when it is due. To better facilitate online learning, Holder (2007) pinpointed that an improved ability in managing time is critical, this includes building a sustainable learning pattern for adjustment and problem solving (Brown et al., 2015; Kahu et al., 2014). Participant S02 noted that as a student, "it's important to take responsibility for what's been given". It was also suggested by Farrell and Brunton (2020) that a regular study habit enables students to get through their studies.

Additionally, Farrell and Brunton (2020) identified that a sense of belonging is a major factor in affecting online student engagement. A herd mentality among students was pointed out by Participant S02, because she noticed that it's "the same people talking in the class all the time". When the lecturer would ask questions, S02 identified that "when nobody else wants to give the answer, why should I open my mouth…... what if I'm saying something wrong"? Compared to students studying offline, online learners may have a greater need for carefully orchestrated opportunities to engage with others in order to express, develop, tolerate, and acknowledge their diverse identities (Delahunty et al., 2014).

Teaching in small-volume classes can be one way to improve engagement, as smaller classes enable higher levels of student engagement (Poon, 2019). Half of all student participants (S04, S05, S07 and S08) in the current study also indicated that the class-size could be one factor that influences the engagement. They appreciated small classes in Block delivery, which enabled students with more interaction, communication and engagement. There is a negative correlation between class size and student satisfaction (Coles, 2002; Douglas et al., 2006). As indicated by Participant S08, there could be "a strong bond" easily developed for better collaboration and learning in Block Mode, because they are "meeting the same people again and again". S08 further reinforced that "the smaller classes were more interactive in terms of content and peers" within Block Mode. If the class size is small, the instructor is more likely to be able to meet the student's needs (Poon, 2019). It was also pinpointed by Gruber et al. (2010) that accessibility for students to contact their teacher could be supportive for increased engagement. All student participants in the current study recognised that the role of the teacher and student is of paramount importance. This finding is very consistent with the existing literature (e.g., Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Poon, 2019).

Learning Management System (LMS)

The results showed that VU learning management system, 'VU Collaborate', is an important element to supporting participants to maintain consistency in their learning. It has been pointed out that the resources and services of a university are considered as essential parts affecting student satisfaction (Poon, 2019). The results of the Kärnä and Julin (2015) study further illustrated this point: improvement in the quality of the research and teaching space will directly help staff and students to meet their goals. Therefore, this kind of LMS is considered to be the most influential aspect to the overall satisfaction of students and employees. Valuable information was regularly available within the VU Collaborate. Student Participant S02 added that "we have so many learning opportunities and much scholarly information that's put up over there". LMSs can provide an all-embracing online framework for students to interact with teachers and peers, submit schoolwork, review subject goals, download curriculum materials, contribute to course discussions and check class progress (Thoms & Eryilmaz, 2014).

Among all the student participants, seven of the eight (S01, S02, S03, S04, S05, S07 & S08) indicated that they log in the VU Collaborate at least once a day in Block Mode, which is more than within traditional mode. Because the assignments need to be finished in a short time within Block Mode, S01 commented that: "I have to really be charged up to complete and read the resources really quickly and get everything done in time". Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) highlighted the importance of being actively engaged in course materials and connecting with teachers and peers, as key factors for students to study effectively. Six student participants (S02, S03, S05, S06, S07 & S08) acknowledged that high frequency of logging in the system helps to connect with the unit content. Participant S07 gave a very apt analogy to describe the idea that "it's like as simple as the more often you open the book, the more you learn. For us the book is VU Collaborate". Maintaining a better social presence in the curriculum enables students to be strongly interlinked with each other, teachers and the subjects (Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2012). The majority (S02, S03, S04, S07 & S08) noted managing in Block Mode is easier compared to the traditional mode. The main reason was "having one thing and one teacher at a time", and not being swamped by the information "coming in from all teachers, from your course chair, from your course or unit advisor" were comments from S02. To increase learning success, easy access to comprehensive resources in an online environment is critical (Kumar & Heathcock, 2016). Basioudis et al. (2012) figured that students' apprehension of LMS would sway students' interaction with the system and ultimately their learning results. The current research results acknowledged the importance

of VU Collaborate in student experience. This was more evident when focusing on one unit within Block Mode.

Students' Study Mode Preferences

The current study presented data that indicated most student participants showed a preference for the Block Mode, while only two out of eight participants (S03 & S06) have a disposition to the traditional delivery mode. Focusing on one subject at a time was reiterated by Participant S01, S05 and S08, who acknowledged the overriding advantage for learning within Block Mode, which was further exemplified by S01 through the modes contribution "towards a better result". Because students are completely immersed in one unit, McCluskey et al. (2019) indicates that intensive courses are more likely to promote students' enthusiasm for the subject, and students are more likely to approach their future studies with a higher degree of inquiry.

In-depth learning is acknowledged by Student Participant S07 when "there is the only one subject that you are doing at the time". She continued that "I would prefer Block Model because it's like you get more time on one unit". It enables students to focus on the general experience of their education rather than concentrating too much on assessment, which may ultimately lead to better outcomes (Klein et al., 2019). Previous research has shown that students may benefit from being focused on one unit in a compact time period as opposed to studying several courses simultaneously across a longer time period (Ho & Polonsky, 2007; Knight et al., 1999).

Student Participant S03, however, showed her preference for the traditional mode because "it was very intensive" in Block learning. It was pointed by Bryson and Andres (2020) that within the intensive learning model, teachers are frequently required to remind and encourage students to ask questions and participate in discussions. This may be the reason as to why some students dislike high-intensity learning. Further to this, Participant S06 indicated that several subjects being completed at the same time within the traditional mode was preferred. Such subject diversity could be an element of situational interest that was identified by Kahu and Nelson (2018) as one emotional aspect which further influences student engagement. Research has indicated that interest is the key to enjoyable and satisfying learning (Dewey, 1913).

The main reason why most participants favor the new education delivery was that the Block Mode leads to an improvement in results because of a high level of content focus within a single unit. This is in line with the existing literature that reinforces that content focus can facilitate engagement across the course (e.g., Ho & Polonsky, 2007; Knight et al., 1999).

Efficiency of Modes of Delivery on Learning

Results from the current research signified that online or face-to-face (i.e., offline) learning environments could have a great influence on the study experience of international student. For the recent year and a half, they have been studying and engaging in their classes online due to the impact of COVID-19.

The existing literature documented a number of interrelated factors that influence online student experience and retention: time management skills; ability to balance the relationship between work, family and study; the sense of belonging; course design; and understanding and support from institutions and teachers (Blackmon & Major, 2012; Brown et al., 2015; Buck, 2016; Holder, 2007; Zembylas et al., 2008). Half of the student participants (S02, S03, S04 & S07) in the study reported differences regarding efficiency of online or offline learning when prompted to comment on their engagement and interaction opportunities in the class within two education delivery modes. Due to the lack of face-to-face contact, S02 expressed that the interaction within class activities is negatively impacted by remote learning, a pattern of student experience previously identified (O'Shea et al., 2015). Student Participant S02 further commented that "when a teacher used to call out of a specific student and the student wouldn't answer", it was hard to tell whether the student was there online. Turning off the camera definitely affected the efficiency of classroom interaction, because "nobody knows what I'm doing", S07 added. An important indicator of online learning success could be the self-efficacy of students (Farrell & Brunton, 2020), as it significantly influences their interest in the subject matter and their engagement behaviors during study (Kahu et al., 2020).

One factor that can have a significant impact on an online student's learning experience is the feeling of belonging to a group of learners (Buck, 2016; O'Shea et al., 2015). Establishing a sense of social presence and high level of interaction in the curriculum will promote the development and establishment of students' sense of community and belonging (Buck, 2016; Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2012). Instructional support plays a vital role in online courses (Stone & O'Shea, 2019), such as

providing timely, proactive, embedded assistance to students in online classrooms (Rose, 2018; Stone & O'Shea, 2019). However, the tendency to "switch off cameras" as noted by Student Participant S03, may indicate a reluctance to engage with teachers and peers. This lack of interaction can hinder the development of a sense of belonging, reduce engagement, and ultimately affect student retention.

Summary

This chapter examined the experiences of international postgraduate students in Block mode delivery, highlighting its advantages and challenges. Participants valued the focused structure, which allowed for in-depth engagement with a single subject and contributed to improved academic performance and clarity. Timely feedback was a key strength, enhancing motivation and enabling rapid resolution of doubts. However, the intensive pace posed challenges, including heightened stress and limited time for information assimilation, particularly during unforeseen personal or professional commitments. The findings emphasise the importance of tailored support, effective teaching practices, and well-designed assessments to address the unique demands of Block mode and improve student satisfaction.

Chapter 4: Study 2- Staff Perspectives and Experiences of Teaching International Postgraduate Students

This study aimed to investigate the experiences of international students in comparison to domestic students within the context of differing education delivery modes. The research explored the perspectives of academic staff regarding the similarities and distinctions between these student groups, specifically focusing on the transition to Block Mode from traditional semester education delivery. Employing a case study approach, the research delved into the viewpoints of academic staff concerning international and domestic students within the Block Mode and in comparison to the traditional semester education system. The data collection involved open-ended interviews completed via the zoom videoconferencing platform. The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design and explored the lived experiences and perceptions of academic staff regarding international and domestic students in Block Mode compared to the traditional semester system. A case study approach was utilised to provide an in-depth examination of these experiences, as it aligns with the goal of understanding contextual factors that shape participants' views. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method, allowing participants to share their insights in a flexible yet guided manner.

Participants

The cohort was drawn from academics that teach coursework in both Block Mode and traditional semester mode, and have had experience interacting with international students. The staff list was obtained with the assistance from one of the supervisors of the student researcher. The distinctive characteristics of this sample served to support the decision to recruit a smaller sample size from the population. Out of a potential cohort of 18 academic teaching staff identified as having experience teaching international students in both Block and traditional modes, 10 participants were successfully recruited through an email invitation process. Aligned with qualitative research guidelines, this sample size is proposed as a suitable number for qualitative interviews (Creswell, 2008). Given the timeframe for data collection and the ongoing constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, this smaller sample size was deemed sufficient to provide meaningful data and achieve the overall research objectives for

this doctoral thesis. All academic staff interviewees were based in Melbourne, Australia. The sample consisted of an equal gender distribution, with five female and five male participants, representing diverse disciplines such as engineering, education, digital media, community development, biomechanics, and information technology.

Recruiting Procedure

The recruitment process targeted a total of 18 potential academic staff participants, and it was conducted in three phases to manage communication and ensure an adequate response rate. In each phase, an initial invitation email was sent to a group of six academic staff, spaced one week apart between each group. This email included a brief introduction to the student researcher, an overview of the research project, and attachments such as information to participant (see Appendix F), consent form (see Appendix G). The academic staff participants were asked to indicate their interest in participating in the research. Upon receiving a positive response indicating interest, the student researcher scheduled an online interview at a mutually convenient time. A consent form was then sent to the participant for completion and return prior to the interview. A copy of the interview question list was sent to the academic staff participants before the interview for their reference and understanding of the topics that would be covered.

If no response was received within three to four days after the first invitation, a follow-up email was sent as a reminder. A third email was sent after an additional three to five days if no reply was still forthcoming. Despite these follow-ups, the researcher ensured that communication remained respectful and professional. Among the 18 academic staff, eight did not respond to any of the invitations, despite some receiving up to three emails in total. Three of these individuals did not reply even after all three rounds of follow-up communication. However, as the target number of ten participants had been reached, no further follow-ups were conducted beyond this point.

Ultimately, ten academic staff members participated in the research interviews. Notably, half of these participants (five) confirmed their willingness to participate and scheduled an interview after receiving the first email invitation. The other five confirmed their participation only after receiving the second follow-up email. Additionally, given the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the need

for online interviews, the process allowed for flexible scheduling and a streamlined communication process to facilitate participant engagement.

This phased and iterative approach to participant recruitment allowed for an organised and efficient process, ensuring that enough participants were secured to meet the research objectives while accommodating the varying response rates and availability of academic staff. Ethics approval was granted from Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) for application: HRE22-120 International Postgraduate Students' Perspectives of their Scholarly Experiences at an Australian University (Appendix E).

Interview Design

A total of 19 interview questions were developed, covering seven aspects: causal questions (2/19), expectation and preparation (3/19), learning experiences (3/19), academic performance (3/19), engagement in class (3/19), use of learning management system (3/19), and Feedback and comments (2/19). Causal questions were designed to warm up during the interview, considered it probably is the first time to meet for academic staff participants and the student researcher. Those questions are also helpful for collecting related basic teaching background. Following qualitative research design principles, the interview questions were carefully developed to align with the study's research objectives (Dörnyei, 2007). They were structured to be open-ended, logically sequenced, and designed to encourage reflective and detailed responses. The semi-structured format allowed for consistency across interviews while providing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences. To ensure clarity and avoid bias, the wording of the questions was reviewed to minimize ambiguity and leading phrasing (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Each participant was asked the questions in the same order, with one or two follow-up questions incorporated when additional clarification or elaboration was needed. Below is the list of questions in the interview (see Table 2 below):

Table 2

List of Questions (Academic Staff)

Topic	No.	Questions
Casual questions	1	Tell us a little about yourself: What role do you have in the delivery of the units in Block Mode to international students?
	2	How many units have you taught in Block Mode?
Expectation & preparation	3	Is your experience so far of the Block Mode as you expected? What's different from your expectations?
	4	How have you needed to change the way you do things in your role to be part of the Block Mode delivery? What processes needed to change? Or could be changed in the future?
	5	Is there any difference in your preparation and processes to work with international coursework students in Block Mode?
Learning experiences	6	What types of learning opportunities do you think are most effective and are these the same for domestic and international students? (may need to prompt for the type of activity)
	7	Are there any learning activities students find particularly challenging and is this the same for domestic and international students or are they different? (may need to prompt for the type of activity)
	8	What sort of student social/collaborative interactions were you expecting from the Block? Is this the same for all students or is it different for international compared to domestic students?
Academic performance	9	Could you outline your thoughts regarding the academic performance of domestic and international students in Block Mode – are they similar or different in any way?
	10	What is your perception of the experience of international students in the completion of assessments in Block Mode? Is this different to domestic students in any way?
	11	Is there a good correlation (or relationship) between student experience and learning outcomes under Block Mode delivery? Does this differ at all for domestic and international students?
Engagement in class	12	What sort of engagement in class were you most interested in or expecting from the Block and is this similar or different for international compared with domestic students? If so, how?
	13	Compared with the domestic students, do you think the international cohort engaged more or less in the class activities? And if so, why?
	14	Could you describe any differences in academic engagement between the two cohorts? For example, interaction with the lecturer and other students, or some other form of engagement.
Learning management system	15	Were international students able to successfully engage with learning management system (VU Collaborate), when compared with domestic students? Were there any significant differences? (may need to prompt)
	16	How often do you expect your students to log in the learning management system in Block Mode? Is this similar for international students?
	17	Do you think students were satisfied? Is this similar for domestic and international students, or do they differ in any way?
Feedback and comments	18	Are there any suggestions going forward that you wish to make in regards to supporting international students in Block?
	19	Any other comments that you would like to share with us regarding postgraduate Block Mode?

Zoom Interview Scheduling

Given the constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the geographical spread of participants across various suburbs in Melbourne, all interviews for the current doctoral thesis were conducted virtually using Zoom. This approach allowed for flexibility and adherence to public health guidelines while ensuring that interviews could be scheduled efficiently without logistical barriers.

Once staff academic participants confirmed their willingness to join the study, the student researcher requested a list of their preferred time slots to facilitate smooth scheduling. Upon receiving this information, a Zoom meeting invitation was promptly sent via calendar to confirm the interview date and time. Participants were also informed of their right to reschedule or withdraw from the interview at any time without any obligation.

To accommodate participants' varying schedules, the researcher ensured flexibility in scheduling options, including offering interviews outside of standard working hours when needed. This adaptive scheduling approach was crucial in maintaining participant comfort and reducing any potential inconvenience. Additionally, Zoom's built-in features for recording sessions, with participants' consent, ensured that the data collection process was seamless and efficient, while also safeguarding the integrity of the research. By utilising Zoom, the research not only adapted to the challenges posed by the pandemic but also allowed for a more convenient and flexible interviewing process, ultimately facilitating the inclusion of a broader range of academic staff participants across different disciplines.

Data Collection Procedure

Participants were asked to provide basic demographic and professional information, including their specific role in the delivery of units in Block Mode, the number of Block units they had taught, and their teaching experience with international student cohorts. The data collection took place before the midpoint of the 2023 academic year, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their experiences with Block Mode delivery and international students.

The interviews were designed as semi-structured, short-response discussions, lasting approximately 60 minutes. Each interview was conducted via Zoom, recorded with the participants' consent, and

subsequently transcribed into individual files for each participant to facilitate detailed analysis. A semi-structured approach allowed for consistency across interviews, as all participants were asked the same set of questions in a standardised order. However, follow-up questions were posed where responses were unclear or could benefit from further elaboration, enhancing the richness of the data.

The interview questions were divided into six key thematic areas: (1) Expectations and preparation, (2) Learning experiences, (3) Academic performance, (4) Engagement in class, (5) Use of learning management system, and (6) Feedback and comments. These areas were chosen to holistically assess the participants' perceptions of Block Mode delivery, particularly in relation to international students. The design of the interview ensured that both broad and specific aspects of teaching in Block Mode were covered, offering comprehensive insights into the academic staff's experiences.

The structure of the interviews allowed for a nuanced exploration of academic staff members' views on Block Mode's impact on student learning and engagement, providing valuable qualitative data to support the broader research objectives. The interview process also enabled academic staff participants to offer suggestions for improving support for international students in the Block Mode, ensuring that their feedback contributed directly to the study's findings.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from academic staff interviews was analysed using thematic analysis, a widely recognised method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can be employed to report participants' experiences, meanings, and perceptions of reality, while also offering insights into how these experiences are constructed and understood. This method serves as a foundational tool for researchers, helping to develop the essential skills required for more advanced forms of qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined six key phases for conducting thematic analysis, which were followed in this study. The first phase involved transcribing the interview data and familiarising the student researcher with the content by reading and re-reading the transcripts, while also noting initial observations. In the second phase, data were systematically coded, with particular attention to

identifying salient features across the entire dataset. In the third phase, these codes were grouped into potential themes, capturing broader patterns in the data. The fourth phase involved reviewing the themes to ensure their coherence and relevance to the research aims. In the fifth phase, the themes were defined and refined, with clear labels and definitions developed for each. The final phase was the generation of the report, wherein the themes were contextualised and linked to the research questions.

In this qualitative study with academic staff interviews, NVivo software was utilised to enhance the organisation and analysis of the qualitative data. NVivo facilitated the systematic coding of interview transcripts and the management of large amounts of data, allowing for the efficient identification and categorisation of themes. This software provided a structured framework for coding, with different colours used to label and organise themes across the transcripts, ensuring consistency in the analysis process.

The student researcher conducted the initial coding of all interview transcripts, identifying key themes. To enhance the reliability of the analysis, two supervisors also independently analysed two full interview transcripts, applying their own coding strategies. The research team then compared their individual analyses, discussing discrepancies and refining the identified themes. This process of triangulation helped to ensure the validity and reliability of the thematic analysis. Ultimately, a consensus was reached regarding the final set of themes, with nine core themes emerging as the most prominent across the ten academic staff interviews.

To further ensure the accuracy of the coding process, one transcription was randomly selected for inter-rater reliability testing. Initially, the agreement between the student researcher and the supervisors reached 70%, which necessitated further discussions to resolve discrepancies and achieve a shared understanding of the themes. Through these discussions, the coding scheme was refined, and inter-rater reliability exceeded 90%, ensuring the robustness of the thematic analysis.

Once a high level of agreement was achieved, the student researcher proceeded to code the remaining transcripts using NVivo, utilising the agreed-upon thematic framework. The coded data were then synthesised and are presented in the results section, where the nine identified themes are explored in

detail, shedding light on the academic staff's experiences with Block mode teaching, particularly in relation to international students.

Results

The results section provided an overview of the experiences and perspectives presented by academic staff who teach in the Block Mode education regarding the engagement of international and domestic students. It delved into various pedagogical and personal impacts of a new higher education delivery model. Key areas of focus for the results included expectations and observations about student engagement and interaction with their peers, teachers, and learning content, academic performance, learning outcomes, assessment completion, the challenges and positives of Block Mode, teaching preparation, the use of the Learning Management System (LMS), feedback and suggestions, and the comparison between Block Mode and traditional mode.

Engagement and Interaction

Academic Staff Participants provided valuable insights into the similarities and differences in engagement and interactions with their peers, teachers, and learning content between international and domestic students during Block Mode delivery. They shared a range of expectations and observations.

Expectation. The findings revealed that academic staff participants anticipated a more immersive and dynamic learning environment in Block Mode delivery. This heightened engagement was seen as a key benefit of the Block Mode structure, which allows for concentrated focus on a single unit, compared to their previous experiences in traditional mode delivery. Notably, eight participants (P1, P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9 &P10) specifically highlighted their expectations regarding the increased engagement of both domestic and international student cohorts in the Block delivery mode.

Many academic staff entered the Block Mode delivery with specific expectations regarding its impact on student engagement and participation, particularly given the intensive design structure of the course. As they reflected on their experiences, several academic staff participants confirmed that their initial assumptions about the potential benefits of Block Mode were largely realised. The prevailing expectation among five academic staff participants (P1, P4, P5, P8 & P10) was that the Block Mode

would indeed foster increased involvement and engagement, irrespective of the students' domestic or international backgrounds. Their observations following the implementation of Block delivery further solidified this anticipation. They consistently observed a tangible increase in active participation and interpersonal interaction, attributing it to the condensed format. For instance, Academic Staff Participant P1 articulated the belief that "the Block facilitates space for relational aspects of teaching and learning to flourish", emphasising the extended time spent with their peers and teachers within a short period. This sentiment was echoed by Academic Staff Participant P8, who highlighted how the intensive nature of Block delivery allowed for the development of stronger connections among students, noting that "they get to know each other better… they see the same 20 or 25 people three times a week, rather than being a part of a massive number of students going through the place". Additionally, Academic Staff Participant P5 underscored the advantages of the focused learning environment in Block Mode, emphasising how concentrating on a single unit at a time led to heightened engagement, stating "one subject at a time… you've got more time and space to think about that subject". These firsthand observations not only validated but also amplified the initial expectation of increased engagement in the Block Mode, highlighting its effectiveness in promoting active participation and fostering stronger interpersonal connections among students.

The expectation that the Block Mode format may foster an environment which encourages active participation from all students was raised by Academic Staff Participant P10. He explained that, "the domestic students are very upfront and have no reluctance in asking any question". There was a distinction noted however, in students' willingness to ask questions. Academic Staff Participant P10 claimed, "the internationals are a bit cautious and conscious, trying to understand the lecturer before they open up". Academic Staff Participant P4 shared a similar expectation, emphasising the shift in the power dynamic from the teacher to the student in Block Mode, with the anticipation of students being more actively involved in dialogues and discussions. She noted the importance of this engagement expectation of students through her example of, "engage in dialogue with me, so as to pose questions to lead discussions".

Observation. The observations regarding the engagement of international and domestic students in Block Mode delivery were informed by the teaching experiences of the ten participants and revealed both similarities and differences. Four academic staff participants (P1, P5, P9 & P10) detailed that international students tend to be engaged more actively, manifesting this through an increased

level of questioning than the domestic cohort. Academic Staff Participant P1 pointed out that, “the international students are more open to asking the lecturer questions”. She claimed it may have stemmed from a need for clarification, especially among those whose first language was not English. Academic Staff Participant P5 concurred, stating that international students displayed greater concern for understanding and, “doing things correctly” resulting in increased engagement. He further acknowledged that international students, “tend to stay back after class and ask more questions, to seek more feedback on their assessments, or whether they’re doing things in the right way…email drafts of assessments”, but also tend to listen instead of talk more during a lesson. Academic Staff Participant P7 brought attention to differences in power dynamics, where international students might come from educational backgrounds discouraging the challenge of a teacher’s opinion. In contrast, the Australian system promotes critique, leading to varied engagement levels in class. Academic Staff Participant P7 further iterated that, “in our course, everybody really engages well, because much of the work we do will require them to express their opinion, or tell us their experiences”. One other contributing factor is the mixed age group of students, where enriched interaction was facilitated and, “the seniors have more experience, the younger ones probably are clever when it comes to use of devices and working with computers and things like that”.

Conversely, Academic Staff Participant P2 and P4 observed a similar level of engagement between international and domestic students. High engagement occurred especially, “when it comes to their assessments”, as noted by participant P4. Participant P2 attributed this consistency to the maturity and commitment of Masters students, emphasising that both international and domestic students shared a common commitment to their education. He stated, “whether they’re from overseas or here, they seem to have the same commitment”. Academic Staff Participant P3, however, held a contrary viewpoint, noting that international students engaged less than their domestic counterparts. This observation was based on factors such as: the internationals, “don’t understand the language of the class activities, don’t know what’s expected of them, or unfamiliar with the discourse of education”.

Results showed that the academic staff participants’ expectations and observations regarding engagement in Block Mode delivery painted a nuanced picture, highlighting various factors that influence the interaction dynamics between international and domestic students and their lecturers (e.g., level of questioning, caution in sharing perspectives). Expectations varied among the participants, with a prevailing anticipation of increased engagement in Block Mode, irrespective of students’ backgrounds. Observations, however, revealed a mixed landscape of engagement. Several

participants noted that international students tended to be more actively engaged whereas, a smaller number of respondents observed similar levels of engagement between international and domestic students.

Academic Performance

In the context of academic performance in Block Mode delivery for both domestic and international students, the interview responses revealed varying perspectives. Two academic staff participants (P5 & P10) highlighted situations where academic performance could be similar or different, while the remaining participants held distinct opinions. Four academic staff participants (P1, P2, P6 & P8) believed that there was no significant difference in academic performance between international and domestic students. The remaining four participants (P3, P4, P7 & P9) thought that there were differences in the academic performance of the two cohorts, with various factors contributing to these distinctions.

Regarding the factors influencing academic performance, Academic Staff Participant P5 indicated that disparities arise when, "the assessments rely on language and cultural understanding or contextual information". Conversely, when assessments do not heavily rely on these factors and proficiency in language is not a strict requirement, "the differences start to disappear". Academic Staff Participant P10 responded similarly highlighting a perspective indicative of situational context. He suggested that variation in performance is not necessarily related to differences in intellectual ability between domestic and international students. However, he emphasised that international students, driven by their financial investment and the full-time mode, typically demonstrated higher commitment. In contrast, domestic students may be less committed because, "they do not have that pressure, can take light load whenever they want to". This higher commitment among international students, as noted by P10, may contribute to their marginally better academic performance.

Four academic staff participants (P3, P4, P7 & P9) underscored the multifaceted nature of academic performance among domestic and international students. Participant P3 discussed that issues related to plagiarism were observed among international students and commented that it, "can be an issue because A, they haven't had an opportunity to think about the referencing system in their past degree if it was overseas. And B, they lack confidence in their written English language skills". She further emphasised the importance of equipping both domestic and international students with a better

understanding of referencing and addressing these issues proactively throughout the Blocks. Academic Staff Participant P4 observed that international students generally performed better. She attributed this to the international students' strong commitment to, "understand the assessment task, stick to the rubric, address all of the aspects in the rubric… they want to perform and want to achieve". Academic Staff Participant P7 mentioned that although international students might face initial challenges, they could reach a comparable or even higher level of academic performance over time, and explained that, "after the initial struggle, and learning how to go about it, they pick up well, not necessarily better than domestic students, but can be at par, some of them are really good, even better than domestic". In an opposite stand, Academic Staff Participant P9 clarified the distribution of grades for international students is more diverse, covering a broader range of grades, including Fail (F), Distinction (D) and High Distinction (HD), while, "most of our domestic would be in the HD, D".

The results revealed varying opinions on the academic performance of domestic and international students in Block Mode delivery. While some academic staff participants highlighted the potential for disparities in performance when assessments heavily rely on language and cultural understanding, others underlined that such distinctions tend to diminish when assessments are contextually neutral. Factors such as language, cultural understanding, and commitment, played a role in the variation between academics' perspectives of students' academic performance.

Learning Outcomes

Responses were provided by academic staff participants regarding the relationship between student experience and learning outcomes for domestic and international cohorts under Block Mode delivery. Results indicated that 80% of them (P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, P8, P9 & P10) explicitly stated that there was no significant difference between international and domestic students. Among these eight academic staff participants, three (P2, P4 & P10) emphasised that good learning outcomes and a positive learning experience were closely intertwined. However, participant 5 and 6 suggested that a good relationship existed between student experience and learning outcomes without explicitly addressing the difference between the two student cohorts.

Academic Staff Participant P10 emphasised the correlation between student experience and learning outcomes in Block Mode delivery stating, "I believe that good learning outcomes are closely linked to good content, leading to a positive learning experience". Academic Staff Participant P3 highlighted

the pivotal role played by lecturers in establishing a strong connection between student experience and outcomes. Participant P3 noted, “The most important factor is the lecturer… how they deliver the learning outcomes, design engaging activities, and provide meaningful engagement with the material in each session”. Academic Staff Participant P8 reiterated the significance of the lecturer as a facilitator, and commented,

> if the students feel like you care about them, and you create an engaging classroom scenario, you understand their life circumstances, you talk to them, you move around the room, and you get to know them, and their experience is good, then I think they are more engaged in what you're talking about in the classroom. I think they try harder to produce not only good outcomes, I think they try harder to come to class, to engage with you, to learn from you, to email you, to ask you questions, to be proactive in their learning. So I certainly think that that helps them. If you are a good facilitator or teacher in your classroom, then the students have a better experience and it does create more positive or more achievable learning outcomes.

An observational perspective was provided by Academic Staff Participant P7, mentioning the variety of experiences students had in Block Mode. He indicated that the relationship between student experience and learning outcomes may vary and stated, “I have observed students who faced challenges, leading to a more difficult learning experience and lower performance. However, I have also seen students who worked hard and achieved positive outcomes”. In contrast, Academic Staff Participant P5 reported that for all student cohorts, a positive student experience did “not necessarily achieve learning outcomes”. Academic Staff Participant P6 was not convinced experience and outcomes were linked, stating, “I think if you’ve got a really good learning experience going on, and if you’re tapping into student’s background, there might be some unexpected positive outcomes that are not 100% captured by the learning outcomes”.

The responses from the academic staff participants reflected a consensus that the correlation between student experience and learning outcomes did not differ significantly between domestic and international students. They also emphasised the crucial role of lecturers and the creation of an engaging classroom environment in fostering a positive learning experience and achieving desirable learning outcomes.

Assessment Completion

When prompted to answer the question, "What is your perception of the experience of international students in the completion of assessments in Block Mode?" all academic staff participants provided valuable comments. Their thoughts shed light on the nuanced dynamics between international and domestic student cohorts. Notably, seven participants (P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9 & P10) described differences between international and domestic student cohorts in terms of assessment completion, particularly regarding international students' commitment, stress levels, and approach to assessment requirements. In contrast, the remaining participants (P1, P2 & P8) observed only minor variations, stating that both cohorts exhibited comparable levels of dedication to their studies.

Academic Staff Participant P10 shared a compelling insight into the completion rates, emphasising that international students tend to display notably higher levels of dedication when compared to their domestic counterparts. He attributed this phenomenon to the stark contrast in flexibility, stating that, "domestic students can afford not completing a course, or have some issue and leaving in the middle, but international students cannot". Domestic students, he noted, sometimes have the luxury of pausing their studies in the face of personal difficulties, as exemplified by an incident where a domestic student took a break due to personal reasons. According to participant P10, the student "had an issue with his personal relationship with his girlfriend as well as he was very close to his grandfather and his grandfather died". Nevertheless, this student finished the course with a gap. However, international students typically lack such flexibility and, as a result, exhibit an unwavering commitment to their studies and assessments.

Participant commentaries indicating international students tend to show a higher level of professionalism than their domestic counterparts were echoed by several Academic Staff Participants (P6, P7 & P9). They emphasised the pronounced anxiety and stress levels experienced by international students, which can be attributed to the elevated stakes associated with their studies. Participant P6 highlighted that international students often operate under a relentless pressure to succeed. This heightened pressure, she explained, stems from their visa requirements, scholarships, and the need to excel academically. In contrast, domestic students seem to exhibit a more relaxed attitude, "any more than a PASS is a waste of time" (Academic Staff Participant P6), possibly due to their lower stakes and a better understanding of the education system.

Academic Staff Participant P5 pointed out that international students frequently seek clearer instructions for assessments, illustrating their commitment to achieving academic excellence. In this pursuit of clarity, they exhibit a dedication to understanding assessment requirements thoroughly. He declared that, “they want examples, they want outlines, they want clear instructions, they want anything that’s going to help them complete the assessment to their highest ability possible”. Academic Staff Participant P3 reinforced the common perception that international students, due to their cultural and academic backgrounds, are more studious and meticulous in their approach. Academic Staff Participant P4 stated that, “they want to check that their understanding of rubrics is correct. So they’re a little bit more organised and prepared to give themselves time and space to be able to make improvements before the assessment is due”. However, it is worth mentioning that the remaining three participants did not discern significant differences and believed that the commitment to assessment completion was relatively uniform across both groups.

The interview data portrayed international students’ academic journey in Block Mode as a complex interplay of dedication, anxiety, commitment, and personal circumstances. The heightened stakes, life challenges, and pursuit of academic excellence seem to set them apart from their domestic peers.

Learning Experiences

Interview questions were included to examine the multifaceted aspects of students’ learning experiences. Through in-depth interviews with ten academic professionals, two distinct sub-themes, challenges and opportunities, were identified that framed the diversity of learning journeys of international students.

Challenges. Data evidenced that both domestic and international students face unique hurdles in their postgraduate studies. However, a specific set of challenges confronted by the international cohort were emphasised.

Language Barrier as a Common Challenge. Four academic staff participants (P5, P7, P8 & P10) highlighted language as a significant challenge for international students. P10 mentioned that international students often find tasks like report writing more challenging because, “their first language is a language other than English”. In addition to language as a reason, P5 figured that for,

"anything that is based on language, culture or society, rules and expectations, there's a possibility for it to be challenging for anyone who is not used to that". However, P7 noted that this challenge is not insurmountable. Independent learning, which involves research and report writing, may pose initial difficulties for international students. Still, they eventually adapt and thrive in such environments.

Collaboration as a Struggle for International Students. Collaboration emerged as a particularly challenging aspect for international students, as noted by participants P1 and P8. Specifically, P1 stated, "it's not the way that they have learned in the past", and underlined how international students influenced by their cultural backgrounds and learning experiences. She also observed that, despite initial challenges, international students ultimately value collaborative efforts.

While language barriers and collaboration challenges emerged as common themes in the interviews, these were not necessarily exclusive to Block Mode. Staff participants, who had experience teaching in both Block and Traditional modes, primarily discussed these issues when comparing international and domestic students. Their observations highlighted that international students often face difficulties in academic communication and group work due to linguistic and cultural differences, regardless of the delivery mode. Although some participants noted that the fast-paced nature of Block Mode might amplify these challenges, they were widely recognized as general issues affecting international students in various learning environments. However, not all academic staff participants shared the view that there is a stark contrast between the challenges faced by domestic and international students. P2, P3, P4, and P9 indicated that there is no significant difference between the two cohorts in terms of learning experience challenges. P4, for instance, pointed out that pre-class readings pose difficulties for all students due to time constraints, irrespective of their background.

Opportunities. Based on insights gathered from the interviews, a question regarding the most effective learning opportunities yielded a range of perspectives and valuable insights. These insights encompassed collaborative learning opportunities, immersive experiences related to placements, group work, activities that tap into students' backgrounds, workshops or seminars featuring external experts, and hands-on practical experiential learning opportunities. Notably, eight of the Academic Staff Participants (P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P10) highlighted that there is minimal disparity between the learning needs and preferences of international and domestic student cohorts. However, P1 emphasised that opportunities that encourage discussion, unpacking of concepts,

and deeper exploration are particularly crucial for international students because, “internationals don’t necessarily have experience of the Australian school system”. P1 suggested that international students may benefit from additional opportunities for interaction to bridge potential gaps in understanding, such as those related to the Australian school system.

Conversely, Academic Staff Participant P6 and P10 identified unique characteristics within the international student cohort. P10 noted that, “international students are comparatively more a bit more sincere, they’re very committed”. They also pointed out that this heightened commitment among international students may be attributed to limited alternatives, as they often have fewer options, while domestic students may exhibit different responses to stress. Similarly, P6 highlighted that international students may excel in situations that demand quick thinking and action.

From these interviews, it can be concluded that international students encounter some specific challenges in higher education. These challenges include language barriers and difficulties with collaboration. Moreover, some academic staff participants also noted that there is no significant difference in learning experience challenges between domestic and international students. This perspective reinforced that despite their diverse backgrounds, students may share common academic challenges.

Teaching Preparation

When asked about differences in preparation and processes for working with international coursework students in Block teaching, the results revealed that 60% of Academic Staff Participants (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6 & P10) indicated that their preparation is consistent for both international and domestic students. Participant P1 emphasised, “there’s no difference in my preparation”, stating that she focuses on preparing content, learning experiences, and assessments with all students in mind, irrespective of the mode of delivery. Video explanations of assessments were provided to enhance understanding for all students. Participant P10 also confirmed that his preparation was not specific to international students. He mentioned arranging extra sessions over zoom, “whenever students need or ask”, and ensuring the extra sessions were open to all students.

Similarly, Academic Staff Participant P2 stressed that the mode of teaching, whether Block or traditional, doesn't affect the core preparation, as the content remains consistent. He explained that Block Mode aims to complete the curriculum within a shorter time frame with no compromises on content quality, commenting, "Block Mode doesn't mean weakening the content, so my preparation is the same". For Participant P4, her preparation focused on ensuring all students, both international and domestic, could effectively engage with the readings and research components. Additional time and support were provided to help, "not just effective for international students, but also domestic students" interpret readings accurately, benefiting students across the board.

Conversely, four Academic Staff Participants (P3, P7, P8 & P9) recognised the need for specialised support for international students. Participant P3 provided the example of an Indian student who faced challenges due to her unfamiliarity with the Australian Curriculum and mentoring expectations. In her response to the student, she highlighted the intention of, "designing a module which will be supporting international students better". Participants P7 and P8 viewed the need for preparing international students differently, focusing on orientation to Australian teaching and addressing challenges in areas like academic integrity, referencing, and plagiarism. Participant P7 specifically commented to, "induct my international students into the way we do education here, which is learner centred, and non-teacher centred". While Academic Staff Participant P8 noted that, "contract cheating, getting somebody else to do your work for you, that sort of thing" were of significance to address.

The importance of a comprehensive approach to teaching preparation was underlined by all academic staff participants in this study. The result findings underscored the flexibility and adaptability of educators in responding to the needs of a diverse student body while ensuring that the quality of education remains a top priority. This nuanced understanding of teaching preparation contributes to the ongoing improvement of Block teaching methods, highlighting the necessity of addressing specific challenges, such as unfamiliarity with the Australian curriculum, mentoring expectations, academic integrity, and referencing. Staff commitment to sharing information reflects their intention to better support international students (e.g., induction, orientation sessions).

Learning Management System (LMS)

In the context of modern higher education, LMSs serve as pivotal platforms for both international and domestic students, shaping their learning experiences. This analysis considered the key elements of

student engagement with the VU Collaborate LMS, as elucidated through the perspectives of academic staff. Two primary themes emerge, Successful Interaction with the LMS and Expectations of Interaction Frequency.

Successful Interaction with the LMS. The central focus of this sub-theme was to explore the engagement levels of both international and domestic students with the LMS--VU Collaborate. The insights gleaned from these interviews shed light on the nuanced dynamics of student engagement with the LMS.

Seven Academic Staff Participants (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7 & P10) expressed their understanding regarding of students being satisficed of the LMS. A prevailing sentiment among three participants (P1, P3, and P10) underscored the notion that students, irrespective of their international or domestic status, effectively navigated the LMS. Participant P1 articulated this perspective by affirming that there were, “no issues and no differences” in the engagement levels observed among students. Their sentiment reflected the view that, in practice, students demonstrated competence in utilising the LMS.

In contrast, a notable subset of Academic Staff Participants (P2, P5, P7 & P9) pointed to subtle distinctions in the engagement levels between international and domestic students. Participant P2 observed that domestic students appeared to relate more readily to VU Collaborate compared to their international counterparts. Specifically, they noted that domestic students employed VU Collaborate as both a communication tool and a resource for academic materials more adeptly. Academic Staff Participant P5 delved deeper into this divergence, attributing it to disparities in prior exposure to LMS across different cultures and countries. According to Participant P5, varying levels of familiarity with LMS technology, acquired through differing educational systems, might render VU Collaborate somewhat more challenging for certain international students. P5 claimed, “different cultures, different countries, maybe don’t use LMS very much, but we do a lot in Australia. I think it is more difficult for some of those international students”.

Adding a layer of complexity to the discourse, Academic Staff Participant P4 presented a contrary viewpoint, asserting that international students exhibited a higher degree of engagement compared to their domestic counterparts. P4 remarked that, “I always find that my international students are very

thorough, and use the resources and materials quite thoroughly, and often show more engagement in those activities, than domestic students". This observation highlighted a proactive approach by international students in their academic pursuits. In a contrasting view, Academic Staff Participant P6 opined that VU Collaborate proved to be, "equally awkward" for both international and domestic students, implying that the platform's challenges transcended the students' international or domestic status.

Overall, the interviews unveiled that various factors, including cultural backgrounds, prior experiences with LMS technology, and individual approaches to learning, contributed to the variable pattern of student engagement with VU Collaborate. While some academic staff participants highlighted disparities, the consensus reinforced that students, regardless of their backgrounds, were generally proficient in utilising the LMS.

Expectations of Interaction Frequency. This sub-theme presented results of the examination of expectations held by academic staff regarding how frequently students should log into the VU Collaborate system, with a focus on the distinction between international and domestic students. A notable consensus emerged among five participants (P1, P2, P6, P7 & P8) regarding the ideal frequency of student engagement with the VU Collaborate system. They emphasised that daily interaction with the platform was essential to maximise the benefits it offered. For instance, Participant P1 underscored the importance of daily LMS use, particularly during scheduled class times, and encouraged students to log in at least three times a week for pre-class materials and assessment information. Similarly, Participant P2 expressed an expectation of daily engagement, emphasising that both international and domestic students should participate regularly to access instructional materials, pre-class and post-class activities, and reference resources.

However, it was acknowledged that while daily engagement was the desired goal, it might not always align with students' actual behaviour. Academic Staff Participant P3 highlighted the disparity between the ideal expectation of daily logins and the reality. He commented

> we would like them to be logging in every day. But that is not the reality. They are not logging in every day. And often, we will see the most login attempts, when there is an assessment due, you will struggle to find out what it is they're doing with the rubrics, and then if there are any readings that they can use around that time assessments due.

This observation showed that while daily engagement is the ideal, practical constraints can lead to variations in student behaviour.

In the context of Block Mode delivery, three Academic Staff Participants (P4, P5 & P9) articulated their expectations for students' frequency of logins. The consensus among these participants was that students should log in at least as frequently as their class sessions were held. For example, Participant P4 noted that, "over a four-week period, we have classes three times a week.... So they have to log in at least three times a week". This expectation held true for both international and domestic students. Participant P9 further emphasised that in online Block Mode, depending on their individual circumstances, "I would be expecting them to be spending around or up around nine hours a week in the learning space".

Remarkably, there was a resounding consensus among the academic staff participants that these expectations applied equally to both international and domestic students. Regardless of their backgrounds, students were encouraged to engage with the VU Collaborate system regularly.

Feedback for Delivery Development

In discussions about feedback and suggestions regarding international students in Block, all 10 academic staff participants provided their valuable insights. Among these participants, six individuals (P5, P6, P7, P8, P9 & P10) emphasised the need to provide international students with more resources and familiarisation. In particular, four of these participants (P5, P7, P8 & P10) highlighted concerns related to the Block Mode education.

Academic Staff Participant P10 raised concerns about commencing international students not having sufficient time to adapt to the Block Mode. He suggested that these students should arrive onshore at least two weeks before the Block starts, with additional training on the Block Mode and Learning Management System (LMS). He stated, "before the first Block, commencing students could have some sort of buffer time for them to be settled down". Additionally, he proposed the importance of familiarising international students with the LMS and the Block Mode teaching and studying before their courses begin.

Similarly, Academic Staff Participant P7 stressed the importance of a thorough induction for international students, given the fast-paced and intense nature of the Block. He recommended providing ample time for international students to receive comprehensive induction, saying, “if you want my recommendation, provide time for the international students to be given good induction”. He also noted the challenges posed by the current three and a half-week Block format for international students, indicating that a longer Block or with an earlier start unit of study could be more beneficial.

Academic Staff Participant P9 underscored the significance of adequate resources and support from the university. She expressed the need for better academic and administrative staff resources, financial support to reduce students’ work commitments, and incentives to encourage class attendance. She stated, “just more resources, I suppose. We got an intake of 1000 students in February 2023. And I don’t think we were adequately resourced to support them”. Additionally, she emphasised the importance of setting clear expectations for workload and English proficiency requirements.

Furthermore, Academic Staff Participant P5 proposed that lecturers should regularly review unit content to ensure clarity and fairness for international students. He also suggested the possibility of improved orientation and transitions for international students, particularly those new to the Australian education system. P5 mentioned, “there’s general kind of recommendation is that every lecturer, every unit should always go through the unit, and analyse the language and cultural assumptions in that unit and the assessments”.

In summary, participants highlighted the need for enhanced support, resources, and familiarisation for international students in Block Mode, emphasising the importance of effective induction, clear expectations, and adequate resources to ensure their success. These insights can be valuable for improving support systems for international students in the academic context.

Block Mode versus Traditional Mode

Results presented insights gathered from academic staff participants regarding their perspectives on Block Mode education in comparison to traditional semester teaching. The participants provided

important information about the similarities and differences they observed, and the changes they made or foresee in the context of Block Mode education.

Positives of Block. Four Academic Staff Participants (P1, P4, P8 & P10) emphasised the benefits of the uniqueness of Block education mode. Closer relationships, shorter time spent in recapping the content, and higher attendance rates were all clearly noted. Particularly, participant P1, P4 and P10 stressed smaller class sizes fostered stronger engagement and the development of close student-teacher relationships. Participant P1 claimed that, "I really have been surprised with the short amount of time it takes to build relationships with students... The Block Mode has really enabled that strong relationship between the teacher and the student". Participant P10 echoed the viewpoint and explained that "I got to know each student very well… their strength and weakness".

Academic Staff Participant P1 and P4 reflected their experiences with the context of face-to-face teaching in Block Mode when compared with traditional semester teaching. They highlighted that the main differences are the increased pace of learning and the ability to move forward with no need "to spend a lot of the time at the beginning of the lesson, kind of recapping what you did in the previous lessons" (P1). Participant P4 seconded that students can engage in, "more rigorous and in-depth learning, debates, and discussions" in subsequent sessions. This is in contrast to a weekly 12-week program where there is a need for more repetition and recapping since students are seen less frequently. Academic Staff Participant P8 commented on the COVID-19 delivery medium of teaching online, stating that staff were rewarded by a high level of attendance. He further explained that "I think the way we teach in Block Mode, it's easier for students to come and sit at their computer desk at home for three hours, rather than traveling to the city where I'm based for three hours and then go home".

The necessity for a different mindset when designing assessment tasks in Block Mode was also mentioned by Academic Staff Participant P2 and P8. They emphasise the need to restructure assessments that suit the accelerated pace of the Block Mode and ensure students have enough time to complete them. Participant P8 stated:

> you can't do exactly the same things as in traditional mode… you need to be able to create assessments that the students can do in their time, you as an academic staff member can also get marked, so they get their grade in time for the end of the Block.

Challenges of Block. Alternative insights were presented by seven Academic Staff Participants (P1, P3, P4, P5, P7, P9 & P10) who discussed the challenges associated with Block Mode teaching, focusing on both academic and student concerns. Six of the academics (P1, P4, P5, P7, P9 & P10) expressed anxiety pertaining to students' ability to balance or survive in the intensive Block Mode learning. Participant P1 noted that students find Block Mode more challenging based on, "conversations with them". Participant P10 expressed concerns in regard to the additional challenge, particularly for international students, of balancing work and study. He further commented:

> the majority international students are at least working 20 hours minimum, so in Block Mode, studying and also working 20 hours. If having over 12 hours per week study, add another six hours commute, 20 hours just face to face class, and 20 hours if they work, 40 hours is gone.

A similar perspective was shared by participant P7 who anticipated students struggling with time management and claimed, "I've seen students say they need a bit more time to do assessments". Participant P9 pointed out that some reading assignments were specifically challenging to complete in a week, commenting that, "we ask students to read three chapters of a really dense philosophical book in one week, it was just so unrealistic".

From a staff standpoint, six (P3, P4, P6, P8, P9 & P10) advocated that the turnaround time for assessments and grades in Block Mode presented as a real challenge for staff. Both Academic Staff Participants P3 and P6 highlighted the challenge of quickly turning around evaluating assessments in the Block Mode. This harsh reality was highlighted by participant P3, claiming, "the majority of staff do have to work on their weekends to ensure that the marking is done in a timely way because of the very short duration". Participant P10 pinpointed that, "marking quality get(s) hampered" because students and staff get exhausted, when students have to finish all the assigned assessment within this four weeks, while staff have to finish the marking, and release the results within this four weeks".

Due to the condensed nature of Block Mode education, Academic Staff Participant P3, P6, and P9 described the challenge for the university to find staff members who are available for short intense teaching periods. Participant P6 commented on the difficulty, "to find people who are just available for a month. And that does impact teaching, because you want to have people who are quite engaged with the industry to be able to teach into something".

Furthermore, Academic Staff Participant P3 and P10 raised concerns about knowledge retention and the depth of understanding in the context of Block Mode education. They believed that the fast-paced nature of Block Mode education may hinder adequate knowledge reinforcement and in-depth understanding.

The opinions shared by these academics illuminates the dynamic landscape of the Block Mode teaching experience. While it offers unique benefits, it necessitates adjustments in assessments and time management. Addressing perceived challenges related to knowledge retention, assessment methods, and workload will be crucial to further enhance the Block Mode's effectiveness for both students and staff (Solomides et al., 2024).

In conclusion, this comprehensive study results offered a multifaceted exploration of Block Mode education, unveiling both its challenges and opportunities when compared to traditional semester teaching. The benefits of this accelerated approach are evident. These benefits included closer student-teacher relationships, reduced time spent on content recap, and higher attendance rates in Block Mode education. However, they coexisted with concerns about staff workload, assessment adaptation, balance between work and study, and differences in student engagement. The findings emphasised the importance of personalised support for international students, alignment of expectations, and effective use of the LMS.

Discussion

The discussion in this study presented an exploration of qualitative insights obtained through interviews with academic staff. Interrogation and contrasting of the results incorporated critical aspects of student learning experiences, teacher practices, and system influences. It examined the intricate dynamics shaping the educational landscape within the Block Mode delivery. The first section explores student learning experiences, with a focus on academic performance and engagement, highlighting how international students navigate their studies and interact with their learning environment. The second section discusses teacher practices, emphasizing instructional strategies, the role of educators in fostering inclusivity, and the challenges faced in supporting international students. The final section examines system influences, specifically interactions with the Learning Management System (LMS)

and the impact of different delivery modes on student learning. As these qualitative findings are scrutinised, a holistic understanding emerged, shedding light on the challenges, successes, and potential areas for refinement within the Block Mode delivery.

Student Learning Experience

The student learning experience is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond academic achievements to encompass active participation and holistic engagement in the educational process. For international students navigating the Block Mode of delivery, their experience is shaped by a combination of cultural, linguistic, and academic transitions, alongside their interactions with teaching methods and institutional support frameworks. Two key dimensions of the student learning experience—academic performance and engagement— were explored, drawing on insights from academic staff to highlight the details of their experiences within this innovative delivery mode.

Academic Performance. In discussions on academic performance within the Block Mode delivery for international students, a range of viewpoints emerged from the academic staff interview responses. While four contributors asserted that there was no noteworthy disparity in academic achievement between international and domestic groups, another four academic staff participants emphasised the relative academic excellence of international students.

Notably, observations were shared regarding the commitment and performance of international students. Academic performance refers to the degree to which students attain or accomplish their educational objectives through continuous classroom activities, examinations, or standardised tests (Camacho-Morles et al., 2021). Academic staff participants noted that international students often exhibit strong dedication, diligently understanding assessment tasks, adhering closely to rubrics, and comprehensively addressing all evaluation criteria. Cho et al. (2023) highlighted factors influencing international students' participation, emphasising their willingness to engage in discussions when they perceive a learning benefit, even in the absence of external incentives. Additionally, there was a consensus among four participants that despite initial challenges, international students tend to achieve academic performance at par with, and in some cases surpassing, their domestic counterparts.

This perspective of dedication was called into question when examining the distribution of grades, which indicated that grades for international students spanned a wider spectrum, including Fail (F), Distinction (D), and High Distinction (HD), whereas domestic students predominantly received grades within the HD and D range. This grading distribution implied that international students demonstrate a wider spectrum of academic performance, encompassing both lower and higher grades, while domestic students tend to concentrate in the higher achievement categories. International students exhibit diverse academic outcomes, potentially influenced by various factors such as language proficiency (Briggs, 2016), cultural adjustments (Gong et al., 2021), or individual learning styles. In contrast, the current doctoral research indicated that domestic students, by and large, are perceived to achieve high academic standing, possibly due to familiarity with the educational system or other contextual factors.

English language skills emerged in this study as a significant hurdle for international students, impacting various aspects of their academic journey. Academic Staff Participants (P5, P7, P8 & P10) highlighted language barriers as a considerable challenge, specifically in tasks involving report writing. In particular, academics emphasised that the use of a language other than English as the first language adds complexity to tasks, making them more challenging for students. P5 further noted that challenges extend to areas rooted in language, culture, society, rules, and expectations. Interestingly, P7 pointed out that while language challenges are prevalent, they are not insurmountable. Independent learning, which involves tasks such as research and report writing, may present initial difficulties for international students, but over time, they adapt and thrive in these environments. Lee et al. (2021) presented the evidence highlighting that students reported struggles with independent learning, time management, and maintaining motivation. Despite these initial hurdles, many students not only successfully completed the courses but also reported acquiring valuable skills. Academic performance is intricately linked to language proficiency and cultural understanding (Briggs, 2016; Gong et al., 2021). Academic Staff Participant P5 pointed out that performance disparities arise when assessments heavily rely on these factors. Conversely, when assessments are more neutral and do not strictly require language proficiency, these differences diminish. Participant P10 highlighted the situational contexts of international students, suggesting that variations in performance are not solely attributed to intellectual ability. Instead, he emphasised the heightened commitment among international students, driven by financial investment and full-time mode, contributing to their marginally better academic performance compared to domestic students. These findings echo previous research, which underscores the central focus of many higher education institutions on enhancing the academic

experience for all students, with particular attention to the needs of international students (Ammigan et al., 2021; Baranova et al., 2011; Shah & Richardson, 2016). The transition to a new academic environment poses challenges for students, and this is especially pronounced for international students who navigate not only a new academic culture but often a language distinct from their native tongue (Andrade, 2006; Bista, 2016; Perrucci & Hu, 1995).

Engagement. The participants in the study underscored the critical correlation between student experience and learning outcomes in Block Mode delivery. Academic Staff Participant P10 emphasised this correlation, aligning with the broader understanding that effective teaching transcends content delivery. It involves creating an environment conducive to engagement and active participation. Comments from Academic Staff Participant P3 and P8 further highlighted the pivotal role of lecturers as facilitators of a positive learning experience. Establishing robust connections with students, understanding their individual circumstances, and employing engaging teaching methods significantly contribute to student engagement and, consequently, better learning outcomes. Their emphasis was on proactive engagement, including communication through emails, questions, and active participation, underscores the multifaceted nature of a positive learning experience.

Those insights align with established literature that emphasises the critical role of teaching quality in shaping student satisfaction and experiences. The findings are consistent with prior research by Wiers-Jenssen et al. (2002), Sahin (2014), Butt and Ur Rehman (2010), Asare-Nuamah (2017), and Ammigan et al. (2021). These studies collectively highlight that teaching quality, expertise, course offerings, and various support services, such as library facilities and administrative services, collectively contribute to enhancing student satisfaction and experiences in higher education.

Teacher Practices

The investigation into teacher practices within the framework of Block Mode delivery revealed a spectrum of approaches adopted by educators in preparing and engaging with international and domestic students. A prevailing sentiment, voiced by 60% of Academic Staff Participants, affirmed a consistent preparation strategy for both student cohorts. Academic Staff Participant P1 unequivocally asserted the consistency of her approach, emphasising the integral focus on content, learning experiences, and assessments for all students, irrespective of the delivery mode.

Consideration of the teaching and learning perspective became paramount in this context. As Arkoudis et al. (2013) suggested, educators should deliberate on how content is presented and which activities are employed to enrich the learning experience for all students. This resonates with the diversity of teaching strategies observed among participants, where inclusivity is a common thread. The provision of video explanations for assessments by Academic Staff Participant P1, for instance, not only underscores a commitment to uniformity but aligns with the literature's emphasis on enhancing comprehension across the entire student demographic. Similarly, Participant P10's dedication to universal accessibility and extending students support was evident in the arrangement whereby they added extra sessions over Zoom, is aligned with the literature that promotes careful consideration of activities that enhance learning (e.g., Harris et al., 2020). The incorporation of such inclusive practices aligns with existing research, illustrating a nuanced approach to pedagogy that caters to the diverse needs of both international and domestic students (Arkoudis et al., 2013).

Examining teacher practices within the framework of Block Mode delivery revealed a consensus among four academic staff participants on the necessity for specialised support, particularly directed towards international students. This echoes Ryan's (2011) assertion that institutions must intensify their focus on teaching and learning practices to effectively 'accommodate' international students. Additionally, Carroll and Ryan (2007) stress the importance of making these practices more explicit to enhance international students' chances of success in their new learning contexts. Lomer and Mittelmeier (2023) noted the importance of practices such as internationalising academic content, integrating new classroom technologies, or creating culturally diverse pedagogic tools. This mirrors the challenges faced by an international student highlighted in Participant P3's case that described the difficulties for international students undertaking initial teacher education studies unfamiliar with the Australian school curriculum and prompted a proactive response to provide targeted support. Participants P7 and P8 approached the preparation process differentially, placing a strong emphasis on orienting students to Australian teaching methods. This strategic approach corresponds with the need identified by Carroll and Ryan (2007) of emphasising the importance of explicitly articulating the 'rules of the game'. This was echoed by Academic Staff Participant P7's dedication to inducting international students into a learner-centred educational paradigm. This further demonstrates an awareness of the necessity for cultural adjustments within the learning environment, echoing the literature's call for more explicit practices (e.g., Shu et al., 2020).

Furthermore, participants consistently emphasise the pivotal role of lecturers in forging a connection between student experience and outcomes. It is not only Academic Staff Participant P3 who highlights this significance, but the sentiments are echoed across the participant group. This collective emphasis aligns with conclusions drawn from existing research, indicating that fostering a positive student–lecturer relationship significantly contributes to improving students' learning capabilities and achieving academic success (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Uleanya, 2020; Yunus et al., 2011). It underscores the interconnectedness between educators' intentions toward teaching and their practices, especially within the tightly defined teaching and learning contexts. According to Martin et al. (2002), the quality of teaching, and to some extent the quality of learning, hinges on what teachers aim for their students to learn. Academic Staff Participant P8 reinforced this perspective by reiterating the profound influence of lecturers as facilitators on students' engagement and proactive learning behaviour. Moreover, the literature supports the perspective that cultivating a positive student–lecturer relationship is foundational for students' academic success, offering them the freedom to express themselves openly with their lecturers and facilitating easier access to assistance when needed (Uleanya, 2020). This integrated perspective reveals a nuanced understanding of teaching preparation and teacher practices, encompassing both reactive approaches. For example, Academic Staff Participant P8 noted, "I didn't specifically teach them, but I would talk to them if they were struggling with their coursework, or if there was some sort of other issue going on". This also demonstrates a proactive stance, exemplified by P10, "I always give extra explanation, always arrange extra session over zoom if whenever students need or ask the students". Together, these insights contribute substantially to the ongoing refinement of Block teaching methodologies. The alignment between participants' perceptions and established educational research underscores the integral connection between pedagogical intentions and instructional practices in shaping the students' learning experience (e.g., Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023).

System Influences

The influence of institutional systems on student engagement and learning outcomes is a topic of paramount importance. One crucial element is the Learning Management System (LMS) adopted by the institution within the study, which is known as VU Collaborate. Findings highlighted the intricate interactions of both international and domestic students with the LMS, seeking to unravel the factors that contribute to their engagement levels. Furthermore, the discussion extends to the impact of delivery modes, particularly the Block education mode, examining its challenges, benefits, and the implications for both students and educators. While navigating this exploration, the intricate interplay

between system influences and the educational experience unfolds, revealing the multifaceted nature of contemporary learning environments.

Interaction with the Learning Management System (LMS). The engagement levels of both international and domestic students within the LMS, was explored across the interviews. Seven academic staff participants expressed their understanding of students being satisfied with the LMS. An additional group of participants asserted that there were no discernible disparities in engagement levels between international and domestic students, whereas others identified subtle distinctions. Participant P1 affirmed a prevailing sentiment that students, regardless of their international or domestic status, demonstrated competence in utilising the LMS. This aligns with the findings of You (2016), who reported that students who actively engaged with online assignments, logging in frequently and consistently reading course materials, tended to perform well. Additionally, frequent and meaningful interaction with the LMS has been consistently linked to better academic outcomes. Students who regularly access the platform, engage with course materials, and participate in online activities often demonstrate higher levels of academic success (Alyahyan & Düştegör, 2020; Nespereira et al., 2014). This highlights the crucial role that consistent LMS engagement plays in fostering student performance, regardless of whether the students are from international or domestic backgrounds. However, Academic Staff Participant P5 attributed varying levels of familiarity with LMS technology, acquired through different educational systems, as a potential challenge for certain international students. The interviews revealed that various factors, including cultural backgrounds, prior experiences with LMS technology, and individual approaches to learning, contributed to the variable pattern of student engagement with VU Collaborate.

The optimal frequency of student engagement with the VU Collaborate system was a point of consensus among participants, with five individuals highlighting the significance of daily interaction for maximizing benefits. This affirmation from within the interview data resonates with a study conducted by You (2016), which extensively analysed various facets of learner interaction with the LMS, focusing on login sessions, delays, and frequency of interactions to ensure active reading and review of information packets within the LMS. Academic Staff Participant P3, however, pointed out the disparity between the ideal expectation of daily logins and the reality, noting that students often logged in more frequently when assessments were impending. In the context of Block Mode delivery, three academic staff participants emphasised that students should log in at least as frequently as their

class sessions. Remarkably, there was a resounding consensus among the academic staff participants that these expectations applied equally to both international and domestic students. Regardless of their backgrounds, students were encouraged to engage regularly with the VU Collaborate system. Previous research has outlined that a standard LMS supports an inclusive learning environment for academic progress, incorporating structures that promote online collaborative groupings, professional training, discussions, and communication among other LMS users (Dias & Diniz, 2014; Jung & Huh, 2019). The use of LMS features can enhance cooperation with student discussions, thereby increasing student intrinsic motivation and learning. LMSs provide various tools, such as a network web server supporting an interface between the learner and the LMS (Bradley, 2021; Kehrwald & Parker, 2019). Additionally, an LMS offers a database to store information related to the user's learning and an LMS video on demand (VoD) database for storing multimedia files, including voice and video files (Jung & Huh, 2019).

Delivery Mode Impacts. Insights from academic staff participants highlighted the need for enhanced support, resources, and familiarisation for international students in Block Mode. Recommendations included providing buffer time for settling in, comprehensive induction, and clear expectations. Participants underscored the significance of resources, financial support, and incentives to ensure the success of international students.

The benefits of Block education mode were highlighted by academic staff participants. They emphasised closer relationships, shorter time spent on content recap, and higher attendance rates. Smaller class sizes were seen as fostering stronger engagement and close student-teacher relationships. The accelerated pace of learning in Block Mode allowed for more rigorous and in-depth discussions compared to traditional semester teaching, allowing students, "get to much deeper levels of learning and thinking" (Academic Staff Participant P4).

Participant P1 expressed astonishment at the rapid development of strong teacher-student relationships in Block Mode. The emphasis on smaller class sizes in Block Mode was highlighted as a catalyst for fostering heightened engagement and closer connections between students and teachers. Four academic staff participants underscored the advantages of this intimate setting, noting that it facilitated improved interaction and a more personalised learning experience. Relational teaching approaches that emphasise fostering a sense of belonging among students have been shown to significantly enhance

the overall student experience in intensive learning environments (Long & McLaren, 2024). This perspective aligns with research conducted by Mitchell and Brodmerkel (2021), suggesting that Intensive Mode of Delivery (IMD) tends to be more engaging and results in increased commitment to learning, focus, and concentration. Further supporting this idea, Mishra and Nargundkar's (2015) survey of management students in India found that students perceived IMD to be more engaging than traditional learning, despite statistically higher overall satisfaction with traditional learning. The survey participants also indicated that IMD contributes to greater commitment to learning, focus, and concentration, aligning with the positive outcomes observed in the Block Mode setting.

Two Academic Staff Participants highlighted that in Block Mode, there is a reduced need to spend time at the beginning of lessons recapping content from previous sessions. This stands in stark contrast to the challenges posed by traditional semester teaching, where longer intervals between classes may necessitate more repetition and recapping. The literature further supports the effectiveness of this model, with studies by Swain (2016) and Gilde (2023) underscoring the benefits of intensive learning modes. It was noted that students opting for intensive modes seek deep engagement, flexibility, and hands-on learning (Male et al., 2016) – attributes well-aligned with the Block Mode. Additionally, Fenesi et al. (2018) highlight the advantages of a compressed schedule structure, such as reduced recapping needs and the creation of an immersive and connected learning environment. Institutional change towards intensive delivery modes requires careful planning and consideration to the "contextual variables that maximise success in intensive teaching and learning" (Solomides et al., 2024, p. 7).

The delivery format of Block Mode, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, was observed to yield high attendance rates. Academic Staff Participant P8 highlighted that the format facilitated virtual attendance from home, leading to a positive progression in participation. However, research by Mitchell and Brodmerkel (2021), identified a notable drawback. They found that while the Intensive Mode of Delivery program started well, issues arose as it progressed. Poor attendance hindered students' deep learning, with the researchers suggesting that the concentrated teaching on a single day magnified the impact of any absence.

The challenges of Block Mode education were discussed by seven academic staff participants, shedding light on concerns spanning both academic and student dimensions. Six academics voiced

their reservations regarding students navigating the intensive nature of Block Mode learning. Academic challenges, encompassing time management hurdles, unrealistic reading assignments, and the compressed assessment turnaround time, came to the forefront, which is also echoed in the literature (Thomas et al., 2024). Notably, research by Mitchell and Brodmerkel (2021) found that students in IMD education were less likely to complete required readings. Similarly, Ramsay's (2011) interviews with Australian law lecturers, who utilised IMD for their subjects, corroborated the trend of decreased reading engagement in IMD subjects compared to traditional mode subjects. Welsh's (2012) survey of engineering students aligns with Ramsay's findings, emphasising reduced reading engagement in IMD classes. From a staff perspective, six academic participants underscored the challenge of swiftly assessing and grading in Block Mode, often necessitating weekend work. Providing prompt feedback to students about their progress is considered an important Teaching Quality Indicator (Almuntashiri et al., 2016), among other factors such as integrating educational technology into teaching and engaging in research-informed teaching. The provision of timely feedback to students on their work not only aids in efficient time management but also enhances their ability to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This constructive feedback further allows students to gain practical insights and experience real-world applications, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter (Gilde, 2023; Male et al., 2016).

This comprehensive exploration illuminates the intricate dynamics between students and the LMS, revealing not only commonalities but also subtle distinctions influenced by diverse backgrounds and learning approaches. The optimal frequency of engagement emerged as a consensus, echoing the findings of previous studies such as You (2016). Moreover, the discussion expanded to the impact of Block Mode, unearthing both its merits and challenges. The intensified relationships and accelerated learning pace in Block Mode contrasted with concerns about resource allocation, assessment adaptation, and the delicate balance between work and study. The collective insights of participants underscore the need for personalised support, clear expectations, and effective use of the LMS to foster a conducive learning environment.

Summary

In summary, the exploration of student learning experiences, teacher practices, and system influences within the Block Mode delivery has unveiled a multifaceted landscape. Noteworthy findings included the dedication and adaptability of international students, and recognition of language barriers

necessitating targeted support. Teacher practices were shown to significantly impact positive learning experiences, emphasising the critical role of engagement. The interaction with the LMS revealed both commonalities and distinctions, underlining the importance of consistent daily engagement. While the Block education mode demonstrated benefits such as closer relationships and rigorous discussions, challenges in resource allocation and assessment adaptation were evident. These collective insights underscore the complex dynamics within contemporary learning environments. As higher education institutions navigate this terrain, the study provides valuable insights to inform strategies for personalised support, clear expectations, and effective utilisation of educational technologies in the Block Mode delivery format.

Chapter 5: Study 3- Quantitative Analysis of the Unit of Study Performance and Satisfaction Data

This chapter presents the research method and procedure used for Study 3, which involved a quantitative study to primarily address the research sub-aim B. Furthermore, this chapter specifically details the data access, data preparation, data characteristics, data analysis, and the results, and provides a discussion of the research findings.

Method

Study 3 employed a quantitative approach grounded in a realist perspective, emphasising that the outcomes of the data analysis should accurately reflect real-world results and phenomena that are closely tied to the research objectives and exist independently of individual interpretation or construction (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010; Sayer, 2010; Williams, 2020). Within a mixed methods research framework, realism allows for the integration of quantitative findings with qualitative insights, enabling a more comprehensive exploration of the research objectives from varied viewpoints (Fetters & Molina-Azorin, 2017).

The quantitative study investigated the overall research aim and sub-aims, utilising institutional data collected and evaluated in relation to the themes and perspectives that were identified within the literature review. The study involved the analysis of accessed data sources and the set of variables selected or formulated to address the research aims.

The data analysis section of this chapter provided a detailed overview of the various techniques applied. These analysis methods were employed to examine any influencing factors or notable variations in the data related to the academic success and student satisfaction variables associated with international postgraduate students who studied in Traditional mode and Block Mode variants. Selected results are illustrated with graphical representations of overall trends and findings, using visual displays of statistics to enhance the clarity and comprehension of the data analysis and the patterns identified (Norris et al., 2012; Singh et al., 2008). The student researcher obtained ethical approval for the quantitative method and procedures outlined in this chapter (see Appendix E).

Data Sources and Variables

The dependent variables were examined in relation to various independent variables through a two-phase quantitative analysis to address the research aims. A summary of the analysis phases, variables, and data sources used the quantitative study are outlined in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Summary of Variables and Data Sources

Two-phased quantitative analysis of the research aims	Dependant variables	Definition and data source	Independent variables
Phase 1- Academic Success: Determine the aspects of different educational delivery modes that have had an impact on academic success for international postgraduate students, across multiple disciplines	Unit: Unit of study grade (USG): -USG-Pass/Fail (P/F) -USG-Mark (M) -USG-Grade Distribution (GD)	The percentage of pass or fail grades (USG-P/F) and mark (USG-M) achieved by international postgraduate students within different educational delivery modes (e.g., traditional, 4WK12CP), and the overall changes in grade distribution (USG-GD), compared in multiple disciplines.	-educational delivery modes -academic discipline
Phase 2- Student Satisfaction: Evaluate the influence of different educational delivery modes on overall and workload satisfaction for international postgraduate students, across multiple disciples	Unit: Student Evaluation of Unit Result (SEUR)	The 5-point Likert scale satisfaction score to item 1 and 6 of the University's Student Evaluation of Unit (SEU) survey, as rated by students from the sample, compared for each educational delivery mode and discipline	-educational delivery modes -academic discipline

The Unit of Study Grade (USG) variables data (e.g., High Distinction, Pass) were accessed from the Student Management System (SMS). Student satisfaction data was representative of the discipline and educational delivery perspectives. The data basis for the student satisfaction was the Student Evaluation of Unit Result (SEUR) variable and was drawn from additional data sources accessed from the Business Intelligence System (BIS) (see Data Access section below). The Student Evaluation of Unit (SEU) survey is conducted internally as an online survey at the University and is made available to students at the end of each unit and teaching period (Victoria University, 2024a). In the survey, students are invited to share their perspectives on their experience with a specific unit they completed during the teaching period. Satisfaction ratings scored by the sample for one item of the SEU were used for this variable. Students complete the SEU during the last week of unit delivery prior to receiving their overall mark for the unit. This SEU survey item was selected as relevant for investigating overall and workload student satisfaction at the discipline level, as well as examining the relationship between each discipline and its associated educational delivery modes. The decisions

regarding the identification and selection of the appropriate item were made in collaboration with the Principal Supervisor. The SEU survey item and its corresponding five-point Likert scoring scale were used to assess students' satisfaction in two areas (overall satisfaction and workload satisfaction) through their responses (Rea & Parker, 2014) is shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4

SEUR Variable Detail

Item for SEUR Variable	SEU Scoring Scale
SEU Q1 Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of this unit.	1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree
SEU Q6 The workload in this unit was reasonable.	1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

Procedure

Data Access

Access to data sources was requested for 2019 to 2023 academic results and satisfaction data from the SMS department. The SEUR data was accessed from the University BIS department under the guidance of the Principal Supervisor. SMS data access required the researcher establishing a data sharing process with the University's BIS department aligned with the approved ethics documentation for BIS data access. A senior coordinator from the BIS department worked directly with the researcher and the Principal Supervisor to oversee data requests and the release of the data.

A data request guide was created to ensure accurate access to data sources for the Student Evaluation of Unit Results (SEUR) within the Business Intelligence System (BIS). The senior coordinator evaluated the data access request, sought clarification on the specific data needed to fulfill the research aims, assisted with gaining access to the data, and authorized its release to the researcher. When extracting the relevant data for the Student Evaluation of Unit Result (SEUR), the Business Intelligence System (BIS) senior coordinator applied a set of data filters (i.e., the year of study, enrolment status).

The SEUR data was transferred to the researcher via a secure file-sharing platform, with appropriate access privileges granted. Upon receipt of the data, the Principal Supervisor engaged in email correspondence with the senior coordinator to: (a) verify the data requirements; (b) seek clarification on any aspects of the data provided; and (c) confirm that the data aligned with the research aims. The data was subsequently reviewed on multiple occasions in collaboration with the Principal Supervisor to ensure its accuracy, completeness, and adequacy for testing and addressing the research aims. The student researcher validated the criteria of the SEUR data sources with the University's BIS department to confirm the data characteristics and ensure alignment with those specified for USG. The finalisation of students for the SEU sample occurs two days after the enrolment census date, with the survey distribution taking place around week 2-3 of a block unit, and data collection concluding before the end of the block (week 4 of the teaching period).

Data Preparation

The University's institutional data underwent a thorough review, cleaning, and transformation process to construct a final dataset suitable for analysis (Pallant, 2020). These procedures ensured the accurate importation of data into the SPSS statistical software program from multiple access sources. Additionally, this process involved classifying the data to determine the status of international students and to analyse both the target population and sample.

A coding scheme was established to: (a) assign codes to categorical data values; (b) carry out data transformations in SPSS for quantitative analysis; and (c) ensure consistent presentation of analysis results across various variables (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Table 5 below provides a comprehensive outline of the coding scheme and the specific data transformations used for analysing and presenting the results. Data from the SMS and BIS were transformed in SPSS to produce numerical values aligned with the requirements of the quantitative analysis conducted. Alpha labels were assigned to each variable to clearly identify the data sources. Additionally, all categorical variables in Study 3 were coded to suit the specific data analysis methods used. The Unit of Study Grade-Mark (USG-M) data was initially recorded in MS Excel (Microsoft, 2018) before imported into SPSS for analysis (Norris et al., 2012; Pallant, 2020). For the Unit of Study Grade-Grade Distribution (USG-GD) data analysis, the University's standard grade codes for graded assessment were applied: F (Fail), P (Pass), C (Credit), D (Distinction), HD (High Distinction) (Victoria University, 2024c). A modification was made to the

University's coding for fail grades, changing the label from N to F to ensure consistent presentation of the data throughout the research study and in reporting of analysis results.

Table 5

Student Enrolment Group Coding Scheme

Academic Discipline		
SMS Data Value (Discipline Group Major)	SPSS Value (data transformation)	SPSS Variable: Discipline
Society And Culture	Arts, Society and Culture	1
Creative Arts	Arts, Society and Culture	1
Architecture and Building	Engineering and Technology	2
Engineering And Related Technologies	Engineering and Technology	2
Information Technology	Engineering and Technology	2
Health	Health and Science	3
Education	Education	4
Management And Commerce	Business	5

Sample Data Characteristics

The dataset in this quantitative study was refined through several stages of filtering and categorisation to focus on relevant units of study, delivery modes, and academic disciplines. This section outlines the characteristics of the sample used for quantitative analysis, including the specific units of study, the delivery modes in which they were taught, and the academic discipline groups into which they were categorised. These characteristics form the foundation for the subsequent comparisons of student performance and satisfaction across varying educational contexts.

Units of Study

The procedure to analyse the academic performance and satisfaction of international students over the period from 2019 to 2023 required the student researcher to access comprehensive dataset containing unit of study information and student satisfaction scores for all postgraduate students enrolled during this period. This data set comprised all units of study in which students were enrolled (N=116, 247 cases) across the data collection period. The initial step involved filtering out domestic students from the dataset, retaining only the data relevant to international students. The second step involved filtering students who received a mark for a unit of study. Students who were enrolled in a unit but did not commence or receive a mark for the unit were removed.

Next, the units of study (represented by unit codes) were sorted by frequency, selecting those that had been delivered with at least 50 occurrences of students undertaking the unit between 2019 and 2023. This ensured the focus remained on units with sufficient representation across the study period.

From this filtered set, the student researcher applied three additional criteria to refine the sample further. First, units that had been delivered in both Block Mode and traditional mode were identified to enable direct comparisons of academic performance and satisfaction between the two delivery methods. Second, only non-thesis-based units were included in the final sample to ensure consistency in the type of academic content delivered. Finally, the selected units were confirmed to be at the postgraduate level, aligning with the research focus on international students' experiences in postgraduate programs.

Delivery Modes

This study examined student performance and satisfaction across two primary delivery modes at VU: Traditional Mode and Block Mode.

Traditional Mode: In the traditional delivery mode, students are enrolled in multiple units simultaneously over a 12-week semester. This mode is followed by a four-week exam period, during which students are assessed across all units they have studied concurrently. This conventional structure requires students to balance multiple subjects and assignments, which can divide their attention across various areas of study.

Block Mode: Block Mode restructures the academic calendar into shorter, more intensive periods known as "Blocks". The VU Block Model® was introduced at the undergraduate level at VU in 2018, and postgraduate level in 2020. Block Mode allows students to concentrate on one subject at a time, creating an immersive learning environment with a strong focus on a single unit during each Block. This delivery mode aims to enhance learning outcomes by reducing cognitive load and allowing deeper engagement with course material.

Block Mode at the postgraduate level consists of three main structures:

4-week 12-credit point (4WK12CP): The most common Block Mode, where students focus on one unit for four weeks. This structure promotes intensive engagement with the content, encouraging deeper interaction with peers and instructors.

8-week 12-credit point (8WK12CP): In this structure, students take two subjects concurrently over an eight-week period, completing two units by the end of the Block. It allows for a balanced approach while maintaining a focused learning environment.

8-week 24-credit point (8WK24CP): This mode involves studying one comprehensive subject over an eight-week period. The extended timeframe allows for deeper exploration and understanding of a single subject area, providing students with in-depth knowledge.

These different delivery structures were analysed to compare their impacts on student academic outcomes such as pass/fail rates, mean marks, and grade distribution. By including a broad range of units taught in both Traditional and Block Modes, this study provided insights into how each mode influences student performance and satisfaction.

Discipline Groups

In this quantitative study, the units analysed were filtered to include only international postgraduate students, as indicated by the International Student field in the original survey data. From this filtered dataset, 111 unique units were identified, each of which had been delivered to more than 50 students between 2019 and 2023. To facilitate a more targeted analysis, these units were categorised into five distinct academic discipline groups: Art, Society, and Culture; Engineering and Technology; Health and Science; Education; and Business.

The refinement of these academic discipline groups was based on a careful consideration of several classification factors, including the Unit Name, Discipline Group Minor, Discipline Group Major, Major Field of Education Minor Group, and Major Field of Education Major Group as indicated in the raw data. This classification process was conducted collaboratively between the student researcher and the supervisory team, ensuring that the final discipline groupings were agreed upon by all parties.

After reaching a consensus, the student researcher was responsible for assigning each of the 111 units to its corresponding academic discipline group. This categorisation served as the basis for the subsequent quantitative analysis, allowing for the comparison of student performance and satisfaction across different academic disciplines.

Data Analysis

This section outlined the data analysis techniques applied to the variables discussed in the previous methods section. Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed to interpret the target sample and data sources, and to access population characteristics based on the sample (McGregor, 2017; Sayer, 2010). IBM SPSS software was utilised for the analysis, while MS Excel was used to create graphical representations of selected findings, enhancing the clarity and informativeness of the data presentation (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001).

The data analysis for each variable began by examining the independent variables at the mode level (Roni et al., 2020). Changes in the dependent variables relative to each independent variable were assessed across two analysis phases to display the data effectively. The analysis investigated significant differences between the dependent and independent variables, with a comparative group analysis highlighting overall trends and an inferential pattern of the results (Sayer, 2010). Appendix H provides a summary of each analysis phase along with the data analysis techniques utilised in Study 3.

Phase 1: Unit of Study Grade (USG)- Academic Success

Academic success was assessed through three dependent variables related to the USG: the frequency of pass and fail grades, student marks within discipline groups, and the overall variations in grade result distribution. Comparisons were made across the independent variables. Three analytical methods were applied to examine the USG variable and assess the outcomes for academic success, as outlined in the subsequent sections.

Analysis 1: USG-P/F. The independent variables were analysed using the two categorical outcomes of pass (P) and fail (F). Descriptive statistics, specifically cross-tabulation, were employed to assess the frequency distribution of grade outcomes (P or F) across groups and to explore differences

among the independent variables. A chi-square test of independence was conducted to investigate the relationships between the independent variables and the P or F grade categories, as well as to identify differences among various delivery modes. Given that two of the dependent variables encompassed more than two categories (i.e., four delivery modes for Traditional, 4WK12CP, 8WK12CP and 8WK24CP) within the independent variables, the Cramér's *V* non-parametric test was employed to assess effect size and the strength of association between the categorical variables (Field, 2024; Roni et al., 2020). Since SPSS provides Cramér's *V* statistic as an output of the chi-square statistic test, the significance of Cramér's *V* mirrors that of the chi-square statistic (Frey, 2018). This consistency was observed throughout the analysis using the Cramér's *V* technique. Therefore, the significance of Cramér's *V* is not separately reported in the Results section to avoid redundancy, as the *p* value matched that of the chi-square *p* value.

In recognition of the variability in correlation measures used by researchers (Frey, 2018), this study applied the Rea and Parker's (2014) scale to interpret the Cramér's *V* statistic values. The scale was further tailored to align with the research aims of this study, as outlined in Table 6 below.

Table 6

Interpretation Scale for the Calculated Cramér's V statistic

Value	Interpretation of Association
.00 and under .10	Negligible
.10 and under .20	Weak
.20 and under .40	Moderate
.40 and under .60	Relatively strong
.60 and under .80	Strong
.80 to 1.00	Very strong

Analysis 2: USG-M. The dependent variable of student mark (M) within each discipline was analysed in relation to the independent variables. A univariate General Linear Model (GLM) one-way samples ANOVA, incorporating descriptive statistics, was applied to evaluate differences among the independent variables, analyse mean student marks, and compare the effect sizes of these variables (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The Select Cases functionality in SPSS was used to filter the independent variables to facilitate this analysis.

Analysis 3: USG-GD. In this analysis, similar methods to those outlined in Analysis 1 were employed to assess the distribution of grade results across different groups. The categorical data for

grade outcomes—Fail (F), Pass (P), Credit (C), Distinction (D), and High Distinction (HD)—served as the dependent variable to examine relationships with the independent variables. Cross-tabulations were used to assess the frequency and distribution of these grade outcomes across categories of the independent variables, providing a clearer view of trends in academic performance across different delivery modes.

To evaluate the significance of these distributions, chi-square tests were conducted, revealing potential associations between the independent variables and grade outcomes. Cramér's V was further used to assess the effect size and strength of any significant associations, offering insights into the relationship strength between the categorical data.

Phase 2: Overall and Workload Satisfaction (Student Satisfaction)

Student satisfaction was assessed using two dependent variables: Overall Satisfaction and Workload Satisfaction. These variables were measured through ordinal data obtained from student survey responses, where satisfaction levels were recorded using a Likert scale applied to each survey item (Roni et al., 2020; Wu & Leung, 2017). This data was analysed in Analysis 4: Overall and Workload Satisfaction.

Using SPSS, categorical mean scores for both Overall and Workload Satisfaction were derived from the aggregate student satisfaction scores across the sample (Norris et al., 2012). These scores were categorised by delivery modes (Traditional, 4WK12CP, 8WK12CP and 8WK24CP) or by discipline, allowing for a general estimation of satisfaction characteristics across the entire sample (Bhattacherjee, 2012). In analysing these variables, both the parametric and non-parametric tests were employed to interpret the categorical mean scores, represented as the mean (M). This approach enabled consistent evaluation and clear presentation of findings related to student satisfaction throughout the study, providing insight into both overall satisfaction levels and perceptions of workload across various delivery modes and the disciplines.

Analysis 4: Overall and Workload Satisfaction. The 5-point Likert scale satisfaction scores for the Overall and Workload Satisfaction were analysed in relation to the independent variables using three analysis techniques. First, a parametric one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the

mean ranks of the overall survey responses, examining variance across different delivery modes and the disciplines. To facilitate this analysis, the Select Cases function in SPSS was used to filter data by independent variables, enabling a targeted evaluation of differences in satisfaction levels across these groups. Secondly, a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used to test if the Overall and Workload Satisfaction categorical mean score of the three delivery modes was significantly different (Roni et al., 2020; Wu & Leung, 2017). The Kruskal-Wallis test also analysed any significant difference between the disciplines in each of the delivery modes for the satisfaction variable, using the Overall and Workload Satisfaction categorical mean score. A Mann-Whitney U test was used to test if the Overall and Workload Satisfaction categorical mean score of the two delivery modes was significantly different. Thirdly, pairwise comparisons were analysed using the Kruskal-Wallis test to examine and report on any significant differences between the delivery modes, and the Overall and Workload Satisfaction categorical mean score of the three delivery modes was significantly different categorical mean score. The Kruskal-Wallis test of pairwise comparisons consistently examined 1v2 (Traditional and 4WK12CP), 1v3 (Traditional and 8WK12CP), 1v4 (Traditional and 8WK24CP), 2v3 (4WK12CP and 8WK12CP), 3v4 (8WK12CP and 8WK24CP), 2v4 (4WK12CP and 8WK24CP) in all analysis conducted. Finally, two-way ANOVA analysis was performed with both Overall and Workload Satisfaction as dependent variables, and disciplines and delivery modes as independent variables. Post-hoc LSD analyses were conducted to further explore significant effects. The post-hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted using Dunn's method with a Bonferroni correction for multiple tests to compare the mean students' score for both overall satisfaction and workload satisfaction.

Results

This section is organised to present data in accordance with the overarching research aim and specific sub-aims, following a two-phased evaluation: phase 1 focuses on academic success, while phase 2 examines student satisfaction. Descriptive statistics were used to depict characteristics of the target sample and data sources, while inferential statistics were applied to interpret findings about the broader population based on sample statistics from the target group and data sources. The following guidelines pertain to the data analysed and to the presentation of all results in this section:

i. All numbers values and statistical results presented in this section have been rounded to decimal points, following APA Style guidelines (American Psychological Association, 2024).
ii. The data sources analysed and presented in this section do not correspond to individual, unique students.

iii. As highlighted earlier, the data sources pertaining to 498 international students with a mark of 0 were found to contain invalid academic result information during the data cleaning process. Consequently, these data sources were excluded from the quantitative analysis focusing solely on international students with valid academic mark, to examine their academic performance and satisfaction levels across different educational delivery modes.

iv. During the analysis, 736 data entries were identified with null values ('·') in the Mark variable. These null values were excluded in all analysis of USG-P/F, USG-M, USG-GD, and SEUR to ensure accuracy.

v. All reported percentages from the data analysis reflected the percentage within each group relevant to the variable (e.g., students, grade result).

Phase 1 Results: USG (Academic Success)

The findings from the non-parametric and descriptive analyses of the USG-P/F, USG-M and USG-GD variables are presented in this section. Data were examined in relation to delivery mode and discipline.

USG-P/F (Pass or Fail). Pass or Fail unit grade results in each of the figures presented in this section are represented as a percent proportion of student grades within the educational delivery modes and discipline.

Comparison Between Traditional and Block in General. The chi-square test of independence showed that there was a significant association between the P and F variables and the delivery modes (X^2 (1, N = 38,812) = 30.28, p < .001). A significant percentage change was evident for each delivery mode when comparing the two dependent variables of P and F. The Cramér's V statistic was .03, representing a negligible association between the delivery modes (Traditional and Block in general) and the P and F grades, as shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7

USG-P/F Comparison by Delivery Modes in General

Delivery Modes	USG-P/F							
	P		F		Chi-square			Cramér's *V*
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	X^2	*df*	*p*	*V*
					30.28	1	<.001	.03
Traditional	20965	95.8	924	4.2				
Block	16006	94.6	917	5.4				

Comparison between Traditional and Different Block Modes. A Chi-square analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the P and F variables and different educational delivery modes. The analysis revealed a significant association between the variables (X^2 (3, N = 38,812) = 580.27, $p < .001$). A significant percentage change was evident for each educational delivery mode when comparing the two dependent variables of P and F. The Cramér's V statistic was .12, representing a weak association between the groups and the P and F grades. As shown in the Table 8 below, an increase in pass grades percentages was reported for 4WK12CP Block mode, when compared to Traditional mode. The greatest increase in pass grade percentages was from Traditional mode to 8WK24CP Block mode (3pp). Pass grade percentages decreased 6pp from Traditional mode to 8WK12CP Block mode.

Table 8

USG-P/F Comparison between Traditional and different Block modes

Delivery Modes	USG-P/F							
	P		F		Chi-square			Cramér's V
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	X^2	*df*	*p*	*V*
					580.27	3	<.001	.12
Traditional	20965	95.8	924	4.2				
4WK12CP	9886	97.6	239	2.4				
8WK12CP	5959	89.8	676	10.2				
8WK24CP	161	98.8	2	1.2				

Comparison in Different Academic Disciplines. The chi-square test of independence showed that there was a significant association ($p < .001$) between the P and F variables and the delivery modes for all academic disciplines, except for Health and Science ($p = .018$) as presented in the Table 9 below. The Cramér's V statistic varied between the academic disciplines and the delivery modes. A weak association was reported for Engineering and Technology, and Education. Art, Society, and Culture reported a moderate association, while all other academic disciplines reported a negligible or weak association between the delivery modes and disciplines.

Table 9

USG-P/F Comparison in Academic Discipline and Delivery Modes

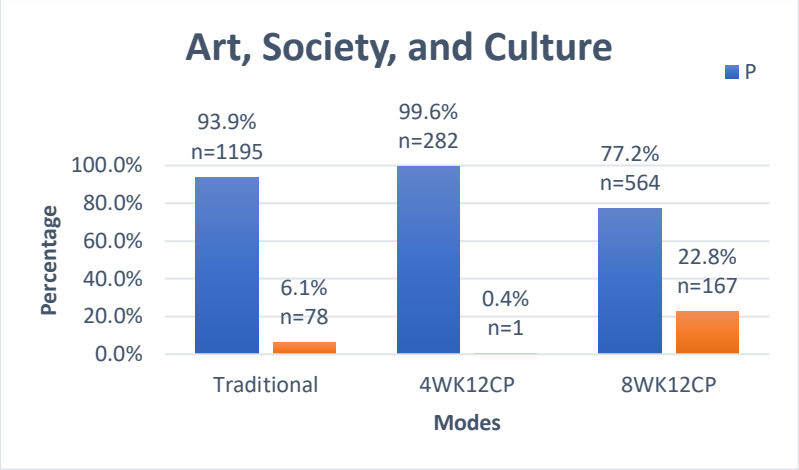
Academic Discipline and Delivery Modes	USG-P/F							
	P		*F*		*Chi-Square*			*Cramer's V*
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	X^2	*df*	*p*	*V*
Art, Society, and Culture					171.61	2	<.001	.27
Traditional	1195	93.9	78	6.1				
4WK12CP	282	99.6	1	0.4				
8WK12CP	564	77.2	167	22.8				
Engineering and Technology					26.84	2	<.001	.05
Traditional	10518	96.2	411	3.8				
4WK12CP	126	100	0	0				
8WK12CP	2187	94.1	136	5.9				
Health and Science					5.62	1	.018	.10
Traditional	338	75.8	108	24.2				
4WK12CP	76	87.4	11	12.6				
Education					18.02	2	<.001	.04
Traditional	1866	99.1	16	0.9				
4WK12CP	9402	97.6	227	2.4				
8WK24CP	161	98.8	2	1.2				
Business					157.47	1	<.001	.12
Traditional	7048	95.8	311	4.2				
8WK12CP	3208	89.6	373	10.4				

Three academic disciplines (Art, Society, and Culture, Engineering and Technology, and Health and Science) reported an increase in pass grade percentages between Traditional mode and 4WK12CP Block mode. Only Education and Business reported a negative change in pass grades between Traditional and Block mode(s). However, when the 8WK12CP Block mode was available for academic disciplines, negative changes in pass grades were reported between Traditional/4WK12CP mode and 8WK12CP Block mode. Art, Society, and Culture, and Engineering and Technology reported a moderate change in pass grades between Traditional mode and 4WK12CP Block mode, which brought the pass rate close to 100% (namely 99.6% and 100%). Graphical representations of these findings are shown in Figures 1-5.

The biggest decrease of 22.4pp was reported in Art, Society, and Culture between 4WK12CP and 8WK12CP, and a moderate decrease of 16.7pp in the same academic discipline between Traditional and 8WK12CP Block mode (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1

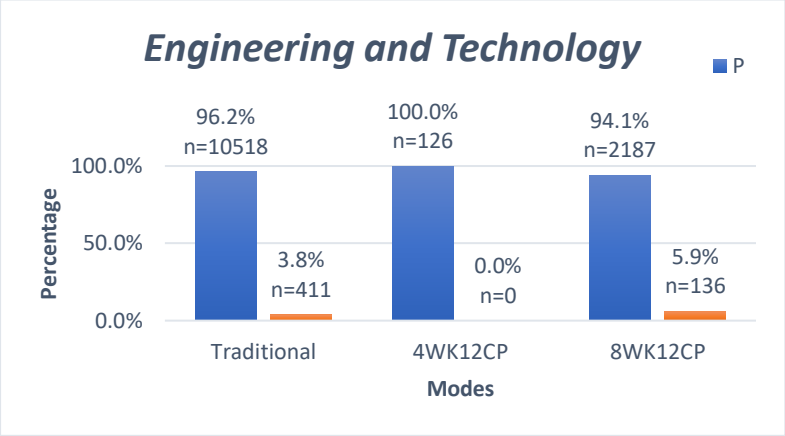
USG-P/F Comparison by Discipline (Art, Society, and Culture) and Delivery Modes



In the Engineering and Technology discipline, the data revealed a perfect pass rate in the 4WK12CP Block mode, with no reported fail grades. However, a slight decrease of 5.9pp in the pass rate was observed between the 4WK12CP and 8WK12CP Block modes, alongside a minor increase in fail grades. Additionally, the traditional mode showed a 96.2% pass rate, with a moderate 3.8% fail rate, aligning closely with the 8WK12CP Block mode results (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2

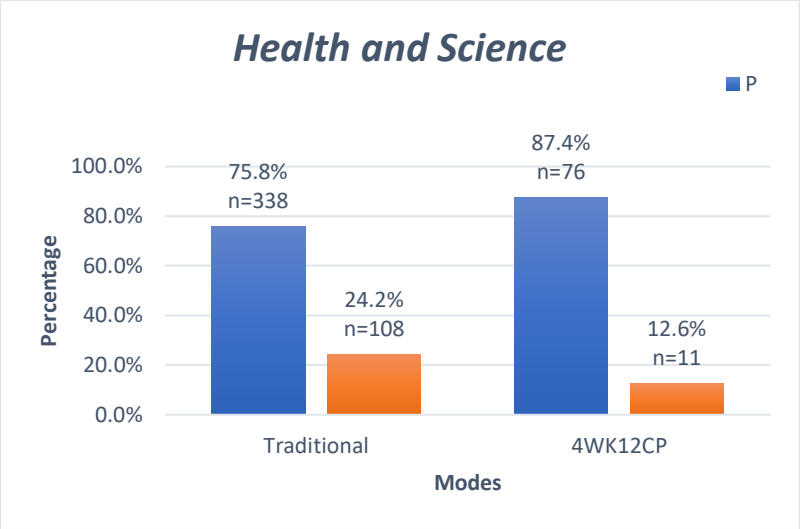
USG-P/F Comparison by Discipline (Engineering and Technology) and Delivery Modes



The most significant change in P and F grades occurred in Health and Science, with a reported 11.6pp increase in pass grades between Traditional mode and 4WK12CP Block mode, and an associated decrease in the percentage point of fail grades (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 3

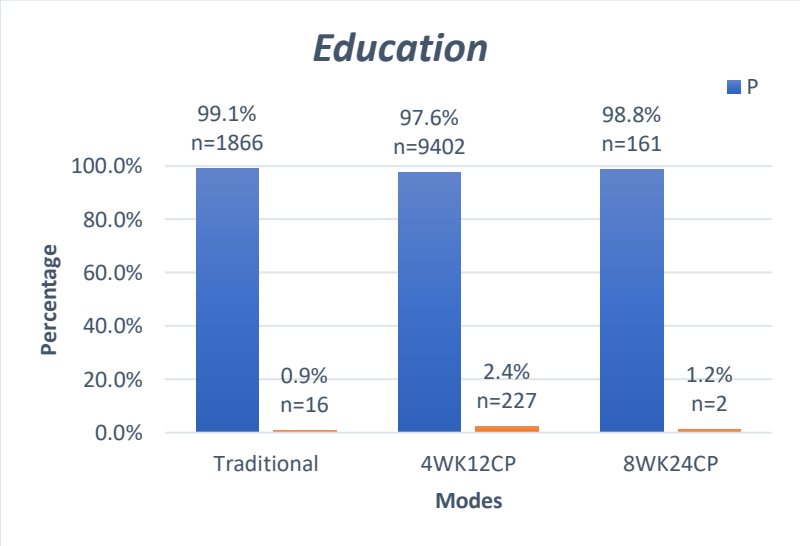
USG-P/F Comparison by Discipline (Health and Science) and Delivery Modes



As the only discipline with 8WK24CP Block mode available, Education reported a slight increase of 1.2pp between 4WK12CP and 8WK24CP (see Figure 4 below).

Figure 4

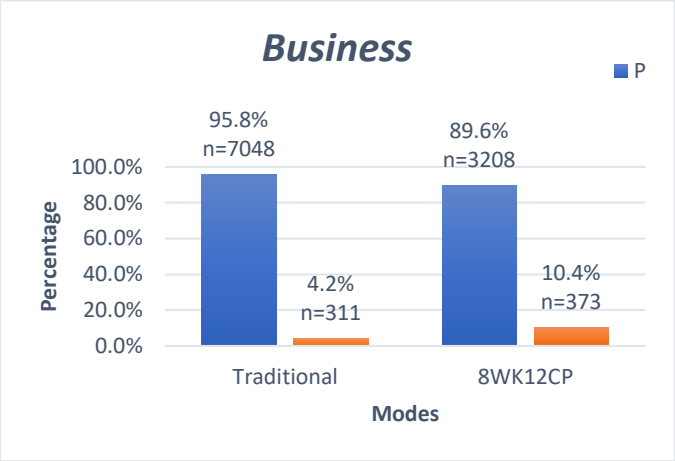
USG-P/F Comparison by Discipline (Education) and Delivery Modes



There was significant difference between Traditional and 8WK12CP Block mode in Business discipline. Fail grade percentages increased by 6.2pp (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5

USG-P/F Comparison by Discipline (Business) and Delivery Modes

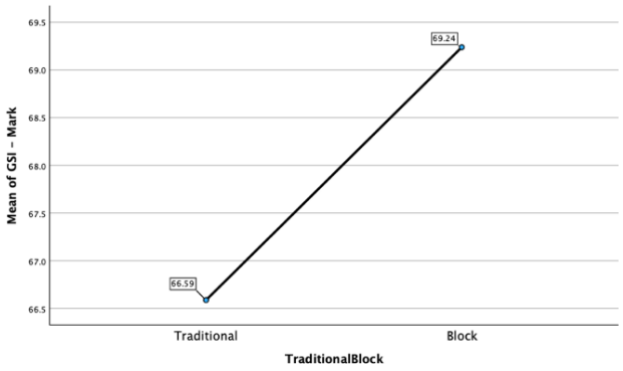


USG-M (Mark). The results for the USG-M analysis in this section are presented as mean scores across different delivery modes. This analysis offered a comparative perspective on overall academic performance in Block and Traditional modes, and among Block sub-variants and academic disciplines.

Overall Marks for Block versus Semester. A univariate General Linear Model (GLM) one-way samples ANOVA analysis revealed a significant difference for the mean mark and the Traditional and general Block mode. Marks were higher in Block mode (M = 69.24) compared to Traditional delivery (M = 66.59) (see Figure 6 below). A significant difference was reported between the two delivery modes, t (35055.16) = -19.690, p < .001.

Figure 6

Distribution of Overall Marks for Block versus Semester



Marks for Block Sub-Variants. In comparing the Block sub-variants, marks were higher for 4WK12CP Block mode and 8WK24CP Block mode than for traditional and 8WK12CP Block mode. Mean values for traditional and three Block modes (4WK12CP, 8WK12CP, and 8WK24CP) are 66.59, 71.85, 65.05, and 77.20 respectively (see Table 10 below). Results of the ANOVA are revealed as significant overall difference between groups, p<.001. Post Hoc results revealed significant differences between each contrast of the four modes of delivery.

Table 10

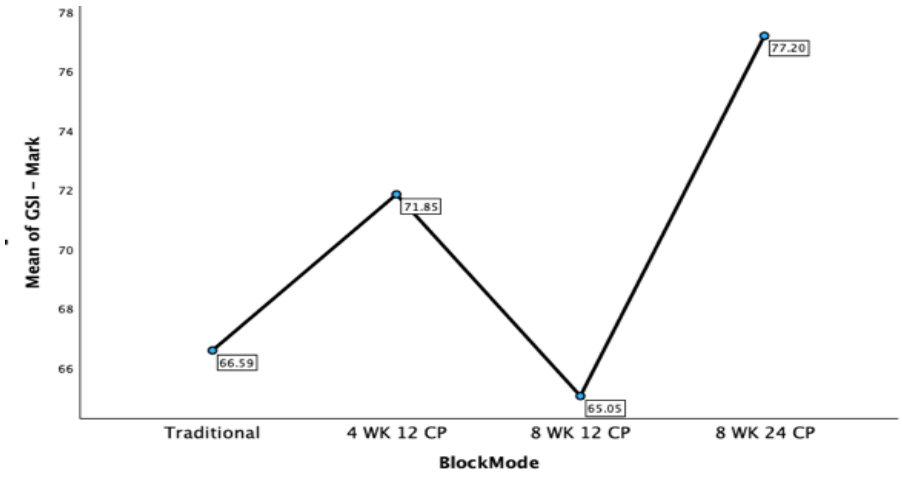
Marks for Block Sub-Variants

Delivery modes	USG-M						
	n	*M*	*SD*	*df*	*F*	*p*	η^2
	38812	67.74	13.09	3	531.95	<.001	.04
Traditional	21889	66.59	12.61				
4WK12CP	10125	71.85	11.12				
8WK12CP	6635	65.05	15.700				
8WK24CP	163	77.20	10.67				

The univariate General Linear Model one-way samples ANOVA analysis revealed a significant difference for the mean mark and the delivery modes, with a small effect size reported (F (3, 38808) = 531.949, p < .001, η^2 = .039). The descriptive analysis indicated that the mean mark improved for 4WK12CP and 8WK24CP Block modes, with the greatest increase in mean mark reported between 8WK12CP and 8WK24CP Block modes, as shown in the graphical representation of the findings in Figure 7 below. The mean mark between delivery modes was reported as significant (p < .001) and was shown to be significant between multiple group comparisons.

Figure 7

Mean Marks for Traditional and Block Subvariants



Marks in Different Delivery Modes for Disciplines. The Descriptive results for Education revealed the greatest overall mean mark (M = 71.86, SD = 10.96) while Health and Science reported the smallest (M = 57.26, SD = 16.28). The comparison of academic disciplines and delivery modes showed an increased mean mark for all disciplines between Traditional mode and Block mode, except for Business. Specifically, Engineering and Technology showed the greatest increase of mean mark between Traditional and 4WK12CP Block mode, with the mean mark difference of 14.11. However, results for Education reported a decrease between Traditional and 4WK12CP Block mode, and increase compared with 8WK24CP Block mode. Additionally, for Business, and Art, Society, and Culture, declines were observed between Traditional and 8WK12CP Block mode. ANOVA results showed significant differences for the mean marks for each of the academic disciplines in relation to the delivery modes, except for Business (p = .143), as reported in Table 11 below. Post hoc results revealed significant differences for all delivery modes contrast within academic disciplines, except for Art, Society and Culture. The effect sizes are reported as small for all academic disciplines, except for the medium effect size for Art, Society and Culture.

Table 11

Marks in different delivery modes for disciplines

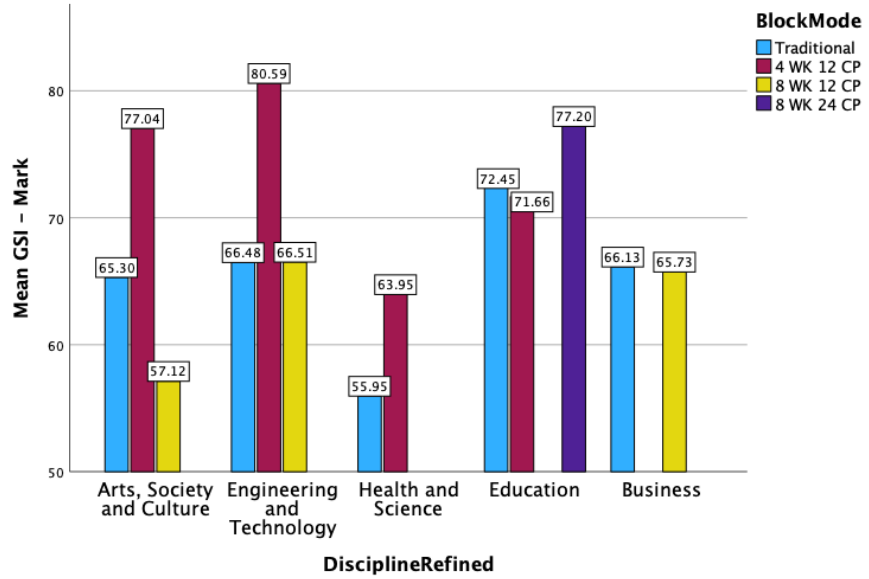
Academic Discipline and Delivery modes	USG-M							
	n	*M*	*SD*	*df*	*F*	*p*	*η2*	*Post hoc*
Art, Society, and Culture	2287	64.14	16.35	2	184.02	<.001	.14	
Traditional	1273	65.3	15.02					
4WK12CP	283	77.04	8.39					1v2*1v3*2v3*
8WK12CP	731	57.12	17.35					
Engineering and Technology	13378	66.61	12.87	2	75.76	<.001	.01	
Traditional	10929	66.48	12.45					
4WK12CP	126	80.59	6.82					1v2*2v3* 1v3=.911
8WK12CP	2323	66.51	14.58					
Health and Science	533	57.26	16.28	1	18.15	<.001	.03	
Traditional	446	55.95	15.77					Post hoc tests are not performed as fewer than three groups.
4WK12CP	87	63.95	17.29					
Education	11674	71.86	10.96	2	23.76	<.001	.00	
Traditional	1882	72.45	10.31					
4WK12CP	9629	71.66	11.06					1v2=.004 1v4*2v4*
8WK24CP	163	77.20	10.67					
Business	10940	66	13.33	1	2.15	.143	.00	
Traditional	7359	66.13	12.08					Post hoc tests are not performed as fewer than three groups.
8WK12CP	3581	65.73	15.58					

Note: Traditional (1), 4WK12CP (2), 8WK12CP (3), 8WK24CP (4); * p < .001

The greatest increase in mean mark between Traditional mode and 4WK12CP Block mode was reported for Engineering and Technology with mean mark difference of 14.11. As demonstrated in the Figure 8 below, the mean mark from Traditional to 8WK12CP Block demonstrated an obvious decrease in Arts, Society and Culture. However, a negligible increase was demonstrated for Engineering and Technology, and Business. Among the disciplines examined, besides Education, the transition from Traditional to 4WK12CP Block mode showed the most noticeable increase in average scores across other disciplines. Additionally, it is worth noting that no 4WK12CP Block mode was implemented within the Business discipline during the study period. Furthermore, it is observed that the 8WK24CP Block Mode is exclusively implemented in the Education discipline, where students achieved the highest mean marks compared to both Traditional and 4WK12CP Block Modes.

Figure 8

Marks in different delivery modes for disciplines



USG-GD (Grade Distribution). Results of the USG-GD analysis and the presentation of data in this section are represented as a percentage proportion of grade results within each delivery modes. Grade distribution was examined in relation to delivery mode and discipline.

GD for Block versus Semester. The chi-square test of independence showed that there was a significant difference between the USG-GD and the Traditional/Block delivery modes, (X^2 (4, N =

38,812) = 898.56, $p < .001$). The Cramér's V statistic was .15, representing a weak association between the Traditional/Block modes and the grade results (see Table 12 below).

Table 12

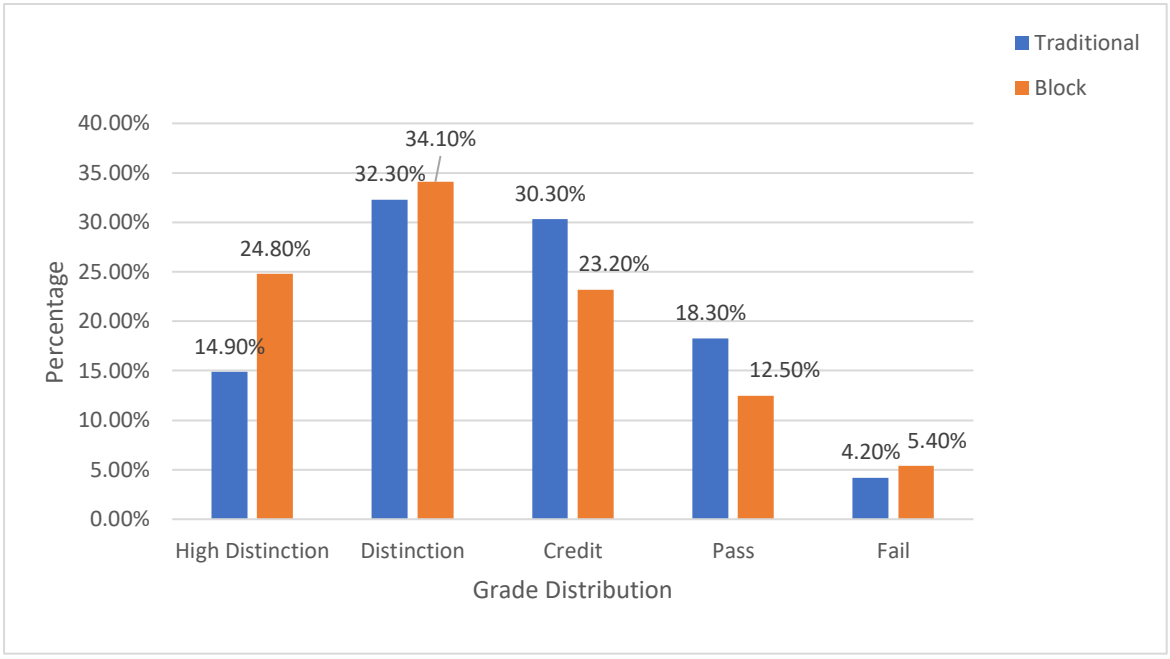
GD for Block and Semester

Grade	USG-GD							
	Traditional		Block		Chi-square			Cramér's V
	n	%	n	%	X^2	df	p	V
					898.56	4	<.001	.15
High Distinction	3260	14.90	4190	24.80				
Distinction	7070	32.30	5765	34.10				
Credit	6628	30.30	3934	23.20				
Pass	4007	18.30	2117	12.50				
Fail	924	4.20	917	5.40				

Analysis of the data indicates a discernible shift in student performance between the two delivery modes. Within the Block mode, there is a visible increase in the percentage of students achieving High Distinction and Distinction grades compared to the traditional mode. Conversely, the traditional mode appears to yield higher percentages of students attaining Credit grades (see Figure 9 below).

Figure 9

GD for Block and Semester



GD for Block Sub-Variants. The chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between GD and education delivery modes. The relation between these variables was significant, X^2 (12, N = 38812) = 1992.77, p <.001. The Cramér's V statistic was .13, representing a weak association between the delivery modes and the grade results (see Table 13 below).

Table 13

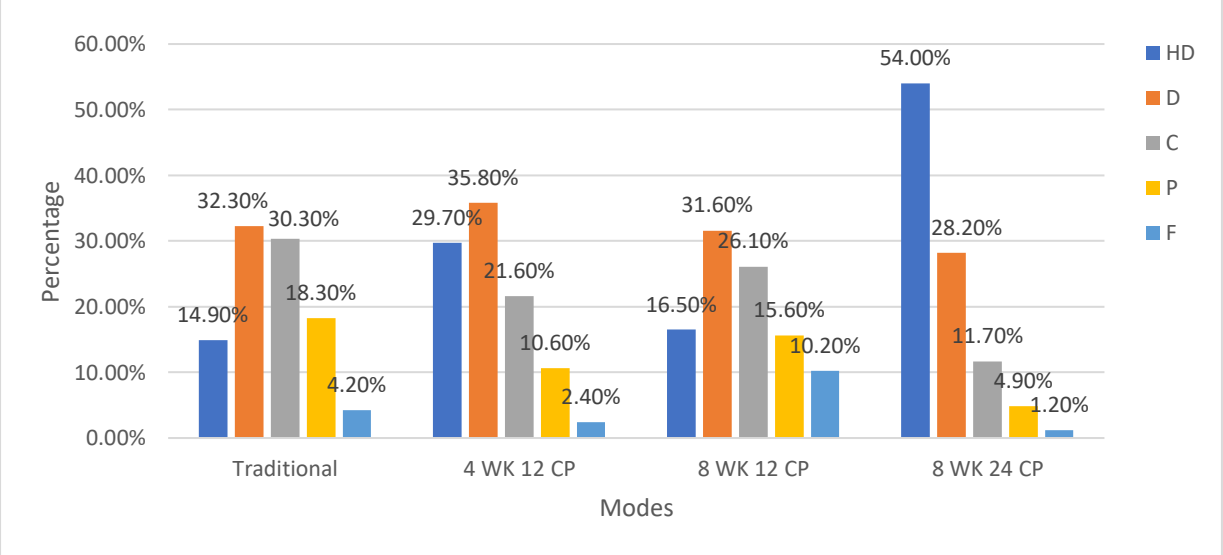
GD for Block Sub-Variants

Grade	USG-GD								
	HD	D	C	P	F	Chi-square			Cramér's *V*
	%	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	X^2	*df*	*p*	*V*
						1992.77	12	<.001	.13
Traditional	14.90	32.30	30.30	18.30	4.20				
4WK12CP	29.70	35.80	21.60	10.60	2.40				
8WK12CP	16.50	31.60	26.10	15.60	10.20				
8WK24CP	54.00	28.20	11.70	4.90	1.20				

The greatest grade result percentage was for 8WK24CP Block mode, which reported 54.0% in High Distinction grades. The greatest percentage proportion of F grades (10.2%) occurred in 8WK12CP Block mode. The combined percentages for D and HD grades were reported as highest in 8WK24CP Block mode (82.2%). Additionally, in 4WK12CP Block mode, over half of the students achieved D or HD grades, with a combined percentage of 65.5%. Figure 10 below presents a detailed numerical comparison of delivery modes and grade result distributions.

Figure 10

GD for Block Sub-Variants



GD in Different Delivery Modes for Academic Disciplines. As shown in Table 14 below, the chi-square test of independence showed that there was a significant difference between the USG-GD and the delivery modes for all academic disciplines. The Cramér's *V* statistic revealed a weak association between the delivery modes and academic disciplines of Education, while Art, Society, and Culture, and Health and Science all showed a strong association.

Table 14

GD in Different Delivery Modes for Academic Disciplines

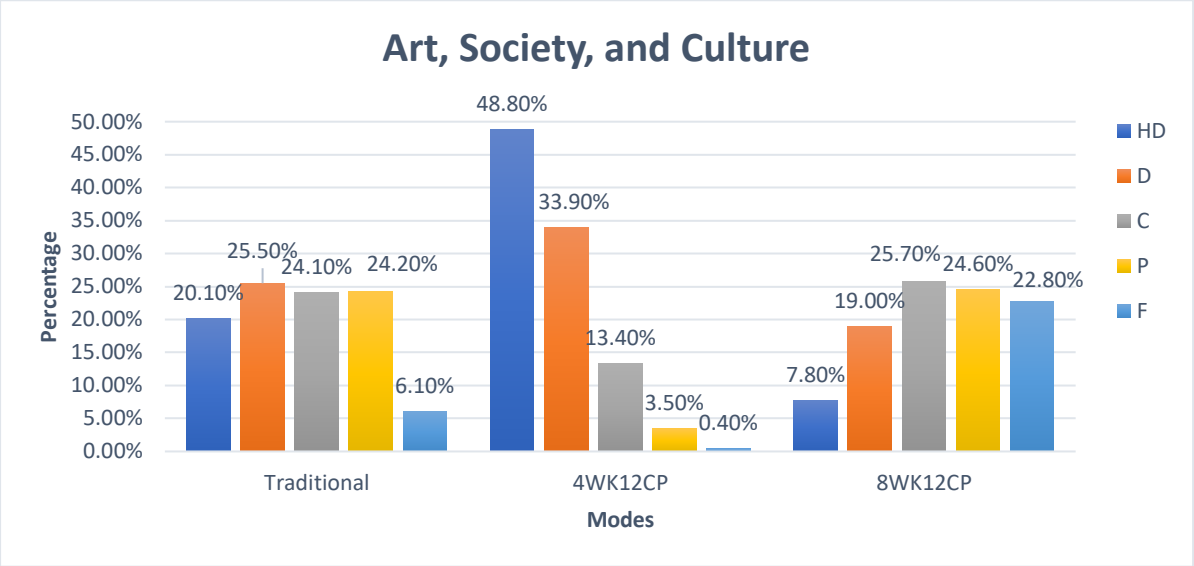
Academic Discipline and Groups	USG-GD								
	HD	D	C	P	F	*Chi-Square*		*Cramer's V*	
	%	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*	X^2	*df*	*p*	*V*
Art, Society, and Culture						410.16	8	<.001	.30
Traditional	20.1%	25.5%	24.1%	24.2%	6.1%				
4WK12CP	48.8%	33.9%	13.4%	3.5%	0.4%				
8WK12CP	7.8%	19.0%	25.7%	24.6%	22.8%				
Engineering and Technology						401.48	8	<.001	.17
Traditional	13.8%	32.5%	32.4%	17.6%	3.8%				
4WK12CP	73.0%	21.4%	3.2%	2.4%	0.0%				
8WK12CP	18.6%	31.1%	28.1%	16.4%	5.9%				
Health and Science						38.07	4	<.001	.27
Traditional	4.5%	13.0%	26.5%	31.8%	24.2%				
4WK12CP	19.5%	24.1%	24.1%	19.5%	12.6%				
Education						76.15	8	<.001	.06
Traditional	27.4%	39.4%	22.2%	10.2%	0.9%				
4WK12CP	28.7%	36.1%	22.0%	10.8%	2.4%				
8WK24CP	54.0%	28.2%	11.7%	4.9%	1.2%				
Business						258.31	4	<.001	.15
Traditional	13.0%	32.5%	30.6%	19.6%	4.2%				
8WK12CP	16.9%	34.5%	24.9%	13.3%	10.4%				

All academic disciplines reported different frequencies in grade distributions between the delivery modes. Figures 11-15 below show the detailed comparison of delivery modes, academic discipline, and grade distribution.

Art, Society, and Culture was the only academic discipline to report a negative percentage of HD grades between Traditional and 8WK12CP Block mode. But the 4WK12CP Block mode presented a big number for the HD percentage of 48.8% (see Figure 11 below).

Figure 11

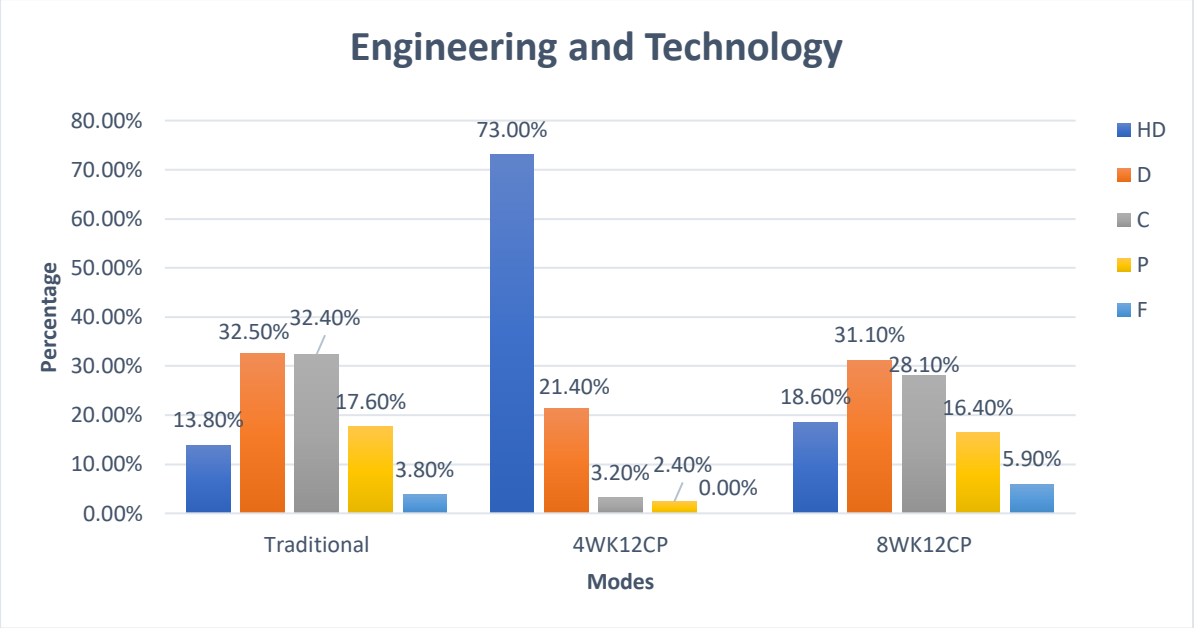
USG-GD Comparison by Discipline (Art, Society, and Culture) and Delivery Modes



The greatest grade percentage improvement for HD grades between Traditional mode and 4WK12CP Block mode occurred in the Engineering and Technology discipline. It also reported the highest HD percentage of 73%. The most significant reduction in F grades from Traditional mode to 4WK12CP Block mode occurred in Engineering and Technology (with F rate reduced to 0%) (see Figure 12 below).

Figure 12

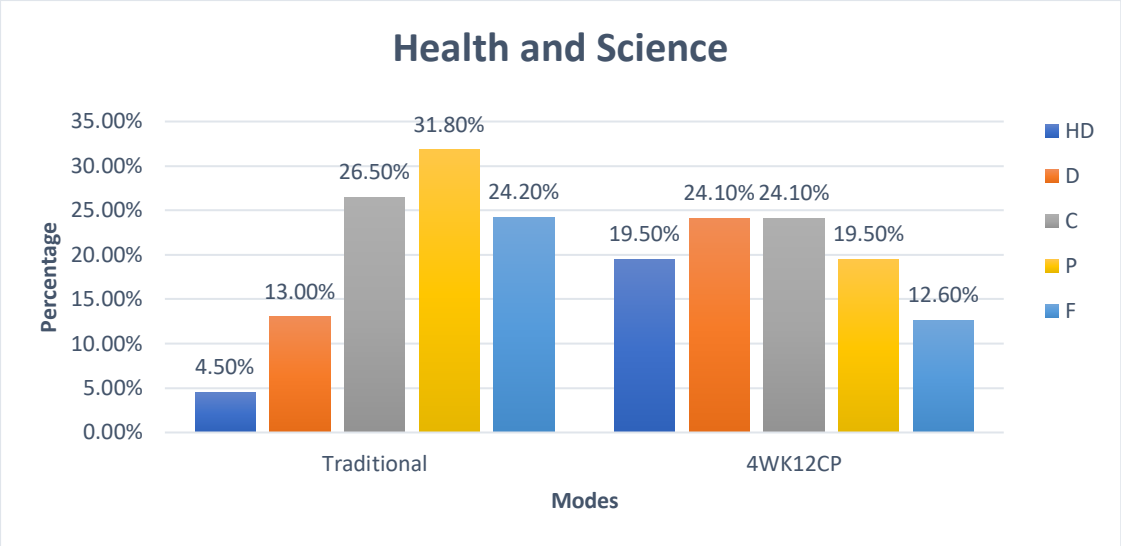
USG-GD Comparison by Discipline (Engineering and Technology) and Delivery Modes



In Health and Science, the HD and D rate increased dramatically, while the P and F rate dropped to some extent (see Figure 13 below).

Figure 13

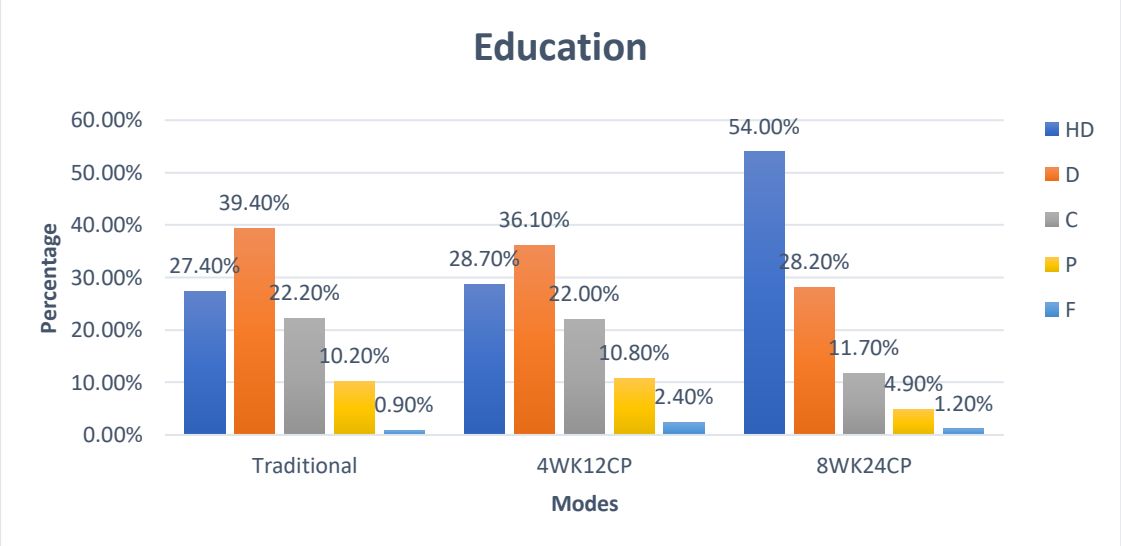
USG-GD Comparison by Discipline (Health and Science) and Delivery Modes



Education reported with high HD percentage of 54% in 8WK24CP Block mode. There is a very subtle increase from Traditional to 4WK12CP Block mode for the HD rate (see Figure 14 below).

Figure 14

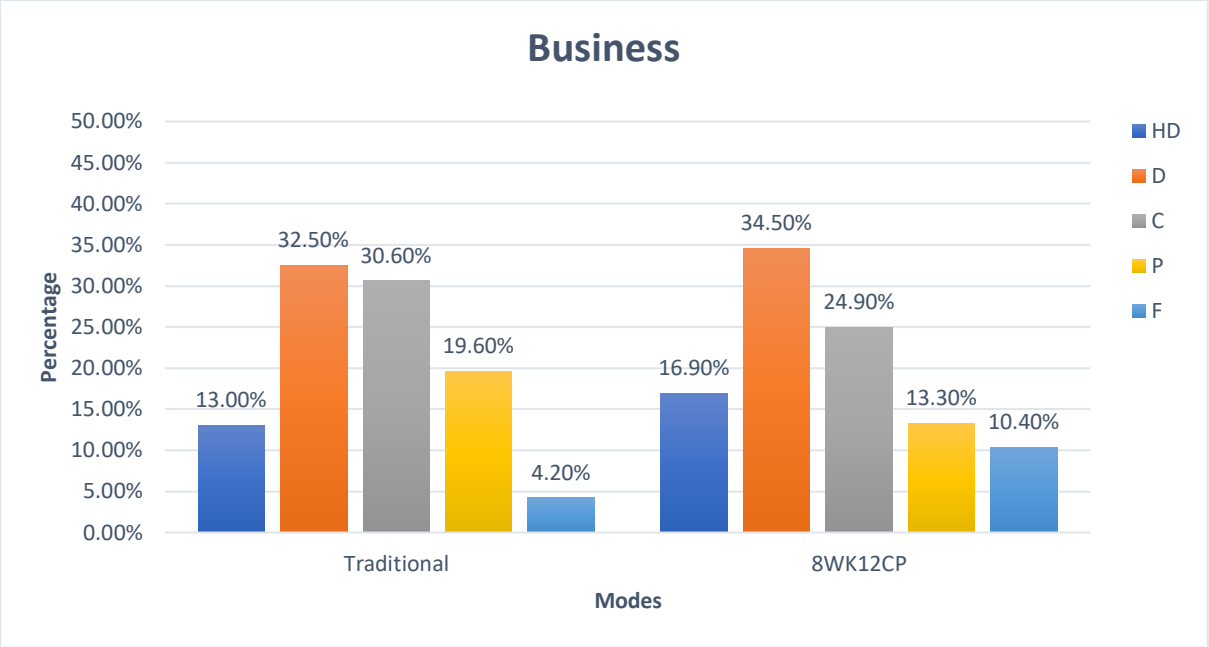
USG-GD Comparison by Discipline (Education) and Delivery Modes



In Business, there are growth from Traditional to 8WK12CP Block mode for HD, D, and F rate (see Figure 15 below).

Figure 15

USG-GD Comparison by Discipline (Business) and Delivery Modes



Phase 2 Results: SEUR (Student Satisfaction)

The findings from the analysis of the SEUR variables are presented in this section. A total of 9673 SEU data sources were provided by the University in response to the targeted data sample request. This indicated that 24.9% of the total 38812 data sources used as the sample for Study 3 had associated SEU data.

Overall Satisfaction for Traditional versus Block in General. Descriptive results for the SEUR categorical mean score (*M*) of the Traditional and Block modes are presented in the Table 15 below. For students' overall satisfaction feedback, the results did not reveal a significant difference between the two modes (p=.058). There is only .004 difference in the mean score between Traditional mode and Block mode. However, it was revealed a significant difference between the two modes regarding workload satisfaction (p<.001), with difference mean score of .008. A Mann-Whitney U test

was performed to evaluate whether students' overall and workload satisfaction differed by Traditional and Block modes. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between the overall satisfaction of Traditional and Block delivery, z =-.91, p = .36. Results also showed that students workload satisfaction had significantly in Traditional mode than Block mode, z =-2.92, p=.004.

Table 15

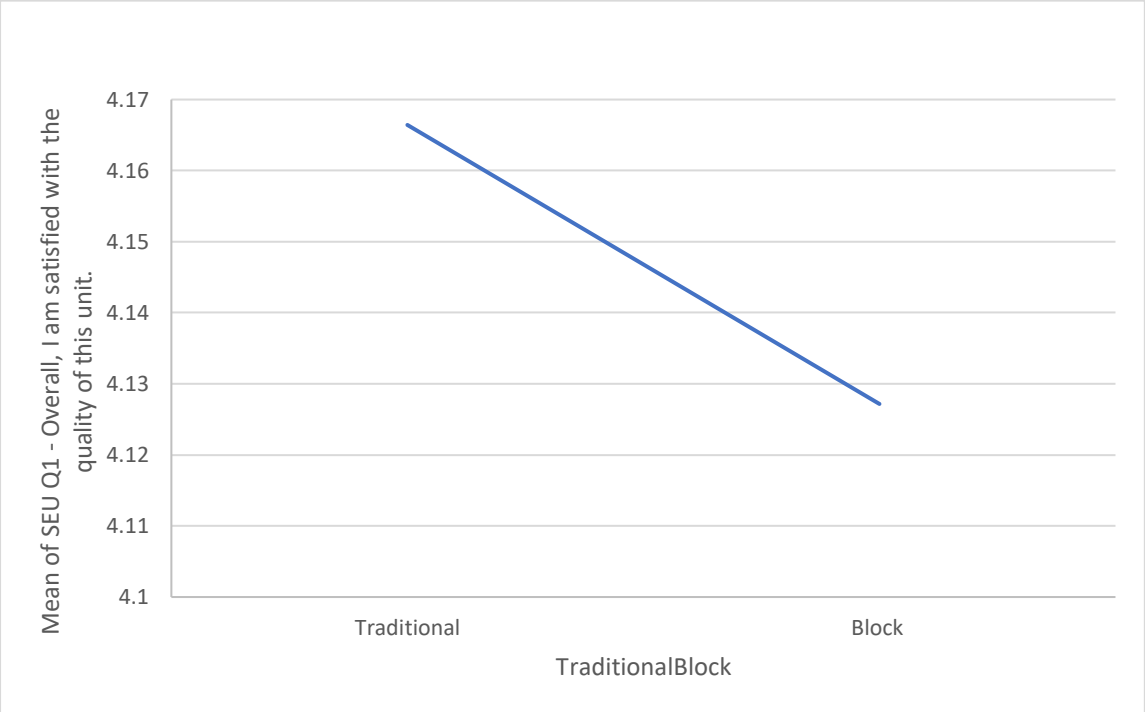
Satisfaction for Traditional and Block in General

SEUR	Delivery modes	Descriptives				Mann-Whitney				
		n	*M*	*SD*	*p*	*n*	*M*	*z*	*SD*	*p*
Overall Satisfaction					.058	9673	4.15	-.91	.98	.361
	Traditional	6213	4.17	.95						
	Block	3460	4.13	1.01						
Workload Satisfaction					<.001	9673	4.05	-2.92	1.03	.004
	Traditional	6213	4.08	1.00						
	Block	3460	4.00	1.08						

Overall satisfactions were slightly lower in Block (M=4.13, SD = 1.01) than Traditional (M = 4.17, SD = .95) delivery, t (6794.79) = 1.87, p=.003, as displayed in Figure 16 below.

Figure 16

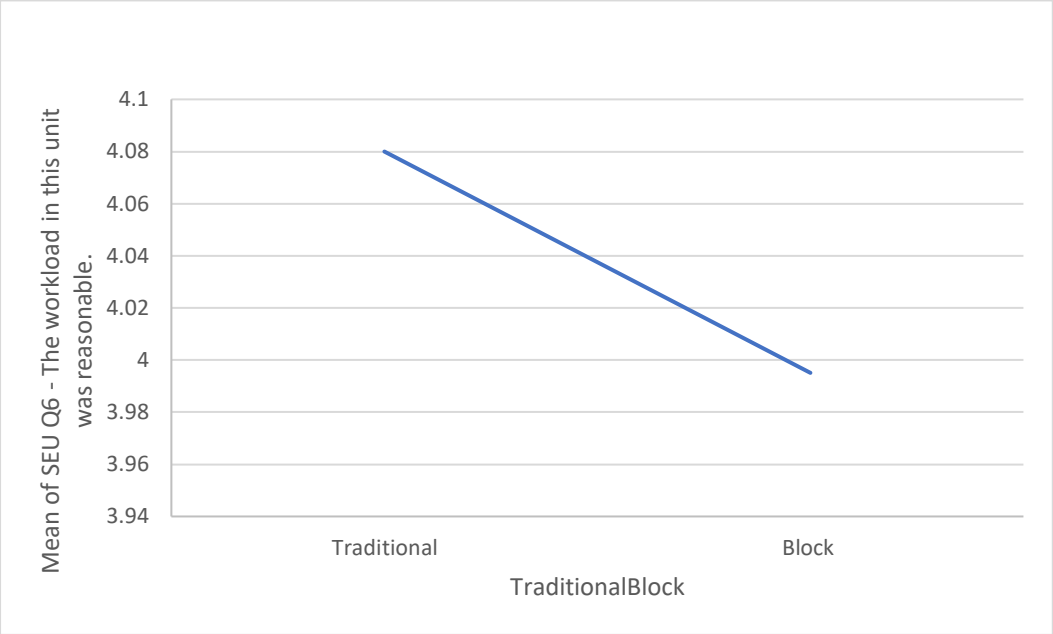
Mean Overall Satisfactions for Traditional versus Block



Workload satisfaction scores were higher in Traditional (M=4.08, SD = 1.00) than Block (M = 4.00, SD = 1.08) delivery, t (3,6702.72) = 3.79, p=.001, as displayed in Figure 17 below.

Figure 17

Mean Workload Satisfactions for Traditional versus Block



Satisfaction for Block Sub-Variants. Descriptive results for the SEUR categorical mean score (M) of the four delivery modes are presented in the Table 16 below. For students' overall satisfaction feedback, the highest mean score was for 8WK24CP Block mode (M=4.27), and the lowest mean score was for 4WK12CP Block mode (M=4.05). A Kruskal-Wallis test indicated that there was a significant difference in both students overall satisfaction feedback across four educational delivery modes, χ^2 overall satisfaction (3, N = 9673) = 13.26, p = .004; χ^2 workload satisfaction (3, N = 9673) = 51.86, p<.001. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons using Dunn's method with a Bonferroni correction for multiple tests indicated that the mean students' score for both overall satisfaction and workload satisfaction for Traditional mode was significantly higher than that of 4WK12CP Block mode, p overall = .003, p workload<.001, and that is also higher in 8WK12CP Block mode than 4WK12CP Block mode, p overall =.001, p workload <.001. Additionally, the workload satisfaction is significantly higher in 8WK24CP Block mode than 4WK12CP Block mode, p = .043. However, there was no significant difference between the Traditional and 8WK12CP Block mode, between Traditional and 8WK24CP Block mode, and between 8WK12CP and 8WK24CP Block mode, p > .05.

Table 16

Satisfaction for Block Sub-Variants

SEUR	Delivery modes	Descriptives			Kruskal-Wallis				
		n	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*H*	*df*	*p*	Pairwise Comparisons*
Overall Satisfaction	Traditional	6213	4.17	.95	9673	13.26	3	.004	1v2 (p=.003) 1v3 (p=.356 1v4 (p=.220) 2v3 (p=.001) 2v4 (p=.075) 3v4 (p=.285)
	4WK12CP	1369	4.05	1.05					
	8WK12CP	2050	4.17	.98					
	8WK24CP	41	4.27	1.07					
Workload Satisfaction	Traditional	6213	4.08	1.00	9673	51.86	3	<.001	1v2 (p<.001) 1v3 (p=.300) 1v4 (p=.438) 2v3 (p<.001) 2v4 (p=.043) 3v4 (p=.547)
	4WK12CP	1369	3.86	1.12					
	8WK12CP	2050	4.08	1.05					
	8WK24CP	41	4.22	.88					

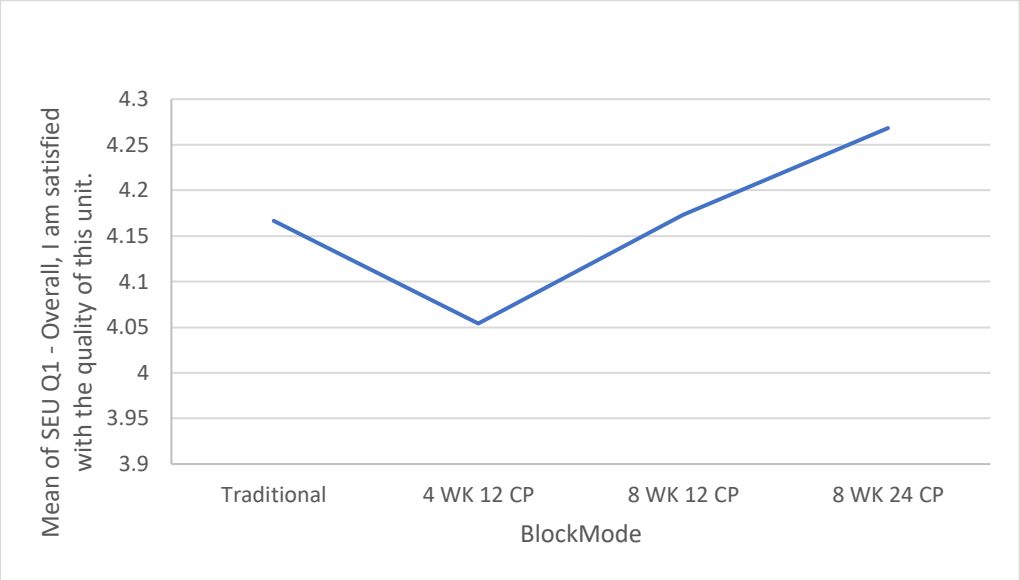
*Note: Traditional (1), 4WK12CP (2), 8WK12CP (3), 8WK24CP (4)

A non-parametric inferential test of significant differences, using the Kruskal-Wallis test, revealed a significant difference ($p < .001$) between the SEUR variable and the delivery modes (H (3) = 13.28, p =.004). Further analysis using a Kruskal-Wallis test of the pairwise comparisons of the SEUR variable and the delivery modes revealed variations in the significance of difference between the groups. Significant results were found for 4WK12CP Block and Traditional mode (p = .003) and 4WK12CP Block mode and 8WK12CP Block mode (p=.001). However, there was no evidence of a significant pairwise difference for all other delivery modes comparisons.

In comparing the Block sub-variants, satisfaction of overall experience was higher for 8WK24CP Block mode than for Traditional, 4WK12CP and 8WK12CP Block Mode as displayed in Figure 18 below. The mean values for traditional, 4WK12CP Block, 8WK12CP Block, and 8WK24CP Block Mode are namely: 4.17, 4.01, 4.17 and 4.27, with F (9673) = 5.58, p<.001. However, all means are above 4, indicating that students are generally satisfied with all modes.

Figure 18

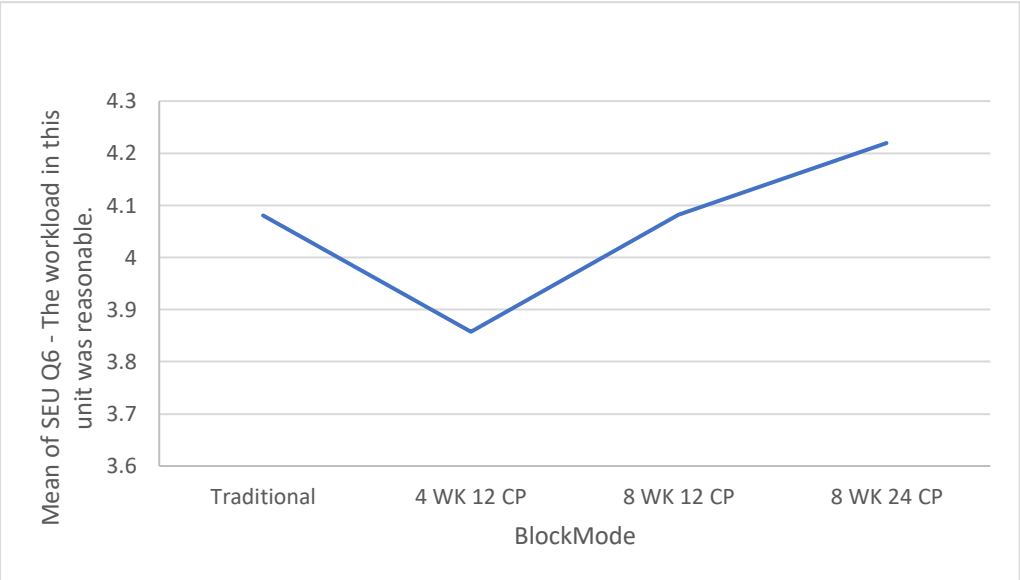
Mean Overall Satisfactions for Semester and Block Subvariants



In comparing the Block sub-variants, satisfaction of workload was higher for 8WK24CP Block mode than the rest three modes, as displayed in Figure 19 below. In detail, the means for traditional, 8WK12CP and 8WK24CP Block mode are above 4 (namely 4.08, 4.08, and 4.22) while the mean 4WK12CP Block modes is below 4 (3.86), with F (3, 9673) = 18.73, p<.001.

Figure 19

Mean Workload Satisfactions for Semester and Block Subvariants



Satisfaction in Different Delivery Modes for Disciplines. Two methods, non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis analysis and one-way ANOVA, were employed to compare the data about students' overall satisfaction for three disciplines that available in three different educational delivery modes as shown in Table 17 below. The results revealed significant differences between three delivery modes for Education ($p < .05$), indicating substantial variation among this discipline across the three different delivery modes. For other disciplines (Art, Society, and Culture, and Engineering and Technology with p values ranging from .05 to .7), although differences between groups were observed, the significance levels were lower, suggesting a greater influence of random factors. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons indicated that the mean students' score for overall satisfaction in Education for Traditional mode (M=4.00) was significantly lower than that of 8WK24CP Block mode (M=4.27), p (1v4) =.024.

Table 17

Overall Satisfaction in Different Delivery Modes for Disciplines

Academic Discipline and Delivery modes	SEUR							
	Descriptives			Kruskal-Wallis				
	n	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*H*	*df*	*p*	Pairwise Comparisons
Art, Society, and Culture				603	1.14	2	.565	1v2 (p=.299)
Traditional	353	4.23	.91					1v3 (p=.622)
4WK12CP	77	4.34	.87					2v3 (p=.535)
8WK12CP	173	4.28	.87					
Engineering and Technology				4070	5.04	2	.081	1v2=.186
Traditional	3267	4.22	.93					1v3=.062
4WK12CP	27	3.89	1.25					2v3=.355
8WK12CP	776	4.13	1.01					
Education				1857	6.38	2	.041	1v2=.338
Traditional	588	4.00	.99					1v4=.024
4WK12CP	1228	4.04	1.06					2v4=.073
8WK24CP	41	4.27	1.07					

Note: Traditional (1), 4WK12CP (2), 8WK12CP (3), 8WK24CP (4)

In addition to one-way ANOVA, Mann-Whitney U analysis was applied to compare the data about students' overall satisfaction for two disciplines that available in two different educational delivery modes as shown in Table 18 below. The results revealed significant differences between two delivery modes for Business ($p < .05$), indicating substantial variation among this discipline across the two different delivery modes. It indicates that the mean students' score for overall satisfaction in Business for Traditional mode (M=4.10) was significantly lower than that of 8WK12CP Block mode (M=4.19).

Table 18

Overall Satisfaction in Different Delivery Modes for Disciplines

Academic Discipline and Delivery mode	SEUR					
	Descriptives			Mann-Whitney U		
	n	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*z*	*p*
Health and Science				166	-1.630	.103
Traditional	129	4.37	.81			
4WK12CP	37	4.05	1.08			
Business				2977	-2.787	.005
Traditional	1876	4.10	.98			
8WK12CP	1101	4.19	.98			

A one-way univariate ANOVA was performed to evaluate the effects of discipline and educational delivery mode on international students' overall satisfaction. The means and standard deviations for international students' overall satisfaction are presented in Table 19 below. The overall model for the univariate analysis was significant, F (12, 9660) = 5.872, p<.001. The results indicated a significant main effect for discipline, F (4, 9660) = 5.641, p = <.001, partial η^2 = .002; no significant main effect for educational delivery modes, F (3, 9660) = 1.710, p = .163, partial η^2 = .001; and a significant interaction between disciplines and educational delivery modes, F (5, 9660) = 3.529, p = .003, partial η^2 = .002. A series of LSD Post-hoc analyses were conducted. Results revealed significant differences for Education and all other disciplines, and Business and all other disciplines.

Table 19

Overall Satisfaction in Different Delivery Modes for Disciplines

Discipline	Delivery Mode	M	SD	Post hoc Discipline	Post hoc Mode
Arts, Society and Culture	Traditional	4.23	0.91	1v4<.001 1v5=.004	AvB<.001 BvC<.001
	4 WK 12 CP	4.34	0.87		
	8 WK 12 CP	4.28	0.87		
Engineering and Technology	Traditional	4.22	0.93	2v4<.001 2v5=.005	
	4 WK 12 CP	3.89	1d.25		
	8 WK 12 CP	4.13	1.01		
Health and Science	Traditional	4.37	0.81	3v4<.001 4v5=.031	
	4 WK 12 CP	4.05	1.08		
Education	Traditional	4.00	0.99	4v1<.001 4v2<.001 4v3<.001 4v5<.001	
	4 WK 12 CP	4.04	1.06		
	8 WK 24 CP	4.27	1.07		
Business	Traditional	4.10	0.98	5v1=.004 5v2=.005 5v3=.031 5v4<.001	
	8 WK 12 CP	4.19	0.98		

Note a: 1: Arts, Society and Culture; 2: Engineering and Technology; 3: Health and Science; 4: Education; 5: Business

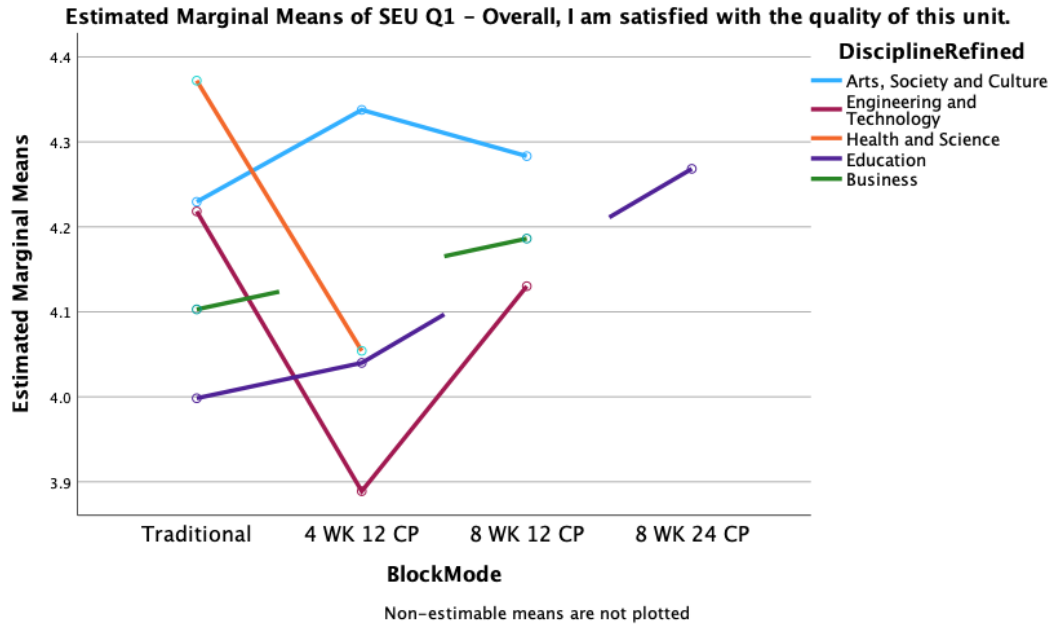
Note b: A: Traditional; B: 4WK12CP; C: 8WK12CP: C; D: 8WK24CP

The line chart (Figure 20) below further illustrates the mean scores of international students' overall satisfaction across four different educational delivery modes for five disciplines: Arts, Society and

Culture, Engineering and Technology, Health and Science, Education, and Business. For Arts, Society and Culture, there is a noticeable increase in overall satisfaction from Traditional (4.23) to 4WK12CP (4.34), with a slight decrease in the 8WK12CP mode (4.28). This indicates a peak in satisfaction at the 4WK12 CP mode. In contrast, Engineering and Technology shows a different trend. The overall satisfaction decreases from Traditional (4.22) to 4WK12CP (3.89), and then increases again in the 8 WK 12 CP mode (4.13), indicating the lowest satisfaction at the 4 WK12CP mode. In regard to the Education and Business disciplines, students' overall satisfaction in the Block modes is higher than in the Traditional mode. Education shows an increase from Traditional (4.00) to 4WK12CP (4.04) and further to 8WK24CP (4.27). Similarly, Business satisfaction increases from Traditional (4.10) to 8WK12CP (4.19). Finally, the Health and Science discipline shows a clear decrease in overall satisfaction from Traditional (4.37) to 4WK12CP (4.05), indicating a drop in satisfaction with the shorter Block mode.

Figure 20

Overall Satisfaction in Different Delivery Modes for Disciplines



Significant post-hoc differences were revealed for a number of the disciplines. A significant interaction effect is also highlighted. The descriptive results shown in the line graph clearly indicate overall satisfaction patterns varied across disciplines. For example, Health and Science and Education are notably different within the Traditional mode, however within the 4WK12CP mode the scores are very similar. In contrast, Arts, Society and Culture and Engineering and Technology are very similar in in

Traditional mode, but substantially different in 4WK12CP, and marginally different in 8WK12CP mode.

When comparing students' workload satisfaction feedback, the two methods, non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis analysis and one-way ANOVA, were employed for three disciplines that available in three different educational delivery modes as shown in Table 20 below. The results revealed no significant differences between three delivery modes for those three disciplines (p>.05), although differences between groups were observed, the significance levels were lower, suggesting a greater influence of random factors. Further to this, post-hoc pairwise comparisons indicated that the mean students' score for workload satisfaction in Education for 8WK24CP Block mode (M = 4.22) was significantly higher than that of Traditional mode (M = 3.91) and 4WK12CP Block mode (M = 3.84), p (1v4) = .048, p (2v4) = .035.

Table 20

Workload Satisfaction in Different Delivery Modes for Disciplines

Academic Discipline and Delivery modes	SEUR Descriptives			Kruskal-Wallis				
	n	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*H*	*df*	*p*	Pairwise Comparisons
Art, Society, and Culture				603	1.80	2	.406	1v2 (p=.470)
Traditional	353	4.13	.94					1v3 (p=.356)
4WK12CP	77	4.12	.79					2v3 (p=.197)
8WK12CP	173	4.20	.94					
Engineering and Technology				4070	2.234	2	.327	1v2=.183
Traditional	3267	4.13	1.00					1v3=.466
4WK12CP	27	3.89	1.24					2v3=.243
8WK12CP	776	4.07	1.06					
Education				1857	4.457	2	.108	1v2=.752
Traditional	588	3.91	1.00					1v4=.048
4WK12CP	1228	3.84	1.14					2v4=.035
8WK24CP	41	4.22	.88					

Note: Traditional (1), 4WK12CP (2), 8WK12CP (3), 8WK24CP (4)

Both one-way ANOVA and Mann-Whitney U analysis were applied to compare the data about students' workload satisfaction for two disciplines that available in two different educational delivery modes as shown in Table 21 below. The results revealed no significant differences between two delivery modes for those two disciplines (p>.05), indicating a greater influence of random factors.

Table 21

Workload Satisfaction in Different Delivery Modes for Disciplines

Academic Discipline and Delivery modes	Descriptives			SEUR Mann-Whitney U		
	n	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*z*	*p*
Health and Science				166	-.65	.517
Traditional	129	4.02	1.01			
4WK12CP	37	3.92	1.01			
Business				2977	-1.28	.200
Traditional	1876	4.04	1.02			
8WK12CP	1101	4.07	1.06			

A two-way ANOVA was also performed to evaluate the effects of discipline and educational delivery mode on international students' workload satisfaction. The means and standard deviations for international students' workload satisfaction are presented in Table 22 below.

Table 22

Workload Satisfaction in Different Delivery Modes for Disciplines

Disciplines	Delivery Modes	*M*	*SD*	Post hoc Discipline	Post hoc Modes
Arts, Society and Culture	Traditional	4.13	0.94		
	4 WK 12 CP	4.12	0.79		
	8 WK 12 CP	4.20	0.94		
Engineering and Technology	Traditional	4.13	1.00		
	4 WK 12 CP	3.81	1.24	4v1<.001	
	8 WK 12 CP	4.07	1.06	4v2<.001	AvB<.001
Health and Science	Traditional	4.02	1.02	4v5<.001	AvC<.001
	4 WK 12 CP	3.92	1.01	5v1=.034	BvC<.001
Education	Traditional	3.91	1.00	5v2=.012	
	4 WK 12 CP	3.84	1.14		
	8 WK 24 CP	4.22	0.88		
Business	Traditional	4.04	1.02		
	8 WK 12 CP	4.07	1.06		

Note a: 1: Arts, Society and Culture; 2: Engineering and Technology; 3: Health and Science; 4: Education; 5: Business

Note b: A: Traditional; B: 4WK12CP; C: 8WK12CP: C; D: 8WK24CP

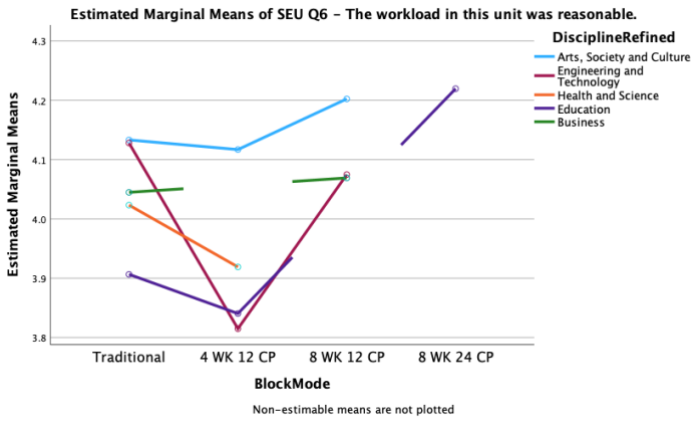
The overall model for the univariate analysis was significant, F (12, 9660) = 7.64, p <.001. The results indicated a significant main effect for discipline, F (4, 9660) = 4.07, p = .003, partial η^2 = .00; no significant main effect for educational delivery modes, F (3, 9660) = 2.47, p = .060, partial η^2 = .00; and no significant interaction between disciplines and educational delivery modes, F (5, 9660) = .80, p = .550, partial η^2 < .00

The descriptive results highlighted by the line chart below further illustrate the variation in mean scores of international students' workload satisfaction across four educational delivery modes within those five disciplines: Arts, Society and Culture, Engineering and Technology, Health and Science, Education, and Business. For Arts, Society, and Culture, the workload satisfaction scores show a slight decrease from Traditional (4.13) to 4WK12 CP (4.12), then an increase for the 8WK12 CP mode (4.20). Engineering and Technology exhibits a significant decrease in workload satisfaction from Traditional (4.13) to 4WK12CP (3.81), followed by an increase in the 8 WK12CP mode (4.07), although it does not increase to the same value as the Traditional mode's score. Education demonstrates the lowest workload satisfaction at 4WK12CP (3.84) compared to Traditional (3.91), but the score rises significantly for the 8WK24CP mode (4.22). Health and Science shows a clear decrease in workload satisfaction from Traditional (4.02) to 4WK12CP (3.92). Business maintains relatively stable workload satisfaction scores, with a slight increase from Traditional (4.04) to 8WK12CP (4.07).

Post Hoc results revealed significant differences between Education and all other disciplines except for Health and Science. The Business discipline demonstrated significant differences with all other disciplines except Health and Science. For example, the line graph (Figure 21) of the descriptive results provides additional evidence of variation between disciplines across the modes of delivery. The Arts, Society and Culture discipline and the Engineering did demonstrate pattern variation in scores between the traditional mode and 4WK12CP mode, in which there was a notable difference for the latter mode.

Figure 21

Workload Satisfaction in Different Delivery Modes for Disciplines



Summary

The quantitative analysis conducted in Study 3 aimed to examine the academic success and student satisfaction within the context of different educational delivery modes. The results presented in this section were organised according to the two phases of evaluation, focusing on academic success (phase 1) and student satisfaction (phase 2). Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to provide insights into the data, with careful consideration given to rounding conventions and the exclusion of invalid data sources. Notably, international students with zero marks were excluded from certain analyses to ensure the integrity of the findings.

Phase 1 data revealed significant associations between academic success indicators, including pass/fail grades, mean marks, and grade distribution, and various educational delivery modes. These correlations varied in strength across different disciplines, underscoring the nuanced influence of delivery modes on student outcomes. Particularly noteworthy were the distinct changes observed in pass grade percentages, especially evident in disciplines such as Engineering and Technology, and Art, Society, and Culture. Furthermore, examination of mean marks and grade distribution provided additional insights into the complex interplay between educational delivery modes and academic performance within different academic domains. Additionally, the distribution of grades varied between traditional and each of the three Block delivery modes, however, overall Block Mode results showed a marked increase in the percentage of students achieving High Distinction and Distinction grades compared to the traditional format.

Phase 2 results focused on student satisfaction, as measured by SEUR variables. Overall, satisfaction levels differed marginally between traditional and block delivery modes, with workload satisfaction showing more pronounced variations. Subsequent analyses by delivery mode and academic discipline provided further insights into these differences, highlighting the nuanced relationship between delivery mode and student satisfaction.

Discussion

The purpose of Study 3 was to address the research aims related to the impact of different educational delivery modes on student outcomes, utilising quantitative data analysis. This discussion focuses on key themes derived from the findings, including variations in student academic success, pass/fail rates,

mean marks, and grade distribution across academic disciplines and delivery sub-variants. Additionally, the study examined student satisfaction. The analysis provided insights into differences between Traditional and Block delivery modes, as well as variations across Block sub-variants and academic disciplines.

Changes in Student Academic Success

This first phase of Study 3 revealed findings that the intervention of the 4WK12CP Block mode and 8WK24CP Block mode contributed to a significant overall positive effect on pass rates, study marks, and grade results for international students, when compared to the Traditional mode. The results demonstrated the efficacy of the University's adoption of Block delivery in supporting an improvement in international students' academic success when compared to achievements of those who studied in the traditional mode. The results also indicted that the two interventions of the 4WK12CP and 8WK24CP Block modes contributed towards greater academic success than the 8WK12CP Block mode.

Pass/Fail. The present study involved a stratified analysis to investigate the pass rates across different educational delivery modes. The findings revealed that international students enrolled in 4WK12CP and 8WK24CP Block modes exhibited higher pass rates compared to those in the traditional instructional setting. However, it is noteworthy that the pass rates declined under the 4WK12CP Block mode, failing to surpass the levels observed in the traditional mode. The observed improvement in pass grade percentages among students enrolled in 4WK12CP and 8WK24CP Block modes resonates with prior studies showcasing enhanced academic success for first-year undergraduate students in First Year Model (FYM) and Block Mode (BM) across diverse academic disciplines (Howe et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2022; McCluskey et al., 2021).

A subsequent disaggregation of the data by academic disciplines further substantiated these findings. Across disciplines including Art, Society, and Culture, Engineering and Technology, and Health and Science, the pass rates were notably elevated in the 4WK12CP Block mode when contrasted with the traditional mode. This underscores the potential efficacy of the 4WK12CP Block mode in fostering student success across a range of disciplinary contexts. This finding resonates with Daniel's (2000) exploration, which highlighted that intensive courses spanning various fields and disciplines have the

capacity to deliver alternative and high-quality learning experiences within condensed time frames. Dempsey (2023) further highlights the differentiation in student success across various disciplines when comparing traditional and intensive modes. The study found that while most disciplines saw moderate increases in pass rates under the intensive format, disciplines such as Sport exhibited substantial improvement. This pattern underscores the potential of intensive courses to foster greater academic success in certain fields compared to traditional modes.

Nguyen et al. (2017) conducted a quantitative study exploring the impact of computer-based assessment design on student engagement, satisfaction, and pass rates in first-level undergraduate modules at The Open University. They found that modules with a higher relative frequency of assessment activities were associated with increased pass rates. This emphasis on frequent assessment activities parallels the intensive learning structure of Block mode, where students engage in numerous educational activities and assessments on a weekly basis. Thus, the findings from Nguyen et al.'s study provide further support for the observed higher pass rates in educational delivery modes such as 4WK12CP Block modes compared to traditional instructional settings.

Interesting results were observed in the domain of Education, where both the 4WK12CP and 8WK24CP Block modes were implemented. Despite the implementation of these intensive block modes, surpassing the high pass rates observed in the traditional mode (99.1%) proved to be a formidable challenge, given the already robust performance in this academic discipline. Furthermore, when comparing the 8WK12CP Block mode with the traditional mode across all disciplines, the data consistently revealed lower pass rates under the former. This indicates that the 8WK12CP Block mode may not be as effective as the traditional mode in facilitating student success across diverse academic domains. One aspect of delivery in this format warranting consideration is framed by previous investigations into the frequency of assessment activities relative to student pass rates within intensive delivery (Nguyen et al., 2017; Rienties & Toetenel, 2016). Specifically, research by Nguyen et al. (2017) revealed that an increase in the time dedicated to assessment activities each week was significantly associated with a decrease in the time allocated for other types of activities (e.g., assimilative, communication, experiential). This is indicative that educators may introduce more assessments while cutting back on other learning activities to prevent overwhelming students. This finding is crucial because earlier studies using aggregate data found limited relationships between assessment and other learning activities (Rienties & Toetenel, 2016). In the 8WK12CP Block mode, students study two units at the simultaneously, which may result in students receiving multiple

assessments to complete concurrently across the two units. In the 4WK12CP or 8WK24CP Block modes, where students study one unit at a time, they typically engage in weekly singular assessments, reinforcing the critical role of unique and targeted regular assessment in fostering academic success within condensed teaching frameworks.

Mean Mark. The analysis of mean marks across different educational delivery modes provides critical insights into the academic outcomes associated with Block mode and its sub-variants compared to traditional modes. This discussion delves into overall performance differences, specific student performance trends within Block mode sub-variants, and variations across disciplines. By examining these patterns, findings can illuminate how the structure and intensity of delivery modes influence student success, supporting a developed understanding of the efficacy and challenges of each approach.

Overall Difference in Mean Marks. The analysis reveals a notable difference in mean marks between the Traditional Mode and the Block mode interventions. Specifically, the Block mode demonstrates a higher overall mean mark of 69.24 compared to the traditional delivery's mean mark of 66.59. This aligns with earlier findings on pass/fail rates, highlighting a potential advantage of the Block mode in fostering enhanced academic performance among students. Consistent with this, a study conducted at a UK university found that students enrolled in an immersive four-week Block mode format achieved notably higher grades compared to those in traditional modes, with student marks improving by approximately 4 percentage points (Turner et al., 2021).

Marks for Block Sub-Variants. Further examination of the Block mode sub-variants underscores the superiority of the 4WK12CP and 8WK24CP over both the traditional mode and the 8WK12CP Block mode in terms of mean marks. Specifically, the 4WK12CP and 8WK24CP Block modes exhibited higher mean marks, with values of 71.85 and 77.20, respectively. This trend is consistent with the pass/fail rate findings and emphasises the efficacy of the intensive short-duration single delivery Block modes in bolstering student academic achievement.

Marks in Different Delivery Modes Across Disciplines. The stratification of student data by academic discipline reaffirms the aforementioned results. Particularly noteworthy is the elevated

mean mark observed in disciplines, including Art, Society, and Culture Engineering and Technology, and Health and Science, under the 4WK12CP Block mode when compared to the traditional mode. Additionally, the Education discipline registers commendable mean marks under both the 4WK12CP and 8WK24CP Block modes, with the latter demonstrating the highest scores compared to both the traditional and 4WK12CP Block modes. Nguyen et al. (2017) emphasised the significance of week-by-week learning design activities in influencing engagement, highlighting the importance of educators' strategic planning of students' learning experiences. This emphasis on weekly activities resonates within the structure of Block mode, where intensive sessions are conducted multiple times each week.

However, in line with the pass/fail rate findings, the 8WK12CP Block mode consistently exhibits lower mean marks across all disciplines compared to the traditional mode. This underscores the limitations of the 8WK12CP Block mode, when it adopts a delivery framework of two units being studies simultaneously, reinforcing that it may not consistently outperform the traditional mode in facilitating student academic performance.

Grade Distribution. The analysis of grade distribution across various delivery modes offered a nuanced perspective on how instructional formats influence academic achievement. The following section explored the overall trends in grade distribution between Traditional and Block modes, investigates the variations observed among Block sub-variants, and examines discipline-specific outcomes. By highlighting these patterns, the discussion aimed to shed light on the strengths and challenges associated with intensive delivery approaches, providing a foundation for understanding their impact on student performance.

Overall Grade Distribution between Traditional and Block Modes. Comparing grade distribution between the Traditional and Block modes reveals significant differences. Notably, Block modes consistently show higher percentages of High Distinction and Distinction grades compared to the traditional mode, indicating a positive shift in student performance.

Grade Distribution for Block Sub-Variants. Further analysis of grade distribution across Block sub-variants reaffirms the superiority of Block modes in fostering high academic achievement.

Across all Block modes, there is a notable increase in the percentage of students achieving High Distinction grades compared to the traditional mode. This trend underscores the effectiveness of Block mode reforms in facilitating improvements in academic performance relative to grades. In addition to the observed improvements in academic achievement associated with Block mode delivery, previous research has highlighted the benefits of a focused learning approach and intensive mode delivery. Specifically, studies have shown that such approaches positively influence student achievement through enhanced learner confidence, concentration, time management, social connection, and motivation to achieve (Buck & Tyrrell, 2022; Daniel, 2000; Davies, 2006; Kucsera & Zimmaro, 2010). Moreover, Block mode delivery has been found to instil a sense of urgency and accountability, as students perceive there is little room for error (Buck & Tyrrell, 2022). This multifaceted approach to learning may contribute to the overall academic success observed in students, as evidenced by Dempsey's study (2023). Additionally, Huber et al. (2022) compared 17 subjects in science faculty, which offered in both Intensive Mode Delivery (IMD) and Standard Mode Delivery (SMD), and observed significant differences in grade distribution. Eight subjects demonstrated a significant shift towards higher grades in the IMD, driven by a higher proportion of students achieving HD and a lower proportion of pass or fail grades. Conversely, three subjects showed a shift towards lower grades in the IMD. The remaining six subjects exhibited either no significant difference between IMD and SMD, or a mixed response with increases in both high and low grades, accompanied by a decrease in mid-range grades. Notably, Huber et al.'s findings highlighted the complexity and varied outcomes associated with intensive course delivery, indicating that while IMD can enhance performance in some subjects, it may also contribute to challenges in others. Therefore, institutions should take into account the diverse contexts of different disciplines and consider how the pedagogical aspects of intensive modes of delivery may affect and improve student learning (Solomides et al., 2024).

Grade Distribution in Different Delivery Modes for Academic Disciplines. Stratification of data by academic discipline reinforces the previous findings of this study, with all disciplines exhibiting higher percentages of High Distinction grades under Block modes compared to the traditional mode. This indicates a consistent pattern of improved academic outcomes across diverse disciplinary contexts. The limited body of research on Block Mode delivery has revealed that, in comparison to traditional instructional approaches, block or intensive modes of learning and teaching have been associated with positive student academic performance (Buck & Tyrrell, 2022; Burton & Nesbit, 2008; Dixon & O'Gorman, 2020; Sewagegn & Diale, 2021).

It is worth noting, however, that in the discipline of Art, Society, and Culture, the 8WK12CP Block mode reported a lower percentage of High Distinction grades compared to both the traditional and 4WK12CP Block modes. This reinforced the findings regarding pass/fail rate and mean mark. Such discrepancies highlight the nuanced effects of different instructional approaches within specific disciplinary domains. Huber et al. (2022) observed significant variations in grade distributions between Intensive Mode Delivery (IMD) and traditional mode across several subjects in the science faculty. These findings align with the current research, outlining that the impact of intensive delivery formats can vary widely depending on the academic discipline, noting also the variance in designing and organising of units and courses (Solomides et al., 2024).

The findings of the current study demonstrated that intensive short-duration Block modes may offer advantages in enhancing international students' academic performance from different aspects (pass rate, mean marks, and grade distribution), particularly in specific disciplines and Block sub-variants. The performance outcomes of this study identify the preferred delivery model appears to be the 4WK12CP format, where students focus on one unit at a time, allowing for deeper immersion and understanding of the subject matter. This concentrated approach can help optimise learning outcomes and improve academic performance. However, it is important to note that the 8WK12CP format, which may involve concurrent study of two units over longer period, could also present benefits in certain contexts, such as student workload satisfaction. Nevertheless, 8WK12CP Block mode configurations may not always yield superior outcomes compared to the traditional mode, warranting further research and discussion to optimise instructional design and implementation strategies.

Changes in Student Satisfaction

The analysis of student satisfaction, as measured by the Student Evaluation of Unit Result (SEUR) variables, revealed insights into the differences between Traditional and Block delivery modes, and variations across different Block sub-variants and academic disciplines. The two key areas considered in this study were overall unit of study satisfaction and student workload satisfaction within the unit of study delivery period.

Overall Satisfaction. When comparing Traditional and overall Block delivery mode results, it is evident that students rated Block modes lower in overall satisfaction compared to Traditional

mode. Specifically, the mean overall satisfaction scores were marginally higher in the traditional mode (M = 4.17) than in the Block mode (M = 4.13), indicating a subtle satisfaction preference for the traditional instructional setting. The finding that student satisfaction slightly decreased when comparing the Traditional mode to the general Block Mode, is largely inconsistent with comparable research studies on student satisfaction evaluations that examine Block and Traditional modes (Buck & Tyrrell, 2022; Dempsey, 2023; Klein et al., 2019; Loton et al., 2022; McCluskey et al., 2019).

However, the current study's findings align with Samarawickrema and Cleary (2021), who reported a substantial increase in performance among first-year students, but noted a decrease in course satisfaction in intensive modes. They highlighted that the key aspects or factors influencing overall student satisfaction, in an online intensive Block mode and flipped classroom during COVID-19, included the quality of learning materials, pre-recorded lectures, assessments, and feedback. This indicated that while intensive delivery modes may enhance performance, the specific aspects outlined by Samarawickrema and Cleary (2021) need to be addressed to improve overall student satisfaction.

Further analysis, in terms of overall satisfaction, comparing Traditional with different Block modes revealed that students rated the 4WK12CP Block mode the lowest in satisfaction, followed by Traditional and 8WK12CP Block modes, which received similar scores. The highest satisfaction ratings were observed for the 8WK24CP Block mode. This pattern of satisfaction is reminiscent of findings from Macquarie University's shift in 2011 to a three-session academic year, which included two 13-week traditional sessions and one seven-week intensive session (Whillier & Lystad, 2013). In their study, Whillier and Lystad (2013) reported that the university ensured that the quantity and quality of material, along with the total hours of instruction, remained consistent across both traditional and intensive modes, delivered by the same teachers. This finding is in line with the current study, where in the 8WK12CP format, despite being half the length of the Traditional mode, there was consistency of satisfaction across the two modes. Unlike studies from U.S. institutions where 39% of respondents reported shortening projects and reducing content in intensive modes (Laves, 2010; Scott, 1994), Whillier and Lystad's (2013) commentary on courses (i.e., units of study), highlighted a similarity to the current study's 8WK12CP units, whereby, modification included no reduction in content to fit the intensive framework. Whillier and Lystad's study detailed that the same quantity and quality of material was maintained, delivered to the same standards, by the same teachers, and covering the same total instructional hours, but within a condensed timeframe. This pattern reinforces that progressions

to intensive delivery may not impact on students' satisfaction for the units they undertake reflecting the general preference for intensive courses observed in previous research (e.g., Ho &Polonsky, 2009).

The findings of Whillier and Lystad (2013) are consistent with the current study's results, where the 8WK12CP Block mode received similar overall satisfaction scores to the Traditional mode. This supports the proposition that a well-structured intensive course can achieve comparable levels of student satisfaction. In both the Traditional and 8WK12CP Block modes, students are enrolled in more than one unit simultaneously, unlike the 4WK12CP and 8WK24CP Block modes where students focused on only one unit at a time. This difference in course structure, where students must manage multiple units concurrently, could explain the varying satisfaction scores among the different modes.

In contrast to previous studies, which primarily examined the satisfaction of both domestic and international First Year students, this doctoral study specifically targeted international students. For example, Dempsey (2023), Loton et al. (2022), and McCluskey et al. (2019), predominantly focused on satisfaction levels among First Year students, encompassing a mixed cohort of domestic and international learners. Conversely, Klein et al. (2019) investigated repeating students who had previously failed under the traditional model, and Buck and Tyrrell (2022) conducted a pilot study involving a group of 94 students, potentially including both domestic and international participants. The current study's focus on international students may present a basis for the observed discrepancy in satisfaction ratings, as this student cohort might experience unique challenges in adapting to Block delivery modes compared to their domestic counterparts. Factors such as cultural adjustment (Gopalan et al., 2019), language barriers (Smith, 2020), and different educational expectations (Gibson, 2010) could significantly influence their satisfaction levels. Given this distinction in participant demographics, with a sole emphasis on international students in the current doctoral study, it is plausible that the divergent findings stem from the unique needs and experiences of this specific cohort. However, it is important to note that, from the quantitative data, both modes received high satisfaction ratings, with mean scores above 4, indicating that students were generally content with their learning experiences regardless of the delivery mode.

Workload Satisfaction. When comparing only Traditional and Block delivery modes, it is evident that students rated Block modes lower in workload satisfaction compared to Traditional mode. Specifically, the mean workload satisfaction scores were notably higher in the traditional mode (M =

4.08) than in the Block mode (M = 4.00), indicating that students perceived the workload to be less manageable in the general Block settings.

Further workload satisfaction analysis comparing Traditional with different Block modes revealed consistent trends. Students consistently rated the 4WK12CP Block mode the lowest in workload satisfaction (M=3.86), followed by Traditional and 8WK12CP Block modes (M=4.08), which received similar scores. The highest workload satisfaction ratings were observed for the 8WK24CP Block mode (M=4.22).

The design of the Block requires students' engagement in their studies with regular tutorials, before and after class tasks, and completion of assessments, which is all considered as part of the workload for students' study. The intensive nature of the Block design is reinforced through students reporting lower workload satisfaction scores in the 4WK12CP Block. This aligns with Kember (2004) and Entwistle and Ramsden's (2015) perspectives whereby students may feel levels of stress or pressure within intensive delivery design due to how they equate workload with class time, independent study and assessment demands. Additional reinforcement of students associating workload with the length of delivery time for a unit of study is demonstrated through the higher scores for Traditional model and 8WK12CP Block model. The longer forms have higher mean scores in their satisfaction feedback for workload. In the 8WK24CP Block model, the satisfaction score reached the highest among other delivery modes. This finding aligns with research conducted by Kyndt et al. (2014), which indicates that having sufficient time is essential for students to feel that their workload is manageable. When students have enough time, their interest and ability to plan and prioritize significantly influences their perception of workload. Therefore, the extended duration of study units in the Traditional and 8WK Block models helps fulfil this time requirement, leading to higher workload satisfaction. However, in both Traditional and 8WK12CP Block modes, students are enrolled in multiple units simultaneously, requiring them to manage several units at once. In contrast, the 8WK24CP Block mode, similar to 4WK12CP mode, focuses on a single unit, eliminating the possibility of students feeling overwhelmed by pressures from multiple units.

The satisfaction feedback score used in this research indicates students' perceptions of their workload in completing a unit of study. International students rated 4WK12CP much lower than the 8WK24CP Block mode in terms of workload satisfaction. Perceived workload includes the demands placed on

students and the impact of these demands, such as the effort required and the frustration experienced (Kyndt et al., 2014). Kember (2004) noted that students often interpret a heavy workload as feelings of pressure or stress. Kyndt et al. (2014) also highlighted the logical relationship between time and learning, stating that learning occurs within the time available to students. However, Karjalainen et al. (2006) argue that even an infinite amount of time does not guarantee learning. While the existence of time is a necessary condition for learning, it is not sufficient on its own. Chambers (1992) concludes that the perception of workload is defined by the extent to which individuals feel overwhelmed. According to Kember and Leung (2006), perceived workload should not be considered merely as a measure of time commitment, as it is a multifaceted concept influenced by various elements of teaching and learning, including assessment, collaborative learning, and feedback.

Interestingly, similar trends were observed in the findings of Goode et al. (2023), who examined the implementation of a 6-week immersive learning model at Southern Cross University. Their study revealed that, despite students reporting reduced satisfaction with workload in the immersive model, this factor had a relatively weak correlation with overall unit satisfaction. This aligned with the current findings, where the variability observed in students' workload satisfaction scores between modes reinforced the impact of delivery design in maximising students' overall connection to their learning.

Satisfaction Differences Between Disciplines. In addition to the overall and workload satisfaction comparison across different educational delivery modes, detailed examination of satisfaction ratings across different academic disciplines showed nuanced patterns. While there was no clear consensus among disciplines, certain trends emerged. For instance, in Engineering and Technology, the 4WK12CP Block mode received the lowest ratings for both overall and workload satisfaction, while Traditional mode received the highest. Similarly, in Health and Science discipline, where only Traditional and 4WK12CP Block modes were available, students perceived Block mode to be less satisfying (with lower ratings) than Traditional mode. However, international students in Business disciplines held contrasting views, with Block modes, particularly the 8WK12CP variant, being perceived as more satisfying than Traditional mode from both overall and workload perspectives. Conversely, in the Education discipline, both overall satisfaction and workload satisfaction were highest for the 8WK24CP Block mode, while Traditional mode received the lowest overall satisfaction ratings, and the 4WK12CP Block mode received the lowest workload satisfaction ratings. These trends were mirrored in Art, Society, and Culture discipline, where Traditional mode received the lowest

overall satisfaction ratings, and the 4WK12CP Block mode received the lowest workload satisfaction ratings.

The results of the current study demonstrated that both overall and workload satisfaction feedback from international students may not be significantly impacted by the educational delivery modes themselves but rather by the specific disciplines. These patterns indicate that discipline-specific factors may play a more crucial role in shaping student satisfaction than the mode of delivery alone. The variability in student satisfaction with different delivery modes observed in the study parallels the variability in course workload reported by Lutes and Davies (2013). The perception of workload, and the preferences for certain delivery modes over others, are influenced not only by the structure and duration of the courses but also by the nature of the academic disciplines and the specific needs and expectations of the students within those disciplines. The current set of findings also reinforce that factors beyond delivery mode, such as course content, teaching approach, and discipline-specific demands, play crucial roles in shaping students' overall and workload satisfaction. Lutes and Davies (2013) analysed survey data from approximately 29,000 students and over 7,000 classes at Brigham Young University in the USA. However, this overall finding was somewhat misleading, as the workload differences were minimal when comparing general education courses on the same subject taught by the same instructors in both semester and term sessions. Notably, course workload varied significantly by subject and instructor.

Overall, the differences in satisfaction levels across academic disciplines further underscored the nuanced relationship between delivery mode and student satisfaction. This result is indicative that factors beyond delivery mode, such as course content and teaching approach, may influence students' perceptions of workload. In the Education discipline for example, where active hands-on learning experiences and practical applications are often emphasised (Hein, 1991; Kyere, 2017), international students may find certain delivery modes more conducive to their learning preferences. The higher overall satisfaction observed in Education for the 8WK24CP Block mode compared to Traditional mode shows that students in this discipline may appreciate the immersive and intensive nature of the Block mode at the postgraduate level, which allows for concentrated learning over a longer period than 4WK12CP Block mode.

Conversely, in disciplines like Business, where theoretical knowledge and analytical skills are highly valued, students may prioritize delivery modes that offer comprehensive coverage of course content and opportunities for critical thinking. The finding that overall satisfaction was significantly higher in Business for the 8WK12CP Block mode compared to Traditional mode could reflect students' appreciation for the structured and focused approach of the Block mode in this discipline. Additionally, in the 8WK12CP Block mode, where students typically study two units concurrently, they have relatively more time to interrogate and compare the content knowledge acquired from more than one unit. This extended period could allow for greater opportunity to contrast course materials and support students' ability to synthesise information across multiple subjects, potentially contributing to their overall satisfaction with this mode.

In content-heavy disciplines such as Engineering and Technology, and Health and Science, reducing the duration of instruction can lead to superficial and inadequate learning (Davies, 2006; Tripodi et al., 2020). For instance, in these fields, the 4WK12CP Block mode received the lowest ratings for both overall and workload satisfaction, while the Traditional mode received the highest. Similarly, in the Health and Science discipline, where only Traditional and 4WK12CP Block modes were available, students perceived the Block mode as less satisfying, reflected in its lower ratings compared to the Traditional mode. This trend supports Whillier and Lystad's (2013) findings, where a shift to shorter, intensive sessions maintained student satisfaction but did not match the academic performance of traditional longer sessions. These findings imply that extended time is necessary for teaching and learning complex material, and reducing the instructional period can negatively impact both student satisfaction and learning outcomes. However, the data of the current study demonstrates that the modes of Block delivery resulted in improved academic performance in several disciplines, despite variations in satisfaction levels.

Satisfaction levels in this study differed across various disciplines, a result pattern consistent with the findings of previous studies. Radloff and Coates (2010) reported that Australian science and agriculture students were the most satisfied, whereas psychology graduates had average satisfaction scores amongst the discipline set examined (Lipp et al., 2007). García-Aracil (2009) discovered that European social science graduates had similar satisfaction levels to those in law and medicine but were less satisfied than education graduates. Additionally, Wiers-Jenssen et al. (2002) observed that Norwegian social science and medical students were more satisfied compared to those in natural science and technology.

Furthermore, the learning environment plays a significant role in student satisfaction. For instance, Coles (2002) observed that business students' satisfaction decreases with larger class sizes. In contrast, Cheng (2011) found that psychology students' satisfaction remained unaffected by class size, even though psychology often features some of the largest classes. These past findings resonate with the current study. In the Block mode, where class sizes are reported to be smaller compared to the Traditional mode (Loton et al., 2022), business students reported higher overall satisfaction scores in the 8WK12CP Block mode. Conversely, in the Health and Science disciplines, the mean satisfaction score was higher in the Traditional mode compared to the 4WK12CP Block mode. This indicates that student satisfaction is more influenced by the specific discipline rather than the educational delivery mode.

It is important to note that workload satisfaction did not exhibit significant variations across disciplines. This implies that factors beyond delivery mode, such as course content and teaching methodologies, may play a more significant role in shaping students' perceptions of workload. For example, the workload satisfaction levels observed across different delivery modes in disciplines could be influenced by the nature of assignments and assessments rather than just the mode of delivery. Existing research underscores the critical impact of teaching quality on student satisfaction (Green et al., 2015). Perceived teacher discipline knowledge and teaching ability are key predictors of student ratings (Douglas et al., 2006; Eom et al., 2006; Hearn, 1985). Letcher and Neves (2010) found teaching quality was crucial for business students' satisfaction, while Elliott and Shin (2002) highlighted excellent instruction and knowledgeable faculty as paramount. Additionally, Spooren et al. (2007) identified clarity of objectives, subject matter, and teacher assistance as crucial for satisfaction.

These findings align with the current study's observations, indicating that satisfaction levels exhibit variability in score patterns across different disciplines undertaken within the various teaching modes. The results reinforce that factors beyond instructional delivery methods, particularly discipline-specific influences, play a significant role in shaping students' satisfaction.

This quantitative study has provided valuable insights into the academic outcomes and satisfaction levels of international postgraduate students in the Block mode. The analysis of institutional data, particularly USG and SEUR, has revealed key trends that reflect the complex relationship between

delivery mode and student success. While the findings indicate a generally positive impact of Block mode on academic performance, certain variations across disciplines and cohorts highlight the need for targeted interventions to address specific challenges (e.g., adapting to the intensive schedule, language or cultural barriers). Additionally, the nuanced patterns in student satisfaction highlight the importance of aligning educational practices with the diverse expectations of international learners.

Chapter 6: General Discussion

This chapter synthesised findings from the three interconnected studies to provide a comprehensive analysis of international postgraduate students' experiences in different educational delivery modes. By integrating insights from qualitative data—derived from student and academic staff interviews—and quantitative analyses of student performance and satisfaction, this chapter explored eight key themes that emerged across the studies.

Contrast in Experiences of Unit

The review of staff and student experiences regarding unit delivery highlighted the contrast between Block Mode and traditional semester mode as a significant theme. The qualitative data underlined the diversity in perspectives and expectations associated with these two modes, revealing both advantages and challenges.

One of the most significant contrasts emerged from the flexibility associated with traditional modes. Student Participant S03 emphasised the value of having time to plan tasks around study commitments, a sentiment echoed by Student Participant S01, who noted that the traditional semester provides personal time benefits, especially for those juggling work and study. This aligns with both Andrews and Tynan (2012) and Buck (2016), who emphasise the importance of scheduling academic tasks around other responsibilities. However, within the context of this study, the challenges identified by S04 reveal that missing classes due to other commitments can lead to a sense of irrevocable loss, indicating that if you miss class time across one week, then "it's gone," underscoring the intensity of Block Mode's condensed schedule.

Moreover, the impact of focused learning in Block Mode was a highlighted advantage. Student Participant S01, along with others (S02, S03, S04, S05, S07 & S08), noted that the ability to focus on one unit at a time contributed to a clearer academic experience, with S01 stating, "I wasn't trying to do two or three things at a time and forgetting what the main focus was." This resonated with research on mindfulness in education, where focusing on the present has been shown to alleviate psychological distress (Cavanagh et al., 2013). The qualitative data from this study further supports these findings,

as student participants frequently reported feeling calmer and more focused, with less confusion between assessments, thanks to the Block Mode structure.

However, the Block Mode's accelerated pace also brought challenges. Academic Staff Participant P3 and P10 expressed concerns regarding knowledge retention and the depth of understanding within this condensed format. They feared that the fast pace might impede students' ability to fully absorb and reinforce knowledge. Such concerns are consistent with previous research emphasising the need for adequate time for information assimilation and reflection in educational settings (Smyth et al., 2012). These concerns were mirrored by Student Participants S03 and S05, who noted that while Block Mode allowed for quick completion of tasks, it sometimes led to superficial learning, with S03 commenting, "the learning in Block Mode was really low compared to the normal mode."

The preference for timely feedback, particularly in Block Mode, emerged as a critical factor for both students and staff. Student Participant S01 noted that receiving results and feedback quickly provided "quick resolutions of doubts," which enhanced engagement. This sentiment was echoed by Academic Staff Participants P3 and P10, who acknowledged that while the fast turnaround time in Block Mode posed challenges for marking, it also led to more immediate student engagement. The quick feedback loop was seen as crucial in keeping students motivated and on track. This aligned with studies by Aspden and Helm (2004), Welker and Berardino (2005), Zhang and Cetinich (2022), and Oraison et al. (2020), which found that timely feedback reduces student anxiety and enhances learning outcomes. In the current study, this was evident as both student and academic staff participants reported that quick feedback in Block Mode validated their efforts, helping students stay on track, despite the increased pressure on staff to meet these demands.

The contrasting experiences between traditional and Block Modes underscored the complexity of educational delivery (Testa & Van Dyke, 2024). While Block Mode offered the benefits of focused learning and quick feedback, it also presented challenges related to pacing and content retention.

Psychosocial Impact

The interview findings revealed significant psychosocial impacts associated with Block Mode and traditional semester mode, particularly concerning student anxiety, workload management, social life,

and academic engagement. The findings underscored the profound influence of educational delivery modes on the psychosocial well-being of students, particularly international students, who often face unique challenges such as managing stress, balancing workloads, and navigating social integration (Kahu et al., 2014; Stone & O'Shea, 2019). These challenges are amplified in intensive delivery modes, like Block Mode, where students must adapt to condensed schedules and heightened academic demands, impacting both their mental health and academic engagement.

Anxiety and Social Life

A prevalent feeling among students in this research is the heightened anxiety linked to the traditional semester mode, attributed to the concurrent deadlines of multiple assignments. Student Participant S01 reported severe anxiety when multiple assignments were due simultaneously, a sentiment echoed by S05, who mentioned the pressure of completing assignments "at the last minute." This aligned with Redfern's (2016) identification of academic workload and complex assessment tasks as primary stressors for international students. The challenge of managing several assessments at once in traditional mode exacerbates this anxiety, as noted by Student Participant S02 and S03. In contrast, there is a lessened level of stress with the weekly singular assignment requirements of Block Mode. In Block Mode, assignments are concentrated in shorter periods and spread across the Block, making it easier for students to focus on one task at a time. However, it is important to note, however, that the intensive nature of this mode can still lead to significant stress, especially for individuals balancing work and study commitments (Blackmon & Major, 2012; Farrell & Brunton, 2020). The key difference between the assessment workload in the two modes was the concentrated nature of traditional mode assessment and the continuous assessment expectations of Block Mode. This factor could represent a basis as to why the quantitative data indicates that students feel marginally more satisfied with their workload in traditional mode than that in Block Mode, as they only struggle in the final period in traditional, while most of students stressed out each week across every Block.

Block Mode's demanding schedule could severely limit students' social interactions and extracurricular activities outside their classes. Student Participant S06 remarked on the lack of social life during Block Mode, focusing entirely on studies without time for personal interests such as music or dance. This aligns with previous research indicating that a balanced social life is crucial for maintaining mental well-being and effective learning (Kahu, 2013; McGivney, 2004). Conversely, Traditional semester mode was reported by Student Participant S03 to provide more flexibility for

students to plan and adjust their study tasks alongside other commitments, fostering a healthier balance between academic and personal life (e.g., S03: “in normal mode I had more time to put towards my studies with other life work and life commitments”). Student Participant S08 highlighted that the variety of assessment tasks in traditional mode keeps the coursework interesting and engaging, which can positively impact motivation and overall satisfaction (Park & Choi, 2009). This aligned well with the quantitative data that indicated students reported higher overall satisfaction levels in traditional mode than in Block Mode. Because the intensive nature of Block Mode often disrupts the life-study balance, making it difficult for students to engage in non-academic activities, which are vital for overall well-being and academic success (Brown et al., 2015; Stone & O'Shea, 2019). Student Participant S01 indicated that Block Mode can be particularly challenging for students who work full-time, noting the toll it takes on those trying to balance work, study, and personal commitments. This sentiment aligned with Testa and Van Dyke’s (2024) research, which discusses academic concerns about the inflexibility of intensive modes when students miss a class. Furthermore, Samarawickrema et al. (2024) emphasise the difficulties associated with part-time study, suggesting that the condensed and rigid nature of Block Mode may exacerbate the struggles of students trying to maintain equilibrium across competing responsibilities.

Furthermore, Academic Staff Participant P6 noted that international students often exhibit higher professionalism and stress compared to domestic students, who may have a more relaxed attitude towards their studies. Academic Staff Participant P10 expressed concerns about the additional challenge for international students in balancing work and study, emphasising that many international students work at least 20 hours per week, adding to their stress. These observations aligned with the literature indicating that international students face unique pressures that significantly impact their engagement and academic performance (Kahu et al., 2014), and highlights the critical need to explore how Block mode delivery can better accommodate the competing demands faced by international students.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Evidence drawn from the qualitative and quantitative data reinforces that the concentrated interaction with a single instructor and a consistency in peer group interaction in Block Mode fosters stronger relationships and a deeper sense of community, also echoed in the literature (Muscat & Thomas, 2023). Student Participant S02 highlighted that Block Mode facilitates better understanding and alignment

with a single teacher's expectations. Similarly, Student Participant S03 noted that spending more time with the same cohort enhances camaraderie and engagement, consistent with Veletsianos and Navarrete's (2012) findings on the importance of social presence in educational settings. This further aligns with Bird's (2017) study, which highlighted the positive aspects of cultural adjustment for international students, such as forming friendships with peers from diverse backgrounds and improving conversational English skills. Academic staff participants also observed that the intensive Block Mode cultivates closer connections and a more supportive learning environment, despite the quick turnaround times for assessments presenting significant challenges (Mitchell & Brodmerkel, 2021). For example, Academic Staff Participant P1 articulated that "the Block facilitates space for relational aspects of teaching and learning to flourish," emphasising the extended time spent with peers and teachers within a short period. This sentiment was echoed by Academic Staff Participant P8, who highlighted how the intensive nature of Block delivery allowed for the development of stronger connections among students, which is echoed in the Block research (Baillie & Male, 2019; Long & McLaren, 2024; Thomas et al., 2024). Academic Staff Participant P3 also noted that lecturers play a pivotal role in establishing a strong connection between student experience and outcomes.

Academic Performance and Engagement

Analysing the experiences of international students within the current study revealed a multifaceted relationship between academic performance, student engagement, and the mode of educational delivery. Both qualitative and quantitative data indicate that Block Mode, particularly the 4WK12CP and 8WK24CP variants, offered distinct advantages in fostering positive development in academic performance and student engagement compared to traditional semester-based delivery.

Academic Performance

Qualitative insights from the student participants underlined the perceived advantages of Block Mode in achieving better academic outcomes. Notably, five out of eight participants (S01, S02, S03, S04 & S05) reported improved and more stable academic results in Block Mode compared to the traditional mode. For instance, Student Participant S02 highlighted that, "in Block Mode all my units have a HD, but traditional mode all my units are going up and down", reinforcing the consistency in academic performance achieved through Block Mode. Similarly, Student Participant S05 noted, "I struggled a little bit last semester. But surprisingly, my results were better [in Block Mode] than the previous ones," attributing this improvement to a focused study approach where they could concentrate on one subject

at a time. The literature aligned with these qualitative findings, highlighting that Block Mode's concentrated structure can enhance academic performance by allowing students to focus on one subject at a time (Dempsey, 2023; Goode, Roche, et al., 2024).

Quantitative data from the study emphasised overall student performance findings, demonstrating higher mean marks and a more favourable grade distribution in Block Mode compared to traditional modes. However, the overall and workload satisfaction scores are lower in Block Mode than that in traditional mode. These outcomes were attributed to several factors, including the focused nature of Block Mode, which allows students to concentrate on one subject at a time, thereby reducing cognitive load and enabling deeper engagement with the material. This aligned with existing literature, where the connection between the timing of assessment feedback and student satisfaction has been established as a critical factor influencing academic performance (Aspden & Helm, 2004; Poon, 2019; Welker & Berardino, 2005). This pattern was also consistent with studies such as Turner et al. (2021), which documented similar improvements in student grades within intensive Block Mode formats. Furthermore, the observed enhancement in Block Mode pass rates, underscores the efficacy of this mode in supporting academic achievement, as evidenced by research on a First Year Model and Block Mode interventions across various disciplines (Goode, Roche, et al., 2024; Howe et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2022; McCluskey et al., 2021).

Engagement

The level of student engagement also emerged as a crucial factor in academic success. Several student participants noted the benefits of closer relationships with classmates and lecturers in Block Mode, facilitated by the concentrated and immersive nature of the course structure. For example, Student Participant S03 highlighted how frequent interactions in Block Mode fostered a sense of community and enhanced learning, explaining, "you have the same people in the class for one month. And you get so close to them… the lecturer had more sessions with us each week". This sentiment was echoed by academic literature, which links high levels of engagement with better learning outcomes (Ahmed et al., 2018; Buck & Tyrrell, 2022; Kent et al., 2016).

This was particularly relevant for international students, who, as indicated by academic staff participants, often demonstrate a higher level of motivation towards seeking feedback and clarification. Academic Staff Participant P1 noted, "the international students are more open to asking the lecturer

questions", attributing this behaviour to their heightened need for understanding, especially when English is not their first language. Additionally, Academic Staff Participant P5 observed that international students "tend to stay back after class and ask more questions, to seek more feedback on their assessments, or whether they're doing things in the right way", indicating a strong commitment to their academic success. It is possibly due to their heightened dedication and investment towards their education.

However, engagement in Block Mode is not universally perceived as superior. Two of ten academic staff participants (P2 and P4) observed no significant difference in engagement levels between Block and traditional modes, attributing this to the consistency in content delivery across both formats. For example, Academic Staff Participant P2 remarked, "there's no difference in the level of engagement," reflecting a viewpoint that engagement might be more influenced by the content and teaching methods than by the delivery mode itself. Despite these mixed perceptions, the overarching trend indicated that the immersive and intensive nature of Block Mode may facilitate higher engagement and, consequently, better academic performance, particularly among international students (Goode, Roche, et al., 2024).

Disciplinary Variations in Perceptions of Block Mode

The analysis of discipline-specific variations within the current study provided insightful perspectives on how students and staff participants perceive the effectiveness of Block Mode in comparison to traditional semester mode. The findings highlighted that perceptions of Block Mode differ across disciplines, particularly in terms of student satisfaction and academic performance. Both qualitative and quantitative data demonstrated that while Block Mode was perceived favourably in some disciplines, such as Education. The findings drawn from participant interviews underlined the variability in experiences across different disciplines when engaging with these educational delivery modes.

In the context of Education disciplines, a significant number of student participants (S01, S02, S03, S04 & S05) reported better academic outcomes in Block Mode compared to the traditional mode. The rapid feedback and resolution of doubts were highlighted as key advantages in Block Mode, with Participant S01 noting "the results were also given very quickly. So you keep getting validated on your work very quickly, I thought that was the advantage with the Block one", which facilitated better

engagement. This qualitative observation was corroborated by the quantitative data from the current doctoral research, in the Education discipline in which an increase in students achieving High Distinction (HD) to 54% in the 8WK24CP Block Mode from the Traditional mode (27.4%). A smaller increase in the HD rate when compared to the 4WK12CP Block Mode (28.7%) further featured the potential of Block Mode to enhance academic performance through focused and immersive learning experiences. Student Participant S02's experience was particularly noteworthy "Block Model all my units have a HD but traditional model all my units are going up and down", highlighting her consistent achievement of HD grades in Block Mode, which contrasted with her fluctuating results in traditional mode. Furthermore, the Block Mode preference of these education discipline students aligned with literature related to the concentrated study format, which details that intensive courses can promote deeper engagement, improved academic results, and a more enthusiastic approach to learning (McCluskey et al., 2019). The qualitative data also revealed the academic success of Student Participant S02 in Block Mode, in which she noted a boost in her confidence and being awarded a scholarship, as key motivators to her performance.

Additionally, six of eight student participants expressed a preference for the Block Mode. Quantitative data further supported the preference for Block Mode within the Education discipline, where overall satisfaction ratings were higher in Block Modes compared to the traditional mode. Specifically, satisfaction increased marginally from 4.00 in the Traditional mode to 4.04 in the 4WK12CP Block Mode, and further to 4.27 in the 8WK24CP Block Mode. This trend highlighted the effectiveness of Block Mode in supporting the educational needs and preferences of Master of Teaching students, reinforced by the qualitative insights gathered from the student participants.

However, the experience was not uniform across all disciplines. In Engineering and Technology, while academic outcomes such as HD grade percentages demonstrated the most significant improvement in Block Mode, with the HD rate reaching 73% and a notable reduction in fail (F) grades to 0%, overall student satisfaction showed a more complex pattern. Despite these positive academic outcomes, student satisfaction decreased in the Traditional mode from 4.22 to 3.89 in the 4WK12CP Block Mode whereas satisfaction scores in the 8WK24CP Block Mode was 4.13. This variability in satisfaction could be attributed to the lack of adjustment in teaching approaches despite the change in delivery mode, as noted by Academic Staff Participant P2, who emphasised that content preparation in some cases remained consistent across modes. Teaching modes necessitated alignment in design to reflect

the intensive nature of Block Mode, and if not implemented, may contribute to the lower satisfaction scores.

These findings revealed that while Block Mode may enhance academic outcomes, especially in disciplines such as Education, and Engineering and Technology, its influence on student satisfaction can vary depending on how effectively the mode is implemented. The success of Block Mode in improving grades was evident, but the accompanying student experience, as seen in the Engineering and Technology discipline, indicated that impactful teaching strategies tailored to the intensive format are crucial to maintaining or improving student satisfaction.

Students' Study Mode Preferences and System Delivery

The present study highlighted a clear preference among student participants for the Block Mode over the traditional delivery method. During interviews, six out of eight student participants expressed a preference for the Block Mode, citing its focused context and the mode's capability to allow concentration on one subject at a time. Student Participant S01, for example, noted that the Block Mode "stretched [her] towards a better result" and motivated her to "complete [a unit], then forget about it, and go to the next one." This sentiment was affirmed by Student Participant S05 and S08, who also appreciated the reduction in 'recapping' previous content and the prevention of procrastination ("because when there is less gap between the information delivered and received. We can take more on the previous concepts and apply new learning", S08), common issues in traditional modes where multiple subjects are studied concurrently. The qualitative insights provided by these student participants were supported by quantitative data from the current study. Specifically, Block Mode showed a higher mean mark ($M = 69.24$) when compared to the traditional delivery ($M = 66.59$). The statistical significance of this difference was important evidence substantiating that the delivery structure of Block Mode is a genuine factor in enhanced academic performance.

Previous research validated these findings, with studies showing that students often achieve higher grades in intensive, focused learning environments compared to traditional modes (Goode, Roche, et al., 2024; Goode, Syme, et al., 2024; McCluskey et al., 2019; Winchester et al., 2021). Turner et al. (2021) found that students enrolled in a four-week Block Mode at a UK university achieved marks approximately 4 percentage points higher than those in traditional modes. This improvement in

performance can be attributed to the immersive nature of Block Mode, which allows students to engage deeply with the material without the distraction of other concurrent courses. Consistent with these findings, the current doctoral research revealed that students in Block mode achieved significantly higher grades (M = 69.24) compared to those in Traditional delivery (M = 66.59) (see Figure 6). This statistically significant difference further underscored the potential of Block mode to enhance academic outcomes through its concentrated and immersive structure.

In addition to higher mean marks, the analysis also revealed a noticeable increase in the percentage of students achieving High Distinction (24.8 percentage) and Distinction (34.1 percentage) grades within the Block Mode. This trend aligned with the observations of Dempsey (2023), who found that intensive learning formats instil a sense of urgency and accountability in students, leading to improved academic outcomes. Buck and Tyrrell (2022) further supported this by suggesting that the focused and accelerated nature of Block Mode reduces the margin for error, compelling students to stay engaged and perform consistently well.

However, not all student participants preferred the Block Mode. Student Participants S03 and S06, for instance, expressed a preference for the traditional mode. Participant S03 found the Block Mode to be "very intensive," while S06 appreciated the diversity of subjects offered simultaneously in the traditional mode. These preferences highlight the fact that while the Block Mode may offer significant advantages for some students, it may not be the best fit for everyone. Kahu and Nelson (2018) emphasised that situational interest and emotional engagement play crucial roles in student success, and for some students, the variety and pacing of the traditional mode may better suit their learning style. The nuanced endorsement of the Block delivery design by some students was reinforced by S03's observation that the traditional mode "feels less intense and more manageable," while S06 valued the simultaneous engagement with multiple subjects, which they described as "better for keeping my interest and balance." These insights underscored the importance of offering flexible learning modes to accommodate diverse student preferences and needs.

Factors Impacting Students Experience and Satisfaction

The international student experience in higher education is complex, influenced by a range of factors that shape their academic performance and satisfaction. In the context of this doctoral study, qualitative

data from both student and academic participants, and quantitative data, revealed the significant role of lecturers, the discipline focus of the subject, class size, and students' own efforts in influencing their overall learning experience and satisfaction. The current findings were in line with existing literature that underscores the importance of teaching quality, class dynamics, and individual student engagement in fostering positive educational outcomes (Poon, 2019; Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002).

Role of Lecturers

One of the most prominent factors highlighted by student participants was the impact of the lecturer on their engagement and satisfaction. Review of qualitative results showed that student participants consistently attributed their level of engagement in class activities to the quality of teaching rather than the mode of delivery. For instance, "The engagement really depends on the lecturers" (Student Participant S05) with no relation to the education delivery mode. Specifically, Student Participant S02 highlighted: "some teachers are very particular about just finishing off the content and leaving. Whereas some teachers want to cross the line and stay on if you have, you know, things to discuss and doubts to clarify". This aligned with Hagenauer and Volet's (2014) findings, which highlight the critical role of student-lecturer relationship in enhancing students' learning experiences. Moreover, as noted by Academic Staff Participant P8, the lecturer's role as a facilitator is crucial in encouraging students to engage proactively in their learning. This viewpoint was supported by prior research, which indicates that effective teaching practices are central to improving student satisfaction and academic success (Uleanya, 2020; Yunus et al., 2011).

The importance of the lecturer's role was further emphasised in the context of both Block Mode and traditional modes of delivery. Student Participants S05 and S07 observed that a lecturer's ability to engage students could transcend the mode of delivery, underscoring that effective teaching practices are key to maintaining student engagement regardless of the instructional format. This finding was consistent with (Martin et al., 2002), who argued that the quality of teaching is closely tied to the educator's intentions and practices. Furthermore, the commitment and attitude of the lecturer were identified as crucial in shaping students' learning experiences, with Student Participants S05 and S06 pointing out that insufficient interaction or rushed lessons negatively impacted their understanding and satisfaction. These observations resonate with Poon's (2019) assertion that smaller class sizes and personalised attention can enhance student engagement, a factor that was particularly appreciated in

the Block Mode by several participants, and also reinforced by the positive academic performance results revealed within the quantitative analysis.

In addition to the qualitative insights, quantitative data provided further clarity on how overall and workload satisfaction scores vary across different educational delivery modes and academic disciplines. Notably, in disciplines such as Engineering and Technology, the 4WK12CP Block Mode consistently received the lowest satisfaction ratings for both overall experience and workload, whereas the Traditional mode was rated the highest. Similarly, students in Health and Science disciplines, where only data for Traditional and 4WK12CP Block Modes were available, expressed a clear preference for the Traditional mode. Conversely, in Business disciplines, particularly among international students, the 8WK12CP Block Mode was perceived as more comfortable and satisfactory compared to the Traditional mode. In Education, the highest satisfaction ratings were observed for the 8WK24CP Block Mode, while the lowest were for the Traditional mode in terms of overall satisfaction, and the 4WK12CP Block Mode in terms of workload satisfaction. A similar trend was evident in the Art, Society, and Culture disciplines. These findings implied that the relationship between educational delivery modes and student satisfaction is more complex than it might initially appear, with discipline-specific factors playing a pivotal role. This echoed the variability in course workload observed by Lutes and Davies (2013), where perceptions of workload and preferences for certain delivery modes were influenced by the nature of the academic disciplines and the specific needs of the students. Importantly, these results reinforced that elements beyond the delivery mode, such as course content and teaching approach, are critical in shaping students' overall and workload satisfaction.

Impact of Discipline-Specific Content on Student Satisfaction

Beyond the overall differences in perception of Block Mode across disciplines, the nature of the discipline-specific content itself played a critical role in shaping student satisfaction. Several student participants emphasised that their engagement was influenced not only by the delivery mode but also by the way course content was structured and delivered. As Student Participant S07 advocated, "the engagement has less to do with the type of model than the teacher and the subject". The discipline-specific content, as facilitated by the lecturer, was seen as a determinant of how students connect with and engage in the unit content. This notion was supported by research indicating that the relevance and organisation of course content are essential components of student satisfaction (Petruzzellis et al., 2006). Moreover, the findings revealed that students valued when lecturers streamlined resources and

provided clear guidance, which helped them manage their time effectively and focus on the most pertinent aspects of their studies. This aligned with the work of Arambewela and Hall (2009), who found that international students in Australia particularly valued the role of teaching staff in enhancing their academic satisfaction.

Class Size

Class size also emerged as a factor that influences student engagement and satisfaction. Several student participants noted that smaller class sizes in the Block Mode facilitated greater interaction and communication, leading to a stronger sense of community and collaboration among peers and with the teacher. As Student Participant S05 commented given to the small class size "we could easily ask questions and the lecture had time to talk to everyone". This observation was supported by Coles (2002) and Douglas et al. (2006), who reported a negative correlation between class size and student satisfaction. The ability of students to easily interact with their lecturer and peers in smaller classes was seen as a key driver of their engagement, echoing Gruber et al.'s (2010) findings on the importance of accessibility to teaching staff in enhancing the learning experience.

Students' Efforts

The effort and impact of students themselves were identified as crucial in shaping their learning journey. Several Student and Academic Staff participants acknowledged that their own habits, such as consistent study practices (Student Participant S01) and active participation in class (e.g. Academic Staff Participant P5), significantly contributed to their engagement and understanding of the content (e.g., P10 "international students are comparatively more a bit more sincere, they're very committed"). This highlighted the role of self-regulation and proactive learning in achieving academic success, a factor that has been extensively discussed in the educational literature (e.g., Zimmerman, 2002). Additionally, the current study revealed that students' emotional connection to their lecturers could either positively or negatively impact their learning experience, reinforcing the importance of a supportive and engaging classroom environment.

Perspectives of Support in Delivery Mode

The perspectives of delivery development highlighted the critical need for adapting educational practices to better support international students, particularly in Block Mode. Student participants, like

S02 and S03, expressed concerns over the compressed timeline in Block Mode, noting that the intensity left little room for managing life events, that could severely disrupt their studies (e.g., illness, personal issues). This sentiment was supported by Farrell and Brunton (2020), who emphasise that such constraints can negatively impact student engagement and overall learning outcomes. Similarly, the academic staff participants echoed these concerns, recognising the challenges international students face in adapting to the accelerated pace of Block Mode. For instance, Academic Staff Participant P10 commented that international students would benefit from arriving onshore earlier, with a buffer period before the start of their studies to familiarise themselves with the Learning Management System (LMS) and the Block Mode. This reflection was consistent with the literature that underscores the importance of providing resources and opportunities, and a structured orientation, to help students acclimate to new learning environments (Cameron & Rideout, 2022; Ryan, 2011). The qualitative data in the current doctoral research further reinforced the necessity of refining the delivery mode to accommodate for challenges experienced by international students such as additional time to familiarise themselves with the system and the environment.

Moreover, the need for specialised support for international students was a recurring theme among the academic staff. Academic Staff Participant P7 emphasised the importance of a thorough induction process, advocating for extended preparation time to help international students adjust to the learner-centred approach prevalent in Australian education. This aligned with Carroll and Ryan's (2007) argument that educational institutions should make teaching practices more explicit to enhance international students' chances of success. In the current doctoral research, this was illustrated by academic staff participants who noted that students often struggled with adapting to the educational norms and expectations in Australia, highlighting a gap between the orientation provided and the actual needs of the students. The proactive steps suggested by academic staff, such as more comprehensive inductions and tailored resources, underscore the critical role of support systems in facilitating international students' transition to new educational contexts. Student Participant S03 also highlighted the impact of supportive lecturers and placements, stating, "Academically it's been really good, I really love the lecturers, they've been very supportive… the learning experience so far… has been really great for me." This underscored the importance of structured support in enhancing student engagement and success in Block Mode.

The staff interview data also indicated the need for restructuring of assessment tasks to suit the accelerated pace of Block Mode. Academic Staff Participants P2 and P8 pointed out the need for

assessments that are both manageable for students and feasible for timely grading by faculty. This practical consideration reflected the broader challenge of aligning teaching methods with the unique demands of Block Mode, a point that is often overlooked in traditional educational settings. The concerns raised by academic staff about time management and the difficulty of completing dense reading assignments within the short timeframe further illustrate the need for a more flexible and supportive learning environment. Student Participant S02 echoed these challenges, noting, "It was a little difficult… every weekend, we have to push in an assignment… because we had only four weeks or eight weeks per unit." This student perspective reinforces the necessity for assessment designs that account for the compressed schedule of Block Mode, highlighting the importance of balancing rigor with feasibility.

The feedback from both students and academic staff participants underscored the importance of adapting delivery methods and support systems to better meet the needs of international students in Block Mode. The integration of these insights with the literature highlighted a shared understanding of the challenges posed by the accelerated format and the necessity for proactive strategies to mitigate its impact on student learning (e.g., Burton & Nesbit, 2008; Konjarski et al., 2023). This collaborative approach to feedback and development was essential for ensuring that the educational experience is both inclusive and effective for all students.

Learning Management System (LMS)

The interview findings from both international students and academic teaching staff offered valuable insights into the usage and perceptions of the VU Collaborate learning management system (LMS). These insights uncovered common themes and notable points of divergence that reflect the broader dynamics of student engagement in higher education.

Frequency and Mode of LMS Engagement

The qualitative data revealed a clear preference among international students for logging into VU Collaborate more frequently in Block Mode compared to the Traditional semester mode. Seven out of eight student participants indicated a higher frequency of logins in Block Mode, attributing this to the intensive nature of the coursework which requires constant reference to online resources. As Student Participant S01 aptly summarised, the need to complete assignments in a short time frame necessitates

frequent access to the LMS, a sentiment echoed by Student Participant S07 and other participants. This finding aligned with Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) conclusion that active engagement with course materials is crucial for effective studying, as well as You's (2016) research, which showed that students who frequently logged and consistently interacted with online assignments performed better academically. Both students and academic staff participants in this current research acknowledged the structured nature of Block Mode, which allows students to focus on a single subject at a time, making course content easier to manage. Academic staff participants emphasised the importance of regular engagement with the LMS, indicating that daily logins are ideal for maximising the benefits of VU Collaborate. However, they also noted that students tend to log in more frequently around assessment deadlines rather than maintaining consistent daily interaction. This pattern mirrors You's (2016) findings, which stressed the significance of regular logins for effective learning outcomes.

Both cohorts of participants acknowledged the role of frequent LMS logins in enhancing connection with course content. International students emphasised that regular access to VU Collaborate facilitated staying updated with course materials and opportunities such as scholarships (e.g., Student Participant S02 "we have so many opportunities, so many scholarship things that information that's put up over there"). This sentiment was reflected by academic staff participants who stressed the importance of daily engagement for accessing a comprehensive range of instructional materials (e.g., Academic Staff P2 "that's where you've got instructions to pre class activities, post class activities, reference point resources, and the rest of them. They're all there"). Previous research by Dias and Diniz (2014) and Jung and Huh (2019) has outlined that LMS features can enhance cooperation with student discussions, thereby increasing student intrinsic motivation and learning.

Maintaining a better social presence in the curriculum enabled students to be strongly interlinked with each other, teachers, and the subjects, as highlighted by Veletsianos and Navarrete (2012). This aligned with the observations from both academic staff and students regarding the importance of frequent logins to VU Collaborate.

Perceptions of LMS Management and Usability

Most international students participants found managing VU Collaborate easier in Block Mode, primarily due to the reduced cognitive load associated with focusing on one subject at a time. S02 and others highlighted that having a single point of focus in Block Mode mitigates the feeling of being

overwhelmed by information from multiple courses and instructors. This finding was supported by Basioudis et al. (2012), who noted that students' apprehension of LMS affects their interaction with the system and ultimately their learning outcomes. Additionally, the academic staff participants provided a nuanced view of LMS engagement, noting differences in how international and domestic students interacted with VU Collaborate. While some staff participants (P1, P3 & P10) observed no significant differences, others (P2, P5 & P7) pointed out that domestic students seemed more adept at using the LMS due to greater familiarity with such systems from their prior educational experiences. Conversely, Academic Staff Participant P4 noted that international students often demonstrated higher engagement levels, indicating a proactive approach to utilising LMS resources. This resonated with the findings of Thoms and Eryilmaz (2014), who emphasised that LMS can provide a comprehensive framework for student interaction, engagement with course materials and, submission of class assessments.

It has been shown previously that the resources and services of a university are considered essential parts affecting student satisfaction (Poon, 2019). The results of Kärnä and Julin (2015) further illustrated the importance and improvement in the quality of the teaching space directly helps staff and students meet their goals, making the LMS a crucial aspect of overall satisfaction. The current doctoral research revealed that while the frequency and mode of LMS engagement vary, both international students and academic staff participants agree on the necessity of regular interaction with VU Collaborate to optimise learning outcomes. These insights highlighted the importance of considering student experiences in the design and implementation of LMS strategies to foster an inclusive and effective learning environment.

Chapter 7: Summary, Recommendations, Limitations and Conclusion

Overall Summary of the Thesis

This doctoral research investigated how the immersive Block Mode of educational delivery influences the academic experiences of international postgraduate students at Victoria University. The study employed a mixed-method approach (Östlund et al., 2011) within a case study framework (Merriam, 1988), with Victoria University serving as the case study for the research. Positioned within the phenomenological and realist paradigms, the research integrated quantitative and qualitative designs for data collection, analysis and interpretation. This mixed-methods design provided a robust evidence base for assessing and deepening the understanding (Bamberger, 2012) of how Block Mode impacts students' academic experiences, shaped by the specific context of this study.

The study's mixed-methods approach examined factors affecting international postgraduate students' teaching and learning experiences at VU, particularly regarding their engagement, academic performance, and unit of study satisfaction. This was coupled with a critical review of both Australian and international research literature on higher education theory, practice and policy in the context of effective, engaged and successful learning of students within postgraduate programs. The mixed-methods phases of research include qualitative (phase 1 and 2) and quantitative (phase 3) studies. The phenomenological approach was used to explore how participants perceive and experience Block Mode education (Lester, 1999).

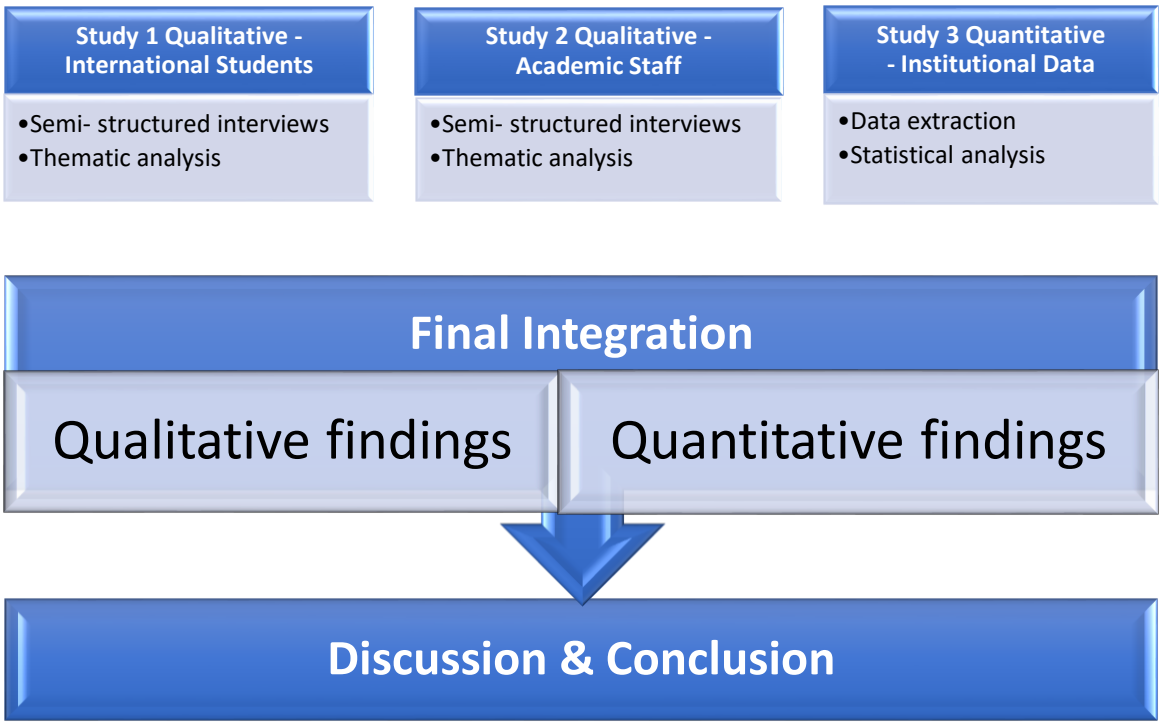
The research specifically addressed how Block Mode impacts the academic experience of international postgraduate students at Victoria University. Qualitative data was collected via open-ended Zoom interviews with a sample of eight international students majoring in teacher education, alongside interviews with 10 academic staff from different disciplines. Both staff and students had experience in pre- and postgraduate Block unit deliveries, providing qualitative data that was subsequently used to complement the quantitative patterns of student achievement and satisfaction. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data, offering a clearer understanding of how Block Mode influences teaching, learning, and the personal experiences of international students. Key findings from the two studies revealed several critical insights. First, international postgraduate students reported that

the Block Mode's intensive delivery structure facilitated deeper engagement with course material and improved their ability to manage workloads effectively. However, some students noted challenges in balancing the fast-paced schedule with external commitments, such as part-time work. Second, academic staff highlighted that while Block Mode encouraged interactive teaching and closer student-teacher relationships, it also required significant adjustments in lesson planning and delivery to maintain effectiveness. Overall, the findings highlight the quality of Block Mode as a delivery method, with implications for future educational policy adjustments, while adding to the body of research on delivery models in higher education, particularly for international students.

The quantitative phase of the study explored how different Block Mode delivery types influenced academic performance and unit satisfaction. Inferential and non-parametric statistical designs were used to compare pre-Block and Block Mode student data from 2019 to 2023. The analysis focused on postgraduate units involving international students, examining performance outcomes before and after the shift to Block Mode. Specifically, institutional data was utilised to gain insights of postgraduate students' performance in Block Mode education through the interrogation of their unit of study results and rating of unit of study satisfaction. The quantitative analysis also focused on identifying factors and significant variances in academic performance and satisfaction variables between postgraduate international student groups studying in traditional delivery mode and those studying under Block Mode. The Block Mode unit of study data was further subdivided into three types of Block Modes (i.e., 4WK12CP, 8WK12CP, 8WK24CP). The resultant data were contrasting with themes and perspectives that emerged from the literature review, highlighting both alignments and differences of relevant variables related to academic performance and unit of study satisfaction across different disciplines (e.g., Pass/Fail rate, Grade). Major findings included notable improvements in academic performance under Block Mode, with higher mean marks compared to the traditional mode. The 4WK12CP and 8WK24CP Block Modes consistently demonstrated superior grade outcomes, particularly in disciplines such as Engineering and Technology and Education. However, the 8WK12CP format exhibited lower mean marks, suggesting that studying two units concurrently posed challenges for student performance. Additionally, the analysis revealed variations in satisfaction levels across disciplines, emphasising the need for discipline-specific strategies to optimise the benefits of Block Mode delivery.

The outcomings of this phase of the doctoral study support the continued development of Block Mode as a positive and engaging educational model for international students. The study examined the impact

of innovative delivery modes on academic success and satisfaction, contributing to broader research on the efficacy of new teaching and learning models for postgraduate international students. This research complements existing literature on delivery models by providing a focused investigation into the international student experience within Block Mode education.



This flowchart above outlines the sequential execution of the three studies in this research. Study 1 and Study 2 were conducted independently but provided qualitative insights that helped contextualize the quantitative findings in Study 3. While the studies were designed as distinct phases, reflections from earlier phases informed aspects of later analyses. This structured approach ensured a comprehensive exploration of international students' experiences with Block Mode delivery, balancing qualitative perspectives with quantitative data trends.

Recommendations

The mixed methods approach used in this research has provided strong evidence to support the following recommendations for improving both practice and future research. These recommendations can guide future approaches to enhance international postgraduate students' academic success and immersive Block Mode learning.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research and highlight a range of factors associated with international postgraduate student engagement and satisfaction (Goode, Roche, et al., 2024; Zhang & Cetinich, 2022). The results of the current study reveal a set of strategies that universities and faculty have implemented to increase international student engagement and satisfaction within Block Mode delivery. In addition, the findings indicate that successful strategies should aim to reflect the factors that influence engagement and satisfaction in the learning experiences of international students within Block Mode delivery (Loton et al., 2022). The following recommendations for practice are based on the major findings of this research.

Preserve Essential Block Mode Design Features for Student Success. The research highlights the importance of core design elements in the Block Mode format that promote academic success and provide enhanced scholarly experiences for international students. Key features such as focused, active, and highly engaging learning environments, small class sizes, and delivering one unit at a time are central to the success of international students in postgraduate studies. Institutions transitioning from traditional teaching methods to Block Mode should ensure these essential characteristics are maintained to foster international students' academic progress experience and overall satisfaction.

Implement a Continuous Evaluation and Improvement Framework for Block Mode. Given the complex nature of institutional environments, an effective and dynamic feedback mechanism is necessary to continually refine Block Mode practices. Both students and staff have expressed concerns about the pressures related to assignments and timely feedback, which have impacted their overall satisfaction. A systematic evaluation framework that regularly gathers insights from students and staff through diverse channels, beyond typical surveys, will allow universities to respond more effectively to emerging challenges. This framework should include active engagement with students to thoroughly explore their learning experiences and identify areas for improvement.

Revise Student Satisfaction Evaluation Methods. As part of the recommended program for continuous Block Mode evaluation and improvement, the Student Evaluation of Unit (SEU) survey program should be transformed in terms of timing, frequency, and purpose to align with the Block

Mode education system. The current data reinforced the low response rate of international students in completing the SEU. Specifically, 38,812 students undertook the units, however only 9,673 students completed the accompanying SEU survey. Previous literature highlighted that student success is non-linear and complex (Naylor, 2017), and traditional evaluation methods may not capture the unique dynamics of four-week block units. Currently, students in the 4WK12CP Block Mode format are asked to complete their surveys towards the end of the block, a period when heightened workload and anxiety are commonly reported, particularly among international students. This timing issue highlights the need for a renewed student satisfaction framework.

To enhance the accuracy and relevance of satisfaction evaluations, surveys should be more frequent and integrated throughout the Block period to capture a broader spectrum of international student experiences. Incorporating qualitative and quantitative feedback mechanisms will offer a more nuanced understanding of student satisfaction. Engaging students directly in the design of these evaluations, particularly international cohorts, can foster a shared understanding of what strategies work well and what areas require improvement. This collaboration between students and the institution may also enhance the validity of the evaluation process and facilitate the identification of intervention strategies that address the challenges international students face.

Additionally, exploring the lived experiences of both staff and students, combined with quantitative unit evaluation surveys (despite their limitations), may provide insights that could reduce inconsistencies in student satisfaction evaluations and improve academic outcomes. A closer partnership with students in both the design and delivery of learning will support the institution in validating current Block Mode practices and addressing concerns related to the international student experience. Such an approach can also empower students to confidently express their views on potential interventions (Kahn & Anderson, 2019), fostering a collaborative environment that promotes ongoing improvement in Block Mode delivery.

Enhancing Support for International Students. Based on the findings of the present study, institutions should prioritise support systems for international students, extending assistance at multiple levels—institutional, community, and within the educational delivery framework. Both students and staff provided specific commentary reinforcing the need to continue to develop practices associated with supporting international students. For example, Academic Staff Participant P10

highlighted the value of curriculum-integrated support, outlining that international students would benefit from an early onshore arrival with a structured transition program to familiarise themselves with the Learning Management System (LMS) and Block Mode. Similarly, Student Participant S03 emphasised the importance of faculty support, noting that having approachable and responsive lecturers created a positive learning environment. Overall, the challenges international students face are not limited to academic demands but include cultural, social, and personal adjustments. It is essential to provide resources such as language support, academic counselling, cultural adaptation programs, and integration opportunities within the community. Strengthening these support mechanisms will enhance international students' academic experience and overall well-being, contributing to improved engagement and satisfaction levels (Andrade, 2006; Cho & Yu, 2015).

In addition to academic support, fostering a sense of belonging and addressing cultural challenges are essential components of a successful international student experience. Institutions can mitigate challenges such as social isolation and struggling to integrate within both the academic and community environments (Tavares, 2024). Targeted support, such as mentorship programs, that involve pairing international students with domestic peers, and creating social platforms where students can engage in both academic and non-academic activities warrant investigation. Furthermore, language barriers emerged as a recurring theme, indicating that ongoing English language support beyond initial orientation programs may be necessary, especially in immersive Block delivery mode, as the fast-paced weekly assignments pose additional challenges for non-native speakers. Extending these resources throughout the students' academic journey could ensure that they feel more confident in both their academic and social interactions, ultimately improving their satisfaction and performance.

Clear Communication of Delivery Mode Changes. One key finding from the first study, which involved qualitative data from international postgraduate students in the Master of Teaching, was their lack of awareness regarding the shift from traditional delivery to Block Mode. The transition occurred without proper consultation and communication with students, leading to confusion and frustration. Therefore, it is critical for institutions to ensure that all stakeholders—students, teaching staff, and the broader university administration—are fully informed in regards to any changes in delivery mode. This requires clear and timely communication from the university senior leadership that will guide students and staff, to ensure both adequate preparation and adaptation to the new academic structures.

In alignment with the qualitative data from Study 1, the unexpected shift to Block Mode left many international students feeling unprepared and disoriented. Beyond merely announcing a change, institutions must ensure that students understand the practical implications of new delivery modes. For instance, clarifying expectations around workload intensity, time management, and assessment timelines is crucial in preparing students for the demands of Block Mode. This can be achieved through early, transparent communication across multiple channels—email, in-class announcements, and even student ambassadors/mentors who can offer peer perspectives. Moreover, providing resources such as workshops or online tutorials that explain the benefits and challenges of Block Mode could further alleviate concerns, ensuring a smoother transition for both students and faculty.

Staff Training to Support International Students. As postgraduate courses often attract large numbers of international students, it is imperative that academic staff receive targeted training to better understand the learning approaches and cultural backgrounds of these students. International students often face unique challenges, such as balancing study commitments with part-time work or navigating different academic expectations. Training staff to recognise these challenges will enable them to offer more tailored support, ensuring that international students are better equipped to succeed academically. Additionally, fostering greater cultural awareness among staff can improve classroom dynamics and enhance the overall student experience.

While staff are generally aware of the diverse student body, this research highlighted gaps in understanding the specific needs of international postgraduate students, particularly in an intensive learning environment such as Block Mode. Institutions should consider implementing professional development workshops that equip academic staff with tools to better address the educational and emotional needs of international students. These could include training on inclusive teaching practices, intercultural communication, and strategies to manage the unique challenges posed by intensive learning modes. Additionally, creating spaces for staff to regularly engage with international students and understand their lived experiences could foster a deeper, more empathetic understanding, thereby enriching classroom dynamics. Such training would not only enhance teaching quality but also contribute to a more supportive and responsive learning environment for international cohorts.

A Continued Focus on Student Satisfaction and Academic Performance. While quantitative data in the current doctoral research showed an improvement in assessment results under

Block Mode, the same data indicated that student satisfaction did not increase correspondingly. This indicated that while the Block Mode may enhance certain aspects of academic performance, it does not necessarily address other important factors that contribute to student satisfaction, such as workload management, teaching quality, or student engagement. Institutions should remain committed to refining the Block delivery model, ensuring that it not only supports academic achievement but also fosters a positive and engaging learning environment that aligns with the students' broader expectations and experiences.

The discrepancy between improved academic outcomes and stagnant or declining student satisfaction under Block Mode underscores the complexity of the student experience. While academic performance is a key metric of success (Alyahyan & Düştegör, 2020; Bowden et al., 2021), this study reveals that international students value a balanced approach that also accounts for their overall well-being, including workload manageability, quality of instruction, and engagement in the learning process. Institutions should, therefore, seek to strike a balance by not only focusing on rigorous academic standards but also fostering a learning environment where students feel supported and engaged. This could involve smaller class sizes (Iglesias-Pradas et al., 2021), more personalised feedback (Karaoglan Yilmaz & Yilmaz, 2020), and clearer communication about course expectations. Additionally, integrating further opportunities for peer collaboration and fostering a supportive community could significantly improve satisfaction levels without compromising academic performance.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following five recommendations for future research are based on the major findings of this set of studies, reflecting areas where further investigation could significantly contribute to understanding and improving educational delivery models. These recommendations emphasise longitudinal student tracking, the inclusion of diverse stakeholder perspectives, and additional consideration of course quality experience of the student. By addressing these areas, future studies can build on the groundwork laid by this research to provide insights into the complexities of Block Mode education and its implications for international student engagement and success.

Longitudinal Studies with Undergraduate Students. This study provides the foundation for future research that could include longitudinal studies involving undergraduate students

to explore their perceptions of Block Mode at the beginning of their studies and track their academic performance over time. By conducting initial interviews to gauge their expectations and comparing these with their academic results as they progress, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the long-term impacts of Block Mode on student outcomes. This approach would help in identifying shifts in students' attitudes and performance linked to different educational delivery methods. Specifically, future research could involve longitudinal qualitative studies with undergraduate students to explore their perceptions of Block Mode at the beginning of their academic journey and track their experiences over time. Researchers could conduct initial interviews with a cohort of 8-12 students at the start of their studies to capture their expectations and attitudes toward Block Mode. Follow-up interviews with the same group of students could be conducted at key intervals, such as after each Block learning semester, paired with an analysis of their academic performance data. This approach would help identify shifts in student perceptions and performance over time, offering a deeper understanding of how Block Mode impacts student outcomes across different stages of their education. The adoption of a mixed-method approach, in which the qualitative interview data would be linked with quantitative unit of study performance tracking, would provide a more comprehensive view of the long-term effects of this delivery model.

Perspectives of International Administrative Staff. While the current study focuses on international students and academic staff, including international administrative staff in future research is crucial. Administrative staff play a vital role (Abbas, 2020; Galeeva, 2016) in supporting international students and managing their academic experience. Understanding their perspectives can provide valuable insights into the challenges and support systems that impact students' academic journeys. Investigating how administrative staff view and manage educational delivery modes could reveal gaps and areas for improvement in institutional support structures. The study design should involve semi-structured interviews with 5-10 administrative staff from various departments across university that engage with international students to explore their views on the impact of Block Mode delivery on the student cohort. This could include examining how they perceive the effectiveness of institutional support systems and the challenges they face in helping international students navigate different educational delivery modes. The findings would offer valuable insights into the role of administrative staff in enhancing international students' academic experiences and help institutions identify gaps in their support frameworks.

Insights from External Agencies Involved with International Students. Another important area for future research is to examine the role of external agencies (e.g., educational consultants and recruitment agencies) involved with international students. Current research does not address the perspectives of these agencies or the data they can provide. Agencies often play a significant role in guiding students through their educational journeys and their feedback can offer insights into how educational delivery modes affect students before and after they start their studies. Exploring agency perspectives could help in understanding the broader context of student recruitment and subsequent support and satisfaction. A qualitative study involving interviews with representatives from 10-15 key agencies could provide their views of international students' expectations before they commence their study in a foreign country. This could be significant in exploring how agencies prepare students for the unique challenges of international study at an institution utilising Block Mode and gather their feedback on how students adapt to this learning structure. Such research could reveal important additional factors influencing student success and satisfaction and help institutions collaborate more effectively with these agencies to improve the overall student experience.

Perspectives of University Leadership and Government. An improved understanding of developments in course and unit delivery mode would benefit from investigating the viewpoints of university leadership and government. Sourcing evidence of how decision-makers perceive the efficacy and impact of different modes can inform policy and strategic decisions related to educational delivery. This research could explore if leadership and government perspectives align with, or differ from those of students and academic staff, providing a more holistic view of the educational landscape. A qualitative study could involve in-depth interviews with 7-10 senior university administrators and policymakers, exploring their views on the efficacy of Block Mode and its alignment with institutional and national educational goals. This research could also contrast leadership and government perspectives of the experiences of international students and the academic staff who teach them in regards to the impact of major delivery mode changes, and subsequently highlight any discrepancies or areas of consensus with the evidence drawn directly from students and staff. By examining the decision-making processes behind the adoption of new higher education delivery formats such as Block Mode, findings could inform future policy and strategy development at both institutional and governmental levels to support the successful engagement of international students.

Postgraduate Students' Satisfaction and Expectations. Future research should focus on gathering detailed feedback from postgraduate students regarding their satisfaction with their university experience. This includes understanding what they consider essential in a good university and identifying the factors that contribute to their satisfaction. This research would involve in-depth interviews with 20-30 postgraduate students from diverse disciplines, aiming to understand what they value in a university and the factors that contribute to their satisfaction. Using a semi-structured interview format, researchers can gather detailed, personal insights into students' expectations of a "good university" and what aspects of their experience—whether related to academic support, course delivery, or extracurricular opportunities—meet or fall short of those expectations. Thematic analysis would then allow researchers to identify common themes and provide institutions with actionable insights for improving the postgraduate student experience. The research outcomes could also assist institutions to better tailor their offerings to meet the needs and expectations of postgraduate students.

Limitations

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to mitigate the limitations of relying solely on either approach (Bamberger, 2012). Although the study achieved its primary objectives, several limitations were identified and are discussed below.

General

The study was context-specific, focusing on Victoria University, its international postgraduate student population, and the Block Mode of unit of study delivery. Although this presented a unique opportunity to explore an international postgraduate educational reform and large-scale implementation of intensive mode education for both domestic and international students, data collection was limited to a single university, constraining the generalizability of the findings.

Moreover, the research was conducted during the initial implementation of Block Mode, with classes being taught in person on campus. Consequently, the findings reflect only the lived experiences of students and staff during this period. Following the onset of COVID-19, the delivery of Block Mode was adapted, incorporating an 'online real-time' mode. Although some initial findings on student experiences of this new format were included, as students reflected on both in-person and online

experiences during interviews, the study primarily addresses the early, face-to-face phase of Block Mode delivery. Recommendations based on these initial findings are provided in Chapter Seven.

Qualitative Study Limitations

Studies 1 and 2 captured the experiences of 8 international postgraduate students and 10 academic staff at the university. Although the sample size was sufficient for an in-depth exploration of the topic (Dworkin, 2012), it is not representative of all students or staff, and the findings cannot be broadly generalized. Nonetheless, the sample size allowed for the generation of meaningful qualitative insights relevant to the scope of the research.

Future studies could benefit from larger sample sizes for both students and staff, as well as longitudinal data collection to provide more extensive insights over time. Expanding the sample cohort would offer additional perspectives on student success within Block Mode, while a more diverse range of staff, including professional support staff, could enrich the understanding of institutional support systems. The online interviews, necessitated by COVID-19, posed no significant issues, and participants provided valuable insights into their lived or observed experiences.

Quantitative Study Limitations

The quantitative component (Study 3) was limited by the target population, focusing solely on international postgraduate students enrolled in units that were offered in both traditional and Block Mode between 2019 and 2023. The cross-sectional data collection, spanning 111 units across five academic disciplines, further limits the findings' applicability to the broader international student population. Furthermore, the categorisation of the five discipline areas were determined by the research team based on complementary aspects of unit of study rather than specific discipline categories that were in existence within the university course and faculty structure. A longitudinal study encompassing a larger and more diverse sample over a longer period including traditional discipline categories (e.g., nursing, psychology, law, history) would provide a deeper understanding of the Block Mode's impact on the student experience.

A final limitation was the disparity between the sample sizes for academic results and satisfaction surveys. Although all students included in the study had academic results, participation in satisfaction

surveys was not mandatory, leading to a smaller dataset for satisfaction metrics. Factors influencing survey response rates may include the frequency and timing of Block Mode surveys, survey fatigue, impact bias, and non-response bias (Grimes et al., 2017; Mendes & Hammett, 2021; Porter & Whitcomb, 2005).

Conclusion

This doctoral research contributes to the growing body of teaching and learning literature associated with higher education delivery, specifically examining how immersive Block Mode influences the academic experience of international postgraduate students at Victoria University (VU). By adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting student performance, satisfaction, and engagement within different educational delivery modes.

In addressing Sub-aim A, the study explored how Block Mode impacts the teaching and learning experiences of international students. Through both qualitative and quantitative data, the research identified that Block Mode offers a more immersive and student-centred learning environment. However, it also highlighted areas for improvement, particularly in course design and institutional support. For instance, students reported challenges with assessment design, citing that the compressed timeframe often led to a high-stakes assessment structure with limited opportunities for formative feedback. Additionally, the volume of content covered within a short period was perceived as overwhelming, making it difficult for some students to fully engage with and retain key concepts. In terms of institutional support, international students would benefit from a more structured induction program specifically tailored to Block Mode. These insights are essential for informing future policy and practice at both VU and other higher education settings.

The research fulfilled Sub-aim B by comparing the academic performance and unit satisfaction of students in traditional and Block Modes. The findings demonstrated significant differences, particularly in how international students adapted to Block Mode. Students studying in Block Mode generally performed better academically, though variations were observed across disciplines and different Block Mode structures. These results will be crucial for refining educational delivery and enhancing academic outcomes for international students.

Sub-aim C was addressed by capturing both student and academic staff perspectives on the changes in delivery mode. The study found that both groups generally recognised the benefits of Block Mode in creating a more focused and flexible learning experience. However, challenges such as increased workload and varying levels of support were noted. These insights provide valuable feedback for future improvements in the design of the delivery to ensure a balance of knowledge acquisition and assessment expectation to facilitate higher levels of student engagement and satisfaction within Block Mode.

Overall, this research confirms the potential of Block Mode as an innovative delivery model that enhances international students' academic success, satisfaction, and engagement. The findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on educational reform by providing evidence that Block Mode can offer a viable and holistic alternative to traditional educational delivery, particularly for diverse and international student populations. The research findings will support educators, policymakers, and higher education institutions in considering new approaches that enhance the postgraduate experience and improve educational outcomes.

In considering the current set of findings as contributing evidence to foster positive developments in the academic experience of international postgraduate students within a new design of delivery mode in higher education, an alignment can be drawn with Buck and Tyrrell's (2022) perspective that "being able to focus and immerse in well-structured and clearly mapped learning one module at a time supported those students juggling a multitude of demands" (p. 1089). The current research reinforces the value of Block Mode's immersive and concentrated learning environment, particularly for international students who face various academic and personal challenges. The insights gathered from this doctoral research not only contribute to enhancing the student learning experience but also provide a foundation for rethinking educational delivery models in a way that better accommodates diverse student needs in the evolving landscape of higher education.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Victoria University Ethics Approval (Study 1)

Saturday, November 13, 2021 at 15:06:35 Australian Eastern Daylight Time

Subject: Quest Ethics Notification - Application Process Finalised - Application Approved
Date: Friday, June 25, 2021 at 2:09:46 PM Australian Eastern Standard Time
From: quest.noreply@vu.edu.au
To: AnthonyWatt@vu.edu.au
CC: Chunxiao Liu

Dear PROF ANTHONY WATT,

Your ethics application has been formally reviewed and finalised.

- Application ID: HRE21-091
- Chief Investigator: PROF ANTHONY WATT
- Other Investigators:
- Application Title: How does Block Mode education impact on the experience of international students at Victoria University?
- Form Version: 13-07

The application has been accepted and deemed to meet the requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)' by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval has been granted for two (2) years from the approval date: 25/06/2021.

Continued approval of this research project by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) is conditional upon the provision of a report within 12 months of the above approval date or upon the completion of the project (if earlier). A report proforma may be downloaded from the Office for Research website at: http://research.vu.edu.au/hrec.php.

Please note that the Human Research Ethics Committee must be informed of the following: any changes to the approved research protocol, project timelines, any serious events or adverse and/or unforeseen events that may affect continued ethical acceptability of the project. In these unlikely events, researchers must immediately cease all data collection until the Committee has approved the changes. Researchers are also reminded of the need to notify the approving HREC of changes to personnel in research projects via a request for a minor amendment. It should also be noted that it is the Chief Investigators' responsibility to ensure the research project is conducted in line with the recommendations outlined in the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).'

On behalf of the Committee, I wish you all the best for the conduct of the project.

Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee
Phone: 9919 4781 or 9919 4461
Email: researchethics@vu.edu.au

This is an automated email from an unattended email address. Do not reply to this address.

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Appendix B: Initial Emails Sent to Potential Student Participants (Study 1)

Thursday, January 19, 2023 at 12:16:07 Australian Eastern Daylight Time

Subject: invitation to participate in an interview regarding your experience as a remote research student
Date: Friday, April 29, 2022 at 16:08:56 Australian Eastern Standard Time
From: Chunxiao Liu
To: [redacted]
CC: Anthony Watt
Attachments: INFO to participants (remote delivery program) chunxiao liu.docx

Hello [redacted],

How is your research study going? We had some classes together last year.

Hope you are keeping safe and well!

My name is Chunxiao LIU, and go by 'Joy'. I am a PhD student at Victoria University. I am currently contacting you as an international student that is involved in the remote delivery of a Master's by Research program at Victoria University to seek your support as study participant. We are hoping you will be interested in participating in an interview, during which I will ask you some questions about your experiences as an international research student studying remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Your involvement in this study will provide insightful information that may help enhance research programs for international students studying remotely. It may also contribute to streamline current processes to better support you as an international student, but also for the staff who are responsible for supervising your research. The significance of the current research may also contribute to the quality assurance cycle of improvement for research design and training at the university.

So, I would welcome your involvement and please email me on: Chunxiao.liu1@live.vu.edu.au if you are interested and happy to participate. I have included additional detail within the accompanying information to participation form.

I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Many thanks,
Joy (Chunxiao LIU)

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Appendix C: Information to Participants Involved in Research (Study 1)

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled '*How does Block Mode education impact on the experience of international students at Victoria University*'.

This project is being conducted by a student researcher, Chunxiao LIU, as part of a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) study at Victoria University (VU) under the supervision of Professor Anthony Watt and Professor Ian Solomonides from the College of Arts & Education.

Project explanation

This doctoral study aims to explore the student perceptions of factors that influence the academic experience of international students in post-graduate education program in Block Mode. In addition, the research will try to identify and reflect upon other factors influencing the academic experience of international post-graduate students enrolled in an education major. Data will be collected via zoom meeting interviews. We are seeking to assess students experience from academic performance, engagement in class, use of learning management system, and connection to unit content.

What will I be asked to do?

You have been asked to participate in this study as an international student who has finished a twelve-week traditional mode semester and at least one Block. You have been purposely selected to participate in this research project. Permission is being sought from you to be involved in a thirty to forty minutes interview regarding your course experience within both Block and traditional delivery modes. Participation within this study does not involve anything that students would not already be participating in as part of their regular assessment practices. After reading though the information provided here we would like you to consider your involvement and if you would like to be part of the research please sign and return the consent form to the student researcher.

What will I gain from participating?

You will not receive anything directly as a result of your participation in this study but will have the opportunity to provide insightful information that may help contribute new knowledge to the field of Block Mode Education. This research will add your personal voice to the international student experience of engaging in the postgraduate Block model. The significance of the current research for the proposed overall PhD program is that it may contribute to the quality assurance cycle of improvement for the Block Model delivery design.

How will the information I give be used?

The information will form the basis of the student researcher's thesis. The information may also be used to evaluate and validate the development of programs associated with Block Mode education. It will also be used to form the basis of journal papers and articles to communicate findings and recommendations to the education profession. The secure storage, transfer and destruction of your data will be undertaken in accordance with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research. We will keep relevant information for 5 years after the project is completed. After this time we will destroy all of your data.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

Risks to participants in this study are minimised through the use of procedures consistent with ethical research design and with adequate safeguards so that participants are not unnecessarily exposed to risk. If, as an outcome of involvement in the project, participants experience any continuing concerns due the unlikely event that the participation may stimulate personal discomfort, then participants may contact Dr Romana Morda. Dr Morda is a registered psychologist of Victoria University, who is available to discuss any issues that you would like to raise or share (9919 5223, romana.morda@vu.edu.au).

In the case where an adverse event may happen, participants will be asked if they wish to continue with the research and at all times have the opportunity to cease participation within the study. Participants will also be offered the opportunity to contact the Chief Investigator, Professor Anthony Watt for clarification of any issues or further information.

How will this project be conducted?

Participants will be invited by email, which will reiterate the project information. Consent will be confirmed again at the beginning of the interview.

Who is conducting the study?

Professor Anthony Watt
Chief Investigator
Victoria University
Tel: 03 9919 4119
Email: Anthony.Watt@vu.edu.au

Professor Ian Solomonides
Associate Investigator
Victoria University
Tel: +61438 216 603
Email: ian.solomonides1@gmail.com

Chunxiao Liu
Student Researcher
Victoria University
Tel: 0449 811 957
Email: Chunxiao.liu1@live.vu.edu.au

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator listed above.
If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix D: Consent Form for Participants Involved in Research (Study 1)

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:
We would like to invite you to be a part of a study into **the project under the title of How does Block Mode education impact on the experience of international students at Victoria University**

The study aims to explore the student perceptions of factors that influence the academic experience of international students in post-graduate education program. In addition, the research will try to identify and reflect upon other factors influencing the academic experience of international post-graduate students enrolled in a teaching degree.

CERTIFICATION BY PARTICIPANT

I, "[Click here & type participant's name]"
of "[Click here & type participant's suburb]"

certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study:
How does Block Mode education impact on the experience of international students at Victoria University being conducted at Victoria University by: **Prof Anthony Watt, Prof Ian Solomonides, and Miss Chunxiao Liu.**

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by:

Miss Chunxiao LIU

and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- **Participate in the interview(s) for 30 to 40 minutes**

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher
Prof Anthony Watt
+61450955497
Anthony.Watt@vu.edu.au

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix E: Victoria University Ethics Approval (Study 2 and 3)

Subject: Quest Ethics Notification - Application Process Finalised - Application Approved
Date: Wednesday, July 20, 2022 at 10:54:34 Australian Eastern Standard Time
From: quest.noreply@vu.edu.au
To: Anthony.Watt@vu.edu.au
CC: Chunxiao Liu, Ian.Solomonides@vu.edu.au

Dear PROF ANTHONY WATT,

Your ethics application has been formally reviewed and finalised.

» Application ID: HRE22-120
» Chief Investigator: PROF ANTHONY WATT
» Other Investigators: MISS Chunxiao LIU, PROF IAN SOLOMONIDES
» Application Title: International Postgraduate Students' Perspectives of their Scholarly Experiences at an Australian University
» Form Version: 13-07

The application has been accepted and deemed to meet the requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)' by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval has been granted for two (2) years from the approval date; 20/07/2022.

Continued approval of this research project by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) is conditional upon the provision of a report within 12 months of the above approval date or upon the completion of the project (if earlier). A report proforma may be downloaded from the Office for Research website at: http://research.vu.edu.au/hrec.php.

Please note that the Human Research Ethics Committee must be informed of the following: any changes to the approved research protocol, project timelines, any serious events or adverse and/or unforeseen events that may affect continued ethical acceptability of the project. In these unlikely events, researchers must immediately cease all data collection until the Committee has approved the changes. Researchers are also reminded of the need to notify the approving HREC of changes to personnel in research projects via a request for a minor amendment. It should also be noted that it is the Chief Investigators' responsibility to ensure the research project is conducted in line with the recommendations outlined in the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).'

On behalf of the Committee, I wish you all the best for the conduct of the project.

Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee
Phone: 9919 4781 or 9919 4461
Email: researchethics@vu.edu.au

Appendix F: Information to Participants Involved in Research (Study 2)

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled '*International Postgraduate Students' Perspectives of their Scholarly Experiences at an Australian University*.

This project is being conducted by Professor Anthony Watt, Professor Ian Solomonides and student researcher Chunxiao LIU, as part of a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) study at Victoria University (VU).

Project explanation

The proposed purpose of this research is to examine key characteristics of the teaching and learning experiences of international postgraduate students studying at an Australian university. The researchers will consider the perceptions of two stakeholder groups: international students, and academics, with particular regard to the successes and challenges of managing student academic performance and satisfaction in Masters level coursework programs..

What will I be asked to do?

You have been invited to participate in this research project because of your work as a lecturer working with international students undertaking postgraduate coursework at Victoria University. Permission is being sought from you to be involved in a 30-40 minute interview regarding your experience with the remote delivery of a research course to international students. Students will be offered the opportunity to participate in an individual interview of 30-40 minutes. The Zoom platform will be used and audio recording of the interview will be completed. After reading the information provided here, we would like you to consider your participation. Participants will be given the choice of a consent form to sign and return or a digital voice recording at the start of the interview to the designated researcher.

What will I gain from participating?

Your participation in this study will provide insightful information that may help enhance research programs for international students studying remotely. It may also contribute to streamline current processes to better support, not only international students, but staff who are responsible for implementing support. The significance of the current research may also contribute to the quality assurance cycle of improvement for research design and training at the university.

How will the information I give be used?

The information will form the basis of a report that will be used to evaluate current research programs delivered remotely. It will also be used to form the basis of a doctoral thesis, journal papers and articles to communicate findings and recommendations to the education profession. The secure storage, transfer and destruction of your data will be undertaken in accordance with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research. We will keep relevant information for at least 5 years after the project is completed. After this time we will destroy all of your data.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

Risks to participants in this study are deemed to be low-risk and consistent with ethical research design and with adequate safeguards so that participants are not unnecessarily exposed to risk. If you experience, as an outcome of involvement in this study, any continuing concerns or personal discomfort, then participants may contact Dr Romana Morda, a registered psychologist of Victoria University. She is available to discuss any issues that you would like to raise

or share (9919 5223, romana.morda@vu.edu.au). We anticipate that international student interviews will take place AEST Mon-Fri between 2pm-5pm, while academic and staff interviews and small/focus groups will occur Mon-Fri between 9am-5pm.

Participants have the opportunity to withdraw consent at any time, and are offered the opportunity to contact the Chief Investigators, Professor Anthony Watt, Professor Anne-Marie Hede or Dr Gabriella Pretto for clarification of any issues or further information.

How will this project be conducted?

Participants will be invited by email, which will reiterate the project information. Consent will be confirmed again via email at the request of the participant, or at the beginning of the interview/small group session.
The project will be conducted using Zoom platform.

Who is conducting the study?

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Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator listed above.
If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix G: Consent Form for Participants Involved in Research (Study 2)

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:
We would like to invite you to be a part of a study into **the project under the title of International Postgraduate Students' Perspectives of their Scholarly Experiences at an Australian University**

The proposed purpose of this research is to examine key characteristics of the teaching and learning experiences of international postgraduate students studying at an Australian university. The researchers will consider the perceptions of two stakeholder groups: international students, and academics, with particular regard to the successes and challenges of managing student academic performance and satisfaction in Masters level coursework programs.

CERTIFICATION BY PARTICIPANT

I, "[Click here & type participant's name]"
of "[Click here & type participant's suburb]"

certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study:
International Postgraduate Students' Perspectives of their Scholarly Experiences at an Australian University
being conducted at Victoria University by: **Professor Anthony Watt, Professor Ian Solomonides and student researcher Chunxiao LIU, as part of a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) study at Victoria University (VU).**

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by:

Miss Chunxiao LIU

and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- **Participate in the interview(s) for 30 to 60 minutes**

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher
Prof Anthony Watt
+61450955497
Anthony.Watt@vu.edu.au

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix H: Summary of Quantitative Analysis Techniques

Data Analysis Techniques				Phase 1 USG (Academic Success)			Phase 2
				Analysis 1 USG-P/F	Analysis 2 USG-M	Analysis 3 USG-GD	Analysis 4 SEUR (Student Satisfaction)
				nominal, categorical-no direction	Interval-scale	nominal, categorical	Ordinal-Likert scale, categorical mean score
Cross Tabulation	Frequencies	Descriptive parametric	*n*, %	√		√	
Chi-Square	Independence Test (measures difference)	Inferential, non-parametric	X^2, *df*, *p*	√	√	√	
Cramér's *V*	Effect Size of chi-square (measures association)	Inferential, non-parametric	*V*	√	√	√	
Univariate oneway ANOVA, General Linear Model (GLM)	Estimated Marginal Means F-statistic and Partial Eta Squared Effect Size	Descriptive parametric	*n*, *M*, *SD* *df*, *F*, *p*, η^2		√		
Oneway ANOVA	Compare Means of Groups (measures difference)	Descriptive parametric	*n*, *M*, *SD*				√
Kruskal-Walls	Significance (measures association)	Inferential, non-parametric	*n*, *H*, *df*, *p*				√
Kruskal-Walls	Pairwise Comparisons of Groups	Inferential, non-parametric	*p*				√
Mann-Whitney U	Pairwise Comparisons of Groups	Inferential, non-parametric	*n*, *z*, *p*				√
post hoc	Pairwise Comparisons of Groups	Inferential, non-parametric	*p*		√		√