

COLECCIÓN
INNOVACIONES
PEDAGÓGICAS

UNIVERSIDAD CASA GRANDE

*Requisite EFL Language Skills
for Content-Based Courses
and Employment: A Mixed
Methods Study*

Nº 02

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Educación Superior Mención en la
Formación de Maestros de Inglés

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With the aim of identifying English language needs of students from a private university in a large city in Ecuador for success in English content-based courses and the workplace, the present study employed a mixed methods needs analysis. Participants in the study were students, faculty, administrators and companies. Findings indicated that speaking and listening are the most important requisite skills for content-based courses. Those same skills are also needed for the workplace, and organized writing skills are needed in both places. Student and faculty perceptions coincided that the students' greatest weaknesses were in speaking. The present placement and proficiency test for determining student readiness for the content based courses was seen as being inadequate. In order to help satisfy the English language learning needs of the students, this study offers recommendations about specific language-related goal setting, the inclusion of student needs in curriculum design, strategies for student motivation, and suggestions for improving the quality of assessment in the program.

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PRESI

Hace ya una década, al poco tiempo de haber inaugurado su Facultad de Ecología Humana, las autoridades de la Universidad Casa Grande consideraron imperativo ofrecer a la comunidad educativa de Guayaquil y su región, la oportunidad de actualizar conocimientos en el ámbito de la Educación Superior, con énfasis en sus visiones contemporáneas, sus métodos de investigación y las tendencias de su devenir.

El esfuerzo cumplido por quienes decidieron tomar el desafío culminó con la elaboración de muy serios y profesionales trabajos que vale la pena compartir y hoy se presentan a la consideración de la comunidad educativa nacional, en una primera entrega que acumula algunos de ellos.

En un entorno globalizado, basado en la comunicación y el conocimiento, donde la variabilidad tecnológica, política y social es una constante, el rol de las instituciones de educación superior es estratégico para mantener el desarrollo sostenible de los países y el de sus profesionales.

Es imperativo que estos últimos posean las competencias necesarias para insertarse exitosamente en un contexto laboral determinado, y también la suficiente flexibilidad y capacidad de adaptación a varios sistemas diferentes y diversos por su cultura, idioma, condiciones geográficas y otros aspectos.

Lograrlo requiere contar con docentes de un excelente nivel académico, experticia en el área de especialización que enseñan y capacidad de creación de entornos reales o simulados que faciliten experiencias significativas y pertinentes.

ENTACCIÓN

A esos requerimientos respondió exitosamente la Maestría en Educación Superior, que formó docentes innovadores, con destrezas en estrategias de aprendizaje activo e investigación, orientados a mejorar la calidad de la docencia universitaria.

La Maestría en Educación Superior fue aprobada por el CONESUP mediante resolución RCP.So4.NºIII.04. e inició su primera promoción en el año 2004. El requisito para obtener el título de Magíster fue la aprobación de todas las materias y un trabajo de tesis, equivalente a 60 créditos.

Por lo señalado, la Universidad Casa Grande se complace en presentar la Colección “Innovaciones Pedagógicas”, obra que aporta a la renovación de las prácticas educativas habituales, investigándolas, debatiéndolas honestamente y proponiendo enfoques y didácticas de vanguardia para abordar, de manera pertinente, el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje. El presente es un esfuerzo por compartir y divulgar reflexiones sobre experiencias docentes que dan cuenta de la ruptura necesaria y urgente que debe hacerse en relación a las concepciones tradicionales de la educación.

Tener como objeto de estudio los ambientes de aprendizaje en que éste ocurre, implica atravesar una experiencia de transformación docente, que solo puede ser comprendida y compartida por los propios sujetos que enseñan y aprenden; es decir, a partir de la reflexión en acción, después de la acción, como bien señala Schön. Eso han logrado los autores de esta Colección, con temas como el uso del portafolio para introducir prácticas constructivistas, la aplicación de desempeños auténticos de comprensión, el juego de roles y análisis de Casos de aprendizaje, el aprendizaje basado en problemas, la aplicación del método

Casos (simulación pedagógica), el uso de métodos mixtos para el aprendizaje del inglés, por citar algunos.

La UCG decidió iniciar la publicación de estas tesis como una colección abierta a nacientes contribuciones en el campo de la educación superior, cuando logró sumar suficientes títulos para hacerla consistente. A su vez, por motivos personales y profesionales de los Tesistas o por compromiso con la confidencialidad de algunos temas explorados, no se publican todos los trabajos de titulación.

Marcia Gilbert de Babra
Rectora UCG

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Directora de Postgrados de la UCG

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CHAPTER I

Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

Ever since the world began experiencing changes brought about by globalization and technological development, peoples' lives have been affected by international networks, operating via financial markets, transnational corporations, and the Internet. Since much of this globalization is linked to US power and influence, the main language for the exchange of information has increasingly been English. Films, music, television and advertisements in the English language are all seen and heard in many countries where English is not the first language. According to Crystal (cited in Warschauer, 2000), ...85% of international organizations in the world make official use of English, at least 85% of the world's film market is in English and some 90% of published articles in some academic fields, such as linguistics, are written in English (p.3).

There is a strong need, for a large portion of the world's population, to learn English, "often one upon which their livelihood depends" (Cook, 2003, p. 26). To give an example closer to home, the Human Resources Department of Mindamar University receives notices of employment opportunities from different companies in the city. According to that university department, one third of them require a good to fluent command of English.

To prepare students for this challenge, universities around the world increasingly offer college courses through the medium of English. A quick search on the Internet shows evidence of the growing number of courses offered in English in Asia and Europe as well as certain Latin American universities (mostly graduate courses).

In the city where the present study took place, the author discovered through a phone survey of university administrators, that several universities require students to take

English content-based courses at the undergraduate level, but with the

exception of Mindamar, the courses are limited to such academic programs as commercial and industrial engineering, international studies and tourism - programs that have a defined need for English. In three of these major Ecuadorian universities, the curricula of these particular programs of study include a strong English program which is designed to teach students the English they will need in their careers (English for Specific Purposes) as well as to prepare them for scholarships to study at English-medium universities. Achievement tests are also given on a regular basis to check proficiency levels. At one university in particular, students must pass a special course of fluency, principles of writing and advanced grammar. One American college in Guayaquil is an exception, where all courses are taught in English. In the case of the Spanish medium Mindamar University, all students, regardless of their majors, must take English courses as well as content courses taught in English, specific to each academic program.

According to Flowerdew and Peacock, in English speaking countries belonging to the inner circle (USA, Britain, Australia, and Canada) most universities offer ESL classes to help international students improve their language proficiency before facing the challenge of content-based courses in their respective fields. Many universities offer a course called English for Academic Purposes (EAP) which zeroes in on the more specific language skills that are required for college level classes. According to Flowerdew and Peacock (2001):

... far more students are likely to require EAP in many of the post-colonial countries... where there are many English-medium universities and the countries in which English has no official status (e.g. many Latin American countries), where many students are required to take English, often EAP (p.9).

One of the curricular decisions that administrators make in each university is: At what point is a student ready to attend a course in English? Most universities use a test as a determiner of student readiness. They must ask themselves, what cut-off score will adequately guarantee that a student is ready for the challenge of a college course in English? While other factors such as motivation, determination and aptitude may compensate for language limitations, “there appears to be a threshold of proficiency below which students are unlikely to cope with academic study” (Elder, Erlam & von Randow, p.1).

In Ecuador, English as foreign language skills have been developed among students mostly through their high school English classes or private institutes. What is generally taught in those programs is English for General Purposes (EGP), which focuses on communicative language for general or social purposes. Students do not get adequate exposure to academic reading or listening material, nor do they get explicit instruction in academic study skills such as outlining and essay writing. However, when a student takes a college course, he/she will need listening and note-taking skills, academic writing and reference skills, familiarity with general academic English register, with formal and academic style, as well as proficiency in the language use. This is known as English for Academic Purposes [EAP] (Jordan, 1997).

Writing presents a particular challenge, because writing instruction is not common in the Ecuadorian school system. Students may arrive to college unprepared for requirements even in their first language, as results show in an internal report from Mindamar University. From 2006 – 2008 an obligatory Spanish language test was given to all aspiring students which evaluated a number of reading and writing capacities. The overall average placed students below what was expected at a high school level. The lowest scores obtained were in writing skills. The problem seems to be compounded when the students find that there may also be different cultural conventions and academic expectations in Ecuadorian university classrooms when the professor is not Ecuadorian and comes from a different educational system (Mindamar has several international faculty members). Students may be asked to use skills that they were never expected to use, even if they did study at a bilingual high school.

At Mindamar the admission procedure for registration in content-based courses in English consists in obtaining a minimum score on the SLEP Test which measures understanding over production (Wilson, p. 28). Students who score in the same percentile on the test may have different levels of production skills. While one may be able to produce an understandable piece of writing or have acceptable oral expression, another may have extreme difficulty doing either. Informal conversations with faculty at Mindamar have indicated that students who may not be ready, are entering English content-based courses. Consequently, their teachers are forced to adapt their syllabi, sometimes by finding substitute reading material, and changing course requirements.

Clearly, the students whose language skills are not adequate for the requirements of a content-based course should raise their English level before contemplating registration. An English program, which provides basic English courses and an English for Academic Purposes course, must meet the needs of the students so they can advance in their mastery of the language toward the goal of not only being able to communicate in English, but also to acquire proficiency in the academic language skills needed at the university level. Of no lesser importance is the preparation of students in English language skills that they will need in their careers and in the workplace. So targeting the needs of the work setting is crucial. The more that the people responsible for organizing the English program know about the needs of the students, the better they might be able to organize it to satisfy those needs. As Braine states: “The design of English language curricula without some consideration of learner needs is almost unthinkable today” (2001, p.196).

A number of studies have been carried out to gather information about the specific language needs students may have in the college classroom (for academic purposes) and also for vocational purposes. This type of study is known as a needs analysis. These studies come from countries where teaching through English plays an important role in the curriculum, such as those where English is the first language, as well as post-colonial Anglophone countries. Research to determine academic skills needed in specific situations has also been done at universities in countries where English is not the predominant language, such as the American University in Beirut, and in Japan (Balint, 2004). The author has not been able to find any comparable research done in a Latin American University.

As a faculty member, at Mindamar, I experienced firsthand the difficulties that arise when students are not equipped with the target language skills needed for the challenges of English content-based courses. No known research had been done to date to determine the types of language tasks the teachers were requiring in these courses, neither had the language needs of the students been formally identified. I felt it was urgent to discover which language skills were needed by students to achieve academically in the English content-based courses offered at Mindamar University as well as discover the attitudes and perceptions of the students toward taking those courses, as attitudes may influence learning. So, I decided to conduct a needs analysis.

At the outset of this study, my main objective was to identify the language and language skills that students needed to be successful in the English content-based courses at Mindamar and determine what skills they were lacking. After some of the data was collected, I realized that the language requirements of the classroom represented only a part of the student's needs; once they graduated, some of them would have to confront English language challenges in the workplace. This challenge was one of the reasons why the university included English content-based courses in its curriculum. Therefore, it seemed important to

identify the English language needs of the workplace, as this information may help the university design the courses that could ensure the adequate language-related development of the students for their future employment. Thus, a second phase of this research was carried out with the aim of identifying the English language needs of the students' possible future employment in the city.

To fulfill this purpose, I employed quantitative as well as qualitative methods, as needs analyses require both objective and subjective information from a variety of sources.

The Research Questions.

I identified five research questions for the study:

- 1) What language skills do students need to be successful in English content-based courses?
- 2) What are the English language skills needed for the workplace in and around the major city where the study took place?
- 3) How can the target language skills of the students in the study be described?
- 4) What non-linguistic factors contribute to student success in the English content-based courses?
- 5) How were the Basic English and English content-based courses at

Mindamar preparing students with the skills they were going to need for their possible future employment?

Since this study will focus wholly on the Mindamar courses and students, it will not be possible to generalize the results to other research settings. The results of the study may eventually benefit the students of Mindamar directly, especially those who have not yet begun to take courses in English. The faculty may also benefit from the results which have

the potential to allow administrators to make the necessary modifications in the English Program in order to align it with the particular needs of the students.

Operational Definitions and Acronyms.

A glossary of acronyms and operational terms, incorporated in this study, follows in this section.

CEF. Common European Framework

EAP. English for Academic Purposes

EGAP. English for General Academic Purposes EGP. English for General Purposes

EOP. English for Occupational Purposes.

ESP. English for Specific Purposes

IELTS. International English Language Testing System

NA. Needs Analysis. A needs analysis is basically “the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners require a language and arranging the needs according to priorities...” (Richards cited in Jordan, 1997, p.20) SLEP. Secondary Level English Proficiency Test

TOEFL. Test of English as a Foreign Language

Literature Review

The literature review covers the following topics: Language Requirements for Academic Achievement; Relationship between English Proficiency and Academic Achievement; English for Academic Purposes; and Needs Analysis.

Language Requirements for Academic Achievement.

Getting beyond primary and secondary education and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, academic achievement (or performance) generally refers to the attainment of reasonable performance targets set by the educational institution and the instructor. There is no one single factor that can predict academic achievement. Many factors are involved such as cognitive processing abilities, content knowledge, aptitude, performance skills as well as motivation, and interpersonal skills (Saville-Troike, 1991). However, in the case of university level English content-based courses for non-native speakers of English, there are some factors that seem to be more important than others for determining academic achievement. The student certainly needs the necessary language skills that enable him or her to understand and produce written and oral English at the level of class difficulty. He or she needs to have content-related vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge to help with the interpretation of meaning, the ability to decode and encode meaning in context-reduced tasks, strategies for listening and reading, and know “how to use language as a tool in acquiring knowledge and in performing analytic processes” (Saville-Troike 1991, p.5).

Students with an acceptable language level may or may not have the other skills needed for achievement. Language testing alone cannot provide information regarding those other needs that students may have. It is a multidimensional situation that requires a focus on “language in relation to academic proficiency” (Ibid., P. 8).

Relationship between English proficiency and academic achievement.

In order for non-native speakers of English to be accepted into an English-speaking university or, as in the case of Mindamar, into a course in an

English medium, students are required to take a proficiency test, usually a standardized test such as the TOEFL, or the IELTS, among others, to assess overall ability in the English language. These tests contain multiple choice items on grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension and aural comprehension, and in some instances a writing sample is added and/or an oral performance. For example, the TOEFL iBT test measures the ability of: ...non-native speakers of English to communicate orally and in writing in English, to understand English as it is spoken in North American academic contexts (the listening skills), and to understand short passages similar in topic and style to academic texts used in North American colleges and universities (reading skills). Writing and speaking are tested in two constructed-response sections (Tannenbaum and Wylie, p. 5)

In some post-secondary institutions in the United States and other countries, the Secondary Level English Proficiency Test (SLEP) is administered, although it was originally developed for use in grades 7 through 12. The SLEP Test measures the “ability to understand spoken English. The questions are based on samples of spoken North American English and test listening comprehension. They do not rely heavily on written material.” The SLEP also measures the ability to “...understand written English. Questions cover grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension” (www.ETS.org). This test does not include a written or an oral component.

Research carried out to correlate standardized test scores with academic success has shown a weak relationship (Brindley & Ross, 2001, Saville-Troike, 1991). While a study by Blue (1993 cited in Jordan, 1997) found that the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) test scores correlated with student academic success at British Universities, (and other researchers support this conclusion according to Robinson (cited in Jordan, 1997), standardized tests (specifically the TOEFL) have been criticized for not being accurate predictors for measuring language proficiency or predicting academic success, as noted in a study by Light, Xu and Mossop (1987). Authors state that

...this is due at least in part to the complexity of the concept of language proficiency (Canale, 1983) and in part to the difficulty of measuring the variety of English language skills necessary for academic success (Cummins, 1983). This is also complicated by “the methodological problems involved in carrying out predictive validity studies, including

reliance on truncated samples and the lack of adequate indicators of 'academic' success (Brindley & Ross, 2001).

However, these authors also confirm that some students who fail the TOEFL test (score under the cut off) have been able to complete courses successfully. Whatever the findings in the literature, the ETS (Educational Testing Services), producers of the SLEP and the TOEFL (among other tests), recommend that institutions using either of the two tests develop their own local norms. For example, in the SLEP manual, the School Services Program advises test users “a) to conduct local studies designed to assess the relationship of SLEP scores to teachers’ observations of proficiency and other pertinent performance criteria, and b) to develop local norms” (Wilson, 1993, p.18).

In that same document, Wilson refers to a study done in the U.S. in 1993 by the Educational Testing Services to get feedback from users in order to examine how well the SLEP test met their ESL assessment needs. It was found that two thirds of the users adopt the test in conjunction with local assessment procedures and/or other standardized tests while only one third relied solely on the SLEP test scores.

The TOEFL iBT Standard Setting Facilitator Notebook, which advises institutions on how to set the final cut scores, suggests that the “evaluation of an international candidate’s potential academic performance should be based on all available relevant information, not solely on the Test of English as a Foreign Language scores” (Setting the Final Cut Scores, 2005). Although there is no doubt that language proficiency is important for academic success, there are other qualities that should be considered, which affect student performance. Among the factors suggested by ETS are knowledge of subject matter, interpersonal skills, motivation, and aptitude. Attitudes of the learner toward the second language play an important role as well. In Gardner’s model cited by Dornyei (2001, p. 16), motivation is made up of “motivational intensity, desire to learn the language and attitudes towards learning the language”. Clearly these qualities cannot be evaluated in a standardized test.

Regarding cases where a non-native English speaker attends university in his/her own country but studies at an English speaking university or takes a course in an English medium, as is the case of Mindamar University, students

may additionally have to confront cultural differences in the classroom born from either having an international professor, as is often the case, or a native Ecuadorian professor, who was educated in a school system abroad. In these cases, the teachers may expect the students to learn different things or learn things in a different way from what they are accustomed, as not only are personality variables responsible for shaping the way learners think and study, but the educational system and the socio-cultural background also influence it (Jordan, 1997). Different academic conventions can be a cause for problems. For example, students coming from backgrounds with little concern for acknowledging their sources when writing will have problems in a North American or European college (or with professors from those countries), because in those cultures plagiarism is considered a violation of academic integrity. The concept of plagiarism needs to be explained and students must have practice in citing references (Jordan, 1997).

Plagiarism aside, Jordan wisely points out that, if the students are studying in their own country, considerations must be given to the culture and technology of that society (Ibid. p.97). Pennycook expresses great concern for this: "...On the one hand we need to help our students develop critical awareness of academic norms and practices, while on the other we need to understand and promote culturally diverse ways of thinking, working and writing" (cited by Swales, 2001 p. 53). In the area of teaching writing, particularly, where there are many different orientations, Jordan points out:

... we need to be sensitive to the practices and perceptions of writing that students bring to the classroom, and build on these so that they come to see writing as relative to particular groups and contexts. In this way students can understand the discourses they have to write, while not devaluing those of their own cultures and communities (p. 26).

While taking into consideration the important cultural issue, academic skills will also intervene in determining academic success. Study skills are a case in point. If they have already been acquired by the student in his own language, they can be transferred to an English medium. However, professors may require some skills that students have never developed because they were not required in their previous educational experience. Furthermore, the extent to which skills acquired in a person's native language can successfully transfer to the new language seems to depend on reaching a threshold level of language knowledge (Alderson, cited in Evans and St. John 1998).

There are differences between cognitive academic language proficiency and basic interpersonal skills learned in EFL courses at high schools, or language institutes. Cummins (cited in Light, Xu and Mossop, 1987) affirms that although an international student attending a U.S. school can master face-to-face communication skills in about 2 years, it takes them from 5 to 7 years to reach grade-level norms in second language academic skills. In addition, each academic program may require a different level of language skills as discovered by Bridgeman & Carlson, 1983; Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Light, Xu & Mossop 1987; Ostler, 1980; Robertson, 1982. Academic writing is one such example. Professors from the United States tend to demand more organized writing, such as essays and reports, compared to that required by Latin American professors. In these countries, writing does not play such an important part in the primary or secondary educational curricula, as most students and teachers can attest to. In fact, writing appears to be one of the most difficult of all the skills for non-native English speaking students, according to studies done by Geoghegan in 1983 and Jordan in 1981 (cited in Jordan, 1997).

Jordan (1997) also found that in the area of writing, lack of vocabulary was the cause of most difficulties for the students at a university level, while Saville-Troike found that “vocabulary knowledge is the single most important area of second language competence in academic achievement” when she studied elementary school students to see what affected their academic success (1984, p.1). At the college level, students will encounter topic specific vocabulary that they may have never learned before as well as a core of academic vocabulary which accounts for a good number of words found in academic texts. Several lists have been made of the vocabulary that appears most often in academic texts (the University Word List (Paul Nation), AWL (Averill Coxhead), and the General Service List (Michael West), to name a few, and students will need to acquire much of that vocabulary in order to understand the readings that will be assigned.

As can be seen, in order to achieve academically in an English medium, students need a variety of skills, a certain level of proficiency, plus knowledge of some of the features of the language that he/she will likely need in the target situation – the college classroom. This area of study is known as English for Academic Purposes.

English for Academic Purposes.

The main concern of any language program is communication and learning, which form the roots of a tree, to use Hutchinson and Waters' analogy (1987). The tree then branches off to show different types of language teaching, the most common being General English (GE) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The latter then branches off into areas such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). Therefore ESP is not a distinct kind of language or methodology, but rather an approach to language learning, that is based on the needs of the learner (Ibid. p. 19). EAP

“is concerned with those communication skills in English which are required for study purposes in formal educational systems” (Jordan, 1997 p.1), as well as with helping students use English to learn (Brindley & Ross, 2001). English for Academic Purposes is divided into two types: English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). Whereas the former is based on “common-core language and skills not related to specific disciplines or professions” (Evans and St. John, p.9), the latter focuses on teaching skills more specific to one particular discipline. For general college level content-based courses, EGAP is the most appropriate.

There have been several approaches to EAP syllabus design since its beginning: The lexico-grammar based approach, influenced by the emphasis on register analysis of the 1960's and 1970's, focused on structure and vocabulary, followed by the function-notional-based approach of the 1970's, which contrasted with the form-focus; the discourse based approach came in the late 1970's which emphasized cohesion and coherence at the text level. In 1987, Hutchinson and Waters developed the learning-centre approach, which focused not so much on the language and skills students needed, but on what they had to do to learn them. This approach emphasized a more meaningful content. The genre-based approach promoted understanding of specific genres that students would need to succeed in their university courses. The skills-based approach appeared in the 1990's and was particularly useful in countries where students require only some of the skills, such as reading; The content-based approach is centered on teaching language related to the students' academic program. The students learn the language structures, syntax and vocabulary from that content which is significant to their area of study (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001).

Whatever the approach, EAP must teach the students certain microskills within each of the four main language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing). Jordan compiled a list of skills that includes prediction, skimming and scanning, distinguishing important from less important information, relevant from irrelevant information, drawing inferences and conclusions, deducing unknown words, understanding text organizations and linguist/semantic aspects (1997). Flowerdew and Peacock add understanding connections between paragraphs and sections, use of cohesive markers and interpreting the writer's point of view (2001, p. 186). Reading is intimately connected to writing, as most writing micro skills such as extracting relevant information and summarizing, are based on reading material. Flowerdew and Peacock mention writing micro skills such as planning for writing, selecting and organizing content, reviewing and revising drafts, proofreading, and note-taking as important to include in the EAP syllabus. Jordan feels that students need to be aware of the writing process as well as the target product and conform to the requirements of their discipline and academic genre (p. 176).

In speaking, students must know how to ask questions, participate in discussions and seminars, give oral presentations, and interact. Developing good listening skills is important; one usually does not have the opportunity to listen a second or third time to a speaker for better understanding, (an advantage one has with written text). So students must be prepared to comprehend and extract meaning from a listening text presented in real time without the possibility of asking for clarification. Note taking skills are key to develop while one listens to a lecture. As in any academic environment, students need to use language as a tool for acquiring knowledge which is not limited to any particular language (Saville-Troike 1991). Instructors often find that students need some instruction as to how to use language as a tool and this also becomes part of the EAP program when necessary.

Some experts agree that language requisites differ among universities and among academic programs. For example in Ferris and Tagg's (1996) analysis at four different post-secondary institutions it was impossible to generalize the requirements of listening and speaking tasks in classrooms, as results showed that tasks varied according to the academic discipline, type of institution and class size. The same was found for writing tasks, which I cover in the following section. Therefore, student language needs also vary according to the institution where they study at as well as the field they specialize in. It

then follows that the objectives established for an EAP course must respond to the specific needs of the students the course is going to serve.

Needs analysis

Flowerdew and Peacock assert that it is vital to produce “a comprehensive description of the unique needs and wishes of the EAP student” (2001, p.177). Since any ESP/EAP course should be based on learner needs, it has become generally accepted that a needs analysis (NA) is a requisite to determine those needs (e.g. Flowerdew & Peacock 2001, Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, Jordan 1997). To use Richards’ definition, a needs analysis is basically “the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners require a language and arranging the needs according to priorities...it makes use of both subjective and objective information” (Cited in Jordan, 1997, p.20). The inclusion of needs analyses in second language curriculum development began seriously in the 1960’s as English for Specific Purposes instruction gained importance (Braine [2001], cited in Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001). The NA focuses on gathering information regarding the specific language needed for vocational or other language needs, such as that for academic purposes.

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), the word ‘needs’ actually embraces three aspects: learner necessities which signifies “what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation”; learner lacks, which is what he/she will require, taking into account what the learner already knows; and his/her wants, which is what the learner wishes to learn (p.55). A more amplified definition of the term ‘needs’ for educational purposes provided by Brindley includes “wants, desires, demands, expectations, motivations, lacks, constraints, and requirements” (Cited in Balint, 2004, p.27). Brindley mentions the possibility of conflicts when the curriculum and student beliefs and assumptions are not the same. The learner is the heart of the program; therefore its effectiveness will be influenced not only by the curriculum but by the attitudes and expectations of the learner as well. Benesch, in her widely quoted paper (1996) suggests that a NA should consider social issues that affect a student’s academic life, including his/her attitude toward studying English. Therefore a NA should not limit itself to discovering what language learners need for a particular situation and what they must do with that language, but also include those other non-academic

areas that exert an influence on student learning. This can be done in part by ascertaining a student's attitude toward English.

Essentially a needs analysis consists of "asking questions about the target situation and the attitudes towards that situation of the various participants in the learning process", such as learners themselves, teachers and others who are responsible for the course (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p.59). There are several ways of obtaining the information: Jordan makes mention of 14 different methods (1997), although the most frequently used are questionnaires, interviews, observation, data collection, and informal consultations (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, Johns, 1981). Jordan states that "there is no single approach to needs analysis and that circumstances are different and change" (Jordan, 1997, p. 38). The following examples serve to illustrate the point.

In 1996, Ferris and Tagg surveyed professors at four different institutions in the U.S.: a community college, a public teaching-oriented university, a public research university and a private university. Their focus was on the expectations and requirements of the listening and speaking tasks in the classrooms. No generalization was possible, as results showed that tasks varied according to the academic discipline, type of institution and class size. Horowitz (1986) was concerned with academic writing, and the types of writing tasks that students are required to do. In his research, he criticized the use of questionnaires for this purpose and based his study on the actual writing assignments, handouts and essay exams given to students at a U.S. university. After categorizing responses, he discovered that much of the writing is of a controlled nature with abundant instruction by the teacher on what to produce, suggesting that ESL instruction should steer away from freer writing and focus more on tasks similar to those given in the classroom, which are basically to "find, organize and present data according to fairly explicit instruction" (Horowitz, 1986, p. 455).

In 1980 the American Language Institute, at the University of Southern California, conducted a study of their advanced ESL students' assessments of the academic skills they expected to need in order to succeed in their studies, as well as a self-assessment of their success in using English in social and business settings (Ostler, 1980). A questionnaire was used for listening skills students thought they needed and for evaluating their own ability in receptive

and productive skills. Two tasks were included to assess student's sentence-combining ability as well as summary skills. Results showed that the strongest needs were the abilities to read texts, to take notes and ask questions in class. Other tasks varied in importance between undergraduate and the graduate students. Students felt comfortable in predictable communicative settings but less so where creative language skills were required.

Johns (1981) surveyed faculty from another U.S. university to determine which of the four basic skills were most important for non-native speakers in the classes they taught. They ranked the receptive skills of reading and listening as most essential for both undergraduate and graduate students. Christison and Krahnke (1986) conducted a study using open-ended interviews with structured questionnaires on 80 non-native speaking students in five different universities across twelve states of the U.S. to determine how they perceived their language learning experiences and how they used English in academic settings. Students stated that 80% of language use was spent in reading and listening while only 20% was speaking and writing. Speaking and listening to class lectures were perceived as most difficult for students. On the other hand, the teachers revealed that while students ask for more interaction in the EAP classroom, they are reluctant to participate when the teachers actually try to incorporate more interactive activities.

Chan (1996) reports on a large-scale needs analysis that was done at the Department of English of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University to update students' language needs and the provision of English programs that were relevant to the students' academic study and future careers. She employed a survey to question undergraduates and teachers regarding the student's background, reasons for studying English, importance of particular language skills in the personal, academic and professional domains, a self-rating of perceived ability and a rating of how much emphasis should be given in class to particular language skills. Both teachers and students concurred that for academic studies, the skills that were most important and in which the students' abilities were low, included reading magazines and periodicals and speaking at seminars and meetings. Post questionnaire interviews confirmed this and students also said they had a hard time expressing themselves in English, and lacked confidence to do so.

Bacha (1999) carried out a needs analysis at the Lebanese American University in Lebanon, where all classes are given in English except for Arabic language and literature. The aim was to compare student and faculty perceptions of the relative importance of the language skills and tasks necessary to follow undergraduate degree programs in the four main schools, as well as the English needed to compete in future jobs. Results showed that while faculty rated the importance of the four skills as reading first, followed by writing, listening and speaking, the students rated speaking first, then writing, reading and finally listening. In the school of the humanities, writing took on more importance than in the other schools. Other than that, the differences were not significant. They all mostly agreed on the tasks that were important.

Although most needs analyses (at least those that have been published for international access), have been done at universities in English speaking countries, or in predominantly English speaking universities in countries with a different native language, it is clear that each situation is different, and that requirements and needs vary according to each particular situation. This fact emphasizes the importance that a needs analysis plays in the design of any English program and the syllabus of the English for Academic Purpose course.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The present study was done in two separate phases. Phase 1 was carried out in 2006 - 2007 and focused on the needs of the students for the English content-based courses at the university. In 2008, Phase 2 was initiated in order to determine the target language needs for Mindamar graduates in the workplace.

Phase I

Institutional Setting and Curriculum.

In 2003, Mindamar University made it obligatory for all students who scored at or above the 50th percentile (considered high intermediate) on the SLEP test (obligatory exam to assess students' English language level) to take at least 12 credits of content courses in English. The purpose of this requirement was to ensure that students maintained their English level, as it was assumed that students already knew English. Courses were initially related more to general education than to the specific fields students were studying, but gradually more program specific courses were added. Those students who scored under the 50th percentile were required to take English courses outside the university until they improved their SLEP test scores, at which time they could register for the English language courses. In 2004, four Basic English courses were added to the curriculum which would take students from beginning level English to the high-intermediate level. These courses were not included within the 12 credit requirement. At the high-intermediate level, students were expected to be able to communicate in social settings and to use English to achieve academically. Upon passing the high intermediate level, students could then register for the content-based courses in English (Source: Mindamar English Department Coordinator).

However, according to the professors, many of the students did not have sufficient target language skills needed for success in English content-based courses. In response, the university added to the curriculum an Oral and Written Communication course in 2003 to help students acquire the written

skills necessary for the college classroom. In 2005, this course evolved into an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. The syllabus of this course was broadened to include not only writing skills, but reading, speaking and listening as well. This curriculum reform was an institutional response to teacher comments on the lack of certain English language skills students had shown in their classrooms. However, no analysis had been done to determine the types of language tasks the teachers were requiring in these courses nor had the specific inadequacies of the students' target language skills been documented. In addition, students had never been asked what skills they felt they needed further instruction in.

A general need had been established and a course had been developed although the specific needs of the students had thus far not been considered. It would therefore seem necessary to identify the specific language skills that students needed to achieve academically in the English content-based courses offered at Mindamar University. It was also important to discover the attitude of the students toward English courses at the university, as this factor comes into play in their learning, as previously mentioned.

The present study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) What language skills do students need to be successful in English content-based courses?
- 2) How can the target language skills of the students in the study be described?
- 3) What non-linguistic factors contribute to student success in English content-based courses.

Methodology for Phase 1.

The first stage in researching learner needs consists of a needs analysis (Braine 2001, Dudley Evans and St. John 1998, Hutchinson and Waters 1987, Jordan 1997). Its purpose is to discover the needs, inadequacies and wants of the students. A needs analysis "is in essence a matter of asking questions about the target situation and the attitudes towards that situation of the various participants in the learning process" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p.59). Evans and St. John (1998) broaden that view:

The aim is to know learners as people, as language users and as language learners; to know how language learning and skills learning can be maximised for a given learner group; and finally to know the target situations and learning environment such that we can interpret the data appropriately (p. 126).

It was important to collect different types of data that would aid in obtaining a more in-depth understanding of the learners, of the target situation and the learning environment. Since a needs analysis "...makes use of both subjective and objective information" (Richards, cited in Jordan, 1997, p.20), a mixed methods approach was chosen. According to Creswell, "A mixed methods design is useful when either the quantitative or qualitative approach by itself is inadequate to best understand a research problem or when the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research can provide the best understanding" (2009, p. 18). Creswell further explains that in mixed methods research designs "the study begins with a broad survey in order to generalize results to a population and then, in a second phase, focuses on qualitative, open ended interviews to collect detailed views from participants" (Ibid). While the qualitative method facilitated obtaining more detailed and in depth data, the quantitative method allowed for obtaining data from a large number of people which "gives a broad, generalizable set of findings presented succinctly and parsimoniously" (Patton, p. 14). The data collection sources used in the first phase of the research were surveys and a focus group interview.

This first phase was aimed at exploring the perceptions of students who were taking a content-based course in English as well as the professors that taught English content-based courses. It included a student survey, a teacher survey and a focus group interview with the English content-based course professors. It was carried out from September 2006 to November 2007. In order to increase the consistency of the findings, methods triangulation was done by comparing the data collected from the quantitative (surveys) and the qualitative methods (focus group interview).

Description and selection of the participants

Phase I focused on students and teachers. The student population consisted of the students at Mindamar University who had taken a content-based

course in English during the spring semester of 2006 (April) and those who were taking a course in the fall (September). Neither grade level nor gender was considered. The teacher population that was surveyed and included in the focus group was comprised of all of those who taught an English content-based course in the spring and/or fall semesters.

Table 1 Instruments used in Phase 1

Type of instrument	Participants	N of participants	Type of data obtained
Focus Group Interview	Teachers of English content-based courses	6	Qualitative
Personal Interview	“ “ “	1	Qualitative
Student Survey 1	Students enrolled in English content-based courses	106	Quantitative and qualitative
Teacher Survey 2	Teachers of English content-based courses	11	Quantitative and qualitative

Focus Group Interview

A focus group interview was audio taped in order to collect information from the teachers. The focus group interview method was chosen as it is ideal for obtaining “high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others” (Patton, 2002, p.386). It was important that participants be able to hear each others’ responses to the questions so that they could make additional comments, and enrich the final data obtained. The structure of the focus group also encouraged comments on anything the teachers wished to express regarding their classes, the needs of their students, or the English program in general. All teachers of subject courses in English were invited to participate in the focus group interview, the topic was clearly explained and they all expressed their interest in participating. However, it was difficult to agree on a convenient date for them all, so a total of six teachers finally participated.

The specific questions for the focus group interview were as follows (also included in Appendix D):

- 1) What do you consider are the major weaknesses of your students’ oral abilities for their success in the classroom? Listening comprehension?

- 2) What adjustments do you make in your program to compensate for a student's weakness in a language skill, such as writing? What about speaking? Reading?
- 3) What qualities or skills have you seen in your students that may have helped them compensate for their initial lack of English skills and helped them get through your course successfully?
- 4) How do you feel about students coming into your classroom who don't have all the language skills you feel they need to be successful in your course?
- 5) What kind of reading skills would you like the students to have before going in to your course?
- 6) How would you describe your students' ability to organize their ideas on paper, in an outline or in an essay?
- 7) What kind of writing skills would you like the students to have before going into your course?
- 8) Is there any other skill or preparation you would like to see your students have before taking an English content-based course?

Interview

One of the teachers who was not able to attend the focus group interview asked to participate; therefore, a separate audio taped interview was held which covered the same questions as those discussed in the focus group.

Survey

I considered it was important to gather information from both teachers and students, since interpretation of needs may vary according to the perspective of each group. There are several methods by which needs analyses are conducted, the most common being through questionnaires, interviews, observation, data collection (gathering authentic texts and assignments), and informal consultations with sponsors, and learners (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p.58).

The advantage of questionnaires or surveys is that if they are given on a large scale, they help build an overall picture of students' perceived needs (Jordan, 1997, p. 33). Many researchers have used them successfully: Chan (1996), Ferris and Tagg (1996), Johns (1981), Nahla Bacha (1999), and Ostler (1980), just to mention a few.

Certainly criticism exists against the use of questionnaires – Horowitz questions whether the data really reflects “what the respondents do, what they think they do or what they want the researcher to think they do” (1986, p. 3). He also points out that instead of trying to discover the tasks or skills which are most important, surveys provide a “set of pre-conceived classifications, forcing on the respondents the particular scheme used in each survey” (Ibid). However, given the nature of the information needed for this investigation (i.e. self-assessment, personal attitude), the survey may prove beneficial in this particular situation.

Procedures

In order to obtain representative data from all the three schools (Communication, Administration and Human Ecology) efforts were made to select a number of participants proportional to the students enrolled in each school. The total number of possible participants was three hundred twenty-two (322). The sample chosen was approximately 40% of the population, which represented one hundred twenty-eight (128) participants and was considered a relatively representative sample.

The participants were found in seven different classrooms which I visited after receiving permission from the respective teachers. I then administered the survey personally over a period of 3 weeks. It took approximately 13 minutes to complete. Only in one class was the survey administered by the classroom teacher, at her request, following a detailed explanation on how to administer the survey. In another class, the teacher requested that the author explain the survey, but allowed students to turn it in at a later date. The number of surveys administered was 112, less than the desired amount, due to absences of students on the days the survey was administered. A total of 106 surveys were returned, as only three of the nine participants given the survey by a teacher and asked to turn in at a later date, actually turned them in.

The teacher population for this study totaled eleven. All of them were informed by the head of the English Department that they would be asked to cooperate with the study. They were individually given an introduction as to the purpose of the research and asked to fill out the survey. It took approximately 20 minutes to complete. The survey was also sent via email to facilitate its return by those who preferred to respond electronically. All of the eleven teachers completed and returned the survey.

Two of the surveys were parallel: Student Survey 1 and Teacher Survey 2 (see Appendixes A and B). Together they identified the gaps between the teachers' views of their students' language needs and the students' views. In addition, they provided data on the teachers' perceptions of the students' abilities in the language, and the students' own perceptions of their abilities. Part 2 of Student Survey 1 and Teacher Survey 2 were adaptations of the survey instrument used by Chan's (1996) study in Hong Kong with 748 students and teachers for rating the importance of language skills for their studies, as well as their perceived abilities in those skills. The type of questions formulated in this instrument helped to identify students' perceptions of their language needs and allowed a comparison with the opinion of their professors. Some modifications to Chan's questions were necessary for this study: for example, the original sections on Future Profession and Social/Private life were eliminated, maintaining only the section on Academic Studies, because the present study aimed at discovering the needs of the students only in relationship to the content-based courses they are required to take at the university. Another adaptation was to limit the length of the questionnaire as much as possible without sacrificing necessary data. The original version used scales of 1 – 6, while in the adaptation the scales were of 1 – 4, simplifying the answers. The options "quite important" and "don't know" were omitted from the rating scale of importance of skills; "quite good" and "don't know" were omitted from the self-assessment scales as well. The four main skills were preserved, however some of the sub-skills were replaced with others that were better suited to the types of activities in the Mindamar classroom.

Student Survey 1 consisted of three parts: Part 1 was a semantic differential which identified students' attitudes toward having to take courses in an English medium. Part 2 consisted of a question about several sub-skills under each of the four main language skills which students measured according to their perceived importance for success in their English content-based

courses. The students were also asked to rate their own abilities in those same skills. Part 3 of the student survey consisted of two open-ended questions:

What language skills do you wish you had developed more before taking a subject in English?

What kind of specific in-class activities would help you learn more English?

Responses to these questions could provide the English Department Director with information helpful to examine the syllabi of the Basic and English for Academic Purpose courses, as well as to inform the professors who teach content courses in English, to better adapt their teaching methods to the needs of the students.

Teacher Survey 2 consisted of 5 parts: Part 1 asked for the name of the course taught in English and the number of students. Part 2 corresponded with, and was the same as, Part 2 of the student version; where teachers rated the importance of specific language skills for their courses and at the same time, rated their students in each of those skills. In this part a question was added for teachers to rate the importance of the four major language skills needed for the English content courses. The question sought to obtain an overall vision of which language skills were most required of the students.

Part 3 requested teachers to rate the importance of more specific writing tasks that they required in their classrooms. The items for this section were based on tasks that were considered basic for any university student.

The question on rating the importance of the specific writing tasks was added due to a concern about the general low level in writing skills found among most of the students. The information obtained could directly feed into the curriculum of the English program.

Part 4 of the survey requested that teachers suggest, and then rate in order of importance, any non-linguistic factors they felt may influence student achievement in their courses. The purpose of this question was to understand what other factors contribute to a student's success, even if he/she may not have developed adequate linguistic skills. This information could be valuable when examining the requirements for enrolling in an English subject course.

Part 5 was added to the survey as a way of obtaining teacher's opinions as to what should be the required level of English, based on the Common European Framework (CEF), for enrolling a student in an English content-based course. This information could inform the English department when considering requirements for being allowed to take a content-based course in English, as the university is incorporating the scales of the CEF into its English program. The CEF provides a scaling of overall language proficiency, as well as a breakdown of language use and competences. There are scales provided for different types of communicative activities under the main skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing, as well a scale for overall production or comprehension in those main skills. The latter scale was chosen for this study as it encompasses those general skills required in an academic setting. The levels included in the survey were B₁, B₂, C₁ and C₂. (See Appendix B, Part V for detailed scales)

Analytical Categories and Operational Terms

The categories explain what is measured in each part of the survey and defines the scale used.

The semantic differential

The semantic differential was adapted from the "Teachers' Attitudes Toward Information Technology Questionnaire" written by Knezek and Christensen in 1998 which consisted of "newly constructed subscales using semantic differential items from Zaichkowsky's Modified Personal Involvement Inventory (1985) that focused on 'a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests.'" (Knezek, Christensen, Miyashita, Ropp, 2000). A semantic differential is a scale that consists of a series of five or more bipolar adjectives (opposites) and where the respondent is asked to rate his position on the scale. It is used to measure a person's attitude toward a concept (Hernandez, Fernandez & Bautista, 2003). Scale scores were produced by adding and then averaging the ten item responses for each individual. This produced a numeric index of the semantic differential perception of each person's attitude toward having to take courses in an English medium. The ten pairs of adjectives used for this study were the following: Table 2: Adjectives used in the semantic differential

Important	Unimportant
Boring	Interesting
Relevant	Irrelevant
Exciting	Unexciting
Means nothing	Means a lot
Appealing	Unappealing
Fascinating	Mundane
Worthless	Valuable
Involving	Uninvolving
Not needed	Needed

In this study, the instrument was intended to determine the students' attitudes towards having to take English content-based courses. In one of the more well known motivational theories called the Theory of Planned Behaviour mentioned by Dornyei (2001), "attitudes exert a direct influence on behaviour, because someone's attitude toward a target influences the overall pattern of the person's responses to the target" (p. 11). Generally speaking, a positive attitude may aid in the learning process, while a negative one may impede learning and students' attitudes toward a subject will influence their performance in the class. The more positive the attitude, the more students can be motivated to learn. Their attitudes toward English were important to compare with how they rated themselves in each of the different language skills.

Analytical Categories of items in Student Survey 1

Part 1) Students' attitudes toward English content courses: defined as how positively or negatively students felt about having to take a content-based course in English. It is measured on a semantic differential scale of 1 - 7, consisting of 10 pairs of opposing adjectives, which reflect attitudes ranging from very positive to very negative

Part 2 a) Students' perceptions of the importance of specific classroom tasks and language sub-skills: defined how important the student felt the task or sub skill was for success in his/her English subject course. This category was measured on a scale of 1 to 4; with 1 being the equivalent of very important

and 4 being the equivalent of unimportant.

Part 2 b) Students' perceptions of their own abilities in specific classroom tasks and sub-skills: defined as how a student rates his/her ability to carry out the tasks or mastery of the sub skill. This category was measured on a scale of 1 to 4; 1 being the equivalent of very good and 4 being the equivalent to poor.

Analytical categories of items in Teacher Survey 2

Part 2 a) Teachers' perceptions of the importance of specific classroom tasks and language sub-skills for their courses: The survey aimed at exploring how important the teacher felt the task or was for student success in their English content-based course. This category was measured on a scale of 1 to 4; 1 being the equivalent of very important and 4 equivalent to unimportant.

Part 2 b) Teachers' perceptions of their students' abilities in specific classroom tasks and sub-skills: defined as how a teacher rates his/her students' ability in carrying out the tasks or having mastered the sub skill. This category was measured on a scale of 1 to 4; 1 being the equivalent of very good and 4 being equivalent to poor.

Part 3) Teachers' ratings of the importance of specific writing tasks: defined as how important specific writing tasks are in his/her English subject course. This category was measured on a scale of 1 to 4; 1 being the equivalent of very important and 4 being equivalent to unimportant.

Part 5) Teachers' opinions of what should be the required level of English for enrolling in an English subject course: defined as which level of the Common European Framework (CEF) scale most closely approximates the level of English language that should be required by students before allowing them to enroll in an English content-based course.

Validity

This survey was adapted from a similar needs analysis done previously in Hong Kong by Chan (1996). In order to ensure validity for the adapted survey, prior to its elaboration, I gathered data from faculty and coordinators through

documents and interviews, which provided information about the types of tasks which were actually required in the different classrooms. In addition, I consulted with two professors from the school of communication (where the majority of the students study) regarding the length of the instrument. It was suggested to make it as short as possible, as they said that students were frequently asked to fill out questionnaires. The professors maintained that after the first page, students tended to answer the items in a careless way. Based on this information, the original section on English for Future Occupation was not included in the final version, as it consisted of an entire page. The scale was reduced from six options to four.

To check for construct and content validity, a pilot of the student survey was done with eleven participants representing the three different schools, who would not be in the main survey participation group. After students had completed the questionnaire, they commented on the design, content, wording and layout. An analysis of the data and comments from the students themselves resulted in certain modifications: inclusion of a Spanish translation for the more obscure terms in the semantic differential, the inclusion of Spanish instructions for each section, a Spanish translation for the tasks in the different skills section, and a rewording of the two questions in Part 3. Other minor modifications were also made in the layout. This information was considered in the preparation of the final version of the survey.

Reliability

In order to determine the internal consistency of Part 1 of Student Survey 1, the items were submitted to the SPSS program Reliability Analysis. The result was a Cronbach's Alpha of .89 for the ten item scale, lying in the range of "very good" according to the guidelines provided by Devellis (1991, p. 85). It was designed to measure students' feelings toward English subject courses: how positively or negatively students felt about having to take content-based courses in English.

Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to determine the internal consistency of the scales in Part 2 of Student Survey 1, which resulted in an alpha range of .525 for the listening importance rating, to a .858 for the writing rating. All but the lowest index lie in the range that would be considered at least minimally

acceptable according to the guidelines provided by Devellis (1991, p.85).

A reliability analysis for the scales of the teacher version of the survey was not done, considering that, being the same instrument as used for the students, the results of the reliability test could be applicable to the teacher version. It is designed to measure how students rate the importance of different language skills needed for success in their English subject courses, as well as a rating of themselves in each of those skills.

Data were analyzed using Null Hypothesis Significance Testing (NHST) which is used to detect whether differences between the ways groups respond are greater than what one would expect by chance alone.

Phase 2

Institutional Setting and Curriculum

By 2007 the Mindamar English program had evolved to where the Basic English courses were connected to the Common European Framework scales (CEF). The department had established that levels A2 and B1 should be reached during the courses (See Appendix D). The goals had shifted from an emphasis on the students being able to communicate socially and to achieve academically, to a more specific focus on academic achievement in career-related subjects and to professional use of English in the workplace. In 2009 the Basic English courses maintain the two levels of CEF scales, A2 and B1, but each one is subdivided: A2 part 1, part 2; B1 part 1, 2 and 3. According to the Guidelines for the Organization and Administration of Foreign Language Courses (Instructivo Para la Organización y Administración de Cursos de Idiomas Extranjeros) at Mindamar, a SLEP test must be taken by students upon completion of levels A2, part 1, B1 part 1 and B1 part 3 and a minimum grade achieved in order to pass to the next level (See Appendix E for Guidelines). However, the department has “found it was too difficult to connect the program to the CEF since they are just beginning to develop placement tests and understand the time frame for each level, which varies” (Email exchange between Coordinator and author of this study, Nov. 3 0/09). As a faculty member, I have observed that support has grown from within the schools for those Basic English courses in the last few years. In order

to facilitate attendance by avoiding scheduling conflicts with career related subjects in 2009, the schools agreed to change the Basic English courses to Saturdays.

There are two types of content-based courses offered in English. One type of course responds to certain general formation objectives set by the university, which try to develop a deeper social conscience in the students. The Academic Dean is responsible for the design of these courses. Social Responsibility and Contemporary Society are therefore obligatory courses in English that aid in fulfilling the general objective mentioned. Professional Presentations helps to develop professional skills that students in all academic programs can benefit from, and this, too, is obligatory. The second type of course is specific to each program and is placed in the curriculum as an elective. These are chosen through a process whereby the department head of each school consults with the Dean of the school and the Academic Dean of the university about the need for a particular course and a consensus is reached regarding the objectives and content of the course (See Institutional Documents in Appendix N). The responsibility for hiring teachers for those specific electives is now in the hands of each school. However the English Department is still responsible for language quality and orientation of new teachers who teach English content-based courses. The English for Academic Purpose course is still offered, but is not mandatory in all schools. (Source: English Department Head, Academic Dean Assistant)

Methodology

Phase 1 permitted me to identify the needs of the learners for success in the English medium classroom. Phase 2 was added to the study in order to discover the English language needs of the students in their potential workplaces. This phase was designed to answer the following questions:

- 1) What were the English language skills needed for the workplace in and around the major city where the study took place?
- 2) How were the Basic English and English content-based courses at Mindamar preparing students with those skills they were going to need for their possible future employment?

To answer these questions I continued with a needs analysis and chose again to use mixed methods, as qualitative and quantitative methods together could accommodate a large sample of the population, and facilitate an in-depth study of the questions included in a needs analysis. To obtain data regarding the language skills needed for the workplace it was necessary to gather data from several sources: the Basic English students, alumni, and companies who were established in the vicinities of the city. An adaptation of the survey used by Chan in 1996 in Hong Kong was employed (See Instruments below). Personal interviews were used in this study as the best source of information regarding how the courses at Mindamar were preparing students with the skills needed for the workplace. The interviews were held with members of the English Department, teachers of English content-based courses, Basic English professors, the different department heads, and the Academic Dean and assistant. It was important for me to get an overall feeling of the attitudes of the university community toward the English program, as well as determine if there was unity of vision.

Description and selection of the participants

The population consisted of companies established in the Ecuadorian city where the study was carried out; Alumni who had graduated after 2003 who had email addresses (both of these groups were able to provide information about what English skills are actually needed in the workplace); all the professors of Basic English courses, who could provide information about how their classes prepare students for the subject courses in English; all English content course faculty, who were able to provide information about the language skills students need for their subjects; all program department heads, Academic Dean and assistant, and the English Department personnel provided information about curriculum design related to the English content-based courses. I decided not to ask English content-based course students to participate in this part of the research, as they had already participated in Phase I of the study, but rather enlisted as participants the students who were taking Basic English courses, who could give their perception of what skills they thought they would need in the workplace.

*Data Collection**The instruments*

Table 3 Instruments used in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of study

Type of instrument	Participants	N of participants	Type of data obtained
<i>Phase 1</i>			
Focus Group Interview	Teachers of English content-based courses	6	Qualitative
Personal Interview	“ “ “	1	Qualitative
Student Survey 1	Students enrolled in English content-based courses	106	Quantitative and qualitative
Teacher Survey 2	Teachers of English content-based courses	11	Quantitative and qualitative
<i>Phase 2</i>			
Interview	Department heads, English content-based course teachers, Basic Eng. teachers, Eng. Department, Academic Dean and assistant	22	Qualitative
Student Survey 3	Basic English students	55	Quantitative
Alumni Survey 4	Alumni	69	Quantitative
Company Survey 5	Companies	15	Quantitative
Alumni Survey 6	Alumni with work experience	27	Quantitative and qualitative

Interviews.

Teacher and Administrator Interview

For the interview, the strategy chosen was a standard open-ended type which allowed me to focus on the information I required so that the time available could be used efficiently, and to facilitate the analysis by “making responses easy to find and compare” (Patton, 2002, p. 346). All four of the Basic English teachers were interviewed; of the ten professors giving a content-based course in English, I was able to interview nine. I was not able to reach the last of the teachers. (See Appendix J 1 through 5 for interview questions)

There was some overlap in the administrative participants. Of the eleven department heads of Mindamar, I was able to interview nine; only two were unavailable. One of the department heads was also teaching a subject; therefore she is counted only once. The three members of the English

Department were interviewed together. I did not interview separately the department head of the International Education career, as she participated in the interview of the English Department. The Academic Dean and assistant were also interviewed, for a total of 22 interviews.

Surveys

Student Survey 3 and Alumni Survey 4 were adaptations of the Chan questionnaire used in the first phase of the study. It was modified again to include only one question regarding student and alumni perceptions (respectively) of the importance of knowing English for their future profession (See Appendixes F and G). The question was subdivided into the skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing. Each question consisted of several tasks within the skills and was rated from 1 (most important) to 4 (no importance), using the same items as the survey in Phase 1.

Company Survey 5 (See Appendix H) was the same as Alumni Survey 4, except that the question was adapted in order to have companies provide information about the importance of English language skills needed for work in their company.

Alumni Survey 6 (See Appendix I) targeted alumni working in their fields who could provide information on the use of English in the workplace, based on their personal experience where they presently or previously had been employed. Instead of asking what their perception was of the importance of English for their future profession, the instructions requested that alumni base their answers on their actual experience in their present or previous employment. A question was also added to determine how often alumni used English in their jobs. A last section was added which consisted of three open-ended questions aimed at getting the participants' opinions about the value of the Basic English courses and/or content-based courses they had received during the time they were students at Mindamar. Participants were also invited to give suggestions for the improvement of the English program.

The questions were:

Have the Basic English or the content-based courses you received in English relating to your field of study helped you to acquire the English that you now use in your job?

If so, how have they helped you?

What suggestions do you have to improve the English program at the University? Procedures

The targeted population consisted of all students who were registered in a Basic English class at the time the study took place. This totaled 79 students in four different classes. Out of that number, 55 students were present on the days the survey was administered so there were 55 surveys administered and returned.

I had a list of 59 companies belonging to the Ecuadorian-Canadian Chamber of Commerce and a list of eleven others, provided by people related to Mindamar. I called all of the Chamber of Commerce companies, but only in nine cases was able to speak to someone who could help me (the head person in the Human Resources Department). In seven cases, they agreed to complete the survey. It was sent via internet and a total of fifteen companies filled out the surveys. Of those, four can be considered global companies, in addition to two travel agencies. The others were national companies.

For the alumni a total of 269 surveys were sent, with a note explaining the purpose of the study, but of those, 173 bounced and were never received by the alumni. Of the remaining 96 that did not bounce, 69 surveys were filled out and returned.

Whereas the Alumni Survey 4 asked recipients to answer based on their perceptions of what English would be needed for the workplace, (and many may have based their answers on their actual work experience) I felt it was necessary to obtain more data, given the small number of company responses. So I sent out another survey to alumni that had not been included in the original alumni group of recipients. This new survey (Alumni Survey 6) was identical to Alumni Survey 4, except that the question to request the recipient to answer what English was actually used by them on the job, based on their work experience was modified. I designed it online and sent it to a total of 187 alumni not included in the first group (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=udThkqjFQEGoRYj961kTEg3d3d> Alumni English for Professional Use)

It was decided to send it to recent graduates, hoping that their email addresses would be more up-dated and thereby reducing the number of bounced emails. A total of 51 bounced and were not received. Of the remaining 136 alumni, 27 responded to the online survey. The rest did not respond.

Analytical Categories and Operational Terms

The categories explain what is measured in each part of the survey and define the scales used.

Student Survey 3, Alumni Survey 4

One category: Students' perceptions of the importance of specific language tasks and language sub-skills: defined how important the student felt the task or sub skill was for success in his/her future profession. This category was measured on a scale of 1 to 4; (1 = very important, 4 = unimportant).

Company Survey 5

One category: Rating of the importance of specific tasks and language sub-skills. This is defined as how important the participant felt the task or sub skill was when considering hiring a professional to work for his/her company. This category was measured on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = very important, 4 = unimportant).

Alumni Survey 6

Category 1: Rating of the frequency of the four main language skills used in their employment. This is defined as how often reading, listening, speaking and writing were required on the job. This category was measured on a 3-tiered scale: never, sometimes or always.

Category 2: Rating of the importance of specific tasks and language sub-skills. This is defined as how important the participant felt the task or sub-skill was for his/her employment, present or past, based on his experience. This category was measured on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = very important, 4 = unimportant).

Reliability

In order to determine the internal consistency of the surveys aimed at the students, alumni and companies, a Cronbach alpha test was computed for the four different sections relating to language skills.

The scale measuring Reading in English consisted of 15 items which were designed to measure the importance that the respondents ascribed to reading English for their future profession ($\alpha = .74$). Listening to English consisted of 8 items ($\alpha = .73$), spoken English consisted of 5 items ($\alpha = .66$), and Writing in English consisted of 16 items ($\alpha = .83$). Participants responded to all of these items on a 4 point scale which ranged from 1 (very important) to 4 (no importance).

An alpha of .66 is considered acceptable, and anything above .7 is considered good according to the guidelines provided by Devellis (1991, p. 85).

Data were analyzed using Null Hypothesis Significance Testing (NHST) which is used to detect whether differences between the ways groups respond are greater than what one would expect by chance alone.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Phase I

Quantitative Results

Student Survey

Analysis of Semantic Differential responses by students (Part 1 of Student Survey)

In order to measure student attitudes towards having to take content-based courses in English, a semantic differential was elaborated. The results are included in Table 4. The table contains the means and standard deviations for the 10 items included in the instrument administered to the students. Four item pairs were listed in the opposite order (boring, meaningful, worth, need) with the “negative” adjective in the left-hand position, in order to ensure that the respondents do not simply place an X in all the right-hand blanks for an item. Hence the ratings were reversed (1 became 7, etc.) so that the values shown in Table 4 all coincide [1= most positive] (Knezek, p.27).

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviation for Semantic Differential Responses					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Means	Std. Deviation
Important	104	1	7	1.67	1.21
Boring	103	1	7	2.90	1.91
Relevant	97	1	7	2.18	1.29
Exciting	101	1	7	3.11	1.65
Means nothing	103	1	7	2.35	1.46
Appealing	103	1	7	2.91	1.68
Fascinating	103	1	7	3.39	1.72
Worthless	102	1	7	2.27	1.49
Involving	102	1	7	3.09	1.85
Not needed	102	1	7	2.00	1.69

In general, student ratings were positive for all items. Item means ranged from 1.67 to 3.39. It is interesting to note that “importance” of the English classes was rated the highest (meaning the lowest score). The mean rating across 104 students was 2.58 with a standard deviation of 1.15. A value of 2.58 is considered to be a positive overall perception, given that the scale ranges from 1 = most positive to 7 = least positive.

The curriculum is sufficiently challenging to them because they have positive attitudes toward the importance of the classes. At the same time, a less positive attitude can be seen toward the excitement and fascination for the courses or how involving they are.

Student perceptions of skills

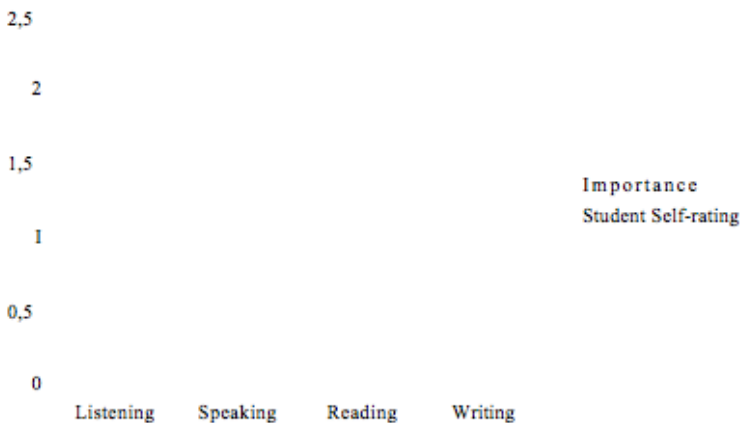
Students rated speaking as the most important skill (1 = very important, 4 = unimportant) for their classes, followed by listening, reading and writing, in that order. The specific tasks they considered most important were participating in class discussions (asking and answering questions), proper pronunciation and listening to instructions. Reading and writing tasks, particularly the more academic writing tasks, were considered least important, however no task was rated less than “important” on the scale. All of the top six tasks are in the area of listening and speaking and the top three are related to student participation in class discussions. However, students rated themselves slightly better at reading and writing than at most of the tasks involving speaking and listening. They gave themselves the lowest rating for listening and speaking for academic purposes (listening to lectures and making oral presentations). (See Appendix K for complete table of ratings of all tasks)

Table 5

Paired student responses regarding importance and self-rating of the four skills	T-test for			
Scale	<i>n</i>	Means	<i>t</i>	<i>sig</i>
Listening: Importance	99	1.65	3.17	.002
Student self-rating	99	1.82		
Speaking: Importance	99	1.48	6.30	.000
Student self-rating	99	1.91		
Reading: Importance	100	1.73	.85	.397
Student self-rating	100	1.78		
Writing: Importance	99	1.77	.85	.400
Student self-rating	99	1.83		

In order to see what differences existed between the importance a student placed on a skill and the perception of his ability in that skill, a paired t-test was done. As shown in Table 5, on the scale of listening, perceived importance vs. student rating of their own competence was significantly different ($p < .002$) ($t = 3.17, 98d\sim$), with students rating their ability lower than the importance they gave to the skill. In speaking, the difference was slightly more significant ($p < .000$) ($t = 3.17$), as students perceived their weakness greater than the importance they placed on the skill. The differences are of sufficient magnitude that they merit attention and consideration for possible program revision.

Figure 1. Comparison of student perception of importance and rating of skills



In Figure 1 the graphic comparison is shown between the way students perceived the importance of the skills for success in their classes (1 being very important and 2 being important), and the way they perceived their ability in each of the skills (1 is considered very good and 2 is considered good).

Teacher Survey

Faculty perception of skills

In Part 1 of the teacher survey, participants were asked to rate the importance of each of the four main language skills for student success in their courses. Responses averaged the following order of importance: listening and speaking as most important followed by writing and reading.

Table 6

Unpaired t-Test for Teacher Responses Regarding Importance and Student Rating of the 4 Skills

Scale	<i>n</i>	Means	<i>t</i>	<i>sig</i>
Listening: Importance	10	1.9	0.64	0.5
Rating of Students' abilities	10	2.15		
Speaking: Importance	10	1.67	1.56	0.13
Rating of Students' abilities	10	2.35		
Reading: Importance	11	1.94	0.83	0.41
Rating of Students' abilities	11	2.27		
Writing: Importance	10	2.18	1.13	0.27
Rating of Students' abilities	10	2.63		

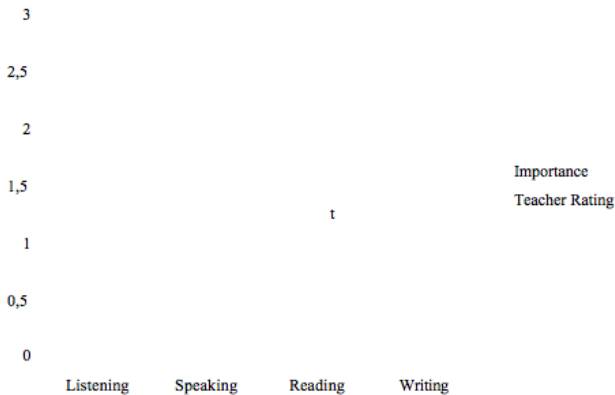
When asked to rate the skills again, but this time as specific language tasks, the order changed somewhat from the results of part 1. As shown in Table 6, teachers rated speaking as the most important skill (1 = very important and 4 = unimportant) for their classes, followed by listening, reading and writing, in that order. Teachers rated the importance of each of the four language skills higher than they rated the ability of their students in those skills, although the differences were not significant. The specific tasks rated by teachers as most important were speaking to participate in class discussions, giving oral presentations, and understanding oral and written instructions.

Although no skill task was rated "unimportant", the least important tasks were listening to lectures and writing summaries and essays. They rated their students highest in reading assignments and listening to discussions

and instructions. They rated their students lowest in all of the writing tasks. (See Appendix L for complete tables of specific task ratings).

Figure 2. Comparison of faculty perception of importance and rating of students' skills

In Figure 2 a graphic comparison can be seen between the way teachers perceived the importance of the skills for their classes (1 being very important and 3 being not too important), and the way they perceived their student's abilities in each of the skills (1 is considered very good and 3 is considered not very good). The difference between the two reveals the deficits that students have in those skills.



Faculty and student comparison of perceptions

Table 7 Comparison between Faculty and Students Perceptions of Importance of Skills

Scale importance	Means teacher	Means students
Listening	2	1.63
Speaking	1.65	1.48
Reading	1.93	1.73
Writing	2.17	1.75

Skills

As shown in Table 7, and graphically represented in Figure 3, the average student perceived importance across all skills is slightly higher than the average teacher perception (1= very important, 2 = important). Listening, speaking and reading were considered by both groups between “important” and “very important” on the scale used, while a difference in perceptions for the writing skill was reported. Teachers rated it as less than “important” on the scale used, whereas students rated it between “important” and “very important”.

Table 8 Comparison between faculty and student perceptions of rating of student skills

Scale Rating of Students	Teacher Means	Student Means
Listening	2.16	1.84
Speaking	2.34	1.91
Reading	2.28	1.76
Writing	2.62	1.79



Figure 4. Graphic Comparison between Faculty and Students of Rating of Students' Ability

How students rated themselves in the skills and how teachers rated the students differed, as shown in Table 8 and graphically displayed in Figure 4. For all four skills students gave themselves a higher rating than what the teachers gave them, meaning that students think they are actually better at those skills than what the teachers think (1= very good, 3 = not so good). In writing, students rated themselves almost an entire grade better than the teachers did. While students rated themselves with a grade close to “good”, the teachers rated them close to “not very good” at writing.

Faculty opinion about importance of different writing tasks

Table 9 Teachers' opinions of writing task importance

Task	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
Note taking	10	1.30	.483
Outlines	10	1.70	1.059
Summarizing, paraphrasing	11	1.73	.647
Short essays	11	2.00	1.000
Critical evaluation of readings	11	2.00	1.095
Reports and projects	10	2.00	.816
Form writing	10	2.10	1.197
Articles	10	2.90	1.197
Journal writing	11	3.09	.944
Research reports or term papers	10	3.10	.994
Long essays	10	3.30	.675

Informal conversations with six members of the faculty and administration before the initiation of this study indicated a concern about students' writing abilities, so in Table 9, I have reported the importance teachers gave to the more specific writing tasks. As shown in Table 9, the tasks considered most important by the teachers (1 = very important and 4 = unimportant) are note-taking, outlining, summarizing and paraphrasing. The least important were reported to be long essays, research reports and journal writing.

Table 10

Teacher opinion of minimum CEF level required to enroll in English content-based courses

Skill	CEF level	n
Overall oral production	B 1	1
	Lo B2	2
	Hi B2	2
	C1	3
Overall written production	B 1	4
	B2	1
	C1	2
	C2	1
Overall listening comprehension	Lo B1	1
	Lo B2	1
	Hi B2	1
	C1	5
Overall reading comprehension	B 1	3
	B2	3
	C1	2

Teachers were asked to choose a level of proficiency they considered minimum, based on the CEF scales, in order for a student to take an English content-based course. There was a scale for each macro language skill: overall oral production, overall written production, overall listening comprehension, and overall reading comprehension. The scales used were: B1 (lowest level considered for this study), B2, C1 and C2 (highest level). (See Appendix B for the detailed scales) Out of the eleven teachers who responded to the survey, nine of them answered this question and one answered in such a way as to render it invalid (marking all of the options). The results of the 8 valid teacher responses are shown in Table 10. As can be seen, no real consensus exists among the teachers regarding a minimum level, except for overall listening comprehension, which teachers expect to be at a C1. Over half the teachers would expect students to have at least a Hi B2 level in oral production. In written production, half of the teachers agreed that a B1 level should be reached before enrolling in an English medium course.

Phase I

Qualitative Results

The following is the data obtained from the focus group and the individual interviews held with the professors of Mindamar University, as well as the data from question 1, Part IV of the Teacher Survey and questions in Part 3 of the Student Survey. The data are arranged according to specific areas. If the answers of 25% of the participants coincided, I considered it a pattern. The data were triangulated and one source supported the other.

Professor perception of the students' language skill inadequacies: In analyzing the qualitative data, a pattern emerged that suggested that the fear of speaking is the main problem most of their students experience in the classroom, due in part to the fear of making mistakes and lacking the language necessary to make themselves understood. The following quote represents the professors' perceptions:

Angie: I think they [the students] lack vocabulary and think they are ashamed when they stand up and even if they had the preparation you can see they are desperate in their faces because they can't express what they think.

A strong pattern in the data indicates that the professors perceive that the students have weak writing skills, with particular problems in organizing their ideas on paper. All the professors (n=6) felt that their students were deficient that ability, requiring them to teach certain skills, such as paragraph writing, essay writing, or outlining, depending on their subject, in order to help students get through course assignments. The following quote summarizes the teachers' thoughts:

Gina: I don't think they are ready enough because they are new students and they come from high school, but they usually can't organize their ideas on paper not even in Spanish, they don't know how to write an essay and sometimes I think they know there should be an introduction and middle and a conclusion but they can't.

Regarding reading skills, the pattern showed that there was a consensus among the English faculty, that the students' reading skills were sufficient,

although some should be further developed. Perceptions about the necessary skills differed among teachers.

When students were asked what skills they wished they would have developed before taking a subject in English, a pattern emerged which showed that students (n=73) recognized that their language proficiency needed further development before they could take English content-based courses in their major. A pattern of insecurity in their speaking abilities was apparent. Speaking, including oral presentations, fluency, and pronunciation were the main concern of the majority of the participants.

Frustration: The feeling of frustration was a trait common in the English faculty participants and they reported on the frustration of the students themselves at having to deal with the lack of adequate language skills:

Gina: I think I feel as frustrated as they are because they can't [do] a good job and you can't demand more, because you know they can't and they try harder. I have seen students in my class who were almost about to cry, because they can't and I try to help them and I say take your time, think of other ways to say what you want to say, but it is so frustrating, they want to say, but they can't.

While feeling concern for the lower level language students, another pattern emerged which showed that the professors also had concerns for the learning opportunities for those students with higher level sub-skills.

Angie: You cannot do as much as you would if you had a class with the same level of the students. On the one hand you have the ones that have a poor level of English and then the other ones who have really good English..... You have to be in the middle so you can do more, have the same level of English

Blanca: You want to help them but you want to continue with the rest of the class, it's frustrating.

Faculty response to student language skill inadequacies. All teachers interviewed stated that in order to aid those students with target language skill deficiencies, they vary their instructional methods, by incorporating such learning activities as vocabulary contests, timed speaking, peer support, choice of topics and deadline extensions on written assignments and other

specific academic instruction where needed.

Student preparation for English content-based courses: The faculty participants agreed that essay writing was an important skill students should have before enrolling in the courses delivered in English. Other skills mentioned most frequently in the survey responses, were critical thinking, responsibility and the ability to work in groups.

In students' responses to their survey question regarding activities that would aid them to improve their English skills, speaking activities emerged as the most predominantly mentioned, including public speaking, debates and group discussions. These were followed by listening activities and finally writing activities in general and essay writing in particular.

Non-linguistic factors. Agreement was evident among the teachers that there are non linguistic factors that contribute to a student's success in the class despite him/her not having the expected level in English. The following quotes represent the English faculty consensus:

Angie: Motivation has a lot to do with it. When they are motivated and they really want to learn, then they really try hard even if they don't have the best English.

Katy: I feel that if they have the desire to be there and they see what is required of them and they want to do it, I want them there, because they have a drive that maybe some of the others don't even have who have the English level. Case in point, one of my students supposedly was too low for the class, but she was permitted to be there, and she finished it with a very high grade and I was very pleased with her performance. She did not hold back at all, she enjoyed the topic, she wanted to be there and I have seen that for years and years.

This belief that low level students can be successful if they have the will and motivation was also evident in the answers to question 2 of Part IV of the teacher survey (Question: Besides language skills, what other factors do you consider influential in determining a student's success in your course?), where participants mentioned such factors as motivation, enthusiasm, proactive personality and creativity as factors that contribute to a student's

success in the subject.

Proficiency testing, although not included in the questions for the interview, was a topic that was mentioned by the majority of those professors interviewed. The faculty (n=5) agreed that the testing process students go through to determine their readiness for subject courses is not adequate. The following quote is representative of the thoughts of those five professors:

Angie: I just think they should have an oral interview, the oral test before they go to – like the SLEP test, for our class they should have it. I know that among our students, some people are not prepared to take English classes. They need to be in Basic English”.

Katy: (Referring to a student who did well in the class) “...he’s bad in grammar and in some of the things that proficiency tests test and he’s bad at that, so those are the kinds of people that are not being adequately tested with the proficiency or standardized test [s] and don’t let us see the whole picture. And, on the other hand we may see someone who is really good at taking those tests but he’s not doing well in the class. That would be an interesting table - to compare their score and then their grades in the class and see how they change. .

Phase 2

Quantitative Results.

One of the ways the university can help to prepare students for the workplace is to identify those English language skills and tasks employers require on the job. With this information the university can adapt its curriculum to fulfilling student needs for language skill development.

Students, alumni and companies were asked to rate the importance of different language tasks for their future professions or workplaces. The results have been summarized in the following table.

Table 11

Comparison of language tasks considered important by students, alumni and companies

Language Skill	Students	Alumni	Companies
Reading	Emails Information from Internet Messages Letters	Email messages Reference books Reports Magazines/journals	Email messages Faxes Legal documents
\Listening	Work abroad Movies and films On the telephone	Work abroad Meetings On the telephone Oral presentations	Work abroad Meetings Oral presentations
Speaking	Conferences Seminars	Telephone Conferences Meetings	Telephone Conferences Meetings Email messages
Writing	Letters CV's	Email messages Letters Internet	Letters Internet

As can be seen, there are a number of language tasks that are going to be needed for the future professions of the Mindamar students, and therefore merit the attention of university faculty and English Department as they may want to consider them in curriculum planning (See Appendix M for descriptive statistics).

The perceptions of the company representatives and alumni coincided on most of the tasks considered important for the workplace, whereas students' answers differed somewhat in each major skill. This might be expected, as many of the students are not yet employed and may not have had work experience to know what language tasks are needed on the job.

Table 12

Comparison of importance of language skills between students, alumni and companies

Basic English Students / Alumni								
	<i>n</i> students	means	Stand. Dev.	N alumni	means	Stand. Dev.	~	<i>p</i>
Reading	55	1.72	0.79	69	1.96	0.96	1.5	.13
Listening	55	1.45	0.09	69	1.66	0.11	11.34	<.0001
Speaking	55	1.61	0.08	69	1.61	0.08	.06	.94
Writing	55	1.60	0.12	69	1.90	0.13	13.6	<.0001

Companies and Alumni

	<i>n</i> companies	means	Stand. Dev.	N alumni	means	Stand. Dev.	~	<i>p</i>
Reading	15	2.17	0.09	69	1.96	0.96	0.81	0.42
Listening	15	2.20	0.08	69	1.66	0.11	18.2	<.0001
Speaking	15	2.29	0.05	69	1.61	0.08	31.7	<.0001
Writing	15	2.39	0.08	69	1.92	0.13	31.7	<.0001

Companies and Basic English Students

	<i>n</i> companies	means	Stand. Dev.	N students	means	Stand. Dev.	~	<i>p</i>
Reading	15	2.17	0.10	55	1.72	0.79	2.19	0.0320
Listening	15	2.20	0.08	55	1.45	0.09	18.2	<.0001
Speaking	15	2.29	0.05	55	1.61	0.08	31.7	<.0001
Writing	15	2.39	0.08	55	1.60	0.12	31.7	<.0001

The overall language skills were measured on a scale of 1 to 4, from very important (1) to unimportant (4). As shown in Table 11, among the three groups surveyed, Basic English students perceived the general use of English skills as being more important for their future professions, with an overall means of 1.60. Alumni rating for all skills averaged 1.78 and companies' ratings averaged 2.26.

T tests were carried out to compare student perceptions regarding the skills they thought they would need for their future employment to those responses given by alumni and the companies. The results showed significant differences between students and alumni responses for listening and writing skills ($p < .0001$) (Refer to Table 11). Students rated those two skills as more important for the workplace than the alumni rated. There was no reliable difference between the two groups for the skills of reading and speaking.

Between companies and students the significant differences were in the skills of listening, reading and writing, the students having rated those skills as more important than the companies. There was no reliable difference between the two groups for the reading skill as shown on Table 11. But given the order of importance of each major skill reflected by each group, the main difference evident between students and the other two groups with work experience, is that students feel they will have more writing to do in their profession than what they actually may have to do. Again, the university may want to address these differences in order to give students a more realistic view of the needs of their possible future places of employment.

Phase 2

Qualitative Results

In this section of the research study I will report results from the qualitative data sources, which were interviews held with the content-based course teachers, the Basic English teachers, members of the English Department, department heads of the different schools of the university and the Academic Dean and Assistant. The thematic patterns that emerged from the data were the perceptions of the participants regarding the: 1) Purpose of the Basic English Courses; 2) Motivation and attitude of the students; 3) Language skills needed for content-based courses; 4) Basic English courses as preparation for content courses; 5) Purpose of English content-based courses and how classes achieve those purposes; 6) Skills needed for workplace; 7) Language objectives for content-based classes; 8) Student readiness for the content-based courses. The thematic patterns were based on consensus of 25% of each group of participants. The data was triangulated and one source supported the other.

Purpose of Basic English courses. The purpose of the Basic English courses, according to the English Department, is both to aid students to achieve academically in subjects related to academic programs and to improve their use of English for their professions and the workplace. Three of the four Basic English teachers interviewed thought the purpose of the Basic English courses was to help students achieve social interaction in English, and to gain confidence speaking. One of the teachers stated it in terms of helping to prepare students to take content-based courses in English.

There was a pattern of absence regarding how the Basic English courses prepare students for the content courses; however it was made clear that students get a lot of listening and reading experience.

Motivation and attitude of students. All of the Basic English teachers agreed that their students do not really like the courses, and see them only as requirements. The following quotes reflect their feelings:

Jorge: I think that they are hard working; it's just that they have so many constraints, time, other subjects; the idea that English is only another subject, not a language; that affects a lot.

Grace: In general they don't like English because they need some credits; they need some points in order to finish their academic program. So, it's not that they come to English and they are really interested to learn. They're not at all."

The students in the Basic English courses are those who never had English classes before or had them but never learned much. Many adolescents and adults feel that it isn't possible to learn a language after childhood. Since it is difficult to learn a new language, and if a person does not have some reason for learning it, there is no motivation. Teachers must help students find a reason and thereby increase their motivation to learn (Dornyei, 2001).

An example of what teachers can do to motivate their students was seen in one response in this study. It refers to a pilot strategy of the English Department to aid in the learning process. This semester one teacher began using portfolios with her students and reported that she saw positive results as students became aware of their own learning processes and could measure their own learning. She mentioned that this has been motivating for them and has given them hope, even to those who never thought they could learn English. She reported:

Irina: I remember she (one of her students) has never seen English and every time she registered for the course, she left. Now doing this, she gets happy, she said she realized she knows this.

Language skills needed for content-based courses. The consensus among all those interviewed was, that although all four of the language skills are necessary in a classroom, speaking is the most important skill that the students will need in a content-based course in English. They felt that more than anything else, they need confidence to speak and interact.

Purpose of English content courses. The English Department views content courses as a means of giving students the ability to participate in the professional discourse of their fields. Faculty also agreed with the view of the English department, and added that the classes seem to help students develop their communicative skills in English, to lose their fear of speaking in public and to boost their confidence, especially in classes such as Professional Presentations. As they read, write, discuss and hear about topics relating to their profession students become more functional in the language.

Another pattern of response was reflected in the comments on the role of other activities such as reading, analyzing and, in some classes, writing, which broaden student's vocabulary and strengthen their English. The following quotes represent the faculty point of view:

Amy: Doing a lot of writing, doing a lot of reading, they need advanced reading comprehension. Many in Ecuador can read but they don't understand what they are reading, and so you have to push them to learn to analyze, to comprehend, but they need to be able to explain in clearly and succinctly, because Spanish is a language that likes length, and so you have to understand the cultural difference between one and the other, and that when you are writing English and you are trying to make it long, all you do is make it confusing.

Janet: You improve their vocabulary and just the fact that you are doing it in a different language, and therefore from a different cultural/point of view, makes them somewhat more sophisticated. It makes them be able to step out of this one block where they've been raised and look at things from a different angle. And that has a great value for their personal development and for their academic development as well.

The pattern that emerged from the responses of the department heads was the desire to help the students become more proficient in English through

constant usage in order to equip them with the vocabulary needed in their professions and to give them world - cultural knowledge so they can be prepared to conduct business on a world-wide level and access information related to their professional careers. Another pattern indicated that by offering specific career-related subjects, students become aware of the opportunities they have as English speakers to access information in their fields, which may aid them in understanding the role English plays in their professions.

Antonio: *Yo creo que cada vez es más importante que los alumnos salgan con un manejo apropiado del inglés por que los negocios ahora son los de la comunicación. Las empresas de la comunicación ya están globalizadas, les tocará recibir mucho material en inglés, les tocará participar en reuniones donde se hablará en inglés y no pareciera ser por ninguna parte que esto se venga para atrás, cada vez va a ser más necesario la utilización del inglés, por la misma regionalización de las empresas*” [I believe that it is becoming more important for students to be able to manage in English because business is now about communication. The businesses in communication are now globalized, they have to receive a lot of material in English, they will have to participate in meetings where English will be spoken and it seems that in no way is this going to be reversed; it will increasingly be necessary to use English, due to the regionalization of business]

Mónica: *Yo creo que en este mundo globalizado, manejar un segundo idioma, y en este caso inglés, es indispensable para el desarrollo profesional de las chicas, entonces es afianzar, es dar las herramientas para desenvolverse en un mundo global.*” [I believe that in this globalized world, managing a second language, in this case English, is indispensable for the professional development of the girls: so it is consolidating, it is giving them the tools to be able to function in a global world]

Alberto: *Bueno yo creo que desde nuestro modelo pedagógico educativo de por qué enseñar, una de nuestras metas es enseñar a nuestros estudiantes a funcionar en el mundo de hoy y una de las características que te pide tanto a nivel profesional y casi a nivel personal es manejar un segundo idioma, manejar el inglés específicamente. Entonces si nuestra meta es prepararlos de la mejor forma posible para funcionar en el mundo con las características que tiene actualmente, el inglés está incluido indispensablemente en el currículo.*” [I think that from our

educational pedagogical model of why we teach, one of our goals is to teach our students to function in the world today and one of the characteristics required on a professional level and on almost a personal level, is to handle a second language, handle English specifically. So if our goal is to prepare them in the best way possible to function in the world with the characteristics that it now has, English is indispensably included in the curriculum.]

Skills needed for the workplace: Three members of the English Department, faculty and administrators generally thought that the skills needed for the workplace were to be able to read professional articles, interact with professionals in English, participate in training, participate in teamwork, attend international conferences, read manuals, read and write emails. Among the department heads, a pattern emerged placing great importance on reading material in their fields. They all felt that speaking was important, particularly for professional presentations, and that career related vocabulary would be needed. Another pattern of response from this group indicated that good writing skills are necessary preparation for content-based courses. The most representative quote follows:

Lady: *Yo creo que van a necesitar de todo, depende del trabajo que van a tener pero yo creo que lo más importante es poderse comunicar, oralmente y también por escrito, es decir, tal vez no escritura académica pero si poderse comunicar formalmente en inglés. Es sumamente importante, me parece que ellos puedan leer en inglés, porque hay muchas lecturas en inglés, hay artículos que se redactan en inglés. Ellos sabiendo inglés podrán informarse. Entonces yo creo que hablar y poder leer textos escritos tanto académicos tanto de revisar información les sirve bastante*" [I believe that they are going to need everything; it depends on the job they are going to have but I think that most important is to be able to communicate orally, but also in writing. Maybe not academic writing, but be able to communicate formally in English. It is very important – I think they should be able to read in English, because there are a lot of readings in English, there are articles that are written in English. Knowing English they can stay informed. So I believe that speaking and reading written texts, academic as well as reviewing information, is quite useful for them]

In addition to the skills that emerged in the mentioned patterns, the different academic programs had their unique skill requirements. It is important to state them here as a way of informing the university, so these specific needs

may be addressed in the curriculum design. For the Educational Psychology and Child Development programs, it was important that the students going into the field of teaching be bilingual and competent in all the language skills, as most preschools offer bilingual education. For the Marketing and International Business programs, the Department Head pointed out that graduates would need the ability to make professional oral presentations, present projects and have well developed writing skills. For students studying Social Management [Gestión Social] and Public Relations, they will also need to present social project proposals in English. In the Social Communication program, students will need to read briefs in English and translate them to Spanish.

Among the content teachers, a pattern emerged regarding reading skills that prepare students for accessing information on the web and reading reports. The following quote represents this perception of this group of teachers:

Maria José: It's an international world – they need to be able to read the emails, search the web for products or services, or whatever, and communicate with the people worldwide in terms of business, and I would think since this is a communications school, an expensive private university, that business would be where some of these people are going – business or politics- and they need to communicate internationally.

A second pattern among the faculty responses emerged relating to other skills needed for the workplace that included speaking as a necessary skill, specifically communicating ideas clearly and professionally to others. The ability to write emails, reports and proposals also revealed a pattern.

Language objectives for content-based classes: Although specific language objectives are not required from the content-based course professors, over half of the teachers stated in the interviews that they set their own personal language objectives for their classes, according to the needs of the students. The objectives were closely linked to student weaknesses mentioned by the teachers, so those perceived weaknesses will also be included here. Most teachers felt that the major weakness among students was their speaking ability, fluency, and thinking in English, while others agreed that writing was their major weakness. Teacher perceptions of students' weaknesses depended on the subject they were teaching. Half of the teachers affirmed that student

vocabulary levels weren't sufficient. Some of the language objectives set by the teachers were: writing an outline, writing an essay, writing a paragraph, and specific vocabulary goals.

Janet: I have basic vocabulary goals – I incorporate certain vocabulary. I try to elevate their vocabulary... I try to use college level vocabulary. I don't talk down to them... Also I try to teach a paragraph- what it is.

María Gracia: I specifically try for them to learn how to write an essay, to write a report. When you write English you are different than when you write in Spanish.”

Student readiness for the content-based courses. Teachers were unanimous on this topic. They felt that anywhere from 20% to 40 % of their students weren't ready for an English content-based course, with some students barely able to express themselves in English. Because of the inadequacies in the target language skills, many of the students are not able to take advantage of the course itself, the struggle with the language being their main concern.

Arturo: About half of my students are really ready to take my class and the other half really struggle. They sit there in class kind of looking around at each other, they won't participate...

Rosa: I will be very careful giving percentages, but I feel that 30 or 40 % of my class are students that barely passed the English test to be in an English class.

Maria Gracia: Because the whole class is around studying the issues and then expressing an opinion about it. I ask them the typical questions: what did we see in the movie, what were the facts, but after that there's always a discussion, there's opinion, there's presentations, on what do we do about this and they can't express what they are feeling and they lapse into Spanish because they are frustrated, they are really frustrated that they can't explain themselves in English.

The pattern that emerged from the department heads was similar; that all students who enroll in a course should have enough language skills to be able to perform the required tasks in the class, and that some students do not feel confident enough in English to be taking the courses.

Antonio: *Hay un tema que es poco de fondo que tiene que ver con la clasificación de los alumnos con el examen que ustedes toman. Hay muchos alumnos que a pesar de sacar un buen resultado en el examen no se sienten seguro en la conversación y se les obliga de acuerdo al porcentaje a tomar ciertas materias. Yo creo que debería haber un poco mas de flexibilidad en eso o algún otro tipo de examen que nos permita saber de verdad, que para el alumno no sea una tortura ir a estas clases de inglés sino que sea que vayan aprendiendo de acuerdo a su proceso.* [There is a subject that is a little deep and has to do with the classification of the students on the exam that you give. There are a lot of students that, although [they are] getting a good grade on the exam, don't feel confident conversing and they are obliged to take certain subjects according to the grade they get. I think there should be more flexibility in that or some other type of test that will show the truth, so that for the student it not be a torture to go to the English classes, but rather they learn according to their process]

The Academic Dean and Assistant felt that some students were not prepared for the courses and that something should be done to ensure that the students get the necessary preparation before taking them.

Alberto: *El sentido común me dice que debe ser una materia donde el alumno sea capaz de interactuar con su Profesor y sus compañeros, Porque si no va a ser frustrante para él, para sus compañeros y el Profesor... yo creo que debemos velar Por que el alumno que ingresa a una materia tenga todas las herramientas para poder desenvolverse bien en esa materia o sino no tendrá mucho sentido.* [Common sense tells me that it should be a subject where the student is able to interact with his professor and his classmates, because otherwise it will be frustrating for him, for his classmates and the professor... I think that we should make sure the student who takes a course has all the tools so he can do a good job in that subject, otherwise it wouldn't make much sense.]

The English Department representatives agreed that students who are going from Basic English into content courses lack vocabulary and fluency. They recognize that teaching the courses can be difficult with lower level students. Another pattern of concern emerged in their responses regarding grading issues that a lack of language skills posed for them, in cases where students have the knowledge, but due to language limitations, are not able to express themselves, to give the answer, or to complete the assignment, in English.

The following quotes express their feeling.

Maria Gracia: So me, as a teacher, I'm stuck with this student that I know is doing his best effort but still, if I compare him or her to some other student in the class that can stand up and talk and express themselves, it's not fair, the grading part, its difficult, because then, how do you do it? I try to grade based on effort and improvement, throughout the whole course, but at the end, if this class will have a second part, even though none of them do, but if that were the case, the next teacher will probably kill you because some of them will probably be great and some not. But, I cannot fail the student that was allowed to get into the class. I cannot do it. It wouldn't be fair to the student and that's a problem we will always have."

Arturo: Sometimes I don't know if I should grade them all on the same scale, is that fair, is it not fair, should I pass somebody that didn't really fulfill the objectives because of the language deficiency?

In this Phase, as in Phase I, teachers questioned the proficiency test used by the University as a means of deciding the readiness of the students to enroll in a content-based course. Again, there was a consensus among teachers as well as among department heads, that the present cut off grade of the SLEP test is an inadequate determinant of a student's readiness to take subject courses in English.

María José: When I took the job here for social science class they gave me stacks of papers about pedagogy, about how it has to be communicative, that they have to talk, they have to produce, and the SLEP is letting people in who can't produce a sentence, a single sentence. It's one thing to read but it's a totally different thing to produce your own sentence.

Arturo: Another possibility is just don't let anybody take a subject until they have at least a 65 or even 70 percentile in the SLEP test. And so if we force, if we force students to get at least one or two subjects before they graduate, then they have to get a 70 percentile by their 3rd year, somehow, someway, inside or outside the university it is their responsibility to do that. I think that would be healthy because this is a, this is a good university, I think that they, I think our students can do that.

A pattern emerged among administrators regarding what could be done to help students prepare for the courses. The suggestion was an addition of intermediate or conversation courses. Roxana's comment represents the groups' consensus:

Roxana: *Yo sentiría que no, no hemos encontrado una respuesta y que a lo mejor lo que falta es algo intermedio después de los cuatro niveles de inglés y antes de tirarlos a la piscina con los tiburones algunos cursos que los ayuden a ser un poco más flexibles, no sé si unos cursos de conversación como antes había en las academias, no lo sé, pero ahí siento que hay un hueco que no hemos solucionado y que debe pensar.*" [I feel like we haven't found an answer and that probably what is missing is something intermediate, after the four basic levels of English and that before we throw them into the pool with the sharks, some courses that would help them be a little more flexible; I don't know, some conversations courses like they used to offer in the academies. I don't know, but I feel like there is some vacuum that we haven't solved yet and should be thought out.]

Role of non-linguistic factors in success: The English Department teachers and coordinators all agreed that success in the courses is not only dependent on language skills, but is also related to personality and motivation. Students who are willing to make the effort and are motivated can get by, sometimes even better than students with more developed language abilities.

Janet: I believe it is more a personality problem than it is a knowledge problem. There are kids who have outgoing self-confident personalities and have very poor language skills but they don't let themselves be defeated by that and therefore they improve a great deal.

The following are results from three open-ended questions included in Alumni Survey 2, which sought to determine: 1) If the different English content-based classes or the Basic English courses, have helped the students acquire the English they now use in their jobs; 2) how those courses helped them in their work and, 3) what suggestions the participants had for improving the English program at Mindamar.

Of the twenty students who took courses and responded to that question, eleven felt the course or courses taken did help them and nine felt they

didn't. Of the eleven who answered the question regarding how the courses helped, a pattern could be seen where eight students felt that fluency was improved through practice, oral presentations and the acquisition of more career related vocabulary.

Although there were several different suggestions (22 alumni responded), a pattern was clearly seen where eight students suggested more opportunity to learn career-oriented English, and another pattern of 7 responses suggesting there be more speaking practice.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

What follows is the general discussion based on the results of both phases of the present study according to the research questions:

1. What language skill needs do students need to be successful in an English content-based course?
2. What are the English language skills that are needed for the workplace?
3. How are the Basic English Courses preparing students with the language they need for the content-based courses in English?
4. How are the Basic English and English content-based courses at Mindamar preparing students with those skills they were going to need for the workplace in a large Ecuadorian city?
5. How can the target language skills of the students in the study be described?

The results of Phase I showed that both faculty and students have agreed in general that speaking and listening skills were the most important requisite language skills for success in their content-based courses. Although there were some differences regarding specific tasks due to the differences among courses and teachers, in general, skills such as being able to understand the English spoken in the classroom and use basic academic vocabulary, being able to ask and answer questions and participate in class discussions, as well as being able to make oral presentations, were considered important by all.

Despite the importance given to oral skills, students and teachers felt that students had inadequacies in speaking and listening. This difference between the importance placed on the skill, and student development of the skill, reflects language deficiencies among students, and clearly shows there are strong needs for improvement in the areas of speaking and listening. The

qualitative data gathered from the teachers supported those quantitative results and also shed light on deficiencies in student written abilities. The difference between the importance teachers gave to the skills and the way they rated their students, indicates a need for more development in written skills, particularly the ones considered most important by teachers: note-taking, outlines, summaries and short essays. The results of this study suggest that these needs should be addressed when revising the curricula for content-based courses and particularly for the English for Academic Purpose course.

Although teachers initially rated the importance of such skills as listening, speaking, writing and reading, in that order, when asked about specific language sub-skills within each main skill, the order of importance was changed: first in importance was speaking, followed by listening, reading and writing. The reason for this could be that in the second question the teachers were required to focus on specific tasks and therefore they reflected more on what actually is done in the classroom. Therefore their answers to the second part of the survey were perhaps more realistic than their answers to the first general question about the importance of each major skill.

It is interesting to note that students rated all skills as more important than teachers, even though the difference was minimal for speaking and reading. The reason may be that the skills present a challenge to students, and this may cause them to exaggerate their perception of skill importance. The consensus between the two groups was that students were stronger in the receptive skills (listening and reading) and weaker in the productive skills (writing and speaking). This is not unusual, as productive skills in any language are more challenging than the receptive skills. However, the biggest gap between perceived importance of a skill and the rating of students' abilities in the skill was found for speaking. Being that the productive skills are necessary for a student's full participation in the classroom, this need requires the attention of the university to find ways to improve student oral production so they can be ready for the demands of the content-based courses offered in English. The mismatch in how a student perceived his ability and the importance he placed on the skill may also be a cause of the frustration of students mentioned by teachers during the focus group interview and therefore merits attention from the professors.

On the other hand, students perceived themselves to be better in all the skills compared to how the teachers rated their students in those skills. This difference was particularly significant in the area of writing. The student's higher perception of their writing performance may be the result of being misled by their professor's encouragement and believing that they are better writers than they really are (Hamp-Lyons, 2000). However, in spite of target language skill inadequacies, the majority of students in general have a positive attitude toward taking content-based courses in English. The results suggest that student perception of the importance of the courses seems to contribute to this positive attitude.

Regarding the proficiency levels expected by faculty, in none of the skills was there found to be unanimity among the opinions of the teachers regarding the English level they expected students to have before taking the English content-based courses they taught at Mindamar. There was a consensus among a majority of the teachers only regarding the level for listening comprehension, which placed it at a C1 level (according de CEF levels) which means that teachers expected students to be able to understand enough to follow extended speech or abstract and complex topics beyond their field of study, recognize idiomatic expressions and follow extended speech even when not clearly structured (Council of Europe, p. 66). Since teachers will use different methodologies for different content-based courses, some requiring more of one skill than another (such as Professional Presentations, one of the courses offered, which requires very little writing but a lot of oral presentation) this could explain in part the absence of consensus for the other requisite language skills.

However, if the university is planning on using the CEF levels as indicators of progress, it seems that a minimum level should be established for each skill as a requirement for the content-based courses. This way, the Basic English courses and any other course that may be necessary for students to develop the necessary language skills, can include realistic objectives that tie in with the overall objectives of the university English program.

Instruments used in Phase 1 gathered information that indicates how language and skills are used in one target situation (the English content-based classroom). But, since the objective of the university is to prepare students to work in their future professions, some of which will include

the use of the English language, an additional target situation needs to be considered if the university is to fulfill its purpose. By having expanded the study to include a second phase that sought to identify the language needs of the workplace, it was possible to gather information about how language and skills are used in the possible places of employment of the students of Mindamar. This data may aid the university in making curricular decisions based on both established educational and professional needs.

In Phase 2, the data from the surveys given to representatives from the companies which require some level of English usage (n=15), in the region where the study was carried out, together with the data from the alumni survey, revealed a pattern regarding the language tasks important on the job. Listening comprehension is needed for attending meetings and oral presentations, as well as work related activities abroad. Speaking skills for talking on the telephone, in meetings and conferences are needed. Emails, faxes, and reports have to be read and understood and an employee will need to have adequate writing skills in order to compose emails and letters and perhaps reports. Important writing abilities required for the classroom seen in Phase 1 overlapped with those of the workplace and/or future profession of the students, where the writing requirements entail the organization of one's thoughts and their coherent expression. This is developed through practice of those same skills required in the classroom – outlining, summarizing and essay writing. So as can be seen, some of the educational as well as professional needs can be satisfied simultaneously. All three groups surveyed considered work abroad as an important possibility in their professions.

It was interesting to see that despite the consensus on what tasks/skills were most important, companies and alumni differed as to how much importance they placed on those skills. Alumni clearly placed more importance on each language skill than the companies did. The difference may possibly be attributed to the fact that the number of companies in the sample was small so the responses may not actually be representative of the majority of companies in the city. Some companies in the city require no English language skills whatsoever, as I was informed many times on the phone while obtaining data for this study. On the other hand, it may be that more alumni are in jobs that do use English – perhaps because of the academic orientations of Mindamar, with programs such as marketing, international business, communication, and international education.

According to the comments made by the administrators and faculty at Mindamar during the interviews as to what skills would be important for the workplace, they generally coincided with company representatives and alumni responses, although the administrators and faculty did place more importance on the need to have a more professional level of English and career related vocabulary. However, company representatives and alumni specifically stated that speaking on the telephone was very important for the workplace, and it was not mentioned by those interviewed at the university. This particular skill differs from other speaking skills where those involved are physically in the same place. Phone communication lacks the advantage of being able to read body language and gestures to aid in communication. Phone communication requires much more dependency on pure speaking ability and listening comprehension, including different accents, regional jargon, etc. If the university seeks to prepare students for the workplace, then it may have to put more emphasis on authentic speaking and listening skill development.

It does appear that the university is aware of most of the English language needs for the workplace. And many of the skills needed for the workplace seem to coincide with the classroom needs. It would be important to ascertain if this knowledge of language needs is taken into consideration when designing content for each of the courses offered in English as well as the Basic English and English for Academic Purpose courses.

Based on both the quantitative and qualitative results of Phases 1 and 2 of this study, it would seem that the English content-based courses contribute to fulfilling at least some of the needs discovered in this study, both for classes at the university as well as for the workplace. The content-based courses in the curriculum specific to each school are related to their respective academic programs, so students are taught some vocabulary related to specific professions and become familiar with some specific terminology. It was seen how those content-based courses, together with the inter-school core curriculum courses, provide students with speaking opportunities to increase their fluency and help them overcome their fear of speaking. The reading, analyzing and some writing required in those courses help broaden student vocabulary and strengthen overall English proficiency. The Intercultural Management course for the Political Science and International Relations programs includes a specific objective to “develop the skills and knowledge to communicate effectively in intercultural settings” (See Appendix N). Just

the fact that a class is conducted only in English in itself may seem to help improve language skills to some degree, regardless of the level with which students begin the course.

Nevertheless, a college level course requires having certain language-related academic skills already developed to a point, as the teaching of those skills is not included in the curriculum of the content-based courses, which focus on just that – content (the exception to this is the Oral Presentations course, where there is a focus on oral language skills). In both phases of this study faculty members made it clear that they expect students to have acquired certain language-related academic skills prior to taking an English content-based course, skills such as outlining, writing coherent paragraphs and essays and having knowledge of basic academic vocabulary, in addition to some oral fluency.

According to results from Phase 2, the main objective of the Basic English courses is to prepare students for academic achievement in subjects specific to academic programs and the use of English professionally, although three of the four teachers were not aware of the specific goals set by the English Department. It seems that the Basic English courses achieve this aim to a certain degree, but not enough to prepare the students satisfactorily for the content-based courses. For example, all faculty members interviewed for this study agreed that fluent speaking is the most important skill students will need for their content classes, yet this is precisely the skill that students appear to have least developed, together with writing skills. Faculty, department heads, and alumni all made it clear that additional opportunities to develop student spoken and written English were needed.

Students themselves felt that they especially needed improvement in oral presentations, fluency and pronunciation, as seen in the results of Phase 1. Teachers in both phases of the study felt that their students do not have sufficient language knowledge or practice to feel confident enough to express themselves freely in the classroom. This is apparently hindering them from full class participation and a source of frustration. It is logical then that students would suggest, as they did, classroom activities that focus on developing their weakest area.

Regarding listening skills, where teachers rated student listening comprehension as their most developed skill, students rated it as being one of the least developed, only a little better than their speaking skills as results show in Figure 3. It may be that students actually understand less of what they hear than what teachers are aware of. However, it appears that students' receptive skills are sufficient enough to get by in the classroom as both teachers and students rated the importance of listening and reading skills very similarly to the rating they gave the students' abilities in those skills. This pattern of perception was confirmed during the focus group interview. This indicates that few, if any, inadequacies in listening and reading comprehension exist for the requirements of the courses.

Writing skills were considered insufficient for the requirements of the English content-based courses (according to the results from both phases) which appear to demand more structured and organized writing, such as outlining, paragraph writing, and essay writing. These are skills that many students have not developed even in their native language, as they are not commonly taught in high schools in the city. In addition, some experts consider writing practices and conventions culturally bound, so there are differences in what is acceptable for a paper in English and a paper in Spanish. Therefore students will also have to be taught to write in English if they are to develop the paragraph and essay forms that would be expected in an English speaking content-based course.

Frustration in students and concern in the teachers when students are not able to express themselves seem to result from skill inadequacies, as faculty expressed in both phases of the study. Teachers tried to help students pass the courses, but at the same felt they had to make sure the other students in the class with better language skills were adequately challenged. Methods they used to help students compensate for their inadequacies in target language skills in the classroom included rewarding effort, ensuring peer support, and giving time extensions on assignments, plus specific academic instruction. Teachers have little choice, as these students were allowed to register for the course because they obtained at least the minimum score allowed on the SLEP Test. Consequently, teachers felt they should have the same opportunities in the classroom.

At the same time, due to the wide gap in English language skill level among students, teachers at Mindamar faced a dilemma when deciding how to grade fairly, how flexible they were willing to be for the sake of a few students, and how to keep the course challenging enough for the higher level students while considering the limitations of the ones with inadequacies in the target language skills.

A noteworthy difference that emerged from the study was the attitude toward English classes among the students taking content-based courses during Phase 1 compared to the attitudes of those attending the Basic English courses in Phase 2. Despite some difficulties due to inadequate target language skills, most students attending content-based courses had a positive attitude toward their classes, while the Basic English students had a more negative attitude (although the data source for the latter group was limited to their professors), manifesting itself in the lack of desire and motivation to take the classes. While the positive attitude in the first group was due in large part to their awareness of the importance of English for their professions, the Basic English students felt that English was not important for them. This lack of perceived importance may have an effect on how much English the students learn, which in turn will affect their performance in the English content-based courses they have to take later on. Since motivation is a key factor in learning, it seems that attention needs to be given to motivational strategies in the Basic English courses so that students develop a more positive attitude toward the target language.

In both of the phases of the study, teachers seemed to place importance on non-linguistic factors and how they can play a decisive role in the success of students in their classes. Several teachers commented that some of the their lower level language students deficient in the required language skills, did quite well due to their outgoing personalities, their positive attitudes, motivation and will power. A few students even obtained higher grades than some of the higher level students, who may not have had those qualities. These affective learning factors cannot be measured by any standardized English test and could only be evaluated through personal interviews.

Despite not being included in the research questions, the issue of determining readiness of students for the content-based courses was a concern for faculty and administrators alike, and was a topic mentioned by faculty members in

both phases of the study. It seems clear that many students are admitted into content-based courses in English without having the necessary level of productive language skills. By going unprepared into the courses, students suffer frustration, they do not benefit completely from the content being offered and they do not get the chance to properly develop the specific academic skills they need, which coincidentally, are similar to the skills they will need in the workplace.

According to the data collected from both phases, it appears that most faculty and administrators that participated in this study agreed that the current procedures being used to determine readiness for content-based courses are not adequate for placement. Faculty and administrators alike feel that a more reliable assessment system needs to be employed in order to predict with more precision the readiness of the students for the content-based courses. But, at the same time, highly motivated students who are willing to accept the challenges of the course requirements should not be barred from those courses, even if they do not share the English level of the majority of the students in the class.

Since one of the most important skills mentioned by the teachers, is speaking in the classroom, student achievement in the course will depend in no small degree on this skill being developed. So, it stands to reason that the instrument used to measure a student readiness for a class in English must be able to determine the level of a student's oral skills. However the current instrument used, the SLEP test, does not have an oral component. To include that component would require much more manpower and would be very time

consuming for the university. But lacking an instrument that measures what needs to be measured may be the reason why a significant number of students are being allowed to take English subject courses, with the results not always being positive. Using the SLEP Test alone, which does not allow for individual differences such as motivation and interest, the university may be keeping out of those classes some students who could actually benefit from them, despite lower language levels.

Conclusions

This study has been a needs analysis which investigated the perceptions of student, faculty, and administrators regarding the necessary English

language skills and tasks needed for achievement in the English content-based courses as well as those needed for the workplace related to the careers offered at Mindamar. It explored the opinions of alumni and representatives of companies regarding the actual language skills required on the job.

From the results it can be seen that the specific language needs vary depending on the subject; however there are some common target language needs of the students for the classroom and these also coincide with the needs of their possible future workplace. Well developed speaking and listening are the skills most needed, followed by reading and writing. Students will need academic as well as specific program-related vocabulary in order to express themselves on a variety of topics, including those related to their fields of study, and to be able to discuss those topics with a certain degree of fluency. For the workplace, this will need to be done not only in person, but also on the telephone, something which requires a greater knowledge of the language. Students will need to produce an organized and coherent written text (such as a letter or an essay) on a variety of topics, including career-related subjects. Their reading comprehension must be developed enough for them to understand the main idea of texts that include academic vocabulary as well as career-related terminology.

It was seen that students principally lack oral fluency and confidence to develop that fluency. Students lack basic writing skills which would enable them to produce coherent, organized writing such as in outlining, summarizing or essay writing, something that may be attributed partly to inadequate writing skills development in their native language.

Basic courses are fulfilling part of the identified student needs by preparing them for content-based courses in English in the areas of listening and reading, whereas in the areas of speaking and writing, those courses are not sufficient to develop in the students the specific academic language skills they need in order to achieve in the college classroom or on the job, nor do they provide sufficient oral language practice to give the students confidence in speaking. There is a need for more specialized courses to help students acquire those academic skills and develop oral fluency.

Content-based courses aid students to develop some of the required language for the workplace, especially career-related terminology, and give them

needed practice using the language in a career-related way. However, due to certain pre existing language and academic skills deficit, some students are not able to benefit fully from the practice in the content-based courses and require specific skill development prior to enrolling in the courses.

Non-linguistic factors play an important role in student success in the classroom and may compensate for a certain lack of language skills. Teachers are willing to accept highly motivated students into their courses if they are willing to confront the challenges of a course in English even without the benefit of an acceptable language level. By the same token, those students who are not yet aware of the importance of English for their career and don't display a positive attitude toward the language do not have the necessary motivation for learning and are struggling with the Basic English courses.

Program department heads and faculty are aware of most of the language needs students will face in the workplace as well as in the classroom, but this knowledge is not consulted among those involved in curricular decision-making and therefore the language needs of the students are not necessarily reflected in the courses offered.

Limitations of the study

This study was limited in the data obtained regarding the needs of the workplace. It would be necessary to have a larger sample size of companies to obtain a greater amount of data regarding skills needed for the workplace, as well as a larger number of international or multinational companies. Given the large number of companies in the city, there may be a greater diversity of English language requirements. The university could benefit from more information which would make the study more reliable. Personal interviews with persons in charge of Human Resources in these companies would provide a much richer source of information.

A thorough needs analysis includes determining reasons learners want to learn the language, and not just the reasons why he needs it. This study did not take into account student desires for learning English, considering it would make the survey too lengthy and would compromise the students' desire to fill it out.

Implications and recommendations for the institutions

The implication for the teaching/learning situation is that the English program at Mindamar needs to continue to develop the curricular focus on relevant academic tasks which prepare students for academic as well a job related activities.

Recommendations.

Based on the findings, the author recommends that all faculty members, deans, department heads, and English department personnel be made aware of the specific needs and deficiencies of the students and consultation should take place to determine methods to fulfill these needs, for the content courses as well as for the workplace. The curricular revision should always take into consideration and reflect the needs of the students.

According to the results and findings it is recommended to set attainable goals for the Basic English program. The English Department could evaluate the courses to determine what level of skill development students actually have when finishing the courses.

Another suggestion is to tailor the English for Academic Purpose class to the specific needs identified and design additional language courses (if necessary) that will help students continue to develop those skills needed for the content based courses, such as oral fluency and organized writing tasks (outlining, summarizing, note-taking, essay writing), and help them acquire a core of needed academic English vocabulary.

If the university is to continue using the CEF levels as a guide for student progress, it is important to ensure that the skills implicit in the level required for enrolling in an English content-based course be developed in the students before allowing them to enroll in those courses to help avoid the problems mentioned by the teachers.

Where possible, courses should be arranged so that the language level of the students is as homogenous as possible. This will make it possible for teachers to set and fulfill specific language objectives from which the whole class can benefit; something not possible at present.

The university should agree to specific language-related objectives that professors of all courses (or most) can help to carry out, such as summarizing and essay or letter writing. This would be of great help to students in both Spanish and English for developing their much-needed language skills.

Motivational strategies should be applied in the Basic English classes to help create a more positive attitude toward learning English. Strategies such as raising the learner's intrinsic interest in the English language learning process (the portfolio mentioned on page 66 is a good example), promoting the students' awareness of the instrumental values associated with the knowledge of English and how it relates to their profession, increasing the learner's expectancy of success, among others.

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that the English Department establish its own norms, based on the needs identified and the language objectives of the university, on which to base its evaluation of students proficiency level and readiness for an English content-based course. This may include using the current instrument, but raising the cut off score and adding an oral and written component or changing the instrument to one that better suits the purpose of the university.

Recommendations for future research

Since this study did not identify the students with inadequacies in the target language skills, it isn't possible to know what percentage of them were graduates of Basic English, and what percentage were students who came with a passing level on the SLEP Test (according to present university standards) and were enrolled directly into the content-based courses based on that grade. In order to determine how many of the students' needs are being addressed in the basic courses, it would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study in which a group of students beginning at the Basic English level and another group who are not required to study Basic English, are followed throughout their four years at the university. Specific language skills could be assessed upon entrance and then again before students graduate in order to reliably determine the progress made in English at the University.

It may also be helpful if a study be done to identify the academic program-related vocabulary in each field that students will most likely encounter in

English in the workplace in order for it to be included in the career-related content-based courses. This could be part of a continuing needs analysis where more alumni with work experience, as well as other companies, could be requested to respond to the survey used in this study, particularly multinational or international ones, as the majority of the companies that participated in this study were not of that type, and their needs would be different from those local or national companies.

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