

FACULTY AND ESL STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC LINGUISTIC
AND CULTURAL PREPAREDNESS: EXPLORING EFFECTIVE TEACHING
PRACTICES FOR ACADEMIC ESL STUDENTS

by

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M.Ed Thompson Rivers University, 2013

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Education
in
Leadership

Thompson Rivers University

Spring Convocation 2013

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank all of the student and faculty participants who contributed to my thesis research. I appreciate the time they took out of their busy lives to share their experiences with me.

Secondly, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Jim Hu. I owe Jim a huge thank-you. He guided me throughout this entire process. His background knowledge of relevant literature and experiences in the field and the countless hours he spent carefully reviewing my drafts have been invaluable in the completion of this thesis.

To Dr. Gloria Ramirez, thank you for your sound advice during the final stages of my thesis draft.

I would also like to thank the instructors who played an integral role during my M.Ed coursework including Dr. Patrick Walton, Dr. Carol Rees, and Dr. Jack Miller, just to name a few.

Finally, a special thanks goes to my spouse Jeremy Bates. His constant support and encouragement gave me the strength and confidence to further my education.

ABSTRACT

This thesis reports on a mixed-methods research study based on faculty and English as a Second Language (ESL) students' perceptions of ESL students' linguistic and cultural preparedness for academics in a Canadian university. Research has shown dramatic differences between English for academic purposes (EAP) and academic disciplines in environments, instructional approaches, and faculty expectations and reported on the challenges and needs of ESL students in academic programs; however, only limited research has investigated how academic instructors can adapt to better meet the needs of ESL students.

By surveying and interviewing first-year undergraduate ESL students and interviewing academic faculty, this project examines the gaps in ESL students' academic skills and cultural knowledge. In addition, the study considers implications for current teaching practices and recommends ways in which academic faculty and the institution can better support ESL students. The research questions were: (a) How do teachers in the undergraduate programs perceive the linguistic preparedness of ESL students in their undergraduate courses? (b) How do ESL students who are enrolled in first year academic courses perceive their linguistic preparedness for their current field of study? (c) What are effective teaching practices instructors can use in the academic programs of universities to support ESL students? and (d) Which are the factors involved in the success of ESL students in their undergraduate courses?

Based on the results of a mixed-methods methodology, I offer implications for teaching, and provide a number of recommendations to improve the quality of instruction. I offer recommendations around the following themes: online resources (e.g. Moodles for courses); communication and relationship building (e.g. group work, marks for participation, and office hour conferencing); time constraints; language and cultural support services; and admission requirements. The recommendations are based on an analysis of findings in the study and literature reviewed. Furthermore, I suggest ways to improve policy and practice in institutional and faculty development. Finally, I suggest issues and areas for further research.

KEYWORDS

Academic literacy, ESL, ESL students, Academic culture

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

1.1 Research Problem

This project examines the gaps in ESL students' academic skills, and how academic faculty and the institution can better support ESL students.

Research has shown dramatic differences between English for academic purposes (EAP) and academic disciplines in environments, instructional approaches, and faculty expectations (e.g., Benedetti et al., 2012; Leki & Carson, 1997) and reported on the challenges and needs of ESL students in academic programs (e.g., Hu, 2010; Intersegmental Committee, 2002; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). Preliminary data collected from THE UNIVERSITY'S Student Records and Institutional Planning and Analysis (IPA) department, affirm that English as a Second Language (ESL) first-year English failure rates are as high as 16%. Faculty participants confirmed that some sections fail up to 50% of their ESL students.

Little research has been done to explore the transition of ESL students into their undergraduate programs; furthermore, only limited research has investigated how academic instructors can adapt to better meet the needs of ESL students. In order to contribute to research in the field, this thesis attempts to start filling the gap by seeking to produce a broad analysis of the adequacy of programs offered at Canadian universities and the relevancy of teacher practice employed to support ESL students transitioning into mainstream English academics.

1.2 Rationale and Context of the Study

This thesis reports on a study of faculty perspectives on ESL student preparedness for academics and effective practices of academic faculty to support ESL students at a Canadian university. In addition, I will report on the experiences and perspectives of ESL undergraduate students enrolled in first year academics. Additionally, I will report on experiences of three ESL graduate students enrolled in their subsequent or concurrent semester of study in the university's EAP program.

Research argues that ESL students may not have the English language proficiency or cultural confidence to be successful in first year academics immediately out of high school or EAP programs (Roessingh, 1999). Furthermore, research affirms that, in order to gain the language proficiency for English academics, which includes: abstract content often loaded with cultural references, symbolism and metaphors. For sufficient understanding and control of English academic language, ESL students require a minimum of five years training with the English language (Cheng, Myles & Curtis, 2004; Leki & Carson, 1994; Roessingh, 1999). The purpose of this study is to explore the academic preparedness of ESL students at the university under study and to examine the effectiveness of teaching practices employed by academic faculty at the university in supporting these students.

The research took place at a small, urban Canadian university with an approximate on-campus student population of 13,000. Students from more than sixty countries attend the university, which allowed for a diverse research population to obtain results from. The university under study has an enrolment of ESL students, which makes up 12% of the total student population, is growing by an average rate of 18% annually (BCHEADset, 2013; Kunin, 2009). Some researchers in the field argue that international students have not acquired the level of language proficiency needed, and a lack of cultural background knowledge¹ hinders their comprehension of textbook content (Bifuh-Ambe, 2009; Schmitt, 2012).

1.3 Research Questions

The main purpose of this study is to explore a) the academic preparedness of ESL students studying at a Canadian university, in particular, how do students and faculty perceive ESL students' linguistic and cultural preparedness in comparison to their native English speaking (NES) classmates; and b) strategies that can be adopted to better meet the needs of ESL students. The research questions are broken down into four topic areas:

¹ Cultural background knowledge is defined as a person's understanding of his/her historical, educational, political, religious, and social traditions, etc, in a given country from a broad perspective. (Oxford, 2013).

- (a) How do teachers in the undergraduate programs perceive the linguistic preparedness of ESL students in their undergraduate courses?
- (b) How do ESL students who are enrolled in first year academic courses perceive their linguistic preparedness for their current field of study?
- (c) What are effective teaching practices instructors can use in the academic programs universities to support ESL students?
- (d) Which are the factors involved in the success of ESL students in their undergraduate courses?

1.4 Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this thesis, I wish to clarify the definitions of the following terms:

Academic course, or field of study, is a branch of knowledge that is taught and researched at the college or university level.

Academic language preparedness: a) the student is linguistically qualified to be in first-year academic courses; i.e., the listening, speaking and writing skills do not hinder their success in first-year academic courses; and, b) the student is able to complete undergraduate course assignments (e.g., essays, summaries, and exam questions) with a passing mark (e.g., 50% for ENGL 1100). Based on the data collected and the literature review, I will offer a practical analysis and recommendations for professionals in the field of academics.

Culture refers to “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group;” It also includes “the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place” (Merriam-Webster, 2013).

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) refers to “the teaching of English for people who are using English for study, but whose first language is not English” (Oxford, 2013).

Instructor refers to a teacher who teaches at a post-secondary institution

Mentor refers to a faculty member who mentors undergraduate and/or graduate students outside of the classroom, and who is committed to encouraging the students to explore, inquire and engage in new knowledge creation by providing meaningful guidance and support to the students that extends above and beyond the classroom experience.

Support services refers to the volunteers or paid staff employed by the support services. This includes faculty members and students who have special knowledge or skill in an area relevant to studies at an university. In this thesis, the term primarily refers to the Writing Centre. It does not include the ESL faculty in the ESL Department who are the assigned instructors of ESAL courses.

1.5 Limitations of the Thesis

As the person conducting the interviews, I brought a certain bias to the process. As a native English speaker, I have not experienced studying in an international program in a second or additional language. Furthermore, as a trained and experienced teacher of ESL, elementary education and special education, my bias is towards a communicative and interactive style of teaching. My only experience with lecture-style is as a student, not as a professor. Because of this, I am more critical of large class sizes and lecture-style teaching methods. Additionally, having taught within both an institution (School District

#58) that has strict curriculum guidelines and assessment tools and one (TRU World and TRU ESTr) that allows for more flexibility and teacher autonomy for curriculum outcomes, I can see benefits and drawbacks for both methods. Finally, being a female interviewer, I may have affected the outcome of the participants' answers. Gender can affect the level of comfort one may have when discussing personal opinions. This is evident in the research on culture and intercultural communications (Holmes, 2004; Huang & Brown, 2009; Ishii, et. al., 2009; Jackson, 2002).

The participants in this study could potentially limit the results. For example, despite attempts to contact all the educational departments and faculties at the university, only three departments responded affirmatively to an interview. Consequently, the conclusions drawn are limited to populations similar to the participants. In addition, the student survey was voluntary; thus, those students who chose to respond to survey questions may have a certain bias. Fortunately, the large number of participants for the survey provided additional measures of reliability and validity to the results because I was able to draw from students representing thirteen nationalities and a minimum of seven programs of study. The quantity and diversity of the data collected will account for significant outliers if they appear.

Finally, one of the goals of this study was to explore undergraduate ESL students' perceptions of language preparedness for academics. Due to a lack of student participant volunteers for one-on-one interviews, I chose to include survey and interview results from three graduate students. These graduate students (see Figure 2: student participants A, F and G) were enrolled in a Masters of Education program at the university under study, which required them to take an Academic Writing course as part of the EAP program at the university. The graduate students had been residing in Canada for less than one year at the time of the interviews. Because the students were enrolled in both EAP and academic courses, the experience of transitioning from EAP to academics was fresh in their minds. Furthermore, the survey and interview results were not significantly different than results collected from the undergraduate students.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

Above, I have stated the research problem, given justifications for the study, outlined the research questions, defined a key term, and highlighted limitations of the thesis.

In Chapter 2, I review relevant literature in the field of ESL language acquisition and cultural factors affecting academic success. I cover topics including: economic impact of international students attending the university; admission requirements; intercultural communication; communication in reference to student-teacher and ESL student and native English speaking (NES) student relationships; language support services; and teaching practices. After reviewing the literature and gaining a better understanding of what has been achieved, I comment on the areas in which further research is worth conducting.

In Chapter 3, I outline the research process explaining the value of a mixed-methods approach in which I employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods. I describe the process in which the study evolved and the participants involved. I include a profile of student and faculty participants. The student profiles include gender, nationality, and field of studies. The faculty profiles include gender, years of teaching experiences, field of teaching and the number of ESL students they are currently teaching, qualifications, and highest academic degree achieved. I conclude with the procedures for data analysis.

In Chapter 4, I analyze the data collected; in addition, I interpreted faculty and student perceptions of academic linguistic preparedness. I compared the findings with relevant research. Topics explored include: academic writing skills, academic course assignments, academic instructors, grading policies, cultural influences, student participation, and language support services. I compared faculty and student responses to similar questions to find similarities and differences in perceptions of ESL students' academic abilities. I offered a number of explanations for some ESL student behaviors and provided recommendations to improve teacher practices.

In Chapter 5, I summarize the data collected, offer implications for teaching, and supply a number of recommendations to improve the quality of instruction. I offer recommendations around the following themes: online resources; communication and relationship building; time constraints; language and cultural support services; and admission requirements. The recommendations are based on a theoretical analysis of findings in the study and literature reviewed. I suggest ways to improve policy and practice in institutional and faculty development. I end the thesis by suggesting issues and areas for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter I review the literature, which is relevant to the field of research of ESL learning in academics. Specifically, I review research on ESL linguistic skills in academics; discipline-specific discourse in relation to sheltered classes and content-based instruction; adjunct support; language benchmarks and admission requirements; intercultural communication; economic impact of international student enrollment; linguistic support services; and, academic needs and student motivation² of ESL learners. All these themes play a role in the academic success of ESL students. This chapter is broken down into the following categories: 1) economic impact of international student enrollment, 2) admission requirements, 3) intercultural communication, 4) communication, 5) language support services, 6) teaching practices, and 7) summary and gaps in the research.

2.1 Economic Impact of International Student Enrollment

With advancements in technology, the global community is connecting in more ways than ever before. Cultures around the world are placing a greater emphasis on international business and communication; thus, the English language is becoming increasingly popular. English-speaking countries and their universities are capitalizing on this trend. The Canadian university chosen for this study is making a name for itself in British Columbia as having one of the highest enrollments of international students among the six public research universities in the province (BCHEADset, 2013; Kunin and Associates, Inc., 2009). In addition, the university's enrollment of ESL students, which makes up 12 percent of the total student population, is growing (BCHEADset, 2013; Kunin and Associates, Inc., 2009). The increase in student population and tuition allows for more competitive recruitment of faculty and the establishment of quality programs, which are offered to the entire student body. In fact, as part of the final report, the then President of the university, highlighted the value of international student

² Motivation is defined as the driving force or influencing factors for a student's educational choices (Merriam-Webster, 2013).

enrollment at the university by saying, “International Engagement opens the door to a wide range of economic, cultural, and scholarly exchange – an interchange that only becomes more vibrant and more necessary in our increasingly interconnected global society. Internationalization, therefore, is a pathway to global citizenship for both our institution and our students” (Kunin and Associates, Inc., 2009, p. 41).

The *Economic Impact of International Education in Canada* final report presented to Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canada, in 2009 highlighted the economic benefits of international students studying in Canada and at the university. The report claims that over ten million dollars in international tuition and fee revenue was brought to the university in 2005/2006 (Kunin and Associates, Inc., 2009). With an average growth rate of 18 percent and the residual effects of housing costs, staff hiring, and general spending in the community, international students play a significant role in the growth of Kamloops. To continue drawing students and supporting this lucrative business in a competitive market, we must continually reflect on best teaching practices.

2.2 Admission Requirements

Recruiting international students to Canadian universities may be a lucrative project but, in order to maintain quality instruction and high standards for native-English speaking students, the admissions process for international students must be based on fair and accurate judgments of students’ academic preparedness. Current admission requirements include Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test scores. What these tests lack, argues Diane Schmit on behalf of UK university staff members, “is any direct method for determining whether or not prospective students’ previous experience of educational practice or culture has prepared them for the approaches to study required of students in British universities” (Schmitt, 2012, p. 1). With this in mind, we must consider the quality of the Accuplacer tests, which are used by secondary institutions including the university under study. It is important to determine the level of proficiency ESL students have when they transition into mainstream academics. Some researchers in the field

argue that international students have not acquired the level of language proficiency needed for enrollment in academic courses, and a lack of cultural background knowledge hinders their comprehension of textbook content. In an ongoing study, the joint ESL-English Articulation Project on behalf of the BC ESL Articulation Committee and the BC English Articulation Committee is working to align ESL articulation levels with Canadian language benchmarks (Ostler, Sheldrake, Vogel & West, 2008). The project has identified a significant problem associated with establishing a base-line entry-level language requirement considering the diverse backgrounds of ESL students, their training, and language competency. Joint research funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England investigated the educational practices of international students from China, India and Greece. They discovered major differences in the cultures' concepts towards teachers, collaborative study, referencing and use of resources (HEFCE, 2007). Recently, there has been progress in the area of developing more rigorous test methods with the increased use of the *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000* (CLB website: language.ca). The following professions have applied the CLB within British Columbia: Engineering and Applied Technologies Project for Internationally-trained Engineers and Technologists and the Five Occupational Sectors Curriculum Project through Camosun College. Unfortunately, university courses and programs have not yet been benchmarked as of 2008 (Ostler, Sheldrake, Vogel & West, 2008). Therefore, more research needs to be done in this area, in particular looking at a wide range of post-secondary programs.

2.3 Intercultural Communication

We must also consider the role culture plays in education. At the cost of generalizing, we can categorize the world into two cultural domains: east and west. The eastern worldview (Eastern and Southern Asia including Korea, China, Japan, India and others) can be described as polytheistic; in other words, life is circular (Ishii, Klopff, & Cooke, 1999). In direct contrast, the western worldview is monotheistic; in other words, everything is headed towards something – an individual's actions will have some payoff

in the end (Ishii, Klopff, & Cooke, 1999). We can see where these worldviews collide with the co-mingling of business and nature. One side yearns to develop and conquer while the other reveres Mother Nature. Furthermore, western culture is individualistic whereas the east is collectivist (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2006). In the classroom, we can see the two worldviews at odds, where the collectivist ideals of civic responsibility and equality meet individualistic autonomy (Hu, 2009; Jackson, 2002; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000; Rubenstein, 2006). For example, contemporary Chinese education is characterized by memorization, rote learning, and repetition whereas Western education is generally described as knowledge constructed or co-constructed through a process of questioning, problem solving, and critical thinking (Holmes, 2004; Huang & Brown, 2009). In many Chinese classrooms “children are expected to show effort, be respectful of knowledge and authoritative sources, and demonstrate behavioural reform. Student-teacher interpersonal relationships are hierarchical. Communications tend to be indirect” (Holmes, 2004, p. 296). There is significant value placed on adherence to group norms and retaining harmony among social groups. In a recent study conducted at a business university in Hong Kong, Chinese students attributed their lack of participation in class discussions to a preference for harmony; they were reluctant to have the instructor “lose face” if they disagreed (Campbell, 2007; Huang & Brown, 2009; Jackson, 2002; Tani, 2009). This is common among Asian students whose Confucian belief system emphasizes harmony. On the other hand, the western model of education is more direct and explicit. The learning is “holistic, interactive, cooperative and diversified emphasizing critical thinking, real time evaluation, hands-on experience and overall education quality” (Holmes, 2004, p. 296). Students can be seen readily volunteering answers, commenting, interrupting, criticizing, and asking questions. University professors in Canada expect student involvement. In some cases, teachers request student involvement in the decision-making process of course content. It is easy to see how difficult it may be for a student from China transitioning into western academics. A recent report presented to Foreign Affairs of Canada confirmed that international students at the university under study primarily come

from China, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand (BCHEADset, 2013; Kunin and Associates, Inc., 2009), thus confirming the pertinence of research on students from these areas. Ethnic Chinese students are an increasingly significant presence in Western university business programs and a recent study's findings indicated that these students were not prepared for the dialogic nature of classroom communication, which created difficulties in listening, understanding and interacting (Holmes, 2004; Huang & Brown, 2009; Tani, 2005).

Along this same line, it is important to consider the perceived role of the student and the teacher in the classroom. In a recent study conducted at the University of Tasmania, Australia, faculty perceived students' learning problems as linked to difficulty in taking responsibility for their own learning (Robertson, et. al., 2000). In addition, research has shown that faculty view international students' lack of participation in lectures as "lazy" (Arkoudis, S. & Tran, L., 2010; Robertson et.al., 2006). Furthermore, in a study conducted at the University of Melbourne, faculty attributed students' lack of participation in class discussions to their inadequate understanding of course content and terminology (Arkoudis, S. & Tran, L., 2010). In contrast, in a different study, students attributed their lack of understanding to the instructors' use of colloquial language during lectures (Robertson et. al., 2000). The most common reaction of Chinese students is fear and anxiety; they are "more anxious about being the centre of attention... and worried about the value of their points" (Jackson, 2002, p. 74). Some Chinese students feel that a lack of time to process questions, formulate an answer and translate it into English forces them to give brief, simple answers (Campbell, 2005; Huang & Brown, 2009; Jackson, 2002). There is no doubt that worldviews and cultural values play significant roles in a student's learning.

2.4 Communication

Research has shown that frequent communication between international students and their course instructors both inside and outside of class time can have positive effects (Friesen & Saevi, 2012; Hu, 2000; Wiltse, 2011). Based on two prominent studies in the

field, in particular Wiltse (2011) and Friesen and Saevi (2012), the student-teacher relationship was seen as paramount in establishing academic confidence and self-awareness for the learner. In addition, Hu (2009) examined the student-teacher relationship and found that close relationships translated into motivation. As part of a study conducted at one Australian university, students confirmed that the cost of tuition and feelings of isolation ranked highest amongst their problems (Robertson et. al., 2000). Psycholinguistic theories of language acquisition argue that social and personal characteristics such as attitude, motivation, attention and communicative competence affect the success of language acquisition (Bifuh-Ambe, 2009; Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Student motivation has been identified as one of the most powerful tools for success in learning English for academic purposes (Bifuh-Ambe, 2009; Lightbown and Spada 2006).

Research to date is especially critical of the lecture practices of faculty in English academic learning (Huang, 2006; Huang & Brown, 2009; Robertson et. al., 2000). Among the English skills native English speaking students more readily acquire is the knowledge of slang, idioms and colloquial language. The amount that these phrases are spoken by instructors during lectures can negatively affect the success rate of international students. Furthermore, the speed and volume of delivery by the instructor play a large part in international students' comprehension of a lecture (Robertson et. al., 2000; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). This is an important area of study because it raises awareness about lecture delivery in a diverse classroom of learners and will affect the successful transition of ESL students into mainstream academics. To add to this, studies have shown that international students often have difficulty deciphering instructors' comments on student work (Woodward-Kron, 2007; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). Fortunately, one study has shown that, as students become more aware of their instructor's organizational design, they can more easily select important information and make predictions about where the lecture is heading (Huang, 2006).

2.5 Language Support Services

If we consider the factors that support a positive transition into undergraduate programs at a university, a mentor provides the custom support that individuals can benefit from. For this study, a mentor refers to a faculty member who mentors undergraduates outside of the classroom, and who is committed to encouraging undergraduate students to explore, inquire and engage in new knowledge creation by providing meaningful guidance and support to students that extends above and beyond the classroom experience. A mentor can act as a go-between for the international student and the instructor. This may alleviate some of the students' pressure and feelings of isolation. Unfortunately, recent studies have shown that international students typically do not access the support services available to them (Arkoudis, S. & Tran, L., 2010). Research has shown that family and friends are the most preferred source of contact and support for ESL students (Zhai, 2004). As part of this research project, it was important to discover the relevancy of the support services offered at the university under study for international students. For this study, support services refers to the volunteers or paid staff employed by the support services. This includes faculty members and students who have mastered the relevant area of introductory study at the university. This does not include the ESL faculty in the ESL Department who are the assigned instructors of ESAL courses.

Research has shown that some instructors are critical of language support services offered at universities. For this study, instructor refers to university professors assigned to teach within one or more of the faculties and disciplines at a university. These instructors have completed Masters and/or doctorate degrees. Research recognizes that some instructors argue that the support staff does not have the skills to give advice on language and discourse organization issues unique to the students' chosen discipline (Arkoudis & Tran, 2010; Baik & Greig, 2009; Woodward-Kron, 2007).

One research study, which looked at first-year architecture students in an ESL intervention program, found that the students highly valued a discipline-specific approach

to language and academic skills and that, with regular participation, their grades improved (Baik & Greig, 2009; Pawan & Ortloff, 2011; Roessingh, 1999). In addition to adding discipline specific training, adjunct or bridge courses can also be used to support ESL students in their transition to academics with practice leading class discussions, giving presentations, small group discussion, writing longer essays, and forming opinions (Cheng, et. al., 2004). Carson and Leki (1997) argue that “it is with the sheltered support of EAP writing classes that NNSs [non-native speaking students] can best struggle with accurately interpreting and representing in writing new realities and making them their own” (p. 65). Cheng, Myles and Curtis (2004) discovered that only a few ESL students commented on difficulties with academic reading unless they had changed their major and were less familiar with the subject matter of their new courses. Students mentioned that the discipline-specific literature was time-consuming to read because they were forced to read slowly and re-read the material several times (Cheng, et. al., 2004).

A university can offer incredible language support services, but if international students are not aware of what is available to them, they will seek out help where they are most comfortable: family and friends. Zhai (2004) suggests universities offer quality orientation programs for international students, which address academic and cultural differences, and offers activities to increase interaction between international and domestic students. Zhai (2004) also recommends universities offer the following programs and activities to support ESL students on campus: academic orientation, cultural orientation, interaction with domestic students, arrange formal meetings with faculty, ESL tutoring program, and add international perspectives to curriculum.

2.6 Teaching Practices

Research has shown that there exists a lack of collaboration amongst faculty members in and across departments (Arkoudis, S. & Tran, L., 2010; Cheng, et. al., 2004; Giridharan & Robson, 2011; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). The sharing of resources could lead to better teaching practices and therefore it is important to explore this issue further. Students in this study commented on the confusion of assignment criteria. Despite the

fact that the university under study hosts the Teaching Practice Colloquium annually, a forum for sharing ideas, there may be value in establishing a standard system and method of sharing materials within each faculty or school.

Additionally, there exists a discrepancy across disciplines and within departments regarding the breakdown of grading and the percentages going towards content versus language (i.e. mechanics, grammar, vocabulary, etc.). Grading breakdown is a key issue we must examine when looking at the preparedness of ESL students for academics. When students are losing a considerable portion of their grade to language, but maintain a high level of content knowledge, they are not linguistically prepared for academic course work; however, grammar skills might not be the only hindrance to overall success. Leki and Carson (1994) found that 44% of ESL students, when commenting on content course writing tasks referred to: knowing the material, being able to supply relevant details in their written answers, and selecting the most important material, as primary components of writing tasks. Whereas 22% of faculty surveyed were looking for rhetorical skill – including the ability to organize writing and to write clearly; additionally, 16% of faculty indicated that language proficiency (specifically grammar and wording) was important (Leki & Carson, 1994). Arkoudis and Tran (2010) in their research refer to “the lack of guidance to assist lecturers in their efforts to teach international students and a lack of clear policy guidelines at a systemic level” (p. 170). This reinforces the need for departments and faculty within the departments to develop consistent and clear teaching standards.

At the University of Melbourne in Australia, there is not a standardized assessment tool for marking assignments in any of the faculties (Arkoudis, S. & Tran, L., 2010). The study recognized that there was a miscommunication about the clarity of assessment and assignment criteria. While lecturers felt they had provided clear and objective guidelines, students felt the criteria were vague (Arkoudis, S. & Tran, L., 2010). The same study showed that faculty course planning lacked the integration of disciplinary and language learning (Arkoudis, S. & Tran, L., 2010). This further emphasizes the need

to raise awareness about effective teaching strategies for faculty in the undergraduate programs.

ESL students have unique linguistic and cultural needs, which are often overlooked once they have completed their high school English or EAP training and have transitioned into academics. Research has shown that ESL students often lack independent strategies for advancing their English language proficiency (Cheng, et. al., 2004). Zhu & Flaitz (2005) conducted a study using focus groups to better understand international students' academic language needs. The study revealed that students perceived language needs in the areas of: listening, essay writing, and group work (Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). More specifically, students expressed difficulties in listening to long lectures; additionally: "1) simultaneously juggling listening and note-taking, 2) understanding special terminology, and 3) understanding idiomatic expressions and classroom procedures" (Zhu & Flaitz, 2005, p. 4) were perceived as one of the most difficult aspects of academic studies. Concerning essay writing, students highlighted three areas of concern: 1) the need for and their lack of experience with writing longer essays/papers, 2) their difficulty with organizing the paper and with using the academic register, and 3) their need to learn how to use appropriate format" (Zhu & Flaitz, 2005, p. 4). Finally, to address the third area of difficulty, students remarked on their difficulties with participation in group and class discussions: "1) they needed time to process questions and others' comments and think of responses, 2) they feared producing grammatically inaccurate speech and asking inappropriate questions which would distract others, and 3) they lacked experience competing for turns in on-going discussions" (Zhu & Flaitz, 2005, p. 4).

Research presents different teaching methods to better meet the needs of ESL students which can be applied in academics and which also benefit domestic students. Giridharan and Robson (2011) recommend the process approach, which "centres around writing activities that engage learners in the process of writing, such as generation of ideas, drafting, revising, editing, etc... The process approach focuses on cognitive strategies that can be applied to writing tasks" (Giridharan & Robson, 2011, p. 3). An

important component of this teaching method is the quality of instructor feedback, the research states that “the quality of feedback provided to students play a critical role in further advancing students’ academic writing skills” (Giridharan & Robson, 2011, p. 3). In addition, research recommends that instructors set assignments early in the semester in order to give students feedback early on in order to influence future writing (Arkoudis & Tran, 2010). Furthermore, research suggests giving both oral and written comments on students’ writing assignments (Arkoudis & Tran, 2010).

Giridharan and Robson (2011) criticize typical academic writing evaluations because they tend to focus only on the product of writing rather than the process of pre-writing, writing and revision. They argue that students need the skills to evaluate their own writing and that “the failure to recognize or evaluate own work prove to delay the academic writing learning process. Learners must be able to draw conclusions about their own writing abilities so that they develop the ability to cope with the demands of academic writing in genres of disciplines as they progress in their courses” (Giridharan & Robson, 2011, p. 9).

2.7 Summary and Gaps in the Research

In conclusion, many factors affect the overall success of ESL students transitioning into first year academics. Not all of these factors involve English language proficiency. Nor are ESL students able to control all of the factors acting upon them during their academic years. Ultimately, it is a combination of student motivation, instructors’ teaching practices, language supports as provided by post secondary institutions and cultural awareness on the part of classmates, faculty, and the ESL students themselves.

Little research has been done to explore the transition of ESL students into their undergraduate programs. Research has shown dramatic differences between English for academic purposes (EAP) and academic disciplines in environments, instructional approaches, and faculty expectations (e.g., Benedetti et al., 2012; Leki & Carson, 1997) and reported on the challenges and needs of ESL students in academic programs (e.g., Hu, 2010; Intersegmental Committee, 2002; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). However, only limited

research has investigated how academic instructors can adapt to better meet the needs of ESL students. This research project attempts to fill the gap by seeking to produce a broad analysis of the adequacy of programs offered at the university under study to support ESL students transitioning into mainstream academics.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter I provide a rationale for employing a mixed-methods approach to data collection. Then I explain the process of data collection and how the study developed. The process will be broken down into categories: 1) quantitative research, 2) qualitative research, 3) data collection, 4) participants, 5) procedures, 6) additional data collection, 7) preparing the data, and 8) data analysis. In order to seek a broad and yet in-depth understanding of faculty and student perceptions of ESL students' linguistic preparedness in the undergraduate disciplines, this study will follow a mixed-methods (Creswell, 2012) design incorporating triangulation (Creswell, 2012) : survey of ESL students, in-depth interviews with ESL students and academic faculty, and secondary data analysis of ESL student records. The qualitative component of this project aims to uncover the participants' perspective and interpretation of their own experiences. The combination of secondary data, surveys, and interviews will allow for analysis of trends and themes in the data and will enrich the results, producing strong evidence for the conclusions that will be drawn.

3.1 Quantitative Research

The function of the quantitative research surrounding ESL students in this project, i.e. the secondary data analysis and questionnaire, is to look at a large, representative sample of population. Creswell (2012) defines quantitative research describing a trend as it appears in numeric data. It allows the researcher to find relationships among the variables and to then interpret results by comparing them with prior predictions and past research. The survey will allow me to gather information from a significant number of willing ESAL 0580 Academic Writing graduates in their subsequent years of academics at a Canadian university. The quantitative data analysis component of this project will look at university Student Records to compare Winter 2012 and Summer 2012 ENGL 1100 grades of ESL students with their ESAL 0580 (Academic Writing) grades. The purpose of this analysis is to gauge the gap between achievement levels in ESL programs and academic undergraduate programs. If there is a large gap between grades, I can

assume that there is also a gap between EAP and first-year academic standards. In addition, the literature review will show how the findings relate to other research in the field.

3.2 Qualitative Research

The function of qualitative research surrounding faculty and students in this project was (a) to provide an interpretive, naturalistic (Creswell, 2012) approach to the subject matter; (b) to explore the participants' meaning and understanding of their experiences; (c) to provide for an inductive approach to build concepts and hypotheses which can inform academic instructors and post-secondary institutions; and (d) for the researcher to function as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Qualitative research shows concern for context (i.e., social, political and cultural influences affect the data). The goal was to collect data from a natural setting, to observe real world, human behavior. It was an emergent design, inherently flexible (Hu, 2009). Creswell (2012) defines qualitative research as best suited to address a research problem in which you do not know the variables and need to explore. The problem that existed for this research was that ESL students experience language difficulties in academics and there exists a lack of support from faculty and the institution. The purpose, then, of the qualitative research was to better elucidate meaning from the responses, which would lead to a better understanding of student and faculty perceptions of ESL students' linguistic and cultural preparedness for academics. Because each participant's experience was different, I gained a better understanding of the issues affecting ESL student success rates in academics. Furthermore, this process allowed for a flexibility and evolution of the research as new factors that emerged.

With this understanding, the qualitative aspect (in-depth interviews of faculty and students) of this research project added validity and meaning to the quantitative data (survey and secondary data analyses) by exploring faculty and student perceptions. The interview phase allowed for probing, open-ended discussion, and expansion on the survey. It is my hope that this information will help to inform faculty about a) effective

teaching practices, b) cultural dynamics that influence students' educational philosophy and study practices, and c) awareness and understanding to foster healthy student-teacher relationships.

3.3 Data Collection

The research project included surveying 76 ESL students enrolled in at least one academic course, interviewing seven ESL students enrolled in academics, and eight academic instructors. I first contacted first year undergraduate instructors from the following courses via e-mail: ENGL (Faculty of Arts), ECON (School of Business and Economics), (Communications and New Media) and TMGT (Faculty of Adventure, Culinary Arts, and Tourism). These courses were selected because they are language-intensive. The instructors' information, including e-mail addresses and courses schedules, can be found online. I asked instructors for 20 minutes at the end of a class for permission to meet with the ESL students on the class roster. At the scheduled meeting time, I notified the students of the intentions for this research project and asked for permission to administer the survey. The purpose of administering the survey face-to-face rather than using an on-line distribution process (e.g. Survey Monkey) was that personal contact often elicits a higher response rate. Using the student contact information provided on the survey I emailed students requesting a follow-up interview and received confirmations from seven students. In addition, eight of the faculty members agreed to individual follow-up interviews, as well.

3.4 Participants

Student Participants

ESL students enrolled in the following Summer 2012 and Fall 2012 courses taught by participating faculty participants were invited to complete the survey: ENGL 1---, CMNS 1---, TMGT 1--- and ECON 1---. This sample of students was chosen because they represent the group of ESL students presently experiencing the transition from ESL to mainstream academics. The experiences are fresh in their minds as they live them on a daily basis and have not had the opportunity to develop a wide-range of coping strategies learned

outside of the ESAL program. In addition, three Masters of Education students (M.Ed) were invited to complete the survey and follow interview because they were either currently enrolled in ESL courses in addition to the M.Ed or had completed ESL 0580 in the previous semester. Figure 1 details the breakdown of student survey participants.

Figure 1: Student Participants Surveyed: Background Information

Topic		Number of Students
	Total number of ESAL students surveyed enrolled in academics	76
	Male : Female	43:33
Country of Origin	China	36
	Saudi Arabia	23
	India	4
	Russia	3
	Taiwan	3
	South Korea	2
	Mexico	2
	Bangladesh	1
	Burundi, Africa	1
	Japan	1
	Ukraine	1
	Philippines	1
	Argentina	1
Program of Study	Business	48
	Tourism, Hotel & Resort Management	12
	Engineering	2
	Masters of Education	3
	Computer Science	2
	Finance	2
	Science	3
	N/A	5

For the interviews, I attempted to use a sample population that had the following qualities: (a) be representative of female and male genders, (b) be representative of a variety of ethnicities for richness of cultural experiences and beliefs, and (c) demonstrate a willingness to provide thoughtful reflections based on their answers on the questionnaire. Student anonymity will be ensured so that the results are not affected by the students' potential fear of their professors' reactions to student perceptions. You can see by looking at Fig. 1 that the student participants represented thirteen nationalities, both male and female genders and represented students from a minimum of seven academic disciplines. The primary nationality represented was Chinese, making up 47% of the sample student population, with Saudi Arabians making up the second largest group at 30%. The faculty of business was the primary discipline of choice for the student participants; which, was represented by 63% of the student population. Tourism and Hotel Management was the second most represented discipline at 16%.

Figure 2 outlines the background information for the seven student participants who volunteered for the one-on-one interview. The student interview participants represent both male and female genders, four nationalities, and three academic disciplines. Also represented are both undergraduate and graduate students.

Figure 2: Student Participants Interviewed: Background Information

Student Participant	Gender	Country of Origin	Home Language	Completed ESAL 0580, TRU	Program of Study
A	Female	China	Chinese	Yes	M.Ed
B	Male	China	Mandarin	No	Pre-MBA
C	Male	Saudi Arabia	Arabic	Yes	1 st year, Software Engineering
D	Male	Burundi, Africa	French	Yes	BA
E	Female	Argentina	Spanish	Yes	Pre-MBA
F	Male	China	Chinese	Yes	M.Ed
G	Male	Saudi Arabia	Arabic	Yes	M.Ed

Faculty Participants

All faculty members teaching first-year undergraduate language intensive courses during the Summer 2012 and Fall 2012 semesters were invited via email to participate. The instructors' information was available online on the course calendar. I received feedback from some instructors who felt they were unable to participate due to busy schedules or too few ESL students on their class roster. Nine instructors volunteered to have their classes participate in the survey and eight instructors volunteered for the follow up interview. The instructors who volunteered had a minimum of two years teaching at a post-secondary institution and a maximum of 22 years. In addition, they were teaching a minimum of 15 ESL students at the time of the interview. This level of experience ensured that the instructors had considerable experience teaching ESL students and understood the complexities that it potentially involves.

Figure 3 outlines the background information for the faculty participants interviewed. The faculty participants represent both male and female genders, a minimum of two years teaching experience in a post-secondary institution, and three academic disciplines.

Fig. 3 Faculty Participants Interviewed: Background Information

Faculty Participant	Highest Academic Degree	Academic Rank	# of years teaching in a post secondary institution	Approx. # of ESL students currently teaching	Course #	Gender
A	MFA	Sessional	5	27	TMGT 1---	Female
B	PhD – English	Sessional	15	60	ENGL 1---	Female
C	PhD – English	Sessional	2	16	ENGL 1---	Male
D	MFA	Sessional	5	45	ENGL 1---	Female
E	MA	Sessional	3	35	ECON 1---	Male
F	MFA - English	Associate Professor	22	15	ENGL 1---	Female
G	MA	Lecturer	12	15	ENGL 1---	Female
H	PhD – Philosophy	Lecturer	4	32	CMNS 1---	Male

3.5 Procedures

Phase 1: SURVEY

ESL students enrolled in the following Summer 2012 and Fall 2012 courses taught by faculty participating in the study were invited to complete a survey: ENGL 1---, CMNS 1---, TMGT 1--- and ECON 1---. I administered the survey during class time. The questionnaire consisted of nine questions regarding the student's background, three Yes/No questions, 13 questions on a Likert scale and six open-ended questions, with the last enquiring about any other issues on how to help ESL students succeed in their

undergraduate programs (see Appendix A). The purpose of the survey was to (a) gather data from a large number of ESL students and (b) narrow the scope of the research project to the areas of greatest concern for ESL students. After analyzing the surveys, I contacted viable student candidates who might volunteer to participate in a one-on-one in-depth interview. The survey I selected is a modified version of a student survey previously used to study the student perceptions of Chinese graduate students' communication challenges in the disciplines (Hu, 2009).

Phase 2: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

The faculty and student volunteers were interviewed individually for 30 - 60 minutes at a time and location convenient to both them and me. The interviews were semi-structured with a guide to maintain focus and yet allow exploration (see Appendices C and D). All the interviews were audiotaped with the participants' permission and transcribed. Interviews took place during the Summer 2012 and Fall 2012 semesters. The purpose of the interview was to identify the perceptions of students and faculty in relation to ESL student learning around the following topics:

- a. Student-teacher relationship
- b. Teaching methods (i.e. lecture style, seminars, group work, etc.)
- c. Assignments
- d. Course materials
- e. Academic writing
- f. Perceived student motivation and engagement
- g. Support services
- h. Cultural issues

Phase 3: SECONDARY DATA

Information was gathered from the university's Student Records and Institutional Planning and Analysis (IPA) department to compare Winter 2012 and Summer 2012 ESL student grades in ENGL 1100 with their ESAL 0580 grades. The data was used to find

gaps in ESL student success and failure in academics. For Survey and Interview Guides (see Appendices C, E, and G).

3.6 Additional Data Collection

As part of this research project, the relevancy of the support programs offered for ESL students at TRU were examined. I searched the TRU website and found little formal ESL support services aside from those of the ESL Department at TRU. The Writing Centre provides feedback on writing assignments; in particular, it offers help with the writing process, including generating ideas; organizing; managing issues of sentence structure, grammar, punctuation and documentation; revision and editing.

3.7 Preparing the Data

The faculty and ESL students who consented to be interviewed were also asked for their written consent to audio-tape the interview (see Appendix B). Audio-taping the interview was presented as an option, and not as a requirement to participate in the study. The audio-tapes allowed the researcher to review the interview sessions. Interview data was coded to conceal individual identity. In addition, all data collected was kept in a locked filing cabinet and all computer files protected by password. All participants received a subject feedback form and, upon request, received a copy of the completed report.

3.8 Data Analysis

This project applied an inductive approach for data analysis. The transcripts and other documents were read to search for recurrent themes. The data collected from the transcripts of the interviews was entered into Microsoft Excel to look for relationships between these variables, as well. The variables showing significant relationships ($p < 0.05$) were clustered to make sub-scales. Regression Analyses was also conducted to show the predictors of ESL students' success in undergraduate programs.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Discussion

In this chapter I present a theoretical analysis and practical implications of some of the findings of this study and relate them to relevant theories presented in the literature review. This project applied an inductive, interpretive approach for data analysis. The interview transcripts and survey data were combed for recurrent themes. The data, from both faculty and student participants, suggest that there is room for improvement in terms of instructional practices and institutional support services. The following data will be broken down into categories: 1) academic writing skills, 2) assignments, 3) instructors, 4) grading, 5) culture, 6) participation, and 7) support services. Together, the data will show trends and themes from the research.

The faculty participants represent both male and female genders, a minimum of two years teaching experience in a post-secondary institution, and three academic disciplines. Comparatively, the student interview participants represent both male and female genders, four nationalities, and three academic disciplines. Also represented are both undergraduate and graduate students. Additionally, the survey student participants represented thirteen nationalities, both male and female genders and represented students from a minimum of seven academic disciplines. The primary nationality represented was Chinese, making up 47% of the sample student population, with Saudi Arabians making up the second largest group at 30%. The faculty of business was the primary discipline of choice for the student participants; representing 63% of the surveyed student population. Tourism and Hotel Management was the second most represented discipline at 16%. Based on the findings, culture plays an important role in the academic success of ESL students. The large populations of Chinese students and their experiences and perceptions have especially influenced the analysis, conclusions and recommendations.

4.1 Academic Writing Skills

Relevant studies in the field have shown that the demands on ESL students in academics go beyond language proficiency including advanced reading, independent and Internet research, group work and presentations, and writing following discipline-specific

genre conventions (Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). In many cases, poor academic writing skills have been the key factor in ESL student failure rates (Giridharan & Robson, 2011; Olivas & Li, 2006). In addition, research on faculty perceptions of ESL students' academic needs shows that there is a concern over academic writing skills (Giridharan & Robson, 2011; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). Furthermore, faculty has raised concerns regarding thesis and dissertation writing with graduate students, in particular, organization, vocabulary and grammar (Zhu & Flaitz, 2005).

Student Participants

The following information is the findings from the student surveys coupled with dialogues taken from student interviews. As part of the questionnaire, students were asked questions about their written assignments in their undergraduate courses using a Likert scale: 1 – 7. Figure 4 displays the results to the following statements: (dark gray) I always have no difficulty completing written assignments, (light gray) I have the writing skills to complete academic courses, and (gray) I have a good understanding of university rules and regulations (e.g. referencing). The x-axis follows the Likert scale (1-7), while the y-axis represents the number of student participants, out of a possible 76.

Figure 4: Writing Skills in Academics

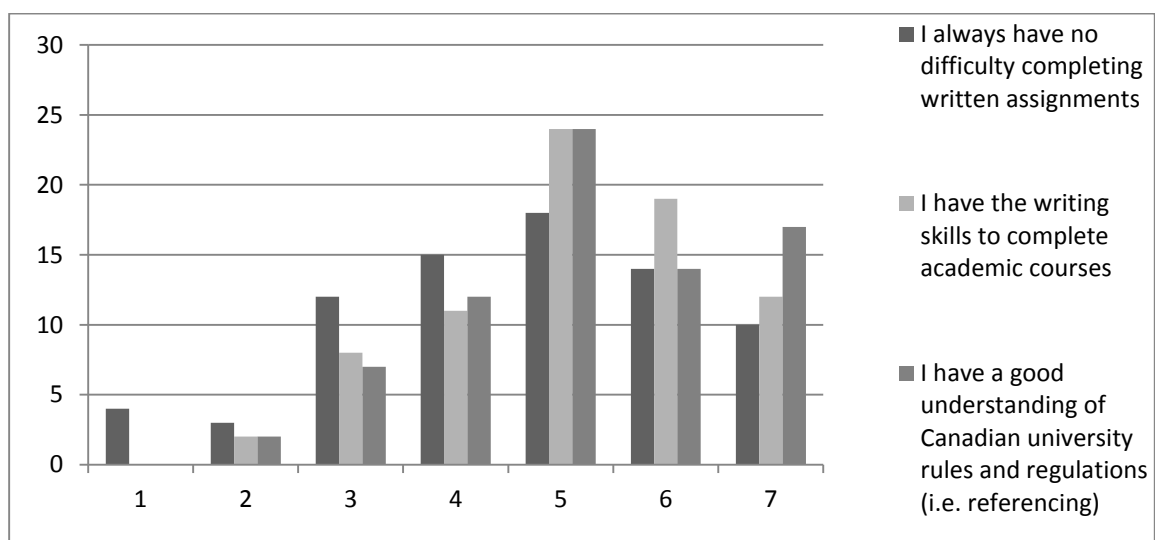


Figure 4 (dark gray) indicates that 45% of student participants scored a 4 or lower, meaning they had difficulty completing written assignments in their undergraduate courses. The light gray bar indicates that 28% scored a 4 or lower, meaning they did not believe they had the writing skills to complete academic courses successfully. The gray bar indicates that 28% scored a 4 or lower, meaning they did not fully understand Canadian university rules and regulations. Based on these results, an average of one third of students surveyed experienced some difficulty with their academic written assignments. This is on trend with research in the field (Bifuh-Ambe, 2009; Schmitt, 2012; Roessingh, 1999; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005), which argues that it takes a minimum of five years for ESL students to gain the level of language proficiency required for academics. Roessingh argues that academic language is particularly difficult for ESL learners to grasp because “the content is accessible only through language itself. The content is often remote, abstract and laden with cultural references and the language of imagery, symbolism, and metaphor” (Roessingh, 1999, p. 77). This does not mean that ESL students are incapable of success in academics; it does, however, mean that they will require additional supports in order to be successful.

Faculty Participants

To get a better understanding of faculty expectations for academic writing in order to contextualize the academic writing requirements placed on students, I asked faculty participants what they would like the ESL students to have done in preparation for academic writing prior to enrolment in their course. Some faculty suggested the following:

Join communities outside of their culture group in order to practice speaking English. (Interview with Faculty A, Summer 2012)

Read in English; hard things, longer than a tweet. Practice reading and then explain what you just read; over and over. (Interview with Faculty C, Summer 2012)

Read the newspaper, The Guardian, New York Times, and The Globe & Mail. Practice reading about ideas and current events. Practice forming opinions. (Interview with Faculty D, Summer 2012)

Read the textbook before coming to class. Listen to my lecture. Re-read the textbook... It's rare for an ESL student to come to my office. There is a portion of ESL students who are failing my course but have never come to my office. (Interview with Faculty E, Summer 2012)

I suggest they read English media, newspapers, TV; converse in English with friends; make Canadian contacts; and break out of their comfort zone. (Interview with Faculty H, Fall 2012)

The faculty felt that many ESL students have problems with motivation, essay structure, citations, grammar and mechanics, classroom etiquette, socializing and working with native-English speaking (NES) students. In order to combat these issues, the faculty recommended that students step outside of their comfort zone by socializing with domestic students, perhaps by joining a club or team. In addition, the faculty suggested students stay up to date on current events and read relevant media sources regularly (see also Hu, 2010).

Another issue arose during an interview with one faculty participant who was asked the same question about ESL students' preparation for academic course work. The participant expressed her concerns about some students resulting to cheating as a way to find academic success. She explained:

I would discourage them from cheating... Let them know if they attend, listen and try and ask for help, then they can actually do OK in the course. They come in with the idea that they can't and they turn to cheating. They get caught and get zeros. (Interview with Faculty G, Fall 2012)

During my follow up questioning, other faculty members expressed similar concerns in regards to ESL students turning to cheating as a coping strategy for the strenuous demands of English academics. Some faculty responded:

One of my students from China submitted exceptional work and had a high enough IELTS score; but, they had to bring in a translator whenever we had meetings. They

must have been cheating otherwise, the IELTS testing is inaccurate. (Interview with Faculty A, Summer 2012)

I have had students submit work completed for previous classes; which, they then give to me as a new assignment. They will lie to instructor's face. It seems there is a cultural attitude around cheating mixed with desperation. There has been discussion amongst my colleagues. We communicate regularly with students and instructors regarding assignments to see if students were caught cheating in the past. I haven't failed students because of cheating because it didn't fall within [the university's] policy. So, I have to put in the course outline that there is a policy about submitting work done in previous courses and if it happens, students will receive a mark of zero. (Interview with Faculty C, Summer 2012)

Yes, I've had issues with plagiarism and cheating, predominantly with ESL students. Some ESL students talk to each other during exams and I will ask them to stop talking. If they don't stop talking then I take their exams away. (Interview with Faculty E, Summer 2012)

It's a culture around the way the institution places ESL students. The structure of the whole system is a problem. ESL students pay a huge amount of money. Are we providing an adequate support system? Can you blame them for cheating if they can't meet the unrealistic standards? How can you fail a student who you have told is capable of taking the course; it's not fair to fail them. (Interview with Faculty F, Fall, 2012)

The faculty participants raised concerns regarding how qualified ESL students should be in their academic courses and whether or not it is fair to allow them to enroll in a course in which they may not be likely to succeed in. In addition, the faculty viewed institutional policies and rules as lacking in clarity concerning plagiarism.

In summary, students and faculty raised concerns about ESL students completing assignments on time, lacking the qualifications and writing skills for their academic course work, and their lack of familiarity with Canadian academic standards and regulations. Faculty recommended that students gain more experience in Canadian culture by reading relevant media, including newspapers and staying up-to-date on current events. Finally, faculty was concerned with ESL students resorting to cheating. The faculty expressed a need for stricter guidelines concerning plagiarism.

4.2 Assignments

As mentioned in the literature review, research has shown that there exists a lack of collaboration amongst faculty members in and across departments (Arkoudis & Tran, 2010; Cheng, et. al., 2004; Giridharan & Robson, 2011; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). Additionally, there exists a discrepancy across disciplines and within departments regarding the breakdown of grading and the ratio of percentage applied to content and language assignment marking.

Faculty Participants

To gain a better understanding and to explore the consistency, or lack thereof, across courses and sections in terms of grading policies I asked the faculty: What are your requirements and/or expectations for written assignments? For the faculty interviewed, written assignments included summaries, research essays (arguing and supporting a thesis), persuasive letter writing, quizzes and exams. The following is a sample of the responses:

I don't crack down on grammar and spelling as long as I can understand and meaning wasn't lost or that the student was careless. Must show comprehension and is written in their own words. (Interview with Faculty A, Summer 2012)

I mark down for grammatical mistakes. In ENGL 1---, I have to grade ESL students on a level playing field. No matter how good their ideas are, even a well-researched essay with logical arguments, with bad grammar can't get above a C grade. (Interview with Faculty B, Summer 2012)

I use holistic grading: Content (depth, sophistication, vocabulary, diction), Organization, Citations (quotation, paraphrasing, summary) and Language Use (grammar and mechanics). If in one area there is a failure to meet basic course requirements, then F is the result. (Interview with Faculty G, Fall 2012)

50% content, 30% structure, 20% grammar. I am always flexible with the grammar. If I can read it, then I treat your grammar the same as others. If you can't communicate in the language, then you have to fail. (Interview with Faculty C, Summer 2012)

I take off marks for improper format... Must write in their own words... I look for errors in mechanics and grammar. Mechanical errors make it difficult for a student to get a B grade. (Interview with Faculty D, Summer 2012)

I don't mark grammar. My challenge is to understand what they are writing and extract the content. The problem is if their poor grammar makes it impossible for me to decode what they are saying. (Interview with Faculty E, Summer 2012)

Bottom line is if someone's English isn't understandable, then the person will fail. If the English has lots of errors, I try to weigh how comprehensible it is and how clearly their ideas are coming through. Basically if something has a serious grammatical error in every sentence, then they won't pass. (Interview with Faculty F, Fall 2012)

It is clear that, despite some of the faculty participants being from the same discipline, the standards for marking and assignment criteria vary greatly. This can be confusing for ESL students who struggle with essay writing formats and structures. This can also attribute to course shopping as some instructors become known for being lenient on marking in comparison to other instructors who are teaching the same course. Looking more closely at the faculty grading practices, I can see that poor grammar and mechanics skills can negatively impact a student's overall mark regardless of their understanding of the course content.

These findings resonate with prior research, which has found that many university faculties lack standardized, or consistent assessment tools (e.g., Arkoudis & Tran, 2010). Similarly to findings in Arkoudis and Tran's study, interview with faculty members who participated in the current study revealed that there was a miscommunication about the clarity of assessment and assignment criteria. Results from this study showed that while faculty felt they had provided clear and objective guidelines, students felt the criteria were vague. Arkoudis and Tran (2010) also discovered that faculty course planning lacked the integration of disciplinary and language learning. During the faculty interviews I asked if there was any talk within the department to raise admission requirements. The majority of faculty (75%) explained that they did not attend department meetings because they were sessional instructors and were not required to attend. While, the faculty commented on having discussions amongst their peers in the hallway or in the staffroom, it is clear that there is not a structured conversation with mandatory attendance of faculty around how to improve teaching practices and policies for ESL students in academics.

Student Participants

To compare faculty responses with student perceptions on written assignments, I asked student participants to respond to the following questions as part of the survey a) What is most difficult about written assignments in your academic courses?, and b) What difficulties have you experienced as an international student in academics? Figure 5 (below) identifies eleven areas that students found negatively affected their success with academic written assignments: a) culture, b) oral English language skills, c) vocabulary, d) listening, e) group work, f) quality of instruction, g) grammar skills, h) organizing ideas, i) time to complete assignments, j) academic writing style, and k) referencing.

Figure 5: Written Assignments in Academics

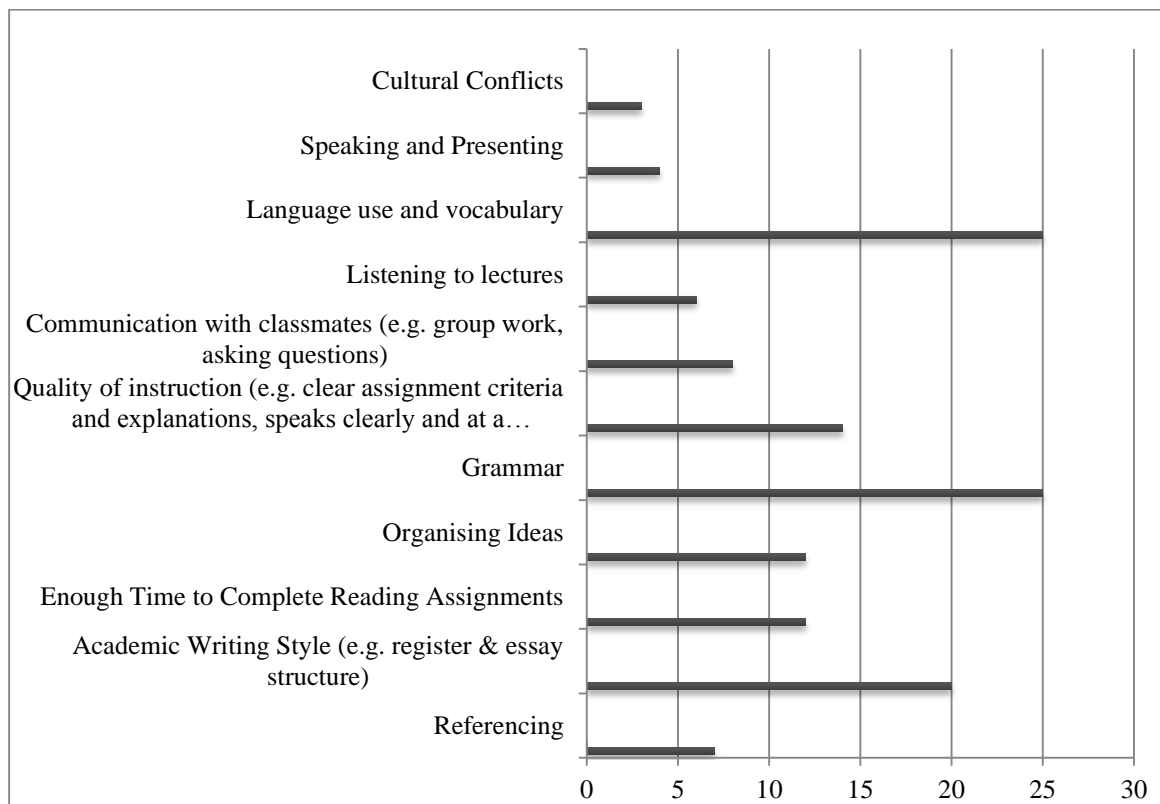


Figure 5 displays the percentage of students who referred to each area of written assignments in which they experienced difficulty. The gray bar on Figure 5 indicates that 25% of the students surveyed found language usage to be the most difficult part of written

assignments in academics. Grammar also ranked highest among areas of concern for ESL students. Students also noted academic writing style (20%), quality of instruction (14%) and time to complete assignments (12%) as problematic.

A study conducted at both universities and colleges in the United States identified students' perceptions of the most difficult tasks associated with writing as: a) having to expand on ideas and challenging theories, b) constructing sentences that are grammatically correct, c) paraphrasing sentences, and d) fear of inadvertently plagiarizing (Giridharan & Robson, 2011). Figure 5 (above), shows that the results of this study are consistent with the discoveries of Giridharan and Robson (2011) as the students I surveyed experienced similar difficulties. Language usage and vocabulary was similarly ranked highest among ESL students for areas of concern in academic writing (Giridharan & Robson, 2011). Leki and Carson (1994) argue that vocabulary plays a fundamental role in ESL student success in order for them to properly paraphrase resource content. Giridharan and Robson (2011) found that 51% of the ESL students they surveyed were unclear about their abilities to paraphrase or bring synthesis in their writing; furthermore, 12.1% described themselves as unable to do so. The study recommended that "the lecturer should share more techniques of paraphrasing and referencing" (Giridharan & Robson, 2011, p. 8).

Moreover, a study conducted with the purpose of identifying best testing practices for ESL students at an American university found that students referred to a lack of academic vocabulary as negatively affecting test performance (Teemant, 2010). As a result, the researcher recommended that instructors "use high frequency words when writing tests rather than sophisticated, low frequency academic language" (Teemant, 2010, p. 100). In addition, the researchers recommended allowing students to use dictionaries during exams "especially when those words merely impede comprehension of the question rather than reveal lack of content learning" (Teemant, 2010, p. 100).

Based on student responses, one can see that a student's linguistic preparedness is perceived as the primary reason for a lack of success in academics; however, cultural conflicts also play a role in student success, particularly if one factors in students' cultural beliefs regarding referencing. Relevant research in the field attributes ESL, in particular

Chinese ESL, students' plagiarism to educational experiences in a system "where there is greater allegiance to established authorities [which] place a greater emphasis on acquiring information rather than contesting it" (Holmes, 2004, p. 301). Furthermore, students working in another language and using source materials will often choose to stay close to the words and ideas used in the source rather than risk grammatical errors; instead, they select a few words to replace with synonyms which can often lead to inadvertent plagiarism (Bifuh-Ambe, 2009; Holmes, 2004; Hu, 2000).

To better understand ESL students' perceptions of their academic learning and English language proficiency when writing papers, during the follow-up interviews, I asked students the question: What aspect of paper writing is most challenging? The following is a sample of the responses:

The idea is the most challenging. Sometimes I use an idea in the Chinese way but it doesn't translate into English. In ENGL 1100, we had to discuss homosexuality and because of my background it was difficult to discuss. My ideas aren't always accepted in class. Sometimes it is difficult to express myself because I don't know which word to use. In Canada, I have to reference all the time. We need at least two references and I find this very difficult. In Canada, we can't copy materials we need to use quotations. In China, we don't do this we just use it. (Interview with Student A, Summer 2012)

It's difficult because in China most writing is just small essay. Maybe 250 words. In Canada, more than 600 to 900 words. The types of essays are also different. In China, we write IELTS to compare and contrast, to argue or discuss advantages or disadvantages. In Canada, my first assignment was about describing and narrating. [In] ENGL 1100, I feel like a child starting a university course. The professor writes the format [citation] on the board... Sometimes I can't follow the speed of the instructor's lecture. This is really difficult. If I can reread the lecture notes at a later time, then I will be more successful. (Interview with Student B, Summer 2012)

Changing my writing style from Chinese way to Canadian way [is the most challenging]. In Canada we have to constantly repeat ourselves. I do my research in both languages. Some sentences are confusing because I translate from my mother language to English and the translation is confusing. (Interview with Student C, Summer 2012)

My instructor told me to go in depth and explain further. This is difficult because of [a lack of] vocabulary. (Interview with Student D, Fall 2012)

Changing my writing style from Chinese way [is the most challenging aspect of paper-writing]. In Canada, I make my thesis clear and repeat it. Vocabulary [is challenging]. I use the word *make* but it is boring. (Interview with Student E, Fall 2012)

The literature [review] was the hardest [assignment] so far. I haven't done it before, even though I've studied many things in ESL. In Arabic, this doesn't exist. I didn't achieve the right criteria. My instructor provided more details and divided the work into five or six sections and explained. Grammar is challenging, more so than structure. (Interview with Student G, Fall 2012)

In general, student participants referred to having difficulties formulating ideas and thoughts in English, following the Canadian essay structure and writing style, and understanding assignment criteria; however, grammar and referencing were also noted. Student A referred to his difficulties with referencing and finding the right diction. Many ESL students have difficulty summarizing and paraphrasing technical and low frequency dense sources; this puts high demands on their linguistic abilities. These findings are consistent with relevant research in the field which identified: a) the need for and lack of experience with writing longer essays, b) their difficulty in organizing the paper and using the academic register, in particular academic vocabulary, and c) their need to learn how to use the appropriate format (Hu, 2000; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005).

In a follow-up interview with students, I asked the question: Do you rely on any written sources of information about your topics, which are not in English, for example, a computer dictionary? All eight students responded affirmatively to the question. Below are three student responses to the question:

Yes, a computer dictionary. For research, I find sources in Chinese unless the teacher specifically asks me to research in English. By doing this, I can save lots of time. (Interview with Student A, Summer 2012)

Yes, electronic dictionary. I find resources in Mandarin to create new ideas. (Interview with Student B, Summer 2012)

Yes, always. Internet, books from home. (Interview with Student C, Summer 2012)

It is not uncommon for ESL students to conduct their initial research for academic paper writing in their first language. Hu (2003) discovered that Chinese ESL graduate students in sciences and engineering at a major Canadian university regularly planned their writing, generated ideas, and thought in Chinese, in this case, their first language (L1). Hu explained that “even if the students tried to comprehend English sources in English, they still had to resort to translation into Chinese in order to understand difficult concepts... They even had to translate the concepts into Chinese in order to store them in long-term memory” (2003, p. 51). Developing English language proficiency is a gradual progress and the reliance on L1 for research and draft writing is a common, and often necessary, part of the process. Hu (2003) recommends that we may need to encourage ESL students with underdeveloped second language (L2) proficiency to use translation as a tool to generate ideas and content for writing. Furthermore, Hu (2003) recommends that students be allowed to write topics related to their L1 education rather than only those topics specified by the instructor.

In some cases, however, writing and researching in L1 can lead to what is called “trapped knowledge” (Teemant, 2010, p. 96) which is described as content knowledge that was obtained first in a student’s native language and is not easily translated into the L2 language. Teemant (2010) described meeting a Korean student who had majored in anthropology before coming to study abroad and who had hoped that his background knowledge would give him an advantage; unfortunately, the student explained, “I know the answer, but the problem is I cannot describe [it] in English” (p. 10). The test for academic faculty then is to find ways to encourage ESL students to conduct their research in English, especially after the student has been working with the English language for several years. I recommend instructors highlight resources for students to choose from. The university libraries often hold workshops and short lectures, which can be useful tools for all students to attend, not just ESL students.

Research has shown that many students follow the structure and writing forms as they appear in journal articles and textbooks to help guide them when doing their essay writing (Cheng, et. al., 2004). This can be troublesome when the assignment criteria ask

students to format their papers in a different way. Moreover, some students will write drafts in their first language in order to find the right words to formulate an idea. This can also lead to difficulties in translation, particularly when students lack the correct English vocabulary to express themselves clearly. Hu challenges the traditional notion of plagiarism claiming that,

Chinese culture sees copying... as a valuable and effective way of learning. Copying an unaltered representation of either source texts or source ideas, shows the learner's respect for knowledge and authority. Word-for-word copying is the most reliable means to produce source knowledge accurately. In order to find out how well students have learned the knowledge taught, most university courses in China... require students to write tests and examinations with closed books, and thus copying from memory... becomes a key strategy to test success (Hu, 2000, p. 24).

Based on this information, we can better understand some ESL students' tendency towards copying from sources. It is a part of their learning process and as their strength and comfort with the English language improves, gradually they will rely less and less on copying directly from sources.

To further clarify ESL student perceptions of their academic writing experiences, I then asked students to describe any linguistic difficulties they had experienced when writing academic papers. The students commented on their linguistic difficulties in academic writing below.

In China, the teacher tells us how to write this and how to get a good score, but they don't care about your ideas... In China I had to reference, but not regularly. In Canada, I have to reference all the time. We need at least two references and I find this very difficult. In Canada, we can't copy materials, we need to use quotations. In China, we don't do this, we just use it. (Interview with Student A, Summer 2012)

In Arabic, the academic style of writing is very different – they give you everything, then a solution at the end. In the beginning it was difficult to adjust, but now I am comfortable with the style. (Interview with Student C, Summer 2012)

These are two examples of students who have experienced difficulties completing writing tasks because of their cultural educational experiences. Kaplan (1966) argued that writing is a cultural phenomenon and conversely that each language has a unique set of writing conventions and finally that a person's first language interferes with their writing in a

second language. Leki outlined some of the areas affected by culturally-oriented discourse in her comprehensive study of contrastive rhetoric; these areas included: “preferred length of sentences, choice of vocabulary, acceptability of using first person, extent of using passive voice, degree to which writers are permitted to interpret, [and the] amount of metaphorical language accepted” (Leki, 1991, p. 125). Leki also highlighted some examples of how contrastive rhetoric may appear in student writing with the following: “Spanish rhetoric requires longer introductions than English does; that Japanese employs a reader-responsible rhetoric while English favors a writer-responsible one; that certain ways of structuring arguments appear to be admired in a variety of cultures” (Leki, 1991, p. 137). Research has shown that having a better understanding of contrastive rhetoric does not necessarily mean students’ writing will improve or become more *English* (Leki, 1991; Jiang & Zhou, 2006); however, Leki argues,

Students who are having trouble writing in English and who are made aware of cultural differences in rhetoric suddenly view themselves, not as suffering from individual inadequacies, but as coming from a particular rhetorical tradition, which they must retain of course, but which cannot be applied wholesale to English writing (Leki, 1991).

Therefore, cultural awareness, as mentioned before, is an important component in the success of international students. Understanding these differences is a valuable tool in building ESL student confidence.

In summary, the results show a lack of collaboration and consistency in grading policies amongst faculty across the disciplines and within departments. Due to the variance in grading policies and disjointed focus on grammar and content, some ESL students are finding success where others are failing. ESL students appear to be struggling most with English language use and grammar in their academic paper writing. They also expressed difficulty articulating ideas, which is in part due to a lack of English academic vocabulary. Furthermore, students admitted to conducting the majority of their research in their native language first before researching in English. This often resulted in a confusing translation of the sources.

4.3 Instructors

Research has shown that teaching practices play a crucial role in the success of ESL students. If instructors do not clearly articulate course assignments and ensure clarification of students' understanding, then ESL students may not meet assignment expectations (see also, Hu, 2000). For example, a Chinese student's essay may be filled with facts and generalizations while the instructor is looking for a deeper analysis and critical examination of the ideas presented. Contemporary Chinese education often teaches memorization, rote learning, and repetition; contrastingly, Western education involves more questioning and critical thinking (Holmes, 2004). The result can be confusion in terms of the expectations of the student from the teacher.

Student Participants

To better understand the expectations of ESL students for their academic instructors, I asked student interview participants to comment on the role and/or responsibility of course instructors in their home country in comparison to Canada. The responses indicate that the role of the instructor varies greatly depending on their cultural background. The following are comments made by student participants:

In China, most students are good listeners. We follow the professor's ideas. In China, you don't ask *Why*? In Canada, you can discuss [ideas] with your instructor and it's OK to ask *Why*? (Interview with Student B, Summer 2012)

In Saudi Arabia, there is a lot of respect for the teacher. When talking to an instructor in Canada, you can share your ideas. In Saudi Arabia, you might get blacklisted if you are critical of their teaching. For example, in a Canadian chemistry class I told my teacher her handwriting was illegible and she tried to improve. I would never think to ask a Saudi teacher this. (Interview with Student C, Summer 2012)

In Argentina, the student-teacher relationship is similar. We have a voice and can give our opinions. In Canada, I feel like we are required to participate in discussions more. In Canada, you have to make your ideas clear and then clearly describe them, this is difficult. (Interview with Student E, Fall 2012)

It is totally different! In China, the teacher always wants to give information. The students just take notes. In Canada, the teacher always wants to encourage students to understand the topic and theory of the knowledge. In China, we just need one standard answer. In Canada, we can have different reflections. For example, in a Canadian class I misunderstood the meaning of the article but I was still given a high score because of my explanation. (Interview with Student F, Fall 2012)

I feel like the Canadian culture is very helpful and made me comfortable all the way along. My self-confidence increased. The university goes out of its way to help international students. In the United Kingdom, English speakers and international students are separated. (Interview with Student G, Fall 2012)

Based on these student responses we can see that the students' educational background varies greatly. As these responses suggest, students had to make adjustments to adapt to the different expectations of instructors in Canada. Students struggle most with sharing their opinions during class discussions and making their ideas clear. Therefore, I encourage instructors to become aware of the educational background of their students as this could help to clarify cultural misunderstandings.

With additional questioning, I sought to better understand the perceived relationship between ESL students and their academic instructors so I asked student participants questions, as part of the survey, about their undergraduate course instructors using a Likert scale: 1 – 7 (see Figure 6). I asked the students to rate their experiences based on the following statements: (dark gray) I easily follow my instructor's lectures, (light gray) I easily follow my instructor's written instructions, and (gray) if I have questions regarding an assignment, my course instructors are helpful. The x-axis follows the Likert scale (1-7), while the y-axis represents the number of student participants, out of a possible 76.

Figure 6: Academic Instructors

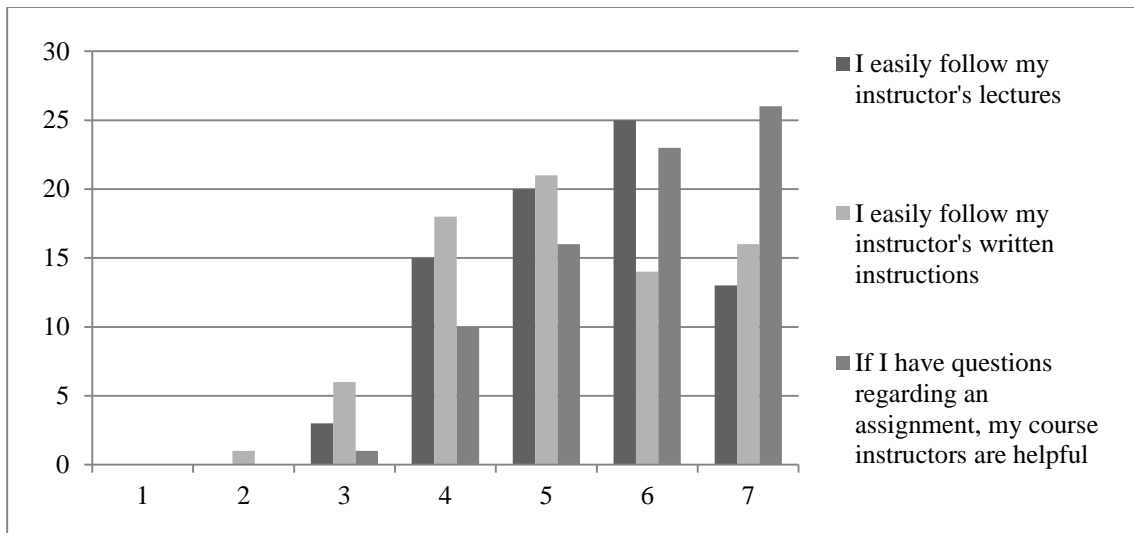


Figure 6 (dark gray) indicates that 24% of ESL students surveyed could not easily follow their instructors' lectures. The light gray bar indicates that 33% could not easily follow their instructors' written instructions. The gray bar indicates that 14% felt that their instructors were not successful in helping them understand questions regarding assignments in their undergraduate course work. Almost one quarter of the ESL students surveyed had difficulty following their instructor's lectures. Research shows that ESL students often have difficulty comprehending lectures due to the following: a) simultaneously juggling listening and note-taking, b) understanding special terminology, and c) understanding idiomatic expressions (Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). Additionally, some cultures, Chinese students in particular, are accustomed to a more rigid, formal system of education which follows a course outline and lecture notes; rarely, does the instructor in this kind of system stray from the outline (Holmes, 2004). ESL students who struggle with listening to lectures can become easily confused when instructors stray from the lecture notes or pepper their dialogue with anecdotes and humour.

During the follow up interviews I asked student participants if they experienced any difficulty understanding the terminology used by the instructor or in the textbook. The following are responses given by the student participants:

Yes, sometimes [I have difficulty], so I have to prepare for each class so I will feel more prepared. To prepare for one class, I will prepare at least two days in advance. I will spend at least five hours preparing. (Interview with Student A, Summer 2012)

No, [I don't have difficulty]. The text is good because my professor allows us to use a paper dictionary. This is helpful for international students. (Interview with Student B, Summer 2012)

Yes, sometimes [I have difficulty] with the instructor, [but] not in the textbook. Sometimes, I read some words which are more Latin based and those are difficult. (Interview with Student C, Summer 2012)

Sometimes [I have difficulty] with the textbook. New words are difficult so I use an electronic dictionary. (Interview with Student E, Fall 2012)

Yes, [I had difficulty] reading academic articles. There are a lot of difficult words. (Interview with Student F, Fall 2012)

Yes, sometimes I have difficulty. I make an appointment with the instructor to talk about it and get more details or use the dictionary and Google translate. I find some difficulties in the textbook because in Arabic we have a totally different process of writing and reading a text; also, the vocabulary is new. (Interview with Student G, Fall 2012)

The majority of the students interviewed experienced some difficulty either with understanding their instructors and/or the textbook. Some of the students have adopted coping strategies which include: doing the readings prior to class, using an electronic or paper dictionary, and making an appointment with the course instructor to clarify understanding.

When English is a second or additional language, course readings and research can take considerably longer to complete in comparison to the time spent by native English speaking (NES) students. One can see that this was the case for Student A who mentioned preparing an additional five hours prior to one class. For this study, I wanted to better understand how ESL students perceived their workload in terms of the ability to complete assignments on time thoughtfully and with detail. To find this information I asked the student participants: a) Generally, do you have a great deal of reading work to do in your current program, and b) Do you have enough time to complete your reading assignments

each week, and c) Generally, do you have a great deal of written work to do in your current program. Students responded with a unanimous “yes” in regards to having a lot of reading and writing work; however, the majority of the students felt it was the students’ responsibility to finish even if it meant they may not get adequate sleep. The following are comments made by the student participants:

[Every class, I have] new vocabulary which I record in my notebook. I don’t have time to review it. I read the textbook. In one week, I will have to read about 100 pages... Yes, [I have enough time] if I sleep less. Yes, I have five writing assignments per semester per course. (Interview with Student A, Summer 2012)

Yes, ENGL 1100 has lots of writing assignments: five assignments, one essay midterm, and one final essay exam. (Interview with Student B, Summer 2012)

Yes... I read a lot of newspapers and economics journals... In ENGL 1100, we read several books and novels... I struggled to finish... Fiction stories are difficult to follow. (Interview with Student D, Fall 2012)

Yes. I spend about two hours each day completing reading homework. I am only taking two courses at one time, but in ENGL 1100 there is a lot of writing work to do. (Interview with Student E, Fall 2012)

Yes, I had a lot of newspaper readings and economics journals. I had to read textbooks and novels and I struggled to finish them in time. This semester I have read more than fifty articles. (Interview with Student G, Fall 2012)

While this workload may be normal for domestic students, in comparison, most Chinese students were used to a different kind of academic workload prior to coming to Canada. Huang and Brown explain that “Chinese education is an examination-driven system” (Huang & Brown, 2009, p. 645). Consequently, Chinese students are used to “high-stakes testing” (Rubenstein, 2006, p. 438) where memorization, repetition and rote learning are favoured over problem solving and questioning (Holmes, 2004).

Once students have completed their assignments, regardless of their ability to complete them thoughtfully and in detail, an important next step is instructor feedback. Research has shown that the quality of instructor feedback provided to students plays an important role in how students’ perceive their writing abilities and additionally, quality

feedback can further advance students' academic writing skills (Giridharan & Robson, 2011). During the student interviews I asked students to comment on the feedback they had received from instructors on paper writing. Below are some of the students' responses.

My first draft I got 0.5/20. The professor told me to go to the Writing Centre. Grammar and punctuation were the problem. In China, [we] don't regularly use colons and commas. The instructor included a piece of paper which identified the problems. It was useful and the next time I improved by 10 points. (Interview with Student B, Summer 2012)

[I received] some notes, like "you have a lot of grammar mistakes". The instructor explained how to fix the mistakes. Some sentences are confusing because I translate from my mother language to English and the translation is confusing. I think the feedback helped. (Interview with Student C, Summer 2012)

My teacher told me I have good ideas but I need to go in depth and explain further. This is difficult because [I don't have the] vocabulary. The feedback helped a little bit but it is a slow process. I use the Writing Centre and my marks have improved. (Interview with Student D, Summer 2012)

The feedback is very basic. Not enough or specific enough. No notes were made throughout the essay, only a short paragraph at the end. It's helpful because I know what position I'm in, but the Writing Centre is the one who gives good feedback. (Interview with Student E, Fall 2012)

Yes. She gives me examples, i.e. solution and perspective, so that I write more. I give the outline to my instructor and she gives me feedback. This way is very effective because, if I go in the wrong direction it is difficult to write the right way. (Interview with Student F, Fall 2012)

No, nothing specific. It was not helpful. (Interview with Student G, Fall 2012)

Based on the above student responses, the students received a mixture in terms of quality feedback from their instructors. Those students who received detailed feedback were able to apply the corrections and improve on their academic writing. Other students chose to use the Writing Centre to gain a better understanding of their mistakes. Giridharan and Robson (2011) argue that, through quality feedback, students can better understand themselves as writers and learn to self-evaluate. Detailed written feedback also supports

the Writing Centre staff to better meet the needs of ESL students during short tutoring sessions.

Figure 5 showed that 12% of students named a lack of time to complete assignments as one of the main reasons for not achieving academic success. During the follow-up interviews, I asked: Do you have enough time to complete your written assignments thoughtfully and with detail? The majority of students replied “yes” but stipulated that the quality of work is often below their own personal expectations. The following are explanations given by students:

It depends. It’s difficult to finish in the summer. During the fall and winter, there is a good amount of time. (Interview with Student C, Summer 2012)

Yes, but it depends. 1500 words... I do my best and hope for a good mark. (Interview with Student D, Fall 2012)

These student participants’ concerns regarding time constraints are typical among many ESL students’ perceptions documented in the literature (e.g. Arkoudis & Tran, 2010; Huang, 2005; Roessingh, 1999). Thus, Arkoudis and Tran (2010) recommend that instructors set assignments early in the semester to allow instructors time to give feedback which can influence students’ future writing; however, instructors must remain cognizant of the students’ ability to complete assignments thoughtfully in the time allotted.

Faculty Participants

To gain a better understanding of the ability of ESL students to complete academic assignments on time and the regularity that this occurs, I asked faculty to comment on the consistency of their ESL students submitting assignments on time. The majority of faculty, five out of eight, confirmed that their ESL students were reliable in submitting assignments on time. Two faculty participants, however, expressed concerns regarding the submission.

Some students do and some don’t. Sometimes they look blank when people hand things in. All the big assignments are on the course outline but some assignments are not on the outline. I think sometimes the ESL students don’t know they have to

hand in an assignment. They don't always pick up what I'm saying. Sometimes they get verbal instructions wrong. (Interview with Faculty A, Summer 2012)

About 50% of students hand in assignments on time. The others usually say they need another meeting with the Writing Centre and then I will give them an extension. I'm flexible with things like that. (Interview with Faculty D, Summer 2012)

Some of the faculty expressed concerns about communicating with ESL students. They were worried that ESL students were not understanding assignment expectations. Based on faculty comments it appears that the assignment expectations are not being clearly communicated to ESL students. I recommend that faculty put assignment instructions in writing, noting clear expectations and using high-frequency vocabulary. Having clear written expectations will also benefit support staff at the Writing Centre and allow them to make better use of their tutoring time with students.

Student Participants

Another important theme to consider is the ability of ESL students to comprehend lectures. Figure 6 shows that 24% of the ESL students surveyed had some difficulty following their instructor's lectures. During the follow up interviews, I asked the students to comment on their instructor's use of lecture notes to supplement instruction. Below are some of the students' responses of interest.

Yes, my instructor uses PowerPoint, but I don't like PowerPoint. It's confusing, either in Chinese or in English. I don't like it because there is less writing and more speaking, so I cannot focus on the slides. I can only focus on the teacher. (Interview with Student A, Summer 2012)

Yes, my instructor in ENGL 1100 posted on Moodle. This is very helpful because I can double check. (Interview with Student D, Summer 2012)

Yes, my instructor used PowerPoint and Moodle. [Some] Chinese schools don't use projectors. In Canada I found this useful. (Interview with Student F, Fall 2012)

The majority of the students interviewed found PowerPoint and Moodle to be helpful for following instructors' lectures; however, one student commented on her difficulty following both the instructor's lecture and the PowerPoint slides. It is not uncommon for ESL students to have difficulty with this; Huang and Brown explain that "in Chinese classrooms, teachers write a lot on the blackboard while lecturing. They always put the important points on the blackboard. Blackboard writing can give students a deep impression and help them better understand a lecture" (Huang & Brown, 2009, p. 650). The difficulty with PowerPoint is that the pace at which instructors move through important points is increased and students miss out on the physical act of writing the points on the board which help embed the information in their minds. In addition, Huang and Brown (2009) are critical of North American teachers' failure to follow textbooks; according to Huang (2005), "as much as 80% of the students reported that their teachers did not closely follow the textbook while lecturing... [Furthermore,] more than 90% of the subjects thought they had more problems in understanding an academic lecture if the teachers failed to follow the textbook" (p. 649).

In summary, ESL students spoke about their difficulties following instructors' lectures. They referred to a faculty inconsistency in use of lecture notes and difficulties following the pace and key points of a lecture. Chinese students prefer to follow an outline or to have key points written on the blackboard during a lecture. Additional issues raised by students include: time constraints for assignments and heavy workloads, and adapting to different teaching practices.

Finally, as one research study pointed out, "it may be easier for EAP experts to train subject-matter instructors to adapt their communication styles than to train ESL university students to understand and process information from professors who mumble, talk too fast, use inaccessible vocabulary, and do not provide visual aids for students" (Ferris, 1998, p. 313). Rubenstein explains in his research that "in most Western settings, the teacher's role is conceived primarily in terms of transmission of knowledge and/or skills. The Chinese teacher, in contrast, is viewed as a moral guide and friend or parent

figure with valuable knowledge that is a student's duty to learn" (Rubenstein, 2006, p. 436). Furthermore, Rubenstein explains,

Students from traditional educational systems may expect teachers to behave in a more formal, authoritarian manner. They may be displeased, puzzled, or even offended by an informational instructional style. These students are accustomed to a highly ordered pattern of classroom activity. When this is not the case, they may perceive the teacher as being poorly prepared or lazy (Rubenstein, 2006, p. 436).

Understanding this difference may help Canadian instructors to better understand their relationship with their ESL students. I recommend faculty at post-secondary institutions attend mandatory cross-cultural workshops. The workshops could offer teaching strategies for faculty of international students and provide relevant sources for learning further teaching strategies.

4.4 Grading

It is not uncommon for ESL students to fail first-year courses and have to retake them in order to obtain the courses necessary to enter university programs. Due to higher failure rates among ESL students in comparison to NES students, some studies have found that students will revert to "course shopping" (Roessingh & Douglas, 2012, p. 92) as a survival strategy. Students may take courses that are deemed easy to pass to counter a low GPA in a required course. Additional coping strategies include prioritizing readings and assignments to complete thereby managing time more effectively; this also includes reading only the abstract and conclusion of chapters or articles (Holmes, 2004).

Student Participants

During the interview phase, one student commented on the inconsistency of instructional practices within an academic department:

In some courses, each instructor uses a different reading textbook. So some sections are better than others. There should be more uniformity among the sections. (Interview with Student C, Summer 2012)

To better understand the success rates of ESL students who have completed the EAP program at the university under study and their rate of success in academics, I analyzed the grade distribution for the same group of students: Winter 2012 and Summer 2012 ENGL 1100 students. Specifically, I was looking to see if there existed a higher failure rate once ESL students entered academics. The ESL 0580 course is part of the EAP program offered at the university under study. It is a level five academic writing, non-credit course. Figure 7 is a breakdown profiling the student population generated by the Institutional Planning and Analysis (IPA) Student Records search for ESL students from the Winter 2012 and Summer 2012 semesters.

Figure 7: Student Population for ESL 0580 and ENGL 1100 Grade Breakdown

Topic	Number of Students
Total number of Student Records analyzed	158
Male : Female : Unknown	110 : 47 : 1
Country of Origin	
Africa	1
Americas	1
Asia	138
Europe	10
Domestic	8

The following two charts outline the grade distribution for ESL students who completed ESL 0580 Academic Writing, which is comparable to a 6.5 IELTS band score and ENGL 1100 English Composition. ESL 0580 is a pre-requisite for ENGL 1100 at the university.

Figure 8: Grade Distribution for ESL 0580 Academic Writing Students (EAP)

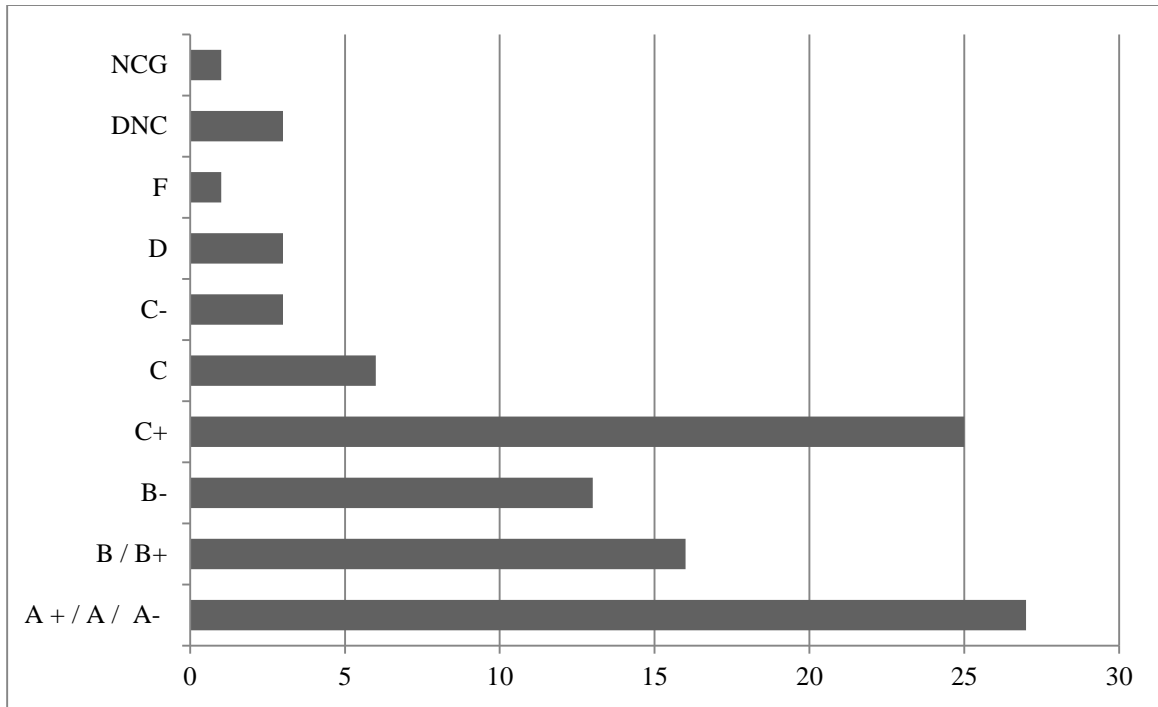


Figure 8 shows the grade distribution for 158 ESL students from the EAP program at the university under study. The y-axis outlines the students' grade while the x-axis is the percentage of students who achieved that grade. The chart shows that 11% of ESL 0580 students failed the course or did not complete as the grade for completing ESL 0580 is a C+ or higher.

The following chart represents the grade distribution for the same group of ESL students taking ENGL 1100 at the university under study. Figure 9 shows the grade distribution for ESL students taking a first year English course which is a requirement for many of the graduate and undergraduate programs at the university. The y-axis outlines the students' grade while the x-axis is the percentage of students who achieved that grade.

Figure 9: Grade Distribution for ESL Students in ENGL 1100

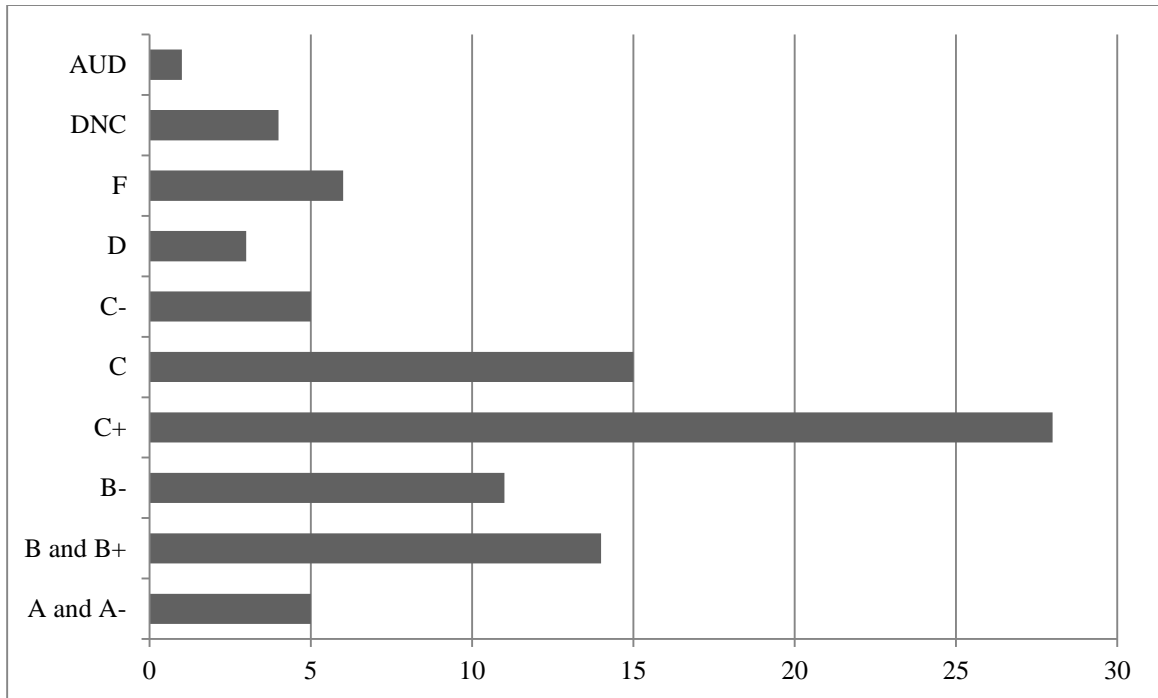


Figure 9 shows that 11% of ESL students taking ENGL 1100 failed or did not complete the course requirements. These rates are on par with completion rates of ESL 0580.

Figure 10 is a breakdown of the grading scale for undergraduate programs used by the university's staff.

Figure 10: Undergraduate Academic/Career/Developmental Programs Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Numerical Grade	Grade Points	Letter Grade Definitions
A+	90-100	4.33	Excellent. First Class Standing. Superior Performance showing comprehensive, in-depth understanding of subject matter. Demonstrates initiative and fluency of expression.
A	85-89	4.00	
A-	80-84	3.67	
B+	77-79	3.33	Very Good. Second Class Standing. Clearly above average performance with knowledge of principles and facts generally complete and with no serious deficiencies.
B	73-76	3.00	
B-	70-72	2.67	
C+	65-69	2.33	Satisfactory. Basic understanding with knowledge of principles and facts at least adequate to communicate intelligently in the discipline.
C	60-64	2.00	
C-	55-59	1.67	Pass. Some understanding of principles and facts but with definite deficiencies.
D	50-54	1.00	Minimal Pass. A passing grade indicating marginal performance. Student not likely to succeed in subsequent courses in the subject.
F	0-49	0.00	Unsatisfactory. Fail. Knowledge of principles and facts is fragmentary; or student has failed to complete substantive course requirements.
DNC		0.00	Did not complete the course, less than 50% of course work completed or mandatory course component(s) not completed. No official withdrawal.

Figure 8 and Figure 9 demonstrate that completion rates are similar for ESL 0580 and ENGL 1100 students. I suggest that this means standards for English language proficiency are on par or increase at a steady rate with the ESL students' learning curve. Therefore, there is not a deficiency in the standards of the university's EAP program in comparison with the standards of first-year English.

Faculty Participants

Based on the failure rates of ESL students in first-year English courses, it is clear that not all ESL students are finding success in their academic courses. I first asked the

faculty to share their failure rates of ESL students and then to discuss the issues and themes which attribute to these rates. Based on student and faculty comments, a number of ESL students will drop out of their academic courses before they can receive a failing grade if the situation arises. Therefore, it can be difficult to find exact passing and failing rates. Figure 11 outlines the failure rates of ESL students in courses taught by the faculty I interviewed.

Figure 11: Breakdown of ESL Student Failures in Courses of Interviewed Faculty in S12 and F12

Faculty	Course #	Failure Rates of ESL Students
A	TMGT 1 - - -	1 – 2 ESL students per semester
B	ENGL 1 - - -	7 – 8 ESL students per course in summer semester
C	ENGL 1 - - -	0
D	ENGL 1 - - -	1 – 2 ESL students per course
E	ECON 1 - - -	50% of ESL students per course
F	ENGL 1 - - -	50% of ESL students per course
G	ENGL 1 - - -	0 – 1 per course
H	CMNS 1 - - -	0 (1-2 drop-outs per course)

Figure 11 indicates a range of failure rates from 0% to 50% regardless of the course number or section. Comparing teacher perceptions of ESL student failure rates with Figures 8 and 9, one can see there is some discrepancy where the average failure rate of ESL students according to student records as collected by the IPA Department varies greatly with more than half of the teachers interviewed. This is not uncommon among institutions in the United States where research has shown that instructors' requirements varied substantially across institutions and academic disciplines (Ferris, 1998). When ESL students share their academic experiences with one another, statistics like these can lead to

course shopping. The following comments refer to faculty perceptions concerning the failure rates of ESL students and suggest possible reasons for these numbers:

In a class of 30 [ESL and NES students], I usually fail seven or eight ESL students. ESL students are more likely to negotiate for a passing grade, they might say “you can do this for me”, “my father will be upset with me” or “I need to finish my degree and I’m moving back home”. (Interview with Faculty B, Summer 2012)

Referencing has gone from a one-hour discussion to a two-week discussion [with enrolment of ESL students], especially in the summer. I usually either allow a rewrite or give a zero on an assignment but I never kick them out. I fail four students per summer term because of this reason. (Interview with Student C, Summer 2012)

Failure due to not completing assignments. Usually if ESL students complete assignments, then they can get a passing grade. I allow re-writes. (Interview with Faculty D, Fall 2012)

Last winter semester I had roughly 50% of my ESL students fail. I often have bi-modal distributions in the average score of ESL students and non-ESL students. Attendance and tardiness are an issue. (Interview with Faculty E, Summer 2012)

They [drop-outs] usually just disappear. Sometimes they’ll ask if they have any chance of passing this course... I explain that sometimes ESL students have to take the course two to three times. (Interview with Faculty F, Fall 2012)

While the faculty in this study refer to referencing, not completing assignments, and attendance as primary reasons for ESL student failure, research highlights ESL students’ lack of class participation and their inability to respond to questions as problem areas (Ferris, 1998). Another trend which came out of this line of questioning was the variance in failure rates. Some faculty explained that, “If ESL students complete assignments, then they can get a passing grade” which implies that by simply putting in the effort, they will be successful. Contrastingly, one faculty participant explained “that sometimes ESL students have to take the course two to three times” which implies that a better understanding of course content and skills are needed to obtain a passing grade. This is

something needs to be researched further because it seems to demonstrate a lack of consistency in grading policies across sections.

Student Participants

To compare results in order to better understand what students perceived to be reasons behind ESL student failure rates, I asked the students during the interview phase: In your opinion, what factor has the greatest influence on ESL student failure rates?

Spending time with native [English] speakers will improve your English speaking faster. There are so many Chinese students and they like to spend all their time together because it is easier and they feel more comfortable. (Interview with Student A, Summer 2012)

ESL students don't like to ask instructors something. The second essay I wrote I got a low grade. I was nervous to ask the instructor how to fix it. When I spoke with him, I gained confidence. It was very helpful. (Interview with Student B, Summer 2012)

They don't study. The Writing Centre was helpful, but not all the time. Some instructors [Writing Centre], they just underline and they don't always say anything. When the instructor only has 30 minutes to look at your essay, it can be frustrating... Then you have to make another appointment to finish your essay. (Interview with Student C, Summer 2012)

[There is a lack of] interaction between student and instructor. In ESL, instructors try to encourage students to engage with them and make them feel comfortable. [The EAP courses are] more interactive, [with] less intensive lectures. (Interview with Student D, Fall 2012)

Several of the students I interviewed commented on the hesitancy of ESL students to communicate with NES students. In addition, the students referred to a lack of interaction between students and faculty as having a negative impact on students' academic success. The literature on student-teacher relationships supports building strong communication channels in which students can seek help, clarify assignment criteria, and spend more time conversing in English (Hu, 2009; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Olivas, 2006; Robertsen, et. al., 2000). Olivas (2006) argues that "the quality of relationships

international students had with faculty, the perceived quality of instruction, and the presence of faculty interest in the student's professional development can all act as a protective function to mental well-being of students" (p. 2).

Faculty Participants

At the university under study there are minimum requirements for admissions into academics for international students. ESL students with a minimum TOEFL score of 88 (iBT) (with no section below 20) or a minimum IELTS score of 6.5 (with no band below 6.0) can register directly for academic courses. I asked faculty members if they believed these test scores are a satisfactory indication of written English proficiency. The faculty interviewed agreed unanimously that, due to the number of unqualified ESL students in their courses, these scores were not satisfactory indications of written English proficiency. On average, two thirds of ESL students in an undergraduate course obtained admittance through test scores. Below are two faculty participants' perceptions on ESL students' eligibility for first year academic courses.

The minority of ESL students entering my class are qualified to be in it. (Interview with Faculty D, Summer 2012)

No. ESL students are way below NES students' writing skills. I have an uncomfortable number of students who are significantly below. (Interview with Faculty F, Fall 2012)

The faculty participants are concerned about the level of preparedness of some ESL students entering first year academics and believe it may be linked to inadequate admission requirements.

In summary, ESL students' success rates in academics can be linked back to inadequate admission requirements. The faculty expressed concerns that some ESL students were not qualified to be in their courses. Faculty also attributed failure rates to: lack of attendance, failure to complete assignments, and a lack of participation in class

discussions and group work. Students, however, referred to poor student-teacher relationships and a fear of communicating with faculty to clarify meaning.

4.5 Culture

Research has shown that students' cultural competence can either positively or negatively affect their success in academics (Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). ESL students in a Canadian university need to understand cultural norms, including when to ask questions or when to disagree with the instructor. In addition, ESL students need to understand the student-teacher relationship in order to seek out the appropriate help. Studies have shown that cultural skills are directly related to language skills (Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). Rubenstein (2006) draws attention to the dichotomous use of repetition by Western and Chinese cultures: "for Western students, repetition is used as a test of memory. Chinese students use repetition to deepen or develop understanding by discovering new meaning. For Western students, understanding results from sudden insight. Chinese see understanding as a long process that requires considerable mental effort" (p. 437). These conflicting beliefs can be confusing for international students and domestic students when trying to work in groups. Therefore, discussions around cultural beliefs are an important component of building successful relationships between domestic and international students.

Student Participants

In order to better understand which issues of concern are the most common among ESL students and have the greatest impact on their academic success, I asked student participants: What difficulties and conflicts have you found with cultural identity when doing writing assignments? The majority of students responded that they had experienced some kind of difficulty with writing assignments due to their cultural identity.

In Canada, you can say whatever you want. In China, we need to think about whether we can say this. When we graduate from high school [in China] we have an important exam. We have to write an essay but we can't say whatever we want.

We have to follow the topic and say a positive side. (Interview with Student A, Summer 2012)

There was a topic, but I was with it not against, but it was a part of my cultural beliefs. When I showed it to the instructor, I was concerned she would mark it poorly, but she didn't. The result was good. (Interview with Student C, Summer 2012)

Being Saudi, it makes me uncomfortable to write whatever I want. I'm afraid the audience won't understand. (Interview with Student G, Fall 2012)

The issue of knowing when it is appropriate to share and whether or not students feel comfortable sharing is more of a cultural issue than a linguistic one. Western teachers often encourage students to share their ideas and opinions with emphasis and passion; however, in some cultures, displays of emotion are considered inappropriate. This issue can be especially complicated in some cultures if both males and females are present (Rubenstein, 2006). Rubenstein (2006) recommends that "discussion topics should be assigned judiciously. Teachers might want to be alert to indications that a particular topic may have inadvertently hit a nerve. Such signs would include verbal reticence or writer's block in an otherwise involved and cooperative student" (p. 439). If this occurs, I recommend scheduling a one-on-one conferencing time to discuss the concerns the student may be having.

Faculty Participants

To compare faculty and student perceptions on cultural influences in academic success of ESL students, I asked faculty participants to comment on their perception of possible language and cultural challenges or problems of ESL students regarding academic writing and other aspects of their academic life. Many of the faculty referred to some of the same themes raised by the student participants.

ESL students have problems understanding the connotative meaning of language. They also have problems with sayings [idioms]. (Interview with Faculty A, Summer 2012)

Structuring essays, introductions... Some Chinese students have a different structure, not as broad an opening. It's difficult to motivate students to do work. (Interview with Faculty B, Summer 2012)

A lot of students don't understand the problem of plagiarism and ownership of ideas... I have to adjust some of the readings I give the students because they may not understand. (Interview with Faculty D, Summer 2012)

Concept of attendance... Concept of grading – [some] students may ask for a particular grade. General respect issues – cell phone usage during class. (Interview with Faculty E, Summer 2012)

Asian students have difficulty participating due to their educational experiences. They tend not to ask questions in front of other students. On one assignment, all of the Asian students failed in the same way [made the same mistake] because they asked each other rather than the teacher. (Interview with Faculty G, Fall 2012)

Asian students don't participate in class very happily. Students attribute it to not being accepted. They sit outside of the group. It's hard to motivate them to work... Asian students and plagiarism: The concept seems foreign to them. It takes a lot of work to make them understand. I have failed students because of plagiarism. This is a constant problem that we discuss within the department. You fail students because of poor language skills so they seek out illegitimate help. (Interview with Faculty F, Fall 2012)

[ESL students'] reliance on electronic dictionaries. [Their] lack of integration with native English speakers. [Their] failure to seek the appropriate help. (Interview with Faculty H, Fall 2012)

The two main themes that came out of this line of responses were: ESL students' concept of the ownership of ideas and class participation. The literature on intercultural communication draws connections between these two themes, referring to the Eastern ideals of collectivism, which is largely influenced by Confucius and his philosophy (Huang & Brown, 2009). As a result, Chinese students are reluctant to challenge their teachers or interrupt a lecture to ask a question.

In summary, I cannot deny the role culture plays in ESL student learning. Student participants referred to their difficulties communicating and building relationships with faculty and NES peers. Additionally, students spoke of their reluctance to share their views

on certain assigned writing topics. These factors have affected how easily ESL students can collaborate in group discussions.

Aligned with some of the reactions of faculty participants, pertinent research in the field has shown that, “the onus is on these Chinese [ESL] students to reconstruct and renegotiate their primary culture learning and communication styles to accommodate another way” (Holmes, 2004, p. 303). The challenge then is for faculty to move from the perception that Chinese ESL students, and additionally all ESL students, must conform to the domestic culture. Instead, I need to learn how to better understand different learning styles and to practice cultural sensitivity. As one solution, research recommends faculty employ experiential learning, i.e. case studies, through group work to encourage critical thinking, reflection, and intercultural awareness among ESL students and NES students.

4.6 Participation

Relevant research in the field has shown that ESL students are often reluctant to participate in class discussions (Bifuh-Ambe, 2009; Holmes, 2004; Rubenstein, 2006). The reason is often a combination of cultural influences and a lack of confidence in English language proficiency.

Faculty Participants

For this study, two faculty participants commented on the resistance of ESL students to participate:

Asian students have difficulty participating due to their educational experiences. They tend not to ask questions in front of other students. (Interview with Faculty G, Fall 2012).

Asian students don't participate in class very happily. Students attribute it to not being accepted. They sit outside of the group. (Interview with Faculty F, Fall 2012)

Research conducted at the University of Waikato, New Zealand compared the learning styles of ethnic Chinese students with domestic students. The New Zealand style of education is part of Western education which is generally described as Socratic, “where knowledge is generated, or co-constructed, through a process of questioning and

evaluation of beliefs; additionally, problem solving and critical thinking skills are considered important” (Holmes, 2004, p. 295). The research discovered that Chinese students, due to their educational experiences, lack some of the skills to involve themselves in discussions; namely, they require turn-taking skills (Holmes, 2004). The study discovered that Chinese students had developed coping strategies which included a “dependence on same-culture classmates, reluctance to ask for clarification or elaboration during a lecture, pre-reading, and highlighting and marking rather than note taking” (Holmes, 2004, p. 299).

Western teachers expect students to ask questions during lectures and seminars to clarify meaning and extend knowledge. To understand how faculty perceived the participation of ESL students, I asked them if, generally, they felt their ESL students appeared confident in answering questions orally in English (during group work and/or class discussions). Among the faculty interviewed, five out of eight gave participation marks ranging from 1 – 15% of the final grade. Participation involved: small group discussion, feedback from the group to the whole class, answering questions orally, attendance, and respectable behaviour (e.g., not texting).

Yes, the [few] ones who answer seem confident. (Interview with Faculty A, Summer 2012)

It varies from student to student. They are reluctant to share initially. The class [ENGL 1---] is a large class which can be intimidating. (Interview with Faculty B, Summer 2012)

No, they don’t contribute to class discussions. There is always someone in the back texting and not paying attention. (Interview with Faculty D, Fall 2012)

Sometimes I cannot understand a word they are saying but it’s still important for them to answer. (Interview with Faculty F, Fall 2012)

The faculty noted that the majority of ESL students were reluctant to participate. It is well documented that ESL students are often disinclined to participate in class discussions (Arkoudis & Tran, 2010; Cheng, et. al., 2004; Holmes, 2004; Jackson, 2002; Tani, 2005).

Many ESL students do not feel confident in their English language proficiency to share their ideas, fearing that they will make mistakes and lose face. Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2006) explained that Asian culture has no real history of debate. Furthermore, they stressed, disagreeing with others, especially face to face, and arguing one's points is seen as confrontational. As a result, some Canadian academic instructors see the students as lazy, disrespectful, or unprepared for class. According to Faculty D, a student who is not contributing is seen as "not paying attention" (Interview with Faculty D, Summer 2012). That is why it is important for faculty to be aware of cultural differences and international students' educational backgrounds.

Student Participants

To compare comments on participation given by faculty members, I asked the student interview participants if they regularly contributed to class discussions and to explain their comfort level, either academically and/or culturally, in doing so. The following are some responses.

Yes [I regularly participate]. If my classmates are kind and nice to me then I feel comfortable sharing. Sometimes, they speak so fast and use slang that is very difficult for me to understand. If they use this language then I don't like to participate. (Interview with Student A, Summer 2012)

No. Besides listening to lectures, I'm not comfortable speaking in front of class and I lose confidence. (Interview with Student B, Summer 2012)

I'm a bit nervous, but that's OK with me. I have to prepare well [to speak in class]. (Interview with Student C, Summer 2012)

Not often. If I'm prepared for a presentation then I feel comfortable. It depends how the group is comprised. If there are other ESL students I feel more comfortable. If they are all native English speaking students then I don't feel comfortable. (Interview with Student D, Fall 2012)

I don't know how to communicate with native English speaking students. I need to work on this. It depends on the topic, whether I am familiar with it. If I just give some experience working in China, I always have the confidence to share,

but if I have to share political issues, I will keep silent about it. (Interview with Student F, Fall 2012)

I always feel comfortable unless it pertains to a person's culture. I don't know if it is appropriate to ask questions. (Interview with Student G, Fall 2012)

The feelings these students are expressing are common among ESL students as noted in the literature (Holmes, 2004; Huang & Brown, 2009; Jackson, 2002; Rubenstein, 2006). In a study conducted at California State University in Sacramento, 65 – 75% of ESL undergraduate students reported *always*, *often*, or *sometimes* having problems with oral presentations, student-led discussions or structured large group debates (Ferris, 1998) confirming that the perceptions and experiences of students interviewed in this study are not unique to the university under study. The students in the study at the afore-mentioned university attributed their lack of confidence to “their speaking skills and English pronunciation, which inhibited their class participation and interaction with native-English speaking classmates” (Ferris, 1998, p. 301). Furthermore, in a study targeting language support for non-native English-speaking graduate students, most of the participants felt self-conscious about their foreign accents and were concerned about their pronunciation (Cheng, et. al, 2004).

In summary, both the faculty and the student participants referred to the reluctance of ESL students to participate in class discussions. Students explained that they lacked confidence in their use of the English language and feared losing face if they mispronounced words or said the wrong thing. Students expressed concerns about the appropriateness of certain discussion topics and worried that faculty and their NES classmates would not accept their views. The faculty expressed their concerns regarding how to motivate ESL students to participate in class. Some faculty used participation marks to encourage students to join in class discussions. I recommend regular use of group activities in class to allow ESL students more opportunities to gain confidence working with their NES peers and to practice using English.

4.7 Support Services

Relevant literature in the field suggests that factors supporting a positive transition for ESL students into academics include language and cultural support services (Arkoudis, & Tran, 2010). Language and cultural support service includes, but is not limited to, the following: adjunct and sheltered courses, mentors and tutors, orientation and workshops, and writing support service labs. Research shows that ESL students need continued support throughout their education abroad and should not be limited to their EAP training.

Student Participants

In order to find the relevancy of support services at the university, I asked the student participants, as part of the questionnaire, if they regularly use one of the writing support services offered the university, specifically the Writing Centre. Forty-six percent of students surveyed responded “yes”. Of the students interviewed, all but one of the students use the Writing Centre to help with their academic assignments. Below, the student participants commented on their experiences using the Writing Centre.

I use the Writing Centre for all assignments. They are very helpful. (Interview with Student D, Summer 2012)

I have difficulty understanding assignment criteria. For one assignment, I resolved it through the Writing Centre. It's easy to book appointments, but I have to book one week in advance. I visit the Writing Centre at least once a week, sometimes three times a week. (Interview with Student E, Fall 2012)

The Writing Centre helps me with grammar mistakes. They help to edit. I go to the Writing Centre two to three times a week, especially at the end of the semester. It's not hard to make an appointment. I book one week in advance. You wouldn't be able to book one day in advance. (Interview with Student F, Fall 2012)

In general, the students were happy with their experiences using the Writing Centre. They found it helped them with essay editing, in particular grammar mistakes. These students made use of the Writing Centre a minimum of once a week and up to three times per

week. They expressed the necessity of booking appointments at least one week prior, noting that it would be impossible to book an appointment one day in advance. Research has shown that working one-on-one with students can greatly increase the rate at which students learn. Furthermore, Hu, Hoare and Yu (2013) report that advanced ESL students in a writing class preferred one-on-one conferencing most, as the students found the simultaneous dynamic oral-written feedback to be the most effective and valuable mode of correction.

The findings of a study targeting language support for ESL graduate students at a Canadian university confirmed the theory that graduate students still need “continual targeted language support even after they are admitted into the graduate programs... a closer collaboration between EAP programs on campus, academic departments, graduate programs, and their professors should be encouraged” (Cheng, et. al., 2004, p. 65). The study also recommends six-week, noncredit oral courses as pre-enrollment requirements to graduate programs which include content-based instruction or as a bridging program. Research looking at ethnic Chinese students at a New Zealand university also confirmed the value of bridging programs which support international students who may be suffering from culture shock in addition to poor English language proficiency (Holmes, 2004).

In summary, language and cultural support services are relevant and necessary components of a successful international student’s study abroad. The results of this study confirmed that almost half of the students surveyed were taking advantage of the services offered by the Writing Centre however some of the students commented that they would benefit from longer tutoring sessions. Research has shown that one-on-one tutoring is beneficial in advancing academic success; furthermore, continued support throughout an international student’s education is a necessity.

Chapter 5: Findings and Implications

In this chapter, with the data and literature in mind, I will present my conclusions in order to answer the research questions. This chapter will be broken up into four sections: 1) findings to research questions, 2) implications for theory, 3) implications for policy and practice, and 4) suggestions for further research.

5.1 Findings to Research Questions

The following research questions were posed in Chapter 1: a) How do teachers in the undergraduate programs perceive the linguistic preparedness of ESL students in their undergraduate courses?, b) How do ESL students who are enrolled in first year academic courses perceive their linguistic preparedness for their current field of study?, c) What are effective teaching practices instructors can use in the academic programs to support ESL students?, and d) Which are the factors involved in the success of ESL students in their undergraduate courses?

5.11 How do teachers in the undergraduate programs perceive the linguistic preparedness of ESL students in their undergraduate courses?

Based on this study, the teachers in undergraduate programs at the university under study perceived ESL students as not fully prepared linguistically and/or culturally for their undergraduate courses. The faculty interviewed agreed unanimously that TOEFL and IELTS scores were not satisfactory indications of written English proficiency. They believed the ESL students should be graded on a level playing field with NES students. The faculty attributed ESL failure rates, in part, to unsatisfactory admission requirements.

The faculty felt that many ESL students have problems with motivation, essay structure, citations, grammar and mechanics, classroom etiquette, socializing and working with NES students. The faculty often compared ESL students to NES students. In addition, the faculty commented on their concerns regarding ESL students' cheating habits. The faculty noted that cheating was often a coping strategy for those students who were not qualified to be in the course and the faculty blamed inadequate admission requirements for

the number of unqualified ESL students in their courses. The forms of cheating the faculty referred to included: plagiarism and/or incorrectly sourcing materials, re-using past assignments, and talking during exams.

Many of the faculty interviewed expressed their concerns for a lack of effective communication with their ESL students. They explained the frequency of ESL students misunderstanding assignment criteria and class expectations, including not submitting assignments on time. Several of the faculty explained that they had ESL students who failed their course but had never come to speak with their instructor during office hours. Of the faculty participants interviewed, 37.5% indicated that they failed, on average, 50% of their ESL students per section. The faculty commented on having to change their teaching practices with the increase in enrollment of ESL students. These changes included selecting easier course texts and/or articles to read and extending the amount of class time spent on referencing and sourcing instruction.

Finally, the faculty expressed concerns regarding lack of class participation from their ESL students. Some of the faculty felt the students' lack of participation was due to their not paying attention in class while other faculty felt the ESL students were not confident enough to share their ideas in front of their peers. Ultimately, the faculty believed that many ESL students entering their courses were not prepared for the linguistic and cultural demands of first-year academics at a Canadian university.

5.12 How do ESL students who are enrolled in first year academic courses perceive their linguistic preparedness for their current field of study?

The study findings suggest that ESL students blame themselves for being unsuccessful in academics. They refer to laziness, lack of confidence, shyness, and not using support services available to them (e.g. the Writing Centre or communicating with instructors). The students compared their level of success and work ethic to other ESL students rather than NES students.

The following survey results highlight the uncertainty some ESL students felt about their academic preparedness: 45% had difficulty completing written assignments; 28% did

not believe they had the writing skills to complete academic courses successfully; and, 28% did not fully understand Canadian university rules and regulations. More specifically, the students highlighted problems with language use, grammar, academic writing style, quality of instruction and time to complete assignments as negatively affecting their academic performance. During the interview phase, the students spoke of their difficulty following instructors' lectures. The students found it difficult to pick out key points of the lecture. Research (e.g. Huang & Brown, 2009) shows that Chinese students prefer to follow an outline or the text during a lecture and have key points noted on the blackboard whereas Canadian academic instruction encourages more student participation and critical reflection and questioning of the ideas presented.

In addition, the students expressed concerns about their lack of English language proficiency which deterred them from participating in class discussions. This lack of confidence with the English language meant that the students interacted less frequently with NES students. The students preferred to spend their time with other international students from their own culture. As educators, we want to encourage ESL students to break outside of their comfort zone and make friends with domestic students so that they may gain a better understanding of Canadian culture and have more opportunities to practice using English.

5.13 What are effective teaching practices academic faculty can apply to support ESL students?

The findings suggest teachers should employ a variety of methods to better meet the needs of ESL students. These methods include: using Moodle to allow the students better access to course materials, resources, lecture notes, and assignments; assigning group work; giving marks for participation; scheduling mandatory office hour conferencing; and allowing increased time for class exams. Additionally, the findings suggest post-secondary institutions should provide more language support services for ESL academic students (e.g. more Writing Centre meeting time), sheltered academic courses, and adjunct courses.

The student participants reflected on their difficulties following the pace and technical jargon of their instructors. The students appreciated those instructors who posted lecture notes and assignment criteria on Moodle or Blackboard because it allowed them a second opportunity to review the information at their own pace. The findings support research which has shown that using online sites can be beneficial for ESL students because they allow students more time to review the material (Campbell, 2007). The student survey results showed that 24% of the students could not easily follow their instructors' lectures; furthermore, 14% felt that their instructors were unsuccessful in helping them understand questions regarding assignments. Finally, 33% of the students could not easily follow their instructors' written assignments. This final survey result emphasizes the need for mandatory one-on-one office hour conferencing to clarify assignment expectations and review instructors' written feedback. In fact, a recent study found that ESL students taking an advanced EAP writing course most preferred one-on-one conferencing and considered it as the most effective approach to writing feedback (Hu, Hoare, & Yu, 2012). Research has also shown that the quality of instructor feedback provided to students plays an important role in how students perceive their writing abilities and can further advance students' academic writing skills (Giridharan & Robson, 2011). During the interview phase, the students identified mixed results in the quality of instructor feedback given to them. This finding suggests that some instructors may benefit from professional development in feedback provisions.

Both the faculty and students described a lack of ESL student participation in class discussions. The faculty expressed difficulty in motivating ESL students to participate. Several faculty participants reflected on the tendency of their ESL students to segregate themselves from their NES classmates. On the other hand, many Asian students raised with Confucius beliefs, are often reluctant to challenge their teachers or interrupt a lecture to ask questions. By assigning regular small group activities, ESL students will have more opportunities to practice using English in a less intimidating setting than the large class discussions.

Lack of time to complete assignments was also identified as a factor affecting the academic success of ESL students. Several of the teachers interviewed commented on ESL students taking longer to complete exams and/or submitting assignments late; nevertheless, none of the teachers allowed additional time for ESL students to complete exams. One of the faculty participants, however, allowed extensions for those students who were waiting for an appointment with the Writing Centre before submitting their written assignment. Since generally ESL students have to contend with both language and content, it is not surprising they take longer than NES students to write exams. Thus, contentious as it is, it may be necessary to allow ESL students reasonably more time to complete exams or homework assignments if justified. Along with giving ESL students additional time to complete exams, research has shown that by using high frequency words when writing tests rather than low frequency academic language, ESL students can be more successful (Teemant, 2010). In addition, I recommend allowing students to use dictionaries during exams. All of the students in this study used electronic and paper dictionaries to assist their learning. However, measures will need to be put in place so that students only access dictionaries and not cheat.

5.14 Which are the factors involved in the success of ESL students in their undergraduate courses?

This question is not easily answered because a significant number of factors contribute to the success of ESL students as can be seen in Chapters 2 and 4. Some of the key factors which came out of this study were: understanding of Canadian university rules and research skills; the availability and quality of support services; the quality and frequency of communication between ESL students, instructors and NES students; university admission requirements; cultural beliefs and past educational experiences; and the consistency in grading policies across sections.

Relevant studies in the field have shown that the demands on ESL students in academics go beyond English language proficiency (e.g. Giridharan & Robson, 2011; Olivas & Li, 2006; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). The skills required to be successful in

Canadian academics include an understanding of independent and Internet research, group work and presentations, and writing according to discipline-specific genre conventions. Student survey results showed that 25% of the students found language usage and grammar to be the most difficult parts of written assignments in academics.

All of the faculty participants expressed their concerns regarding admission requirements. They unanimously agreed that the test scores were not satisfactory indicators of written English proficiency based on the number of unqualified ESL students enrolled in their courses. One faculty participant explained that she regularly told ESL students who were close to failing her course that it was not uncommon for ESL students to have to take her course two or three times in order to pass.

Culture is one factor that plays a significant role in the success of international students in Canadian universities. Through this study and following research in the field I have learned that cultural beliefs and educational experiences affect international students in the following areas: class participation; communication with instructors; differences in teacher, learning and assessment models; plagiarism; attendance and tardiness; and dependency of L1 use for content knowledge. Culture also influences the preference towards certain styles of discourse including preferred length of sentences, vocabulary usage, use of first person, passive voice usage, etc. Understanding these cultural differences is important for Canadian instructors to better understand their ESL students and their needs. I recommend faculty attend mandatory cross-cultural workshops which offer teaching strategies for faculty of international students.

During this study I found a large discrepancy in the grading policies of the faculty participants. The faculty described a spectrum of failure rates ranging from 0% to 50% per section while the IPA Student Records confirmed an average failure rate of 11% for ENGL 1100, for example. In addition, the first year English faculty described a variety of written assignment assessments that ranged from holistic grading to minimal weighting for grammar and mechanical errors. This inconsistency in grading policy can be confusing for international students and may lead to course shopping. The student survey

identified that 14% of students ranked the quality of teacher instruction as a dominant factor in their academic success.

Finally, the availability and quality of language and cultural support services play a significant role in the success of ESL students. All of the student interview participants have used the Writing Centre; some of them used it two or even three times a week. Research shows that ESL students need continued support throughout their education and should not be limited to their EAP training (e.g. Arkoudis & Tran, 2010; Holmes, 2004).

5.2 Implications for Theory

Earlier research has shown that, on average, ESL students are behind in terms of post-secondary academic success compared to their NES counterparts (Roessingh, 1999; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). Many factors affect the academic success of ESL students including cultural beliefs and educational experiences. My study suggests that ESL students at the university under study are similarly failing to meet expectations of academic faculty. Based on the study results, I am challenging the current teaching practices in academics and suggesting strategies which will benefit both ESL and NES students. Furthermore, findings suggest that English language proficiency may not be the only factor affecting the success of ESL students in academics and changes in language support services and teaching practices could improve the success rate of ESL students.

Based on the results of this study, one example for teaching practice is allowing ESL students to conduct research in L1. Hu (2003) discovered that it was not uncommon for Chinese graduate students studying sciences and engineering at a Canadian university to plan their writing and generate ideas in L1. ESL students have obtained content knowledge in L1 which is easier to recall in L1. Translation can be used as a tool to generate ideas for content writing. The tendency towards copying directly from sources is also part of their learning process but with proper guidance and referencing education, they will eventually rely less and less on this method as their mastery of English improves.

The second implication for theory is the practice of allowing ESL students additional time to complete exams. Many Canadian high schools already practice and follow the policy of allowing students with learning disabilities extended time (Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). ESL students need additional time to read the questions, formulate answers (often occurring in L1), and then, if necessary, translate the answers into English. This theory can also be applied to course assignments. I recommend instructors give students major assignments early to allow students plentiful time to prepare and set assignment due dates early in the semester to allow instructors time to give feedback which can influence students' future writing.

5.3 Implications for Policy and Practice

The following breakdown will outline the recommendations for teaching practices. This section of the chapter will be broken down further into categories to better highlight the recommendations for improving teacher practices: 1) online resources, 2) communication, 3) time, 4) language support services, and 5) admission requirements.

5.31 Online Resources

Based on the research results and relevant literature in the field, ESL students need more time to process questions, formulate their ideas and translate those ideas into English. As a result, online discussion has become a common tool in education and can be beneficial for ESL students. Online discussion refers to the use of wikis and blogs, discussion forums such as Moodle and Blackboard, and e-mailing. In a study designed to bring ESL students out of their shells, researcher Nittaya Campbell at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, asserted that “it allows more flexibility than face-to-face discussion. It also gives time to think about the messages they [ESL students] receive and send without the pressure of immediate response” (Campbell, 2007, p. 38). Relevant literature in the field confirms that online discussion, which allows more time for thoughtful consideration and forming ideas, is “a major liberating factor” (Campbell, 2007, p.

40) affirming that “ESL students have ideas but not enough time” (Holmes, 2004, 40).

I recommend using Moodles to allow students better access to course materials, resources, lecture notes, and assignments. As one research study suggests, “students may not understand professors’ lectures very well when they are listening to them but they may still be able to function effectively in class if the lecture material is also available in the textbook or if the professor makes lecture notes and handouts available” (Ferris, 1998, p. 313). During the student interviews Student D commented on the use of Moodle, “It is very helpful. In the English class the teacher posted notes on Moodle so I can double check.” (Interview with Student D, Fall 2012). Another student participant explained how his teacher used Moodle to give grammar tests. He believed the process was “very useful” (Interview with Student F, Fall 2012). The student participants affirmed that, by having access to lecture notes on Moodle, they benefited from the opportunity to review the ideas discussed during class.

5.32 Communication

Results from this study and others show that international students often feel isolated from domestic students (Zhai, 2004). There are many reasons for encouraging interaction between ESL students and NES students, including: improving ESL students’ language and communication skills, providing ESL students with opportunities to understand Canadian culture, and increasing cultural understanding and awareness. The literature suggests that students should be encouraged to participate in social and academic conversation groups with NES students because it increases the opportunities ESL students may have to practice speaking English and experiencing Canadian culture (Friesen, 2012; Hu, 2000 & 2009; Wiltse, 2011). This will undoubtedly enhance their ability to speak English and become more comfortable with the academic and cultural environment on campus (Cheng et. al, 2004).

As part of a study on reticence in second language case discussions, researchers at the Chinese University of Hong Kong discovered that Chinese students felt less inhibited when they were representing others when they spoke (Jackson, 2002). In other words,

“students are less afraid of speaking out when they are speaking for others” (Jackson, 2002, p. 70). Furthermore, the study found that Chinese students were much more confident when presenting their ideas in formal presentations. Jackson (2002) suggested the use of small groups to serve as a “rehearsal for the full-class case discussions” (p. 71) because they are an opportunity for students to practice discussing the content and forming ideas in English with the support of their classmates in a small, less intimidating setting.

Research has shown that the most common reaction of Chinese students when being singled out for a question in front of the class is fear and anxiety (Jackson, 2002; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). Students’ difficulties with participation in a group are linked to: a) the need for time to process questions and others’ comments in order to think of a response, b) the fear of producing grammatically inaccurate speech and asking inappropriate questions which would distract others, and c) the lack of experience competing for turns in on-going discussions (Zhu & Flaitz, 2005). In addition, for some cultures, asking for help can be seen as losing face because it is perceived as a sign of weakness or failure (Rubenstein, 2006).

I recommend encouraging ESL students to communicate with their instructors and communicate with NES students on a regular basis (e.g. group work). By scheduling one-on-one conferencing hours, instructors can get a better understanding of the students’ progress without singling them out in front of their peers. Some common complaints among Chinese students are “the professor [not giving] enough time to think” (Jackson, 2002, p. 74), being anxious about being the centre of attention, and worrying about the value of their points (Jackson, 2002).

During the faculty interviews, two faculty participants commented on the tendencies of ESL students to distance themselves from their NES peers.

ESL students tend to segregate themselves. I see distinct groups within the class form. I used to use a lot of group work, but now I’m reluctant because it can be too painful to figure out how to make it work. (Interview with Faculty G, Fall 2012)

ESL students need to converse in English with friends and make Canadian contacts. They need to break out of their comfort zone. (Interview with Faculty H, Fall 2012)

The research shows that culture may inhibit a student from seeking help. Asking for help can be difficult for many students, particularly those from cultures where this is seen as a sign of weakness or failure.

Based on a study on educational expectations around the world, Rubenstein (2006) suggests that “if it appears that a student is struggling, rather than waiting for them to seek help, it may be advisable to request, even insist, that he or she schedule a private consultation to discuss the situation” (p. 440). Many of the faculty I interviewed referred to students who were failing or had failed their course but had never come to speak to them. Based on relevant theories in the field, I recommend office hour conferencing as a way to combat this issue. Tran (2008) found that

The students transform their own practices through seeking ways to contact their lecturers, either through written forms or direct dialogue, to deepen their understandings of the disciplinary expectations, ask for feedback on draft versions of writing assignments and go through the redrafting process... The academics also reveal that through conversations with international students who actively discussed their needs, they increase their understandings of the needs of international students and how to accommodate these needs (p. 533).

Furthermore, research has shown that teaching practices play a crucial role in the success of ESL students and, therefore, if instructors do not clearly articulate course assignments and ensure clarification of students’ understanding, then ESL students may not meet assignment expectations (see also, Hu, 2000). I recommend that instructors put their assignment expectations in writing and clearly articulate expectations using high-frequency vocabulary.

Five of the eight faculty members interviewed had adopted participation marks as a way to motivate students to participate. For ESL students struggling with writing assignments, this could be a useful tool to help bolster their grades and encourage participation. Finally, research has shown that successful ESL students develop coping strategies for maintaining positive well-being; these strategies include: building

relationships, expanding their worldview, asking for legitimate help, developing cultural and social contacts, establishing relationships with advisors and instructors, and improving English proficiency (Tseng & Newton, 2002).

5.33 Time

Based on the data collected, the students and faculty participants raised the concern of ESL students not having enough time to complete assignments thoughtfully and with detail in comparison with their NES peers. One solution would be to allow ESL students more time to complete exams. For instance, in Alberta, high school students are permitted, “in keeping with regulations for other learners with exceptional needs (learning-disabled and deaf and hard of hearing students) attending the school, the ESL students were allowed double the time scheduled to write the English 10 exam” (Roessingh, 1999, p. 81).

It is important to consider the reason why a student may be taking longer to complete an exam. For example, some exams can be literature dense and involve a significant component of reading. Research affirms that ESL students need extra time to process questions and develop their answers (Jackson, 2002; Leki & Carson, 1997; Roessingh, 1999; Teemant, 2010; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005).

Research conducted at an American university looked at ESL students enrolled in four-year university programs. The study was concerned with ESL students’ perspectives on university classroom testing practices (Teemant, 2010). The study identified seven language-related problems with testing: a) vocabulary, b) understanding questions, c) memorizing English, d) knowing how to write, e) time constraints, f) trapped in L1 content knowledge, and f) keeping pace in the classroom with the instructor (Teemant, 2010). One of the most troublesome aspects of test writing for ESL students was time constraints. Students spoke to having “to think, to organize, and to check grammar, and that their ideas often come to them first in their native language and need to be rephrased in English” (Teemant, 2010, p. 95). Students also felt that, by improving their reading skills, they would be better prepared to finish tests in the allotted time (Teemant, 2010).

University textbooks are especially challenging for ESL students simply due to the high density of low-frequency words. Laufer (1992) described the threshold of vocabulary comprehension at 98% to allow for an accurate understanding of academic information while Lightbown & Spada (2006) claim there is evidence in the research that “in order to successfully guess the meanings of new words in text, a reader usually needs to know 90% or more of the words in the text” (p. 188). While ESL students are often taught skimming and scanning strategies in their EAP courses, “strategies taught in the context of short paragraphs don’t automatically transfer to the context of extensive reading” (Zhu & Flaitz, 2005, p. 4). One faculty participant commented on his experiences giving exams to his economics class:

When students are doing an exam, it takes the ESL students much longer to read the questions and understand [them] in order to formulate a response. When I write the exams, I write them with a particular average response time in mind... If I have students who run out of time, 99.9% of the time it is an ESL student. Sometimes, I get a response that is a bunch of random key words. (Interview with Faculty E, Summer 2012)

Apart from allowing ESL students more time to complete exams, a study at one American university on ESL test practices found that students requested instructors to provide study guides, allow the previewing of tests, write test questions clearly with simple vocabulary, allow dictionary use, answer students’ questions during exams, and meet one-on-one with struggling students beforehand (Teemant, 2010). Finally, if allowed the choice, the majority of ESL students surveyed by Teemant preferred to take tests orally because that was what they were accustomed to in their home country (Teemant, 2010). It is important to note that the thirteen students in Teemant’s study (2010) represented seven different language backgrounds: Belorussian, Russian, Portuguese, Spanish, Korean, Chinese and Arabic. Much of the literature for my study focuses on Asian cultural beliefs and educational experiences; therefore, the preference for oral examinations cannot be directly correlated to the test preferences of the students at the university under study.

5.34 Language Support Services

The university under study offers a wide variety of language and cultural support services, including: orientation week, academic and international student advisors, celebration of international students and diversity on campus in the form of International Days, international news and advising support on WebCT, the International and Student Activity Program (ISAP), international student clubs and associations, the Canadian Buddy program, the Writing Centre and Language Labs, and counseling. One concern is the relevancy of these programs in terms of their success rate and the number of students who take advantage of them.

Relevant studies have shown that international students have a higher rate of difficulty adjusting to university life in comparison with domestic students (Olivas & Li, 2006; Zhai, 2004). There are several reasons including: fast-paced lectures, two-way interaction between instructors and students, more student participation, more group activities, more assignments (reading and writing), more student presentations, and more speech requirements (Zhai, 2004). As a result, international students require extra support services in order to ease the transition into academics. Zhai, a research and planning analyst from the United States, discovered that 70% of international students will look to family and friends for help in academics rather than seeking help from their instructors or classmates (2004). Based on the results of his research, Zhai recommended universities improve their orientation programs by having them highlight the support services available to international students; furthermore, Zhai (2004) recommended creating activities and groups for students to increase interaction between international students and domestic students. Orientation should be a continuous process in which mentors maintain contact with international students throughout their university experience abroad. Finally, Zhai (2004) suggests the university offer mini communication workshops; “in these workshops, international students may become familiar with the use of colloquial English, commonly used slang words, and the social and cultural mores of society in order to communicate effectively in both academic and non-academic settings” (p. 103).

I also recommend that the university invest in quality language support services, which should be run by staff with degrees in the fields of linguistics, TESL, and adult education (Woodward-Kron, 2007). In order to better meet the needs of ESL students, I recommend providing instructors opportunities to improve their training and qualifications. In addition, I recommend increasing the length of time for appointments at the Writing Centre. This might come in the form of offering students the option of booking a 30 minute or 50 minute appointment based on their needs.

One faculty participant commented on the language support needs of his ESL students.

The Writing Centre needs to be more flexible; more available to help them [ESL students]. A 30 minute appointment doesn't go very far. Sometimes I give ESL students an extension if they cannot get an appointment right away. The employees might not be trained in how to teach English mechanic errors. (Interview with Faculty D, Summer 2012)

In addition to providing quality language support services, I recommend offering sheltered academic courses and adjunct courses. A sheltered academic course occurs when “the teacher takes into consideration students’ English-language skills and modifies the delivery of instruction through slower speech, giving information verbally as well as visually, and the use of controlled vocabulary while at the same time striving for academically rigorous instruction” (Echevarria and Graves, 1998, p. 35). In comparison, adjunct courses involve an ESL course that is linked to a content area course. Students are enrolled in both courses concurrently. In addition, the courses share the same content base and complement each other in terms of jointly coordinated assignments. A key feature of the design is the coordination and collaborative planning between the ESL instructor and the content area instructor. The content area course is taught by a teacher with expertise in the area, whereas an ESL instructor teaches the ESL adjunct course.

The benefit of these types of programs is that student learning needs are placed above course content. Researchers in the field argue that TESL trained instructors can

better meet the needs of struggling ESL students, as “ESL teachers are the educators with the expertise to be proactive in responding to ESL learners’ needs. ESL students’ language learning needs for success in high school English are predictable, and it is these needs that should drive ESL instruction, not the content” (Roessingh, 1999, p. 74). Arkoudis and Tran (2010) found that University of Melbourne academic instructors had difficulties integrating disciplinary and language learning. The instructors at the university found it challenging to “respond to issues such as communicating effectively with students, enhancing the integration between home students and international students, and evaluating international students’ language skills” (Arkoudis & Tran, 2010, p. 170); furthermore, “they found it challenging to give advice to students on academic writing, and they self-positioned themselves as unclear about what the advice should be” (Arkoudis & Tran, 2010, p.175). Arkoudis and Tran (2010) argue that “English language learning is still considered by the [academic] lecturers as occurring outside of the domain of the disciplinary teaching” (Arkoudis & Tran, 2010, p. 174). This research suggests that the academic faculty at the University of Melbourne lack the required skills that an instructor trained in linguistics and TESL have for academic language development; thus, further emphasizing the need for collaboration between academic and EAP instructors.

5.35 Admission Requirements

The requirements for international students enrolling in courses at the university under study are on par with other Canadian universities. As of 2012, the requirement for ESL students attempting to gain direct entry into academic programs was an iBT TOEFL score of 88 or higher with no band below 20 and an IELTS score of 6.5 or higher with no band below 6.0. These exams test listening comprehension, structure and written expression, reading comprehension and short composition. For students completing the EAP program, the fifth level is equivalent to an IELTS band score of 6.5. Despite having reached the required enrollment standards, university educators assert that ESL students will likely still have difficulties with idiomatic language, quick or reduced pronunciation, specialized vocabulary, speaking out in class or in groups, expressing ideas in English, and English pronunciation.

I recommend that the minimum TOEFL and IELTS scores be raised and, if possible, request IELTS ‘academic’ instead of IELTS ‘general’ scores. Unfortunately, however, IELTS short essay writing, albeit academic writing, has a whole range of assignment types, including use of citations; thus, IELTS test scores cannot be an accurate measurement of students’ ability to perform well in all types of academic or disciplinary writing. While raising the test scores may help separate students with linguistic competence, it does not directly prepare ESL students to write successful academic assignments. Thus, what is also needed is bridge courses that prepare ESL students to deal with various common types of written assignments such as a literature review, project reports, and research papers. Ryan (2000) argues that “universities need to respond to the needs of international students by opening their doors to them, but once in, making sure that the curriculum is also accessible” (Ryan, 2000, p. 5).

The following comment was taken from an interview with a faculty participant who has a background in ESL instruction and development of language proficiency assessment tools. Based on her teaching experiences at the university she expressed concerns that the admission requirements and the quality of work produced by her ESL students were in conflict.

ESL students need better training in the principles and conventions of academic writing. If they have a 6.5 in IELTS they should have stronger skills than what I’ve seen. I don’t see the vocabulary around how to present an argument. The IELTS ‘general’ score of 6.5 is not adequate compared to IELTS ‘academic’. There is a difference in the kind of vocabulary and reading skills. (Interview with Faculty C, Summer 2012)

This faculty participant raised concerns about the quality of one assessment tool used by the university under study for international student admission requirements. She also questioned the validity of these test scores based on the level of academic English language skills of some of her ESL students. She believed there is an inconsistency in the test score and the level of her ESL students’ ability, thus she suggested the university raise IELTS scores and switch to the academic test version.

In this chapter I have reviewed seven areas affecting the linguistic preparedness of ESL students in academics. Three themes surfaced above all others in this chapter: a) academic writing, b) intercultural communication, and c) student-teacher and ESL student-NES student relationships. The research results indicate that Moodles for courses, group work, marks for participation and office hour conferencing, increased time for class exams for ESL students, and more language support services for ESL academic students are some of the best teaching practices which can be employed to support ESL students in academics (Cheng et. al., 2004; Hu, 2010).

5.3 Further Research

The current study has limitations that can be addressed in future research on this topic to best meet the needs of ESL students in academics. Firstly, the findings of this study are focused primarily on undergraduate ESL students, in particular first year ESL students. While a couple of the student participants are Masters of Education study students (0.03% of the total student participant population), more research needs to be done to explore the success of ESL students throughout their entire undergraduate and graduate experiences at the university.

Secondly, further research needs to be done to compare the success of ESL students across the disciplines and to look at how faculties and departments are dealing with their ESL population. Due to the voluntary nature of participation in this research project, I was only able to gain the perspectives of faculty from three different disciplines: English, Economics and Communications, and Tourism and Hotel Management. The faculty participants represented both male and female genders, a minimum of two years' teaching experience in a post-secondary institution, and three academic disciplines; however, a more diverse group of academic disciplines and feedback from both sessional and tenured faculty would better enrich the data and bring to light issues faculty in academics experience when teaching ESL students.

Furthermore, while the student population I sampled was diverse, the particular make-up of the group may lend to some bias in the results. For this research study the

student participants represented thirteen nationalities, both male and female genders, and represented students from a minimum of seven academic disciplines. The primary nationality represented was Chinese, making up 47% of the sample student population, with Saudi Arabians making up the second largest group at 30%. The faculty of business was the primary discipline of choice for the student participants, which was represented by 63% of the student population. Tourism and Hotel Management was the second most represented discipline at 16%. Surveying a larger sample to minimize outlier effects will lend to a more diverse sample of both students and faculty to get a broader range of views. Having a good understanding of the ESL population is important for finding ways to best meet their needs.

Thirdly, further research should be conducted to gain perspectives of EAP faculty and language support staff including the Writing Centre instructors, academic advisors and international student advisors. This datum would be valuable to gain a better understanding of the potential language supports which can be made available to ESL students. Furthermore, we need to look at possible relationships which can be forged between EAP faculty, support staff, and academic faculty.

Finally, in order to better understand the needs of ESL students at Canadian universities, further research needs to compare ENGL 1100 grades of students who went through the ESL program at the university with those of students who came to academic programs through TOEFL and IELTS tests. With this information, we can identify with more certainty whether or not standards for enrollment in academics need to be raised and, if so, to what level.

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Appendix A

**Request to administer a survey to ESL students and to have faculty interviews for
Master of Education thesis project
“Transitioning into English Academics: Examining the Preparedness of ESL Students”**

Investigator: Alana Hoare

Phone: 250-319-9430

Email: achoare@live.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Jim Hu

Email: jhu@tru.ca

The investigator mentioned above is planning to conduct a study to examine the linguistic preparedness of ESL students when entering undergraduate academic courses. The study involves quantitative and qualitative analyses to explore the perceptions of ESAL 0580 graduates and instructors from a variety of faculties and schools.

The research project will include surveying students who completed the ESAL 0580 course (Academic Writing) in the past year. I am asking for 20 minutes at the end of your class to meet with the ESL students on a day convenient for you. At this time, I will notify the students of the intentions for this research project and request their permission for me to administer a survey if you agree to cooperate for my research.

Based on the results of the survey, students will be contacted via e-mail with a request to volunteer to participate in a one-on-one, in-depth interview. Ten students will be selected from the student volunteers across TRU. Student anonymity will be ensured so that the results are not affected by the students' potential fear of their instructors' reactions to student perceptions.

I am also looking for volunteers from the instructors who have ESL students on their class roster to participate in one 60-minute interview. All the interviews will be audio-taped with the participants' permission and transcribed. The interview will take place during the spring of 2012.

To sum, I am 1) seeking your permission to administer a short survey to ESL students regarding their linguistic preparedness for academic programs, and 2) asking if you are

willing to accept an interview with me regarding your perceptions on ESL student linguistic preparedness for their program of study in terms of writing, reading, listening, speaking and socio-cultural differences.

If you agree to cooperate and/or participate, your identity and any identifying information obtained will be kept confidential. You may refuse to cooperate or participate or withdraw your participation in this project at any time without consequence.

If you are interested in cooperating and/or participating in this research project, please respond via e-mail to achoare@live.ca or phone Alana at 250-319-9430.

Sincerely,

Alana Hoare
Masters of Education Student
Thompson Rivers University

Thank you,

Alana Hoare

Appendix B
Student Consent Form – Questionnaire



**Thompson Rivers
University**
900 McGill Road
Box 3010
Kamloops, BC
V2C 5N3

**Informed Consent by Student Subjects
to Participate in a Research
Project or Experiment
(Questionnaire)**

I understand that my identity and any identifying information obtained will be kept confidential, unless I agree to have the interview videotaped.

I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw my participation in this project at any time without consequence. My involvement or non-involvement in this project is in no way related to my status as a student.

I understand that I may ask any questions or register any complaint I might have about the project with either the chief researcher named above (Alana Hoare, 250-319-9430, achoare@live.ca), Dr. Jim Hu, assistant professor in the ESL Department at TRU (250-828-5190, jhu@tru.ca) or the Dean of Human, Social and Educational Development at TRU, Dr. Charles F. Webber, DeanHSED@tru.ca. If I have any questions or issues concerning this project that are not related to the specifics of the research, I may also contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee – Human Subjects, telephone number, 250-371-5532 or email mhealey@tru.ca.

Confidentiality: Any information resulting from this research study will be kept strictly confidential. All copies of documents will be identified only by code numbers and kept in a locked filing cabinet. In particular, where necessary, I will be identified by a pseudonym (**not real name**) in all reports of the study. Following the completion of the study, all the collected materials will be destroyed by shredding.

I have received a copy of this consent form and a Subject Feedback form.

Name: (Please Print) _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail: _____

Address: _____

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C
Student Survey



School of Education, Faculty of Human, Social and Educational Development

For M.Ed. thesis research project
“Transition into Academics: ESL Student Preparedness and Academic Faculty Response”

Investigator: Alana Hoare
Phone (250) 319-9430, email achoare@live.ca

Thompson Rivers University wants to improve the success of English-as-a-Second-Language students, and we are pleased that you have consented to be surveyed. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

You may refuse to participate or withdraw your participation in this project at any time without jeopardizing your class standing. Your involvement or non-involvement in this project is in no way related to your status as a student. Your responses and any identifying information obtained will be kept confidential. If the questionnaire is completed, it will be assumed that consent has been given. Thank you for participating.

A. Background Information

1. What is your country of origin?

2. What is your home language? _____

3. What is your gender? _____ **Female** _____ **Male**

4. What year did you begin studying at a Canadian university?

5. What year did you complete ENGL 1100?

Date (e.g. fall 2012 or F12) _____

Not Yet _____

6. What is your current program of study at TRU?

B. Please answer the following questions by selecting either Yes, No, or Not Applicable (NA)

1. I regularly use the writing support services offered at TRU (e.g. the TRU Writing Centre, etc.) **Yes** **No** **NA**

2. My undergraduate academic course instructors provide me with adequate marking criteria and clear explanations for course assignments. **Yes** **No** **NA**

C. Using the scale, please indicate to which degree you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

1. I have a good understanding of Canadian university rules and regulations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I am comfortable giving class presentations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. If I have questions regarding an assignment, my course instructors are helpful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4. I am comfortable discussing school-related issues with my course instructors.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I easily follow my instructors' lectures.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. My instructors often use difficult colloquial language during lectures (e.g. slang).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I always have enough time to complete my reading assignments.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I always have no difficulty completing written assignments.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I always complete assignments on time.	1	2	4	4	5	6	7
10. I have the writing skills to complete university programs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I easily follow my instructors' written instructions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

D. Open-ended questions.

1. Have you ever experienced any cultural misunderstanding about academic course assignments? If so, explain the situation and how you dealt with it.
2. Which teaching practices in your academic courses could be changed to make your learning easier?
3. What difficulties, if any, have you experienced as an international student during your undergraduate studies? Which of the problems have been resolved? Please list these and the solutions. Which of the problems are ongoing?

4. What is most difficult about written assignments in your academic courses?

5. Could you share any idea on how TRU may help ESL students succeed at the university?

6. Would you be willing to participate in a 30-minute interview with the chief researcher to discuss this research project further? The interview will take place at the end of November or early December of this semester. If yes, please provide the easiest way to contact you.

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix D Consent Forms

Informed Consent by Student Subjects to Participate in a Research Project or Experiment (Interview)

Note: The University and those conducting this project subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of subjects. This form and the information it contains is given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures, risks and benefits involved in this research project or experiment.

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details, feel free to ask at anytime. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I have been asked by Alana Hoare, Master of Education student of the School of Education, Thompson Rivers University, telephone number 250-319-9430, to participate in a research project entitled **Transition into Academics: ESL Student Preparedness and Academic Faculty Response**.

The purpose of the research project is to identify the adequacy of the English-as-a-Second-Language Program at Thompson Rivers University in preparing students linguistically for successful completion of their undergraduate studies. Alana plans to interview ten first-year undergraduate ESL TRU students in Kamloops.

I understand that I will be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes by the researcher, Alana, who will ask me about my experience as a student at TRU and factors related to my preparedness for my undergraduate program, and notes will be made during the interview. The interview will be held at a mutually convenient time and place. I also agree to allow access to information from the existing TRU databases including student admissions, student records, and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Confidentiality will be maintained by presenting only group results so that individual identity is concealed. My identity and all records will be kept confidential.

The findings of the project may be presented in reports, at conferences, and possibly in research journals.

I will be asked the following questions during the interviews, and there may be other questions:

- a. Do you have enough time to complete your written assignments thoughtfully and with detail?
- b. Do you feel comfortable contributing to discussions in front of the class and in small groups?
- c. If you do not understand something in a lecture, will you ask the instructor to explain it? If not, what methods do you use to clarify the information?
- d. According to your experience and perceptions, what is the role or responsibility of the course instructor in your writing in your country of origin vis-à-vis in Canada? How did that influence your writing in Canada respectively?

If participants become upset by the interview questions as they might be talking about why they were not able to complete the university courses, they will be offered information to access support services with the TRU Counseling Services (250-828-5023).

Participants will have the option to have the interviews audio taped or videotaped. Portions of the videotapes may be presented at conferences and as part of reports to increase the awareness of the findings of the project. Participants can change their mind later and not consent to be videotaped. Consenting to be videotaped is not required to participate in the interview.

My signature on this form indicates that I understand the information regarding this research project, including all procedures and the personal risks involved, and that I voluntarily agree to participate in this project as a subject.

I understand that my identity and any identifying information obtained will be kept confidential, unless I agree to have the interview videotaped.

I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw my participation in this project at any time without consequence. My involvement or non-involvement in this project is in no way related to my status as a student.

I understand that I may ask any questions or register any complaint I might have about the project with either the chief researcher named above (Alana Hoare, 250-319-9430, achoare@live.ca), Dr. Jim Hu, assistant professor in the ESL Department at TRU (250-828-5190, jhu@tru.ca) or the Dean of Human, Social and Educational Development at TRU, Dr. Charles F. Webber, DeanHSED@tru.ca. If I have any questions or issues concerning this project that are not related to the specifics of the research, I may also contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee – Human Subjects, telephone number, 250-828-5000.

Confidentiality: Any information resulting from this research study will be kept strictly confidential. All copies of documents will be identified only by code numbers and kept in a locked filing cabinet. In particular, where necessary, I will be identified by a pseudonym (**not real name**) in all reports of the study. Following the completion of the study, all the collected materials will be destroyed by shredding.

I have received a copy of this consent form and a Subject Feedback form.

Name: (Please Print) _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail: _____

Address: _____

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

I agree to have the interview **audio taped**. The audiotapes will be destroyed once the project is completed or after 7 years by erasing all audio files.

Signature _____ Date _____

I agree to **videotaping** the interview, which will be used for report and conference presentations. The videotape will be destroyed by erasing all video files after 3 years or as soon as the research is completed.

Signature _____ Date _____

In order to compare your progress in the current academic course with your grade for the course ESAL 0580 Academic Writing, the researcher, Alana, needs to access your academic record at the TRU Registrar's. Will you give permission for the researcher to do so? YES ____ NO ____

Appendix E

Student Interview Guide

Part A: Writing

Written Academic Requirements

1. Generally, do you have a great deal of written work to do in your current program?
2. Do you have any difficulty understanding any of the assignment criteria?
3. Do you have enough time to complete your written assignments thoughtfully and with detail?
4. What style format (e.g., *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association - APA Style Manual*, 4th ed.) are you required to use in writing academic papers for your undergraduate course?

Composing

5. What aspect of paper writing is most challenging?

Papers and Feedback

6. What feedback did you receive from your professors on your papers?
7. What did you think about the feedback? Helpful, fair, etc.?
8. Did the feedback influence your writing subsequent papers?

Part B: Reading Academic Requirements

Reading Sources

9. Generally, do you have a great deal of reading work to do in your current program?
10. Do you have enough time to complete your reading assignments each week?
11. Do you have difficulty understanding any of the terminology used by the instructor? In the textbook?
12. Do you rely on any written sources of information about your topics, which are not in English? For example, a computer dictionary?
13. Does your instructor use lecture notes, e.g. PowerPoint presentations, etc. to support lectures? Do you find these helpful?

Part C: Speaking Academic Requirements

14. Does your instructor require you to participate in class discussions on a regular basis?
15. Do you regularly contribute to class discussions?
16. Do you feel comfortable contributing to discussions in front of the class? In small groups?
17. Do you discuss your work with native English speaking students in your course? If so, how helpful is it?

18. Do you discuss your topic or work with your course instructor? If so, how helpful is/was it?

Part D: Listening Academic Requirements

19. Generally, are you able to follow lectures?
20. In your opinion, how much colloquial language does your instructor use during lectures, e.g. idioms, etc.? Does this affect your understanding of lectures?
21. If you do not understand something in a lecture, will you ask the instructor to explain it? If not, what methods do you use to clarify the information?

Part E: Socio-Cultural Differences

22. According to your experience and perceptions, what is the role or responsibility of the course instructor in your writing in your country of origin vis-à-vis in Canada? How did that influence your writing in Canada respectively?
23. What linguistic difficulties and conflicts have you found when writing academic papers?
24. What difficulties and conflicts have you found with cultural identity when writing the assignments?
25. What did you do to try to resolve these difficulties and conflicts?
26. Have you failed or come close to failing a first year undergraduate course? If yes, what were the reasons why you were unsuccessful?
27. In your opinion, what factor has the greatest influence on ESL student failure rates?

Additional Comments/Suggestions

Appendix F

Consent Forms

Informed Consent by Faculty Subjects to Participate in a Research Project or Experiment (Interview)

Note: The University and those conducting this project subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of subjects. This form and the information it contains is given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures, risks and benefits involved in this research project or experiment.

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details, feel free to ask at anytime. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I have been asked by Alana Hoare, Master of Education student of the School of Education, Thompson Rivers University, telephone number 250-319-9430, to participate in a research project entitled **Transition into Academics: ESL Student Preparedness and Academic Faculty Response**.

The purpose of the research project is to identify the adequacy of the English-as-a-Second-Language Program at Thompson Rivers University in preparing students linguistically for successful completion of their undergraduate studies. Alana plans to interview ten first-year undergraduate ESL TRU students in Kamloops and 10 faculty members instructing first-year academic courses in the undergraduate faculties and disciplines at TRU.

I understand that I will be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes by the researcher, Alana, who will ask me about my experience as an instructor of undergraduate courses at TRU with ESL students in the class and factors related to ESL students' preparedness for my undergraduate course. I also understand that notes will be made during the interview. The interview will be held at a mutually convenient time and place. Confidentiality will be maintained by presenting only group results so that individual identity is concealed. My identity and all records will be kept confidential.

The findings of the project may be presented in reports, at conferences, and possibly in research journals.

I will be asked the following questions during the interviews, and there may be other questions:

- a. What are the written assignments? Their weighting?
- b. What is your purpose/objective for the written assignments?
- c. What are your requirements/expectations for student participation?
- d. What are your assessment criteria or grading policies?

If participants become upset by the interview questions as they might be talking about why they were not able to complete the university courses, they will be offered information to access support services with the TRU Counseling Services (250-828-5023).

Participants will have the option to have the interviews audio taped or videotaped. Portions of the videotapes may be presented at conferences and as part of reports to increase the awareness of the findings of the project. Participants can change their mind later and not consent to be videotaped. Consenting to be videotaped is not required to participate in the interview.

My signature on this form indicates that I understand the information regarding this research project, including all procedures and the personal risks involved, and that I voluntarily agree to participate in this project as a subject.

I understand that my identity and any identifying information obtained will be kept confidential, unless I agree to have the interview videotaped.

I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw my participation in this project at any time without consequence. My involvement or non-involvement in this project is in no way related to my status as a student.

I understand that I may ask any questions or register any complaint I might have about the project with either the chief researcher named above (Alana Hoare, 250-319-9430, achoare@live.ca), Dr. Jim Hu, assistant professor in the ESL Department at TRU (250-828-5190, jhu@tru.ca) or the Dean of Human, Social and Educational Development at TRU, Dr. Charles F. Webber, DeanHSED@tru.ca. If I have any questions or issues concerning this project that are not related to the specifics of the research, I may also contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee – Human Subjects, telephone number, 250-828-5000.

Confidentiality: Any information resulting from this research study will be kept strictly confidential. All copies of documents will be identified only by code numbers and kept in a locked filing cabinet. In particular, where necessary, I will be identified by a pseudonym (**not real name**) in all reports of the study. Following the completion of the study, all the collected materials will be destroyed by shredding.

I have received a copy of this consent form and a Subject Feedback form.

Name: (Please Print) _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail: _____

Address: _____

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

I agree to have the interview **audio taped**. The audiotapes will be destroyed once the project is completed or after 7 years by erasing all audio files.

Signature _____ Date _____

I agree to **videotaping** the interview, which will be used for report and conference presentations. The videotape will be destroyed by erasing all video files after 3 years or as soon as the research is completed.

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix G

Faculty Interview Guide

M.Ed. student: Alana Hoare, achoare@live.ca, 250-319-9430

Supervisor: Dr. Jim Hu, jhu@tru.ca, 250-828-5190

Factors affecting language preparedness include: writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills, and socio-cultural differences.

A: BACKGROUND INFO

1. Highest academic degree:
2. Academic rank:
3. Number of years taught at TRU ____ and other postsecondary institutions ____.
4. Approximate number of ESL students you are teaching ____, and have taught ____.

B: ADMISSION AND PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

5. I understand ESL students with a minimum TOEFL score of 88 (iBT) or a minimum IELTS score of 6.5 (with no band below 6.0) can register directly for academic courses. Has there been any discussion at the program level to raise the minimum scores?
6. Are these test scores a satisfactory indication of written English proficiency?

C: FACULTY EXPECTATIONS AND ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC WRITING

7. Regarding written assignments (a written assignment here means any type of writing to be completed by students after class) for one undergraduate course you taught, such as:

Course #:	Title:
a. What are the written assignments? Their weighting (% of the final grade)?	
b. What is your purpose/objective for the written assignment(s)?	
c. What are your requirements/expectations for the written assignment(s)?	
8. What are your assessment criteria or grading policies?
9. Do you expect your students to follow a certain style format (e.g., *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association - APA Style Manual*) in writing academic papers?
10. During assessment, do you take into account the language and format aspects of the written assignments? If so, how and why?
11. What is your class policy on the use of electronic dictionaries?
12. What is the average failure rate of ESL students in one of your first-year courses?

D: FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF ESL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING

13. Have you found any particular strengths and weaknesses in ESL students' writing compared with those of native-English-speaking students?

14. What do you perceive to be some of the language and cultural challenges or problems of the ESL students regarding academic writing and other aspects of their academic life?

E: FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF ESL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC READING

15. Generally, how much reading do you assign students for a course during the week, e.g. 10 pages, 100 pages, etc?
16. Are students required to answer questions in class based on the class readings? If so, are students required to submit their answers in writing?
17. In general, do the ESL students submit their written assignments on time?

F: FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF ESL STUDENT CLASS PARTICIPATION

18. Do you require students to regularly participate in class discussions? Please describe what class participation means to you?
19. What percentage, if any, does class participation count toward the student's final course grade?
20. Generally, do your ESL students appear confident in answering questions orally in English?

G: FACULTY AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

21. Do you regularly use visuals, computer, and media to support class lectures? Describe what materials you use and/or provide the students with during a class lecture?
22. What would you suggest to TRU and ESL professionals to do in order to help ESL students with academic writing if you perceive such a need?
23. What advice would you offer to the ESL students regarding academic writing?
24. What would you like the ESL students to have done in preparation for academic writing prior to enrolment in your course or program?
25. Do you think that students' grades should be discounted based on language imperfections, even though English is not their native language? What is your opinion and/or practice in these regards?

Other issues, suggestions, and comments?

Appendix H
Request to access student records for
M.Ed. thesis project

“Transition into Academics: ESL Student Preparedness and Academic Faculty
Response”

The investigator mentioned above is planning to conduct a study to examine the linguistic preparedness of ESL students when entering academic courses. This research project examines the perspectives of ESL students and academic faculty regarding how the EAP program at a Canadian university prepares ESL students for academic studies, how the EAP program can better prepare students for academic studies, and how academic faculty can better support ESL students. By surveying and interviewing first-year undergraduate ESL students, interviewing undergraduate faculty, and analyzing a student engagement survey, we seek to address: (a) How do undergraduate academic faculty at the university perceive the linguistic preparedness of ESL students for undergraduate studies?; (b) How do students who have completed ESL perceive their linguistic preparedness for academic studies?; (c) What are effective teaching practices academic faculty can apply to support ESL students?; and (d) Which are the factors involved in the success of ESL students in their undergraduate courses?

As part of the research project, we would like to access information from the following sources, (a) National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) and, (b) TRU Student Records, to search for trends in ESL student success and failure. The TRU Student Records will be analyzed for data on gender, ethnicity, undergraduate program of study, and age. The NSSE will be analyzed for links between student motivation and engagement and overall success in undergraduate courses. The data results from the NSSE will be taken from the Winter 2011 survey. The data will be analyzed to identify significant predictors of international student success in undergraduate programs. In addition, correlation among the following factors: gender, age, ethnicity, ESAL 0580 grades, and academic performance, will be explored.

We very much appreciate your support of the project and consideration of our request. If you have any question, please contact Alana Hoare. Phone: 250-319-9430 or Email: achoare@live.ca

Sincerely,

Alana Hoare

Dr. Jim Hu
Associate Professor

Appendix I

Subject Feedback Form

Dear Participant:

The Research Ethics Committee – Human Subjects Committee would like to thank you for participating in this study.

If you would care to comment on the procedures involved you may complete the following form and send it to the Chair, The University Research Ethics Committee on Human Subjects. Completion of this form is optional, and is not a requirement of participation in the project. All information will be treated in a strictly confidential manner.

Name of Principal Investigator: Alana Hoare

Title of Project: Transition into Academics: Examining the Preparedness of ESL Students

Department: Faculty of Human, Social and Educational Development

Did you sign an informed Consent Form before participating in the project? _____

Were you given a copy of the Consent Form? _____

Were there significant deviations from the originally stated purpose, procedures and time commitment:

I wish to comment on my involvement in the above project, which took place:

(Date)

(Place)

Comments:

Is it permissible for the Research Ethics Committee to contact you regarding this form?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Completion of this section is optional

Your Name: _____

Address: _____ Telephone: _____

This form should be sent to Chair, Thompson Rivers University, Research Ethics Committee on Human Subjects, P.O. Box 3010, TRU, Kamloops, B.C. V2C 5N3