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Students' Perceptions of Their ESL Training in Preparation for University Reading Tasks

Olha Kondiyenko

Brigham Young University - Provo

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Student's Perceptions of Their ESL Training

in Preparation for University

Reading Tasks

Olya Kondiyenko Shelyakina

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Norman W. Evans, Chair

Neil J. Anderson

Diane Strong-Krause

Department of Linguistics and English Language

Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

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Olya Kondiyenko Shelyakina

Department of Linguistics and English Language

Master of Arts

This study sought to determine perceptions of former English Language Center (ELC) students of their readiness for university reading tasks after completing their ESL training. Former ELC students who now study or have studied at 10 different American post-secondary institutions provided insights for the study. Through questionnaires and face-to-face interviews, the study collected and analyzed many interesting and revealing comments from participants. Their comments demonstrated that even though the majority of students overall were satisfied with their learning experiences at the ELC, some significant changes still have to be made to be able to fully meet students' educational needs. Participants expressed the need to start rigorous university preparation earlier, beginning with an intermediate level of proficiency, by reading more advanced university-level texts and spending more time on developing and practicing critical reading strategies and test-taking skills.

Keywords: ESL, reading, university preparation

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background

A number of factors have contributed to an increasing enrollment of non-native English speaking students in American universities and colleges in the last decade.

Among these factors are the growing number of immigrants that come to the United States, the popularity of an American education, and the use of English as the business language of the world (The Institute of International Education, 2008). These factors, in turn, have placed a substantial demand for English as a second language instruction.

Many universities now operate their own English language centers and at the same time work on developing appropriate curricula to meet the needs of English as a second language (ESL) students (Ignash, 2000). ESL students come to English programs with various goals in mind. One of these goals is to learn English in order to pass a certification examination and to be prepared to study at an American college or university.

To succeed in a university, ESL students must learn much about the English language. For instance, students not only have to learn to read in English but they also have to learn how to read academic texts. Reading is one of the important, yet very difficult, skills to master. Studies show that many ESL students believe it to be the number one skill that, when not mastered, interferes with their successful performance at a university (Cheng, 1995; Christison & Krahne, 1986; Mustafa, 1998). College students are required to read anywhere from 20 to 100 pages of academic text each day.

In addition to this amount of reading, they are asked to process material by answering questions, solving problems, and responding to key issues, among other tasks (Gunderson, 2009; Sheorey, Mokhtari & Livingston, 1995).

Because reading in the academic setting is often content reading, many ESL students struggle as they learn to read academic texts while also gaining knowledge about a subject. Content reading material differs substantially from leisure reading, which typically includes reading novels and stories. Content reading texts contain more complex sentence structures; more difficult, specialized, and abstract vocabulary; graphs, maps, charts, and timelines; and more substantial and information-packed material, often written in a difficult style (Feathers, 2004; Gunderson, 1991, 2009). Therefore, for students to comprehend this type of material, they need to use specific skills, such as distinguishing important from unrelated details, finding main ideas, locating topic sentences, and reading and interpreting tables and graphs (Feathers, 2004; Gunderson, 1991, 2009).

Overall, the number of skills required for academic reading can be overwhelming even for a native English speaker, let alone an ESL student. Often English language courses for general purposes in reading instruction do not provide ESL students with the skills they need to read specialized texts (Christison & Krahne, 1986; Deckert, 2006; Gunderson, 1991, 2009; Ostler, 1980; Smoke, 1988). Most students acquire these skills independently by struggling with content material. As a result, ESL students can feel frustrated when learning to read academic texts, and their frustration can be detrimental to their progress and success in school. For example, such feelings of frustration can cause students to drop out of their classes and not finish their degrees (Gunderson, 2009).

In order to prevent student frustration, special content-area reading instruction should be prepared to teach the skills students need to read, comprehend, and learn from academic texts. When these skills are explicitly taught in the ESL classroom, students feel more prepared to enter the academic environment and are more likely to succeed. They develop confidence in reading difficult technical texts, and their motivation to read grows (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989; Brooks, 1988; Cheng, 1995; Echevarria & Graves, 2007; Gunderson, 1991, 2009; James, 2006; Mustafa, 1998; Ruddell, 2001; Smoke, 1988).

Despite well-articulated research in L2 reading, at this time there is no single adequate reading model that can account for the multiple reading needs of different students within the same program. Such needs include learning how to read to pass a certification examination, improving reading skills to get a better job, and reading to improve overall English language skills (Gunderson, 1991). While it is hoped that the development of different ESL reading models will be a primary goal for ESL reading researchers, it is probably impossible to meet the needs of everybody in every intensive English program. Programs would be well-advised to center teaching curriculum on the needs of the majority of the ESL population. Nonetheless, before this can be done and a curriculum is set in place, an analysis of students' needs has to be conducted.

Rationale for the Study

At Brigham Young University's English Language Center (ELC) in Provo, Utah, 209 students were surveyed during the fall semester of 2006. One hundred and sixty-seven, or about 80%, of the students indicated that they plan to attend a university in the U.S. (J. Hartshorn, personal communication, January 25, 2007). Such a high percentage of university-bound students at this English center is not surprising. The ELC is located at and is closely affiliated with Brigham Young University-Provo. Eighty percent of the students come to the ELC to prepare to pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) as well as to get adequate training before entering academia.

Students are eager to learn how to read hard, technical texts that they will encounter later in their university studies. After initially learning how to read in English, intermediate- and especially advanced-level students are ready to engage in meaningful reading in order to learn (Anderson, 2008). Because "there is little exploration in L2 reading research of the transition from learning-to-read to academic reading-to-learn" (Grabe & Stoller, 2002, p. 85), students at the ELC, similarly to many other English centers, spend a lot of time on learning-to-read and not much time on academic reading-to-learn. Yet the transition between these two aspects has to take place if ESL students are going to succeed in their university endeavors. This transition can happen either in the ESL classroom or later during college studies. Ideally, the transition will occur in the ESL classroom, where students will be given adequate preparation and time for the transition to happen. Gaining academic reading skills in an ESL program is generally less painful for ESL students than being almost immediately immersed in reading primarily informational texts with large amounts of new information, as they are in academia.

Given the complexity and difficulty of university reading, one might logically ask if ELC graduates feel prepared for university reading, or how well the ELC reading curriculum prepares its students for university-level reading tasks. This question were the genesis of this study. In order to answer these questions, an evaluation of the present reading curriculum needed to be conducted. To complete such an evaluation, ideally all stakeholders, such as students, teachers, university professors, and the ELC administration, needed to voice their opinion. However, research constraints have limited the extent this evaluation to the primary stakeholders—the students.

Students are the primary users of the reading curriculum, so they, more than anyone else, will benefit from a good, purposeful curriculum. For them, their sacrifices merit an excellent final product. Unfortunately, students do not usually have a voice in what the curriculum should be. No previous formal evaluations of the ELC reading curriculum have been done, nor have the students' goals been identified and correlated with the program's objectives (C. Thompson, personal communication, April, 2, 2007). Nonetheless, research suggests that a good, purposeful curriculum for an ESL program for academic preparation should be supported by empirical research that reflects students' experiences (Christison & Krahne, 1986).

Students can provide valuable information about their language learning experiences. This, in turn, should encourage more “detailed and rigorous investigations into student feedback, yielding data that can be used to improve ESL students' experiences in higher education” (Smoke, 1988, p. 17). One possible direction in carrying out such research is by exploring the experiences of students who are now enrolled in academic courses at universities. This is the focus of the current study. The purpose of

this research is to examine perceptions of former ELC students that are now studying or have studied at American colleges and universities by answering the following research question:

From the perception of former ELC students, how well did the ELC reading curriculum prepare ELC students for university-level reading tasks?

Outline

Chapter Two reviews traditional and current trends in teaching reading as well as overviews existing models of programs which teach English for academic purposes. Chapter Two also outlines existing research on the reading challenges of the growing ESL population in American post-secondary educational institutions. Chapter Three gives a description of the research design created to answer the research question and addresses such important points as participants, data-collection instruments, and data analysis procedures. The final two chapters, Chapters Four and Five, attend to results and implications of the study and offer recommendations. The study's strengths and limitations are also discussed in the final chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Olivia (name changed) is a first-year student at Brigham Young University (BYU). She is an international student from Brazil. When she came to America, her goal was to enter an American university and graduate with a degree in nutrition. Before she could achieve this goal, she had to enroll in the English as a second language program at the English Language Center (ELC), which is part of BYU's Division of Continuing Education, because her English proficiency was not sufficient to pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). The TOEFL serves as a measure of academic language proficiency and is designed to assist in the decision-making process for undergraduate and graduate admissions in many American universities and colleges. She was hoping that the ELC would help her reach her goal by, first, preparing her to pass the TOEFL, and, second, by helping her to get ready to study at a university.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the majority of students (about 80%) come to the ELC with similar goals in mind. They too want to pass the TOEFL and be prepared for the challenges of university life before they enroll in academic classes. The program description of the ELC states that, "The English Language Center focuses specifically on preparing students to develop English language skills in order to attend a university where English is the medium of instruction" (English Language Center, 2008). The purpose of this study is to find out whether this goal is being achieved by examining the ELC's reading curriculum from students' perspectives because reading in an academic setting is often identified by students as a the most important skill for successful performance at a university (Cheng, 1995; Christison & Krahne, 1986; Mustafa, 1998).

To adequately address the issues that are being researched in this study, this chapter will establish a context by reviewing relevant literature.

The purpose of this chapter is to unveil the underlying reasoning for the curriculum decision-making process at the ELC by investigating how second language reading is taught traditionally and in various educational settings. The discussion is opened by looking at different purposes for reading and how reading is taught typically in ESL settings. This is done by providing an overview of methods and techniques that are used to teach second language reading in general, followed by a survey of different types of programs designed to teach English for academic purposes (EAP). Part of this discussion will include content-based language instruction. This will be important since EAP is, in fact, part of the ELC curriculum. The discussion then culminates with the demographics of the second language population in American institutions of higher education, presenting studies that investigated ESL students' academic needs as well as studies that researched challenges that ESL students encountered in their academic reading before and after general and content-based reading instructions.

Teaching Reading in the ESL Curriculum

ESL programs at the college or university level serve a vast population of adult students (Reppy & Adames, 2000). These students come from various countries with diverse backgrounds. Such ESL programs operate in a number of settings. For example, they can be located in an English department, a continuing education department, or a department of its own, depending on the size of a program. Other alternatives are also possible; for example, ESL programs can be operated by independent language schools contracted by a university. Admission requirements also vary from program to program.

Some programs accept students at “zero” level proficiency (true beginners), while others require some degree of proficiency. Usually these programs offer a sequence of courses from beginning to advanced levels, teaching not only how to speak and understand spoken English but also how to read and write it.

Intensive English Programs (IEPs), as a type of ESL program, offer a minimum of 18 hours of instruction per week, thus helping their students achieve great progress in a relatively short period of time. According to Reppy and Adames (2000), different programs also offer different pedagogical approaches to teaching English, shifting in recent years to a more learner-centered, communicative classroom. Despite the existence of a vast variety of pedagogical methods or approaches, recently an eclectic approach prevails in most programs. In this approach, first level classes help students to achieve some level of communicative competency, and higher level classes prepare students to enter the academic environment by helping them achieve some level of academic English proficiency. This is also true for ESL programs that specifically are designed to prepare students to pass the TOEFL or other similar tests (Reppy & Adames, 2000).

Reading proficiency in English is often plays an important role in students achieving their personal, occupational, and professional goals. Designing reading programs for ESL students is often more complicated than selecting programs for native English speakers because ESL students’ age, literacy background, proficiency level in English, and purpose for reading have to be considered when making curriculum decisions (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). As already discussed in Chapter One, different reading purposes require a different combination of skills and strategies. Reading for general comprehension is quite different from reading to learn from a text. A recent and popular

trend in reading instruction has been to combine both approaches: strategic training to help students with reading to learn and exposure to longer expository and narrative texts to increase reading fluency (Gunderson, 2009).

In order to understand the underpinnings of the reading program at the ELC, the following discussion presents different existing reading schemes that have had an influence on the ELC curriculum. It begins with definitions and a classification of learning strategies, specifically strategies that have been identified by TOEFL 2000 guidelines as important for successful college performance, and then briefly reviews different models for strategic training. Following the discussion on strategies is a presentation of the current view of teaching extensive reading in a second language classroom. The discussion then culminates with an overview of the different divisions of English for academic purposes programs.

Teaching reading comprehension strategies.

Reading comprehension strategies have been identified as part of a wider category of learning strategies (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002). The concept of learning strategies was introduced into ESL teaching during the 1970s. Since then, teaching learning strategies has increased in importance. Learning strategies have been defined as conscious (Anderson, 2005; Cohen, 1990; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003), semi-conscious (Cohen, 2003), or subconscious (Chamot, 2005; Macaro, 2001) actions or procedures that facilitate a learning task. The reason some authors believe that strategies are conscious is because once the use of strategies becomes automatic, strategies become skills (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003) or processes (Cohen, 1990), and not strategies. Chamot (2005) agrees that most often the use of strategies is a

conscious process but argues that some strategies can be used with some automaticity and that learners will be able, if required, to “call the strategy to conscious awareness” (p. 112).

If strategies are conscious, then a learner is in charge of their selection and use (Anderson, 2005), which also supports the idea that strategies only succeed to the extent that learners cause them to succeed (Cohen, 1990). The “more is better” principle does not always apply in the use of strategies. More proficient learners may use fewer strategies with greater success while less proficient learners may use more strategies without necessarily achieving success (Cohen, 1998). Success in using strategies, therefore, lies in (a) applying a variety of strategies and being aware of the strategies available to successfully perform a task (Anderson, 2005), (b) intentionally and systematically choosing strategies (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002), and (c) manipulating strategies in everyday encounters with the language (Brown, 2001).

College readers have often been identified as skilled or strategic readers (Abraham, 1990). In fact, skilled reading must be a constructive, fluent, strategic, motivated, and lifelong pursuit. College readers must be able to possess the following skills to be successful at university-level reading: (1) “the ability to strategize (to read for breadth and depth),” (2) “to synthesize (to construe evidence from parallel references)” and (3) “to evaluate (to judge the worth of a book)” (Abraham, 1990, p. 11). In addition to the skills cited above, researchers investigating academic writing tasks also offer insights into college-level reading. Bridgeman and Carlson (1984) gathered survey data from 190 academic departments at 34 universities. They found that most mandatory

university writing tasks required underlying reading tasks such as the abilities to summarize, synthesize, and evaluate individual texts and multiple sources.

Using the TOEFL as a measure of academic language proficiency and readiness for university studies also provides insight into strategies that are required of college and university readers (Chapelle, Grabe, & Berns, 1997). The TOEFL is designed to assist in the decision-making process for undergraduate and graduate admissions. According to TOEFL 2000 guidelines, the main components of language, for both comprehension and production, include procedural, linguistic, discourse, and sociolinguistic competence. Table 2.1 summarizes strategies that skilled readers should use to be successful in American institutions of higher education as defined by TOEFL 2000 guidelines. For a complete list of these and other strategies found in related studies, see Appendix A.

As noted, not all these strategies are used by skilled readers. Skilled readers use a wide range of strategies that improve their reading comprehension. Consequently, reading strategies are explicitly taught to facilitate reading comprehension. They can be learned to the point of automaticity, after which they become skills, and learners must know not only what strategies to use but also when, where, and how to use them.

Table 2.1

Reading Strategies Found in TOEFL 2000 Guidelines (Chapelle et al., 1997)

Reading Strategies	
<i>Procedural Competence</i>	
	Skim
	Scan
	Guess words from context
	Predict
	Use extralinguistic cues (illustrations, charts, etc.)
	Rephrase, paraphrase during reading process
<i>Linguistic Competence</i>	
	Recognize orthographical features of written language
	Discriminate among forms and structures
<i>Discourse Competence</i>	
	Infer links between events (situations, ideas, causes, effects)
	Recognize coherence relationships
	Follow a topic of the discourse
	Recognize the parts leading to the whole
	Draw conclusions
<i>Sociolinguistic Competence</i>	
	Understand/recognize variations in language with respect to
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of readers in the intended audience • Familiar or distant relationships between writer and audience • Subordinate or superordinate relationships

Strategy instruction helps students become aware of available strategies and learn how to use them effectively and systematically in different contexts (Brown, 2001; Cohen 1998). Strategy training calls for the development of a strategy instruction routine in teaching. To understand what should be a part of such a routine in every classroom, Macaro (2001) proposed a cyclical model of strategy training. The model has nine steps: (1) raise the awareness of the students, (2) explore possible strategies available, (3) have the teacher or other students model the strategy, (4) combine strategies for a specific purpose or specific task, (5) apply strategies with scaffolded support, (6) have students perform an initial evaluation, (7) gradually remove the scaffolding, (8) perform an evaluation by students (and teacher), and (9) monitor strategy use and reward effort (Macaro, 2001, p. 176). Similar models have been developed by other authors (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990).

Finally, the development of a strategic reader involves more than just teaching reading strategies (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). It requires more time and intensive instructional effort. Students may be able to learn individual strategies and apply them effectively “on the spot,” but they forget to use them over time or fail to generalize them to other contexts. The challenge for teachers here is to help students develop efficient reading strategies that work together for a specific reading purpose and see ways of applying these strategies in new learning situations. Developing these abilities requires much time and practice. Students can practice by engaging in extensive reading as part of a reading course, where they have ample time to practice strategies in different contexts, narrative or expository.

Teaching extensive reading.

Since Krashen's (1989) idea of accidental acquisition, different extensive reading schemes have been advocated as approaches to making a substantial difference in learner's second language acquisition. Some of these approaches have prevailed more than others in ESL/EFL classrooms. The Hong Kong Extensive Reading Scheme in English (HKERS), for example, has been implemented in the Hong Kong secondary school system since 1991 (Green, 2005). The focus of this and similar schemes lies in the individual reading of large amounts of text, mostly narrative, thus facilitating second language acquisition by accidental vocabulary gain while increasing students' motivation to read more. Green (2005) argues that the prime concern of such schemes seems to be progressing to the next book or to the next level, "leading to the development of a superficial fluency at the cost of deeper and more focused learning. The principles of analysis and recycling so vital in consolidating and extending learners' knowledge of and ability to use target language systems do not operate in most reading schemes" (p. 309).

Grabe and Stoller (2002), on the other hand, argue that although a large amount of reading, by itself, is not sufficient for the development of fluent readers, generating such readers is not possible without extensive reading. Similar to Green (2005), Grabe and Stoller (2002) advocate silent reading in class, reading lab periods, and reading extended texts together in class as an alternative to reading only at home.

Day and Bamford (2002), and Prowse (2002) present the top ten principles to define their approach to teaching extensive reading. A synopsis of their principles is as follows: extensive reading should be done silently, at the learner's own pace; the reading material should be easy but yet interesting, with the learners having an opportunity to

choose what they like to read; reading should not be followed by comprehension questions or any other type of test because it detracts from the purpose of extensive reading; and the teacher should be a facilitator and a role model of a good reader.

The principle of students choosing topics for their study seems to be well-supported (Green, 2005; Day & Bamford, 2002; Prowse, 2002), and teachers should conduct class surveys to determine learners' preferred topics. The exploration by students of the literature related to their preferred topics becomes a benchmark for developing skills in critical thinking, research, and synthesizing information from different sources.

Extensive reading can also be integrated with other language skills. Integrated reading and writing instruction shows a strong positive correlation with a number of learning benefits (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Reading and writing completed together form natural connections for processing academic texts. For example, as a response to a reading assignment one can summarize information, take notes, or write short responses, critiques, or longer research papers. Reading and listening can be combined when students have to write their comments on a lecture they have just listened to, take notes while listening, or write a response to the oral presentation of one of their classmates.

A similar notion of coherence in reading curriculum is presented by Guthrie, Anderson, Alao, and Rinehart (1999) in Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI). CORI was developed and integrated into a school curriculum by a team of teachers, reading specialists, and university professors. They created coherence by linking the activities, materials, and contexts in a way that students were able to make connections between real world experience and reading by bringing together strategies, content about

a particular topic, and scientific or narrative text. They found that such integration of curriculum “provides a more interesting, meaningful way to teach and attain the main goals of the curriculum” (Guthrie et al., 1999, p. 348).

Clearly, extensive reading plays an important role in ESL reading. It benefits learners of different ages and contexts, and offers gains in reading, listening, and writing proficiency (Day & Bamford, 2002; Green, 2005; Leung, 2002; Prowse, 2002). However, specific reading schemes that exist in various schools’ curricula can either add to or detract from the effectiveness of extensive reading. For instance, it has been debated whether extensive reading should be done mostly silently “with the teacher sitting at the head of the class enforcing a rule of silence or in small groups through active discussion, oral presentations, and text recycling with the purpose of identifying grammatical, lexical, discourse features in the text” (Green, 2005, p. 308).

Whatever the reading scheme, it should preferably match the reading purpose of the majority of students in an ESL program. For example, different extensive reading schemes are beneficial to a student whose purpose is to gain expertise in learning to read in English and to a student whose main purpose is to prepare for and enter an English-speaking university. The latter goal is better achieved in EAP programs, which focus on preparing students by teaching them all the skills they need to succeed at a university. It is important, therefore, to take a closer look at these programs and their effectiveness in students’ preparation for academic work.

Teaching English for Academic Purposes Programs

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instruction deals with “the use of English in study settings (particularly but not exclusively in higher education) where the main goal of language learning is the ability to cope with the student’s chosen academic specialism” (Johnson & Johnson, 1998, p. 105). Linking academic content with ESL teaching is, therefore, important in helping students prepare for university tasks. How is this being done? Several approaches are used to deal with ESL students’ academic needs. Specifically, these needs are addressed by means of content-based instruction (CBI), bilingual education, and several new approaches such as the Fluency First and Computer Technology Programs, all of which are discussed in more detail below.

Content-based language instruction.

CBI is part of teaching and learning English for academic purposes (Celce-Murcia, 2001; James, 2006) and is used as a way of providing EAP instruction at colleges and universities around the world (Crandall & Kaufman, 2002). CBI is a teaching method that combines teaching academic subject matter with teaching second language skills. CBI has been taught through three different models, and of course, a combination of them: theme-based, sheltered, and adjunct. Still they all share the same characteristic—they teach a subject matter core through authentic material with adaptation to meet the needs of ESL learners (Stoller & Grabe, 1997; Richards & Rodgers, 2006).

Theme-based English as a second language.

The theme-based approach has been popular for a long time in foreign language education (Stryker & Leaver, 1997). Theme-based instruction is focused on teaching content through selected themes, such as the family, the environment, or politics.

Selected themes should be appealing to students' interests. They are taught in conjunction with necessary study and critical thinking skills, thus helping students to develop academic reading, writing, listening, and speaking expertise.

Sheltered content instruction.

In sheltered content instruction, ESL learners study a content area, such as biology or history, in a separate class from native English speakers (Echevarria & Graves, 2007). The approach was first introduced in the 1980s by Stephen Krashen as a way to use second language acquisition strategies while teaching content. Students focus on mastery of the subject matter but with additional support from the teacher. The teacher adapts academic material to the language proficiency of her students, emphasizes key vocabulary, and uses speech that is both comprehensible and slower in rate. The majority of such courses offer college credit. Two such examples are the Biology 100 and English Language 105 classes offered on campus for BYU ESL students. By taking these courses, students do not have to compete in the same classroom with native English speakers.

Adjunct content instruction.

Adjunct content instruction is instruction that takes place in two separate classes: a content class and a language class (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989). ESL students have to enroll in both classes at the same time. The content class is taught by a content teacher, and students receive credit for enrolling in this class. The language class is taught by an ESL specialist who reinforces language skills, supporting what has been taught in the content class. It is usually offered as a non-credit class. Such linking of two courses can be challenging as it requires a willing interaction and cooperation between two teachers.

Bilingual programs.

Bilingual programs, also called dual-language programs, use two languages as the medium of instruction (Rosenthal, 2000). One language is English and another is the native language of a student enrolled in the program. These bilingual programs, which have been found in many universities, are different from bilingual education for school children in grades K–12. Students that enroll in these programs are adults with limited English proficiency but who would like to pursue a college or university degree in America. These students begin by participating in an ESL program that teaches them how to read, write, speak, and listen. At the same time, they take introductory academic courses in their native language. As their English proficiency increases, these students gradually move from native language courses to exclusively English mainstream courses while still receiving credit for both. As a result, they graduate with an academic degree and proficiency in two languages (Rosenthal, 2000).

Despite the limited availability of information on these programs, Rosenthal (2000) describes bilingual programs as “a practical solution to the ‘problem’ of providing access to, retention in, and higher education for local populations of academically qualified adult students who are non-native speakers of English” (p. 97). She agrees that there are several requirements that should be met in order for such programs to exist. For example, American post-secondary institutions must have a history a large group of students with the same native language, and they should have faculty members that are proficient in that language as well as in different content areas. Mostly, such programs serve Spanish-speaking populations, with the exception of one or two programs in other languages (Rosenthal, 2000).

New approaches.

Two approaches, the Fluency First and Computer Technology Programs (CTP) are part of a newer generation of pedagogical approaches that have emerged as a result of changing trends in ESL teaching toward more independent, computer-assisted language learning (Reppy & Adames, 2000). Computers are becoming more and more common in language classrooms, and more instructors use computers in teaching writing, reading, speaking, and listening. Thus instructors in CTP use the Internet for communicating with their students, obtaining information and authentic materials, searching library databases, and testing students. The Fluency First approach focuses on students' exposure to a large amount of written and listening material and on producing the same amount of writing and speaking. This massive exposure to the English language is expected to produce confident ESL speakers with the necessary English proficiency to succeed in a college or university.

Summary of EAP programs.

The discussed EAP programs have been created to assist in students' preparation, admission, and successful completion of academic work because of many underlying factors. First, various studies have documented that even upon successful completion of their general ESL course work, students do not feel adequately prepared for mainstream academic work (Cheng, 1995; Christison & Krahne, 1986; Ostler, 1980; Sheorey, Mokhtari & Livingston, 1995). Second, many second language researchers believe in the existence of two types of language proficiency: one for communication in everyday life, and the other for success in an academic environment (Cummins, 1979). The latter, as has been observed, takes much more time to acquire (Reppy & Adames, 2000). Third,

developments in second language acquisition during the 1960s to 1990s, supported by empirical research, have suggested that students learn best when their attention is focused on the meaning (content) rather than on the language (Brinton et al., 1989).

While these studies clearly demonstrate that students who have aspirations to attend a university should enroll in EAP programs, many still enter institutions of higher education without the benefit of EAP instruction (Ignash, 2000). What challenges are awaiting second language students when they enter American institutions of higher education? How prepared do they feel? What studies, if any, have been done to investigate the level of ESL students' preparation for a college? The following discussion is an attempt to find answers to these important questions by first looking at demographics of the second language students in American institutions of higher education, then surveying ESL students' academic needs, and, finally, examining challenges that ESL students encounter in their academic reading, both before and after reading instruction.

Second Language Students in American Institutions of Higher Education

Because of the growing number of immigrants and international students that come to the United States, the enrollment of nonnative English speaking students in American universities and colleges has been increasing. International students are classified as anyone who is enrolled in an American college or university and holds an F (student), H (temporary work/trainee), J (temporary educational exchange/visitor), or M (vocational training) visa. The Institute of International Education (IIE) (2008) has conducted an annual statistical report of foreign students in the United States since 1949. According to the IIE report, the number of international students enrolled in U.S. colleges

and universities was 623,805 in the 2007/2008 academic year. This number was a 7% increase from the previous year.

Intensive English programs have also experienced an increase in enrollment during the same time, with a 15% increase from 2006/2007 to 2007/2008 (IIE, 2008). According to the International Students and Scholar Census conducted by the International Services of Brigham Young University (2009), the number of international students enrolled in various programs at the university, including the English Language Center, during the Winter semester of 2009 was 1,908. This is 12.5% decrease from the previous year. The same census reports that of this number, 1,372 students were working on their undergraduate degree, 289 on their graduate degree, and 247 students attended the English Language Center (ELC).

Many ESL programs, including the ELC at BYU, offer courses that are noncredit but which hopefully enable students to gain the language skills they need to further their education. However, Ignash (2000) believes that ESL programs that do not offer college credit for ESL classes or that “afford little contact with the main campus or with students in other college programs can act as barriers to the pursuit of further education” (p. 21). In contrast, ESL programs that allow their students to enroll in some of the core college classes, either for credit or not, increase students’ desire for further education and their self-esteem. According to Ignash (2000), ESL students that sat in the same classrooms with the students who were taking courses for credit “realized that they, too, could handle college-level work” (p. 21). Consequently, the Committee on Professional Standards at a TESOL Convention in 1987 passed a resolution asking institutions of higher education in America to grant credit for ESL courses (Benesch, 1988). The resolution states that ESL

courses are as difficult and demanding as foreign language courses and therefore must be offered credit, thus taking ESL students out of isolation from their native counterparts and increasing their motivation to pursue their studies.

Second language students' academic needs.

When ESL students are finally able to enroll in regular university classes and gain credit towards the completion of their major requirements, they are faced with another challenge: staying at and succeeding in American colleges and universities (Gunderson, 2009). Often English language courses for general purposes do not provide ESL students with the skills they need to succeed in their academic majors, such as reading and comprehending material in a particular academic area (Christison & Krahne, 1986; Deckert, 2006; Gunderson, 1991, 2009; Ostler, 1980; Smoke, 1988). In this section, several studies are summarized and presented that help shed some light on the academic needs of ESL students in American institutions of higher education. How do ESL students in American universities and colleges perceive their level of mastery of academic English reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills as a result of their preceding ESL instruction? How do ESL students feel about college reading in terms of its difficulty and its importance for their successful performance at a university? Answers to these and other related questions are offered in the following chronological overview of the existing research.

It is generally accepted that ESL students at a university have more needs in connection to their academic work than their American counterparts. They will more likely be the ones to struggle to understand a professor, to successfully pass tests, or to express themselves clearly in writing. Because of this, university professors are usually

aware when ESL students are present in their classrooms, but rarely do they know or try to find out their ESL students' academic needs (Gunderson, 2009). Gunderson (2009) points out that often ESL students' needs are being ignored or overlooked by their professors. To better understand the needs of the ESL students enrolled in regular university classes, several researchers carried out studies among ESL populations at universities and colleges across the country (Cheng, 1995; Christison & Krahne, 1986; James, 2006; Ostler, 1980; Sheorey, Mokhtari & Livingston, 1995; Smoke, 1988). Some of these studies were completed almost three decades ago; nevertheless, they constructively contribute to the overall picture of the second language students' academic needs. Additionally, as the comparison to more recent studies shows, the students' needs have not changed significantly over the last three decades.

Ostler (1980) conducted a study among 133 students from the American Language Institute of the University of Southern California. The students were enrolled concurrently in ESL classes and in core university classes. Their ESL classes had a strong emphasis on writing skills and on research paper techniques. An evaluation of the program was conducted when several teachers in the program expressed concerns that the real needs of the students were not being met. A questionnaire was designed to assess the students' academic needs. The results showed that 90% of the students were concerned about their abilities to read textbooks, 84% were worried about taking notes in class, and 68% wanted help asking questions in class. Fifty-eight percent of the students indicated a strong need for reading academic papers and journals. The author concluded that teaching general reading skills in their ESL classes did not compensate for the need to develop reading strategies for reading specific types of text, such as academic journals and papers.

About 41% of students pointed out that they needed to give talks in class and therefore implied a need for academic speaking skills. In conclusion, suggestions were given to establish core classes to meet the needs of students in teaching them specific text reading and note-taking skills, as these were the top two concerns of the students.

In another study, 80 nonnative English speakers from five different universities in the United States were interviewed (Christison & Krahne, 1986). At the time of the research, they were enrolled in full-time academic study. They had all completed intensive English language programs at the same or different universities from the ones at which they were currently studying. The students were asked to evaluate their experience in their English programs. Specifically, they were asked to identify activities that they perceived as having contributed the most to their language learning and also to their academic preparedness. In addition, the researchers were interested in finding out types of language skills former ESL students used the most in their academic work and what skills they viewed as easy or difficult for them.

The results of the study reported that most of the students saw their ESL intensive programs as “a good general preparation for academic work,” but they did not feel prepared for specific academic skills, such as reading academic texts and listening to lectures (Christison & Krahne, 1986, p. 72). When asked what they would like to add or change in their intensive ESL programs, a majority of the students expressed a need for “realistic learning activities—listening to real lectures or having an opportunity to participate in actual academic class work” (Christison & Krahne, 1986, p. 72). Many students referred to their inability to understand their course lectures and take good notes. Students also asked for more natural interaction with native speakers in class (65%) and

out of class (55%), thus regarding natural interaction as a major means to learning the language.

A similar study questioned 62 ESL students about their views of their academic preparation after completing developmental reading and writing ESL courses (Smoke, 1988). Ninety-seven percent of the students felt that their English skills had improved as a result of ESL courses, yet only 18% indicated that they were prepared for college work. When asked to describe difficulties they had encountered in their academic courses, 92% of students checked understanding how to read and study from textbooks. In the questionnaire and follow-up interviews students expressed a need for better preparation to meet the demands of college life.

In the aforementioned studies, ESL students have identified reading as one area they struggled with the most. Some authors consider reading as “one of the most pervasive and important skills for most learners” (Cheng, 1995, p. 3) and have identified it as the number one skill for a successful performance at a university (Cheng, 1995; Mustafa, 1998). On the other hand, Andrade and Evans (2007) showed that university faculty rated listening first (mean=4.52), closely followed by reading (mean=4.36), then writing (mean=3.82), and finally speaking (m=3.48). Interestingly, while these were the reported combined means for ESL and non-ESL faculty, ESL faculty placed reading, not listening at the top of the list. This may be due to the fact that ESL teachers are more acquainted with the challenges of learning in a second language. However, it should be noted that this was not statistically significant difference.

Clearly, two receptive skills, reading and listening, are the two skills that should not be overlooked when preparing students for academia. Both, listening and reading were identified by students as the most frequently-used skills in their academic work (80%), followed by speaking and writing (20%) (Christison & Krahne, 1986). Therefore, ESL students often feel a lack of adequate instruction in reading academic texts, reporting many difficulties in connection to their reading.

Academic reading challenges of ESL students.

Both nonnative and native speakers have difficulties with academic reading because students “are simply not mature enough to deal successfully with the demands of college reading” (Sheorey, Mokhtari & Livingston, 1995, p. 674). However, nonnative speakers have an even harder time with academic reading than native speakers, not only because of potential language difficulties but also because of a lack of adequate instruction in reading academic texts and in generally knowing how to learn in a foreign academic environment (Sheorey, Mokhtari & Livingston, 1995).

Sheorey, Mokhtari and Livingston (1995) conducted a study where they compared reading habits of native (130) and non-native (114) English speakers at one Midwestern university in the United States. Interestingly, the study showed that ESL students read a wider variety of academic reading materials than did native speakers and therefore spent more time on their reading (mean=11.3 hours per week) than did native students (mean=4.7 hours per week).

The study also showed that there was a significant difference in students’ perceptions of their reading difficulties. A significantly larger number of ESL students

(85% compared to 47% of native speakers) perceived a lack of vocabulary and comprehension as the source of their difficulties in reading. These difficulties can explain the number of additional hours that non-native speakers spend reading academic texts. In addition, nonnative students were more motivated to spend more time reading their academic texts in order to meet rigid selection criteria in American universities and/or meet their own or their parents' expectations. In contrast, native English speakers do not read textbooks because of a lack of interest and motivation and because they know how to pass exams just by reading class notes, whereas non-native students may have less confidence in their note-taking skills (Sheorey, Mokhtari & Livingston, 1995). Both groups expressed a desire to be better readers, especially wanting to improve skills needed to read their textbooks.

Some studies have demonstrated that reading comprehension in an L2 can be improved by explicit teaching of the different reading strategies, thus enabling the transfer of these strategies to other university courses (Brooks, 1988; Mustafa, 1998). Other studies demonstrated that even upon successful enrollment in an EAP course, transfer of learning from a CBI course to other university courses did not occur automatically, but was restricted by many factors (Cheng, 1995; James, 2006). Still other researchers believe that non-native speakers have difficulty in reading second language texts until they have reached some sort of threshold of L2 proficiency, after which the skills they acquired in their first language can transfer to their second language (Alderson, 1984).

At the University of Reading, U.K., 63 ESL students indicated that after taking a 4 to 11 weeks of pre-session coursework in general reading instruction, which included

reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, identifying the main idea, and predicting, they still experienced difficulty applying these strategies to their academic texts (Cheng, 1995). One third of the students identified understanding unknown words as a skill they struggled with most because of the technicality of their texts. Another third of the students identified reading speed as a problem in their studies because they spent a large amount of time reading their assignments in order to fully understand them. According to the students, reading quickly did not lead to a full understanding, which caused great frustration for students at all levels of their academic studies. Moreover, one fourth of the students also indicated difficulty in understanding text organization and the writer's attitude (Cheng, 1995).

In a similar study, Mustafa (1998) was able to show results contrary to those of Cheng (1995)—the students he surveyed indicated that explicit teaching of reading strategies in the ESL courses had an impact on their performance in academic courses. Seventy percent of the students indicated that strategy instruction was helpful to some extent in their academic courses, and only 17% of the students thought it did not help them at all. Students were explicitly taught how to identify topic sentences, understand paragraph cohesion and development, deal with unknown words, and find information in a text quickly. Most students found identifying the topic sentence and guessing the meaning of unknown words interesting and enjoyable, but they found understanding paragraph cohesion—including tasks on identifying the links between sentences, providing adverbial links in gaps, and rearranging jumbled paragraphs—to be the most difficult, and also the least enjoyable, strategies.

Students in the aforementioned studies were engaged in general reading strategy instruction as part of pre-sessional mandatory ESL courses, whereas a large amount of literature advocates carrying out reading instruction in the context of content-based instruction (Brinton et al., 1989; Brooks, 1988; Cheng, 1995; Echevarria & Graves, 2007; Smoke, 1988). Students express a need to read more academic texts in specific technical areas in order to be more familiar with academic vocabulary and texts before they enroll in regular classes; this is usually a part of content-based instruction (Cheng, 1995). However, the transfer of strategies learned in a CBI course to students' mainstream courses may be restricted by some factors.

James (2006) conducted a one-year longitudinal study with five ESL students enrolled in a CBI course and other university courses concurrently. The results showed that learning transfer from the CBI course to other university courses occurred but with some constraints to the process. When students were asked if the CBI course had helped them generally prepare for their university courses, they all answered that it did not. Nevertheless, James (2006) was able to show through careful analysis of students' journal entries, classroom observations, and interviews with students that a transfer of some learning skills, mostly in reading and writing, did occur to regular university courses. Thus James (2006) cautions that the transfer of learning outcomes from CBI to regular courses should not be assumed as an automatic process, because of many factors that can restrict the transfer. One of these factors is the difference between the content of a CBI course and a university course. Such a disciplinary mismatch can be a barrier for transfer when students don't see how they can apply what they have learned in a CBI course to their other courses.

Conclusion

The research presented on second language students' academic needs—and the mismatch between their needs and what English language centers often have to offer—makes it clear that more studies have to be done to understand what reading skills are required of students in higher academic settings and what skills they have the most difficulty with. “A thorough understanding of the complex nature of academic reading skills based on data collection is essential for guiding teaching and testing for EAP (English for Academic Purposes) reading” (Cheng, 1995, p. 4).

ESL programs should identify skills students need in core university courses and prepare students, particularly those lacking certain academic skills, in addition to general English Language development (Brooks, 1988). Therefore, the curriculum of ESL programs for academic preparation should be supported by empirical research that reflects students' experiences because students can indeed offer an abundance of valuable information about their own language learning experiences (Brooks, 1988; Cheng, 1995; Christison & Krahne, 1986; Ostler, 1980). This, in turn, should encourage more “detailed and rigorous investigations into student feedback, yielding data that may improve ESL students' experiences in higher education” (Smoke, 1988, p. 17). Even though the needs of the students cannot always be determined by students' perceptions of their needs, students' opinions about what is needed or useful to them in preparation for academic work should be taken into consideration when making curriculum decisions.

With this understanding of how reading is taught in the second language classroom and the strain that university reading places on ESL students at American universities, we can move on to the current study. The next chapter presents the

methodology for this study, which aims to unveil students' perceptions of their academic reading preparedness for a university.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Design

The purpose of this research was to find out university students' perceptions of the English Language Center (ELC) reading program in relation to their academic preparedness for a university. The research sought to answer the following research question:

- From the perception of former ELC students, how well does the ELC reading curriculum prepare ELC students for university-level reading tasks?

In order to answer the main research question, seven secondary research questions were posed. Answers to these questions were derived from data that were gathered from an online questionnaire and one-on-one interviews.

The questions, which sought the students' perspectives, were as follows:

1. How satisfied are the students with their ELC classes?
2. What are the students' perceptions of their overall preparedness for an American university after finishing classes at the ELC?
3. How do they rank the importance of reading in comparison to other language skills (writing, listening, and speaking) at an English-speaking university?
4. What are students' reading requirements and challenges at a university?
5. What have students learned at the ELC that now helps them to fulfill these requirements and overcome the challenges?
6. What ELC reading activities and assignments have not proven to be helpful to them in their university studies?

7. What suggestions do students have for the ELC reading and content classes to better prepare them for university reading tasks?

Answers to these questions, in the form of utilizable data, will be presented and analyzed in Chapter Four. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the context, participants, instruments for gathering data, and data analysis procedures used in this study.

Context

This study is directed at evaluating the reading curriculum of the English Language Center (ELC) at Brigham Young University (BYU) in Provo, Utah. The ELC offers daytime intensive English classes focused on preparing students for college in the United States. The classes are taught by a number of experienced teachers who have already received a degree in TESOL or language acquisition, but the majority are new teachers who are either enrolled in courses for the BYU TESOL graduate certificate program or MA TESOL program.

At the time of their enrollment, students are placed in classes based on three measures: a placement test administered before the semester starts, a diagnostic test given the first week of instruction, and a teacher rating (based on the diagnostic test and teacher observations) determined at the end of the first week of classes.

At the time this study started (Fall semester of 2006) students enrolled in regular daytime classes were offered 17 hours of intensive instruction per week for a total of 13 weeks. Upon enrollment, students were placed into five proficiency levels. Level 1 was a high-beginning level—students with limited English proficiency were placed in this

level. Levels 2, 3, 4, and 5 represented the low-intermediate, intermediate, high-intermediate, and low-advanced levels proficiency in English, respectively.

Students that were placed in Levels 1–4 received instruction in the following skill areas: listening/speaking, reading, writing, and grammar. Students in Level 5 were placed in an applied grammar and academic writing class in addition to two content classes within three different content tracks—general education, humanities, and management.

However, the program at the ELC has undergone significant changes beginning in the fall semester of 2009. The program is now divided into the Foundations English program and the Academic English program, with each program further separated into three levels: A, B, and C. The Foundations program aims at helping students achieve the basic proficiency in English needed for day-to-day communication. The Academic program is centered on helping students prepare to enter institutions of higher education in the United States. Students who are admitted to the Academic program should have at least a high-intermediate proficiency in English and be oriented towards entering American universities and colleges. While the study examined students' perspectives of the former ELC curriculum, their views could prove to be especially valuable to ELC curriculum developers as they strive to make the current program more reflective of and responsive to students' needs.

Participants

Former BYU ELC students who are now studying or have studied at an American college or university were chosen to participate in this study. Their opinions are especially valuable because they already have some college or university experience which they can use to evaluate their academic preparation at the ELC. A total of 1,730

email addresses were obtained through a database created at the ELC for all former students who attended the program beginning with the winter semester of 2001. These students were contacted through email to verify their email addresses and with the initial request to participate in the current study. In addition, former ELC students were asked to indicate whether they have or have not been enrolled in classes at an American college or university to estimate the number of potential participants. A total of 70 students replied, thus comprising a 4% response rate. Only 39 emails came back undelivered.

Such a low response rate can be explained by many factors: students had created email addresses but no longer used them; students incorrectly entered their email addresses when filling in their entrance questionnaire; the letter of request to participate could have been placed in a junk mail file; or students did not feel obligated to respond. It must be noted that the ELC makes no effort to keep this database current once students leave the ELC. Out of those 70 who responded, 35 indicated that they were either enrolled or had taken some classes at an American institution of higher education; 20 students did not have any experience studying at American colleges or universities; and 15 students did not indicate either of the above options. In order to increase the number of participants, current and former ELC students and teachers were asked for referrals of former ELC students. In addition, a request for participation with a link to the questionnaire was placed on Facebook.

A second email with a link to the questionnaire was sent to the 35 students who had indicated they had university experience, thanking students for their willingness to participate and inviting them to follow the link to the questionnaire. In addition, a link to the questionnaire was also sent to those 15 students who responded to the first email but

who did not provide information about having university experience. This was done to ensure that all students who had some university experience were contacted.

Furthermore, 11 referrals of former ELC students, obtained from ELC teachers and students, were also sent an email with a link to the questionnaire. Thus, a total of 61 students received a request to participate in the study with a link to the questionnaire. A consent form to participate in the study was attached to the questionnaire. Before proceeding to the questionnaire, students were asked to read the consent form and then complete the questionnaire if they consented to participate.

Forty-six students took the questionnaire, with 40 students indicating that they had some American college or university experience. All 46 participants took the first part of the questionnaire, where they were asked to provide background information and answer the first 14 questions. These questions were meant to discover students' overall satisfaction with the ELC classes and rate their learning experience at the ELC. The second part of the questionnaire was directed at finding out students' preparedness for university courses in America. So, only those participants who indicated prior study at a university took this part of the questionnaire (14 questions). The rest of the participants (6) were directed to the end of the questionnaire. Because students were not obligated to answer all questions of the questionnaire, some participants chose to omit answering some questions. Therefore, the number of respondents to each question of the questionnaire varies from 46 to 35.

Participants in this study were students at the ELC for various lengths of time beginning with the winter semester of 2001 to the winter semester of 2008. In many ways, the profile of these students is similar to that of current ELC students. For instance,

the average length of time participants spent at the ELC is 2.59 semesters. The average ELC stay for current students is 2.32 semesters (T. Cox, personal communication, August 11, 2009). Participants also represent ELC student populations from all five levels, with the majority of the students having attended Levels 3 and 4. This is also consistent with average ELC populations. Typically 54.31% of the ELC population is enrolled in Levels 3 and 4. In addition, 15 of the participants (32.61%) in this study repeated one level more than once (Figure 3.1). This is also typical of ELC student populations (T. Cox, personal communication, August 11, 2009). Table 3.1 presents a comparison of participants in this study to a three-semester average (F '08, W '09, S '09) of ELC student populations.

Table 3.1

Participants/ ELC Students' Attendance Profile

Average	Participants N=46	ELC students (F '08–S '09) N=711
Length of stay (semesters)	2.59	2.32
Number of students in each level	Level 1= 3 (6.52%)*	Level 1= 21.67 (9.12%)
	Level 2= 8 (17.39%)	Level 2= 35.33 (15.05%)
	Level 3= 29 (63.04%)	Level 3= 61.67 (26.23%)
	Level 4= 34 (73.91%)	Level 4 = 67.33 (28.08%)
	Level 5= 25 (54.35%)	Level 5= 51.00 (21.52%)

* Because participants studied at multiple levels, the percentages do not equal 100% and totals exceed total N.

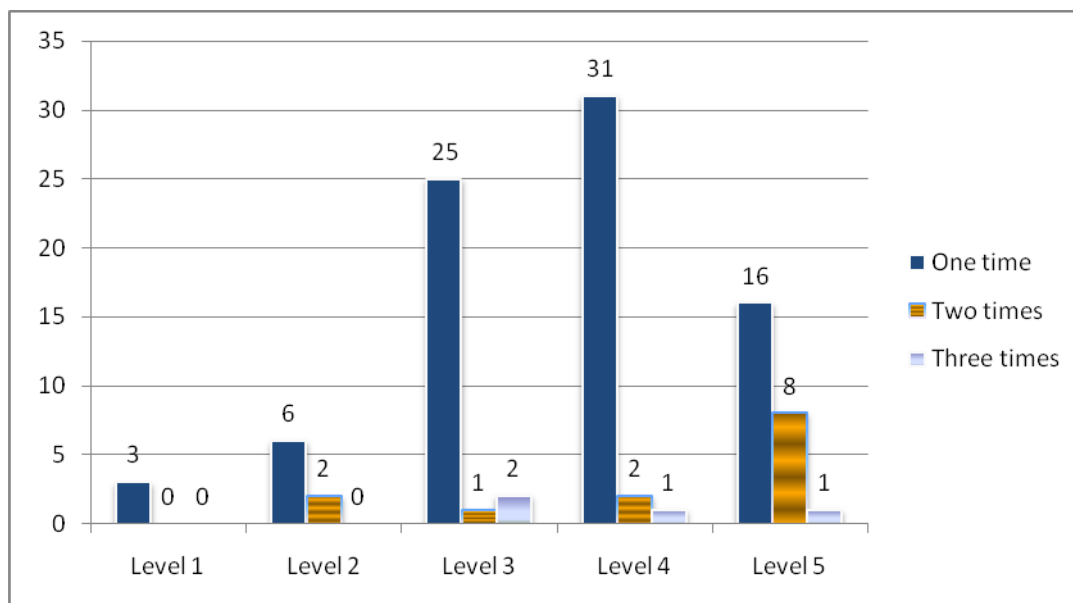


Figure 3.1 Levels attended and number of times they were repeated (N=46).

Participants came from various backgrounds, representing 19 countries. A little more than half of the students came from Mexico (28%), South Korea (13%), and Japan (11%). The rest (48%) of the students originated from 16 other countries. This distribution of students among language groups is quite representative of the general ELC population. Table 3.2 compares percentages of students' native languages reported by study participants and ELC students that attended ELC from 2001 to 2008 (T. Cox, personal communication, August 11, 2009).

Table 3.2

Participants/ ELC Students' Language Profile (2001–2008)

Students' L1	ELC students		Participants	
	N=3073		N=46	
Spanish	1167	38.43%	21	45.65%
Korean	786	25.58%	6	13.04%
Chinese	312	10.15%	1	2.17%
Japanese	308	10.02%	5	10.87%
Portuguese	160	5.21%	5	10.87%
Mongolian	142	4.62%	3	6.52%
French	45	1.46%	0	0.00%
Thai	37	1.20%	0	0.00%
Russian	36	1.17%	4	8.70%
Creole	32	1.04%	0	0.00%
Italian	26	0.85%	0	0.00%
Arabic	22	0.72%	1	2.17%

The main two language groups, Spanish and Korean, correspond to 64.01% of the overall student population at the ELC and are well-represented in the study (58.69%).

While some languages are underrepresented—for example Chinese, French, Thai, and Creole—participants still come from the top twelve language groups widely represented at the ELC.

Before coming to the ELC, 48% of the participants already had experience in studying at American post-secondary institutions, whereas 52% of the participants came to the ELC with a high school diploma. Among those who reported studying at institutions of higher education, the majority—12 students (26%)—had already

completed their bachelor's degree, two students (4%) had completed their master's degree, and one student had started doctoral studies. Figure 3.2 provides an overview of the participants' educational background before coming to the ELC.

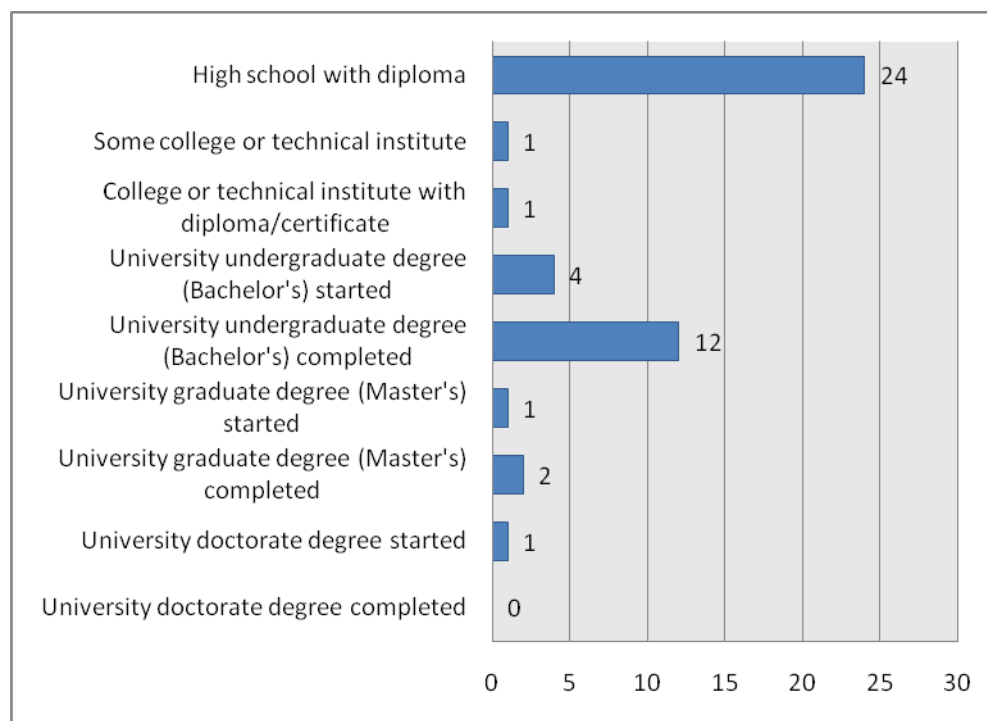


Figure 3.2 Education before coming to the ELC (N=46).

As was mentioned before, the majority of students at the ELC are planning on attending a college or university in the United States. Thirty-three participants (73%) stated that their most important goal for coming to the ELC was to prepare for further study at a college or university (Figure 3.3). The rest of the students had other goals in mind: to improve their ability to use English in daily life (16%), to improve their employment situation (4.44%), to learn about life and customs in the U.S. (2%), and other reasons (4.44%). Among other goals students indicated were making their parents happy, dating, passing the TOEFL, and trying new things.

Students were also asked if their most important goal for coming to the ELC changed after taking ELC classes. Sixteen students (36%) changed their initial reasons for coming as a result of their ELC experience. While most of these students commented on the helpfulness of the ELC classes in gaining valuable learning experiences, six students decided to stay and study at American post-secondary institutions after finishing their course work at the ELC. One student met her husband at the ELC, who happened to be from a different country; thus English became a medium of communication in her home.

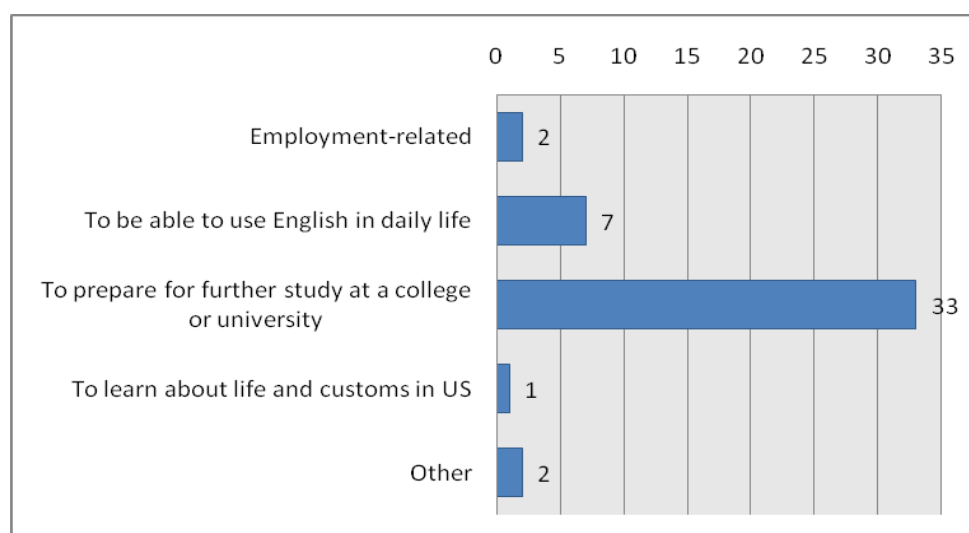


Figure 3.3 Reasons for coming to the ELC (N=45).

Since finishing their studies at the ELC, eight participants (17%) indicated that they took ESL classes at another location before entering an American college or university. Thirty-five students (76%) indicated that they did not take more ESL classes after finishing at the ELC, and 7% of the participants were still taking ESL classes at another location. In conjunction with this question, students were asked to indicate whether they are currently taking or have taken university courses in America. Twenty-six students (59%) were working on their undergraduate degrees, 7 students (15%) were

working on their graduate degrees, 3 students (7%) had already graduated, 4 students (9%) took some university classes but were not enrolled in classes at the time of this study and 6 students (13%) have never taken any college or university classes in America. Therefore, these 6 students were directed to the end of the questionnaire.

Out of the 40 students that indicated they were attending American university or college classes and took the second part of the questionnaire, 24 students left the ELC after attending Level 5, 15 students left after attending Level 4, and 1 student left after attending Level 3. These 40 former ELC students came from 10 different institutions of higher education. The majority of them, 60%, were studying at BYU–Provo, BYU–Idaho, BYU–Hawaii, or LDS Business College. This is not surprising because the ELC is part of BYU’s Division of Continuing Education. Almost 18% of participants indicated studying at the newly-created Utah Valley University (UVU), which is located near BYU–Provo. The rest, 22% of the students, came from other schools both within and outside of Utah, including the University of Texas, Salt Lake Community College, Hult International Business School, Laney College, Truckee Meadows Community College, Kennesaw State University, and the School for International Training.

The participants of the second part of the questionnaire indicated enrollment in 23 different programs of study, beginning their programs as early as fall semester of 2004. Twelve students (52%) were pursuing business related majors, such as accounting and international business management, or pursuing MBAs. The rest, or 48% of the students, were studying in general education, nursing, TESOL, political science, information systems, nutrition, aviation maintenance, or psychology, among other programs of study. This distribution is quite consistent with national trends (IIE, 2008).

After the participants completed the questionnaire, six of them were chosen to participate in follow-up interviews. Among these were three Spanish-speaking students, one Portuguese-speaking student, a student who spoke Japanese, and a student who spoke Russian. All six students were recent graduates from the ELC, having studied between summer of 2006 and winter of 2008. Three of the participants completed Level 5 (content instruction) and three were accepted at an American college or university after Level 4. Of the three participants that went to Level 5, two started their ELC studies at Level 2 and progressed up to Level 5. At the time of interviews, three interview participants were studying at BYU–Provo, two at UVU, and one at LDS Business College, with five of them pursuing an undergraduate degree and one completing a graduate degree. All of them entered the ELC with the goal to later be accepted at an American college or university.

Instruments

Two instruments were used for data gathering: a questionnaire and in-depth semi-structured interviews. Written questionnaires can provide more information on a broader scale than interviews (Brown, 1995). However, the interviews allowed for gathering personal information that led to deeper insights from the questionnaire participants.

With a sample size of 46 students, questionnaires were an efficient means to gather data. The participants were emailed a questionnaire which was posted online using Qualtrics Survey Software and which was comprised of 28 questions (Appendix B). At the end of the questionnaire, students were invited to participate in interviews by providing their names and contact information. Individual interviews were carried out at

the final stage of the study. The questions posed in these interviews were of a more in-depth nature but were similar to those of the questionnaire.

The Questionnaire.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part of the questionnaire asked background questions to find out when students studied at the ELC and in what levels they studied. Questions also asked about their home country, the language they spoke at home growing up, the highest level of formal education they received before coming to the ELC, and their reasons or goals were for coming to the ELC. The second part of the questionnaire contained several questions on the helpfulness of their ELC classes in achieving their most important goal and in improving their English skills. In this part, students were also asked to indicate whether they had any experience studying at an American college or university. Those who responded positively were directed to the third and final part of the questionnaire which was aimed at finding out students' perceptions of the relevance of their ELC training to their academic studies.

This last section of the questionnaire was specifically devoted to having the students identify the effect of the reading instruction they received at the ELC on their academic success and preparedness for the university. They were asked what ELC reading activities and assignments had proven to be helpful or unhelpful in their university studies. Students were also asked to define the academic load by the number of pages they were required to read each day and to evaluate their use of reading strategies and strategies' effectiveness in completing various reading tasks. The questionnaire also asked participants to identify their greatest challenges in reading and recommend changes in the ELC reading curriculum to correspond with the realities of higher education.

Participants were also invited to share their thoughts about the helpfulness of their classes in achieving their goals for studying at the ELC, their satisfaction with their classes, and their general preparedness for study at American post-secondary institutions. One question asked students to identify which skill (reading, writing, listening, or speaking) they considered to be the least and the most important in succeeding at an English-speaking university.

After the questionnaire was compiled, it was piloted with seven students from different native language backgrounds. These students, all former ELC students, did not take part in the actual study. Students were given a link to the questionnaire and asked to answer questions to the best of their ability. In addition to answering questions, students were asked to time their responses and give feedback on the questionnaire; for example, they noted questions that they did not understand or could not answer. With three students, the principal investigator carried out think-aloud protocols over the phone while students were taking the questionnaire to better elicit their answers. On average, it took the students 12 minutes to respond to all 28 questions. The questionnaire was revised several times during the period of its development as a result of the piloting process.

Interviews.

The six interviews were conducted after the results of the questionnaire were partially analyzed. The interviews were done to extract the most interesting answers or answers that needed more explanation. Nineteen questionnaire participants agreed to participate in the follow-up interviews. Among those, thirteen students were identified who lived within a reasonable distance of Provo, Utah. This was important for travelling convenience and allowed for face-to-face interviews rather than telephone interviews.

Face-to-face interviews allowed for PI to capture any nonverbal messages that were conveyed during the interviews. Whenever an interviewee looked confused or hesitant to answer a question that was asked, the PI was able to clarify the question's meaning and ensure that the student's confidentiality was kept. In addition, conducting face-to-face interviews eliminated some possible distractions and cost of traveling or telephone calls.

The questionnaire answers of the thirteen students that lived in a close proximity to Provo, Utah were reviewed by the principal investigator and graded 1 to 3 based on the relevance and insightfulness of their answers, with 3 being the most relevant. In addition, the language spoken at home while growing up was the last criterion for choosing nine final participants to be contacted. Seven of the nine students selected for interviews responded to the request for an interview. One student was chosen for a pilot interview.

The pilot interview was carried out to test the questions, to practice the researcher's interviewing skills, and to determine an approximate duration of an interview. Since the pilot interview lasted 24 minutes, the 30-minute mark became a target time for the actual interviews. Most importantly, the pilot interview helped the principal investigator learn how to lead the discussion by asking prepared questions and responding to the information shared by the interviewee through follow-up questions to elicit deeper answers. During the interviews, all seven of the prepared prompts were used with slight wording and order modification to better fit the flow of the conversation.

Six participants that were strategically selected for interviews comprised 15% of the study group (40). As noted, the majority of the students that study at the ELC come from Spanish-speaking countries. The majority of respondents to the questionnaire (39%) also indicated Spanish as the language of communication at home. Therefore, it was

appropriate to select half (3) of the interview participants from the Spanish-speaking population. The other three participants came from the next three largest language populations represented in this study: Portuguese, Japanese, and Russian (Table 3.2).

The main purpose of the interviews was to obtain rich qualitative data that would clarify answers and lead to deeper insights from the questionnaire participants. The following seven questions served as prompts for a discussion:

1. We found that about half of the students (47%) who took the questionnaire indicated that their studies at the ELC were very helpful in achieving their most important goal and 39% of students were mainly satisfied with their classes. What about you?
2. The majority of students (63%) felt prepared for university courses in America after they completed their studies at the ELC. What about you? Why?
3. Students that took this survey and have some university experience in America indicated that the most important skill to succeed in an English-speaking university is (1) reading, (2) listening, (3) writing, and (4) speaking. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
4. What are your greatest challenges in reading?
5. What did you learn in your ELC reading classes that have helped you overcome these challenges now that you are at a university?
6. What did you learn in your ELC reading classes that was not helpful to you as a university student?
7. What would be your suggestions for the ELC teachers to better prepare students for university reading tasks?

The interviews were all digitally recorded. Before the recording, students were told the purpose of the interview and given a consent form (Appendix C) to read and sign. Participants were also given an opportunity to ask any questions before the recording. Recorded data were transferred to the principal investigator's computer and kept in a separate file for further review and transcription of relevant passages (Appendix E). The interviews ranged in length between 17 and 36 minutes. During the interview, casual notes were kept. In addition, following each interview, the principal investigator wrote down main ideas and impressions that came to her mind during the interviews. These were later used during data analysis and writing of the results.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data received from the questionnaire and interviews were coded for relevant themes using grounded theory as the framework for interpretation. Grounded theory, developed in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss, still remains a relevant qualitative research methodology used in the social sciences (Kelle, 2005). Since its development, many researchers have been looking for ways to reconcile two seemingly contradictory concepts concerning the relation between data and theory. One concept implies that a researcher must approach data with no predetermined theories or hypotheses. The other states that the researcher has to use his previous knowledge to identify relevant themes in data (Kelle, 2005).

Unlike a quantitative method where hypothesis is formulated first and then tested, grounded theory suggests generating a hypothesis from emerging themes, concepts, and categories. This hypothesis can be further verified by constantly comparing data to the hypothesis by using deductive thinking (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In summary, data gathered through questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative analyses. The free-response answers were analyzed qualitatively by looking for patterns in student responses to help triangulate the quantitative data. Interview data were also analyzed using qualitative analyses for triangulation. The analyzed data are presented in the form of answers to the seven secondary research questions in the next chapter, Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Before engaging in the discussion of the main research question in Chapter Five, this section of the thesis will detail the results yielded by the study instruments, the questionnaire and the interviews, as answers to the secondary research questions in this order:

1. How satisfied are the students with their ELC classes?
2. What are the students' perceptions of their overall preparedness for an American university after finishing classes at the ELC?
3. How do they rank the importance of reading in comparison to other language skills (writing, listening, and speaking) at an English-speaking university?
4. What are students' reading requirements and challenges at a university?
5. What have students learned at the ELC that now helps them to fulfill these requirements and overcome the challenges?
6. What ELC reading activities and assignments have not proven to be helpful to them in their university studies?
7. What suggestions do students have for the ELC reading and content classes to better prepare them for university reading tasks?

The results in this chapter are introduced in the order of the aforementioned research questions, with the aim of answering the main research question. The answers to these secondary research questions were collected from former ELC students through an online questionnaire during a period of three weeks, followed by 6 interviews with strategically-selected questionnaire participants. Question 1 was answered by a total of 46 former ELC

students and Questions 2-7 were answered by a total of 40 students that have already had some university experience in America.

Question 1: Satisfaction with the ELC classes

The first research question looks at students' overall satisfaction with the ELC classes and their perceptions of how well the classes helped them achieve their most important goal and improve their language skills. Twenty-one (46.67%) of the students indicated that their ELC classes were “very helpful,” 11 students (24.44%) found their classes “helpful,” 11 students (24.44%) said the classes were “somewhat helpful,” and two students (4.44%) responded that the classes were “very unhelpful” in achieving their most important goal (Figure 4.1).

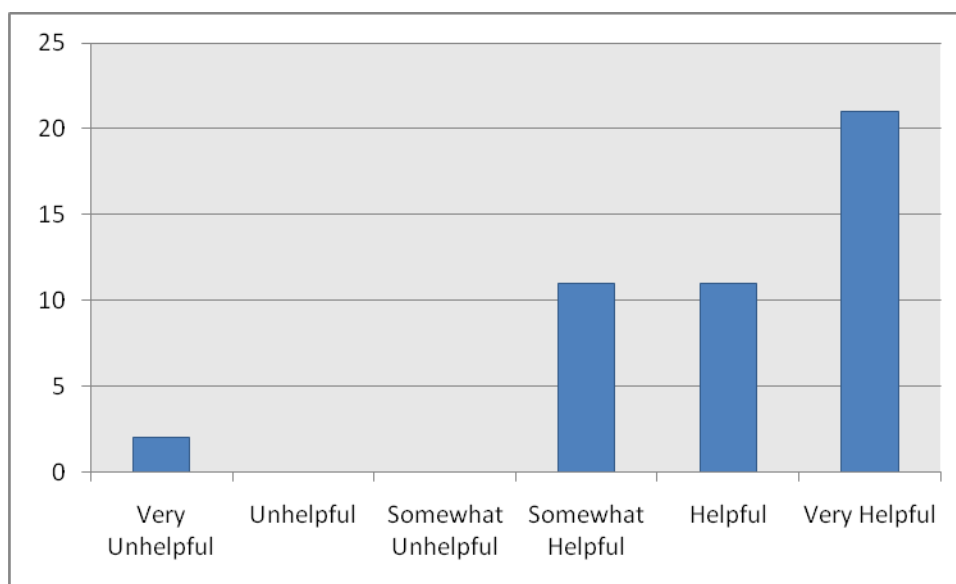


Figure 4.1 Helpfulness of the ELC classes in achieving the most important goal (N=45).

Upon further investigation of the students' answers in the last group (“very unhelpful”) and review of the received data, it became evident that one of the students might have made a mistake in choosing this response. The student that chose “very

unhelpful” in response to the first question later indicated being “completely satisfied” with the ELC classes and rated the quality of instruction as “good” and “very good” in all skills. This student also indicated being “prepared” for study at an American university, thus invalidating his first answer. The second student that selected “very unhelpful” later indicated “not very satisfied” as an answer to the level of satisfaction with the ELC classes, but he rated the quality of instruction “ok” to “excellent” in four skill areas. It is, therefore, not evident that this student made a mistake in answering the first question and may indeed have been unsatisfied with the quality of instruction at the ELC.

The 11 students who indicated that their classes were “somewhat helpful” in achieving their most important goal also stated that they were “somewhat satisfied” (7 students) and “mainly satisfied” (4 students) with their classes. Accordingly, the 21 students who answered that their classes were “very helpful” also answered that they were “completely satisfied” (13 students) and “mainly satisfied” (8 students). Figure 4.2 shows the results of students’ answers about their level of satisfaction with the ELC classes. The strong relationship between these two data sets is evidence of the validity of the results.

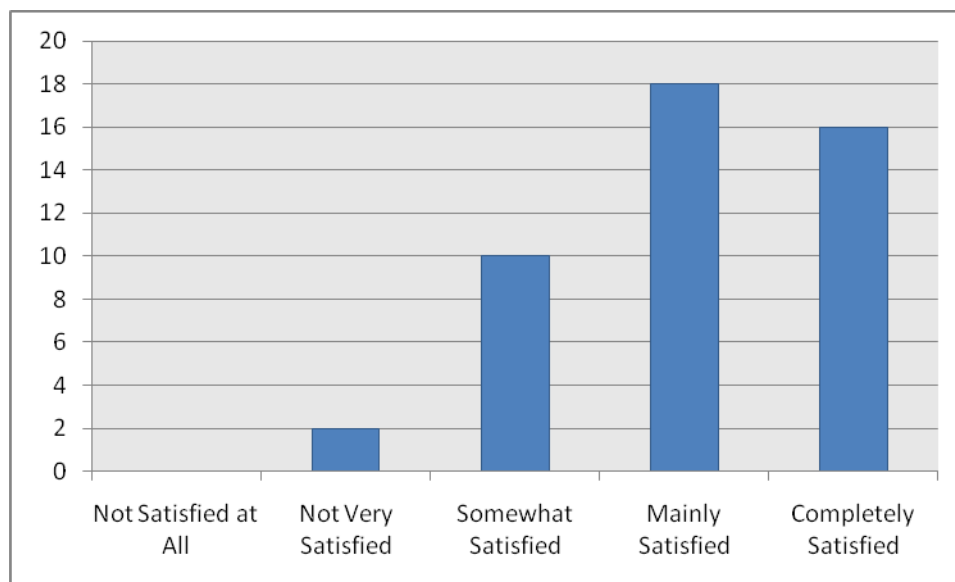


Figure 4.2 Students' overall satisfaction with their ELC classes (N=46).

In order to further verify the obtained results, students were also asked about the helpfulness of their ELC classes in improving their language skills; this included questions about English grammar and about the overall quality of instruction in the corresponding classes. The mean analysis of students' answers shows that the students' responses range between the mean of 4.73 and 5.24 for helpfulness of the ELC classes, with 6 being "very helpful" (Figure 4.3). Accordingly, the same analysis revealed that participants' answers are distributed between the mean of 4.48 and 4.78 for quality of instruction with 6 being "excellent" (Figure 4.4). In all cases, participants found their ELC classes to be "helpful" and the quality of instruction to be "good", approaching "very good."

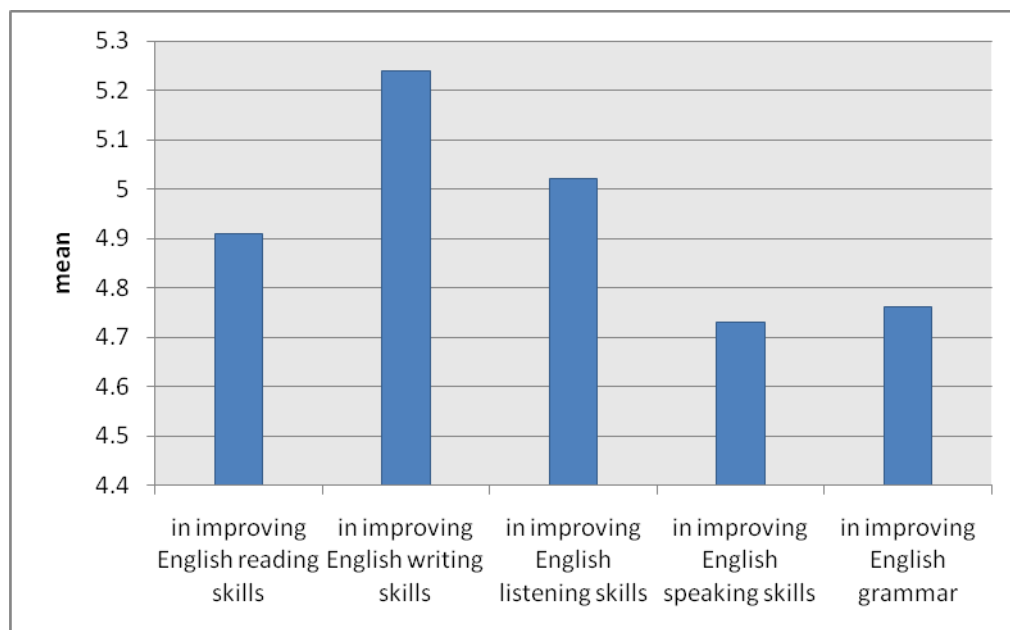


Figure 4.3 Means of the helpfulness of ELC classes in improving English skills and grammar (1 = very unhelpful, 2 = unhelpful, 3 = somewhat unhelpful, 4 = somewhat helpful, 5 = helpful, 6 = very helpful).

Further analysis of the data reveals that participants thought that their writing skills were improved the most by the ELC classes (mean=5.24), with their listening skills (mean=5.02) and reading skills (mean=4.91) coming next, followed by grammar (mean=4.76) and speaking skills (mean=4.73). Participants also rated the quality of instruction in their writing classes as the highest (mean=4.78) with 4 being “good” and 5 being “very good,” followed by reading classes (mean=4.61), content classes (mean=4.57), then listening and speaking classes (4.55) and, finally, grammar classes (mean=4.48).

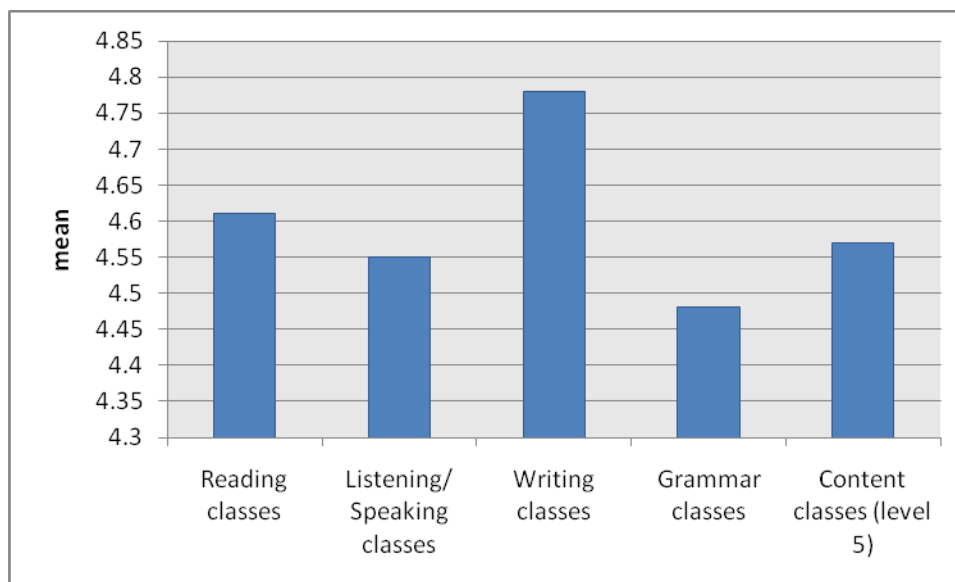


Figure 4.4 Means of the quality of instruction in all skill areas and content classes (1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = ok, 4 = good, 5 = very good, 6 = excellent).

A comparison of the data in Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4 indicates a strong connection between the helpfulness of the ELC classes in improving students' skills and the perceived quality of instruction in the corresponding classes (Table 4.1). Thus the participants chose writing as the skill they improved the most as a result of their ELC classes and writing classes as having the highest quality instruction of all ELC classes. After writing, the mean of student responses gave second place to reading instruction and reading classes, third place to improving combined listening and speaking skills and the quality of instruction in listening and speaking classes, and fourth place to grammar and grammar classes.

Table 4.1

Mean Comparison of Helpfulness of the ELC Classes and the Quality of Instruction in the Corresponding Classes

	Writing	Reading	Listening/Speaking	Grammar
Helpfulness of the ELC classes in improving skills	5.24	4.91	4.875	4.76
Quality of instruction in corresponding skill classes	4.78	4.61	4.55	4.48

Data obtained through interviews with the participants support the results from the questionnaire presented above. All of the interview participants spoke highly of their writing classes, where they learned how to write short essays and academic research papers. One of the interviewees mentioned that when she took a writing class at Utah Valley University (UVU), she and another former ELC student were among the top students in the class, earning a final grade of almost 100% for the class.

Five out of six of the interview participants also gave high ratings to their ELC reading classes, indicating that they learned helpful reading comprehension strategies which increased their efficiency in reading different types of text. “I became a smarter reader,” one of the participants said. She commented on how she is more efficient now in deciding what homework to read more carefully, what to skim while focusing on getting the gist of the reading, or what to scan for important details in order to answer questions for a take-home quiz. A detailed discussion of how students are currently benefitting in

their university courses from the skills they learned in ELC reading classes is presented below in the exposition of the results of the fifth research question.

Contrary to the ELC writing classes, listening and speaking classes did not consistently receive positive assessments from both questionnaire and interview participants. To be sure, some students, after taking the ELC classes, expressed being “more comfortable with the language and speaking it” and not feeling “embarrassed or scared to communicate or give [their] opinion in a classroom with native speakers.” In addition, one student indicated that the ELC classes helped him improve his listening skills as “it was [his] only problem in failing the TOEFL two or three times in his home country.”

On the other hand, some participants indicated that they “did not have enough confidence in communicating skills” and were “afraid [they] would not understand everything in [their] BYU classes or wouldn’t be understood” after completing their ELC studies. As one student said, “I felt that my vocabulary was still not broad enough and that my speaking was not very good.” Other participants also mentioned that in their college studies they felt confident talking about the topics that they earlier encountered in their ELC listening and speaking classes but not so confident when they came across a new or unfamiliar topic. Thus the participants wished that they would have discussed a greater variety of academic topics in their ELC classes, which, in turn, would have helped them feel more prepared for college. As participants further explained, knowing “specific words” or specific vocabulary is key to successful interpreting and mastering of the subject matter in their college courses.

Question 2: Preparedness for a University

The second research question sought to find out students' overall preparedness for an American college or university as well as the underlying reasons behind their answers. This question also aimed at eliciting participants' memories of their course-specific requirements, expectations, and challenges that they encountered in their university-level reading. Students were particularly asked to indicate their level of college preparedness after the completion of their ELC studies. Figure 4.5 shows the distribution of students' answers among different levels of preparedness for university courses.

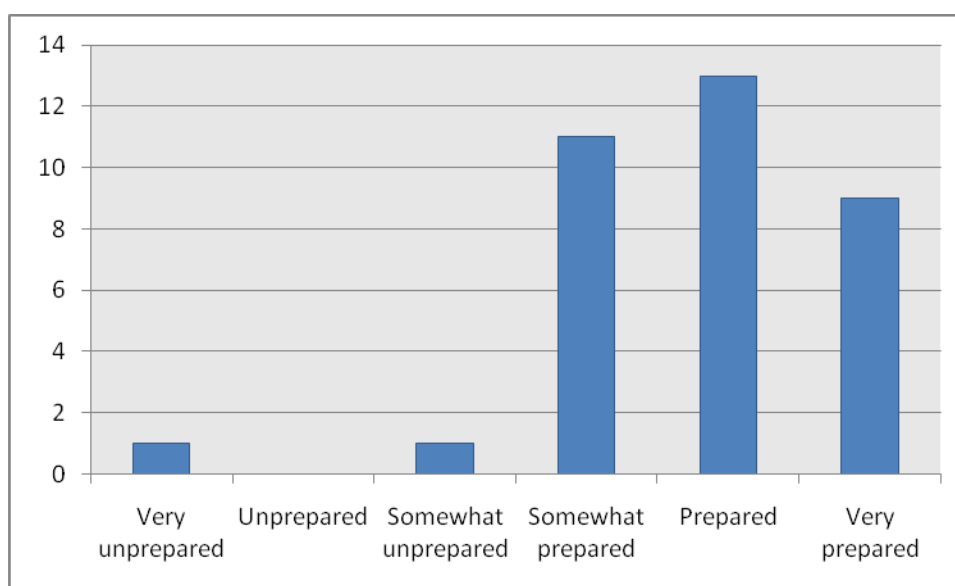


Figure 4.5 Level of preparedness for university studies (N=35).

Among 35 students who chose to answer this question, 9 students (26%) answered “very prepared,” 13 students (37%) chose “prepared,” 11 students (31%) indicated they were “somewhat prepared,” 1 student (3%) felt “somewhat unprepared,” and 1 student (3%) said “very unprepared.” Overall, 68% of students’ answers fall between “somewhat prepared” and “prepared” (mean=4.77). Students were also asked to give an explanation for their choice. Twenty-two students who indicated being “very

prepared” and “prepared” commented on their choices with statements similar to the following (minor editing changes were made for the ease of reading):

- “I learned how to write essays and do research. I also acquired a few helpful reading strategies. I am sure that without the ELC experience studying at college here in America would be more challenging.”
- “...everything was very hard at the ELC Level 5. It prepared me to start studying at a college.”
- “I think content classes in Level 5 are helpful because they are just like college classes.”
- “I feel I have learned the basic and helpful things that are necessary in order to be successful in a college. I don't feel embarrassed or scared to communicate, give or share my opinion in a classroom with native speakers.”
- “I think some courses were very helpful to be ready to study at American universities. For example, the first test I took at UVSC [UVU] was on English prefixes. I remembered a lot from Level 3, when a teacher had taught us those prefixes. Now I am taking American Heritage and I am very thankful for my teacher who helped me to know about American history and understand American government. So, I feel that the ELC helped me a lot.”
- “ELC program helped me to pass the TOEFL. Through ELC program, I could develop my basic strength in speaking, writing, reading, listening, and grammar. And it was really helpful when I took the TOEFL. Teachers were wonderful, and they were trying to improve their classes hard. Also, the classes at ELC were fun.”

In addition, a few participants commented on the helpfulness of the ELC's workload. The amount of homework that students had each day helped them prepare for the amount of homework they had to do at a university. Interestingly, while some students felt that the ELC homework helped them to prepare for the TOEFL, others felt that it did not. For example, one student expressed his disappointment in the following way: "I think the ELC program can't help students who need to take the TOEFL. I studied it by myself." Thirteen of the participants that answered "somewhat prepared," "somewhat unprepared," and "very unprepared" made similar comments:

- "I felt ELC was some kind of private English classes, and did not feel like a college education."
- "I do not know what to say but the ELC prepares students generally, I mean studying or learning how to speak English. While, when you go to a university you have to choose or focus on one major."
- "From my point of view the ELC is oriented to help students of a high school level. Since I was preparing for an MBA level, I had to study so hard by myself."
- "... there was not enough time to practice and prepare."
- "I felt that the program was too stressful. Many times I felt that it was very stressful for my teachers too. I believe that stress does not help in the processing of learning. It was too much homework and I felt that I could not practice the subjects that I had learned in class outside the class."

In summary, students who did not feel adequately prepared for college commented on the "general" nature and stressfulness of their ELC classes. These two factors, in turn, contributed to students' sense that the classes provided inadequate

preparation and too little time for them to practice and learn what they needed to meet their goals.

Overall, among the 35 students that replied to the question on preparedness for college studies, 10 students attended Level 5 classes before Level 5 classes became content-based classes and 12 attended after the changes; 13 students never attended Level 5 classes. Thus a total of 12 students had the benefit of content-based instruction and 23 did not. Answers of these two groups of participants to the question on preparedness for college are displayed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Participants' Preparedness for a University After Taking Different ELC Levels

	Very Unprepared	Unprepared	Somewhat Unprepared	Somewhat Prepared	Prepared	Very Prepared
Students w/ content-based instruction	0	0	1	3	4	4
Students w/o content-based instruction	1	0	0	8	9	5

A T-test was used to compare means of participants' answers to the question of their preparedness for university after the ELC. A significant difference was found between the observed level of preparation for a university between students who attended content-based classes of Level 5 ($M=4.92$, $SD=0.99$) and those who did not ($M=4.0$, $SD=1.04$), $t(11)=4.75$, $p=0.001$. These results suggest that taking content-based classes had an effect on students' perceptions of their preparation for a university. Participants

that took Level 5 content classes reported much higher levels of preparedness than those that did not.

In order to validate these results, the interview participants were asked to comment on their level of preparedness for college. Interview data supported questionnaire findings. Two of the interview participants, who entered the ELC at Level 2 and progressed all the way to Level 5, were asked if they would feel prepared going to a university after Level 4. Their answers, presented below, indicate that they did not feel prepared for university studies after completing Level 4, but they felt more prepared after graduating from Level 5 content classes. When asked to explain their answers, they made the following comments:

- “Because in Level 5 we read American Heritage and Biology books, and these are college books. In Level 4 we’ve never read books like these two. From books like “The Giver” to college textbooks, I would not be prepared. Now I even know some stuff, some history and biology. And it will save me time because I already know them.”
- “I wouldn’t feel good about it. Not at all prepared for a college because my vocabulary and my understanding, the whole thing, was not even college, was like little kids; the kind of books that we’ve read at the ELC. When the ELC was trying to take us to classes on campus, this is when I felt I wasn’t ready. At the ELC teachers are trained to speak very slowly and pronounce every word. When I went to BYU, it was a religion class, even gospel was hard. I couldn’t understand some of the points [the teacher] was trying to make. Not enough vocabulary. Level 5 classes make you feel better about the college life than Level 4 classes

because Level 4 classes are just like Level 1, 2 and 3, the manner and the way they teach is like for little kids, like for someone who is just learning English but not going to a college.”

One of the interviewees only attended Level 5 non-content classes. Nevertheless she felt that it was enough for her to adapt to and understand “the way of American teaching.” She said: “I felt prepared for college because I already had some skills and knowledge. Level 5 was just enough for me to fill in the gaps to be ready for a college.”

If the participants thought that content-based classes were helpful in preparing them for a university, a second question should, logically, be asked about students’ perceived preparedness for a university after they had taken some college or university courses. This question meant to verify the data obtained from the first question as well as to see how students felt in terms of their preparedness after attending university classes. Table 4.3 compares the number of students indicating different levels of preparedness before and after taking some university courses.

Table 4.3

Level of Participants’ Preparedness Before and After Taking Some University Classes

	Very Unprepared	Unprepared	Somewhat Unprepared	Somewhat Prepared	Prepared	Very Prepared
Before taking university classes (N=35)_	1	0	1	11	13	9
After taking university classes (N=35)	0	0	0	4	20	11

This table shows that students' exposure to university or college classes helped them feel more prepared for the rigors of university study. None of the 35 students indicated being "unprepared" and only 4 students (12%) felt "somewhat prepared," the rest—31 students (88%)—indicated being "prepared" and "very prepared." Students experienced less stress and were less intimidated after they became familiar with the nature and workload of university classes. However, some small number of students (12%) still felt "somewhat prepared" even after being enrolled in university classes, possibly due to the demands of a university education, which is often very challenging for native speakers of English, let alone ESL students.

Question 3: Importance of Skills at a University

This research question inquired about students' perceptions of the most and the least important language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) for an international student to succeed in an English-speaking university. Students had to rate these skills in order of their importance from 1 (the most important) to 4 (the least important). And even though many students and teachers alike would agree that all four skills are very important in succeeding at a university, previous research shows that both students and professors were able to successfully rank them (Christison & Krahnke, 1986, Cheng, 1995, Mustafa, 1998).

The mean analysis of the obtained results shows that students ranked the skills of reading, listening, writing, and speaking in that order of importance in successful performance at a university (Table 4.4). These results confirm the previous findings by Christison and Krahnke (1986) and Mustafa (1998). Students were not asked to explain their choice in the questionnaire but were asked to do so in the follow-up interviews. One

questionnaire participant, though not specifically asked but having an option to do so, gave the following explanation to his choice:

As university student, it is necessary to be able to write academically and to read a lot. I think speaking is important to communicate, but if we can read and write more than other skills, we can do very well at school because we can understand and do our tasks. But if we can speak and listen very well, but not write or read, we can have serious problems at school.

Table 4.4

Means of Skills' Ratings

Skill	Reading	Listening	Writing	Speaking
Mean	1.89	1.82	1.59	1.04

Note: The numbers were reversed for the ease of interpretation

Interview participants rated these skills similarly to the questionnaire participants; most of them agreed that the two receptive skills—reading and listening—are the most important in determining success at a university. Some hesitated to give either skill first place, while still others gave quite argumentative support for their choice. One student commented why she thinks reading is the most important skill:

Because at the university they ask you to read many books, if you don't know how to read, you can't. Also, for example, on some tests you can do open book, but you have a limited time to answer. So if you don't know how to do skills for reading, you lose everything.

Another student made a similar comment: "Reading is the most important thing because you have to read so many books. Mostly all of your homework is based on

reading.” Yet another interviewee thought that while reading is very important, listening is more important because, “for reading we can take time to understand, but when we listen, it is only one time to understand.” After reading and listening, students almost unanimously chose writing, followed by speaking. Interestingly, the interviewees that study at a university, such as BYU, chose writing before speaking, explaining that they don’t speak much in class but that for almost every class they are required to write papers. However, a student who studied at LDSBC, a college with a much smaller class sizes, thought that speaking is more important than writing:

Asking questions is really important. During the test or if I have questions about the class, you have to ask your teacher questions. And if we become shy and hesitate to ask questions, it is a problem. In many classes we have to interrupt, we have to be bold to ask questions.

One possible explanation to this is that students are unable or hesitate to speak in the large classes that are typical for most universities. Asking questions or making comments becomes quite difficult in an undergraduate class of 200–300 students, and teachers are unable to assess students’ progress on an individual basis except through tests and papers. On the other hand, students in much smaller classes—for example in small colleges—may feel more confident speaking and asking questions; therefore, such students would tend to consider speaking an important skill for successful performance at a college. For university students, speaking becomes more important as they progress in their studies and enter graduate programs, with smaller class sizes and more requirements for in-class participation. One interviewee commented that she thinks she will speak more when she is doing her master’s degree and has to defend her thesis.

Question 4: Reading Requirements and Challenges at a University

The forth research question sought to find out reading requirements and challenges that students face at an American college or university. To better understand reading requirements of university students, the participants were asked to indicate the number of pages they have to read daily during the semester, the number of times they reread a homework assignment, and what types of assignments they are required to do in connection with their reading.

The results obtained were analyzed by looking for themes in the participants' answers. The analysis shows that 80% of the participants face two types of challenges in connection with their academic reading: 1) understanding complex academic vocabulary when reading their specific textbooks (63%), and 2) the amount of reading they have to do in a short time (37%). Students made the following comments:

- “My greatest challenge is to be able to understand academic books.”
- “[My greatest challenge] is reading chapters of 50 pages for a class.”
- “I have to read too many things in order to find a single answer or to understand something.”
- “[My greatest challenge] is time, finishing everything on time.”

These findings are similar to previous findings. International students have been facing the same challenges in reading for several decades (Sheorey, Mokhtari & Livingston, 1995; Cheng, 1995; Christison & Krahnke, 1986; Ostler, 1980). However, due to ever-growing competition in the job market and demand for a high-quality education, students that are now enrolled in colleges and universities are confronted with a greater number of more complex requirements for passing their classes and graduating

(Ignash, 2000). For instance, in this study the participants indicated reading anywhere from 10 to more than a 100 pages a day (Figure 4.6). From Figure 4.6, it is apparent that the majority of students read anywhere from 10 to 60 pages each day. Nonetheless, the largest single distribution, 8 students (24%), indicated reading more than 100 pages of text each day.

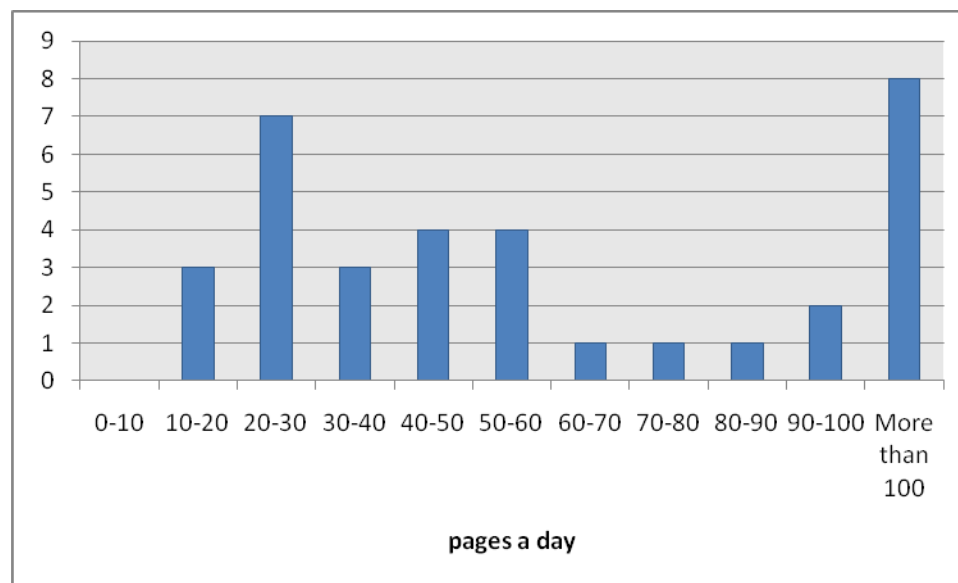


Figure 4.6 The number of pages students read for homework each day (N=34).

Of course, such a wide spread among the students' answers could be explained by the fact that students may not know exactly how many pages they read each day. The selected choices reflect how much students think they read each day and may not be a true representation of their homework assignments. A mean analysis of this distribution shows that students read on average between 60–70 pages a day.

In addition to the large amount of reading that students have to do every day, some students feel the need to reread their homework assignments for better understanding. This, in turn, doubles the average amount of reading they have to do each day. Almost half of the participants (45%) stated that they have to read their reading

assignments twice, and 52% of students read them only once. One student indicated reading the same homework assignment four or more times (Figure 4.7).

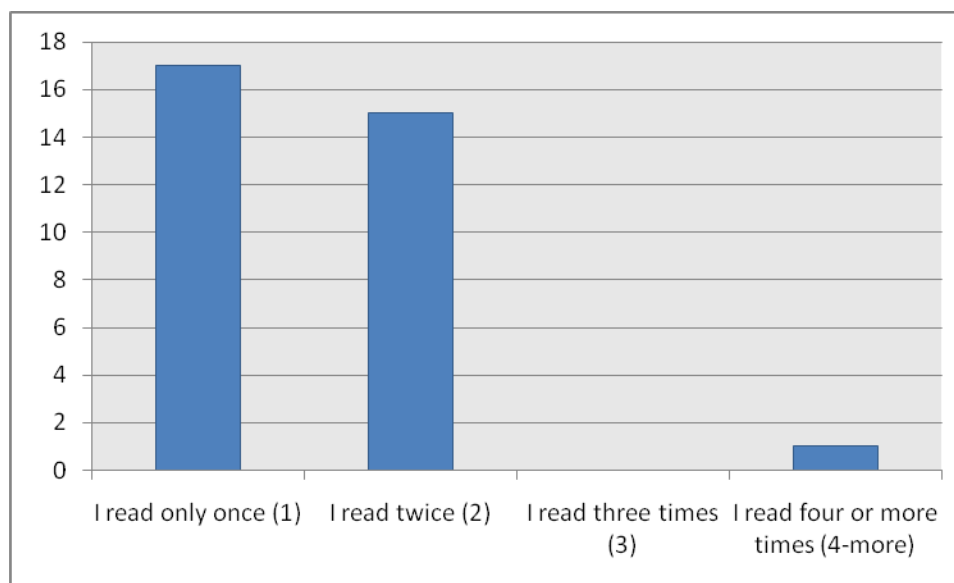


Figure 4.7 The number of times students read their homework assignments (N=35).

Additionally, after completing their assigned reading, students are typically asked to do other tasks. While, 5 students (15%) responded that they don't have to do any additional assignments in connection to their reading, the majority of participants identified a variety of different tasks, as illustrated in Table 4.5. The table shows that the majority of students have to answer questions after the reading 75% of the time and take a quiz based on their reading 65% of the time. Students also have to write a short response for their reading 47% of the time and prepare discussion questions 44% of the time. Three students (9%) who chose "other" explained that after the reading they have to "write a 2–3 page reflective essay."

Table 4.5

Assignments Students are Asked to Do with Their Everyday Reading

#	Answer	Response	%
1	I answer questions for my reading	25	74%
2	I take a quiz based on my reading	22	65%
3	I write a short response	16	47%
4	I prepare discussion questions	15	44%
5	I don't do any assignments, I just read	5	15%
6	Other, please explain:	3	9%

Thus, international students not only have to deal with the challenges of university education and understand and process material on the same level as their native counterparts, but they also face additional challenges related to their language development. Some of these challenges originate from learning the language while also trying to learn in the language, as in the case of dealing with academic texts.

The comprehension of any text is closely related to knowing the vocabulary and applying strategies for reading that specific type of text. Correspondingly, comprehension will improve with increasing exposure to text in a specific subject area. Additionally, students' comprehension will benefit from having a facilitators' help in introducing and practicing strategies. Learning and mastering reading comprehension and time management strategies are also helpful in reducing the time of reading, thus making the reading process more effective. Because of the importance of such skills and methods, the next two research questions specifically ask participants to delineate strategies they learned at the ELC that help them in their current university studies.

Questions 5 & 6: Helpful and Unhelpful ELC Reading Activities for University Preparation

First, students were asked to identify strategies they used in their everyday reading. The results show that the participants use a variety of strategies to get through their everyday reading (Table 4.6). Students' responses indicate no preference for one or two selected strategies. Nevertheless, the top four strategies that students use over half of the time include scanning to find important information, looking for main ideas in each section, guessing unknown words from a context, and identifying topics and topic sentences.

Table 4.6

Strategies Participants Use to Get Through Everyday Reading Assignments (N=34)

#	Answer	Response	%
1	I identify topics and topic sentences	20	59%
2	I guess unknown words from a context	19	56%
3	I scan to find important information	18	53%
4	I look for main ideas in each section	17	50%
5	Before I read I preview the material and predict what is going to be in the reading	15	44%
6	I recognize the organization of ideas (comparison and contrast, cause and effect, illustration, etc.)	13	38%
7	I identify tone and purpose of the author (to inform, to persuade, to entertain)	11	32%
8	I summarize what I read either in writing or verbally	10	29%
9	I don't intentionally use any strategies, I just read	9	26%
10	I infer what is not directly stated in the reading	8	24%
11	I distinguish between fact and opinion	8	24%
12	I make an outline of my reading	6	18%
13	Other, please explain:	0	0%

After identifying strategies that they used in their university studies, participants were then asked to detect which of those strategies they learned at the ELC. Table 4.7 presents the various reading strategies that the participants learned at the ELC. The strategies that were presented for students' selection in Table 4.6 and Table 4.7 came from the cumulative list of strategies taught at each level at the ELC (Appendix D). The number and order of strategies in both tables are the same with some wording modification to facilitate the survey process.

Table 4.7

Strategies Participants Learned at the ELC (N=34)

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Scan to find important information	28	82%
2	Look for main ideas in each section	27	79%
3	Guess unknown words from a context	26	76%
4	Summarize what I read either in writing or verbally	22	65%
5	Preview the material and predict what's going to be in the reading	19	56%
6	Identify topics and topic sentences	18	53%
7	Recognize the organization of ideas (comparison and contrast, cause and effect, illustration, etc.)	16	47%
8	Infer what is not directly stated in the reading	15	44%
9	Make an outline of my reading	13	38%
10	Identify tone and purpose of the author (to inform, to persuade, to entertain)	11	32%
11	Distinguish between fact and opinion	10	29%
12	Other, please explain:	2	6%

When comparing percentages of analogous strategies from Table 4.6 and Table 4.7, it appears that students perceived that they spent more time learning and practicing reading strategies at the ELC than proved beneficial in their university studies. Students indicated twice as much practice as current use for inferring what is not directly stated in

the reading, making an outline for the reading, and summarizing what they read in writing or verbally. For example, 22 students out of 34 (65%) mentioned that they learned and practiced how to summarize what they read, but only 10 students (29%) indicated using this strategy in their university studies. Similar situation appears with another eight out of eleven strategies. Only one strategy, identifying topics and topic sentences, was identified by 18 students (53%) as taught to them at the ELC and by 20 participants (59%) as used to get through their everyday reading assignments. One strategy, identifying the tone and purpose of the author, received an equal number of “hits” in both tables. The student that selected “other” as an option explained that “using a dictionary” is a helpful strategy taught at the ELC.

Thus, even though more participants indicated spending time on learning various strategies at the ELC than those who use them afterwards in their university studies, it appears to be a positive finding. If students are taught a greater variety of strategies, then, whenever they need, they have a much wider and richer their selection to use later (Anderson, 2005). Participants specifically emphasized the importance of learning reading comprehension strategies and spoke highly of the teachers that taught them these strategies. Some interview participants mentioned that because of the strategy instruction in their reading classes, they became better and more efficient readers. Strategy instruction helped them to pass the reading portion of the TOEFL and continued to help them in their university courses. Some students expressed a desire that they wish they had been taught more strategies or spent more time practicing them. One interviewee that completed ELC Levels 2 through 5 made the following comment:

With some of my teachers, we just spent 60 minutes talking about a book, about 20 pages that we have read, most of the time... Until Level 4 we spent a lot of time talking about books but not enough time on strategies. In [my] whole [study], we spent about 15–20% of time on strategies and the rest on books. And the 20% was because of the Level 5. Except for one teacher in L3, she helped us a lot with strategies, most of the time, 30 minutes on books and 30 minutes on strategies.

Among all the strategies that were identified by the participants as “very useful” to them in their university studies, guessing unknown words from the context was the first one to be mentioned. Interviewees recollected that when they first came to the ELC they were spending a lot of time reading because they were checking every word they didn’t know. Many felt that learning how to guess unknown words from the context substantially improved their reading time and comprehension. Several participants noted the following:

- “Reading was so frustrating to me before because if I didn’t know the word, I would look at the dictionary. But the teacher said looking at the dictionary should be the last thing you should do.”
- “During my first semester, I would spend 4 hours to read 20 pages. I was going to look up every word that I didn’t know. I learned that it was not important to understand every single word.”

Scanning to find important information and skimming for main points and ideas were the other two top-mentioned strategies that students found very helpful in their college studies. While acknowledging their usefulness, students at the same time expressed their initial frustration at not understanding how these strategies helped them to

be better readers. Some students felt that they were wasting their time when, in their reading classes, they were asked to read quickly while being timed by a clock and then respond to questions. As one interview participant observed:

I was kind of stressed about speed reading with her [teacher] because she was forcing us to read fast and fast. And I am such a slow reader even in my native language. I read so slow because I like to think. Every time we went to the computer lab, it was such a stress for me because I knew what would be there—speed reading, and I hated it. But eventually, I understood it was helpful. When you do speed reading, you don't realize that, but you kind of use skimming, because you kind of look through and don't focus on every single word.

Participants' comments suggested that they had to learn "to trust" new skills that helped them read faster. Some students liked being taught how to read fast from the beginning; others struggled with the concept. Students who preferred to read more carefully and slowly referred to themselves as slow readers in their own language. They liked to read carefully because they were afraid of missing important information or they liked to take time to "think" about their reading. Such preference for slow reading may be explained by student's personality, educational background, or culture. A couple of interviewed students had already studied at institutions of higher education in their own countries before coming to the ELC. This may suggest that they had already established their own strategies for dealing with academic texts or had been taught how to do so. As one student commented:

In Brazil you are supposed to read word for word. So when I came to America, they taught me that I can just get the main idea. It was hard for me to trust that. But because

of how my grade was very good on the TOEFL, on the reading section, I had to trust that you don't have to read everything.

In addition to reading faster, the participants believed they became "smarter" readers as the result of the strategy instruction in their ELC reading classes. They learned how to evaluate their reading assignments and decide when to read more carefully and when to use scanning and skimming strategies:

When I really needed to know details, like in the American Heritage class, I had to sit down and read [the book] two or three times. In another class, I knew where to go to extract something that I needed and something that I didn't need I would skip, examples, for example. Examples, I don't need them...I think I do read faster, and I became smarter. Before I would read everything, because [I thought] I needed to know this, but now if a teacher says it's not that important, I would not read the whole thing.

According to the participants, when they used scanning and skimming strategies, they read only important information, finding it at the beginning and the end of the paragraphs or in the highlighted areas of the text. They also found key words in the objectives for lessons or take-home quizzes and then looked for them in the text. As one interview participant mentioned,

I learned how to shorten my time, not to spend five hours as I used to. I learned how to underline the main topic, and to skim. If I need details, I will read, but if I don't, I just skim... When she [teacher] gave us home take test four times and the chapters where 50 pages and there were 20 questions, I just looked for a key word in the questions and scanned to look for that word in the text.

Other helpful ELC reading activities or assignments that participants mentioned included the following:

- 1) The amount of reading required at the ELC.
 - “A lot of reading, that's all. If you read a lot, you learn to read. There is no secret. You get familiar with the language and structure. A bad reader in the native language is a bad reader in English. The [teachers'] challenge is to teach people how to read, not English, on that matter.”
 - “As the ELC student you had to read a lot. When I was at the ELC, since I read a lot of books, it made me like to read books. Now it helps me because in college you have to read fast. The ELC encouraged me to read fast because of speed reading and the ELC homework. I had 30 pages each day and I wanted to do other things, so I had to read fast.”
- 2) Content reading assignments through reading magazines, newspapers, and high school–level books.
 - “In one level we had to go to the SASC and pick one book, and they were actually college books about famous people and history. It was the last assignment for the semester. It was very helpful. We were supposed to read one chapter and turn a page from what we understood. It was very good. It was different, because we were kind of tired from the little [narrative] books.”
 - “When I took the Biology class [at the ELC], I learned to read a more complicated vocabulary and a whole hard chapter.”
- 3) Speed reading exercises.

- “In L4 she [teacher] used to time us and we used to do it every day. I think it was helpful, I think it should be done in other levels. I practiced it the whole semester and I by the end I could tell the difference.”

4) Book discussions.

Interestingly, the speed reading exercises and lengthy book discussions were also two categories that students classified as “have not been helpful” to them as university students. For example, one student made the following comment about speed reading exercises: “Speed reading in the computer lab was very frustrating and honestly I don’t read any faster after that.” Another student wrote that “spending 65 min. in class to discuss about 3 chapters of a story that everyone knows” was unhelpful to him. Both questionnaire and interview participants gave different answers about the helpfulness of reading novels for their university studies. Some students believed that novel reading helped them progress from easier readings to much harder readings and overall got them into a habit of reading in English. One student stated: “I didn’t even know that I was progressing because Level 2 was easy books, but slowly, when I was reading those little books and then I found myself in Level 5 reading a Biology book.”

Others thought that novels were for younger people or that they were a different kind of reading than academic reading. One questionnaire participant that only went to Level 3 before being accepted at a university, and thus did not have the advantage of Level 5 content-based instruction, said: “At the ELC we used kind of easy and enjoying books, but during university classes we read hard and stressful ones.” Among the six interview participants, four students did not get to go to Level 5 content classes and two

of them did. Nonetheless, they all made similar comments on the mismatch between the nature of reading at the ELC and their current university reading assignments.

- “Topics are different at the ELC and a college. At the ELC we mostly read about stories, but at the LDSBC we read more academic readings.”
- “The books that we read [at the ELC] were useful, but maybe if they were more academic books, like biology, we could learn more useful vocabulary. They were useful, books that you [teachers] assigned, but not too academic.”

These and other comments by the participants led to further discussion regarding suggestions for the improvement of ELC classes toward better preparing students for university and college work. Again, questions were mainly focused on the improvement of the reading portion of the ELC curriculum, but any other comments were also gladly accepted.

Question 7: Students’ Suggestions for the ELC Reading Curriculum

In order to get a better idea of how the respondents thought the program could be improved, the last research question asked for their specific recommendations to improve the ELC reading curriculum in preparing students for college reading tasks. This question also helps bring focus to responses to questions 5 and 6. Upon further analysis of participants’ answers to this question, three particular themes emerged. Participants made suggestions in the following areas: 1) read more difficult university-level texts earlier on, beginning with Level 3; 2) spend more time on developing and practicing reading comprehension skills and less on book discussions; and 3) develop more critical thinking skills in preparation for the TOEFL and university studies.

Almost half of the questionnaire participants' answers (46%) referred to reading more academic texts, including reading larger amounts and reading a wider variety of topics, if possible in areas related to students' career goals and majors. Interview participants gave similar, but longer, explanations for their choice:

- “Read articles or books according to student's major.”
- “Most of the reading books are fiction. I would suggest more advanced and formal reading.”
- “Read other books that are not for children because the vocabulary is not very hard in those.”
- “Read more interesting books would be helpful, something more real, not very fictional, maybe more helpful books, something that would help us in college, something about History, Biology, things that we are going see in college someday or general culture. We are here in America, things that every American knows about their country, history or culture. Yea, sometimes it's hard to read college books. It's a different vocabulary, more difficult to understand. [Teachers should] use more vocabulary that we are going to use in college.”
- “Levels 1 and 2, they should be how they are right now and L3, 4 and 5 should be something more advance. In L3 they had these magazines about history and science, they were really good. They were amazing because the vocabulary wasn't like little kid, but still wasn't university vocabulary. And then in L4 [ELC should use] something like that, but harder. Make other levels like Level 5. Introduce high school books at Level 3, because your mind is ready for that.

Because it doesn't mean that if I don't speak the language, I didn't have any experience in my country with a university."

Secondly, many of the questionnaire and interview participants suggested more time be spent practicing comprehension and critical reading skills and less time discussing books in class.

- "More practice on skimming and scanning and other reading skills. Sometimes reading classes incline more to the discussion, which is good, but talking can last forever and students do that enough in the speaking class. Students need more time for practicing reading skills."
- "I think I could read the stories book at home, if I had less homework, and then [I could] spend time in class learning more the Dr. Anderson's book or any another book that teaches reading strategies."
- "Level 4 and 5 should be focusing more on critical reading skills. That's what really matters on the TOFEL and in a college."

Other suggestions received from both questionnaire and interview participants included learning to read together as a class through more group reading exercises. One student mentioned that such activities would have been motivating for him because, in his own words, "When I see other people who can read well, I think I have to improve my reading skill more." Some participants suggested taking fewer quizzes and instead spending more time practicing reading skills or doing other helpful activities. Some also expressed a wish for ELC teachers and administration to listen more to what students have to say about their learning experiences at the ELC. The last suggestion is imperative

to understanding and adequately addressing students' needs (Ostler, 1980; Brooks, 1988; Smoke, 1988; Cheng, 1995), and it has become the foundation of this study.

Conclusion

The summary of the results presented in this chapter shows that students are eager to share their learning experiences and give suggestions. The former ELC students that responded to the questionnaire and interview, who are now studying or have studied at ten different universities and colleges in America, have provided invaluable insights for this study. They shared their experiences about what it means for an ESL student to study at such institutions, and by looking back at their experience at the ELC, they were able to evaluate its usefulness and application to their current studies. On the whole, these students expressed fond memories of their ELC studies and spoke highly of the teachers that helped them progress in their language development and achieve their life goals. While more than half of the students (63%) indicated that they felt "prepared" and "very prepared" for their college work, many participants were still able to give suggestions on how the ELC could have better prepared them for university reading tasks. These and other findings are the foundation for a discussion of the main research question that takes place in the next chapter, where possible implications and recommendations for the ELC classes are offered.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find out former ELC students' perception of their preparedness for college reading tasks after finishing their ELC classes. Answers to this main research question were unveiled through secondary research questions that were posed in a questionnaire and during interviews:

1. How satisfied are the students with their ELC classes?
2. What are the students' perceptions of their overall preparedness for an American university after finishing classes at the ELC?
3. How do they rank the importance of reading in comparison to other language skills (writing, listening, and speaking) at an English-speaking university?
4. What are students' reading requirements and challenges at a university?
5. What have students learned at the ELC that now helps them to fulfill these university requirements and overcome the challenges?
6. What ELC reading activities and assignments have not proven to be helpful to them in their university studies?
7. What suggestions do students have for the ELC reading and content classes to better prepare them for university reading tasks?

These secondary research questions were used to discover former ELC students' feelings and concerns about the preparation they received in their ELC reading classes for their subsequent university studies. The participants rated reading as of utmost importance in successful performance in college among all skill areas (writing, reading, listening, and speaking). Learning how to read in a university setting was very important

to participants because of the amount of reading they are required to do for each class and the difficulties inherently associated with reading in a second language. When asked about their challenges while fulfilling their reading assignments, most students were concerned about unknown technical or academic vocabulary that they had to understand during their reading. Many participants spent a considerable amount of time reading their homework assignments and trying to “decode” an unknown text. In order for ESL students to overcome these challenges that await them at American colleges and universities, students must receive adequate reading instruction in their ESL classes. Thus, participants were specifically asked to identify key factors that they saw as necessary in their preparation.

In order to determine key factors that influence students’ preparedness for college reading, participants were asked to share which ELC reading activities they found helpful and unhelpful for their college preparation. This question was intended to extract important areas in the ELC reading instruction that helped participants cope with and fulfill their university reading assignments. Furthermore, it helped with identifying ELC reading activities and assignments that students deemed as unhelpful to them in their college preparation, thus providing data that could be used for further improvement of the ELC reading program.

Participants’ responses to research questions were further analyzed and summarized in order to answer the main research question: From the perception of former ELC students, how well does the ELC reading curriculum prepare ELC students for university-level reading tasks? After the key responses were summarized and analyzed, they were then examined in view of possible suggestions for the improvement

of the ELC reading program. Therefore, the subsequent task of this chapter is to offer recommendations for the improvement of the ELC reading program to better serve students' needs. Finally, this chapter will suggest directions for future research, since the current study, of necessity, was not able to encompass all aspects of this important topic.

Key Factors of Preparedness for College

The analysis of the participants' answers revealed that 26% of students indicated being "very prepared," 37% felt "prepared," 11% said they were "somewhat prepared," 3% felt "somewhat unprepared," and 3% responded that they were "very unprepared" for university studies after finishing the ELC. Participants who gave a positive answer, including those who answered "somewhat prepared," constituted 74% of the population. This number resembles statistics already discussed in the previous chapter where the majority of students (on average 77%) expressed their satisfaction with the ELC program. These students gave their explanations for what prepared them for reading in their college and university classes. Two factors stand out most in the students' responses. Participants commented on the helpfulness of a) helpful reading strategies students learned in their classes and b) the amount and nature of their reading homework. While there were a few counterarguments, which are included in the next section, predominantly these were the main factors that students said contributed to their feeling of preparedness for university.

Strategy training.

Participants indicated using a variety of reading strategies to complete their university reading assignments. Scanning to find important information, looking for main ideas in each selection, guessing unknown words from a context, and identifying topics and topic sentences were identified by half of the participants as the strategies they used

the most while fulfilling their university reading assignments. These were also strategies that were identified by students as being taught at the ELC.

A large number of participants thought that their ELC classes were helpful in preparing them for university studies and spoke highly of their ELC teachers who taught them helpful writing, research, reading, and other strategies. Learning how to write academic research papers and “reading and writing tactics and techniques” was one of the repeatedly mentioned categories. Participants viewed learning and practicing these strategies as “crucial” to their success at a university.

Students perceived the time they spent learning various reading strategies in their ELC classes to be useful and saw the results of strategy instruction in their overall reading improvement. As a result of the strategy instruction in their ELC classes, participants learned how to analyze and “make sense” of what they read, how to understand the meaning of an unknown word from the context, and how to look for main ideas and important details in the body of the text.

In addition, participants commented on the helpfulness of the strategy instruction in passing the TOEFL. Speed reading exercises, which were employed by the ELC teachers, helped students read faster and learn how to find the main idea and important information quickly to answer comprehension questions. Not all students understood and enjoyed speed reading exercises at first, but many were able to recognize their effectiveness later on, after passing the TOEFL or in their university studies.

Notwithstanding such a positive tendency, many participants expressed their desire to spend even more time practicing comprehension and critical reading skills. Perhaps, more importantly, participants wanted to understand the purpose of utilizing

each individual strategy and its possible future application. Not all participants at first enjoyed or understood the purpose of learning strategies, and only much later—some not until their college studies—were able to see their effectiveness and use.

Content reading exercises.

Questionnaire and interview participants also mentioned the amount and nature of their ELC reading homework as a positive contributing factor to their college preparation. Because ELC homework places such a strain on students' time, they have to learn how to do it effectively. As one student expressed, studying at the ELC helped him "figure out what are the American college and university requirements." While a few students had difficulty adapting to such a strenuous schedule, making negative comments about the stressful nature of their schedule, many were able to recognize that large amounts of reading homework were helpful in preparing them for the amount of reading they had to do at a university.

On the other hand, while some participants recognized that the large amount of reading by itself was helpful in improving their reading skills, many students acknowledged that reading different types of text enhanced different reading skills. Therefore, students identified content reading assignments at the ELC as the most helpful to them in preparing for college reading. Participants that went to Levels 1–4 commented on the helpfulness of expository reading found in children's magazines, newspapers, and other middle school–level books. Former Level 5 students found satisfaction in learning how to read high school– or even college-level books through their content classes.

Content classes at the ELC, which were introduced to the ELC in the Winter of 2007, have been quite popular among students. Answers of both questionnaire and

interview participants suggest that this popularity is due to their effectiveness. According to students, the relative difficulty of the Level 5 classes and their specialization played a significant role in their preparation for college studies. Two of the interview participants that progressed from Level 2 to Level 5 at the ELC commented specifically on the helpfulness of the Level 5 classes in their college preparation. When comparing their overall preparation for college after Level 4 and Level 5, they agreed that without Level 5 classes they would have felt less prepared for university studies. When analyzing their ELC experience in each level, they mentioned that Levels 1–4 were general English classes, whereas Level 5 was more college oriented. In other words, after graduating from this level, students felt more confident in their abilities and in the level of their preparation for a university. One student expressed this in the following comment:

“When I took Biology class [at the ELC], I learned to read more complicated vocabulary and (overall) a whole hard chapter.”

Despite these positive comments, there were, on the other hand, students who saw non-expository reading assignments, such as reading of children’s novels and lengthy discussion about them, as unhelpful in college preparation. Participants considered these assignments as not very advanced, somewhat “easy reading” and nonacademic, with topics that differ from topics typically found in college textbooks. One questionnaire participant that only went to Level 3 before being accepted at a university, and thus did not have the advantage of Level 5 content-based instruction, said: “At the ELC we used kind of easy and enjoying books, but during university classes we read hard and stressful ones.” In addition, many participants felt that they were missing out on learning “more useful and hard vocabulary,” which they are now finding in their college textbooks.

Summary of the key factors.

On the whole, the results of the analysis of the key factors that contributed to students' preparedness for college revealed that about 60% of the participants recognized and mentioned the ELC activities and practices that helped them in their overall preparation for college. As a result of their language training at the ELC, some participants felt more comfortable "with the language and with [themselves] speaking it," were able to pass the TOEFL, and thought that "without the ELC experience studying at college here, in America, would be more challenging." At the same time, 40% of the participants made comments that suggested that they did not feel quite ready for their university studies after finishing their classes at the ELC. They were concerned about their reading abilities and not having a "broad enough vocabulary," thus being unable to understand and fulfill their academic reading assignments in their university classes.

In addition to participants' remarks about the helpfulness of the ELC reading activities in college preparation, an analysis of the questionnaire and the interview participants' answers revealed that students made suggestions in the three following areas: (1) read more difficult university-level texts earlier on, beginning with the intermediate level; (2) spend more time on developing and practicing reading comprehension strategies and less on book discussions; and (3) develop more critical thinking skills in preparation for the TOEFL and university studies.

In view of the participants' comments on the helpfulness of the ELC reading classes and their suggestions for improvement, this chapter next discusses this study's implications and gives possible recommendations for improvement of the ELC reading

program and those of other IEPs in order to better prepare students for university reading tasks.

Implications

Since the commencement of this study in the winter semester of 2008, the ELC curriculum has undertaken several important changes. Students who were previously placed into five proficiency levels (Level 1, high beginning; Level 2, low intermediate; Level 3, intermediate; Level 4, high intermediate; and Level 5, low advanced) are now placed into eight proficiency levels divided between two different programs, the Foundations English program and the Academic English program. The Foundations program aims at helping students achieve basic proficiency in English, at the level needed for day-to-day communication, whereas the Academic program is centered on helping students prepare to enter institutions of higher education in the United States. Students who are admitted to the Academic program should have at least high-intermediate proficiency in English and be oriented towards entering American universities and colleges.

Because these changes happened relatively recently, this study examined students' perspectives of the former ELC curriculum. Nonetheless, participants' views could prove to be especially valuable to ELC curriculum developers as they strive to make the current program more reflective of and responsive to students' needs. For example, many participants expressed a desire to read more difficult, university-level texts earlier, beginning with the intermediate level. The new ELC curriculum incorporates this request by offering academic preparation to students at the intermediate level of proficiency. These students begin their preparation for a university in the first

level of the Academic program, Level A, further progressing to Levels B and C if necessary. In addition, two more levels, Academic Preparation and University Preparation, are available for students who need help transitioning from the Foundation program to the Academic program and from the Academic program to a university. Each offers more exposure to university reading material and expectations.

In view of the aforementioned changes to the ELC program, now even those students who leave the Academic program at the intermediate (Level A) or high intermediate level (Level B) and enter universities will have the benefit of academic instruction that was not available previously. Nevertheless, the current reading program is still new and under development, and it calls for evaluation of its objectives and of the materials used to meet those objectives. Do the objectives allow for responsiveness to students' needs? Do they meet the established criteria for students' academic preparation? These and other questions should be considered through ongoing evaluation of the present curriculum.

Along with this ongoing evaluation, based on the findings of this study, a focus on the following three recommendations would immediately bring the objectives of the current curriculum into alignment with the perceived and stated needs of the students:

- 1) New reading curriculum should be able to offer students a more intense reading program where they will spend more time on practicing critical reading skills and reading comprehension strategies in the context of difficult technical texts.

- 2) Likewise, the program should aim at helping students ultimately prepare for the challenges of a university education and help them become accustomed to learning in a university environment.

3) Finally, classes in the Academic program should assist students in preparation for the TOEFL or other required entrance tests by helping students develop critical reading skills as well as necessary test taking skills.

Students who enter Academic program should be able to see difficult university-level texts early on in their Academic program. Of course, the difficulty and the length of these texts might have to be adjusted to different proficiency levels within Academic program. Nonetheless, students are eager and ready to get acquainted with reading difficult academic texts in a sheltered ESL environment. The program administrators and curriculum developers should not be afraid of immersing students in these types of texts because once students pass the TOEFL and are accepted at a university, they have no choice but to cope with large amounts of hard academic reading on their own. On the other hand, when students get acquainted with this type of text in the ESL environment and with the scaffolded support from a teacher, they are more likely to process most of the offered academic material. When students are taught strategies that help them learn how to cope with the difficulty and technicality of their texts, they will no longer fear the task. Students will also gain a greater confidence in their reading ability thus helping them to succeed in their future university studies.

Extensive reading, too, should play a two-fold role in the academic preparation of students. No doubt, students have to develop reading fluency by reading large amounts of technical texts in preparation for a university. Nonetheless, the goal should not be to progress from one chapter to the next by achieving fluency at the cost of accuracy. Rather, the focus of the extensive reading should be on the reader and his or her challenges associated with the particular reading. This, in turn, will provide ample

opportunities for students to study out and to reprocess on many occasions and through different activities the same piece of text up to the point when students are no longer feeling afraid of dealing with the text. As students gain more confidence in coping with academic texts, over time they will achieve greater fluency in reading them.

In addition, to get accustomed to learning in the university environment, ELC students should be able to mix with university students from regular mainstream courses on many occasions. This can be done by either taking ELC students to general education classes or by organizing projects with mainstream students in which each group can benefit from the participation. Moreover, ELC students should be acquainted with all learning and testing facilities on campus and should be encouraged to use them regularly, thus helping students gain necessary experience in preparing for a university and benefit from the available and often free recourses.

Finally, feedback from the study participants suggests that students express a great need for learning how to pass American university entrance tests. For many ESL students, passing the TOEFL or other entrance tests is the only barrier on their way to college. The results of the study suggested this idea. A few participants expressed their frustration with a lack of training in developing test-taking skills as well as critical reading, listening, writing and speaking skills that are being assessed on these tests. If the Academic program aims at helping students prepare and succeed at an American university, it also should be able to assist students in getting ready for entrance tests, which are prerequisite to entering a university.

Making these areas of focus benchmarks for ongoing evaluations of the current curriculum should bring substantial improvements for students preparing for university

enrollment upon completion of the ELC program. Next, this chapter will discuss the limitations of the current study and possible directions for future research.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study was limited to a thorough evaluation of the reading curriculum of the ELC. Writing, listening, speaking, and grammar were necessarily left out. These last four important areas also deserve detailed evaluation in order to find out students' satisfaction with the quality of the instruction in these areas. Therefore, it is hoped that this study is one of many future curriculum evaluations. From the beginning, this study emphasized the importance of conducting regular curriculum evaluations. An institution with strong research practices, such as the ELC, should adopt a practice of carrying out regular curriculum evaluations by striving to find answers to the following question: "How well does the ELC curriculum meet students' enrollment goals?" As has been explained before, not meeting students' enrollment goals is detrimental to the ELC's success and popularity. Therefore, ELC students, especially former students that are now successfully pursuing their goals as a result of their ESL training, should be asked to voice their opinion on the effectiveness of the ELC classes and to make possible suggestions for their improvement.

In the past, ESL programs that conducted similar evaluations of their curriculum were able to successfully implement new teaching policies tailored to students' needs (Ostler, 1980; Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004). The desired outcome of this study is a positive change in the current ELC reading curriculum to better meet students' needs. Of course, the current study is not flawless and has its weaknesses. One of them is the possible subjectivity of the interpretation of study results.

Another weakness of the study is the number of participants that responded to the online questionnaire. Out of a total of 1,730 letters sent via email to former ELC students, 70 of them agreed to participate in this study, comprising a 4% response rate. The reasons for such a low response have been already discussed in Chapter Three. A major factor is invalid email addresses in the ELC database. This inflated the number of requests while not rendering corresponding chances for a response. A possible solution to this dilemma could be creating a separate database of the ELC alumni's email addresses. Students would update their email address upon graduation and that could be used for communication even after the students have graduated. Another possibility is adding an application to the ELC's website in which former, as well as current, ELC students could meet in a chat room or discussion board. There ELC administrators, teachers, and students could post questions and comments and share their thoughts and concerns to help maximize students' experience at the ELC. An effective way to maintain contact with former students for the purpose of feedback and program evaluation after students have begun their university studies would provide an essential benefit that would far outweigh the costs. Therefore, implementation of these solutions is imperative, because the success of a program such as the ELC depends on adapting its offerings to the complex and changing needs of the students.

Conclusion

This study began by asking whether ELC students felt satisfied with their learning experiences at the ELC. The ELC accepts about six hundred students each year. The majority of them come to the ELC with specific goals and future plans in mind. Is the

ELC aware of these goals? What do we, as administrators and teachers, do to meet their goals? This evaluation from the former ELC students' point of view of the reading curriculum was undertaken to try to answer these and other important questions. The results of the study proved that this undertaking was a valuable and informative venture. The study collected and analyzed many interesting and revealing comments from participants. Their comments showed that even though the majority of students were satisfied overall with their learning experiences at the ELC, some significant changes still have to be made to be able to fully meet students' educational needs. Since the majority of the ELC students are aiming to enter colleges and universities in America, the current Academic program has to be constantly evaluated to ensure that positive changes are made to help ESL students better prepare for the realities of university education. Especially important is the task of helping ESL students prepare for the challenges of university-level reading, since reading was identified by many ESL students as being of utmost importance in successful performance at a university. Any changes to the ELC and any other IEP curriculum should incorporate students' suggestions so that the students feel that their voices are being heard. One important measure of success for this study greatly depends on the proper and timely implementation of the requests and heartfelt desires expressed by its participants.

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APPENDIX A:

Reading Strategies Reported in Relevant Studies

Author	Reading strategies
Chapelle et al. (1997)	<p><i>Procedural Competence</i></p> <p>Skimming Scanning Guessing words from context Predicting Adjusting reading speed Re-reading (recognizing misreading) Recognizing literal vs. nonliteral meaning Selective reading (skipping parts) Judging relative importance of information Using extralinguistic cues (illustrations, charts, etc.) Rephrasing, paraphrasing during reading process</p> <p><i>Linguistic Competence</i></p> <p>Recognize orthographical features of written language Discriminate among forms and structures Recognize word order pattern, syntactic patterns and devices, lexical/semantic relations, variations in meaning</p> <p><i>Discourse Competence</i></p> <p>Infer links between events (situations, ideas, causes, effects) Recognize genre markings (features of formal discourse) Recognize coherence relationships Recognize cohesive devices Follow a topic of the discourse Analyze tone from the various parts Recognize the parts leading to the whole Recognize conclusions from parts Draw conclusions</p> <p><i>Sociolinguistic Competence</i></p>

	<p>Understand/recognize variations in language with respect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of readers in intended audience • Familiar or distant relationship between writer and audience • Informal or formal requirements • Subordinate or superordinate relationships • General or topical content • Lay person or specialist as intended audience
Allen (2003)	<p>Obtaining clues from the text for better comprehension</p> <p>Making connections to the available knowledge</p> <p>Asking questions</p> <p>Visualizing</p> <p>Inferring</p> <p>Reviewing</p> <p>Sorting and shifting information</p> <p>Synthesizing into new ideas</p>
Mokhtari and Reichard (2002)	<p>Having a purpose in mind while reading</p> <p>Taking notes</p> <p>Making connections to the available knowledge</p> <p>Taking an overview of a text</p> <p>Reading aloud</p> <p>Reading slowly and carefully</p> <p>Reviewing for text length and organization</p> <p>Going back</p> <p>Adjusting speed according to the reading</p> <p>Deciding what to read closely and what to ignore</p> <p>Underlining and circling information</p> <p>Using dictionary</p> <p>Using tables, figures, and pictures</p> <p>Stopping to think about reading</p> <p>Using context clues and typographical features</p> <p>Paraphrasing</p> <p>Visualizing</p> <p>Finding relationships between ideas</p>

	Analyzing and evaluating information Guessing the meaning of unknown words Re-reading Asking questions Checking guesses
Grabe and Stoller (2002)	Specifying a purpose for reading Planning what to do/what steps to take Previewing the text Predicting the contents of the text Checking predictions Posing questions about the text Finding answers to posed questions Connecting text to background knowledge Summarizing information Making inferences Connecting one part of the text to another Paying attention to the text structure Rereading Guessing the meaning of a new word from context Using discourse markers to see relationships Checking comprehension Identifying difficulties Taking steps to repair faulty comprehension Critiquing the author Critiquing the text Judging how well objectives were met Reflecting on what has been learned from the text

APPENDIX B:

Questionnaire

1/9/2010

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Default Question Block

Consent to be a Research Subject

This research study is being conducted by Olha Kondiyenko, a graduate MA TESOL student at Brigham Young University, under the direction of Norman Evans, a professor in the Linguistic and English Language department at BYU, to determine how well the English Language Center (ELC) prepares its students for university-level reading tasks. You were selected to participate because you were a student at the ELC and because you have experience as a university/college student in America.

If you choose to participate, you will complete an on-line questionnaire which consists of 28 questions and should take you approximately 10-15 minutes. These questions mainly will ask you about your experience as a university/college student in relation to your preparation at the ELC. At the end of the survey you will be given the option to provide your contact information for a follow-up interview with the researcher (Olha Kondiyenko). The interview will be about 30 minutes and has more in-depth questions similar to those of the questionnaire. This interview is completely optional.

There are no known anticipated risks/benefits to your participation in this study. However, it is hoped that through your participation current students and well as teachers at the ELC will benefit from an improved reading curriculum that will prepare them better for the realities of university education. All information provided will remain confidential and will only be reported as group data with no identifying information. You will receive no compensation for involvement in this study.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at anytime or refuse to participate. By choosing the ">>>" button, you consent to participate in this study and will be forwarded to the questionnaire.

If you have questions about this study, you may contact Olha Kondiyenko at 636-9499, olkon_ua1@hotmail.com or her mentor Norman Evans at 422-8472, norman_evans@byu.edu. If you have questions you do not feel comfortable asking the researcher, you may contact Dr. Christopher Dromey, IRB Chair, 422-6461, 133 TLRB, dromey@byu.edu.

Please tell us a little bit about yourself and your reasons for coming to the English Language Center (ELC), Provo
(9 questions)

1. When did you begin studying at the ELC?

Semester/Year:

2. What was your last semester at the ELC?

Semester/Year

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3. Which levels have you completed at the ELC and how many times have you repeated them?

	One time	Two times	Three times
Level 1	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Level 2	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Level 3	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Level 4	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Level 5	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. What is your home country? Please write in the space below:

5. As you were growing up, what language did you speak most often at home? Please write in the space below:

6. What was your highest level of formal education before coming to the ELC?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> University doctorate degree completed | <input type="radio"/> University undergraduate degree (Bachelors) started |
| <input type="radio"/> University doctorate degree started | <input type="radio"/> College or technical institute with diploma/certificate |
| <input type="radio"/> University graduate degree (Masters) completed | <input type="radio"/> Some college or technical institute |
| <input type="radio"/> University graduate degree (Masters) started | <input type="radio"/> High school with diploma |
| <input type="radio"/> University undergraduate degree (Bachelors) completed | |

7. When you first came to the ELC, what were your reasons for coming? How important was it to...

improve your employment situation (get or improve job)?	<input type="text"/>
improve your ability to use English in daily life?	<input type="text"/>
prepare for further study at a college or university?	<input type="text"/>
learn about life and customs in US?	<input type="text"/>
Other, please specify <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

8. When you enrolled in classes at the ELC, what was your *most important* reason or goal for

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enrolling?

- ☐ Employment-related
☐ To be able to use English in daily life
☐ To prepare for further study at a college or university
☐ To learn about life and customs in US
☐ Other

9. As a result of your ELC experience, have your reasons for learning English changed?

- ☐ No
☐ Yes, please, explain how:

Now we would like to ask you about your experience at the ELC
(5 questions)

10. How helpful were your classes at the ELC

in achieving your most important goal?	<input type="text"/>
in improving English reading skills?	<input type="text"/>
in improving English writing skills?	<input type="text"/>
in improving English listening skills?	<input type="text"/>
in improving English speaking skills?	<input type="text"/>
in improving English grammar?	<input type="text"/>

11. How satisfied were you with your ELC classes? Would you say you were...

Not Satisfied at All	Not Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Mainly Satisfied	Completely Satisfied
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. How would you rate the quality of instruction in your

Reading classes?	<input type="text"/>
Listening/Speaking classes?	<input type="text"/>
Writing classes?	<input type="text"/>
Grammar classes?	<input type="text"/>
Content classes (level 5)?	<input type="text"/>

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13. Since finishing your studies at the ELC, have you taken more ESL (English as a Second Language) courses at another location?

- ☐ I am currently taking ESL classes at another location
- ☐ I have taken ESL classes at another location, but not taking them any more
- ☐ I haven't taken more ESL classes since finishing the ELC
- ☐ I am still studying at the ELC, Provo

14. Are you currently taking college or university courses in America?

- ☐ I am working on an undergraduate degree at an American college or university.
- ☐ I am working on a graduate degree at an American college or university.
- ☐ I was enrolled in an American college or university, but I have already graduated.
- ☐ I have taken some classes at an American college or university, but I am not currently enrolled.
- ☐ I have never taken any college or university classes at an American college or university.

Tell us more how the ELC classes prepared you for your college or university courses in America
(14 questions)

15. Please indicate the college/university where you are studying or have studied, your program of study and when you started the program:

College/University:	<input type="text"/>
Program (major):	<input type="text"/>
Start date from (mm/yyyy):	<input type="text"/>

16. If you had to choose, which skill do you consider to be the most (1)/ the least important (4) for an international student to succeed in an English speaking university?

	1	2	3	4
reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
w riting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
listening	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
speaking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. As you completed your ELC studies, how prepared for your college or university courses did you feel?

Very unprepared Unprepared Somew hat unprepared Somew hat prepared Prepared Very prepared

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18. Please, explain your answer to the previous question (#17):

19. Now that you have taken some college or university courses, how prepared do you feel?

N/A	Very unprepared	Unprepared	Somewhat unprepared	Somewhat prepared	Prepared	Very prepared
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. As a university student, what are your greatest challenges in reading?

21. On average, during the semester how many pages a day do you read?

22. Typically, do you read again your homework reading assignment after you have read it once? If yes, how many times?

23. What assignments are you asked to do with your everyday reading? Check all that apply:

☐ I answer questions for my reading
☐ I write a short response
☐ I prepare discussion questions
☐ I take a quiz based on my reading
☐ I don't do any assignments, I just read
☐ Other, please explain:

24. What strategies do you use to get through everyday reading? Check all that apply:

☐ Before I read I preview the material and predict what is going to be in the reading
 ☐ I summarize what I read either in writing or verbally

1/9/2010

Qualtrics Survey Software

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I scan to find important information | <input type="checkbox"/> I recognize the organization of ideas (comparison and contrast, cause and effect, illustration, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I look for main ideas in each section | <input type="checkbox"/> I identify tone and purpose of the author (to inform, to persuade, to entertain) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I guess unknown words from a context | <input type="checkbox"/> I distinguish between fact and opinion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I identify topics and topic sentences | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't intentionally use any strategies, I just read |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I infer what is not directly stated in the reading | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please explain: <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I make an outline of my reading | |

25. Which of these reading strategies did you learn at the ELC? Check all that apply:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preview the material and predict what's going to be in the reading | <input type="checkbox"/> Make an outline of my reading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scan to find important information | <input type="checkbox"/> Summarize what I read either in writing or verbally |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Look for main ideas in each section | <input type="checkbox"/> Recognize the organization of ideas (comparison and contrast, cause and effect, illustration, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guess unknown words from a context | <input type="checkbox"/> Identify tone and purpose of the author (to inform, to persuade, to entertain) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Identify topics and topic sentences | <input type="checkbox"/> Distinguish between fact and opinion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Infer what is not directly stated in the reading | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please explain: <input type="text"/> |

26. What other ELC reading activities/assignments, in addition to learning strategies, did you do that have proven to be helpful in your university studies?

27. What ELC reading activities/assignments have not been helpful to you as a university student?

28. What changes would you make in the ELC reading/content classes to better prepare students for college or university reading tasks?

If you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview, please give your name and contact information:

First name:

APPENDIX C:

Consent to be a Research Subject (Interviews)

Introduction

This research study is being conducted by Olha Kondiyenko, a graduate MA TESOL student at Brigham Young University, to determine how well the English Language Center (ELC) prepares its students for university-level reading tasks. This research is being conducted under the direction of Norman Evans, a professor in the Linguistic and English Language department at BYU. You were selected to participate because you were a student at the ELC and because you have experience as a university/college student in America.

Procedures

You will be asked to answer 10 questions in 30 minute interview with the researcher (Olha Kondiyenko). The questions will ask you to clarify and further explain the answers to the questions you were asked earlier in the on-line questionnaire. The questions will ask you about your experience as a university/college student in relation to your preparation at the ELC. The researcher will take notes as she listens to your answers.

Risks/Discomforts

There are no anticipated risks for participation in this study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to subjects. However, it is hoped that through your participation current students as well as teachers at the ELC will benefit from an improved reading curriculum that will prepare them better for the realities of university education.

Confidentiality

All information provided will remain confidential and will only be reported as group data with no identifying information. All data, including questionnaires and tapes/notes from the interviews, will be kept locked in the PI's office and only those directly involved with the research will have access to them (PI and her chair, Dr. Evans). Most of the questionnaire data will be kept in the on-line Qualtrics survey software, protected by a password. After the research is completed, the questionnaires, notes and tapes will be destroyed.

Compensation

There will be no compensation for involvement in this study.

Participation

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at anytime or refuse to participate without affecting your grades or standing at Brigham Young University.

Questions about the Research

If you have questions about this study, you may contact Olha Kondiyenko at 636-9499, **olkon_ua1@hotmail.com** or her mentor Norman Evans at 422-8472, **norman_evans@byu.edu**.

Questions about your Rights as Research Participants

If you have questions you do not feel comfortable asking the researcher, you may contact Dr. Christopher Dromey, IRB Chair, 422-6461, 133 TLRB, **dromey@byu.edu**.

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Signature:_____

Date:_____

APPENDIX D:

ELC Reading Objectives

(Reading Binder, 2006)

Level	Total # pages	# pages per day	Reading rate	# pages of narrative /expository text
1 High Beginning	900	13.8-16.6	180-190 w/m	775/125
2 Low Intermediate	1100	16.9-21.2	180-190 w/m	950/150
3 Intermediate	1300	20-25	190-220 w/m	1125/175
4 High Intermediate	1500	21.1-28.9	225-250 w/m	1300/200
5 Low Advanced (before the Winter of 2007)	1700	30	250-270 w/m	1475/225 1450/250
5 Low Advanced (after the Winter of 2007)	—	30 min /day in each content course	200 w/m	All expository

Reading Skills	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Preview and Predict	√	√	√	√	√
Scan for information	√	√	√	√	√
Identify vocabulary in context	√	√	√	√	√
Recognize parts of speech and word parts	√	√	√	√	√
Skim for main idea		√	√	√	√
Identify topics and topic sentences		√	√	√	√
Make an inference			√	√	√
Identify discourse markers				√	√
Restatement				√	√
Recognize the organization of ideas					√
Identify the tone and purpose of the author					√
Distinguish between fact					√

and opinion					
Understand the function key words (pronoun referents, transitions words)					√
Use contextual clues strategically to enhance comprehension					√
Interpret argument accurately					√
Take notes and outline texts appropriately					√
Summarize texts					√

APPENDIX E:

Interview Transcriptions

Gandhi*

Spanish, W07, L4, BYU

I have to write a lots of papers, read and participate in class. I knew ELC wasn't like college, so it wasn't important. It was like practice. I knew I was gonna be at the ELC only for one semester. I passed the TOEFL. Last semester at the UVSC I took the class "critical thinking." There were things there that I first saw them at the ELC. So when I was there, I already knew this, so I did very well in that class. The ELC gave me the idea how it's gonna be in college, for example the writing class that I had here helped me to know what the college writing would be like.

Challenges. Writing is challenging, it's even hard for me to write in Spanish. I like to understand really good when I read. When I don't understand something, I underline that word and I keep reading and I will know the meaning of that word, or look at a dictionary. When I am about to read a chapter, I look at the headings so I know what the reading is gonna be about. At BYU, in my Critical thinking class we went through the information more deeply, so it was different than at the ELC. We reviewed the same text for days and days and then we had a quiz about the chapter.

Suggestions. Make classes more like college: making classes more interesting, with subjects and things that someday are gonna help us in college or things that as we are living in America we should know. I don't like to read, but it helped me. At the ELC,

we read short books. Reading more interesting books would be helpful, something more real, not very fiction, maybe more helpful books, something that would help us in college: history, biology, and things that we are gonna see in college someday, general culture, for example. We are here in America, so we have to know things that every American knows about their history and culture. Yea, sometimes it's hard to read college books because it's different vocabulary, more difficult to understand. Use more vocabulary that we are going to use in college.

Catoshi

Japanese, L3, L4, LDSBC

I liked the ELC. Actually, the ELC has more homework than college. So ELC's homework helped me to prepared for college homework. Sometimes I had difficult time to adjust to a class. Each teacher had his own way to teach. When I went to L4 from L3, I had to adjust because they changed textbooks and style of teaching was different. Reading classes were similar. As the ELC student you have to read a lot. When I was at the ELC, since I read a lot of books, it made me like to read books. Now it helps me. Sometimes in college I have to read fast. And the ELC helped me to read fast because of speed-reading and ELC homework. I had to read 30 pages a day. And I wanted to do other things so I wanted to read fast.

Not helpful. Topics are different at the ELC and college, at the ELC we mostly read about stories, but at the LDSBC we do mostly academic readings. Stories made me read, so it helped me feel prepared for academic reading. Sometimes I still don't understand vocabulary. Ten steps to college reading was very good, it helped me to learn

how to guess the meaning of unknown words. In college they say same thing. My English teacher says when you find unknowns word you have to do this and this and this. Similar to what you taught me.

Skills. Before I went to the LDSBC I was thinking speaking and writing is important, but I think now listening, then reading, then speaking and writing. I think listening and reading are very important. For reading we can take time to understand, when we listen, it's one time to understand. If I don't understand what teacher says, I cannot get a good grade in a class. Asking questions is really important. During the test or if I have questions about the class, you have to ask your teacher questions. And if we become shy and hesitate to ask questions, it is also a problem. In many classes we have to interrupt, we have to be bold to ask questions.

Challenges. 10-20% of words I still don't know when I read academic books. I wish there was a program where students can learn vocabulary fast and effectively. When I was in L3, my writing teacher said to memorize 10 words each day, so we could learn many words by the end of the semester. I think before the class maybe each student should present which words they learned and explain them. Free rice was good exercise. At the ELC we focused on vocabulary, finding unknown words, scanning, reading through whole text quickly and knowing basic ideas about the reading. I use it now in college. I read in my computer class and in my writing class I read and then I have a pop up quiz. In math class I don't know any vocabulary words, and I don't understand questions meaning. Questions are easy but since I don't know words, I don't understand the question.

Suggestions. In speaking class we did cultural things, politics, we talked about many different topics. It was good because sometimes I have to talk about my country's politics. Same thing it would be good if I could learn mathematics and computer vocabulary at the ELC, and many other different topics. I remember on the TOEFL, vocabulary and time was hard. But if we focus and if we use the skills that we learned in our reading classes, we can pass. In L 3 we read from the Active book and that textbook it was similar to the TOEFL questions, same format, the reading and then questions, but TOEFL has more difficult questions.

Reading is an individual activity, but since we are learning reading as a class, if we have more reading as a group, maybe we can then read books with more fun. When I see other people who can read well, I think I have to improve my reading skill more. It's motivation. At LDSBC we read sometime the same topic as we read at the ELC, so when I read them, it is very easy for me because I have read it before. In LDSBC I have to write about environment and global warming, so I knew those academic vocabulary words because I learned then at the ELC, so I could do well in the LDSBC. Learn English with fun! We can do really difficult things with fun.

Andriyana

Spanish, W07-F07, L3, L4 (twice), BYU

I felt mainly satisfied. It was useful for me. I didn't know how to write and how to read. It was very helpful. Helped to prepare me for the TOEFL.

Why ELC was so helpful to you in preparing for college? Because at the university they ask you to read many books, if you don't know how to read, you can't.

Also for example on some tests you can do open book, but you have a limited time to answer so if you don't know how to do skills for reading, you lose everything. Why Listening? EL taught me how to take notes. It was very useful, everything, listening and writing too.

I felt prepared. Ten steps for college reading was very helpful and also we were on the computer for speed-reading practice. Now at a university, I try to look for objectives and I try to be prepared before the class. I read the objectives and it's easier to understand the class. I try to read fast. When there is something new and difficult to read, I read a couple of times. I read about 30 pages a day. Sometimes I don't read everything, just the most important things. I try to read the beginning of the first paragraph. When I came to the ELC I tried to look every word in the dictionary to understand everything, but you told us that we don't have to know all words to understand. Usually about 20% of words I don't know. I learned how to guess them.

Reading, then Listening, then Writing and Speaking. Reading is the hardest.

Not helpful. The books that we read they are so useful, but maybe if there were more academic books, like Biology. We could learn more useful vocabulary. They were useful, books that you assigned, but not too academic. Maybe they in L3 would be too hard, but in L4 would be good.

Sasha

Russian, S06, Level 5 (twice)

I learned a lot about grammar and how to write papers. I learned how to read faster and better. I learned how to skim and scan, finding main ideas. We had a lot of activities on the computer and in class we had a lot of different practices, plus we read a lot. We have read authentic literature. Real American authors, we discussed a lot, we not only discussed the books but also the topics that we have been connected to the books we have read. Now when I read the book, I know what the main idea of the paragraph and I underline it. And when I prepare for the test, I know where to go and read over again. Also scanning. If I have a study guide, I look at the question and I scan for this word to find it in the chapter. I only read a few paragraphs. Reading was so frustrating to me before because if I didn't know the word, I would look at the dictionary. But the teacher said looking at the dictionary should be the last thing you should do.

I was kind of stressed about speed-reading with a teacher because she was forcing us to read fast and fast. And I am such a slow reader even in my native language. I read so slow because I like to think. Every time we went to the computer lab, it was such a stress for me because I knew what would be there. Speed reading, and I hated it. But eventually I understood it --it was helpful. When you do speed reading, you don't realize that, but you kind of use skimming again, because you kind of look through and don't focus on every single word.

Challenges. Most of those challenges are connected with vocabulary. If you read a textbook, not knowing words. Vocabulary is still something that I lack and the amount of reading that I have to do.

Reading is the most important thing because you have to read so many books. Mostly all of your homework is based on reading, and then, writing, because for every single class at BYU you have to write a paper at least once. Then listening. How can you survive without listening if you go to lectures every day and students asking questions and answering those questions. Next is speaking because you don't really speak that often in classes.

Prepared. The first semester at the ELC was a time of adaptation and learning the way of American teaching. I felt prepared because I already had some skills and some knowledge and that level 5 just enough for me to fill the gaps that I had and go and be ready for college.

Suggestions. Less quizzes. Teaching more reading skills.

Johannasburg

Spanish, W07-W08, L2, 3, 4, 5, UVU

My friends say that ELC is too hard, but for me if it wasn't hard I wouldn't learn. I passed the TOEFL, for me ELC is the only thing that helped me. In matter of a year I learned a lot. Something that helped me a lot was reading. The first levels when we read little books. I went from little books to biology; it wasn't hard because I was reading the whole year. With writing, I didn't like grammar. I think we wasted time.

Reading. In the class we used to practice with the active book, because I didn't even think of pushing myself. During my first semester I would spend 4 hours to read 20 pages. So with the active book I learned how to scan, skim, I learned how read faster and more efficiently. I was gonna look up every word that I don't know. I learned that it's not important to understand every single word. I didn't even know that I was progressing because in level 2 were easy books, but slowly, when I was reading those little books and I found myself in L5 reading Biology book.

We just used to read books. There is one level we had to go to the SASC and pick one book, and they were actually college books, about famous people, history. It was very helpful, we were supposed to read one chapter and turn a page from what we understood. It was very good. It was different, because we were kind of tired from the little books.

If you were to go to university after L4 would you feel prepared? It would be harder then it was. Because in L5 we read American Heritage and Biology, and these are college classes. In l4 we never read books like those two. From books like the Giver to college textbooks, so I would not be prepared. Now I even know some stuff, some history and biology. And I will save time because I already know them. They are totally different, L4 and L5 books

Do you find it helpful the knowledge that you've gained? With American Heritage, we memorized states; I have found out that many people don't even know about some states, so I am kind of proud. So people are surprised to see that I know them.

How do you think L4 could have better prepared you for university? In L4 they could have prepared them for L5. Maybe instead of the active book activities they could give them the handouts with copies from Biology or other classes to see how fast they read and understand them. They (UVSC) say that they found out that many students struggle with Biology. So they gave us this book with basic vocabulary, and this book they have parts from different college books, like sociology or history, its kind of like Active book but chapters come from real college books. [She is showing me sociology theme]. It's kind of like the Active book, but they come from real books, from real sociology classes. It's only two pages but they are giving us ideas. It is harder for me and for students. Real readings. And then they have activities after, like Active book. I really like it because there are facts and history. It's harder. It would be good for L4. I just read last night about cultural sociology and it was really, really interesting, so I think things like that would help.

In what way did L5 help you prepare for college? In L5, I didn't like grammar at all, I think Biology and American Heritage and writing were helpful. I didn't like grammar. At the UVSC in writing I was the best student, and the way they taught us were the same as in ELC writing. In level 4 and 5 we were using sources, how to cite, transitions. You don't learn that in L 2 and L3.

What did you learn in L5 in terms of reading? In L5 I learned how to shorten my time, not to spend five hours as used to, I learned how to underline the main topic, and to skim. If I need details, I will read, but if I don't, I just skim.

Is it helping you now? Yes, in the Wellness class. When she gave us home take test four times this semester and the chapters were 50 pages and there were 20 questions, I just looked for key words in the questions and scanned to look for those key words in the text.

Suggestions. L2-4 how can we make them better? Just to give handouts from actually the college textbooks with questions. Something that you should actually do is just copy pages from the college textbooks, like Biology. And make them read one page and then answer questions, to see how fast and how well they understand. Because if I went to university after level 4, I wouldn't be able to read a textbook well. Because "The Giver", this kind of books they are not even similar to college books. So I think, I wouldn't be prepared. I would read them but maybe way too slow.

In L4 teacher used to time us and we used to do it everyday. I think it was helpful, I think it should be done in other levels. I practiced it the whole semester and by the end I could tell the difference. And she gave us questions, so we answered questions.

Livea

Portuguese, S06-W08, L2, 3, 4, 5 (twice), BYU

Sometimes I didn't feel that the ELC was very helpful, with some teachers it wasn't. With some teachers they were here to have a job. With other teachers I felt that they really loved what they were doing.

Quality of instruction in reading was Ok. Why? Some of my teachers, we just spent 60 min talking about a book, about 20 pages that we have read at home. Until level

4 we spent a lot of time talking about books but not enough time on strategies. Except with one teacher in L3, she helped us a lot with strategies, 30 min on books and 30 min on strategies. 15-20% about we spent on strategies and the rest on books. About the 20 was because of the level5 because in L5 they teach you other skills, academic ones.

Skills. I think listening is the first one because you supposed to understand what is teacher teaching so you can follow his idea. Secondly, because you don't speak that much, I would put reading. Reading and listening, those are the most important, and then writing. Because you are supposed read and understand in order to write something about the subject. Speaking, I think I am gonna speak more when I am doing my Masters. Listen is because you need to understand and reading because you cannot write anything if you don't understand your reading.

Challenges in reading at a university now. My first semester was time. Not enough time to read. Now it is just time not because a lot of homework but also because of all the main things that are going on in my life: work and that and that. Time is a challenge. In Brazil you are supposed to read word for word. But when I came to the ELC, I had to trust that you don't have to read everything. Sometimes before my class I scan to refresh my mind after I have read it at home. When I was at the ELC, it was time and comprehension. Now it is just time. If I don't understand, I can understand the meaning of the words from the context.

In my first L5 I knew that my weakness was in reading when teacher gave us homework one chapter to read about and gave us quizzes. It was very hard.

What have you learned in L5 that was helpful? Sometime teacher would give us in class the movie that we had to listen. We read and then wrote what we think. She gave us new stories related to the chapter that we read and we had a quiz on that. Vocabulary. She taught us how to find main ideas, if you don't have time to read the whole thing. She taught us how to read bolded words if you don't have time. The questions that were on the quizzes were like on the TOEFL, inference and detail questions. She helped us to read faster with a clock, each time new readings and answer questions. She would give us 20 questions for 5 chapters. It was open book, 20 min. We used skimming to find answers. Most of her other quizzes were oral, she asked questions in class. One of my teachers put us in groups so we could talk about the questions. Also we had presentations, and we were supposed to take notes, and she would evaluate with us.

I wouldn't feel good if I left the ELC after L4. Not at all prepared for college because my vocabulary and my understanding, the whole thing, was not even college, was like little kids, the kind of book that I've read at the ELC. When the ELC was trying to take us to classes on campus, this is when I felt that I wasn't ready. I didn't get it. At the ELC the teachers are trained to speak very slowly and pronounce every word. When I went to BYU, it was a religion class, but even gospel was hard. I couldn't understand some of the points he was trying to make. Not enough vocabulary, sometimes I just feel like L5 should be L4. Level 5 classes make you feel better about the college life than level 4 classes, because level 4 classes are just like follow level 1, 2 and 3, the manner and way that they teach. It is like for little kids, like for someone who is just learning English but not going to college.

Suggestions. Good teachers first. They don't listen to their students, some of them. I want all the levels to be like level 5. It would be so good, and people would love it. Levels 1 and 2, it would be just as they are right now and L3, 4 and 5 would be more advanced. People I was talking from the ELC, they said "oh level 5 is so good." In L3 they have magazines that were good, about history and science, so they could read them because the vocabulary wasn't like little kid, but still not university vocabulary. And then in L4 something like that but harder. Make other levels like level 5. Introduce high school books at level 3 because your mind is ready for that.

Learning more skills in the levels, not spending a lot of time on discussing books. Some teachers should listen to what students think about the class. When you teach one thing and require another thing, students feel it is not fair. Encouraging students to do better.

*Names were changed for confidentiality