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Reflections on Research at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

A Major Qualifying Project Report

Submitted to the Faculty of

WORCHESTER POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

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Submitted to:

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Introduction

My name is Neal Humphrey. I spent C-term of 2008 in Hong Kong doing my Interactive Qualifying Project (IQP). Since I am a double major with Robotics Engineering and Psychology I am doing extra work on my IQP in order to turn it in for a social science Major Qualifying Project. My goal was to look at my research experience for my IQP and reflect on that experience. My aim is to find out what I did well and where I could have improved. I first analyzed what constituted as good research and used that as a measure to see how my research stands. I begin by a description of what I have found and then I reflect on my past experience.

Research and data collection methods

There are many different methods and volumes of texts on each. My intent was not to write another book on these methods but to research and expand my knowledge on effective and proper techniques. In the following sections I will give a brief description of what I have learned and what I feel are the most important aspects of each method.

Survey

A survey can either be guided by a researcher or it can be in question form, such as paper or a computer program. The advantage of using a survey is that it is relative easy to administer to and collect data from a large population. The more people surveyed the more cost effective the survey becomes. The data collected by a survey can give the researcher a broad range of data from a large group of people while allowing the respondents to remain

anonymous.

Good question design is essential for collecting accurate and useful data. In order to improve the reliability of answers there are several steps that can be taken. The most fundamental part of question design is knowing exactly what piece of information each question is meant to gather and how it directly relates to the goals and objectives of the research. Without this careful consideration the data collected may be unusable. To prevent this, the questions must come directly from the data intended to be collected. The following will describe additional ways to ensure that the data collected by the survey is consistent with the goals and objectives of the research.

In order to improve the reliability of answers, great detail must be put into the wording and form of the questions. Depending on the population of the sample, there can be cultural differences that result in interpreting certain words in an unanticipated way. This inconsistency in the interpretation of the question can lead to unreliable data. Each word used in a question must have a consistent meaning to all respondents. One way to increase this consistency is to be sensitive to the cultural context of the population and to make sure all terms are clearly defined.

Another important design consideration is that each question's intent is to gather data for one particular aspect of the research. If a question includes influence from two different intended research objects then it is difficult or impossible to extract the data that are related to each individual objective. A question that includes multiple influences is called a "Double

Barreled” question. In the simplest sense a Double Barreled question asks two questions at the same time, making it impossible distinguish the response to each question. To improve the accuracy of the data, break questions down into the smallest complete segments possible in order to ensure that they are targeting one particular piece of data.

As part of the question design, the form of the respondents' answers must be considered. The question must be designed in such a way that each respondent knows the form of the answer and will answer in a consistent manner. For example, if the question was “How much do you study?” the following answers could follow: three times a week, five hours, a lot, 11, and everyday. Many of these answers are ambiguous and make it difficult to understand what the respondent was intending. Even when the intent of the respondent is understood it is difficult to compare the responses in a meaningful way. To create consistency among the responses the question can be rephrased in such a way to make it clear how to answer. For example if the question was “How many hours per week do you study?” the responses will be much more consistent. Also to improve consistency even more, the responses can be structured. The answer could be put on a scale, selected from a list of answers, or given a structure such as mm/dd/yy. This type of structured response will maximize the consistency between respondents and allow the resulting data to be analyzed.

In some cases inaccuracies in data are caused by the type of data the research intends to collect, not necessarily the design of the question. There are some things that the respondents would not want to report accurately. For example, if there was a survey question such as “Do you beat your children?” the respondents could be embarrassed, or afraid, and

would not want to answer the question truthfully. Any question that deals with less desirable traits or actions will be subject to errors from respondents' unwillingness to answer truthfully.

Good survey design not only includes detailed question design but also includes extensive testing. Many methods exist to test and redesign questions to improve the accuracy of the data. One such method is Cognitive Laboratory. In this method a subject is asked to take the survey while "Thinking aloud". This allows the researcher to find out what the respondents could be confused about, where they get stuck, and why the data received was not what was intended. These sessions are usually recorded and analyzed later for any possible improvements that would be made to the design of the questions.

After the testing and redesigning the questions, the next step in achieving accuracy in data is to survey a representative sample. Ideally this sample would be a Simple Random Sample (SRS), where each member of the population has an equal chance to be selected. However, in practice it is sometimes too difficult or too expensive to do a SRS. Because of this some researchers use methods based off of convenience and not statistical representation. Data collected from convenience samples have no guarantee of being representative. It is entirely possible that the data collected from such a sample is consistent with the population. However, there is no guarantee of statistical representation and this therefore raises questions about the validity of the data. In the ideal situation, researchers would use SRS, but because of restrictions such as money and time, researchers have to do what they can with the data they collect.

Other than how the sample is taken there are many other situations that occur which may introduce error into the data. One such situation is called Non-Response. Non-Response occurs when some of the respondents selected for the survey do not complete or return the survey. When this happens the data that was collected could be biased. Typically people with strong positive or negative opinions respond and do not give an accurate description of the true population. There are a number of ways to reduce Non-Response such as: giving incentives for completing the survey, or trying to collect the data in person as opposed to mail or the telephone. Another way to reduce the Non-Response is to give the respondent multiple opportunities to respond. Not only will this remind the respondent but it may also create a situation where answering the survey may be easier than ignoring it.

Despite the convenience of using a survey there are several limitations on the data collected. The results lack depth and are limited by the questions asked by the researcher and the answers given by respondents. If the researcher doesn't ask the right questions then that data might show nothing of interest while the researcher's hypothesis might be true. It is difficult to design well-thought out and unbiased survey questions. Due to the fact that surveys are often self-reported, there is a high chance of misinterpretation of questions or biased answers.

Focus Group

A focus group is a discussion between six to twelve people guided by a moderator on a particular topic or a range of topics. The main goal of a focus group is to encourage participants

to discuss and to respond to the perceptions and comments of others. They are primarily used when the research wishes to collect quantitative data that will give them a better understanding but not necessarily a representative one. A focus group is a commitment made by the participant. This means that incentives are needed to acquire participants or the focus group could be biased. A skilled moderator is needed to create an effective focus group discussion. However, despite the factors considered when designing a focus group, the implementation of the plan is typically limited by the resources available to the researcher.

The size of a focus group is an important factor. If the group is small than the participants not only have a greater chance to share their views, but the focus groups themselves are easier to perform logistically. However, with the decrease in the number of participants the focus group is limited to a smaller set of ideas. When the size increases, so does the set of ideas. If the number of participants were to grow too large, then there is a possibility for the group to fragment. The consequence of this is that the participants cannot share their ideas because of the number of participants who are trying to share theirs. An indicator of this is when participants begin to whisper or talk separately with the people near them.

The composition of a focus group is another important factor when attempting to collect quality data. In the past, focus groups were ideally composed of people who were complete strangers. This was done to prevent the creation of an environment that may inhibit the sharing of the participants' true feelings. However, in practice it may be almost impossible to find a group of complete strangers. To minimize the possibility of people withholding their

true feelings, it is important to avoid focus groups consisting of close friends, relatives, and family. Also it is important to avoid the existence of power differentials within the group. Workers should not be in a focus group with their boss because the workers will be more concerned about their boss than the questions being asked.

One of the most difficult parts of any data collection method is getting people to participate. It is important to describe to the participant the study, and why it is important. The invitations to each participant should be personalized. The participant should feel that he/she is wanted and that the researcher actually spent effort on the invitation. The invitation should highlight what makes the participant special and why the researcher needs his/her help. Also, to increase the chance that the participant will actually respond, it is important to follow up on the invitation. This will help reduce the chance that the respondent might forget and also it will reinforce the idea that the researcher is spending additional effort in trying to recruit him/her. In order to achieve a high rate of participation the location of the focus group should be in an easy to find, easy to get to and safe place.

Because focus groups are a large commitment and take effort to attend, there needs to be some sort of incentive. The most common incentive is money. It is effective because people immediately recognize the value of money, it is portable, and it is easily transferred. When money is given it should be an immediate cash payment. If it is a check promised to arrive sometime in the future then it will be a disappointment. It is important to ensure that the participants sign a form that states that they have received the money. Each participant within the focus group should receive the same amount of money. When deciding the amount of

money to use as an incentive the researcher must be mindful of the potential to insult and discourage the participants by offering too small of an incentive. The occupation of the participants matters when selecting the amount of money to be offered. If the participants have highly paid occupations like being a physician or an attorney then more money will need to be offered. In addition to money other incentives can be used. Some common incentives are food, refreshments, and gifts. Everything should be clearly described before the focus group in order to prevent disappointment by the participants.

Conducting a good focus group requires a skilled moderator. One of the most important factors is the moderator's respect for the participants. This means that the moderator has to believe that each participant is important and has valuable information despite the level of education, experience, background or economic situation of the participant. Also moderators must have the patience to give the participants respect and use active listening even when the participant is saying something that has already been said before in a previous focus group. The moderators must not only have this respect, but also have the ability to show this to the participants. Adequate background knowledge on the topic of discussion is necessary to follow up areas of concern.

When recording the results of the focus group it is essential to take notes. Tape recorders are often used but should not be relied on. There is the possibility that the tape recorder fails or the best comments are lost due to loud background noise or the switching of tapes. The tape recorder can be an invaluable supplement to notes taken during the focus group but cannot be a replacement. The note taking needs to be separate and not interfere

with the flow of the discussion. The participants should not have to wait for the moderator to finish writing notes before they say more.

The beginning of the focus group discussion is one of the most critical times. It sets the tone and the atmosphere of the entire discussion. The participants need to feel comfortable with the topic and the permissive atmosphere. If the moderator is too formal or rigid then it can prevent the discussion from becoming an open forum for ideas. A sample pattern for introducing the group discussion is to begin by welcoming the participants. After this, the moderator should give a brief overview of the topic followed by the ground rules for the discussion. Once those have been completed then the focus group discussion can begin with the first question.

It is important that the moderators be familiar with the following techniques: the five-second pause and the probe. The five-second pause is commonly used after a participant's comment. The pause allows space for other points of view or agreement with the previous statement. The probe is a request for additional information. There is a tendency in focus groups for participants to make vague comments or give responses with multiple potential meanings. In order to understand the view and intent of the participant it is necessary to probe for more information. The probe should be used early and often in the focus group to encourage the participants to be full and descriptive in their comments.

Because focus groups are so detailed and in-depth they can be expensive and difficult to perform. A focus group is much more of a commitment made by the participant. So, actually

getting people to participate could be difficult depending on the resources available to the researcher. Also because focus groups use a moderator it is easy for the moderator to be a source of bias for the discussion. A moderator has to be skilled and unbiased which makes focus groups difficult to use effectively with limited resources.

Interview

An interview is a form of a survey between two people, an interviewer and a participant. However, an interview focuses on exploring one topic deeply for information that the interviewer could not find out through simple questionnaires. The purpose of an interview is not to simply get answers to questions, but to understand the experience of an individual.

There are many different formats for an interview. One popular format is the three-interview series. It consists of three different interviews that are each focused on specific topics. The first interview is focused on the life history of the participant. The idea of this interview is to gain perspective of the participant's past experience. The second interview is focused on the details of the experience. This aims to understand their present experience that relates to the topic at hand. The third interview is the reflection on the meaning. This interview addresses the emotional and intellectual impact on the participant's life.

Each interview takes place from three days to a week apart and lasts for 90 minutes. Some believe that spending less time for an interview is not sufficient for the participants to share and reconstruct their experience. However, depending on the situation the interview length can be changed. For example, if the participant is a child then the interview time could be shortened. The method suggests the spacing of each interview allows for the participants to self reflect on the interview

experience and as a result the participant will be more prepared for the subsequent interview. If the spacing is too large then there is a danger for the participant and the interviewer to lose the connection between the interviews.

In order to maximize the interview's effectiveness the interviewer must be skilled. The most important skill of a good interviewer is the ability to be genuinely interested in the experience of the participant. If the interviewer does not believe this then the interview will not be effective and the participant's experience may be lost. When the interest is genuine then the interviewer will be much better at drawing out the participant's experience and the participant will be more willing to share.

During an interview it is important for the interviewer to remember that listening is the most important skill. It is the interviewer's job to let the participant share his or her experience. However, it is also important for the interviewer to keep the participant on track. The interviewer must also make sure that the participant is speaking true to his or her own experience and not talking as if they were speaking to a room full of people. People tend to exaggerate or gloss over certain parts in order to impress their audience. The interviewer is not looking for a novel or an adventure but the true essence of the participant's experience.

Novice interviewers may not get complete answers to each question. It is possible that the participant goes off track or says something that the interviewer does not understand. The interviewer has to have the ability to ask for the participant to get back on track or to elaborate. An hour and a half may seem long but that time may not be enough if the interviewer does not ask the right questions at the right time.

The questions asked during an interview should be open-ended and unbiased. The tone or the vocabulary used in a question may influence the participant's answers. Also care must be taken when questions are asked where the answers might be socially undesirable. There is a chance that if the participant would not like to openly admit something then he or she might lie about the answer. Good interview questions are designed to allow the participant to open up and share his or her experience with the interviewer.

Any experiment or research involving human participants needs to be evaluated and must be deemed safe and ethical before it can be performed. An organization called the Institutional Review Board (IRB) is the authority which decides if particular research is ethical and safe. In the university setting the IRB is comprised of faculty members, one representative from outside the university and administrative staff. The IRB looks at the aims of the research, the participants, the methodology, the researcher's qualifications, the risks and the benefits of the research.

Another important part of the IRB process is evaluating the informed consent form. Informed consent is a requirement for any research that will involve human participants and insures that the participants know exactly the risks and the procedures involved with the study. This is done to ensure that the participants are fully aware and accept the terms of the study. Without informed consent it is possible that unknowingly participants will be involved with research that could lead to serious injury or death. The eight major components of informed consent are as follows; An invitation to participate in what, to what end, how, how long, and for whom?, the risks involved, the rights of the participants, the potential benefits, the confidentiality of records, the dissemination of the results, the special conditions for children, and the contact information.

The interviewer must make sure that the act of gathering data and analyzing it are separate. Many interviewers may come into an interview with preconceptions of the results. Also if one analyzes the data from an interview before the end of the research then it is possible that the researcher may impose some meaning from the previous interview into the next. Some argue that interviewing should be a continuous process where after a few interviews the data is analyzed and the questions are reformed. With this method there is a greater chance for bias, but there also exists the possibility for more valuable data.

There are many ways to analyze interview data, but there is no single right way. Researchers can attempt to quantify the data and deal with numbers, or they can read transcripts and see what pops out to them. When reviewing data the researcher must have a certain amount of trust in how they interpret the results. Since there is no single right way, it is difficult for anyone to say that their interpretation is more correct. Also when interpreting the data it is important to keep an open mind. It is always possible to remove certain ideas, but it is better to more open about the possible interpretations.

Reflection

For my team's research we used closed-ended surveys as our primary data collection tool. The main population that we were studying consisted of the first-year students at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). An interesting situation was created when it was discovered that the students at HKUST did not start school until the first week in February. There was a large gap in the methodology because our research began in the first week of January. During this time we interviewed teachers to try to better understand the context of the students' education and learning environment. The environment and resources available to us were strong influences in the design and implementation of the data collection analysis process. In the following sections I will discuss the methods we used and

how they were executed. After each discussion I will reflect on what changes I would or not would not make if I were to do this research again after learning what I have.

Survey Reflection

Surveys were the basis for our data analysis. They provided us with a large amount of quantitative data. Over the course of the research we collected over 1400 surveys from a population of 1800 students. We gave enough surveys for all the students in each class to their respective teachers. Because of the odd composition of the classes and the inability to randomly sample participants we decided to census all the students. However, some teachers did not return the surveys in time for our analysis. Because of this, we had a non-response rate of about a 33%. The survey consisted of about 19 questions and could be completed in less than 5 minutes. Its goal was to find out the students' opinions of their course materials and the teaching methods used. Because of the large volume of surveys, we did not personalize each survey for each class. We gave the surveys to the teachers in a folder that we expected would be returned with the completed surveys. However, only some teachers did this and others just returned the completed surveys. Due to this we were not able to track which teachers had done the surveys and which had not. We were unable to encourage particular teachers to return the surveys.

If I were to repeat this research I would make sure that we could track which teachers returned the survey and more importantly the teachers that didn't. We felt that a 77% response rate was quite good for a survey and that the remaining surveys would not impact the results much. With more responses we would be able to be more confident in the results.

Next time I do quantitative research I will ensure that I know how to analyze the data using a more professional method. I had some statistics background but I was not sure how to handle the census that was not quite a census. Because of this and the lack of an expectation and knowledge of statistical method from my advisors, my group did not employ any statistical analysis of the data. Using statistics we would have been able say our results with a certain level of confidence and be able to have a strong foundation to stand on in the defense of the results.

I felt that the questions and the length of the survey were appropriate. Also, while it might have been possible to randomly select individual students within a classroom, in reality it could not be done. Because of time constraints we had one week to distribute the surveys and collect them. Some teachers brought completed surveys to us after the deadline and we were not able to include them in the analysis. Also during the process of survey development we pretested out survey against second-year students and pre-university students in order to make sure that our survey was culturally appropriate and its level of English was appropriate for the students who would be taking the exam. I feel that it was a solid field test of the survey and gave us valuable insight into how to improve the survey.

Focus Group Reflection

Another data collection tool we used was the focus group. We wanted to get the perspective of students who had already experienced the first-year program. Scheduling any time with second-year students outside of class proved to be extremely difficult. Also, we felt that a survey would not be adequate for data collection because we wanted the students to give us new perspectives and deeper insights into the experience of first-year students. With a survey we would be limited to information

that was based off of what we asked. However, if we used focus groups we felt that we could learn information that we did not expect or anticipate. We managed to persuade teachers to allow us to come into their class, and run a focus group inspired discussion. The response from the students varied class by class and our time with them was limited by what the teacher allowed us. Some were as short as 10 minutes while others were over 45 minutes. Despite the mixed results, the focus groups helped us better understand the students' experience.

If we were to do this research again, we would have taken time to prepare a more neutral setting for the interview and also allow space for the groups to split up into more appropriate sizes. Because these focus groups took place in the class room I felt that the students sometimes acted as if they were still in class. This negatively impacted the response and seemed to sometimes make it less of a discussion and almost more of an interrogation. Since class sizes varied between each class some groups had as little as 5 members while others could have as many as 20. The larger class sizes made it difficult for everyone to participate and it seemed that with each class there were a few students who dominated the conversation and would control the direction of it. With smaller groups it would be easier to get everyone involved.

I feel that given the situation it would be too difficult to gather enough students for focus groups outside of class. Students at HKUST always mentioned how busy they were and how little time they had available for other activities. Also being a college student myself I realize the lack of appeal with an hour long discussion. Without the money or resources for incentives it would have been very difficult to encourage the students to come.

Interview Reflection

Because of the lack of access to the students and the teacher's limited availability, we decided that we should begin by looking at the teachers and their methods. Since our team did not have any formal training on how to interview, we basically expanded upon an exercise that we did in ID2050, the class used to prepare the students for the trip to Hong Kong. Those exercises consisted of having two people interview the participant. One was the interviewer and the other took notes of what the participant said. With too many people there is a greater risk that the participant will be intimidated and if there are too few people then some of the information that the participants share may be lost. We considered using recording devices of some sort to gather the information from the interview, but what we learned in ID2050 it was unfamiliar territory where the possible implications of such a technique were intimidating. We decided on half-an-hour interviews, because we felt that the length of time was appropriate and would not inconvenience the teachers too much. For the questions we had compiled a list of information we wanted to know and wrote down the general idea of each question or a note sheet for the interviewer.

Before beginning research like this we would need to make sure that we get informed consent from all the participants. Without getting informed consent from our participants it is possible that we could get in trouble if an ethical board or if anything happened to the participants then we would be liable. In our case there was not much of a risk, but it is still important to make sure the participant knows every thing involved with the study and what the risks and benefits are.

Now that I look back on my experience interviewing there are things that we should have done differently. If I were to do it again, I would ensure that I went through the proper procedures required to tape record the interviews. There were many times my team discussed our results and I found that what

I got out of an interview was much different than what my note taker did. Because of this, I felt that there were some valuable and interesting experiences that we missed out on because I focused on the conversation and not necessarily all the details needed for analysis. There were also several times where in the analysis process I would remember something the participant said, but was not in the notes and my note-taker did not remember it. During these situations I felt it was best to not include such details because I could not be sure that it was said the way I remembered it several weeks later. With the tap-recording I would have had the ability to go back and find out what was actually said. Also the analysis would be much richer because my teammates could give their own perspective on what was said and this would bring more depth to our research.

I would also make sure that the questions developed for the interview were cleaner and better defined. I found that since there was freedom in the question I was more comfortable asking about it because I could read the participant and transition well to the next question. However, with this freedom also came a splatter of information. In some cases the information that was recorded was quite a bit different from what was intended. Because of this, it became difficult to compare and find the information we were looking for. I believe that more well defined and structured question would result in more robust data and more valuable information.

Part of getting the most out of an interview is utilizing proper technique during an interview. We had no real strategies or techniques that we used. The only technique that I tried to employ was active listening. While this was effective for getting the interviewee to become comfortable and to talk with me, it was not enough to ensure that the information shared was the most valuable. I would definitely attempt to practice and learn effective techniques for ensuring a solid interview.

Although the research I did spoke about doing multiple interviews, each taking an hour and a half, with the same person, I do not think that it was possible or necessary for this research. Given unlimited time it would not hurt to spend the extra time to better understand each teacher and their specific situation. In the setting of my research I feel that my goal was to not to understand the life, beliefs and social dynamics of each teacher, but to understand their views on the students. Understanding more about the teacher, would bring more insight into where their views came from. My focus was on the students' lives and their experience. If we were to do it again we would increase the time the interviews by maybe fifteen minutes, but probably not much more.

Conclusion

Given unlimited time and resources there were many improvements we could have taken with methods, but with what my team had to work with I believe we did a good job. The most important aspect my advisors and all teams overlooked was the need for statistics to back up the results and conclusions made by this research. Also the lack of any institutional review board involvement hurt and restricted my research. Reflecting on my past experience I will now be much more aware of the finer details in planning and executing research. Now the National Institutes of Health Office of Human Subject Research certifies that I have completed their online training course.

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Appendix A: Certificate



Appendix B: Interactive Qualifying Project



English Program Analysis at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

An Interactive Qualifying Project Report
Submitted to the Faculty of
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Abstract

This project, completed for the Language Centre of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, aims to improve the English language courses for first-year students. By interviewing teachers, surveying current students, and conducting focus groups with previous students, we have collected three separate opinions on the current students' English language needs and the ability of the course materials to meet them. We recommended changes, based on our evaluation of these opinions, which should improve the first-year English courses.

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Authorship

All four members contributed an equal amount of work to this project. Most of the written sections of the project report were created and edited by Neal Humphrey, Craig Ropi and Khanhvan Nguyen. All technical documents, such as figures, graphs, and surveys, were created and edited by Norman Lam. Norman Lam also completed all formatting and analysis of tabular data.

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Executive Summary

The importance of English in Hong Kong universities is apparent from the fact that almost all university courses within the territory are taught in English. Since English is not the language of instruction at the majority of primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, most university students need to become familiar with the idea of learning topics in English during their first year at a university. Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) is one such university that is concerned about addressing the English language needs of its students.

The goal of this project was to compare and contrast the opinions of current students, previous students, and the teachers in the Language Centre at HKUST with respect to the English language needs of HKUST's first-year English language students and the ability of the course materials to meet them. We gathered similar data from the current students, teachers, and previous students, but we used different data collection methods for each of the three groups. In order to acquire the students' opinions, we created a survey, which was completed by over 1200 first-year English students. To collect the teachers' opinions, we interviewed 23 of the first-year English teachers. We then conducted focus groups with 6 classes of previous students (approximately 100 total) of the different courses in order to get their opinions.

By examining the opinions of the three groups, we have derived specific conclusions and recommendations for each course as well as overall recommendations that apply to multiple courses. The first of these courses, LABU 101, is an English course for first-year business students that attempt to improve students' English skills by having them examine business cases. Currently, the business department at HKUST chooses the business cases used in the course's textbook, which is re-written by the Language Centre each semester. The problem with this system is that the business cases chosen are often either written above the students level of reading comprehension or do not include enough new vocabulary for them to learn. In order to remedy this problem, we recommend that the Language Centre

become an active partner in choosing the business cases along with the business department to ensure the English content of each case is adequate.

Lang 106, the first-year English course for engineering students at HKUST, takes a more straightforward approach to teaching English than LABU 101 by using activities about daily life to help students improve their English skills. Although the first semester of Lang 106 already concentrates on improving speaking and listening skills, students have requested that the course put more emphasis on the speaking portion of the course. Students have stated that they are less interested in improving their listening skills than speaking skills. Some teachers admitted that the listening exercises in the Lang 106 textbook teach obvious listening tricks that usually don't help the students. However, in focus groups, previous students explained that listening skills are important because teachers at HKUST have varying accents. The reason the students showed a lack of interest in improving listening skills might have been the poor quality of the listening exercises in the Lang 106 textbook. We recommend that the Language Centre either change the listening exercises in the Lang 106 textbook to more effectively address the problem of deciphering lecturers' accents or reduce the course's emphasis on listening skills.

The first-year English course for science students, Lang 108, is taught using a commercially published textbook, unlike LABU 101 and Lang 106. The assessments for this course are comprised of an oral presentation and a written report, but the textbook does not have specific sections or exercises designed to prepare the students for either of these assessments. The teachers have mentioned that because of this gap, they must create their own material in order to prepare the students for the assessments, which takes up a significant amount of the teachers' time. Also, with each teacher creating his or her own materials, the degree to which the students are prepared for the assessments depends on the teacher's ability to create adequate material in the time given. We recommend that either the assessments change to better fit the textbook or that the teachers be given more comprehensive material that will adequately prepare the students for the assessments.

Although the three English courses have some differences, some of our recommendations apply to multiple courses. Both Lang 108 and Lang 106 are compulsory English courses that count significantly less than a typical course at HKUST. When spoken to in person, teachers and students admitted that the one or two credits that students receive for these courses is not enough to warrant the students' attention. Some students have stated that this lack of attention has caused their English skills to decline after coming to HKUST. The students do not blame their lack of progress on the quality of the English material used in courses but on the fact that they do not practice English enough to maintain their ability. The students only spend a few hours a week in class and because the course carries so little credit, students are not motivated to work on English in their spare time. We recommend that the Language Centre consider increasing the amount of credit students receive for first-year English courses. With these changes, we hope all three courses will more effectively meet the needs of first-year students at HKUST.

1. Introduction

English has become an international language, making it possible for different nations to communicate with each other. Realizing the importance of English, many universities around the world are trying to educate graduates capable of these international collaborations by making English their language of instruction. Teaching non-language courses, such as calculus and biology, in English allows students to understand and explain their knowledge in a language that can be understood by the world. Universities that teach students in a language that is not their mother tongue have dual purposes: to teach the subject matter and to teach the second language.

Hong Kong is a formerly British-ruled territory that has used English as its language of instruction at most of its schools for decades (Education Bureau of Hong Kong, 2007). Teaching in English is most common at the university level with all seven of Hong Kong's universities teaching almost exclusively in English. Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), one of China's most prestigious universities, is no exception to the trend of English teaching. This university is academically ranked third in Hong Kong and 43rd around the world (World time ranking, 2005). By using English as its language of instruction, HKUST hopes to make the institution more internationalized and "empower students to study independently through English at the University, work in the international setting of Hong Kong, and communicate with the world beyond" (HKUST, 2007, Language Centre). In accordance with these objectives, the HKUST Language Centre has established a series of mandatory English language enhancement courses to increase its students' familiarity with the English language. However, the HKUST Language Centre staff is concerned about the English needs of their current students as well as the ability of their courses to meet those needs.

Because the teachers in the Language Centre are concerned about their students' needs, some of them administer a custom-made survey at the end of their own courses. One such survey, which was created by the coordinator for Lang 106, asks questions such as "Which activity types did you find the

most useful?” (2007, pg 1) This survey concentrates on finding which teaching techniques and activities worked well throughout the course, how much improvement was made in various English skills, and how much effort was expended outside class time, from the perspective of the students. The data collected from Stella’s survey and others like it are used to change the way the course is taught by that one professor in subsequent semesters.

The Language Centre has not administered a department-wide survey since the English courses were revamped in 2006. No one entity has collected and analyzed the opinions of the current students, previous students, and teachers since that time. Only when one group collects these different opinions in a uniform fashion can they be compared to the other opinions.

Our purpose is to discover and analyze the effectiveness and potential for improvement of HKUST’s English Language Program from the perspectives of science, engineering, and business students at the university and contrast them with the views of the teachers. Contrasting the different views gives the teachers at the Language Centre information that is relevant to their school and their students. The opinions of the three groups were collected through a combination of observations, focus groups and surveys. These different collection methods allowed us to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. With the analysis of our data, HKUST’s Language Centre will be able to tailor the classes towards the unique needs of the current science, engineering, and business students. Creating a better English language program will eventually make HKUST students more likely to succeed in their regular classes and after graduation.

2. Background

This chapter supplies an overview of English as a foreign language (EFL) pedagogical approaches and language teaching methods. It also analyzes examples of language programs around the world that have implemented or tested these teaching methods. These examples are analyzed for the successes and failures of the programs and what can be learned from them. There is an introduction to the workings of Hong Kong as a Special Administrative Region as it relates to the project and an overview of the current status of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology's EFL program. Finally, there is a summary of the contents of the three course books that guide the courses we will be examining.

2.1 EFL/Language

According to Krieger (2005), English as a Second Language (ESL) courses teach students English in an English-speaking location, while EFL courses teach English in an area where the language is not commonly spoken. To clarify, English courses in Hong Kong are examples of EFL courses. The following sections discuss some of the teaching and learning methods of language courses.

2.1.1 Language Learning Methods

Throughout the years, many language-learning methods were developed depending on the “social, economic, political, and educational circumstances” of the current time period (Liu & Shi, 2007, p.1). Two examples of these language-learning methods are the Grammar-Translation method and Communicative Language Teaching.

The Grammar-Translation method emphasizes the reading and writing skills of a language. Students are expected to memorize vocabularies and learn grammar rules through translation of various texts. Although the classes using this method are usually taught in their native language, students attain a

strong understanding of vocabulary and the knowledge how to form grammatically correct sentences.

According to Liu & Shi (2007), a weakness of this method is that the students have little understanding of the language when they hear it and get little to no practice in pronunciation.

Another method is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). According to Hiep (2007), classes that use the CLT method emphasize communication. The goal of this method is for students to express themselves in a way that others who speak that language can understand them. Some activities in CLT include completing tasks related to daily life, having conversations, and speaking the language in class. Some teachers believe that the problem with using this method is that the course does not pay close attention to the grammar usage and pronunciation of the students.

There are many language-learning methods used in language classes around the world. Each of these methods emphasizes certain language skills. Having knowledge of a few methods of English learning allows us to understand the context of HKUST's language courses and better tailor our recommendations for each course. We will now discuss how the teachers and students contribute to the teaching and learning of a foreign language.

2.1.2 Effective Learners and Teachers

The success of a course depends on the efforts of both the teachers and the students. A teacher's education can be divided into two categories: teacher's training and teacher's development (McGillick, 1993). Different students learn by different methods. For example, some students learn better through visuals presentation and others though hands on activities. Therefore, teachers have to be flexible in their teaching style. If there are more visual learners in one class then teachers should use PowerPoint and diagrams during lectures.

Reflective teaching is a method used in the teacher's development to help the teachers run a class (McGillick, 1993). The reflective teaching method has three steps: doing it, talking about it, and doing it

again. This means that after a lesson, teachers should reflect on what they did in class, how and why they did it, and how the students responded to the lessons. After determining the strengths and weaknesses of that lesson, the teachers should then change their teaching styles. Constantly adjusting their teaching style will give them a good understanding of their students' learning styles and how the students respond to the different learning techniques. HKUST's Language Centre repeats this process once a term by surveying their students. It's important for us to understand this process, because our project is helping the Language Centre reflect on its own courses.

Yee (1996) believes that the best way to teach a foreign language is to relate everything done in class to real world situations and to give students positive feedback. By using real world topics, such as talking about a favorite movie, students are given a chance to talk about themselves, which may encourage them to talk more in class. Giving students positive feedback helps them improve their language skills. Students who believe that they are improving their language skills will have a sense of accomplishment, which will encourage them to learn even more.

Using visual aids, such as posters or movies, gives students an image that can help them better understand the lessons taught in class. According to Chang (2006), "people derived...meaning and knowledge from what they see..." (p.6). Visual aids include pictures in textbooks, diagrams used to teach grammar, and movies.

Some common problems with EFL courses around the world are student's low self-esteem, fear, low quality books, and overcrowded classrooms (Kronenberger, Huang, & Anderson, 2003). Low quality books and overcrowded classrooms, those that have more than 15 students per teacher, prevent teachers from designing a good syllabus for the course and accommodating specific needs of each student.

According to Kronenberger et Al. (2003), a teacher's teaching style and classroom's atmosphere contribute to the students' retention of English skills. Teachers, who change their teaching style, depending on the weaknesses and strengths of their students, will allow their students to have a better understanding of the language. This is because these teachers pay attention to what the students need to

become more fluent in the language. Also, when students are comfortable in their classes, they talk more and participate more often in discussion, which will benefit their listening and speaking skills. The positive and negative aspects of these teaching methods may be present in HKUST English courses.

2.1.3 Motivation

Self-efficacy for foreign language learners is the belief in the “capacity to organize and execute the courses of action required to master academic tasks” (Mills, 2007, p.1). If the students know that they can learn a foreign language, then they will be motivated in class. According to Mills (2007), students with strong self-efficacy show greater interest in learning a foreign language, put out more effort, express a lower level of anxiety, and have more confidence than students with weak self-efficacy.

The social cognitive theory of human behavior and motivation states that a person’s behavior is connected to his or her thoughts, beliefs, and feelings (Mills, 2007). For example, students with a strong self-efficacy for mastering a foreign language will be able to do it because they believe they can.

Self-efficacy is a motivation theory that is directed towards the thoughts and feelings of the students toward learning a foreign language. English is the language of instruction in most of Hong Kong’s universities; therefore the students are required to learn English. If the students at HKUST do not believe they can improve their English skills, they will not put any effort toward their English courses. Every course managed by the Language Centre should be ensuring that students’ sense of self-efficacy is strong enough to keep them motivated to learn the language.

2.2 Global Sources

English language programs around the world are continuously developing and changing. Nations such as the USA, China, South Korea, Japan, and many other international settings provide various programs to teach students as well as professionals the English Language. Having the knowledge of the

existence of these programs can help us come up with ideas to improve HKUST's English language program.

2.2.1 ESL Program in the USA

The USA has always been considered a melting pot with immigrants from all around the world settling in all parts of the country. For this reason, it is not surprising that the USA has a wide range of ESL programs. According to Darian (1969) "courses in English as a foreign language at American universities range from two hours to thirty-five hours a week. Within this range, there is obviously a considerable degree of difference in the composition of the EFL course"(p. 221). The main differences in structure among the English programs in the US are their use of language laboratories and their arrangement of speaking, listening, reading, and writing instructions. One way to know whether these programs are effective is by looking at the trends that are changing among these programs.

According to the Association of International Educators (NAFSA), a New York State Department survey of 952 institutions of higher learning, a report by the Institute of International Education which covered 180 institutions, and a report by the Center for Applied Linguistics covering 160 institutions all contain similar information from their research about the changes within English language programs in America (Darian, 1961, p. 230). The results of these research documents make it clear that the majority of colleges structure their English programs as a two-semester course. The average number of hours per week has increased along with the number of times the class meets. The number of difficulty levels of the courses has also increased, creating more choices for American English students. According to Darian (1961), larger institutions emphasized more on writing and less on grammar as opposed to smaller institutions, which covered speaking, reading, writing, and grammar equally.

2.2.2 Teaching methods in South Korea

A study by the Center for Applied Languages (CAL) discussed difficulties with introducing communicative language teaching (CLT) into the EFL program in South Korea. According to the Center for Applied Languages (CAL) (1993), communicative language teaching makes use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. Using real-life situations that change daily creates an environment where the source of student motivation is the desire to communicate using the target language.

According to Defeng Li (1998) the difficulties in incorporating CLT into South Korean schools falls into four different categories: the teachers, students, education system, and CLT itself. The teachers felt that their own deficiency in spoken English was the most common barrier when trying to use CLT in the classroom. They also felt that the students had such low oral proficiency to begin with that it was difficult to perform CLT. This difficulty caused most teachers to become frustrated enough to give up on the system. The teachers mentioned that the educational system in South Korea is not compatible with the CLT system for various reasons. The South Korean Educational system has large class sizes and grammar based standardized English examinations. The CLT method is tailored more to an English as a second language program and not English as a foreign language. In western countries most teachers of English as a second language are native English speakers, while in South Korea most teachers of English are native Korean speakers. As a result of this the Korean EFL teachers have less oral proficiency in English than western ESL teachers.

Currently the educational system in South Korea makes it difficult to incorporate the CLT method in an EFL setting. From teachers who are not orally proficient in English, to the system that tests grammatical concepts and structures heavily in large classes, there are numerous situational reasons why the integration of the CLT method in South Korean schools would be difficult. The conclusion of Defeng Li (1998) was that the fundamental education system must change in order to incorporate CLT into South Korean schools. This type of education system is common around the world, which would

suggest that incorporating CLT into places with a similar system, such as primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, would have the similar difficulties.

2.2.3 English language program study at Japan University

In a professional setting, proficient English language skills are needed. While the level of English language comprehension varies from place to place, universities around the world have been trying to improve the English proficiency of their students. Universities attempt to accomplish this through various techniques, which make students more successful during the remainder of their university education and after they graduate (Orr & Yoshida, 2001, p. 256). About 30 years ago English language education movements around the world created two major developments, which are still being implemented today: the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), a program that was designed to help native speakers improve their English skills, and the English for Specific Purposes (ESP), a program that served the English language needs of non-native speakers. These developments were created and implemented for "naval architecture students in Spain, nursing students in Australia, medical and pharmacy in the United States, and engineering in Hong Kong" (p. 256).

Thomas Orr, an Associate Professor at the Center of Language Research at the University of Aizu in Japan, along with Kin'ei Yoshida, a Master's student in the Graduate School of Computer Science at the same university, were aware of increasing importance of proficient English language skills and the importance of "preparing university students for careers in [their] particular disciplines" (Orr & Yoshida, 2001, p. 263). Orr and Yoshida were concerned about the status of their program in comparison to other Universities' programs. Therefore, they conducted research on universities to understand the perspective of graduate students, professionals employed in universities, and professionals employed in companies "who normally use English in the course of their studies or professional activities" (p. 257). This study evaluated each perspective based on which category of English usage their work involved and their

competence level in that category. Categories ranged from English email to reading and writing business letters and participating in English meetings and discussions (p. 258).

The results of Orr and Yoshida's study revealed that students on average found themselves very weak in all of the English skills especially in "making presentation/speeches in English" and "participating in English meeting/discussions" (Orr & Yoshida, 2001, p. 259). On the other hand, the university professors "rank their English skills, on average, as slightly above average" (p. 259). However, it further showed that very few professors were actually "satisfied with their current English skills because weakness in English slows their work and complicates communication with others" (p. 259). Orr and Yoshida further their research by asking the respondents what makes effective and ineffective learning experiences and their recommendation for effective teaching (p. 260).

Orr and Yoshida's (Orr & Yoshida, 2001, p. 262) study of computer science students' needs for better English education at their university is applicable to our analysis of HKUST's English language program. The research was conducted upon students of a different discipline, but the ideas of their English language programs are vital preparation for the student for when they enter their profession regardless of which discipline they are studying. "Effective English language programs understand not only the content needs of their learners but also their learners' experience with and preferences for learning English" (Orr & Yoshida, 2001, p. 261). Therefore, by surveying and understanding the needs of the students, a university could implement the methods that are preferred by their students in order to make their program more effective.

2.2.4 Language through Drama

Learning any language cannot be done without practice. The pedagogy of "skills and drills" - the repetitive practice of language is often the procedure used in classrooms (Elgar, 2002, p. 193). However, Shirley Heath (1993), a professor at Stanford University, examined an inner city youth organization to get

another perspective on the idea. The teachers in the organization believed that "both language learning theorist and practitioners of teaching English as a second language or dialect have argued that role playing moves language learners beyond their usual performance in ordinary classroom presentations" (p. 177). Thus, in this youth organization, youngsters wrote, casted, and directed dramas to enable them to "maintain their native language while practicing standard English" (p. 173).

In traditional ESL classrooms, the class is based around teachers, textbooks, and individual language learning, but this youth organization is designed to incorporate group interaction and how to accomplish a group goal (Elgar, 2002, p. 181). Unlike language classrooms where the measure of academic ability in English is based on performance in writing, from directing a drama, a student's "writing comes as a natural and necessary part of a rich communication array - including spoken, gestural, spatial, and written means" (p. 182). Lastly, through the production of a drama, practice is not just a standard to follow but an essential and motivational factor that these youth "undergo willingly... to master the skills necessary for their role in the drama"(p. 183) in order to develop their retention of the English language.

The use of drama and group interaction is a reorientation of the traditional perspective on language learning and could very well be positively applicable to language programs worldwide, such as in Hong Kong universities.

2.3 Hong Kong

In this section the cultural and social differences that affect education in Hong Kong are examined. In order to do this, emphasis is placed on the importance of university level English programs and standardized tests. Examples of EFL programs in Hong Kong are used to examine what methods have been tried in the Special Administrative Region.

2.3.1 Importance of University English Programs

Since Hong Kong is a major business capital in the world, its residents have a need to communicate with many different countries. Since English is the main language of international business, English has become an important tool for the professional workplace in Hong Kong. According to Lu (2003), the importance of English in Hong Kong has made it the language of instruction at most of the SAR's universities. While the region was under British rule, prior to 1997, the language of instruction at the majority of primary and secondary schools was English. Since China regained rule of Hong Kong in 1997, the Hong Kong government has made Cantonese the language of instruction at approximately 75 percent of primary and secondary schools. The government of Hong Kong has also forced all primary and secondary schools to teach students Mandarin, the language of Mainland China. This means that in order for students to learn English in Hong Kong, they must learn both Mandarin and English, while retaining their knowledge of Cantonese. Both of these changes will more than likely reduce the English literacy level of incoming University students.

In order to keep their graduates competitive in the international workplace, Hong Kong's universities are compensating for the insufficient English learning in primary and secondary schools by creating English learning courses of their own. Since almost all university courses are taught in English, it is most advantageous to have university students take the English courses as early in their undergraduate study as possible. This creates a need for Hong Kong's universities to build effective English language courses that can make any incoming student prepared to learn other topics in English within as little time as possible.

2.3.2 EFL programs in Hong Kong Universities

Since English is the language of instruction at most universities in Hong Kong, many universities have an EFL program similar to HKUST's. We will examine other EFL programs in Hong Kong in order to find out more about EFL programs in Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong Institute of Education (2007) is one such university. The institute's English program is split into seven modules: language systems, language curriculum, spoken interaction, literacy development and language as a creative expression, language in education, psycholinguistics, and language assessment. All students seeking to obtain a bachelors degree at this university must attend 120 hours of English language enhancement courses.

During their first year at the university, students are placed in one of three pathways “based on their Tertiary English Language Test (TELP) placement results” (Hong Kong Institute of Education, 2007, Student Handbook, Appendix XIII). An optional eight-day English immersion summer camp is offered to first-year students. Non-English majors at the university are required to take one module of English, which spans the entire year, effectively forcing them to be taking English at all times. English majors have even stricter requirements.

This EFL program is one of many in Hong Kong. Examining the structure of the EFL program gives a contrast to some of the techniques used at HKUST. These contrasting methods will highlight areas that may have room for improvement.

2.3.3 Standardized Tests

Standardized Tests are a large part of Hong Kong's school system. Two standardized tests in Hong Kong play an important role in determining every student's future. The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) (2007) claims that the most widely taken standardized examination in Hong Kong is the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE).

According to the HKEAA (2007), students typically take the HKCEE at the end of their five years of secondary school. The exam has a total of thirty-nine topics, most of which can be taken in either English or Cantonese. Students can take any number of these topics, and can pass and fail them

individually. Each school has a list of topics that must be passed in order for students to continue their education. Passing these specified exam topics allows students to attend senior secondary school.

Senior secondary school is a more specialized two years of schooling that prepares students for yet another standardized test. This exam, called the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE), has twenty-four topics and is a deciding factor for university acceptance (HKEAA, 2007). Every student is offered bids by each university department they apply to. These bids include specific grades the students must achieve in which HKALE topic in order to be accepted into that department.

The two major standardized tests in Hong Kong currently define the structure of Hong Kong education. They determine each individual's place in society. Since first-year students at HKUST will have been preparing for the HKALE for the past four years of their lives, it will be important to understand the content of these exams. Although this is the current state of Hong Kong's education system, a reform will be implemented by 2012 that will drastically change the educational background of all incoming freshmen at HKUST.

The one thing that this reform will not change is the emphasis on standardized testing. According to the Education Bureau of Hong Kong (2007), the new structure will have Hong Kong students attending three years of lower secondary school, three years of senior secondary school, and four years of university (assuming acceptance). This new system includes only one standardized test, which is taken by students after their completion of the three years of senior secondary school. While many universities will require the completion of four core subjects and one elective, HKUST will require the completion of two electives along with the four core subjects. The change in the education system will not greatly affect the goal or approach of any Hong Kong university with respect to standardized testing, because incoming students will still have been learning for a standardized test for several prior years.

Because they have been learning for standardized tests, incoming university students will have several tendencies and characteristics that will help them succeed in a university environment. According to Chicago Public Schools (2000), students who do well on standardized tests have learned to use their

time efficiently, are able to follow instructions, know how to avoid common mistakes, and can maximize their scores by informed and educated guessing. These characteristics will help students continue to perform well on university exams, even if they do not completely understand the material. Knowing that many incoming students have mastered one method of testing, it might be advantageous to test them in another way. Using a unique testing method for ESL courses would ensure that students have learned the material and are not passing the course using educated guesses. Whether another method of testing would be useful or not, it is helpful to understand as much about the students who are taking a course before attempting to examine that course.

2.4 Description of HKUST Course Materials

The three classes we will be examining, LABU 101, Lang 106, and Lang 108, are all mandatory English courses taken by first-year business, engineering, and science students respectively during their first semester at HKUST. Each course has its own book that guides the class, while other materials are used to supplement it. In this section we will examine each of the three main course texts.

2.4.1 LABU 101

The Language Centre created the course book for LABU 101, Business Case Analysis. This textbook has five main sections: introduction to business case analysis, critical reading, critical thinking, ISMT Case Study, and MGTO Case study. Instead of teaching vocabulary or grammar throughout the book, most of the content asks complicated open-ended questions or asks the students to create presentations based on their opinions. There are some grammar and vocabulary sub-sections, but they are scattered sparsely throughout the book. All of the sections use business cases as a starting point for most of the activities contained within.

The introduction to business case analysis begins with a few open-ended questions about what a business case is, without any answers. This section then uses two mini-business cases as examples. The text asks questions about each business case that prompt students to think about and form opinions on the case that they have just read. This section also presents several questions about business cases in general as well as methods of analyzing them.

The critical reading section attempts to help students be able to differentiate opinions from facts, understand the tone of writing, recognize biases, and compare and contrast the ideas from two similar resources. The section starts by asking the students to find differences in two nearly identical biographies. Next the text explains how to judge the reliability of a source, detect a bias, distinguish between tones, and distinguish between facts and opinions. Questions about article extracts reinforce these ideas.

The section on critical thinking begins by asking questions that allow the students to think about their own decision making process. The process for analyzing business cases is then thoroughly explained before the section asks students to analyze four separate mini-business cases. The usually set of open-ended and opinion driven questions and exercises follow each of the business cases.

The last two sections of the text are entirely dedicated to the examination of one full sized business case each. The two sections ask simple fact based questions that seemingly just test whether the students read and understood the business case. After these simple questions, each section includes a list of activities and questions that circle the main topic of the business case. The actual business case is not included in the text, which leads one to believe that they are presented to the students in another way.

This text is a collection of many questions and exercises with few explanations or answers. This leads us to believe that most of the actual information being taught is presented by the teacher of the course or some other course material, while the book is used as a tool for practice of this information. The purpose and goal of this text is worth noting because of its drastic difference from the fact and explanation filled textbooks that are used in most college courses.

2.4.2 Lang 106

The teachers of the Language Centre designed the course book for Lang 106, English for Engineering Students. Each year the book is redesigned by the Language Centre to include changes to the overall arrangement of the book and specific tasks that are assigned to the students. These changes are made based on the results of an annual survey. The topics in this book include from adjusting to college life and living in an English Language environment.

The book begins with the syllabus for the course. There is an overview and objectives section followed by an assessment section. The students are evaluated through online activities, a listening/writing task, a group discussion, and a listening test. The online activities follow the topics covered during class and “aim to give additional help to improve...language skills” (Language Centre, 3). The listening/writing tasks require the students to listen to a recorded piece of dialog and write something about it. For the discussion assessments, which aim to improve the student’s critical thinking skills, students are required to present their viewpoint of a topic in a small group. Finally, the listening test is given to “show how much improvement [was] made in [the students’] listening skills” (Language Centre, 3). Each assessment is scheduled for a certain week during the semester, which is outlined in the Course Schedule. For example, the listening/writing assessment is scheduled for week 8 of the semester and the discussion assessment is scheduled for week 12-13.

The topics used in this book relate to adjusting to college life and teamwork. Some examples are: setting goals to succeed in university, coping with stress, and conflict resolution. The book also includes topics such as how to listen and understand information in lectures and how to communicate and get along with people from different cultures.

For each topic, different tasks are assigned to help the students with their listening, speaking, and writing skills. The Setting Goals and Succeeding at University sections begin with a writing task. Students

are asked to answer questions about themselves, such as “What differences do you expect to find between your high school and your university experience.” Next a clip is shown and the students are asked to answer questions and complete a fill-in-the-blank section. The students then learn how to pronounce vowels and consonants. Lastly, there is a discussion skills section, which tells the students how to have a successful discussion. Like the Setting Goals section, all the other sections have different tasks that allow the students to practice and improve their listening, speaking, and writing skills.

2.4.3 Lang 108

The course book for Lang 108 is Headway Upper-Intermediate by Liz and John Soars (2005). Lang 108 is the only course of the three first-year English courses that uses a book that was not created by HKUST’s Language Centre. Headway Upper-Intermediate has 12 chapters that deal with the use of English on a daily basic. Each chapter includes assignments that emphasize different English skills.

The first chapter in this book, called No Place like Home, begins with a grammar section dealing with different tenses. The assignments to review these grammar rules include reading excerpts and answering questions about them. In the next section, reading and speaking, students are asked to read a passage and then work in a group to answer questions about the passage. In the vocabulary and pronunciation section, students work on compound nouns and adjectives. The assignments include fill-in-the-blank, practicing pronunciation, and working in groups to make compound words from a list of given words. The listening section of this chapter asks the students to answer some questions after they have listened to a recording. The last section to this chapter is called Everyday English. In this section, students learn to have casual conversations. The text teaches students to have these casual conversations by giving a sample blurb of conversation and asking the student to pick from a list of possible responses. For example, if someone said “great to see you. Come on in.” the only reasonable response listed is “I

was just passing and thought I'd drop in." Students are also asked to practice the conversation with a partner to work on their listening and speaking skills.

The Headway Upper-Intermediate book was not designed specifically for the science students at HKUST, therefore this book contains materials that can be taught in any intermediate English courses. This book contains everyday topics, such as keeping in contact when you are away and reading about Starbucks's Coffee. The assignments in each chapter are used for practicing the students' reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has discussed many aspects of EFL programs as well as analyzed specific EFL examples from around the globe. These examples have shown what approaches have been taken to solve the problem of teaching English as a foreign language. A review of the education system in Hong Kong has shown that new changes to the system will have an effect on the importance of the EFL program at HKUST. Since students will be less proficient in English when entering HKUST, the program will have to be more effective.

3. Methodology

Our goal is to compare and contrast the opinions of current students, previous students, and the teachers in the Language Centre on the English language needs of HKUST's first-year English language students and the ability of the course materials to meet them. The following are the objectives used to attain our goal.

- To determine the perceived English language needs of the first-year business, engineering, and science students from their own view.
- To determine the needs of the first-year business, engineering, and science students from the view of their teachers
- To determine the needs of the first-year business, engineering, and science students from the view of the previous students.
- To determine the opinions of the course materials from the views of business, engineering, and science students
- To determine the opinions of the course materials from the views of the teachers who have taught it before.
- To determine the opinions of the course materials from the views of previous students who have taken it before

This chapter will explain the methods we employed to attain each objective. A description of what we did and why we did it will be presented along with the differences between each objective.

3.1 The perceived English language needs of the first-year students from their own view

We used close-ended surveys as our main data collection tool. A close-ended survey consists entirely of questions that restrict the respondent to choose between certain answers that are already provided. We used this method because a close-ended survey gives quantitative data that can be directly analyzed and compared. We conducted a census of the first-year student population by giving each English teacher surveys for all his or her students. We then asked the teachers to administer the surveys and return the completed surveys to the Language Centre's general office. We received 1214 completed surveys from the teachers out of the total first-year student population of 1893, giving us a 64% response rate. Some teachers did not return the surveys that were completed by entire sections of a course, so the sections that were returned have no assurance of a statistical representation of the population.

The survey questions (Appendix B) consisted of 17 general questions, seven of which assessed the perceived needs of the students. We used the same needs-based questions throughout the three surveys in order to compare the responses between the courses. The students were on break until the end of January, so the survey was administered at the beginning of the new semester, during the first week of February. The teachers gave out the surveys on the first few days of classes after winter recess.

3.2 The needs of the first-year business, engineering, and science students from the view of their teachers

The purpose of this objective was to gain more insight into the needs of the business, science and engineering students as well as to discover any discrepancies between what the teachers teach and the students' need. We collected a list of all teachers who taught any of the three different first-year courses

either in the previous semester or in the year before. We conducted half-hour interviews with all 23 teachers to assess their opinions of the students' needs.

The interview protocol (Appendix H) was divided into two main sections. Half of the interview, which consisted of six questions, was dedicated to the teachers' perception of the needs of the students. The questions were aimed at finding out what the teachers expected from each of the three different types of student and also to find out what the teachers encountered while teaching each course.

3.3 The needs of the first-year business, engineering, and science students from the view of the previous students

The purpose of this objective was to give us opinions from the perspectives of someone who had experienced the courses first hand and had seen the consequences of any imperfections in the courses. We contacted the teachers of the second year programs and made arrangements to go into each class and conduct focus groups with the students about the course they took the year before. In total, we attended six classes that each contained approximately 15 students. The second-year course for Lang 106 was a modular course. This means that students choose certain sections that they wanted to improve. For example, one module was professional presentations. There were four modules in total and each section taught two modules. To get the best representation of the student population, we chose two classes that would represent students from all four modules. The second-year course for Lang 108 had six modules. However, unlike the previous course, each class only taught one module. To get the best representation of the course we attended three of the largest modules. The second-year course for LABU 101(LABU 201) has no modules. Because this course has a much tighter schedule than the other two, teachers were not overly willing to allow us to occupy much of their class time. As a result of this, we only attended one LABU 201 course class.

The focus group protocol (Appendix I) consisted of 8 general questions followed by questions specific to each course. There were two questions that dealt with the needs of first-year students and the skills needed for their future at HKUST.

3.4 The opinions of the course materials from the view of business, engineering, and science students

In the survey of first-year students, 10 out of 17 questions (Appendix B) were devoted to finding out the students' opinions of the course materials. While the majority of the questions were general questions about the course materials, there were questions that dealt with specific details of each class. These differences will be highlighted below.

Business:

Analyzing business cases has helped me improve my English skills.

After taking LABU 101, I have become more comfortable reading English articles.

After taking LABU 101, I regularly read English articles in my spare time.

Engineering:

Learning and using idioms and slang have helped me understand/express myself
in English? (If you have not learned idioms or slang, please do not answer.)

Science:

The material in the Headway textbook prepared me for the report writing
assessment.

The material in the Headway textbook prepared me for the oral presentation
assessment.

The grammar review sections of the Headway textbook were helpful.

3.5 The opinions of the course materials from the views of the teachers

During the interviews with the teachers, the teachers' opinions of the course materials were also gathered. After the warm up questions, the interviews (Appendix H) continued with three general questions designed to get the teachers' opinion of the course materials. In this case, the majority of questions were tailored toward each course. These differences will be highlighted below.

Business (LABU 101):

Do you think examining business cases is an effective way for the students to learn English?

Do you think a grammar and vocabulary textbook would be more effective?

Engineering (Lang 106):

Do you think teaching students the meaning of idioms such as “screw up” and “hang out” keeps them interested in learning English?

Will these words and phrases help the students express themselves in English?

Science (Lang 108):

How does using a published book verses in house-materials affect this course?

What advantages and disadvantages do you see in using a published book vs. In house materials?

Do the assessments in the Headway textbook properly test students on what is covered in the textbook's sections?

Did you think the grammar review section in Headway is necessary for students at this level?

3.6 The opinions of the course materials from the views of previous first-year students

During the focus groups that took place in second year classes, we gathered the previous students' opinions on the course materials. There were specific questions designed to gather the students' experience with the material. Since each course is different in content, there must be different questions to address each course. These differences will be highlighted below.

Business (LABU 101):

Did your English improve as a result of the program?

Engineering (Lang 106):

What do you think about Slang? Are they helpful or interesting?

Science (Lang 108):

What do you think about the Grammar review in Headway?

What do you think of using a published textbook vs. using in-house materials?

4. Data

This chapter describes and summarizes responses from our interviews with students and teachers and the survey distributed to the students.

4.1 Current Students' Surveys

This section summarizes the data obtained from the current students' surveys, which are broken up into two categories: perceptions of the student's needs and opinions of the course materials.

4.1.1 Perceptions of the Students' Needs

Figures 4.1-4.15 represent which skills the current students believe they need the most to be successful during the rest of their time at HKUST as well as which skills they are the most interested in improving.

LABU 101

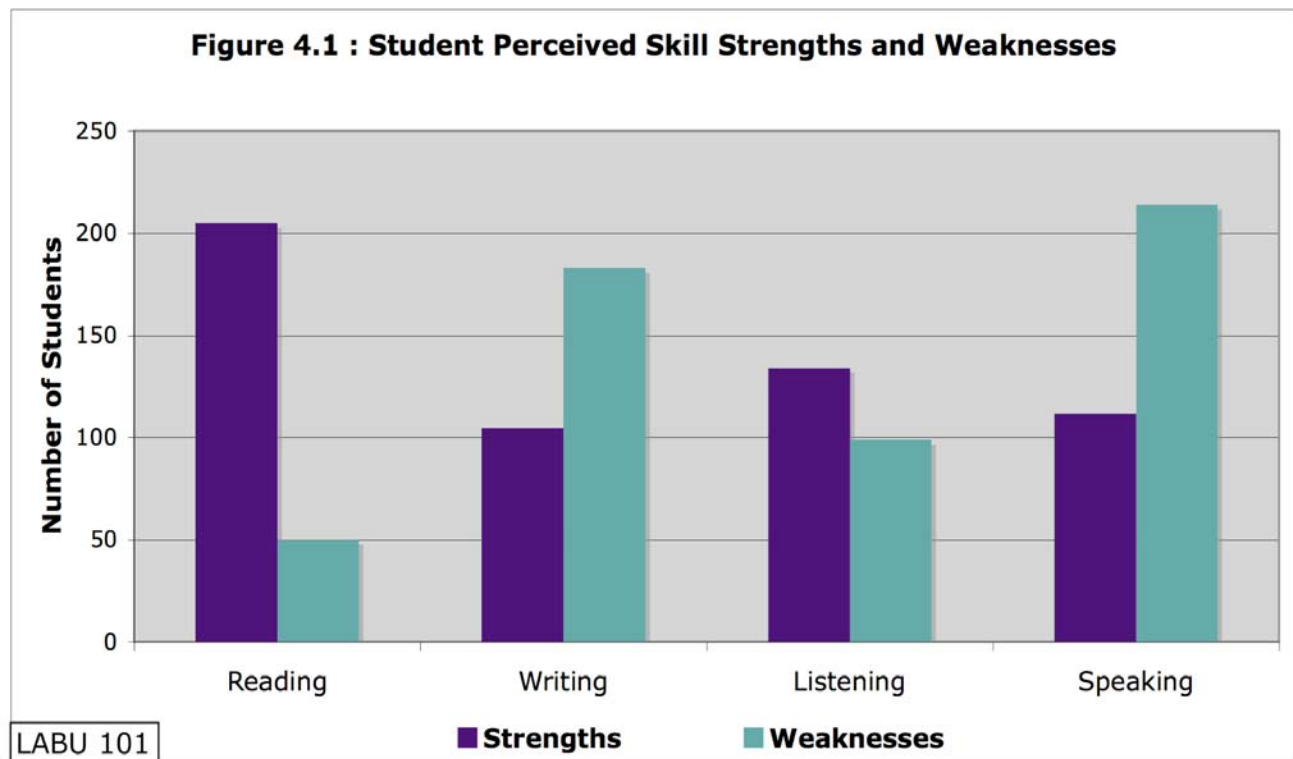


Figure 4.2 : Student Perceived Skills Interested and Skills Improved

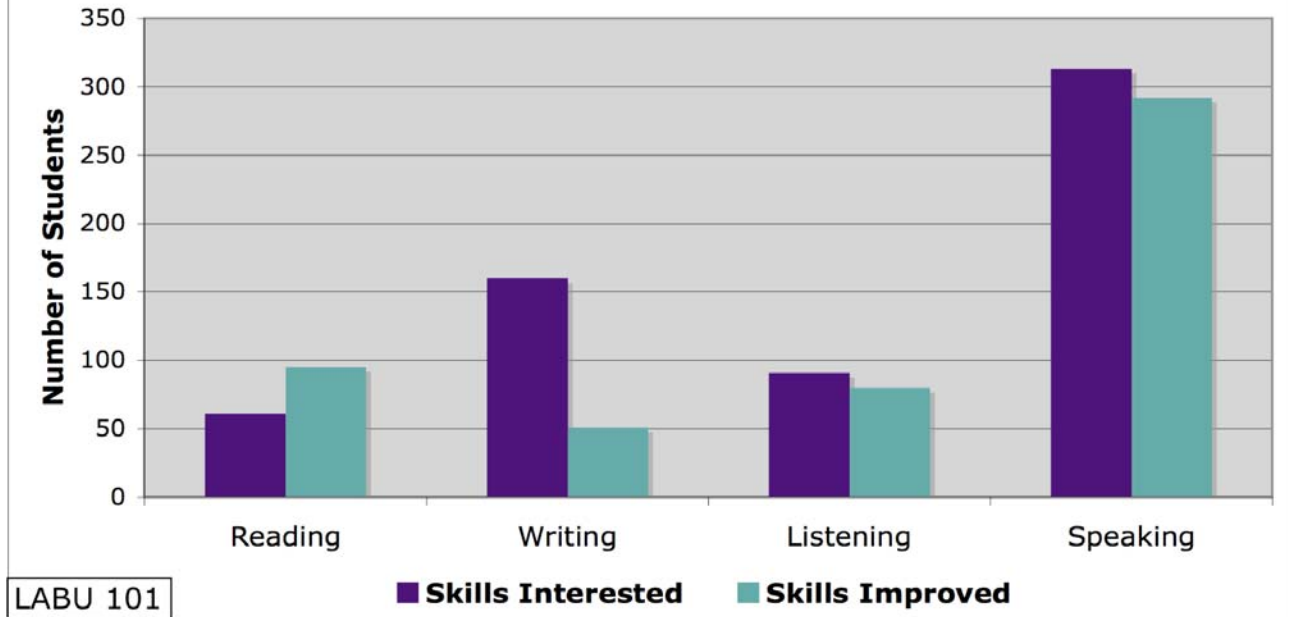
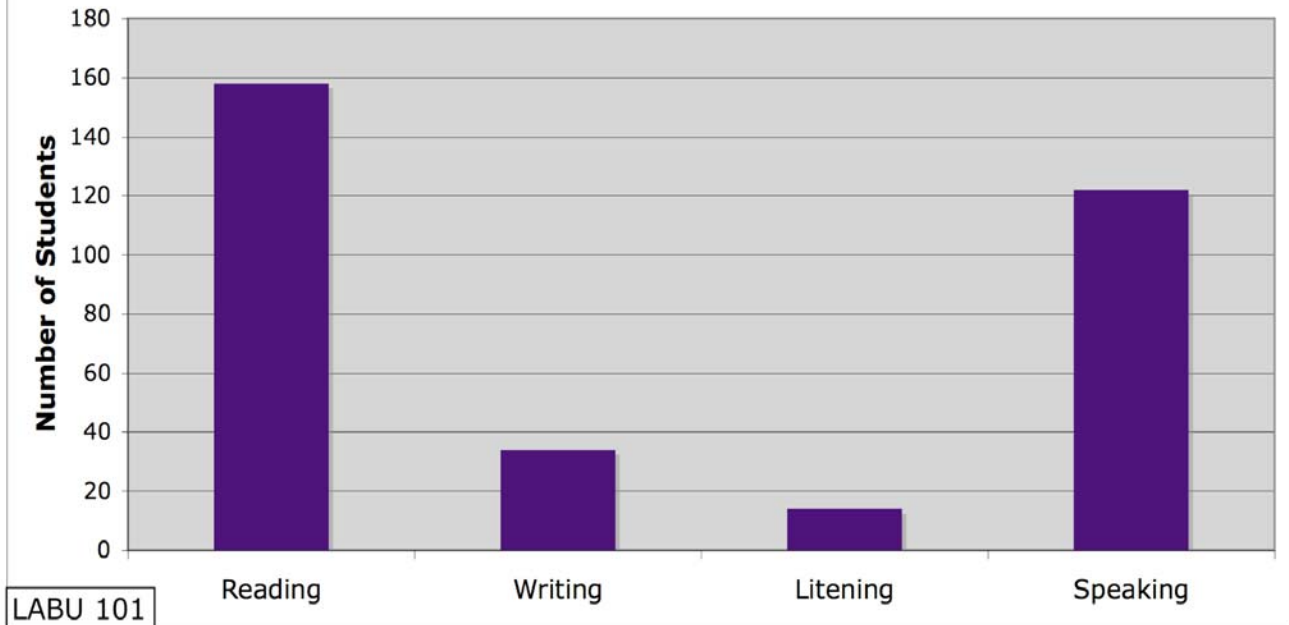
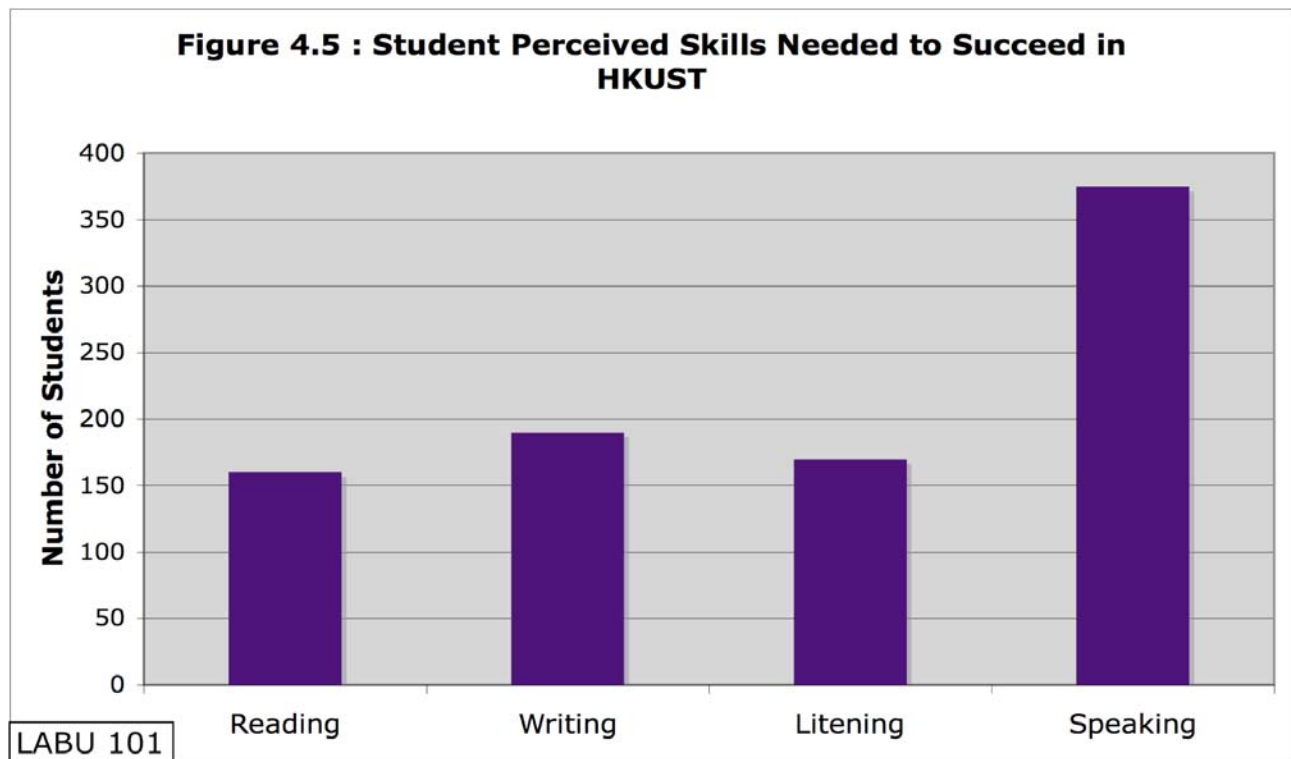
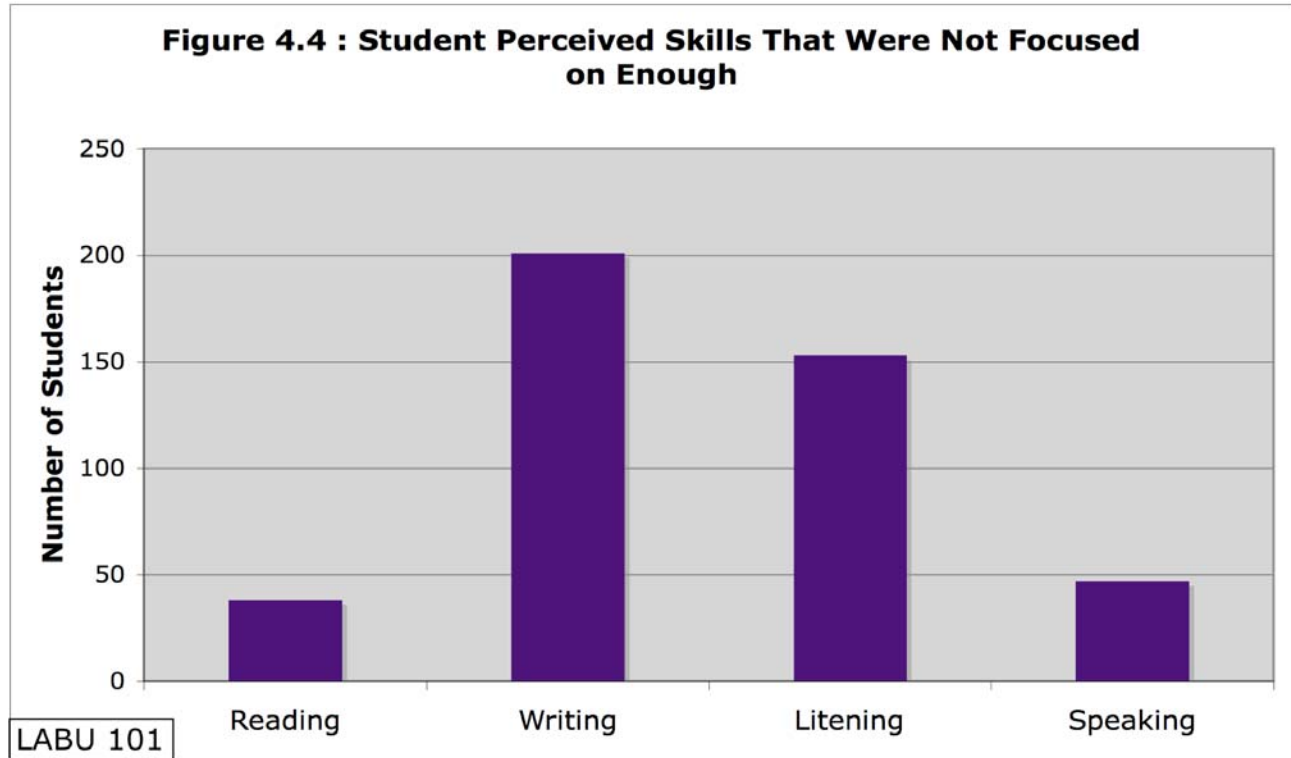
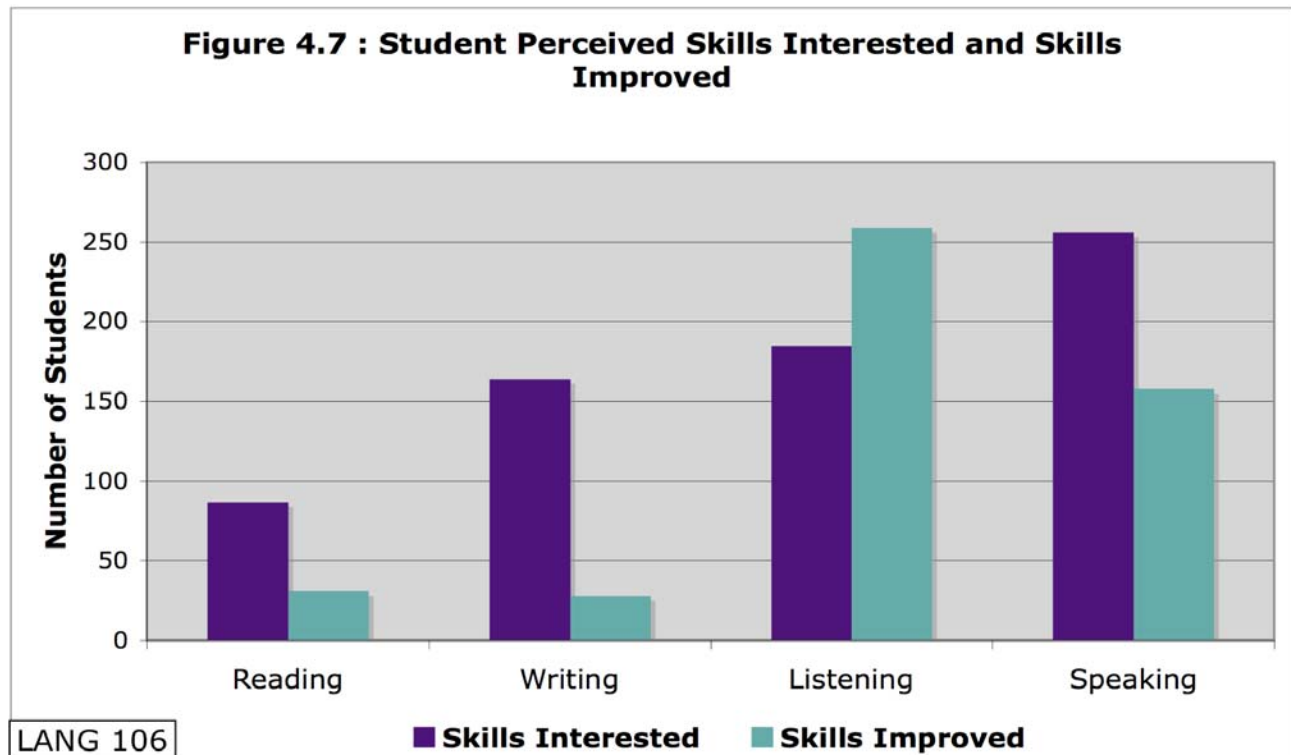
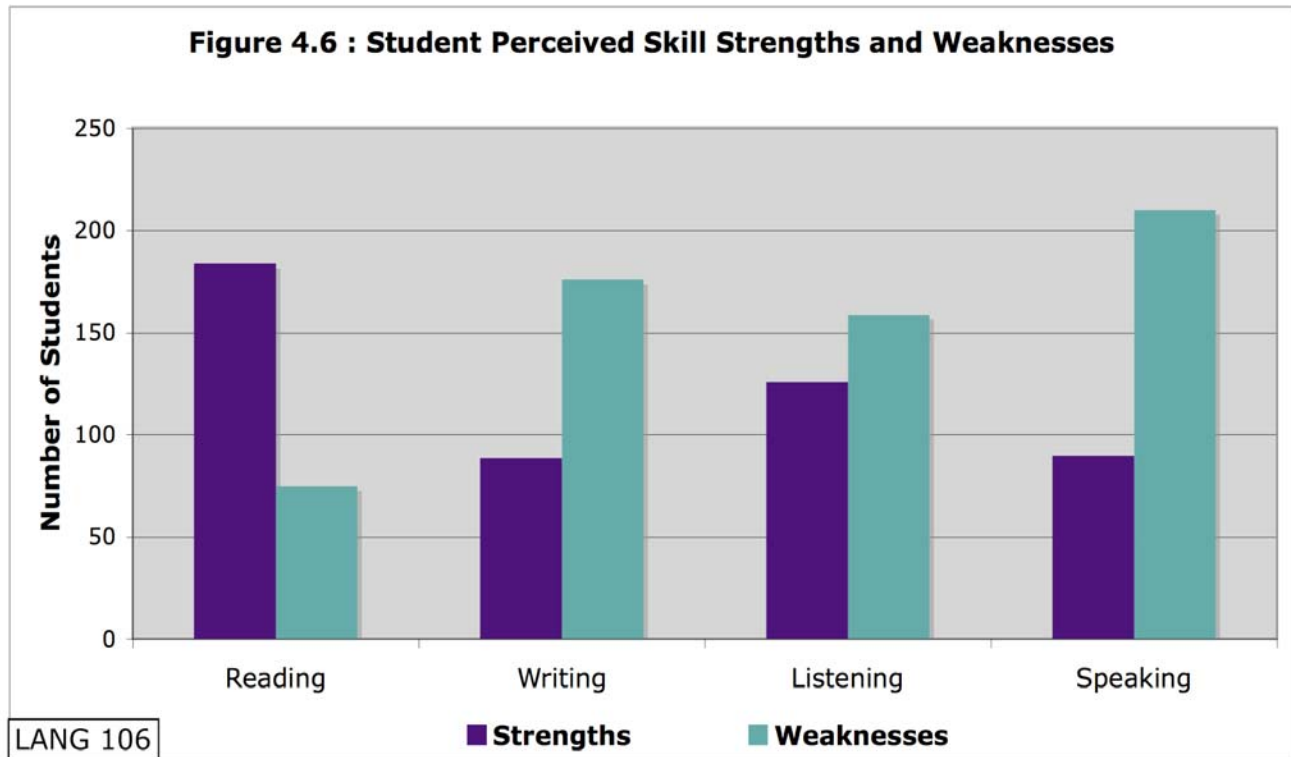


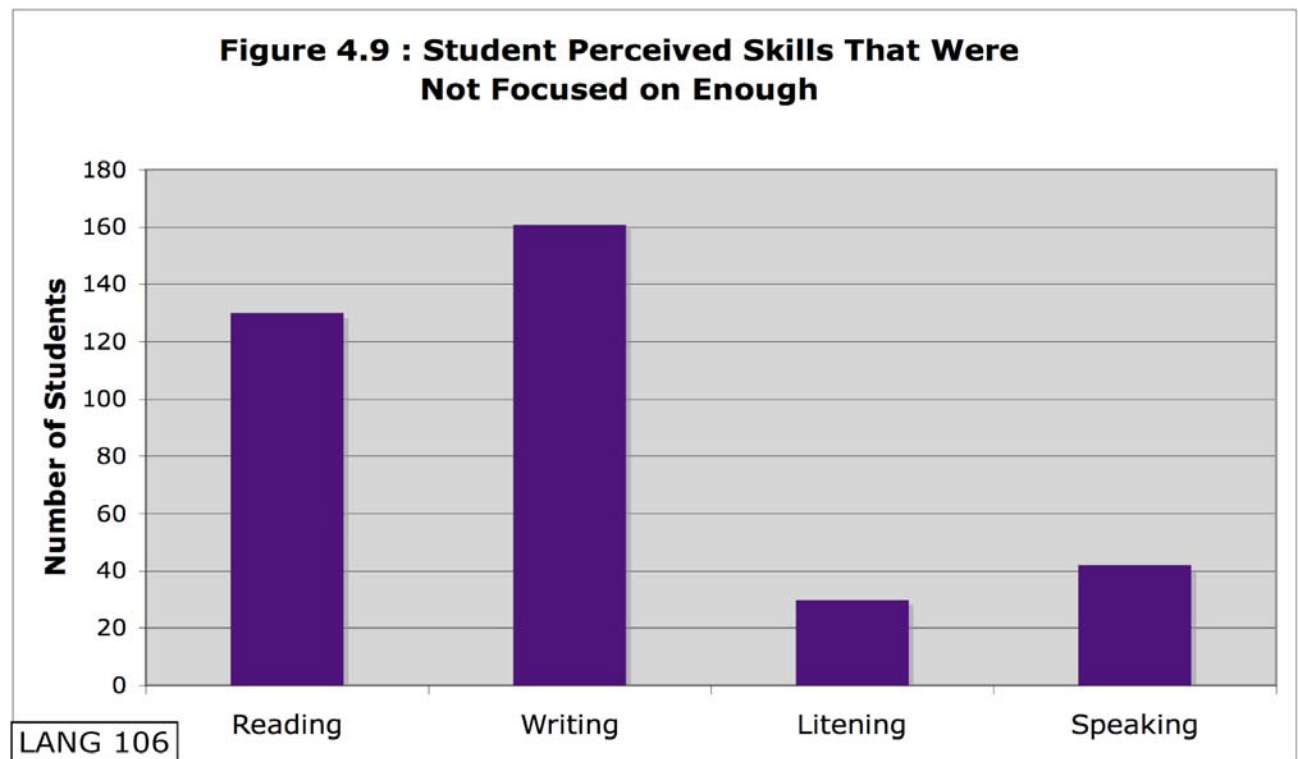
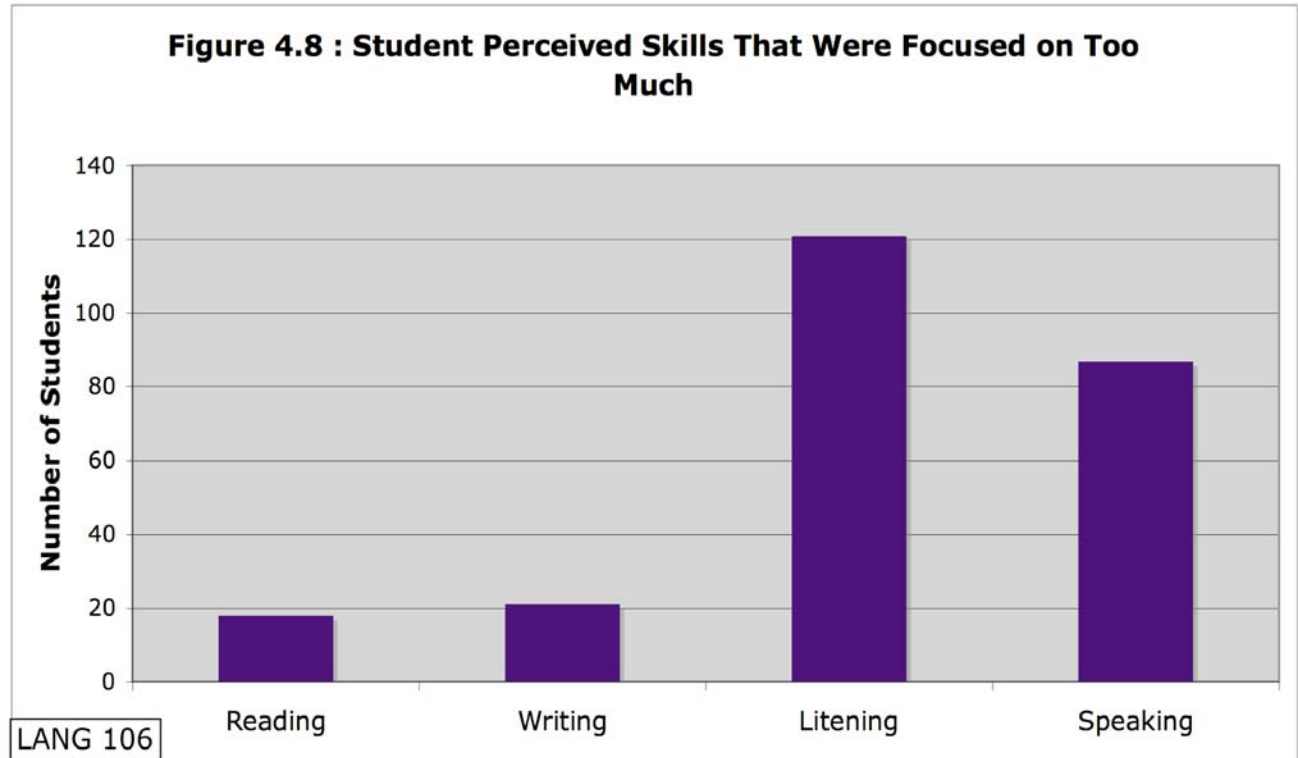
Figure 4.3 : Student Perceived Skills That Were Focused on Too Much

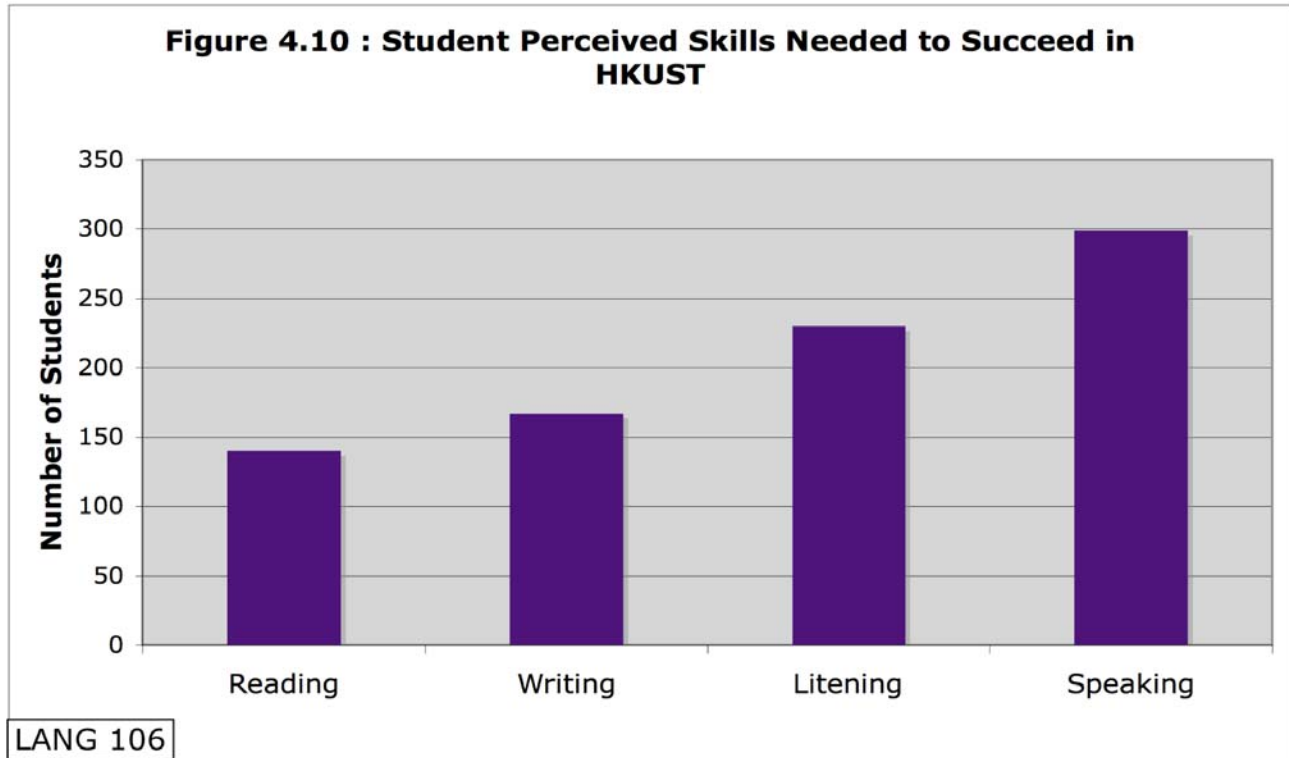




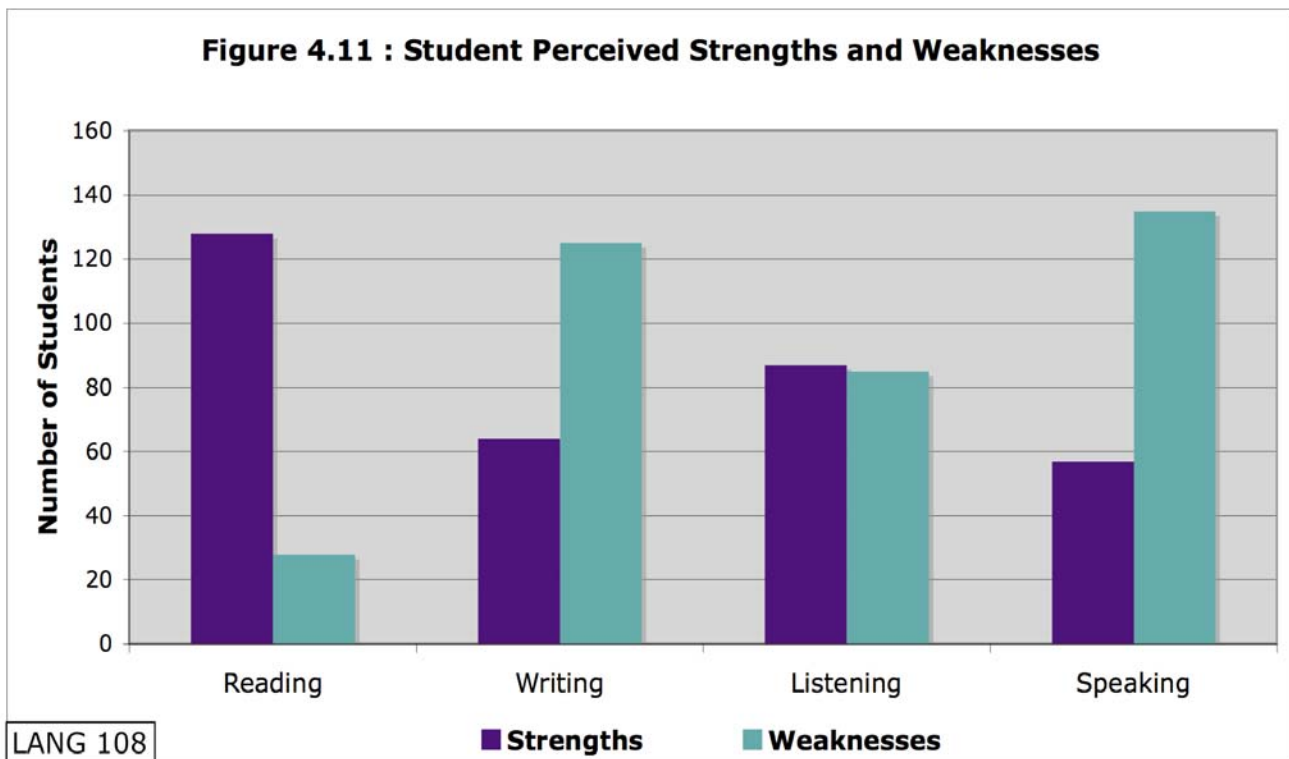
Lang 106







Lang 108



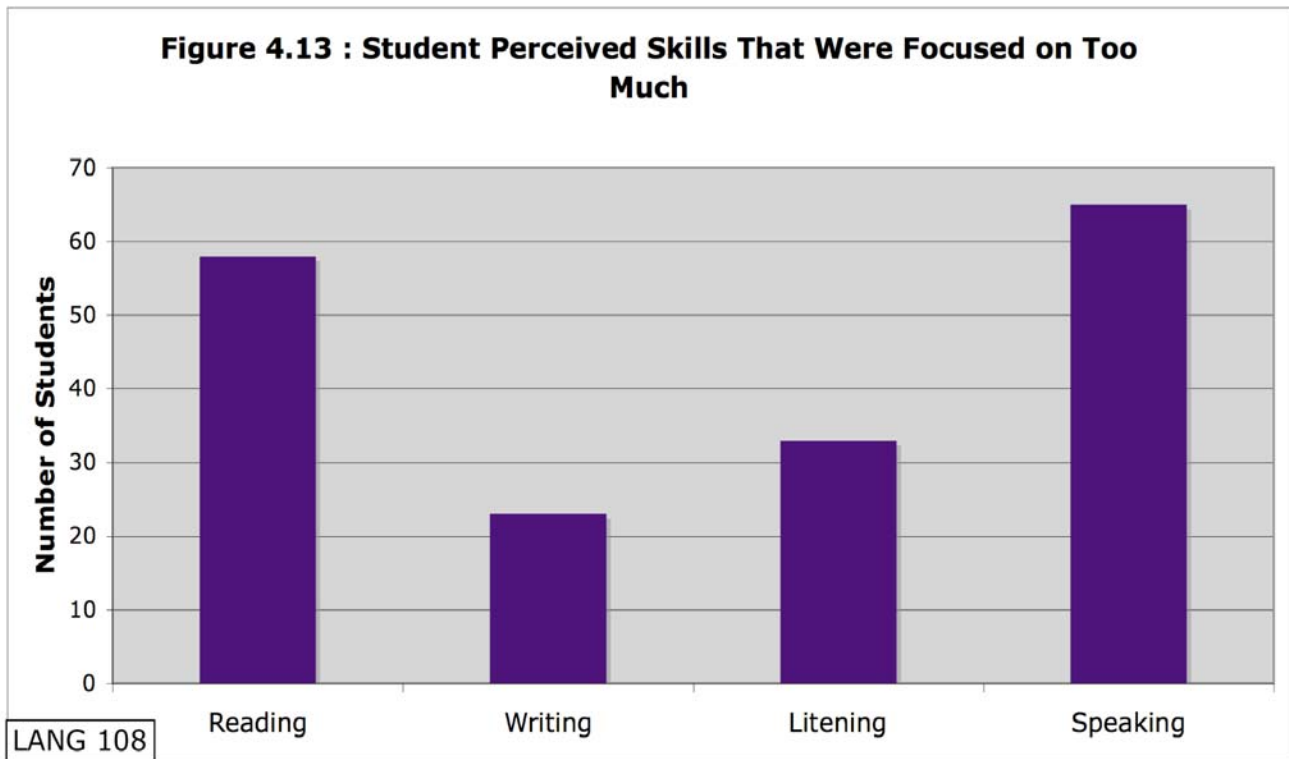
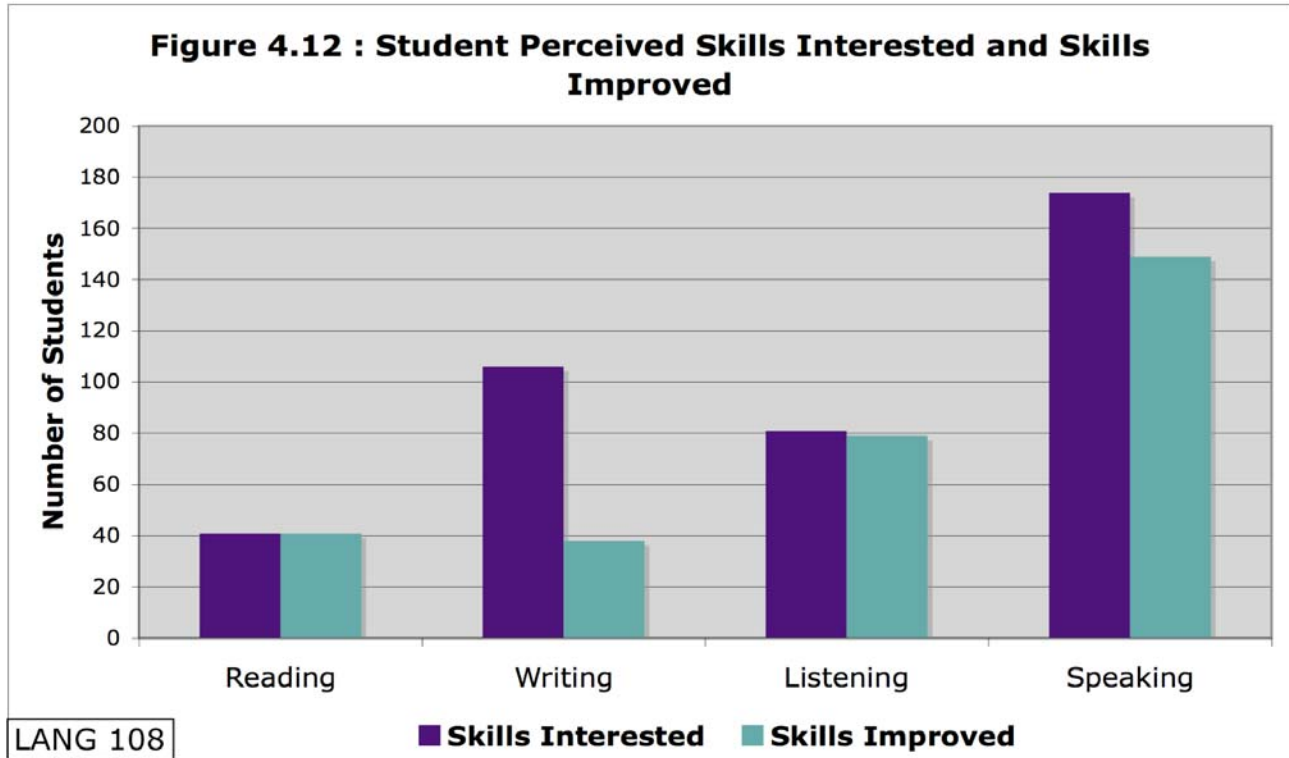


Figure 4.14 : Student Perceived Skills That Were Not Focused on Enough

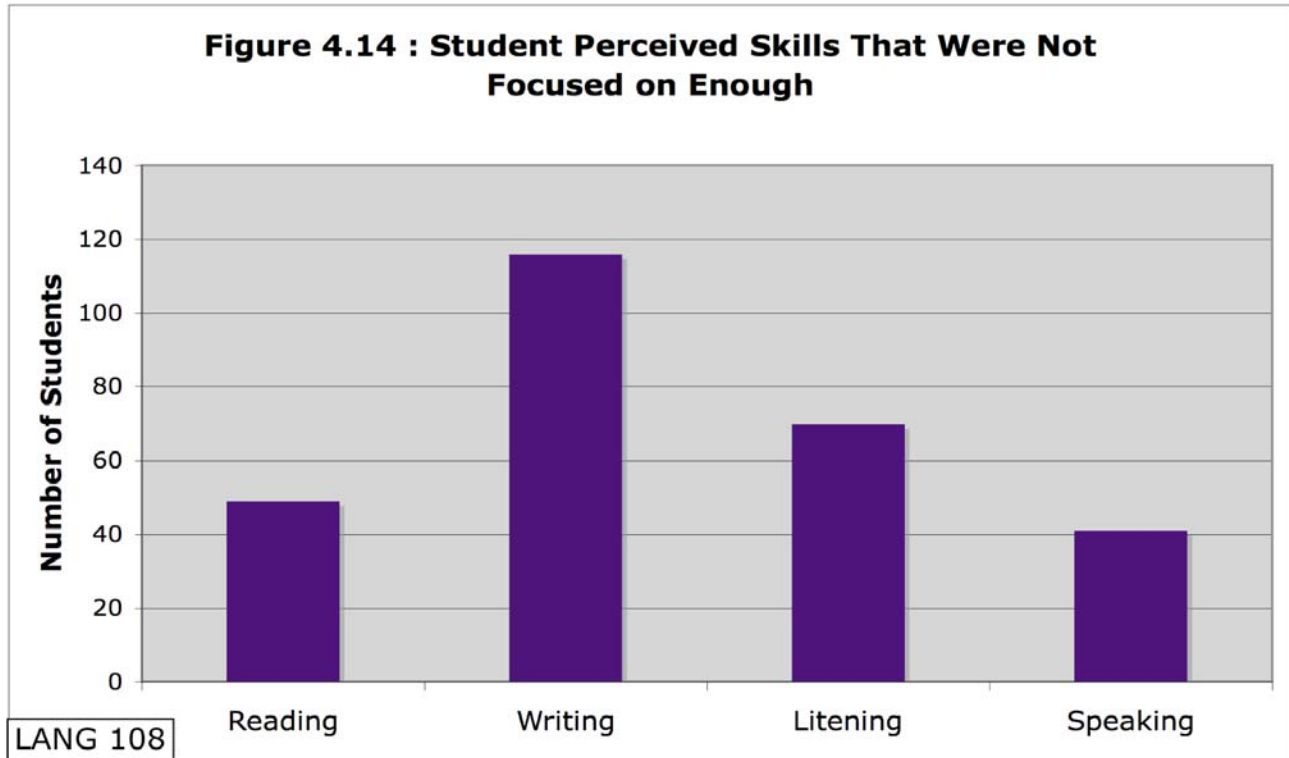
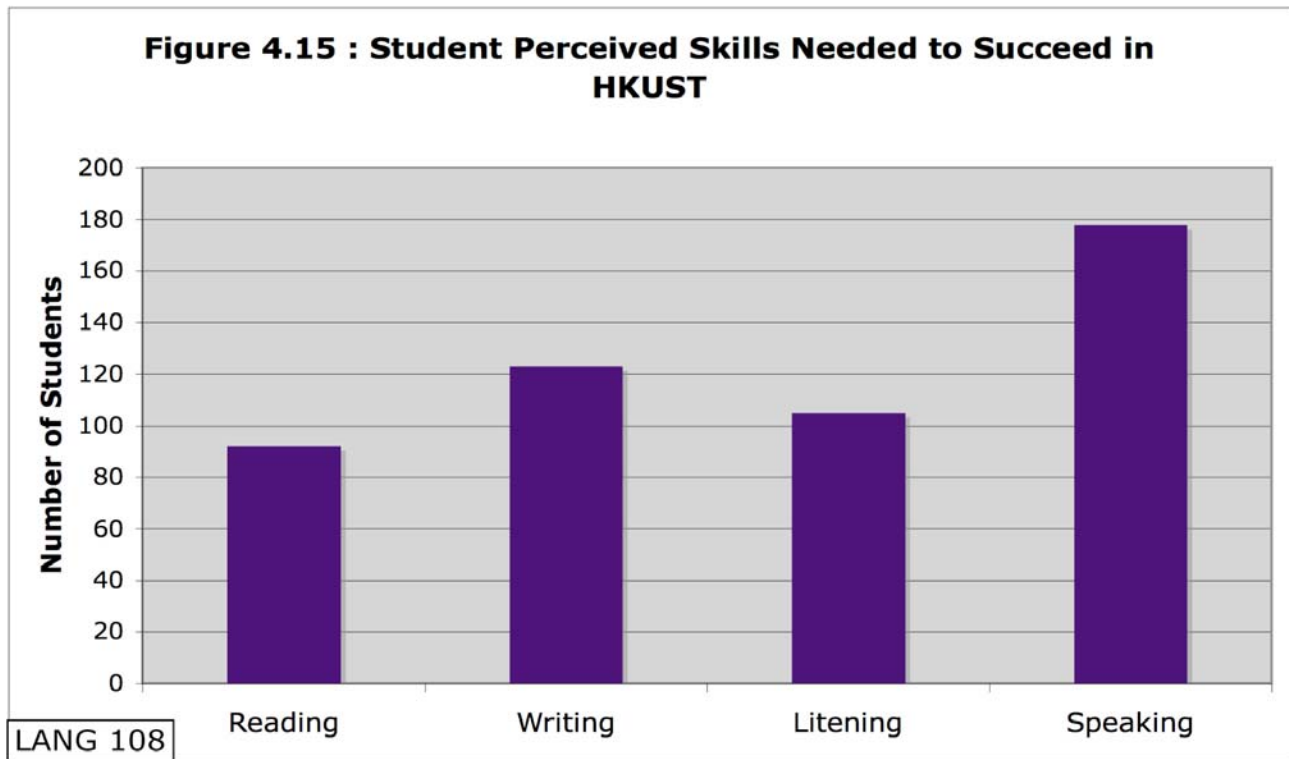


Figure 4.15 : Student Perceived Skills Needed to Succeed in HKUST



4.1.2 Opinions of the Course Materials

Figures 4.16 – 4.43 represent the strengths and weaknesses of the course materials from the perspective of the current students.

LABU 101

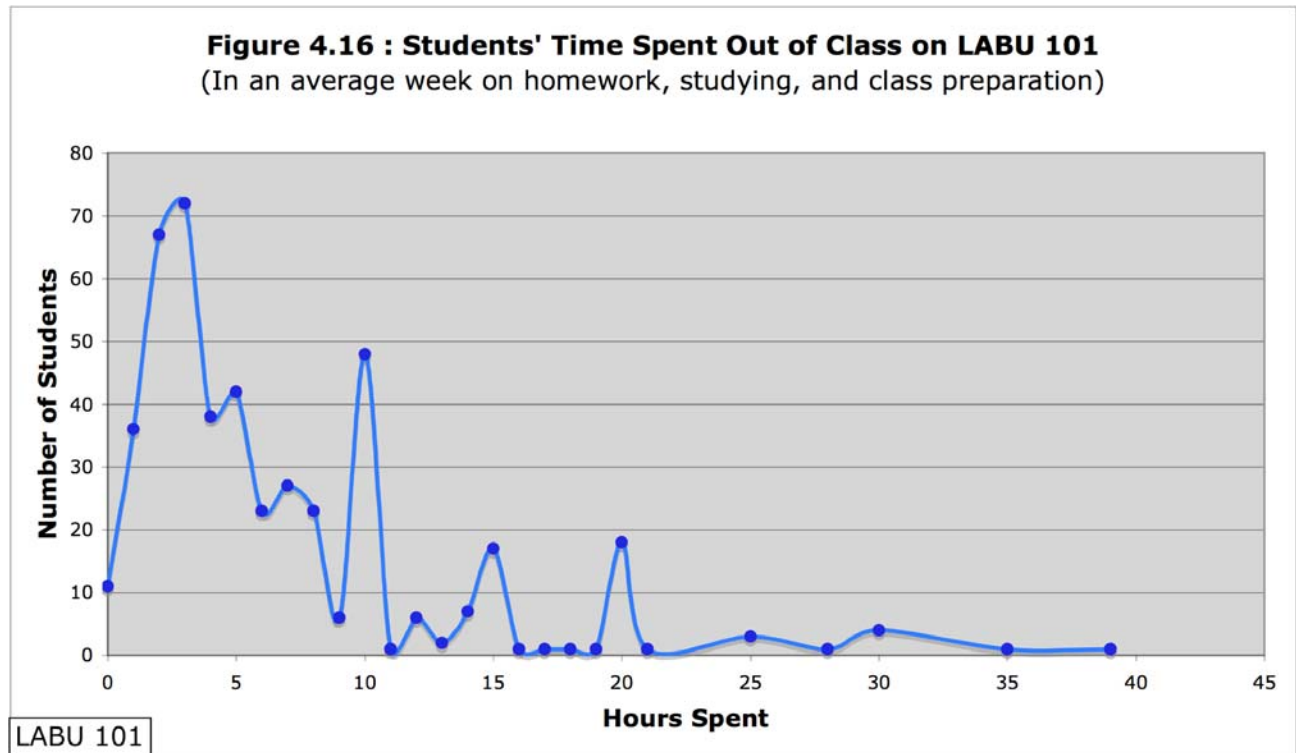
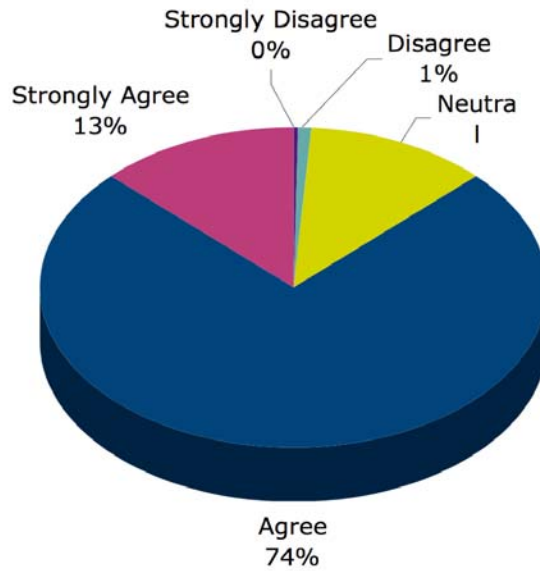
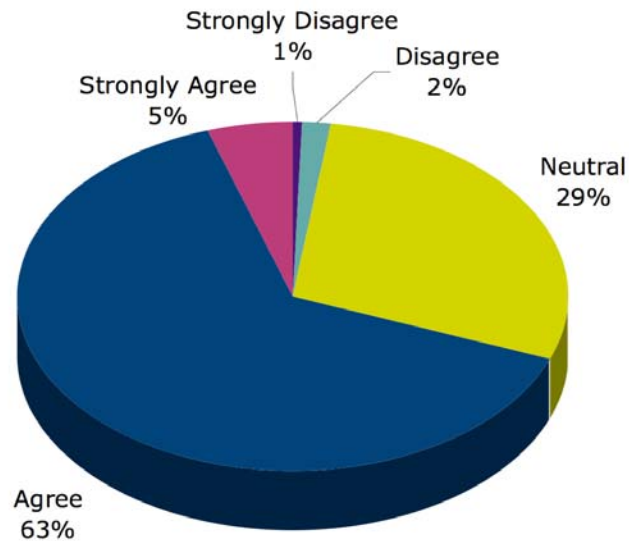


Figure 4.17 : I understand that the objective of the Fall semester of this course was to learn how to analyze business cases.



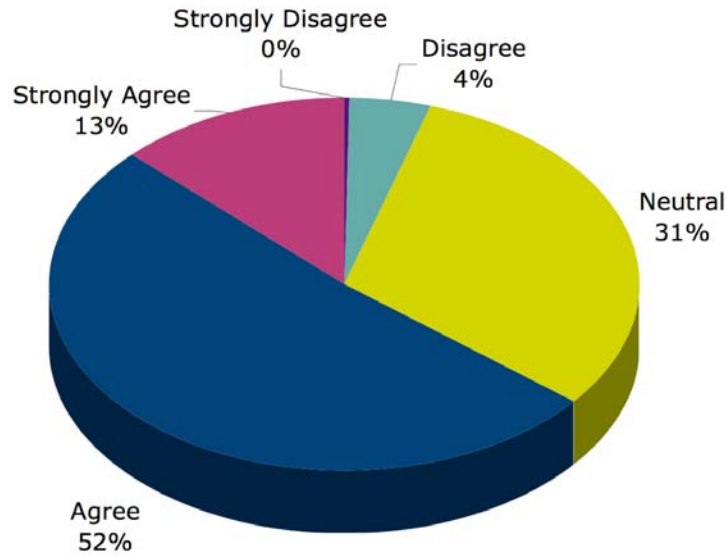
LABU 101

Figure 4.18 : This course achieved the objective stated in previous question.



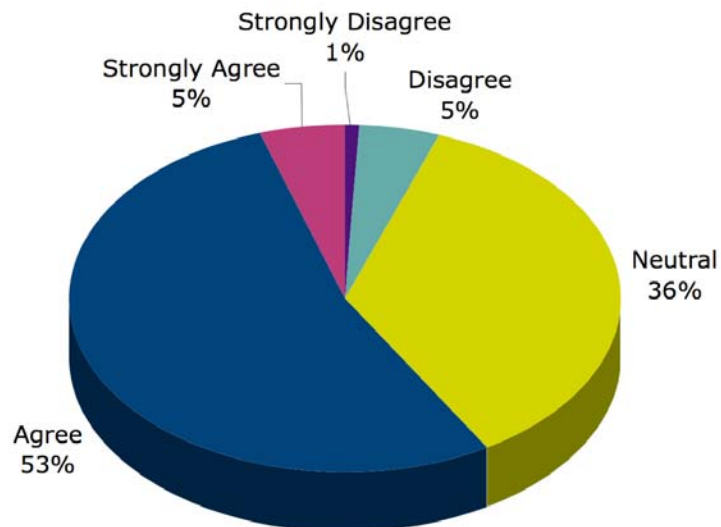
LABU 101

Figure 4.19 : I am interested in learning English.



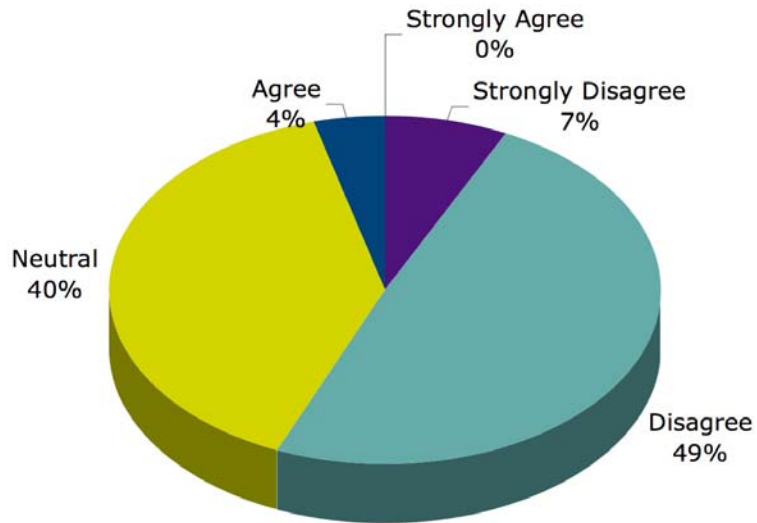
LABU 101

Figure 4.20 : For LABU 101, the material covered during Fall 2007 was useful to me.



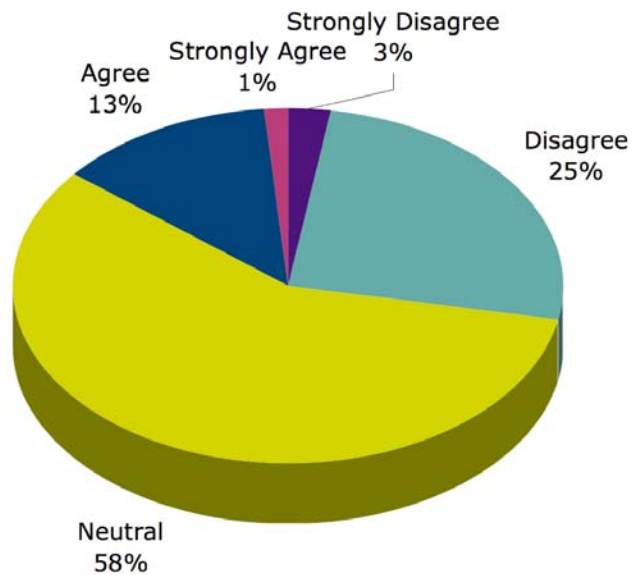
LABU 101

Figure 4.21 : The LABU 101 textbook used during Fall 2007 was difficult.



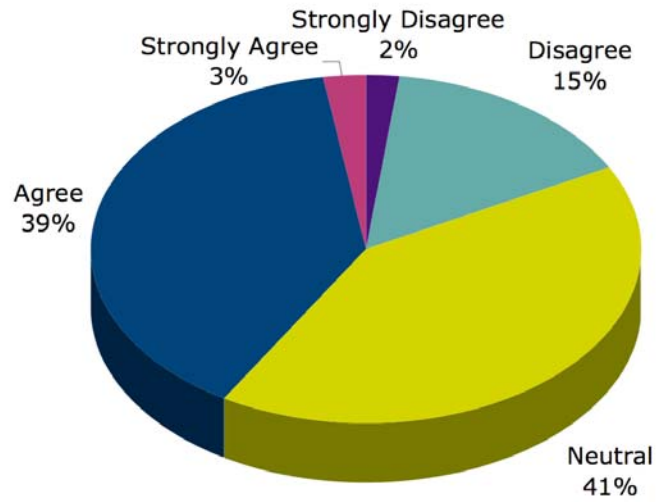
LABU 101

Figure 4.22 : The LABU 101 textbook used during Fall 2007 was interesting.



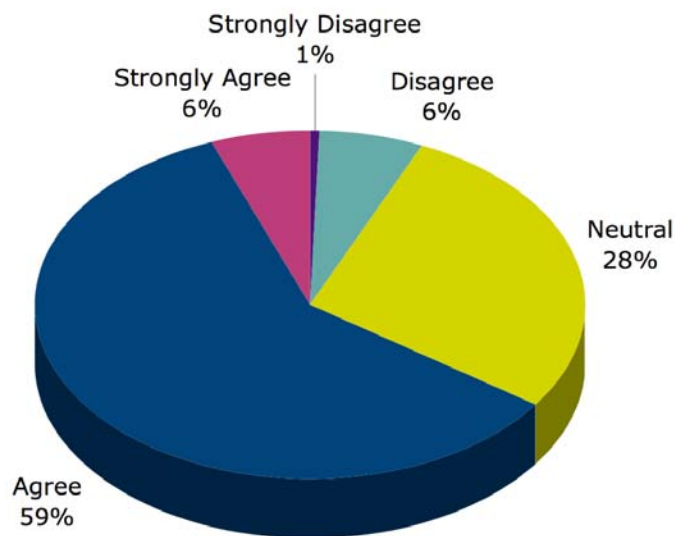
LABU 101

Figure 4.23 : The material covered in LABU 101 has helped me in my other courses at HKUST.



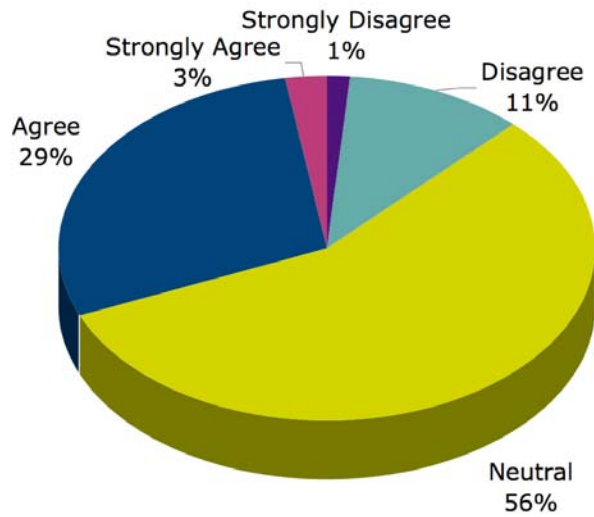
LABU 101

Figure 4.24 : Analyzing business cases has helped me improve my English skills.



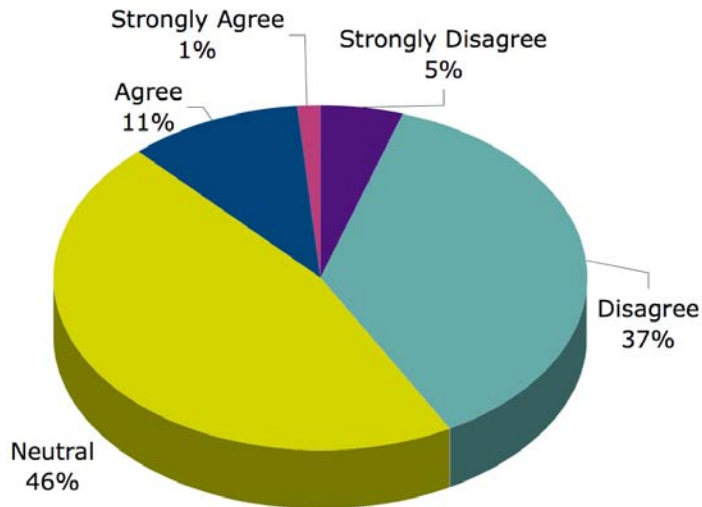
LABU 101

Figure 4.25 : After taking LABU 101, I have become more comfortable reading English articles.



LABU 101

Figure 4.26 : After taking LABU 101, I regularly read English articles in my spare time.



LABU 101

Lang 106

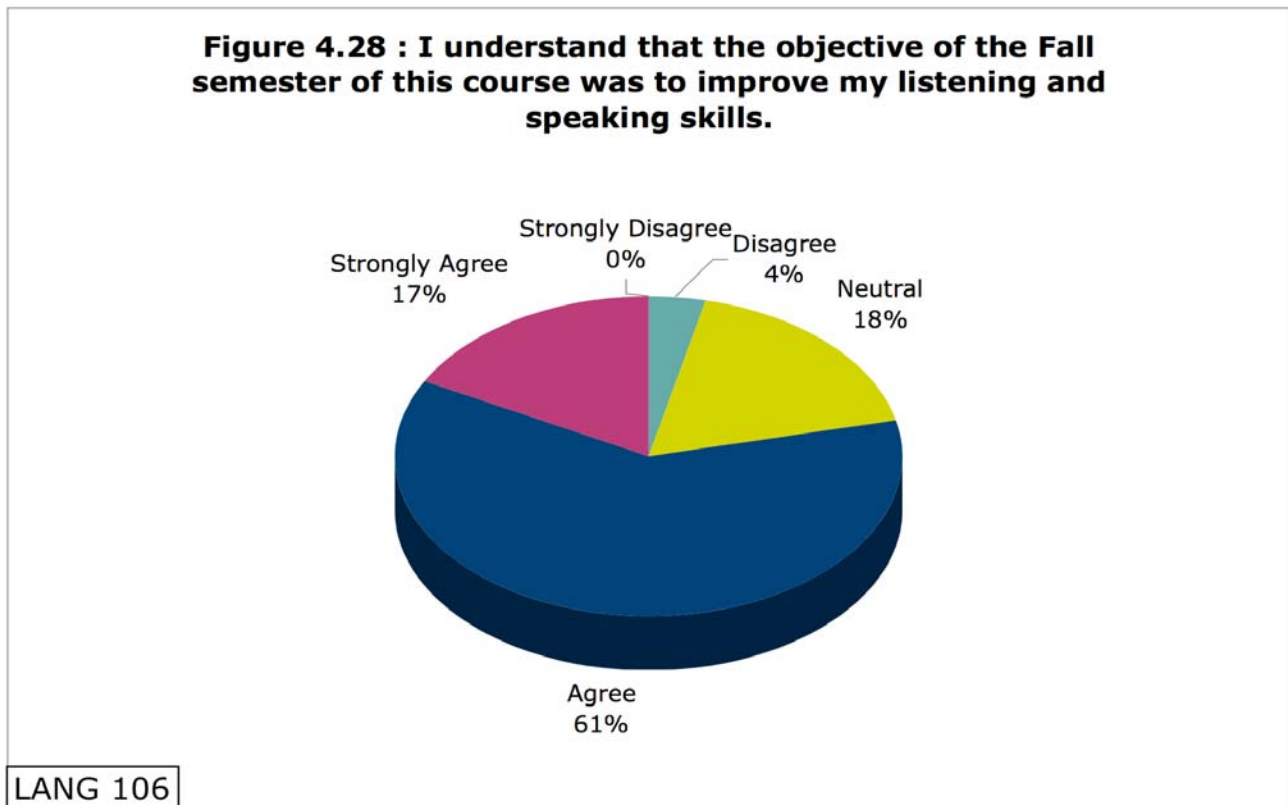
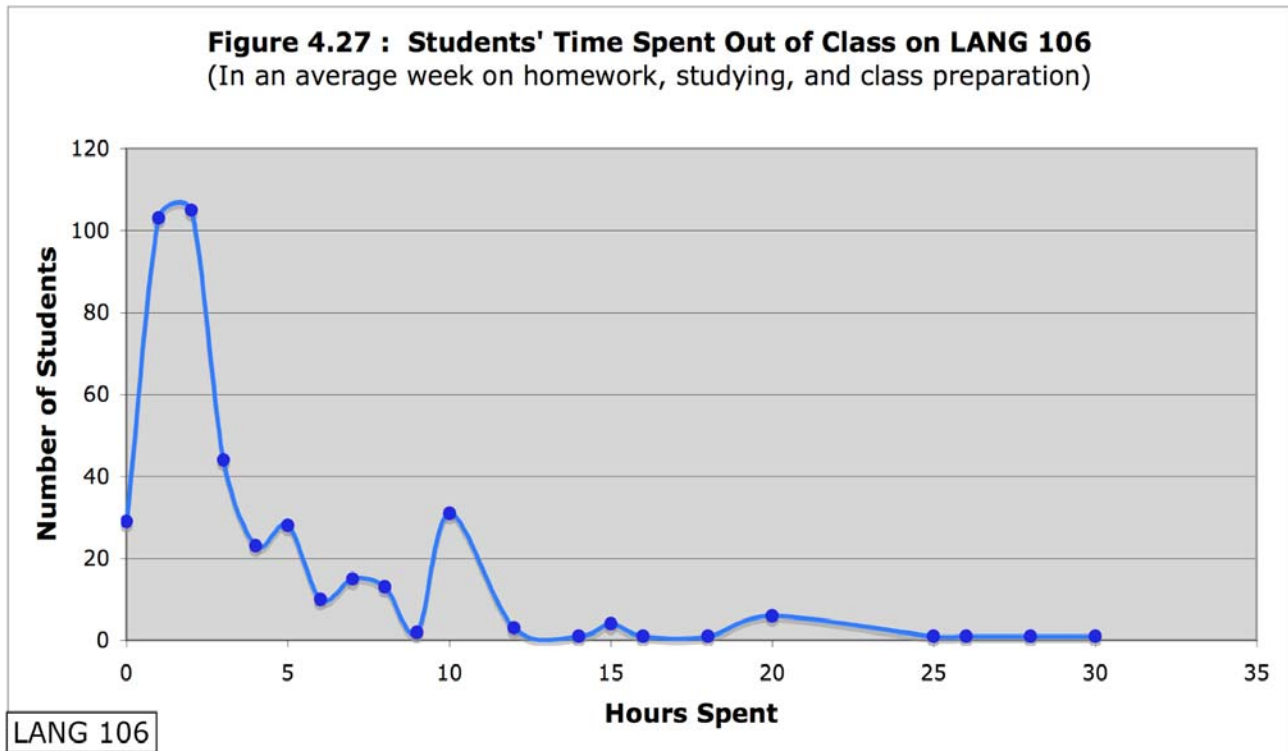
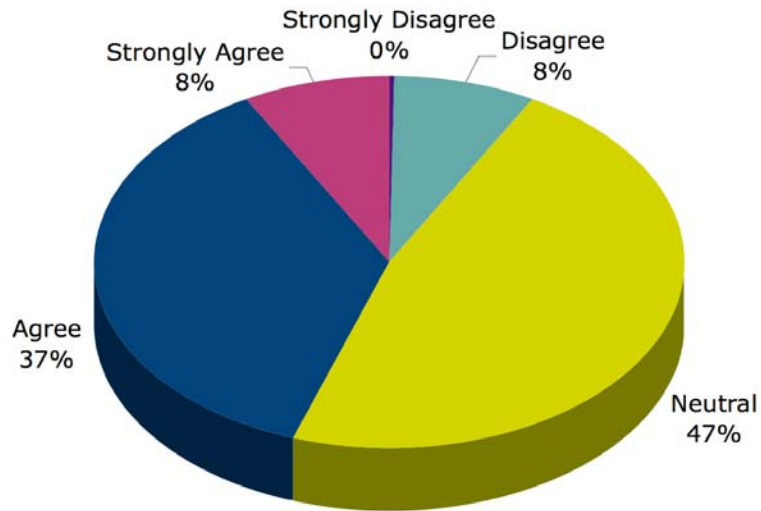
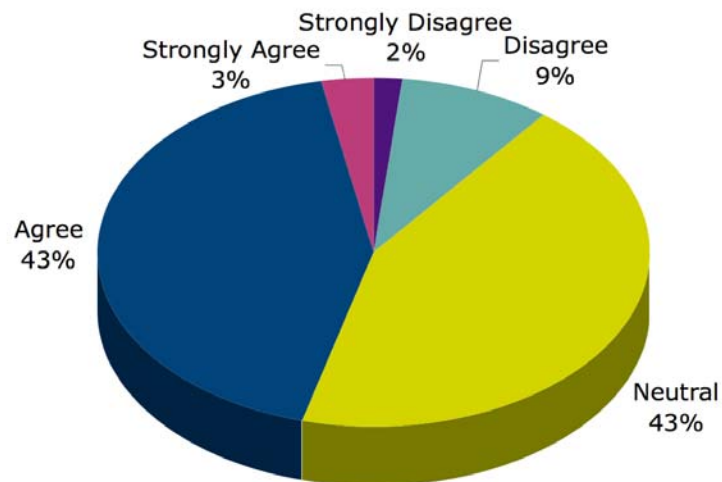


Figure 4.29 : I am interested in learning English.



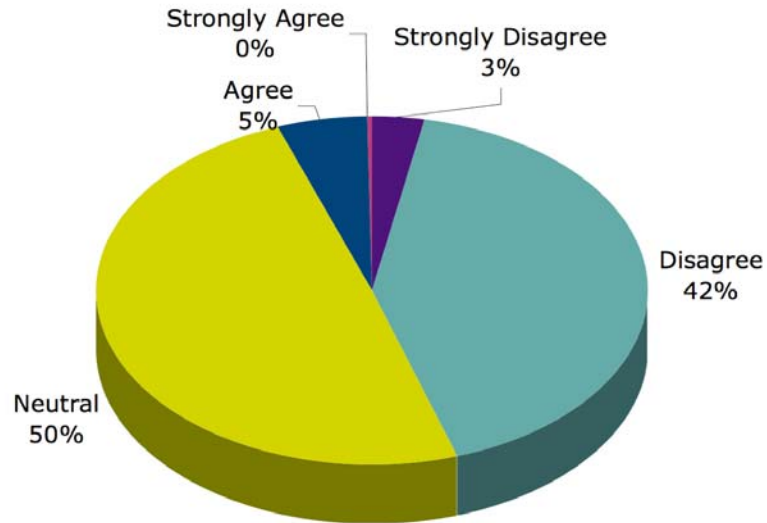
LANG 106

Figure 4.30 : For LANG 106, the material covered during Fall 2007 was useful to me.



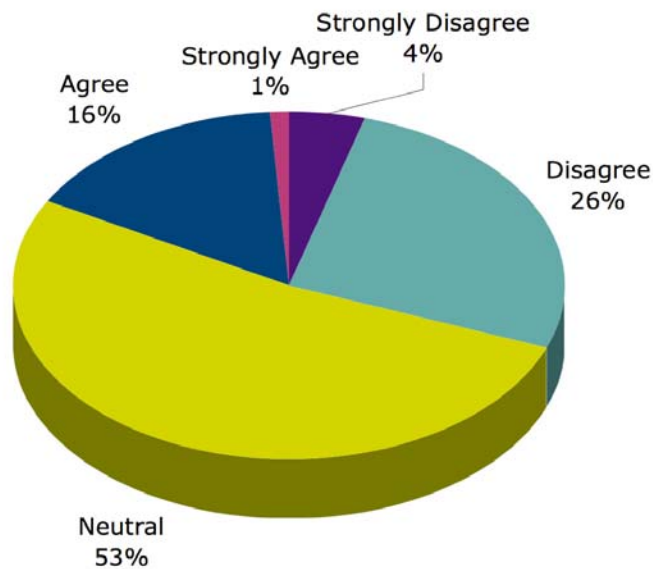
LANG 106

Figure 4.31 : The LANG 106 textbook used during Fall 2007 was difficult.



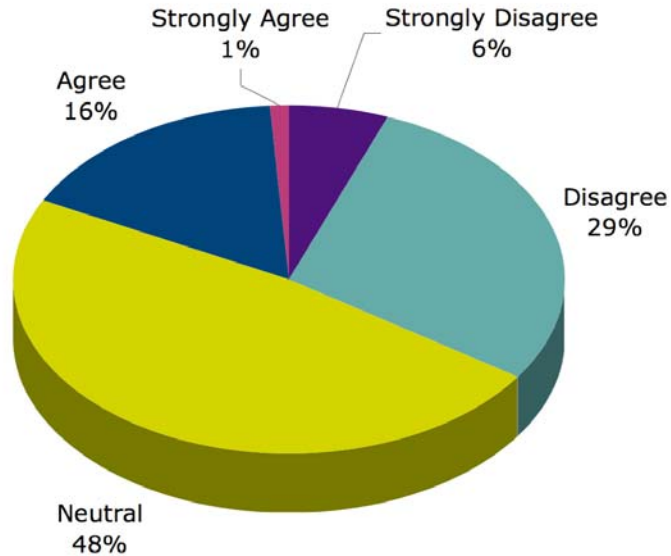
LANG 106

Figure 4.32 : The LANG 106 textbook used during Fall 2007 was interesting.



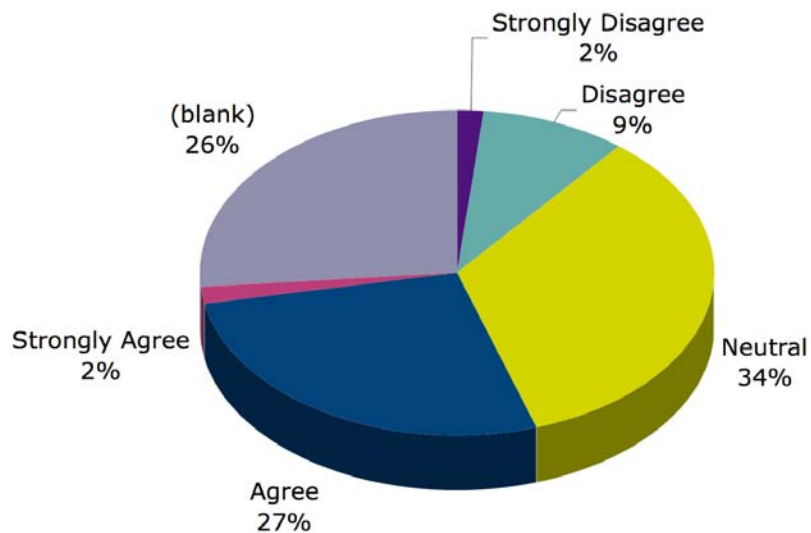
LANG 106

Figure 4.33 : The material covered in LANG 106 has helped me in my other courses at HKUST.



LANG 106

Figure 4.34 : Learning and using idioms and slang have helped me understand/express myself in English? (If you have not learned idioms or slang, please do not answer.)



LANG 106

Lang 108

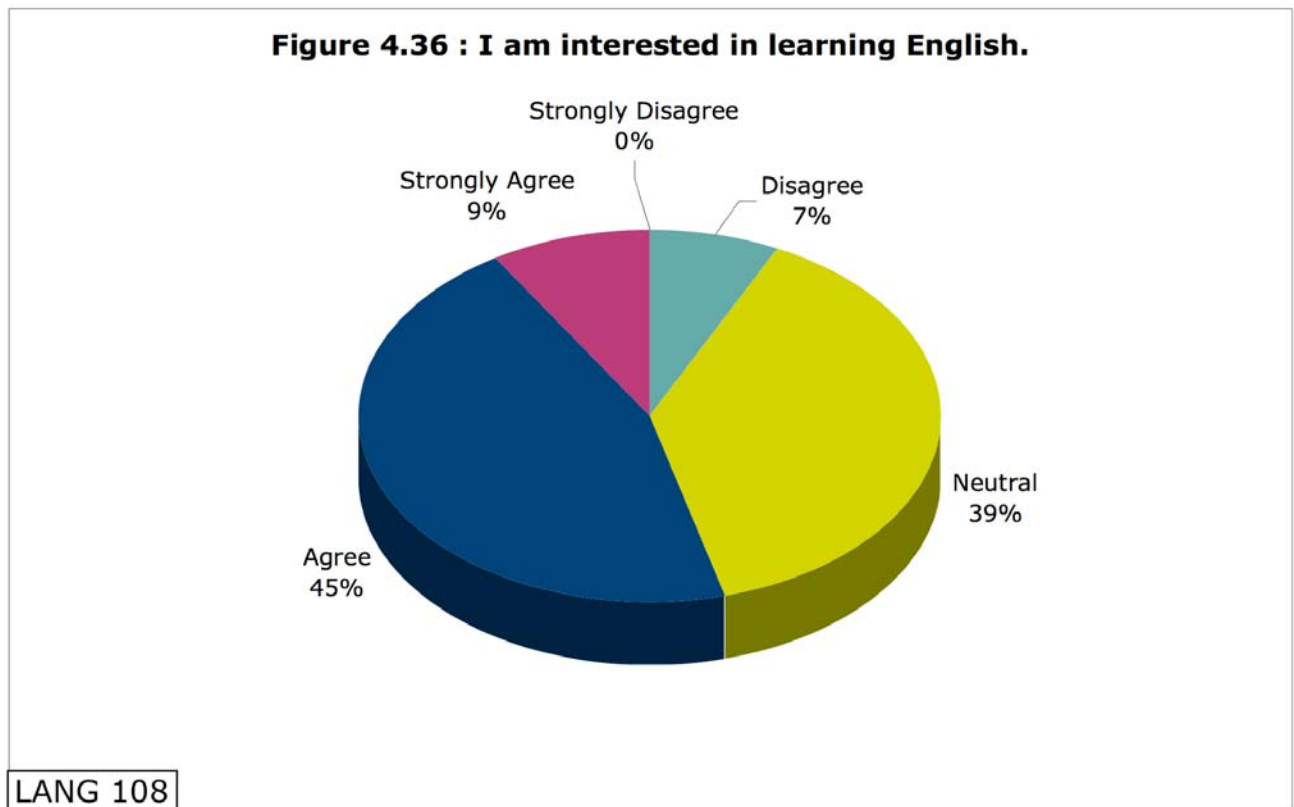
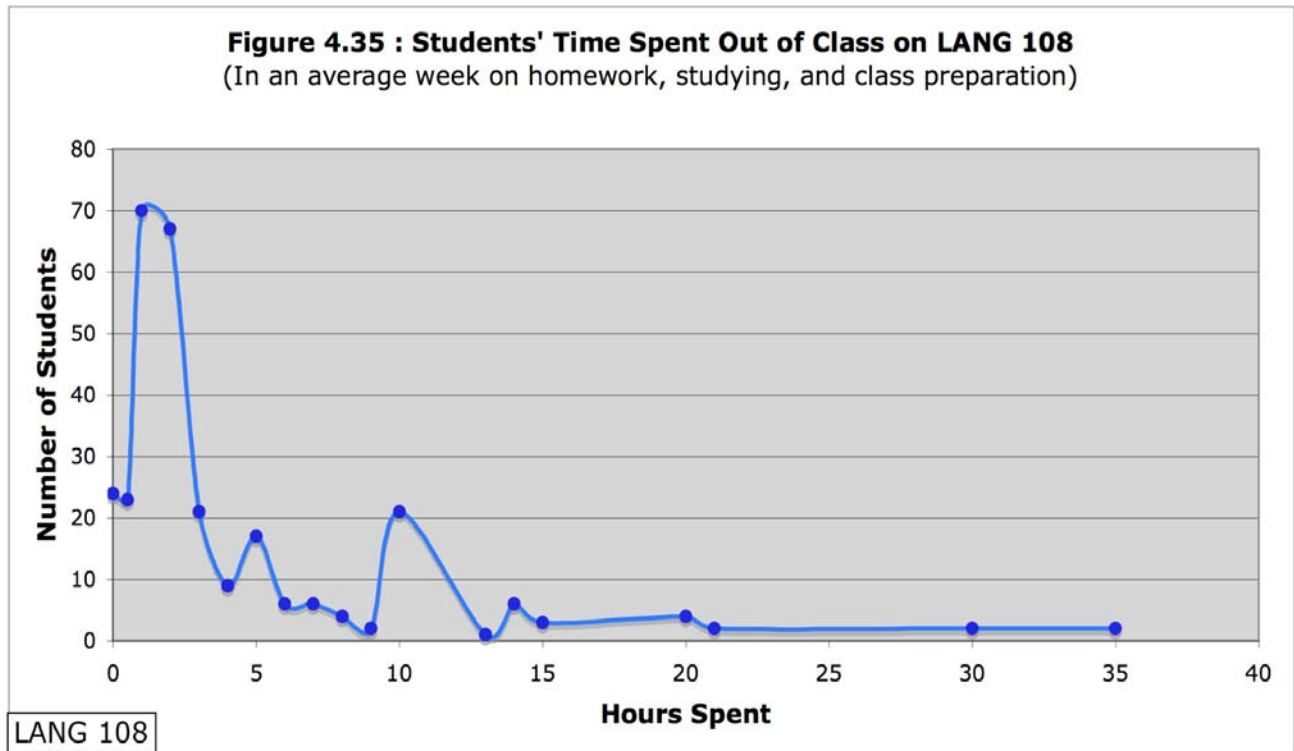
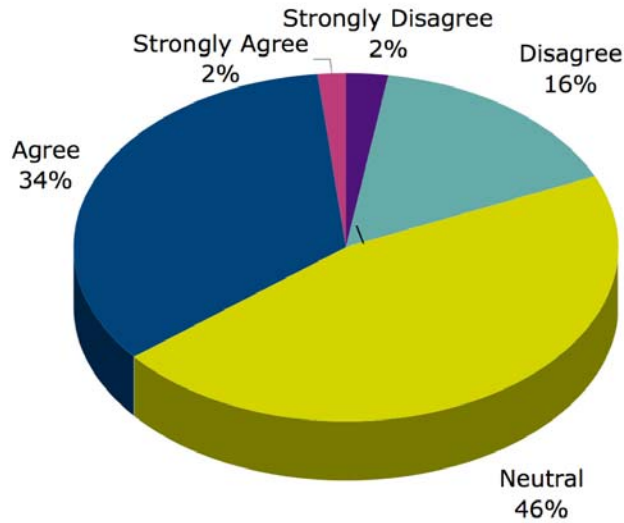
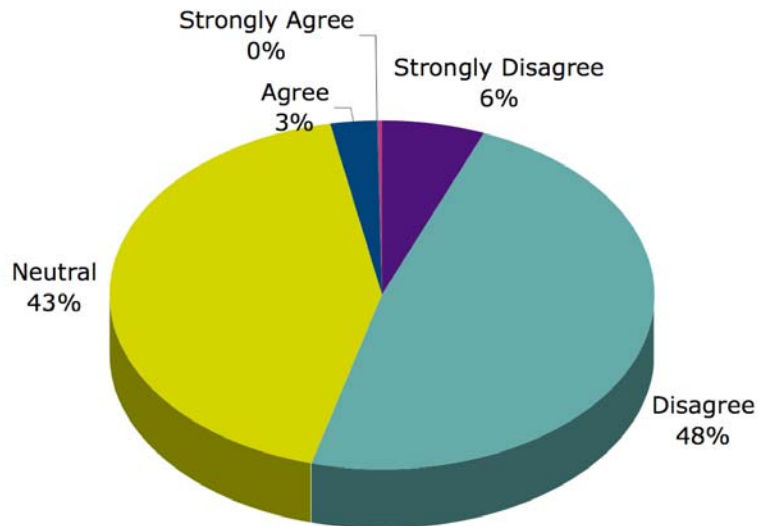


Figure 4.37 : For LANG 108, the material covered during Fall 2007 was useful to me.



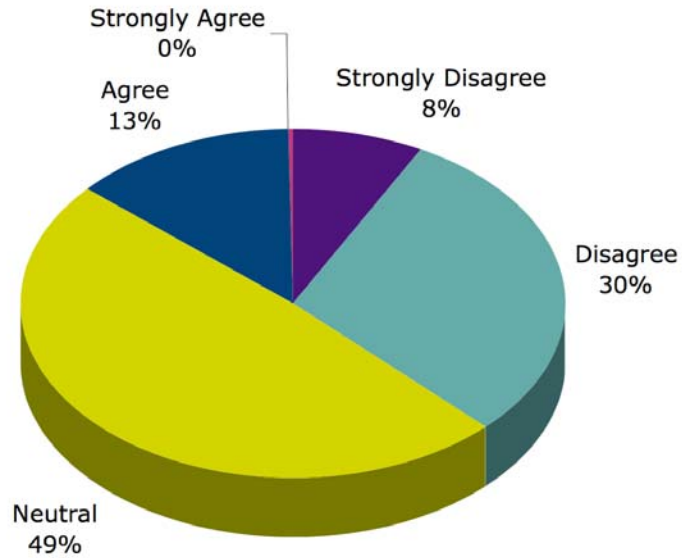
LANG 108

Figure 4.38 : The Headway textbook used during Fall 2007 was difficult.



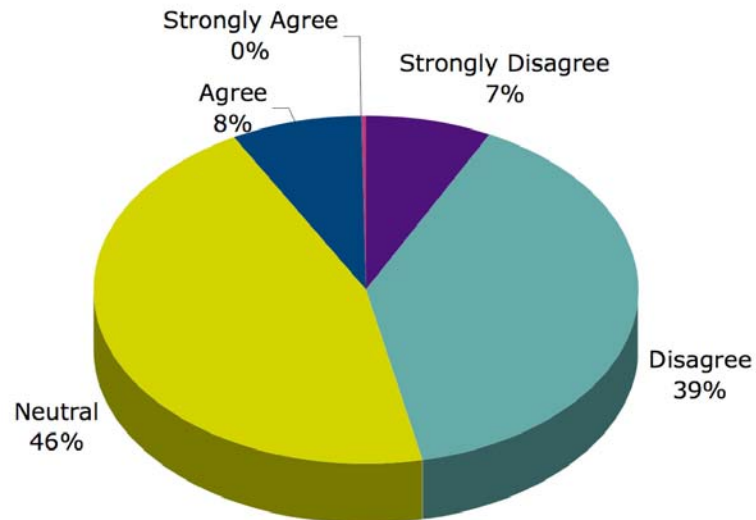
LANG 108

Figure 4.39 : The Headway textbook used during Fall 2007 was interesting.



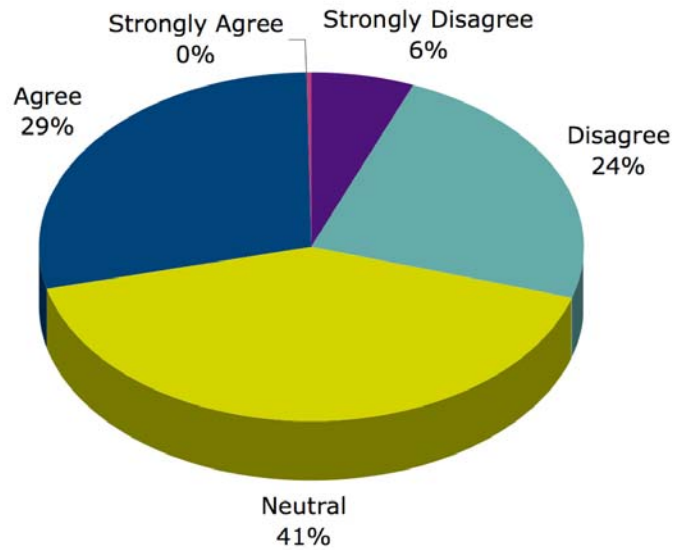
LANG 108

Figure 4.40 : The material covered in LANG 108 has helped me in my other courses at HKUST.



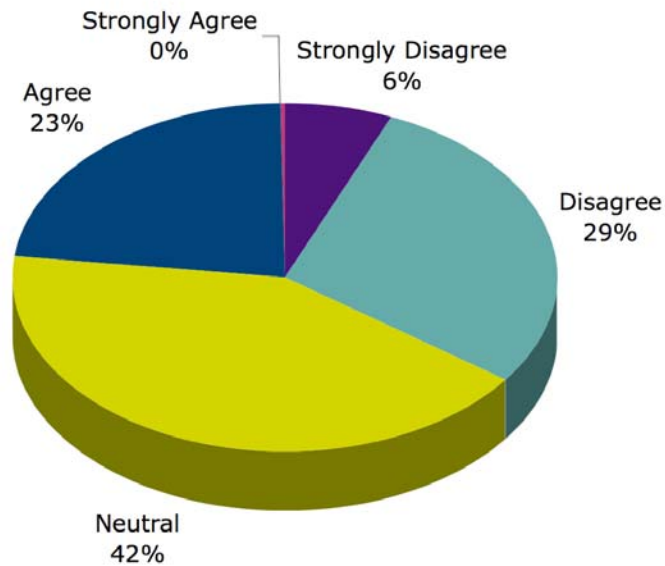
LANG 108

Figure 4.41 : The material in the Headway textbook prepared me for the report writing assessment.



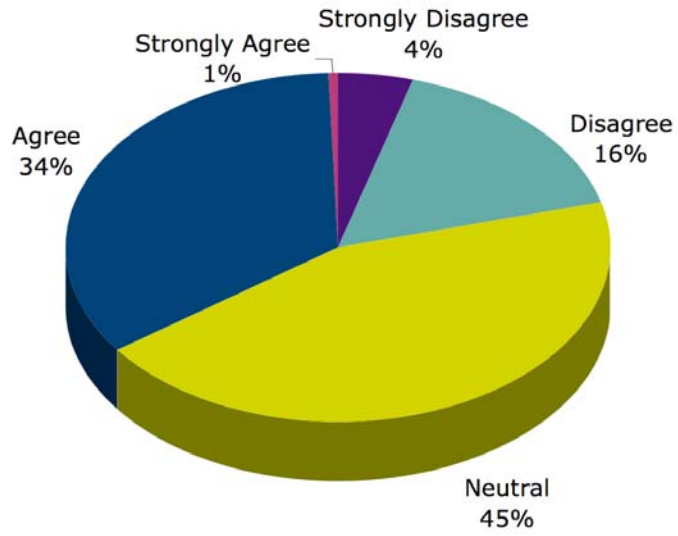
LANG 108

Figure 4.42 : The material in the Headway textbook prepared me for the oral presentation assessment.



LANG 108

Figure 4.43 : The grammar review sections of the Headway textbook were helpful.



LANG 108

4.2 Teacher Interviews

This section summarizes the data obtained from the teacher interviews, which are broken up into two categories: perceptions of the students' needs and opinions of the course materials. In this section we have included a copy of our teacher interview questions and italicized the accumulated responses to each question for each of the three English courses. The responses listed include the opinions of all 22 teachers that we interviewed. We have separated the responses by course in order to emphasize the differences between the courses and the three different bodies of students.

4.2.1 Opinions of the Course Materials

The following themes represent the strengths and weaknesses of the course materials from the perspective of the teachers.

LABU 101

1. How effective is the book that you used in your course?

- *2 teachers said the book effectively taught case studies.*
- *3 teachers had no comment.*
- **What are the books strengths?**
 - *1 teacher said the book's structure.*
 - *3 teachers said the business-focused material.*
 - *1 teacher said it improves critical thinking skills.*
 - *1 teacher said the formatting was very nice.*
 - *1 teacher said the book gives the teacher a lot of freedom.*
- **What are the books weaknesses?**
 - *1 teacher said that the last two business cases required advanced knowledge of how to write a recommendation report that wasn't included in the text.*
 - *1 teacher said the vocabulary exam was too elementary for students at this level and that knowing the few vocabulary words students were tested on would not really help them much in their future.*
 - *1 teacher said the class emphasized business too much and did not emphasize English enough.*
 - *1 teacher said the course relies heavily on which business cases are provided to them by the business department.*
 - *1 teacher stated that the fact that it was made by the Language Centre is a weakness.*
 - *1 teacher said the books presentation and format was bland and uninteresting.*
 - *1 teacher said the book doesn't teach students to analyze statistical data.*

- **Do you think examining business cases is an effective way for the students to learn English? Do you think a grammar and vocabulary textbook would be more effective?**
 - *1 teacher said that the English vocabulary gone over is very narrow.*
 - *1 teacher stated that a general English textbook would be more effective at teaching English, but would sacrifice a necessary introduction to business cases.*
 - *1 teacher said that the business material is relevant to their major, so it keeps the students interested.*
 - *2 teachers stated that students weren't learning English; they were learning critical thinking skills.*
 - *2 teachers simply said it was an effective way to teach English.*

- 2. In addition to the book do you use any supplemental materials?**
 - *All 5 teachers said that they did use supplementary materials.*
 - **If yes, what are the extra materials accomplishing in the course?**
 - *1 teacher uses a web site with slang words.*
 - *1 teacher said he/she finds articles that complement the cases and designs his/her own activities.*
 - *1 teacher said he/she tries to find website to help students further understand the things said in the business cases.*
 - **If no, are there any materials you wish the course included that would be useful?**
 - *None of the LABU 101 teachers had any comments on this question.*

- 3. If you could, how would you change the course? Why?**
 - *3 teachers would include a section in the text that explains how to write a recommendation report.*
 - *1 teacher would eliminate the recommendation report requirement altogether.*
 - *2 teachers would get the business cases for the semester much earlier.*
 - *1 teacher said that listening activities/ sections should be added.*
 - *1 teacher said that the teachers should communicate common problems.*
 - *1 teacher said the English department should be able to choose the business cases they want to use.*

Lang 106

- 1. How effective is the book that you used in your course?**
 - *5 teachers agreed the book is effective.*
 - *1 teacher said the book was not effective.*
 - *1 teacher had no comment.*
 - **What are the books strengths?**
 - *2 teachers said the books' activities.*
 - *3 teachers said the books' topics were self/campus related.*
 - *1 teacher said the multicultural topics.*
 - *1 teacher said the tasks and grammar exercises.*
 - **What are the books weaknesses?**
 - *2 teachers claimed the book has no weaknesses.*
 - *1 teacher said the material was too simple.*
 - *1 teacher said that the "listening to conversation" and "listening to lecture" sections are useless, because the students already know the information in these sections.*

- *1 teacher said the online activities are a weakness, because some students have a hard time with the program and it is very cumbersome to walk them through it.*
 - *1 teacher said the book changes topics too many times in one class period.*
 - *1 teacher said the book does not prompt the students to express their opinions, disagree, or create an argument in English.*
 - **Do you think teaching students the meaning of idioms such as “screw up” and “hang out” keeps them interested in learning English? Will these words and phrases help the students express themselves in English?**
 - *6 teachers agreed that idioms are a great way to keep students interested in learning English.*
 - *5 of these 6 teachers agreed that these phrases allowed students to understand and express themselves in English better.*
 - *1 teacher said that learning them was not necessary, because the students rarely speak to native English speakers.*
 - *1 teacher said that he/she didn't teach this section of the book at all.*
- 2. In addition to the book do you use any supplemental materials?**
- *2 of the 7 Lang 106 teachers used supplementary materials.*
 - **If yes, what are the extra materials accomplishing in the course?**
 - *1 teacher gave more advanced students more advanced materials in order to challenge them.*
 - *1 teacher added PowerPoint presentations on various topics and added his/her own speaking activities to the course.*
 - **If no, are there any materials you wish the course included that would be useful?**
 - *1 teacher thought having students read magazines such as TIME, Newsweek, and South China Morning Post in English would help them learn in a fun way. The other four thought the book was sufficient.*
- 3. If you could, how would you change the course? Why?**
- *2 teachers suggested that the vocabulary section be removed from the back of the book and scattered amongst the book's sections with examples of how the words can be used.*
 - *1 teacher thought each unit should have one task that exercises all the things they learned in that section.*
 - *This teacher also thought pronunciation should not be emphasized, as it is not very useful for the students.*
 - *The same teacher thought that more directions and tips should be given in the discussion sections.*
 - *1 teacher said that the students should be given more power to do what they are interested in.*
 - *1 teacher said he/she would concentrate much more on discussion, because that is the main thing students must know how to do.*

Lang 108

- 2. How effective is the book that you used in your course?**
- *3 teachers said it was not effective because the book is more suitable for secondary students.*
 - *2 teachers said it was great. The book contains all 4 skills and the themes of each chapter are interesting.*
 - **What are the books strengths?**
 - *1 teacher said the articles and verb tense exercises.*
 - *1 teacher that the fact that it does not emphasize grammar is a strength of the textbook.*
 - *1 teacher said the cross-cultural topics, the English expressions, and the graphics are good.*

- **What are the books weaknesses?**
 - *1 teacher said grammar exercises.*
 - *1 teacher said it does not prepare the students for the assessment and that the book is too general (not specific for science students).*
 - *1 teacher said the book is for secondary students.*
 - *1 teacher said the course needs to spend 200 hrs. on this book, not just 36 hours, which is the amount of lecture time HKUST has allotted for Lang 108.*
 - **How does using a published book verses in house materials affect this course? What advantages and disadvantages do you see in using a published book? In house materials?**
 - *1 teacher said Headway does not match the assessments.*
 - *2 teachers said in house materials were tailored toward science students (1 teacher of the 2 said he/she preferred the in house materials).*
 - *2 teachers said the students are biased against published books.*
 - **Do the exams in the Headway textbook properly test students on what is covered in the textbook's sections?**
 - *All 5 teachers agreed that it did not.*
 - **Did you think the grammar review section in Headway is necessary for students at this level?**
 - *2 teachers avoid teaching grammar because the students think it's boring.*
 - *1 teacher doesn't teach grammar because the students did a lot of it during secondary school.*
 - *1 teacher said there is limited time so he/she emphasizes presentation skills more than grammar.*
 - *1 teacher said the grammar is integrated in the reading exercises.*
- 3. In addition to the book do you use any supplemental materials?**
- **If yes, what are the extra materials accomplishing in the course?**
 - *1 teacher does activities such as making the students tell a story by drawing then by just talking.*
 - *1 teacher does discussion and icebreakers and uses the CD that comes with the book.*
 - *1 teacher said he/she talks about his/her experience (in life) and uses other materials (that he/she passes to other teachers).*
 - *1 teacher said he/she looks for more materials on things that the students seem to be interested in.*
 - **If no, are there any materials you wish the course included that would be useful?**
 - *No teachers had comments on this question.*
- 4. If you could, how would you change the course? Why?**
- *1 teacher thinks that the textbook should change according to the students' needs in each section. Students' level of English changes from class to class. Students should be separated according to their [English skill] background.*
 - *1 teacher said the students should speak more to get practice*
 - *1 teacher said the assessments should match the textbook.*
 - *1 teacher doesn't want the course to change.*

4.2.2 Perceptions of the Students' Needs

The following themes represent which skills the teachers believe the current students need the most to be successful during the rest of their time at HKUST as well as which skills the current students are the most interested in improving.

LABU 101

5. **What do you think are the most important English skills that the students need right now to succeed in their courses at HKUST?**
 - *4 teachers said presentations skills.*
 - *5 teachers said writing skills.*
 - *1 teacher said communication skills.*
 - *1 teacher said vocabulary skills.*
 - *1 teacher said the ability to understand business cases.*
 - *1 teacher said listening skills.*
 - **Which skills do you think the students are strong at? Weak at?**
 - *1 teacher said the students were very diverse.*
 - *1 teacher said writing was a strength.*
 - *1 teacher said speaking was a strength.*
 - *1 teacher said writing was a weakness.*
 - *1 teacher said speaking was a weakness.*
 - **Recently, what were some of the language problems the students faced in your class?**
 - *None of the LABU 101 teachers had any specific problems.*
 - **Which skills do you think the students are the most interested in improving?**
 - *2 teachers said presentation skills.*
 - *2 teachers said writing skills.*
 - *1 teacher said listening skills.*
 - *1 teacher said speaking skills.*
 - *1 teacher said students wanted to expand their vocabulary.*
 - *1 teacher said students wanted to improve them all equally.*
6. **What types of activities do you have your students in the classroom participate in on a daily basis?**
 - *2 teachers said projects.*
 - *3 teachers said discussions.*
 - *2 teachers said presentations.*
 - *2 teachers said role-playing.*
 - *3 teachers said group activities.*
 - **Are there particular activities that the students seem to be most interested/engaged in?**
 - *2 teachers said role-playing.*
 - *2 teachers said real-life applicable activities.*

- 2 teachers said anything in teams.
- 1 teacher said ethical discussions.

Lang 106

4. What do you think are the most important English skills that the students need right now to succeed in their courses at HKUST?

- 4 teachers said listening and speaking.
- 1 teacher said grammar and report writing.
- 1 teacher said writing, speaking, and grammar were equally important.
- 1 teacher said taking initiative to learn things on their own.
- **Which skills do you think the students are strong at? Weak at?**
 - 2 teachers said the students were strong at listening.
 - 2 teachers said the students were strong at reading.
 - 1 teacher said the students were strong at speaking.
 - 1 teacher said the students were weak at writing.
 - 1 teacher said the students were weak at oral presentations.
 - 1 teacher said the students were weak at speaking.
- **Recently, what were some of the language problems the students faced in your class?**
 - 1 teacher said that high-level critical thinking was difficult for most of the students. When asked to do critical thinking exercises, students quickly lose interest.
 - 1 teacher noticed that secondary school got them used to very formulaic discussion. The students don't say what they think; they just say what is easiest to say.
- **Which skills do you think the students are the most interested in improving?**
 - 1 teacher said critical thinking.
 - 1 teacher said vocabulary.
 - 1 teacher said writing.
 - 1 teacher said speaking.
 - 1 teacher said listening.
 - 1 teacher said students wanted to improve them all.
 - 1 teacher said students didn't really want to improve any of them.

5. What types of activities do you have your students in the classroom participate in on a daily basis?

- 1 teacher uses competitions.
- 1 teacher uses a hangman activity.
- 1 teacher has students examine ethical issues of a passage.
- 1 teacher uses discussions regularly.
- 1 teacher has students complete a task and report their findings to the class.
- **Are there particular activities that the students seem to be most interested/engaged in?**
 - 1 teacher said competitions.
 - 1 teacher said analyzing the structure and organization of writing.
 - 1 teacher said Hangman.
 - 1 teacher said anything involving native English speakers.

- *1 teacher gave a specific example where students had to help an imaginary student decide which university to attend.*

Lang 108

4. What do you think are the most important English skills that the students need right now to succeed in their courses at HKUST?

- *4 teachers said writing skills.*
- *2 teachers said speaking skills.*
- *2 teachers said listening.*
- **Which skills do you think the students are strong at? Weak at?**
 - *1 teacher said listening was the strongest.*
 - *2 teachers said speaking was the strongest.*

 - *1 teacher said grammar was the weakest.*
 - *2 teachers said speaking was the weakest.*
 - *1 teacher said writing is the weakest.*
 - *1 teacher said listening was the weakest.*
- **Recently, what were some of the language problems the students faced in your class?**
 - *1 teacher said the students need to develop their conversational English.*
 - *1 teacher said the book is too expensive and some students don't buy it until later in the course.*
 - *1 teacher said the students couldn't express their opinion during discussion.*
- **Which skills do you think the students are the most interested in improving?**
 - *1 teacher said writing for filling out applications and speaking for interviews.*
 - *2 teachers said speaking.*
 - *1 teacher said writing.*
 - *1 teacher said it varies among students.*

5. What types of activities do you have your students in the classroom participate in on a daily basis?

- *1 teacher does activities and discussion. The students like to talk to their friends and not listen to the teacher lecture.*
- *1 teacher has the students do presentation on articles they read in Headway.*
- *1 teacher has the students work in pairs then group work to do exercises in Headway.*
- *1 teacher let the students listen to something then do discussion about it.*
- *1 teacher does group activities (i.e. competition).*
- **Are there particular activities that the students seem to be most interested/engaged in?**
 - *1 teacher said students like mini debates or quizzes as long as they have time to prepare.*

4.3 Previous Students' Focus Groups

This section summarizes the data obtained from the previous students' focus groups that is broken up into two categories; perceptions of the students' needs and opinions of the course materials. Information will be displayed in the same way as previous sections with the questions we asked the students in bold and the combined answers given in italics.

4.3.1 Perceptions of the Students' Needs

LABU 101 (Focus group was conducted in LABU 201)

- 1. Out of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which do you think are the most important skills you needed in the first-year?**
 - *Speaking is important because students emphasize reading and writing during secondary school.*
 - *Listening skills because teachers have different accent.*
- 2. Out of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which skills do you think would help you the most with you courses at HKUST?**
 - *Writing and speaking skills.*

Lang 106 (Focus groups were conducted in Lang 206)

- 1. Out of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which do you think are the most important skills you needed in the first-year?**
 - *Speaking, because they didn't not get enough practice during secondary school.*
 - *Listening because it's hard to have a conversation if they don't know what the other person is saying.*
- 2. Out of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which skills do you think would help you the most with you courses at HKUST?**
 - *Writing because they need to write resumes, reports/proposals, and fill out applications.*
 - *Speaking because during an interview you can't prepare a long speech.*

Lang 108 (Focus groups were conducted in Lang 209)

- 1. Out of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which do you think are the most important skills you needed in the first-year?**
 - *Writing because there are too many classes emphasizing speaking and listening.*
 - *Listening because some teachers have an accent so it's hard to understand them.*
 - *Speaking more fluently.*
- 2. Out of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which skills do you think would help you the most with you courses at HKUST?**
 - *Writing because there are many reports to write.*
 - *Speaking because it helps to present oneself.*

4.3.2 Opinions of the Course Materials

LABU 101 (Focus group was conducted in LABU 201)

1. Does anyone remember the textbook?
 - *Many students did not remember it very well.*
2. What were the textbook's strengths? /What was the best part of the textbook?
 - *The cases are interesting.*
 - *Some students like how it emphasizes business more than English.*
3. What were the textbook's weaknesses? /What was the worst part of the textbook?
 - *Some students want to learn more writing and presentation skills.*
4. If you could, how would you change the course? Why?
 - *No students had comments on this question.*
5. Do you think examining business cases improved your English skills?
 - *No students had comments on this question.*

Lang 106 (Focus groups were conducted in Lang 206)

1. Does anyone remember the textbook?
 - *Few students could remember the textbook.*
2. What were the textbook's strengths? /What was the best part of the textbook?
 - *It's easy to follow. Even if the students don't come to class, they can just read the textbook.*
 - *It teach them how to solve conflicts, something they didn't do during secondary school.*
3. What were the textbook's weaknesses? /What was the worst part of the textbook?
 - *No students had comments on this question.*
4. If you could, how would you change the course? Why?
 - *Teach the students through examples. Have things related to daily life.*
 - *Have games and other interesting activities in them. Only remember online activities.*
5. What do you think about Slang? Are they Helpful/Interesting?
 - *Slang is an interesting topic. They want to be able to talk to their native speaking friends.*
6. Is there anything else you remember about the course?
 - *Students don't care about course because it doesn't count a lot.*

Lang 108 (Focus groups were conducted in Lang 209)

1. Does anyone remember the textbook?
 - *Not many students remembered the textbook.*
2. What were the textbook's strengths? /What was the best part of the textbook?

- *It's colorful and has a lot of pictures, like a magazine.*
 - *Some of the topics are interesting.*
- 3. What were the textbook's weaknesses? /What was the worst part of the textbook?**
- *It's too expensive.*
 - *Barely used the book during class.*
 - *Materials are boring and out of date.*
 - *There's no need for grammar.*
- 4. If you could, how would you change the course? Why?**
- *Don't want any book.*
 - *Need more writing course because some students can't enroll into a writing course because to time conflict.*
 - *Some students want a writing course specifically for science students.*
 - *Some students want a writing course that teaches writing skills for things other than reports.*
 - *Students want to read things about daily life.*
 - *Students want materials that are related to Hong Kong's lifestyle.*
 - *Students don't want to learn about things around the world.*
- 5. What do you think about the Grammar review in Headway?**
- *Most students learned a lot of grammar in secondary school already; so don't want to learn them here.*
 - *Students want to learn intonations and expressions used among friends.*
- 6. What do you think of using a published textbook vs. using in-house materials?**
- *No students had comments on this question.*
- 7. Is there anything else you remember about the course?**
- *Students don't remember any assessments.*
 - *Some students said their English declined after entering university.*
 - *Students think it is not worth it to spend too much time for this course because it's only 1 credit. Class only meets once a week, so there's no time for reviews.*
 - *If attendance was not mandatory, the students would not attend class.*
 - *Students would learn other languages if the classes were free.*

5. Analysis

This chapter analyzes the information from interviews with teachers, a survey of current students, and focus groups with previous students of the three first-year English courses: LABU 101, Lang 106, and Lang 108. This analysis shows the needs of the first-year and the ability of the course materials to meet them from the perspectives of these three groups.

5.1 Students' Needs

This section analyzes the three different types of students – Business, Engineering, and Science - and their needs from three different perspectives – current students, previous students, and teachers - and then compares these views. The four major English skills that the students may or may not need to improve are reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

5.1.1 Current Students' Views of Their Needs

Reading and listening are the two skills that most students of LABU 101, Lang 108, and Lang 106 agree were their strongest before they began the fall semester of 2007. Most students also agree that their weakest skills before they began the fall semester of 2007 were speaking and writing. Evidence of this analysis can be seen in figures 4.1-4.15 of the data chapter.

Before the beginning of the fall semester of 2007, students of all three courses were most interested in improving their speaking skills. After speaking skills, students of Lang 108 and LABU 101 were most interested in improving their writing skills while students of Lang 106 were most interested in improving their listening skills. After taking the courses, students of Lang 108 and LABU 101 feel that their speaking skills were most improved. Unfortunately, students of Lang 108 and LABU 101 did not

feel that their writing skills improved much throughout the course. For Lang 106, students improved by the largest margin in listening skills followed by speaking skills, which was the exact opposite of what these students claimed they were most interested in improving.

Most students think speaking is the skill they need the most to be successful during the rest of their time at HKUST. Because most courses require students to make oral presentations and many courses at HKUST are conducted in English, students need good speaking skills.

Lang 106 students believe that the course overemphasized listening and speaking and did not concentrate enough on reading and writing, while for Lang 108 and LABU 101, students believe that the course devoted too much time to improving speaking and reading skills, but did not concentrate enough on writing or listening.

5.1.2 Teachers' Views of Students' Needs

Evidence of this analysis can be seen within the accumulated teacher interview response located in section 4.2.2 of the data chapter. Of the four major English skills, writing, speaking, listening, and reading, most LABU 101 and Lang 108 teachers believe that students will need good writing skills to succeed in their courses at HKUST. Writing skills consist of grammar, vocabulary, and report writing. In science and business courses, students are expected to write lab reports, research papers, and notes for presentation. Therefore, writing skills are essential for these two groups of HKUST students.

After writing skills, most teachers believe that the second and third skills that students need to succeed at HKUST are speaking and listening, respectively. Speaking skills consist of presentation skills such as using formal and informal expressions to express your thoughts and ideas. Listening skills include understanding what is being said during lectures and discussions. In many instances, students are asked to do oral presentations and participate in group discussions, which require them to have sound English presentation skills. HKUST uses English as its language of instruction for most of their courses.

Therefore, students will need listening skills in order to understand lectures and be able to contribute to the classroom.

While the teachers we interviewed have different opinions on the needs of the students, they believe that, for the most part, the students do not need to improve their reading skills to succeed in their courses at HKUST. Most teachers also believe that before taking the first-year English courses, LABU 101, Lang 106, and Lang 108, the students' strongest skills were varied, depending on which secondary school they attended. Moreover, students from Mainland China tend to have generally better English skills than students from Hong Kong.

Most teachers agree that the incoming students need to improve their speaking and writing skills the most. The teachers claim that most students do not have the opportunity to speak with native speakers. More interactions with native speakers would increase the number of expressions and idioms the students can understand and allow the students to use these idioms to express themselves. Most students entering HKUST have good grammar skills because they were required to take the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE). Unfortunately, students may not learn to express their complex thoughts in coherence sentences or be able to think critically.

For Lang 106, teachers believe that speaking skills are the most important for engineering students. Some teachers said that engineering students are not sociable when speaking in English and therefore need to work on their communication and English speaking skills. One teacher explained, "students are too shy to talk, because they are worried about their accent and pronunciation."

Although Lang 106 teachers have no common opinion, LABU 101 and Lang 108 teachers believe that students are most interested in improving speaking, then writing skills. Some teachers mentioned that students want to speak to native English speakers and learn about different cultures and therefore want to improve their speaking skills in a way that allows them to interact with international and exchange students. Because Hong Kong is a business center of the world and houses many international

companies, English-speaking workers are in high demand across the city. While searching for jobs, students may have to fill out applications and go through interviews that are conducted in English if they want to enter these international companies. Besides being able to fill out applications, students will need strong writing skills in their courses to write reports.

Teachers believe that before students enter HKUST, their weakest skills are writing and speaking. Because of this, it makes sense that the teachers also believe that writing and speaking are the skills that the students need most during their time at HKUST. Also, the teachers believe that the students are most interested in improving the same two skills; writing and speaking. Overall, the teachers in all three English courses believe that they are teaching the skills that the students need and want the most: writing and speaking.

5.1.3 Previous Students' View of Current Students' Needs

Evidence of this analysis can be seen in section 4.3.1 of the data chapter. Most previous students of Lang 106, Lang 108, and LABU 101 agree that speaking and listening skills are the most important skills students need during their first year at HKUST. During secondary school, students do not regularly practice speaking, so the students do not feel confident enough to speak to teachers or each other in English. Listening skills are important for first-year students because many teachers have different accents, which make it hard for the students to understand the teachers during lectures. Listening skills are also important when the students try to communicate with each other or exchange students in English. It becomes irritating for both the students and their English partners when they cannot understand what the other is saying.

For the rest of their time at HKUST, previous students of all three courses agree that they need writing and speaking skills. Students will need good writing skills because they will have to write many reports, proposals, and write a resume. As for speaking skills, students feel that corporate workers and

native English speakers judge the students by their English speaking abilities. For example, during an interview, students will need to answer questions without much time to think, so their English speaking skills must be good enough to give a confident and thoughtful response.

Many students feel that the Lang 106 and Lang 108 courses are not worth their time because the courses count as only one credit for the entire year. The courses only meet once a week, so the class does not have time to do any reviews. The students believe they do not learn anything in these courses. If attendance was not mandatory, many students would not attend the class. Some students even said that their English has actually declined since they came to HKUST.

5.1.4 Comparing and Contrasting the Students' View of Their Needs

Teachers in Lang 108 and LABU 101 believe that the most important skills students need to succeed at HKUST are writing, followed by speaking, while the current students of both courses think that they need speaking skills the most, followed by writing skills to succeed at HKUST. Previous students of Lang 108 and LABU 101 stated that students would need both speaking and writing skills equally to succeed at HKUST. Although the teachers and the current students have inverse opinions of which skills the students need to succeed at HKUST, they both listed writing and speaking, alongside the previous students, as the skills students need the most to succeed at HKUST. The teachers and students mentioned that students need writing skills to be able to write labs, business reports, and resumes. As for speaking skills, students will need to be able to communicate with the many native English speakers, such as teachers, at HKUST. Also, when students apply for jobs, many companies will conduct their interviews in English. Therefore, good speaking skills are necessary to impress the interviewers and get a job.

For Lang 106, teachers feel that students need speaking skills to succeed at HKUST and current students of Lang 106 also think they need speaking skills. Previous students of Lang 106 stated that they

need both speaking and writing skills. Once again, reading and speaking skills are more than likely listed for the same reasons given by LABU students and teachers.

Teachers of Lang 108 and LABU 101 think that the students are most interested in improving their speaking skills, follow by their writing. The current students of Lang 108 and LABU 101 said that they are indeed most interested in improving their speaking followed by their writing skills. This shows that the teachers of these two courses have a good idea of which skills their students want to improve. For Lang 106, teachers feel that the students are interested in improving all of the English skills, but from the surveys, most of the current students wanted to improve their speaking skills more than any of the other three skills. For the same reason as Lang 108 and LABU 101 students, current students of Lang 106 wanted to improve their speaking skills so that they would be able to talk to native or any English speaking teachers, students, and interviewers. The current students want to be well prepared for any job interviews conducted in English during their third year.

5.2 Opinions of Course Materials

This section analyzes the opinions of three different courses' materials from three different perspectives and then compares these views.

5.2.1 Current Students' Opinion of Course Materials

This section analyzes the opinion of the three different courses and their materials from the perspective of the current students. Different questions were asked of students in each course, but some questions were used for all three courses. For convenience, we will first analyze the data that was received from these common questions before analyzing the course specific results. Evidence of this analysis can be seen in figures 4.16-4.43 of the data chapter.

The students of all three courses strongly agree with the statement "I am interested in learning English," which is proof of their motivation to learn the language. Students of the three courses also agreed that the material covered in their respective courses was useful to them. However, Lang 106 and Lang 108 students found it much less useful than students of LABU 101.

The three courses' students agreed that the textbook used in their course was not difficult. This may have been one of the factors that made the students mildly agree that the textbooks for all three were not interesting.

Students of LABU 101 and Lang 106 gave neutral responses when asked if the course materials for their courses have helped them in their non-English courses at HKUST. Lang 108 agreed that the Headway textbook used in the course has not helped them in their non-English courses at HKUST. The difference of Lang 108's responses could be because the course is, according to teachers, the most elementary of the three courses and concentrates on improving all the students' skills instead of just one or two.

The majority of LABU 101 students spent 10 hours or less outside of lectures on course related activities such as homework, studying, and class preparation. Students of Lang 106 and 108 spent even less time on such activities, with the majority spending 5 hours or fewer.

LABU 101

From the LABU 101 survey results we have determined that the vast majority of the students of the course either agree or strongly agree with the statement “I understand that the objective of the fall semester of this course was to learn how to analyze business cases.” This shows that the almost all of the students are aware of and understand the objective of the course. The majority of students also felt that the course accomplished its goal. 66% of the LABU students agree that analyzing Business cases does improve their English skills, while only 7% disagree.

Slightly more students agree over disagree with the statement “After taking LABU 101, I have become more comfortable reading English articles.” There was a large neutral response for this question, which may come from the fact that students either do not have much experience with external articles or have not given serious thought to whether or not the material has made them more comfortable. Only 12% of students stated that they regularly read English articles in their spare time after taking LABU 101. This shows that the course has probably not increased its students’ desires to read English outside of class.

Lang 106

For the Lang 106 student survey results, approximately 78% of the students either agree or strongly agree with the statement “I understand that the objective of the fall semester of this course was to improve my listening and speaking skills.” This shows that most students are aware of and understand the objective of the course.

The statement “Learning and using idioms and slang have helped me understand/express myself in English?” is not relevant to a quarter of the students because their teachers did not teach that material. Of the other three fourths of the students who did learn idioms, only 10% of these students feel that learning slang has not helped them. Three times as many students feel that learning slang was helpful.

Lang 108

The survey results showed that the Lang 108 students are neutral on whether or not the material in Headway prepared them for the course’s oral and presentation assessments. This neutrality may be due to the complexity of the of the survey question.

The Lang 108 students slightly agree that the grammar review section of the textbook was helpful. Some of the Lang 108 students may still need this review, because science students at HKUST have relatively weak English skills.

5.2.2 Teacher’s Opinion of Course Materials

According to the teachers’ interviews, the strengths and weaknesses of the course materials differ greatly among the three courses, but generally the teachers agree that their course was too short to accomplish its goals. Because the course materials for each course are so different, this section is separated into three sections with one for each course. Evidence of this analysis can be seen in section 4.2.1 of the data chapter.

LABU 101

For LABU 101, the teachers have many different views about the strengths and weaknesses of the course materials. This variation may arise because this course is a combined English and Business course, which makes it substantially different from most other English courses. Sometimes the same skill

one teacher claimed was a strength of the materials was claimed to be a weakness by another teacher. For example, the business focus and formatting of the textbook were both disparaged by at least one teacher and complemented by at least one other. At least one teacher mentioned that the teacher of each section has a substantial amount of freedom in how he/she wants to teach LABU 101 and that the structure and content of the course itself depends heavily on which teacher is teaching it. One of the teachers' most common criticisms of the course is that the Business department, not the English department, gets to decide which business cases are included in the textbook. This is a major problem, because the business cases are the majority of the textbook's content. From the creation of the course materials to the teaching of the course itself, the quality of the course is bounded by the cases provided by the business department.

Because LABU only examines business cases and never teaches students English directly, teachers question which English skills, if any, are taught in the course. In general, the teachers think that although LABU may not teach English directly, it still teaches students valuable skills such as critical thinking. However, some teachers feel that this course does not teach or improve English or English abilities.

Although LABU 101 has a textbook, it has been mentioned by the book's creator that the book is really meant to be a gateway into other materials. Almost all the teachers mentioned that they used supplementary materials when teaching this course. These materials ranged from new business vocabulary to articles relevant to the cases provided in the textbook.

When the teachers were asked what they would do to change the course, most teachers listed remedies for the weaknesses they gave. Teachers want the course to become more independent from the Business department because they feel that the Business departments' choice of business cases is not impacted by the cases' English content. Along the same lines, many teachers feel that there should be more support for teachers attempting to use the textbook. The teachers' edition of the book offers little help in its current state, with only very minor deviations from the student edition. First-time LABU

teachers may not be able to understand how the course is trying to meet its objectives and are given little support to understand this. LABU is comprised of mainly business topics, which causes problems for the English teachers that don't have a business background. Since these teachers sometimes struggle to learn the course material themselves, it is difficult for them to teach it to their students.

Lang 106

Most Lang 106 teachers agree that the textbook's strength is that it is relevant to the students. Since the book is created in-house by a team of teachers in the Language Centre, it is relevant to first-year engineering students. Most of the teachers felt that the student-related elements of the textbook were included in the book in a user friendly and effective way. However, many teachers thought the book was too simple. A few teachers felt that the book did not stay on one particular topic for long enough. They felt that since the book jumped around so much, the students did not have enough time to fully understand and learn any of the sections, instead of ensuring that the students took at least one thing away from the course.

Learning idioms and slang is popular among the students, but there is some debate as to whether it is necessary. The majority of the teachers said the idioms keep the students interested in learning English. One teacher suggested that students feel this way because when they learn slang, they believe that they are learning useful English. Although slang may maintain the students' interest, some teachers do not believe that slang helps the students improve their English. These teachers stated that slang is not particularly useful unless speaking with a native speaker or watching English programs.

The majority of the teachers said they did not use supplementary materials when teaching this course. Typically teachers use these materials to keep the students interested or to fill gaps in the textbook. Since most teachers followed the book so closely without bringing in extra materials, the teachers must feel that the book is sufficiently interesting for the students and covers the desired material.

When the teachers were asked how they would change Lang 106, there was almost no agreement. Each teacher felt that course should go a different way. The only agreement came from two teachers who felt that the vocabulary should be moved from the back of the book and scattered throughout the text.

Lang 108

For Lang 108, most teachers agree that Headway, the courses' textbook, is well written. Headway is filled with cultural readings and English expressions. Although the book is well written, its scope may be too big for HKUST's classes. The publisher of the textbook suggests that 200 hours of instruction are necessary to explain the book's content, but Lang 108 only includes one fourth of that instruction time. For first-year science students, the assessments consist of a presentation and a written paper. However, there are no sections in headway about making a presentation or writing a report. These examinations test only the students' general English skills and do not ensure that the students have learned the material in Headway.

Many teachers feel that using a published book has limitations. The book does not give much freedom to the teachers of Lang 108. Also, the book is so different from the assessments that the teachers have to take it upon themselves to teach the skills needed for the exams. Despite the limitations of this textbook, there are advantages to using a published book as opposed to in-house materials. Professionals write the book. The publisher spends large amounts of money ensuring the book is polished and refined. From the pictures to the listening activities, each detail is carefully chosen. Available in-house materials have been described as flat and boring. The weak format of these materials typically has little to catch the students' attention.

Because the assessments do not match the material in the book, almost every teacher mentioned that they used extra materials to prepare students for them. In addition to that, many teachers felt that some of the materials in the book were not relevant to the students. These included reading passages

about going on an exchange or going to summer camp in America. Many teachers skipped these sections and supplemented their own material that students could relate to.

When asked how they would change the course for next year, the teachers gave several responses stating that either the course's textbook or assessments have to change. There is a feeling among some teachers that since each teacher must develop his or her own material. Because of this, the teachers are losing valuable time that could be better spent improving the specific needs of their students. Another issue is that different students have very different levels of English ability. One teacher mentioned that some of his/her students actually used Headway in their secondary school. One teacher suggested the use of tracked classes would help all of the English students.

5.2.3 Previous Students' Opinion of Course Materials

Many of the engineering, science, and business students we spoke to did not remember the textbook they used for Lang 106, Lang 108, and LABU 101, respectively. Evidence of this analysis can be seen in section 4.3.2 of the data chapter.

For Lang 106, students think the textbook is easy to understand; easy enough that some think they could have followed the course without attending lectures. According to the students, the textbook contains interesting topics, such as how to solve conflicts. The students like these concepts because they did not learn them during secondary school and because they relate to daily life. Students are also interested in learning slang and informal expressions that they can use among friends.

Like Lang 106, previous students of Lang 108 also want to learn expressions and intonations that are usually used during casual conversations. The students do not like the grammar review sections in the Headway book because they heavily covered grammar during secondary school. The students also think that the Headway book is too boring and out of date. They barely used the book during class, which

makes the relatively high price of the book more irritating. Some students did mention that the book is delightfully colorful and has a lot of pictures, like a magazine.

For LABU 101, previous students like the business cases used in the course, because they have taught them a lot about the business world. They also like the business cases because they are new topics to them, unlike the usual set of grammar, reading, and listening exercises.

5.2.4 Comparing and Contrasting the Opinions of Course Materials

Both the teachers and students of Lang 106 agree that the textbook is very easy to understand and follow. There are no difficult or time-consuming tasks, such as in-depth reading assignments or critical thinking exercises. Because there are no difficult tasks in this textbook, the teachers feel that this book does not challenge the students. The teachers and students of Lang 106 also agree that the topics covered in the textbook are relevant to the first-year students. The textbook includes sections about different aspects of college life, such as how to deal with stress or how to solve conflicts, which the students can relate to. The textbook also includes many slang phrases and idioms that native speakers use in casual conversation, which the students are interested in learning. The students want to learn these slang phrases and idioms because they want to better understand informal conversation in movies and within conversations with native speakers. Unfortunately, many students feel that the textbook is boring and not memorable. There are no colorful pictures or exciting tasks that the students can remember.

Although students of Lang 108 enjoy how the textbook contains many colorful and interesting pictures, they find the materials covered in the textbook very boring and out of date. On the other hand, teachers thought that the materials in the textbook were very interesting because it contains information about other cultures and countries. The students and teachers think that the grammar review in the textbook is really helpful. The students do not want to spend class time going over grammar rules that

they've already learned in secondary school, but they still want the grammar review as a reference for their written work.

LABU 101 tries to improve students' English skills though using business cases. Therefore, there are debates among the teachers on whether or not this method actually improves the students' English. Many teachers feel that the students are improving their English skills by doing tasks such as presentations and group discussions, while other teachers think that this course concentrates too heavily on business related materials. From the surveys, most students stated that their English skills, especially their speaking skills, did improve after completing the first semester of LABU. Since the course is conducted in English, there are many opportunities for students to use and practice their English skills, such as during group discussion. The students feel that this course is teaching them concepts that are relevant to their major, which causes them to be more willing to spend extra time on the course's assignments.

Students and teachers of Lang 108 and Lang 106 agree that the lack of work and motivation in class are largely due to the course being counted as only one credit. Students spend most of their time doing work for other courses because they count for more credit. The teachers understand the students' point of view and try their best to make the class enjoyable and inspiring to motivate the students.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

After examining the opinions of the current and previous students and teachers of the three first-year English courses, we have derived separate conclusions and recommendations for each course as well as overall recommendations that apply to multiple courses.

6.1 LABU 101

The English teachers of LABU 101 are not given enough support to properly teach the course, because of its heavy emphasis on business topics. English teachers do not normally have enough knowledge of business to effectively teach the topics covered in LABU 101. Consequently, some English teachers have complained that the support given to them is surprisingly poor. One teacher mentioned that the teacher's edition of the courses' textbook had very little additional material when compared to the student's edition of the book. We recommend that either the teacher's edition of the LABU 101 course textbook include more explanations of the business topics within it or that first time teachers of the course be given basic business training.

It is difficult for the Language Centre to adapt the business cases used in the LABU textbook to the English needs of the students, because the cases are often written above the students' level of reading comprehension, at one extreme, or do not include enough new vocabulary for the students to learn at the other. Not surprisingly, the business faculty chooses the business cases for their business content, not their English content. In order to remedy this problem, we recommend that the Language Centre become an active partner with the business department in choosing the business cases to ensure the English content of each case is adequate.

The individuals who created this combined English and Business course at HKUST, alongside many other language teachers, are skeptical of the ability of the course to actually improve the English

skills of its students. The results of our current student survey show that the students believe that examining business cases does improve their English. We recommend that the Language Centre continue to use this class model for improving the English of first-year Business students.

6.2 Lang 106

Many teachers and most students agree that slang phrases and idioms are engaging English topics. It should be understood that knowing these phrases might not be very beneficial for the rest of the students' time at HKUST. However, these phrases could help the students understand many native English speakers, including native speaking interviewers. Although knowing these slang may not be the most useful content for the students, it could keep them interested in the course enough to learn other topics. We recommend that teachers of Lang 106 use idioms as they see fit throughout their lectures in order to keep their students engaged in class discussion and activities.

Although the first semester of Lang 106 already concentrates on speaking and listening, the students have requested that the course put more emphasis on the speaking portion of the course. According to our survey of current students, they are least interested in improving their listening skills for what might be a very good reason: Some teachers admitted that the listening exercises in the Lang 106 textbook teach obvious listening tricks that students already know. However, in focus groups, students explained that listening skills are important, because many teachers at HKUST have varying accents, which can make their lectures difficult to understand. The reason the students expressed a lack of interest in improving listening skills may have been the poor quality of the listening exercises in the Lang 106 textbook. We recommend that the Language Centre either change the listening exercises in the textbook to more effectively address the problem of deciphering lecturers' varying accents, or reduce the course's emphasis on listening exercises.

6.3 Lang 108

In the opinion of some Lang 108 teachers, the course's textbook does not properly prepare students for the course's assessments. The assessments for this course are comprised of an oral presentation and a written report. The Lang 108 textbook does not have specific sections or exercises designed to prepare the students for either of these assessments. The teachers have mentioned that because of this gap, they must prepare their own material in order to prepare the students for the assessments, which takes up a significant amount of the teachers' time. Also, with each teacher creating his or her own materials, the degree to which the students are prepared for the assessments depends on the teacher's ability to create adequate material in the time given. The degree to which the students are prepared can vary greatly from teacher to teacher, especially among first-year teachers who do not have any materials from the previous year. We recommend that either the assessments change to better fit the textbook or that the teachers be given more comprehensive material that will adequately prepare the students for the assessments.

The grammar reference section of the Headway textbook is useful for the first-year science students. From the survey we found that there is a large portion of students who find the material useful. Also, during the focus groups with previous students, many students mentioned that the grammar reference helps them, because they are not very good writers. However, some students stated that reviewing the grammar reference section of the textbook is unnecessary, because they have learned most of the concepts in secondary school. Because of this, we recommend that the grammar reference section be used as a reference instead of actual lesson material.

6.4 Multiple Course Recommendations

Lang 108 and Lang 106 are compulsory English courses that count significantly less than a typical course at HKUST. When spoken to in person, teachers and students admitted that the one or two credits

that students receive for these courses is not enough to warrant the students' attention. The teachers think that the students do not care enough about their courses and the students have said that they would rather spend their time on other courses. In one particular case a student mentioned that for an entire year of a compulsory English course he/she would only receive 1 credit. This same student said, "I feel that my English ability has decreased since coming to HKUST." The students do not blame this on the English material used but the fact that they do not practice English enough to even keep their ability at a constant level. The students only spend a few hours a week in class and because the class is worth so little credit, the students spend their extra time on other courses. We recommend that the Language Centre seriously consider increasing the amount of credit students receive for first-year English courses. We also suggest that these two courses become more related to their respective students' lives by either incorporating material on the students' daily lives or their future at HKUST. The ideal way to make the courses more related to the students would be using material related to the students' respective majors in the way that LABU 101 uses business material. However, the fact that science and engineering topics would be near impossible for an English teacher to properly teach makes this solution very unfeasible.

In LABU 101 and Lang 108 classes, writing skills are not emphasized enough. Both students and teachers of these courses identified writing as one of the two most important skills for first-year students. However, for all courses, writing is thought by the students to be the skill least improved by the fall semester of their first-year English courses. For Lang 106, the first semester concentrates on listening and speaking skills instead of writing and reading skills, so it is no surprise that the students of that course did not significantly improve their writing. Both LABU 101 and Lang 108 have writing assessments, but do not directly prepare their students for them. Because of this, we recommend that LABU 101 and Lang 108 add more writing material and exercises so that the students can get feedback on where their weaknesses lie before taking a formal writing assessment.

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Appendix A: HKUST Sponsor Description

Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), a public university, is one of eight universities in Hong Kong. The majority of the universities in Hong Kong including HKUST conduct their classes in English; therefore the other universities are also aiming to improve their English language program. In order to compete with other universities, HKUST wants to improve their academic programs, especially their English program. HKUST's mission is "to advance learning and knowledge through teaching and research, particularly: (i) in science, technology, engineering, management and business studies; and (ii) at the postgraduate level; and to assist in the economic and social development of Hong Kong" (HKUST, 2007, Mission and Vision).

HKUST hopes to accomplish its goal to maintain the effectiveness of its English language program. This goal is of major concern to the university, because English is the language of instruction in Hong Kong universities. In order to increase the educational value of all courses, all students at the university must understand enough English to actively participate in classes that are taught in English. Having more productive students and classes allows their graduates to acquire high paying jobs, such as managers or engineers of an international business company, which will eventually increase the reputation of HKUST.

HKUST is overseen by a government system with three branches: the Court, the Council, and the Senate (HKUST, 2007, Governance). The Court is the university's supreme advisory body, which consists of up to 44 appointed members and 100 honorary members. This branch's duties include reviewing presidential reports, recommending changes to general university policy, and raising funds for the university. The Council, which is led by a chairman who is not an employee of the university, is the governing and executive body of the University that includes 33 members of varying positions within and outside of the university. Among these members is the president of HKUST. This branch is responsible for investments, contracts, property, appointments, budget, and finance. As the president of HKUST, the

president must also chair the Senate meeting. The Senate, a vital government body of the University, deals with all academic matters and the well being of the students and facilities at HKUST. The Senate can have a maximum of 54 members, 3 of whom are student representatives. The Senate is especially relevant to this project. They have the authority to change or enhance the English learning program in accordance with others' and ours research results.

The Language Centre is an extension of HKUST that includes 79 staff members. Although the center contains courses in nine different languages, their primary responsibility is English (HKUST Language Centre, 2007, Mission). Programs sponsored by the Language Centre include the language exchange program, Language Immersion by Residence Abroad (LIBRA) program, and Volunteering in Territories Abroad (VITA) program (HKUST Language Centre, 2007, Learning Support). The language exchange program pairs up students to practice conversational English in weekly discussions. The LIBRA and VITA program gives students opportunity to go aboard to an English speaking country. In order to fund their language programs, the Language Centre receives grants from the Hong Kong government through the University Grants Committee, donations from alumni, and a portion of the school's tuition (University Grants Committee, RGC Central Allocation).

Appendix B: LABU 101 Student Survey



Fall Semester 2007 LABU 101 Student Survey

Please take the following few minutes to fill out this survey.					
PART 1					
DIRECTIONS: For this section please mark an "X" on your response.					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I understand that the objective of the Fall semester of this course was to learn how to analyze business cases.					
2. This course achieved the objective stated in question 1.					
3. I am interested in learning English.					
4. For LABU 101, the material covered during Fall 2007 was useful to me.					
5. The LABU 101 textbook used during Fall 2007 was difficult.					
6. The LABU 101 textbook used during Fall 2007 was interesting.					
7. The material covered in LABU 101 has helped me in my other courses at HKUST.					
8. Analyzing business cases has helped me improve my English skills.					
9. After taking LABU 101, I have become more comfortable reading English articles.					
10. After taking LABU 101, I regularly read English articles in my spare time.					

PART II

11. Not including actual class time, how many hours did you spend on homework, studying, and class preparation in an average week?

PART III

DIRECTIONS: For this section please tick (☑) as many answers as you want. (You may tick no answers.)

12. Which skill(s) were your strongest before you began the Fall semester of 2007?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

13. Which skill(s) were your weakest before you began the Fall semester of 2007?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

14. Which skill(s) were you most interested in improving before you began the Fall semester of 2007?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

15. Which skill(s) were improved the most throughout the course?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

16. Which skill(s) will help you be successful during the rest of your time at HKUST?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

17. Which skill(s), if any, did the course focus on too much?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

18. Which skill(s), if any, did the course not focus on enough?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

I am male /female. (please circle one)	
I have studied in Mainland China sometime in my life.	T/F
If true, for how long? _____ months _____ years	
I have studied outside of Hong Kong and China sometime in my life.	T/F
If true, for how long? _____ months _____ years	

Thank You. 谢谢。

Appendix C: LABU 101 Student Survey Data

(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	
PART 1	
	Averages
1. I understand that the objective of the Fall semester of this course was to learn how to analyze business cases.	4
2. This course achieved the objective stated in question 1.	3.7
3. I am interested in learning English.	3.7
4. For LABU 101, the material covered during Fall 2007 was useful to me.	3.6
5. The LABU 101 textbook used during Fall 2007 was difficult.	2.4
6. The LABU 101 textbook used during Fall 2007 was interesting.	2.9
7. The material covered in LABU 101 has helped me in my other courses at HKUST.	3.3
8. Analyzing business cases has helped me improve my English skills.	3.6
9. After taking LABU 101, I have become more comfortable reading English articles.	3.2
10. After taking LABU 101, I regularly read English articles in my spare time.	2.7

PART II	
11. Not including actual class time, how many hours did you spend on homework, studying, and class preparation in an average week?	6.6

PART III	
	Totals
12. Which skill(s) were your strongest before you began the Fall semester of 2007?	
Reading	205
Writing	105
Listening	134
Speaking	112
13. Which skill(s) were your weakest before you began the Fall semester of 2007?	
Reading	50
Writing	183
Listening	99
Speaking	214
14. Which skill(s) were you most interested in improving before you began the Fall semester of 2007?	

	Reading	61
	Writing	160
	Listening	91
	Speaking	313
15. Which skill(s) were improved the most throughout the course?		
	Reading	95
	Writing	51
	Listening	80
	Speaking	292
16. Which skill(s) will help you be successful during the rest of your time at HKUST?		
	Reading	160
	Writing	190
	Listening	170
	Speaking	375
17. Which skill(s), if any, did the course focus on too much?		
	Reading	158
	Writing	34
	Listening	14
	Speaking	122
18. Which skill(s), if any, did the course not focus on enough?		
	Reading	38
	Writing	201
	Listening	153
	Speaking	47

Male:	215
Female:	224

I have studied in Mainland China sometime in my life.	8.25%
I have studied outside of Hong Kong and China sometime in my life.	9.30%

Appendix D: Lang 106 Student Survey



Fall Semester 2007 LANG 106 Student Survey

Please take the following few minutes to fill out this survey.					
PART 1					
DIRECTIONS: For this section please mark an "X" on your response.					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I understand that the objective of the Fall semester of this course was to improve my listening and speaking skills.					
2. I am interested in learning English.					
3. For LANG 106, the material covered during Fall 2007 was useful to me.					
4. The LANG 106 textbook used during Fall 2007 was difficult.					
5. The LANG 106 textbook used during Fall 2007 was interesting.					
6. The material covered in LANG 106 has helped me in my other courses at HKUST.					
7. Learning and using idioms and slang have helped me understand/express myself in English? (If you have not learned idioms or slang, please do not answer.)					

PART II

8. Not including actual class time, how many hours did you spend on homework, studying, and class preparation in an average week?

PART III

DIRECTIONS: For this section please tick (☑) as many answers as you want. (You may tick no answers.)

9. Which skill(s) were your strongest before you began the Fall semester of 2007?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

10. Which skill(s) were your weakest before you began the Fall semester of 2007?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

11. Which skill(s) were you most interested in improving before you began the Fall semester of 2007?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

12. Which skill(s) were improved the most throughout the course?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

13. Which skill(s) will help you be successful during the rest of your time at HKUST?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

14. Which skill(s), if any, did the course focus on too much?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

15. Which skill(s), if any, did the course not focus on enough?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

I am male /female. (please circle one)	
I have studied in Mainland China sometime in my life.	T/F
If true, for how long? _____ months _____ years	
I have studied outside of Hong Kong and China sometime in my life.	T/F
If true, for how long? _____ months _____ years	

Thank You. 谢谢。

Appendix E: Lang 106 Student Survey Data

(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	
PART 1	
	Averages
1. I understand that the objective of the Fall semester of this course was to improve my listening and speaking skills.	3.9
2. I am interested in learning English.	3.4
3. For LANG 106, the material covered during Fall 2007 was useful to me.	3.4
4. The LANG 106 textbook used during Fall 2007 was difficult.	2.6
5. The LANG 106 textbook used during Fall 2007 was interesting.	2.8
6. The material covered in LANG 106 has helped me in my other courses at HKUST.	2.8
7. Learning and using idioms and slang have helped me understand/express myself in English? (If you have not learned idioms or slang, please do not answer.)	3.2

PART II	
8. Not including actual class time, how many hours did you spend on homework, studying, and class preparation in an average week?	4

PART III		
		Totals
9. Which skill(s) were your strongest before you began the Fall semester of 2007?		
	Reading	184
	Writing	89
	Listening	126
	Speaking	90
10. Which skill(s) were your weakest before you began the Fall semester of 2007?		
	Reading	75
	Writing	176
	Listening	159
	Speaking	210
11. Which skill(s) were you most interested in improving before you began the Fall semester of 2007?		
	Reading	87
	Writing	164
	Listening	185
	Speaking	256

12. Which skill(s) were improved the most throughout the course?		
	Reading	31
	Writing	28
	Listening	259
	Speaking	158
13. Which skill(s) will help you be successful during the rest of your time at HKUST?		
	Reading	140
	Writing	167
	Listening	230
	Speaking	299
14. Which skill(s), if any, did the course focus on too much?		
	Reading	18
	Writing	21
	Listening	121
	Speaking	87
15. Which skill(s), if any, did the course not focus on enough?		
	Reading	130
	Writing	161
	Listening	30
	Speaking	42

Appendix F: Lang 108 Student Survey



Fall Semester 2007 LANG 108 Student Survey

Please take the following few minutes to fill out this survey.

PART 1					
DIRECTIONS: For this section please mark an "X" on your response.					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I am interested in learning English.					
2. For LANG 108, the material covered during Fall 2007 was useful to me.					
3. The Headway textbook used during Fall 2007 was difficult.					
4. The Headway textbook used during Fall 2007 was interesting.					
5. The material covered in LANG 108 has helped me in my other courses at HKUST.					
6. The material in the Headway textbook prepared me for the report writing assessment.					
7. The material in the Headway textbook prepared me for the oral presentation assessment.					
8. The grammar review sections of the Headway textbook were helpful.					

PART II

9. Not including actual class time, how many hours did you spend on homework, studying, and class preparation in an average week?

PART III

DIRECTIONS: For this section please tick (☑) as many answers as you want. (You may tick no answers.)

10. Which skill(s) were your strongest before you began the Fall semester of 2007?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

11. Which skill(s) were your weakest before you began the Fall semester of 2007?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

12. Which skill(s) were you most interested in improving before you began the Fall semester of 2007?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

13. Which skill(s) were improved the most throughout the course?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

14. Which skill(s) will help you be successful during the rest of your time at HKUST?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

15. Which skill(s), if any, did the course focus on too much?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

16. Which skill(s), if any, did the course not focus on enough?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

I am male /female. (please circle one)	
I have studied in Mainland China sometime in my life.	T/F
If true, for how long? _____ months _____ years	
I have studied outside of Hong Kong and China sometime in my life.	T/F
If true, for how long? _____ months _____ years	

Thank You. 谢谢。

Appendix G: Lang 108 Student Survey Data

(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	
PART 1	
	Averages
19. I am interested in learning English.	3.6
20. For LANG 108, the material covered during Fall 2007 was useful to me.	3.2
21. The Headway textbook used during Fall 2007 was difficult.	2.4
22. The Headway textbook used during Fall 2007 was interesting.	2.7
23. The material covered in LANG 108 has helped me in my other courses at HKUST.	2.5
24. The material in the Headway textbook prepared me for the report writing assessment.	2.9
25. The material in the Headway textbook prepared me for the oral presentation assessment.	2.8
26. The grammar review sections of the Headway textbook were helpful.	3.1

PART II	
27. Not including actual class time, how many hours did you spend on homework, studying, and class preparation in an average week?	3.9

PART III		
		Totals
28. Which skill(s) were your strongest before you began the Fall semester of 2007?		
	Reading	128
	Writing	64
	Listening	87
	Speaking	57
29. Which skill(s) were your weakest before you began the Fall semester of 2007?		
	Reading	28
	Writing	125
	Listening	85
	Speaking	135
30. Which skill(s) were you most interested in improving before you began the Fall semester of 2007?		
	Reading	41
	Writing	106
	Listening	81
	Speaking	174

31. Which skill(s) were improved the most throughout the course?		
	Reading	41
	Writing	38
	Listening	79
	Speaking	149
32. Which skill(s) will help you be successful during the rest of your time at HKUST?		
	Reading	92
	Writing	123
	Listening	105
	Speaking	178
33. Which skill(s), if any, did the course focus on too much?		
	Reading	58
	Writing	23
	Listening	33
	Speaking	65
34. Which skill(s), if any, did the course not focus on enough?		
	Reading	49
	Writing	116
	Listening	70
	Speaking	41

Appendix H: Teacher Interview Protocol

Teacher's Name:

Course Taught (last semester):

Additional Notes:

- Introduction questions
 - How long have you been teaching at HKUST?
 - What level of involvement did u have in the creation of the course textbook?
- How effective is the book that you used in your course?
 - What are the books strengths? (Show book)
 - What are the books weaknesses? (Show book)
 - **LABU 101:** Do you think examining business cases is an effective way for the students to learn English? Do you think a grammar and vocabulary textbook would be more effective?
 - **Lang 106:** Do you think teaching students the meaning of idioms such as “screw up” and “hang out” keeps them interested in learning English? Will these words and phrases help the students express themselves in English?
 - **Lang 108:** How does using a published book verses in house materials affect this course? What advantages and disadvantages do you see in using a published book? In house materials?
 - **Lang 108:** Do the exams in the Headway textbook properly test students on what is covered in the textbook's sections?
 - **Lang 108:** Did you think the grammar review section in Headway is necessary for students at this level?
- In addition to the book do you use any supplemental materials?
 - If yes, what are the extra materials accomplishing in the course?
 - If no, are there any materials you wish the course included that would be useful?
- If you could, how would you change the course? Why?
- What do you think are the most important English skills that the students need right now to succeed in their courses at HKUST?
 - Which skills do you think the students are strong at? Weak at?
 - Recently, what were some of the language problems the students faced in your class?
 - How did you approach the problems?
 - Which skills do you think the students are the most interested in improving?
- What types of activities do you have your students in the classroom participate in on a daily basis?
 - What is the purpose of the activity?
 - Do you find the activity useful?
 - Are there particular activities that the students seem to be most interested/engaged in?
- Do you have any additional information for us? Any other suggestion or comments you wish to consider?

Appendix I: Previous Student Focus Group Protocol

Course/Section Name:

Course Teacher:

Additional Notes:

- Introduction
 - Good morning/afternoon! We are a group of American Students working on a project for the Language Centre.
 - This project's goal is to better understand the English Language needs of first-year students and to gather the opinions of the teachers and the students on the course materials used in the first year courses.
 - All information we collect is confidential. For example, we will not mention who actually participated in this discussion and our final report will not mention any names.
- Does anyone have questions before we start?
- Question on Course Textbook
 - Does anyone remember the textbook?
 - What were the textbook's strengths? /What was the best part of the textbook?
 - What were the textbook's weaknesses? /What was the worst part of the textbook?
 - If you could, how would you change the course? Why?
- Questions on English Language Skills
 - Out of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which do you think are the most important skills you needed in the first-year?
 - Out of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which skills do you think would help you the most with your courses at HKUST?
 - **LABU 101:** Do you think LABU 101 improved your English skills?
 - **Lang 106:** What do you think about Slang? Are they helpful or interesting?
 - **Lang 108:** What do you think about the Grammar review in Headway?
 - **Lang 108:** What do you think of using a published textbook vs. using in-house materials?
- Is there anything else you remember about the course?