

**THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES (EAP) PROGRAMS ON
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' SUCCESS IN UNIVERSITY COURSES**

by

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Abstract

In this global economy, non-native English-speaking (NNES) international students are choosing to study at English-medium universities in increasing numbers. In response, many universities have instituted intensive English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs to support students who need to increase language proficiency. These may be pre-sessional “pathway” programs or EAP courses that run concurrently with disciplinary courses. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study, which includes eight cases, was to gain insight into the experiences of NNES students who took an EAP program before they enrolled in disciplinary courses. I aimed to identify the impact of the program and how it prepared students for disciplinary courses by investigating the needs of students as they moved through the first term of university study. Results of the study illustrate that students’ responses to the EAP program were overwhelmingly positive; all eight students reported improvements in one or more skill areas and increased confidence as they embarked on university classes. However, several participants expressed disappointment about the lack of opportunity to meet students from other cultures in order to broaden their experience and practice their spoken English more, especially outside of class time. Some also expressed anxiety due to a lack of academic vocabulary that they would need to function in their disciplinary courses. The participating students reported challenges in their first term of university, including difficulty understanding lectures and classmates, meeting new friends, especially English-speaking domestic students, adjusting to the expectations of a new educational system and learning to manage different, more complex tasks. Implications are discussed for policy, practice and future research.

Preface

This thesis is the original, unpublished work of the author, Karin Keefe. Ethics approval was required for this research. The UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board approved the fieldwork in this study on June 15, 2015 under the certificate #H15-01377.

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List of Abbreviations

EAP: English for Academic Purposes

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

EAL: English as an Additional Language

ESL: English as a Second Language

ELL: English Language Learner

CBI: Content-based Instruction

L1: native/first language

L2: second/additional language

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Dedication

For the students who generously gave their time and energy to this project. I am ever grateful for your enthusiastic support.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

In an ever-increasing global economy, more and more students are crossing borders to study at English-medium universities. For example, the number of international students studying at universities in Canada has increased from 53,168 in 2000 to 116,890 in 2010 (Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, 2012) and the federal government plans to double the current number of international students to 450,000 by the year 2022 (“Canada wants to double,” 2014). In response to the large numbers of applicants who have the academic achievement but lack the English language proficiency, many universities have instituted intensive English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs in Canada, the US, the UK and Australia, among others. These programs may be pre-sessional “pathway” programs that serve as proof of language proficiency in place of a test score (if students achieve a passing grade) or EAP courses that run concurrently with disciplinary courses, sometimes supporting the students through linked content.

1.2 Statement of the problem

As the number of non-native English-speaking (NNES) international students has steadily increased at English-medium universities, previous studies have examined how well those students adapted and what impact their English proficiency had on their success. Researchers found that students’ lack of proficiency was impacting both academic and social life of students and, as a result, concluded that NNES students would benefit from language support (Berman & Cheng, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003), especially that which included some form of intercultural contact, such as workshops attended by international and domestic students and faculty (Benzie, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Trice, 2007). Although many EAP programs have been

implemented at universities across Canada, the impact of these programs and whether they meet the students' needs after they move on to disciplinary courses has not been widely studied, especially at Canadian universities. Therefore, the topic of this study is the role of EAP programs in NNES students' subsequent success in their university courses.

1.3 Statement of purpose and research questions

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to gain insight into the experiences of NNES students who took an EAP program before they enrolled in disciplinary courses. I aim to identify the impact of the program on students and how thoroughly and in which areas it prepares them for disciplinary courses by determining their needs as they move through the first term of university study. Without needs analysis, teachers are left to guess what students need to learn to be successful in their subsequent courses (Johns, 1991). Because the goal of EAP programs is to prepare students for disciplinary courses by means of a transfer of learning (James, 2014), I focus on what the students learn in the EAP program and what is expected of them in the disciplinary courses in order to determine whether students' target needs and whether they are being met. I am also interested to find out how students' lack of proficiency may impact their ability to perform in the disciplinary classes or inhibit their ability to integrate on campus with domestic students. The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To determine what the students lack as they enter the EAP program and if they feel their needs have been met by the end.
2. To compare the EAP curriculum—the types of assignments, texts, method of delivery and level of challenge—with the demands of the disciplinary courses, in order to determine the likelihood of learning transfer, that is, knowledge or skill learned in one context and applied to another (Perkins & Salomon, 1988).

3. To examine the impact that lack of language proficiency has on students' ability to perform in their disciplinary courses and interact socially with domestic English-speaking students.

It is important to continually re-examine the needs of students to gain insight into what is required of them so that course designers and instructors may more effectively answer the question: "Why do these learners need to learn English?" (Hutchison & Waters, 1987, p. 53). This process is ongoing because students' abilities and needs change, as do the demands of the university. This study will contribute to the growing literature on the efficacy of EAP programs and the adjustment factors that help NNES students integrate into an English-medium university. This research may help administrators and instructors make decisions at classroom and program levels to better meet the needs of this ever-increasing segment of the university population.

Based on the needs and objectives, I pose these research questions to gain insight into NNES students' experiences in an EAP program and investigate whether their target needs in disciplinary classes are being met:

1. What are students' experiences in the EAP program?
2. How does taking an intensive language class (EAP) contribute to student's academic performance in their disciplinary programs?

1.4 Significance of study

As universities in Western countries continue to actively recruit international students from non-native English-speaking backgrounds, it becomes important to examine how well students are integrating into university life and provide them with language and social support. This study will provide feedback to the EAP curriculum developers and instructors of this particular course, as well as others in the field of EAP, about how effectively it met the students'

needs once they moved on to university. In order to determine the students' *lacks*—the gaps between the “target proficiency” and the “existing proficiency” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 55–56)—instructors must first be familiar with the demands of the target situation. This familiarity will enable practitioners to promote learning transfer by designing EAP materials similar to those in the students' disciplinary courses, including topics, delivery method, format of assignments, etc. (Counsell, 2011; James, 2006; Leki & Carson, 1994, 1997). And instructors may be able to further promote learning transfer by pointing out connections between what students learn in the EAP course and the disciplinary course (James, 2006b).

1.5 Organization of the remainder of the thesis

In Chapter 2, I present an overview of EAP as a discipline, including historical developments and distinguishing features, and review relevant literature related to the present research questions. Chapter 3 contains the methods used to conduct this study, including description of participants and research site, and the procedures followed in the collection and analysis of data. Next, in Chapter 4, I report the findings and provide a discussion of the students' experiences of the EAP program. Chapter 5 contains the findings and discussion related to the second research question regarding the impact of the EAP program on the students' subsequent university study. Finally, Chapter 6 provides a summary of the findings along with practical implications and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Review of literature

To greater understand the context of the EAP program that is the focus of this study, I provide an overview of the development of EAP over the past decades in this chapter. I first outline the origins of the field and the various approaches that have contributed to EAP methodology throughout the years, and then describe the key role of needs analysis, the debate around general versus specific EAP and potential influence on learning transfer.

2.1 EAP as a discipline

EAP has been defined as the “teaching of English with the specific aim of helping learners to study, conduct research or teach in that language” (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 8), with instruction based on the demands of academic disciplines (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). Hamp-Lyons (2011) describes the early days of EAP as a “grass roots, practical response to an immediate problem” (p. 91). EAP programs provided support to international students on an ad hoc basis as problems arose; however, as a greater number of NNES began to study at English-medium universities in the past few decades, the field of EAP has developed in response to the needs of those learners.

The roots of EAP lie within the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which focuses on teaching English for specific rather than general purposes (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). EAP is one of the strands of ESP along with English for Vocational/Occupational Purposes (EVP/EOP) (Jordan, 1997). In the 1970s, the term “EAP” was mentioned for the first time as a separate field—Tim Johns reports that he used it in October, 1974—and by the spring of 1975 it was regularly being used by the British Council (Jordan, 2002), while at the same time the inclusion of “study skills” was beginning to appear in student practice materials (Jordan, 1997, p. 1). In the early days of ESP in the 1960s, the focus of practitioners was on how the

students would use the language when they finished classes and, as a result, instructors were interested in developing systematic analyses of students' needs in the "real world" rather than guessing what they might be (Johns, 1991, p. 67). Johns (1991) considers this focus on students' needs to be one of the most important contributions of ESP to the field of language teaching.

According to Hamp-Lyons (2011), the focus on needs analysis and the development of EAP-specific materials grew steadily from the 1970s on. Materials development originally focused on discipline-specific materials and then expanded in the 1970s and 1980s to include good study skills, which then developed into more advanced study skills, such as how to write a research paper. Scholars and practitioners in the field of ESP espouse the use of authentic oral and written texts, such as samples of real lectures rather than simplified ones (Hyland & Shaw, 2016; Johns, 1991), although Hyland and Shaw (2016) acknowledge that teachers may need to "tailor a text to improve its readability or highlight a given feature" (p. 3). In addition, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) caution that a text's authenticity does not necessarily indicate its usefulness in the classroom; it must first fit the learning purpose.

2.1.1 Historical development of the ESP/EAP syllabus

Over the years, EAP has become a "theoretically grounded and research-informed enterprise" (Hyland & Shaw, 2016, p. 1), with the aim of ensuring ESP/EAP courses meet the needs of its learners based on the demands of the academic world. These needs and demands have evolved over the decades.

2.1.1.1 Register analysis

In the early days of ESP in the 1960s, instruction was focused on identifying sentence level characteristics that would be useful to students in their particular disciplines, an approach known as *register analysis* (Johns, 1991). The aim of this approach was to identify grammatical

and lexical features, for example, frequencies of verb tenses and vocabulary for different subjects, which would then form the teaching syllabus. It was noted that the language features and grammar of different disciplines vary; for example, the register of Biology is not the same as that of Electrical Engineering, and by developing curricula using this method, students' needs might be more closely met (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). An example of a syllabus based on register analysis is *A Course in Basic Scientific English* by Ewer and Latorre (1969), which examined a three million-word corpus of scientific texts, providing students with essential scientific features that would not have appeared in general English textbooks (Jordan, 1997). Another well-known example of this type of register analysis was Swales' *Writing Scientific English* (1971), which included the most common grammatical forms used in scientific English writing (Johns, 1991). While this approach allowed the development of a syllabus that gave priority to language forms that students would be exposed to in disciplinary courses, it came under criticism for being purely descriptive, merely noting the frequency of language features and not providing an explanation of the function or purpose. These considerations began to be addressed as ESP instruction moved toward adopting a more rhetorical approach in the 1970s (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001).

2.1.1.2 Rhetorical analysis

The emergence of *rhetorical (or discourse) analysis* meant that the field of ESP began to focus on longer text above the sentence level and to consider its communicative function (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Allen and Widdowson (1974) point out that the problem for students was not that they were unfamiliar with the structure of English but with how sentences are used to communicate. They saw a need to “shift the focus of attention from the grammatical to the communicative properties of language” (Allen & Widdowson, 1974, p. 1). This type of

analysis examines longer texts and also the communicative contexts in which they appear, considering “the relationship between the discourse and the speakers and listeners” (Jordan, 1997, p. 229). Research is focused on identifying organizational patterns and the language used to signal those patterns (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), such as the *problem solving* pattern common to many academic texts: “situation, problem, response, evaluation” (Jordan, 1997, p.230). A seminal article which looked at both grammatical form and rhetorical function was published by Tarone, Dwyer, Gillette and Icke (1981), who examined the use of the passive structure in scientific articles, considering not only its frequency but also its communicative functions. Johns (1991) describes this article as breaking new ground for asking why certain features were used and also for noting differences between scientific disciplines and among the various genres in these disciplines.

2.1.1.3 Genre analysis

Following this research by Tarone et al. (1981), others began to investigate the “rhetorical moves within spoken and written languages” (Johns, 1991, p. 69) and this led to methodology developed in the early 1990s by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), which they referred to as *genre analysis*. This approach examined the features of a genre among its users, or *discourse community* (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 15). These features include “structure, style, content and intended audience” (Jordan, 1997, p. 231). The genre approach in EAP focuses on teaching features of particular academic genres, such as essays, research reports, etc., examining the language used and discourse features of the text and its context. An analysis of a sample from a particular genre may provide students with a model with which to create their own product, keeping in mind that genres are not “rule-governed patterns” but “prototypes” that vary from one discipline to another and may, in fact, vary from one example to another within the

same genre (Flowerdew, 1993b, p. 308). The notion of *discourse community*, which in EAP is generally associated with *academic discipline* (Hyland, 2015), is important in the field of EAP, as it provides researchers and practitioners with a framework to examine the conventions of academic disciplines and to use this knowledge to inform teaching and development of materials (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002).

2.1.1.4 Needs analysis

Following register analysis in the 1960s and 1970s and rhetorical analysis in the 1970s and 1980s, Hutchinson & Waters (1987) consider *needs analysis* to be the defining feature of the next phase in the development of ESP from the 1980s onwards. In the early days, needs were determined by practitioners' intuitions (Braine, 2001) or were "simple affairs that sought to get a rough idea" of how students would subsequently use English (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 178). However, in the late 1970s, a more systematic approach to needs analysis was developed by Munby (1978). His target-situation analysis (TSA) consisted of a communicative needs processor which converted into a communicative competence specification that could then be used to create a sequenced syllabus (West, 1994). Although Munby's model had its flaws, including the fact that it only measured target language use, it did lead to a greater role for needs analysis in ESP course design (Jordan, 1997; West, 1994). This development was described by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) as a "watershed" moment (1987, p. 54) and was credited with influencing later models (Jordan, 1997). West (1994) suggests that later developments were not only derived from Munby's approach but were also a response to its "shortcomings" (p. 9); it was criticized for being "overly complicated" (Jordan, 1997, p. 24), not being learner-centered, "collecting data *about* rather than *from* the student" (West, 1994, p. 9), not considering practical constraints until the end of the procedure (Jordan, 1997) and using social rather than academic

English in the skills selection process, which did not reflect the particular needs of ESP/EAP (West, 1994). A more learning-centered approach was developed by Hutchinson & Waters (1987), who considered not only the students' needs and lacks, but also their wants. The *needs* are determined by what the student needs to know to “function effectively in the target situation” and the *lacks* are the gaps between the “target proficiency” and the “existing proficiency” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 55–56). The *wants* consist of things that the learner perceives to be important, which may, as West (1994) points out, be at odds with needs and lacks as they are perceived by others, such as instructors or syllabus designers. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) underline the importance of not just target needs but also on learning needs—“how people *learn* to do what they do with language” (p.63).

Various methods can be used to gather data for needs analysis, and more than one method may be chosen. Methods include interviews (with learners or people in the disciplinary department who are using English), observations and authentic data collection (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Whichever method is chosen, Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) suggest that learners themselves are included in the planning process, which will not only guide instructors to create a useful syllabus but will also likely increase “learner investment and participation” in the class (Belcher, 2006, p. 136).

2.1.2 Settings

These days, EAP programs can be found in a variety of settings: in English-speaking contexts such as Australia, the U.S., the UK and Canada or in the students' own countries. The courses may lead to study in one's own country, such as Hong Kong, or study abroad (Jordan, 1997). EAP may be offered as a pre-sessional course, usually on a full-time basis, such as the

EAP course in my study, or as a sessional course, running contemporaneously with university courses, usually part-time (Jordan, 1997).

Pre-sessional “pathway” courses may be required by a university when students’ English language skills are slightly below the standard for admission and serve as a proof of language proficiency as an alternative to standardized test scores (Dooey, 2010). The role of these courses is not just to improve the students’ language proficiency but also to “[foster] among students the vital skills required for successful intercultural communication and integration into university life” (Dooey, 2010, p. 186). Studies have shown that some students resent having to take these types of courses, and see them as merely “a barrier” they need to overcome in order to move on to regular university courses (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Marshall, 2009).

Students taking concurrent EAP courses may more easily see their benefits since they can immediately apply the lessons to their disciplinary courses and they can also recognize the social support that these courses provide (Cheng & Fox, 2008, p. 326). They may be offered as adjunct content-based courses that support disciplinary courses (Baik & Greig, 2009; Kasper, 1994, 1997; Snow & Brinton, 1988; Song, 2006), a type of program that has grown in popularity compared to general EAP programs, due to students’ perceptions that they are more able to meet their future academic needs (Baik & Greig, 2009).

2.1.3 General vs. specific EAP

How specific the course syllabus must be to meet the needs of students has long been at the centre of debate in the field of EAP. Some argue that there are features of academic English that cross all disciplines (Spack, 1988), while others believe that what sets EAP apart from general language study is its specific focus on target language needs (Hyland, 2002). Spack (1988) argues that teaching highly specific disciplinary topics should be left to the university

lecturers because EAP instructors may lack the expertise to assess assignments written on disciplinary topics and their students may, in fact, know more than they do. Spack (1988) also notes the difficulty of teaching disciplinary conventions because the disciplines contain sub-disciplines with their own conventions and all these may change over time. As a result, she suggests EAP instructors teach only general academic skills, focusing on tasks that “require students to evaluate and synthesize material” (Spack, 1988, p. 44), such as conducting library research, summarizing, paraphrasing, etc. However, Hyland believes that leaving academic literacy to the disciplinary lecturers is not the answer—they may not have the interest or expertise to teach it, or may assume that everyone is already familiar with the discourse conventions (Hyland, 2016). Hyland (2002) also rejects the notion that there is one overarching academic English, leading “learners to believe that they simply need to master a set of transferable rules” (p. 6). Furthermore, he argues that a “narrow-angle” approach is more motivating for students, as it focuses on their particular needs, and also that in the academy it is difficult to come to a consensus on what general academic skills actually are (Hyland, 2016).

Also arguing for general EAP, Hutchinson & Waters (1987) suggest that it is more important to acquire the skills rather than the specific language needed in the target situation. And some scholars have suggested that students should acquire basic linguistic structures before moving on to learning language specific to their disciplines, the so-called “common core hypothesis” (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 18), an argument that ignores that students can learn both basic structures and disciplinary content at the same time. The common core approach also presumes that students learn language in an incremental fashion, an assumption that has been disproved by those in the field of language acquisition (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001).

2.1.4 Transferability

Specific rather than general classes may also have the advantage of allowing more learning to transfer from the EAP course to the disciplinary course, which is the aim of EAP. Leki and Carson (1997) describe the goals of EAP programs as “transcendent” (p. 39)—that is, the purpose of EAP programs is to help students to be successful in the tasks required of them in their disciplinary courses by means of a transfer of learning (James, 2014). Learning transfer has been defined as when “knowledge or skill associated with one context reaches out to enhance another” (Perkins & Salomon, 1988, p. 22). Whether transfer occurs depends on a number of factors, such as how similar the learning situations are. Transfer between very similar learning situations is considered to be *near transfer* (versus *far transfer*) (Perkins & Salomon, 1988). In addition, skills may transfer automatically and not require much thought, for example, when students apply reading strategies to different types of texts. Conversely, the transfer of skills may require “deliberate abstraction” on the part of students to see the connection between two tasks, since it may not be immediately obvious (Perkins & Salomon, 1988, p. 27). An example of the latter is when students apply skills they learn writing a summary in the EAP class to the writing of a literature review in a disciplinary course. Perkins and Salomon call these types of transfer *low road* and *high road* transfer, respectively.

James (2014) points out that while EAP instructional materials are often designed to be similar to students’ disciplinary courses, educators may want to consider emphasizing near transfer in as many ways as possible, for example, by considering topics, purpose of activities, classroom methodology (collaborative or individual) and format (multiple-choice, essay, etc.). If target situations are different from EAP courses in many aspects, learning transfer may be difficult. Instructors can also use techniques that may promote learning in situations that require

far transfer, such as having students learn general principles rather than specific items or having students consider how they may apply learning in various settings (James, 2006b; Perkins & Salomon, 1988). James makes the point that transfer is *possible* but it is not *inevitable* (2014, p. 11) and requires some effort on the part of instructors.

One type of curricular model that has been found to increase the likelihood of transfer to disciplinary courses is Content-based Instruction (CBI), an approach that integrates the academic subject matter with language skills (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 2003). In this type of model, students are enrolled concurrently in language and discipline-specific courses (Brinton et al., 2003) with the goal of providing students with the literacy skills and genre knowledge that will contribute to their academic success (Song, 2006). The benefits of this type of instruction are wide ranging and contribute to students' academic success beyond the semester in which the instruction is delivered. Studies have shown that students who take content-linked courses have a greater likelihood of passing the content-linked class, as well as subsequent ESL classes, have higher levels of academic achievement as measured by GPAs and a greater likelihood of graduating (Song, 2006). Students may also feel more motivated in content-linked classes because there is a greater focus on material that is relevant to them (Baik & Greig, 2009). Because CBI focuses on *use* in context—often with authentic materials—rather than *usage* by means of decontextualized samples of language, it exposes students to the language that is meaningful to them (Brinton et al., 2003).

2.1.5 Summary of EAP as a discipline

I have provided an overview of the development of the field of EAP from its roots in ESP to the present, describing some of the main pedagogical approaches, the key role of needs analysis and the importance of leaning transfer.

In the next section, I review empirical studies that examined the experiences of NNES in English-medium universities, demonstrating the need for language support in the form of EAP courses, the benefits of those courses and the areas where students' needs are still unmet.

2.2 Review of empirical research: How EAP programs contribute to students' success in disciplinary courses

Much of the recent research on the impact of EAP programs has been conducted in Australia, a country that, like Canada, is recruiting international students in large numbers. As a result, the studies that I review reflect that trend, with almost a third of the studies taking place at Australian universities (Dooley, 2010; Dyson, 2014; Floyd, 2015; Phakiti, Hirsh, & Woodrow, 2013; Ryan, Bhattacharyya, Stratilas, & Goela, 2011; Storch & Tapper, 2009; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011; Woodrow, 2006). The other contexts are Hong Kong (Evans & Green, 2007), the US (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Andrade, 2009; James, 2010; Leki, 2001; Leki & Carson, 1994; Leki & Carson, 1997; Martirosyan, Hwang, & Wanjohi, 2015; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010; Snow & Brinton, 1988; Song, 2006; Trice, 2007) and Canada (Berman & Cheng, 2010; Cheng & Fox, 2008; Cheng, Myles, & Curtis, 2004; Fox, Cheng, & Zumbo, 2014; Grayson, 2008; James, 2006; Marshall, 2009; Myles & Cheng, 2003). I have tried to include as many studies as possible that were conducted at Canadian universities and the most up-to-date studies to reflect changes to the pedagogy used in these programs; also, as times change, so do populations of students and their abilities and needs. I focus on research that was conducted in the past 10 years, with the exception of much-referenced studies by Leki and Carson (1994, 1997), Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998), and Snow and Brinton (1988). One other exception is a Canadian study from the early 2000s (Myles & Cheng, 2003), which was included to add to the Canadian context.

This review is organized into two parts. In the first part, I focus on the experiences of NNES international students in English-medium universities and demonstrate the importance of language proficiency to their academic and social adjustment and the role that EAP programs can play to facilitate that adjustment. In the second part, I examine how the EAP programs meet the needs of students, consider the efficacy of Content-based Instruction and the potential of learning transfer from EAP to disciplinary courses and, finally, the examine the academic outcomes of EAP students after they move on to mainstream university courses.

2.2.1 Rationale for EAP programs based on students' university experiences

2.2.1.1 Importance of language proficiency to students' academic success

NNES students who take EAP courses, especially in pre-sessional settings, have the aim of improving their language proficiency before they embark on university courses, but what role does language proficiency play in students' subsequent university experience? Studies have examined the relationship between English language proficiency and students' academic performance as measured by GPAs, and have concluded that language proficiency is important to some degree, depending on the students' English level and degree status (Berman & Cheng, 2010; Ryan et al., 2011; Woodrow, 2006).

In a survey involving 186 first-year students at a Canadian university, Berman and Cheng (2010) found that language proficiency did have an impact, but more on the GPAs of the NNES graduate students than NNES undergraduates. The NNES undergraduates had similar GPAs to their native English-speaking peers, while the NNES graduate students' GPAs were much lower than their native-speaking peers in this study; 67% of NNES graduate students achieved the highest grade compared to 94% of native English-speaking students. The authors thought this difference may have been due to the different language demands on NNES graduates compared

to their undergraduate counterparts. Berman and Cheng suggested that NNES graduate students would benefit from EAP courses with a focus on speaking and writing, because speaking was reportedly the most difficult skill and, along with writing, were much more difficult than the receptive skills. They also thought that NNES undergraduates, who also expressed difficulty with speaking skills, in particular making an oral presentation, should be offered support to build oral proficiency. To help students with discipline-specific vocabulary, the authors recommended that departments create glossaries of necessary vocabulary to be made available to NNES students.

The relationship between language proficiency and GPA was also examined by Woodrow (2006), who concluded that students' academic success in their first semester was only partially due to their English proficiency. She used mostly quantitative methods (questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) to examine whether the perceived difficulty of study had an effect on academic performance and to determine the relationship between IELTS scores and GPAs for 82 NNES graduate students at an Australian university. She found that English proficiency affected the students with IELTS scores of 6.5 and below but not those with scores of 7 and above.

Unlike the previous two studies, which examined GPAs, Ryan et al. (2011) looked at the effect of English language proficiency on perceived learning experiences and outcomes in a typical postgraduate accounting program at a large Australian university and found a "significant relationship between language ability and engagement in learning" (p. 237). In this case study, 60 NNES students were surveyed and the results were compared against a general cohort of Management and Commerce students using the 2010 Postgraduate Survey of Student Engagement (POSSE) at Australian universities. The authors found that students' lack of English meant they were less able to learn from the program; they self-rated their English level generally

as “average,” but writing was rated as “below average,” much lower than other skills. Students were also less likely to obtain help from academic and language support services than POSSE participants, and spent much more time preparing for class but were less likely to participate in class discussions. Fewer were up-to-date in readings and assignments and those with weaker writing skills were less likely to participate in learning activities. The results of this study led to changes being made to the program to emphasize English language development and to incorporate greater cooperation between lecturers and support staff.

While the results are variable, the above authors found that language proficiency played a role to some degree in academic achievement and, as a result, many of them recommended that students be offered more language support, such as tutoring or EAP programs, especially focusing on speaking and writing skills. Other researchers point to the importance of other factors in NNES success in mainstream courses (Martirosyan et al., 2015; Phakiti et al., 2013). Phakiti et al. (2013) administered a self-reported questionnaire to 341 ESL students at a university “pathway” program at an Australian university and obtained GPA data from the university database. The authors concluded that, while language proficiency was necessary, other factors played a key role: motivation, self-regulation (“being active participants in their own learning”) (p. 243), and self-efficacy (the students’ belief in their ability to accomplish a task) also contributed to academic performance.

Martirosyan et al. (2015) came to similar conclusions based on a quantitative self-report questionnaire of 54 international students in their second, third or fourth year at an American university. While the authors found that students’ self-perceived English ability was a significant variable contributing to students’ academic performance, they suggest that, based on their literature review, other factors should not be ruled out as having an impact on the students’

performance, such as “motivation, learning strategies, background variables, personal characteristics” or “difficulties in cross-cultural adjustment” (p. 67). They recommend supporting international students with language courses and tutoring and believe that professors should take a proactive role in identifying language needs of international students in their classes and provide support for them by means of “various pedagogical strategies,” although they do not provide any details.

2.2.1.2 Language proficiency and intercultural interaction/social support

Academic success is not the only factor contributing to the adjustment of international students; self-esteem and the presence of a social network are also important. The development of both of these factors can be affected by students’ language proficiency, which many studies point to as one of the causes for the *de facto* segregation of domestic and international students. Andrade (2009) examined how language proficiency impacted students’ social adjustment as well as academics from the perspective of both students and faculty. This mixed methods study took place at a private religious college in the US with an international population that consisted of 50% of enrollment. This multicultural campus had both a positive and negative impact on students’ interactions with people other than their co-nationals, allowing students to “cluster” in their L1 groups but also forcing them to speak English with other language groups. While English ability was seen as still needing improvement, it did not present major difficulties; however, students expressed difficulty moving out of their own cultural and linguistic groups and reported feeling more comfortable interacting with other international students than with domestic native English-speaking students due to a lack of confidence in their English abilities. The author concluded that although the students and faculty were generally satisfied, students’ language skills could have been stronger and more could have been done to encourage

interaction between international and domestic students. The author calls for more research into this area to determine how English-based institutions might support increased multicultural interaction on campus.

Similar to Andrade (2009), Myles and Cheng (2003) believe that international students benefit from the interaction with local students. They suggest “if cultural mixing does not take place, students will miss out on learning opportunities that can ease the process of adaptation” (p. 259). They looked at international graduate students’ perceptions of their experiences at a Canadian university to provide rationale for increased support to international students, either as part of the EAP programs, or in addition to those programs. The authors interviewed 12 NNES graduate students who had been in Canada for one to three years (six male/six female, from a variety of countries and disciplines). Although they did not make an effort to make friends with domestic students, the students seemed to be “well-adjusted to university life” (p. 259). Even so, the authors suggest that intercultural contact be “formally structured into student life,” (p. 259) such as through cultural orientation sessions and workshops that include all groups, including international and domestic students, faculty and staff.

In her research at a top Midwestern research university in the US, Trice (2007) also found that students “clustered” in their cultural/language groups. She looked at the perspectives of 27 faculty members to cast light on why international students and domestic students were isolated from each other and found various reasons for the lack of integration: international students felt they had weak English language skills, few opportunities to work together, a lack of time and they felt that domestic students lacked interest in forming friendships with them. The faculty suggested that efforts be made to reduce the structural barriers, such as by increasing the diversity in the groups assigned to research projects so that more than one nationality would be

represented, by including more group projects in courses and assigning students to those groups, by providing study rooms for students to spend time together and, finally, by creating awareness among the students about how cultural norms impact relationships.

However, as Leki's (2001) study demonstrates, it may take more than physically integrating groups of students to create real collaboration. In this naturalistic study of six students, Leki looked at the NNES relationship with NES peers and how that contributed to learning experiences; in particular, she looked at group assignments and observed the process that the students followed. Leki concluded that the NNES students "[struggled] to hold their own" (p. 62) and that very little collaboration took place, with the NNES students in particular being left out of the collaboration. However, she acknowledged that she did not have access to the "inner workings" of the groups, which might have revealed other factors that contributed to these dysfunctional group dynamics. Leki points out the teacher's complete ignorance of the lack of collaboration—one particularly dysfunctional group was rewarded with excellent marks. The teacher said at one point to Leki, "Who needs teachers? They can do it themselves" (p. 54). Leki suggests that the teacher can help to legitimize the participation of the NNES students, even though she acknowledges that, in general, teachers prefer to let students work out their own group conflicts.

Similarly, Grayson (2008) found that there were limited interactions between domestic and international students. He suggested this fact negates the notion that the presence of international students enables Canadian students to have exposure to different cultures and develop "mutually beneficial" networks (p.220). In this quantitative study, Grayson compared the university involvement in campus activities of 1415 students entering first year at UBC, York, McGill and Dalhousie and then related this to academic outcomes, which he found were

lower for international students than for domestic. He also found that international students were involved on campus as much or more than domestic students, but they had less social or academic support than their domestic counterparts. In general, although international and domestic students had a similar number of friends, Grayson found that 38% of international students' friendships were with other international students, whereas for domestic students only 11% of their friendships were with international students.

However, Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) found that spending time with co-nationals was not necessarily detrimental to students' well-being, since a balance of relationships was found to be beneficial to international students. Al-Sharideh and Goe found that having strong ties with co-nationals up to a certain number contributed to the adjustment of international students. They also found that having strong ties with locals had a positive effect on students' self-esteem, regardless of the number of close ties with co-nationals. This quantitative survey was conducted over two months at Kansas State University and included 226 participants. Al-Sharideh and Goe recommend that universities take these findings into consideration when planning policy and create programs that foster relationships between students from similar backgrounds as well as with local students.

Sherry et al. (2010) surveyed 121 international students at the University of Toledo and identified four major areas of concern for international students: finances, cultural adjustment and language issues, especially with spoken English. This study also shone a light on the "receptiveness" of the University to international students, who made up 10% of the total university population (p. 37). The authors suggest that more language support could be offered to students who need it, and the services of the Writing Centre should be promoted to a greater extent among international students who need language support. The authors argue that "a

welcoming university and community environment is one of the key factors in the mental health of international students” (P. 34) and they advise universities against focusing solely on academics. Having a strong social network is important, and not necessarily only with domestic students; socializing with students from the same home country is also found to be beneficial, supporting the claims of Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998).

The above studies demonstrate that language proficiency plays a role in both academic outcomes and social adjustment of NNES students. The studies also indicate that there is a role for EAP programs to play in helping students adjust to university life. In part two of this review, I look at the capacity of EAP programs to meet students’ needs.

2.2.2 How well do EAP programs meet students’ needs?

Evans and Green (2007) have conducted a large survey to identify student need, and suggest moving toward more targeted rather than general language support. In one of the largest-scale studies conducted in EAP research, Evans and Green (2007) surveyed 4932 undergraduates (about two thirds of whom were first-year students taking a mandatory EAP course) to discover why EAP was necessary in the context of a large Hong Kong English-medium university. The main problem areas Evans and Green found were lack of subject-specialist vocabulary (and lack of strategies to overcome this), difficulty expressing ideas in complex grammar and difficulty making oral presentations due to lack of fluency. They recommend focusing EAP programs to better meet the particular needs of students and not returning to the old model of General English or “remedial” language classes. They suggest that students lack academic literacy and knowledge of how to apply what they have learned in academic contexts, and recommend a content-based approach and an “English across the curriculum” approach where instructors in all classes help students improve their English by considering the language used when they grade assignments.

The authors recognize that this content-driven framework will require some consultation with programs across the curriculum to allow input into the EAP curriculum.

Students' own perceptions of EAP programs can provide some insight into how well the programs are communicating their purpose and goals, and how satisfied the students are that their needs are being met. Dooley (2010) aimed to discover how well-prepared 13 NNEs international students were as they moved from an English Language Bridging Course (ELBC) into mainstream courses. This course consisted of four units focusing on all four language skills, as well as study skills. Assignments included an individual research essay, a group project and presentation on a topic related to students' intended disciplinary program, practice with listening/note-taking and writing a critical review. Dooley compared students' perceptions after completion of the ELBC program and after one term of disciplinary courses. The students reported that the ELBC was generally considered useful in preparing them for disciplinary courses, especially for providing them with academic and critical thinking skills. After the ELBC, students felt that the program was quite difficult but after one term of disciplinary courses, they expressed appreciation of the level of challenge in the ELBC. However, the students were disappointed that they did not learn more language skills. After their first university term, they felt that their lack of oral proficiency was an impediment to integrating with local students and participating in class discussions. Part of their criticism of the ELBC program was the amount of L1 used in the ELBC classes, which led to clustering of some language groups and a lack of English exposure that the students felt should have been an important part of the class.

While Dooley (2010) studied one group over time, Cheng and Fox (2008) conducted research at three Canadian universities, comparing the perceptions of students at different stages

of their study. Of the 56 participants, 20% were undergraduates in disciplinary courses, 66% were taking EAP and disciplinary courses concurrently and 14% were pre-university EAP students planning to study at a Canadian university. The majority of students enrolled in pre-university ESL programs were angry at having to take these courses and impatient to move into disciplinary classes and, therefore, saw the EAP classes as a barrier. However, the students who were taking the EAP concurrently saw the courses as a “safe haven” (p.326), providing social support for those students who perceived that English-speaking classmates in their disciplinary courses were not very friendly and, as a result, had limited friendships with them. The students who had completed the EAP courses and had already moved into mainstream undergraduate classes appreciated in hindsight the skills that they had learned, similar to the students in Dooley’s (2010) study. One student considered himself “lucky” compared to his friends who were not required to take EAP because he had achieved more and progressed more quickly. This experience echoed a student in Dooley’s (2010) study who felt more prepared than her classmate who had not taken the EAP course and, as a result, did not know how to properly reference in a research paper.

Similar to the pre-university students in Cheng and Fox’s (2008) study, students in Marshall’s (2009) study also resented having to take language classes—they considered themselves to be university students rather than ESL students. Marshall examined students’ perceptions of an academic skills class through interviews with 18 students after they completed the class, part of a larger two-year mixed method study of literacy development at a Canadian university that surveyed 977 students. The students’ opinions changed rather dramatically, however, when they realized that they were learning academic strategies and skills rather than

more of the same ESL lessons, and one student described it as “THE CLASS” that everyone should take (p. 54).

To gain insight into the role that EAP programs play in the Canadian context, Fox et al., (2014) surveyed 641 ELL students in 36 language support programs at 26 Canadian English-medium universities. The authors found that English language programs (both ESL and EAP) supported the development of skills and strategies, which positively impacted the academic and social engagement of NNES students. However, the authors found that the positive impact of programs was moderated by levels of student anxiety, stress and motivation levels. They suggest that the potential impact of language support may be increased if programs better understand students’ needs and strengths.

2.2.3 Targeting students’ needs through Content-based Instruction

Some researchers suggest that incorporating a content-based approach, linking ESL classes to content classes offered at the same university, is one way to focus EAP programs to better meet the particular needs of students and thus increase the relevance of the language instruction. Snow and Brinton (1988) found that students benefited from an intensive English pre-session program for freshmen (FSP) at UCLA that was linked to a content course at that university. The study consisted of two smaller studies, one of which measured the perceptions of 79 former students of the programs’ usefulness, while the other compared 12 students who took the program with 15 who did not by measuring their performance on a simulated exam. The authors found that the FSP students performed at the same level as the non-FSP students, despite the latter having higher English language proficiency scores. Students in both studies reported that the program was useful in helping them in their subsequent university courses: they felt that they were better readers and writers and had improved confidence. The UCLA program provided

a strong network of support, including tutoring and counselling services, which the authors suggest might have played an important role in students' subsequent success.

In a similar study conducted at Kingsborough College of the City University of New York, Song (2006) also compared the academic achievements of two groups of students to measure the impact of a content-linked class. She studied 770 first-semester freshmen students enrolled in either a content-linked ESL class or a regular (non-linked) ESL class between 1995 and 2000. Participants were tracked until they graduated or left the college. The study shows that they demonstrated higher achievement in many areas, including better grades and higher likelihood of passing both that first class and subsequent ESL classes, requiring fewer ESL/developmental English courses before they progressed to credit-bearing courses, achieving a higher grade point average overall and greater likelihood of graduating. Song acknowledged that due to the long-term nature of this study, it was not possible to identify the exact factors that contributed to the students' improved performance. However, she speculated that it may have resulted from a combination of the students' enhanced skills and knowledge learned in the content-linked class, as well as the support services offered at the university, such as counseling and tutoring, which were a mandatory part of the linked program, similar to the program in the study by Snow and Brinton (1988). Also, the author believed the learning communities that developed as a result of the amount of time the classes spent together as a cohort may have continued to support students as they progressed through their subsequent college courses.

Similar to Song (2006), Baik and Greig (2009) found that content-based language support programs had both short-term and long-term effects on students' performance as measured by grades and retention rates. These authors looked at the effects of an optional tutorial program that was linked to a first-year architecture course at the University of Melbourne. This mixed-method

study included questionnaires of 37 students along with analysis of their academic results and also tracking of students' performance in the year after the program. The authors also found that, unlike generic English programs, which were characterized by poor attendance at this and other Australian universities, the attendance in this tutorial increased throughout the term, as students found it "relevant and useful" (p. 409).

2.2.4 Transfer of learning from EAP to disciplinary courses

Many studies show that there is greater likelihood of transfer occurring when the EAP courses are similar to the disciplinary courses. This may highlight for instructors of general EAP courses the benefits of matching content as closely as possible to the target situation (Counsell, 2011; James, 2006; Leki & Carson, 1994, 1997).

In a much-referenced study, Leki and Carson (1994) surveyed 79 students and found that they were able to use skills in their university writing assignments that they had learned in their EAP writing class, including strategies related to managing the text (outlining, revising and managing sources), rhetorical skills (organization or coherence) and language proficiency (grammar and vocabulary). However, the students felt that they needed more complex assignments that involved research skills, and the authors suggested that providing more academic topics would help build students' confidence in their writing. In general, students felt that they needed better language skills, a finding also reported by Dooey (2010). These findings were supported by another qualitative study of a writing class conducted by Leki and Carson (1997) at a large US state university. The research was conducted in two separate phases and included 27 students and 21 students respectively. The researchers found that students perceived the writing class to be a friendly and low stakes environment, with tasks that focused on personal writing and source texts only used as a springboard for writing responses, a practice that the

authors considered to be “infantalizing” (p. 63). This type of writing contrasted with the tasks required in the disciplinary courses, for which students had to demonstrate knowledge of content. Despite these differences, the students were satisfied that linguistic and rhetorical skills were transferring to their disciplinary writing. However, the authors suggest that writing classes could help students even more if they included tasks that resembled those required in disciplinary classes, such as writing that integrated source text. This would also benefit students by exposing them to the vocabulary and sentence structure commonly used in their particular discipline.

Although Leki and Carson (1994, 1997) found that some skills transferred from a general ESL writing course to disciplinary courses, Counsell (2011) concluded that the majority of students in her study did not develop the ability to recognize effective writing strategies or transfer them to discipline-specific writing. She looked at learning transfer among four students, who completed a Direct Entry Academic Program (DEAP) at the University of Tasmania prior to enrolling in courses in the Faculty of Business. The program included language and study skills, such as note-taking during lectures, summarizing and paraphrasing. Counsell found that although students recognized certain strategies as being beneficial, they were not consistent in applying them in their disciplinary courses. Counsell suggests that her study adds support to other research findings that generic skills did not transfer to disciplinary courses (Baik & Greig, 2009) and, as a result, that programs like DEAP should include discipline-specific content to enable students to become familiar with their future disciplines. However, as the author herself acknowledges, the sample size is too small to make definitive conclusions and the students’ lack of success in their disciplinary courses may have been due to a combination of factors such as lack of interest in the discipline itself or other personal challenges.

Differing from the previous studies, all of which focused on the transferability of general ESL/EAP writing courses, James' (2006) research examined the transferability of skills and strategies in a course with content-based instruction. The course was offered to first-year students in the engineering faculty who showed some English language difficulty on the proficiency entry test. James found that transfer occurred to some degree for all five participants in the areas of language skills, study skills and affective factors, for example, synthesizing the gist of listening passages, oral communication in group work or collaborative problem solving. Eight factors were found to contribute to the transfer of learning from the EAP course to the disciplinary courses, including similarity of tasks and level of challenge. One student told James that he appreciated the speed of the EAP instructor's speech because it trained him to "survive" in mainstream courses. This echoes Dooley's (2010) finding that students want to be challenged in the EAP class. James underlines the need for teachers to consider the transferability of text types and instructional tasks when planning EAP content.

2.2.5 Academic outcomes after taking EAP courses

Although EAP courses can provide students with skills and strategies to help them function in their disciplinary courses and help develop their language proficiency (Storch & Tapper, 2009), it is not always possible to close the gap between EAP and non-EAP students when it comes to proficiency levels as measured by GPAs (Dyson, 2014; Floyd, 2015; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011).

Storch and Tapper (2009) studied the effect of an EAP course on the writing of 69 NNES graduate students, using a test/re-test design in the first week and again in the 10th week of term. In this concurrent credit-bearing EAP course, the students were assigned four tasks that are commonly required in graduate studies: a summary, a comparison and critical summary of two

texts, a proposal for research project and an oral presentation based on that project. Students were required to choose their own topic for these assignments based on their fields of study, and were encouraged to develop the same topic for the different tasks. Therefore, like the content-based EAP courses described by Baik and Greig (2009), Snow and Brinton (1988) and Song (2006), this course focused more specifically on the disciplinary needs of students compared to general EAP courses. Storch and Tapper found that most students' writing improved over the semester; the use of academic vocabulary showed a significant increase, as did grammatical accuracy, both of which may have resulted from the explicit instruction and systematic feedback provided in the course. The fluency (measured by length of the writing) showed no change, but this may have been due to the more concise writing and use of reduced clauses in the second test. The authors acknowledge that one text may not be representative of a student's ability, but it was also the opinion of the students that their writing improved as a result of this EAP course.

Unlike Storch and Tapper (2009), who compared one group over time, the following two authors compared an EAP and a non-EAP cohort. Terraschke and Wahid (2011) compared two cohorts from a variety of undergraduate degrees as they progressed through a post-graduate accounting program. The EAP cohort consisted of seven students (five from China, one from Korea and one from Iran), while the non-EAP cohort consisted of 12 students (11 from China and one from Indonesia). The students in both cohorts reported similar progress in listening and speaking and both had difficulty understanding the lecturers due to different accents and rate of speech, similar to Dooley's (2010) findings. However, the EAP students reported that they used more reading strategies, were more satisfied with their progress in writing, learned useful skills and techniques and had a better idea of what was required of them in their courses. The students in the EAP group felt more confident in their abilities and were overall more content with their

university experience, although their academic outcomes were not better than those students in the non-EAP group.

Dyson (2014) also studied a cohort of “pathway” students in Australia enrolled in 10-week pre-entry courses and compared their subsequent performance to their peers who entered the university directly. Based on grades, writing samples and student perceptions of the program, Dyson found that although pathway students had weaker language skills, which resulted in lower grades compared to their peers, they expressed more confidence in their general and academic skills, echoing the findings of Dooley (2010) and Terraschke and Wahid (2011),

In a similar study, Floyd (2015) surveyed 242 students to compare the academic achievement of students who were required to take an EAP course with students who entered an Australian university directly by passing a standardized test. Students were asked how familiar they were with a variety of academic skills, which were learned either in the EAP course for those currently enrolled in one, or in previous courses for those students who entered the university directly. Floyd was also given access to GPAs of both groups in their first and second semesters. She found that although the students who took a test and entered the university directly had better academic results, they were only slightly higher than those of the students in the EAP group. As well, the EAP students reported learning more academic skills than students who tested directly into the university, similar to the findings of Terraschke and Wahid (2011). As a result, Floyd concluded that learning academic skills prior to university courses may help EAP students “close the gap.” She further suggests that learning these kinds of skills might be helpful to all international students coming from a different academic culture, regardless of their level of language proficiency.

2.2.6 Conclusion

This review of literature on the role of EAP programs suggests that these programs do provide benefits for students who lack English language proficiency. Although the students who complete these programs do not have better academic outcomes than their counterparts who entered university directly, it is clear that EAP programs provide valuable skills and learning strategies that help the students in their university courses. The studies also indicate the important role that EAP programs play in helping students adjust to university life, since they provide social support for NNES students who may feel alienated in the broader university culture. Many researchers suggest that universities need to address this alienation by taking a more proactive role in facilitating the integration of domestic and NNES international students, perhaps by including intercultural activities in the EAP programs. This review also adds support to the argument that EAP courses which focus more on the students' specific disciplinary needs provide greater short- and long-term benefits, especially those adjunct courses with linked content.

These studies also reveal some gaps which I hope to address in my research. From the limited number of studies conducted in Canada on this topic, it is clear that the Canadian context is "underexamined" (Fox et al., 2014, p. 59), especially in the last five years. Out of the eight studies in my review that were conducted at Canadian universities, only one was conducted in the previous five years, a small number when one considers that the number of NNES students entering Canadian universities is increasing at a rapid rate. In addition, more qualitative research will provide a detailed picture of students' experiences and highlight where student needs are not being met as they move from language support programs to disciplinary studies.

In the next chapter, I will describe the methodology that I used in my study, including a rationale for using the case study method, sources of data, and the approach taken to data analysis. I also detail ethical considerations and factors that contribute to the trustworthiness of my study.

Chapter 3: Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology, including sources of data and the approach taken to data analysis. I provide rationale for using the case study method and describe the research site, participants and methods of recruitment. The ethical considerations are detailed, as well as data collection procedures and analysis. Finally, factors that contribute to the trustworthiness of my study are described.

3.2 Rationale for case study method

The case study method is an appropriate choice because my study is “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon” (Yin, 2013, p. 31) and consists of a “naturally bounded group” that is “finite and discrete” (LeCompte, Preissle & Tesch, 1993, p. 62). In this study I examine the role of a current EAP program that is defined and bounded by both time and place; participants were enrolled in the eight-week program lasting from July to August 2015, and after completion the students were registered for courses at the participating university in the fall term, ending December 4, 2015.

Furthermore, the case study methodology allows the researcher to examine a phenomenon “in depth and within its real-world context” (Yin, 2013, p. 16) and can accommodate multiple sources of data. In this case study, I look at the experiences of NNES students in both the EAP program and subsequent disciplinary courses in their first term at university. The context is key to this study because I am looking at how the students’ EAP experiences prepared them for university classes. This “How” type of research question is particularly suited to case study research design because it allows a researcher to investigate a

phenomenon over time (Yin, 2013), to focus on “process” rather than “outcome” (Merriam, 1998, p. 33).

The case study design also allows for the use of various data sources. In addition to interviewing with students and instructors, “one of the most important sources of case study evidence” (Yin, 2013, p. 110), I was able to gain a more detailed picture of the students’ experiences through observations of two EAP classes, “the real-world setting of the case” (Yin, 2013, p. 113), and examination of student writing and syllabi from both EAP and disciplinary courses. The benefits of using documents as a source of data is that “they can ground an investigation in the context of the problem being investigated” (Merriam, 1998, p. 126) and “corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (Yin, 2013, p. 107). In my study I examined written samples and course syllabi to corroborate what the students told me about the demands of the courses in terms of assignments and expectations in class. Observations also allowed me to see the teachers’ methodological approaches, which I later compared with the disciplinary courses in terms of delivery methods, types of classroom interactions and teacher expectations regarding student participation. One point I particularly wished to observe was if the class more closely resembled an ESL class or a university class, based on whether the lesson consisted of group work or lectures and the presence of games and “fun” activities, which are more characteristic of ESL classes (in my experience) than university lectures. These observations contributed to my analysis of the level of transferability that exists between the courses.

Although my research questions focus on students’ experiences, instructors were interviewed so I could ascertain the classroom methodology and the instructors’ expectations of students in class and in their assignments. These interviews provided triangulation of data

collected from students. They also provided a sense of how instructors in this program approached needs analysis and their awareness of potential transferability (of skills or content), two key considerations in the teaching of EAP (Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Leki & Carson, 1997).

While interviews may provide an emic perspective allowing a researcher to gain insight into the participants' experiences, they also have their drawbacks. Sometimes participants are subtly and unknowingly influenced by the researcher's perspective (reflexivity) (Yin, 2013), memories may not be reliable, especially when there are long gaps between the events and the interviews, or participants may want to present themselves in a positive light. However, in my study, I believe that reflexivity was not an issue because I had no investment in the results, positive or negative. The students knew that I was not an EAP instructor, nor a university professor, so I believe that the students felt free to express their true feelings about their classes.

3.3 Research site: The EAP program

The English Language Centre (ELC) at the participating university (The name of the program has been changed to provide anonymity.) offers intensive language programs of varying lengths throughout the year for students with "conditional admission" to the university—those who exceed the admission requirements but lack English proficiency. To be granted conditional admission, students must have achieved an average IELTS score of 6.5 (with no scores less than 5.5) or a minimum TOEFL score of 82. The minimum IELTS score for undergraduate admission to the University is 6.5 (with no score less than 6.0) or a TOEFL score of 90 or above. The ELC runs about eight sections of the intensive EAP classes during the summer, which contain mixed disciplines and are sorted for diversity of culture and gender, although these days most of the students tend to be from mainland China, and it is not uncommon to have 100% Chinese students

in one class. The classes are not streamed according to level since there is little variation in the level of students entering the program.

Students in the eight-week EAP program take two integrated skills classes over the course of the program, which consists of two blocks of Reading and Writing (for a total of three hours and 20 minutes per day) and one block of Speaking and Listening (for one hour and 40 minutes per day), Monday through Thursday, with optional workshops offered on Friday. To move on to a regular degree program, students have to achieve 75% in both courses. According to the Head Instructor, the vast majority of students generally pass the course, but if they do not, they may take it again. In general, students in the EAP program are mostly undergraduates, with about half entering Arts and the others entering a variety of other disciplines such as Science, Applied Science, Forestry, Music, Kinesiology and Commerce. This particular site was chosen because the Academic Programmer at the ELC had expressed an interest in having research conducted on their intensive English programs.

3.4 Participants and recruitment

This study consists of eight cases of international NNES students who received conditional admission to the participating university and were enrolled in the eight-week EAP program (July–August 2015) (See **Table 1**).

I was especially keen to gain insight into the experiences of students from both Arts and Science faculties and of students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds; however, I was constrained by who chose to participate in the study. The Head Instructor of the program provided me with the contact information of two veteran instructors who had been teaching in this program at the ELC for some time and asked that I use them as my EAP instructor participants. It was from those two classes that the student participants were recruited. One of the

two classes I observed was made up entirely of Chinese students and the other had only four non-Chinese, and therefore, the proportion of my participants who are Chinese (7/8) fairly represents the student population. The only non-Chinese student in my study was from Korea. The participants are also representative of the general population of students in the EAP program in that they are of both genders (5 women, 3 men) and have varied disciplinary backgrounds including Arts (2 students), Science (3 students), Forestry (1 student), Environmental Science (1 student) and Engineering (1 student). The students range in age from 18 to 22. Three of the students had studied at university in China for two years and were transferring into their second or third year, while the other five were first year undergraduates. All eight students had arrived in Canada a few days to a week prior to the start of the EAP program and about two weeks before our first interviews. Mason was the only one who had studied in Canada before; he had spent seven weeks studying English in Coquitlam in the summer of 2013. The one student from Korea, Jerry, had studied English for three to four years, while the participants from China had studied English for a number of years from elementary through high school, ranging from six to 14 years. The participants' IELTS scores were all within a similar range due to the cut-off point of the EAP program; Anna had the highest individual scores with an 8 for Listening and 7.5 for Reading, while most students achieved scores of 6 or 5.5, with a few scoring 7 for individual sections. In general, the writing scores were the lowest, with five students receiving scores of 5.5 and two with scores of 6. Jerry was the only participant who applied with a TOEFL IBT score of 87. Unlike most of the students from China, writing was his strongest skill and reading was his weakest.

Table 1 Summary of participant biographies

Name (pseudonym)	Lulu	Sara	Anna	Sisi	Mason	Amy	Bramwell	Jerry
Country	China	China	China	China	China	China	China	Korea
IELTS /TOEFL score	listening 5.5 speaking 6 reading 5.5 writing 6	listening 6.5 speaking 6 reading 7 writing 5.5	listening 8 speaking 6 reading 7.5 writing 5.5	listening 6.5 speaking 5.5 reading 6 writing 5.5	listening 7 speaking 7 reading 6 writing 5.5	listening 6.5 speaking 6 reading 7 writing 5.5	listening 7.5 speaking 5.5 reading 7 writing 6	TOEFL (internet based test) 87 Strongest to weakest skills: 1. Writing 2. Speaking 3. Listening 4. Reading
Age	20	20	20	19	18	19	18	22
Time in Canada (at time of first interview)	2 weeks	2 weeks	2 to 3 weeks	2 weeks	2 weeks plus 7 weeks in 2013	2 weeks	3 weeks	3 weeks
University class status	Undergrad 2nd year transfer student	Undergrad 3 rd year transfer student	Undergrad 3 rd year transfer student	Undergrad 1 st year	Undergrad 1 st year	Undergrad 1 st year	Undergrad 1 st year	Undergrad 1 st year
Major subject	Faculty of Engineering: Computer Engineering	Faculty of Forestry: Natural Resource Conservation	Faculty of Arts: Computer Science	Faculty of Environmental Science	Faculty of Arts: German, Russian, Spanish, Geography	Faculty of Science: Land Food System, Nutrition and Health	Faculty of Science: Math, Economics, Physics	Faculty of Science: Biology
Gender	F	F	F	F	M	F	M	M
Years of study in English	Since 3 rd grade (12 years)	6 years	14 years	12 years	12 years	Since 3 rd grade (10 years)	Since 3 rd grade (10 years)	3 to 4 years

3.4.1 Case profiles

In order to provide a clearer picture of participants' backgrounds, I will provide brief biographies for each.

LULU

Lulu is a 20-year-old student who had already completed two years of undergraduate study in China and was transferring into second year courses here in Canada to study Computer Engineering. Lulu chose Canada in particular because she has family who immigrated to Calgary and she felt Canada was somewhat familiar. Lulu had spent 12 years studying English at school in China and is an outgoing and confident English speaker. At the start of the EAP program she considered her speaking ability to be her strong point, which was reflected in her IELTS scores: 5.5 for the Listening section, 6 for Speaking, 5.5 for Reading and 6 for Writing.

SARA

Like Lulu, Sara is a 20-year-old transfer student from China. She had completed two years of university and was transferring into the Faculty of Forestry, studying Natural Resource Conservation. Her courses included Conservation, Geography and Economics. Sara is a very independent and self-reliant student who depends on her own abilities to solve problems. She chose to attend this university in Canada because it has a good reputation. Previously, Sara had studied English for six years in China and she hoped to improve her listening and writing skills in the EAP program. Her IELTS scores at the start of the program were 6.5 for the Listening section, 6 for Speaking, 7 for Reading and 5.5 for Writing.

ANNA

Anna is also 20 years old and a transfer student from China, where she studied statistics. Here in Canada, she is enrolled in the Faculty of Arts, majoring in Computer Science, but also taking English and Spanish. Like Lulu, Anna chose Canada because of a family connection; her sister

immigrated to a nearby city after attending university in Alberta. Anna expressed concern about her lack of English vocabulary and felt that speaking was her weakest skill at the start of the program, although it was due to her IELTS writing score that she had to attend the EAP program. Anna had studied English for 14 years, the longest of all the students in this study, and her IELTS scores were also the highest at the start of the program, with an 8 for the Listening section, 6 for Speaking, 7.5 for Reading and 5.5 for Writing.

SISI

Sisi is a 19-year-old student from China enrolled in the Faculty of Environmental Science, although she is considering switching to Sauder Business School as she thinks it might more likely lead to a job after graduation. Sisi is a determined student who expects a lot from herself and the people around her and, like Anna, was quite anxious about her ability to manage disciplinary courses in English due to her lack of vocabulary. She chose to study in Canada because of its proximity to the US, where she would like to travel. Her IELTS scores at the start of the program were 6.5 for the Listening section, 5.5 for Speaking, 6 for Reading and 5.5 for Writing.

MASON

Mason is an 18-year-old from China registered in the Faculty of Arts, studying modern languages (Spanish, German, Russian) and Geography, the only participant who is not taking any Science courses at all. Mason told me he enjoyed speaking English and spent a summer studying English in Coquitlam two years before and also attended a BC offshore school in Beijing, where his courses were delivered in English. Of all the participants, Mason was the most impatient to begin his disciplinary courses. His IELTS scores at the start of the program were 7 for the Listening section, 7 for Speaking, 6 for Reading and 5.5 for Writing.

AMY

Amy is a 19-year-old student from China enrolled in the Faculty of Science studying Land-Food Systems and Nutrition and Health. Like Mason, Amy attended an international school in China that followed the Canadian secondary school curriculum. She chose to study in Canada because a member of her family had previously studied here. At the beginning of the EAP program, she saw grammar as her weakest point and her IELTS scores at the start of the program were 6.5 for the Listening section, 6 for Speaking, 7 for Reading and 5.5 for Writing.

BRAMWELL

Bramwell is an 18-year-old student from China whose dream it was to attend this university. He is the only participant who was offered direct admission into another Canadian university, but chose to accept conditional admission to this one even though it meant taking an eight-week English course. He is in the Faculty of Science and his courses include Math, Economics and Physics. At the start of the program, Bramwell considered pronunciation to be his biggest weakness in English. He was the only student who was as confident at the beginning as he was at the end of the program. His IELTS scores at the start of the program were 7.5 for the Listening section, 5.5 for Speaking, 7 for Reading and 6 for Writing.

JERRY

Jerry is a 22-year-old student entering his first year in the Faculty of Science, originally from Korea—the only student in this study who was not from China. Also, unlike the other participants, Jerry had experience living in a foreign country. He lived in Guatemala for three years with his family and attended an American school where his courses were in English (80%) and Spanish (20%). Jerry is studying Physics, Math, Chemistry and Spanish and hopes to transfer into the Engineering faculty in his second year. Jerry entered the program with a score of

87 on the TOEFL internet-based test, with writing being his strongest skill, in contrast to the other participants, whose writing scores were generally the lowest.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethics approval was obtained from the ethics review board at the participating university. Prior to the start of the study, all participants were given written descriptions of the intended research and their informed consent was obtained in accordance with ethical procedures for research with human participants. Participants were provided confidentiality; pseudonyms chosen by the participants are used in the study and no identities are revealed.

3.6 Data collection procedures

At the end of the first week of the course, after receiving permission from the program Director and the Head Instructor, I contacted the two EAP instructors whose contact information I had been provided. I first arranged to visit their classes to introduce myself and my research project and then arranged times to interview the two EAP instructors. During the first meeting, all the students in both classes were given an invitation to participate and a consent form to consider until I returned the following week for the class observation. Consent forms were collected at the start of the class before the observation and no data was recorded on those students who had not provided consent. During the EAP class observation, I took notes on the content and activities of the class. Thirty students in total (15 from each class) were invited to participate in the study, and of that group, 10 students volunteered (7 from one class and 3 from the other) by returning their signed consent forms with contact information. Eight students responded to my email or text to arrange interview times (depending on their preferred method of contact). Students were asked to participate in a total of four interviews lasting 30–45 minutes each, one each at the start and end of the EAP course, and then one at the mid-point and end of

the Fall 2015 term. With permission, the interviews were audio-recorded for all but one participant, who preferred not to be recorded. Students who chose to participate in this study were offered one-on-one writing tutorials by the researcher equal to the time spent in interviews as appreciation for participation. Two of the students were interested in tutorials, which took place after the four interviews were conducted. Material from the tutorials was also considered as part of the collected data. At the mid-point of the university Fall 2015 term, instructors in participants' regular university courses were identified on course syllabi and invited by email to participate in this study. None responded to this request.

3.7 Types of data collected

Four types of data were collected for the study, including a) interviews with both the students and the EAP teachers, b) course syllabi from two EAP courses and a variety of the students' disciplinary courses, c) samples of students' written EAP and disciplinary assignments and d) observations of the EAP classes in the second week of the program. The main source of data was the interviews, with course syllabi, writing samples, and observations used to corroborate data.

3.7.1 Interviews

I met with the students four times: at the end of the second and eighth weeks of the EAP program, at the mid-point of the Fall 2015 university term (late October – early November) and, finally, at the end of the fall term. In the first and second interviews, the students were asked for biographical data and about their needs and expectations for the EAP program, followed by their experiences and perceptions about the program, their life in Canada, and how confident they were to begin regular disciplinary courses (See **Table 2**). In the third and fourth interviews in the fall university term, students were asked about how the EAP program benefitted them, the

challenges they faced in their courses and recommendations to improve the EAP program to better prepare them for university life (See **Table 3**). The EAP instructor interviews were conducted at the end of the second week of the EAP program, after the class observations, and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The EAP instructors were asked about their methodology, their expectations of students regarding homework and level of challenge, how the program might meet the needs of students from different disciplines and what types of learning they expected might transfer to the students' disciplinary courses (See **Table 4**).

Table 2 Questions for students at start and end of EAP program

Questions for students at start of EAP program	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is your first language? 2. What other languages do you speak? 3. How long have you been in Canada? 4. How old are you? 5. How many years have you studied English? 6. What percentage of your time is spent in English at school? At home? 7. What are you planning to study in Canada? 8. Have you already studied at the university level? 9. Why did you choose Canada? 10. What would you like to improve in your English? 11. What are your strengths and weaknesses in English? 12. Have you taken an EAP class before? 13. Before you started this EAP course at UBC what had you heard about the program? 14. What do you expect to learn during this EAP program? 15. What academic skills do you need to learn in order to succeed in your university courses? 	
Questions for students at end of EAP program	
To answer Research Q. 1	To answer Research Q. 2
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did you think the program was useful? What did you find the most useful? 2. Was anything a waste of time? 3. What language-related problems have you had in your courses? What (if any) strategies did you use to overcome these? 4. Were you able to keep up with the readings and assignments? 5. Did you have the opportunity to speak in your classes? 6. Have you had feedback from your teachers or classmates that has been helpful? 7. Who did you go to for help? 8. Did you work together with other students? 9. Did you have the opportunity to speak in your classes? 10. Did you spend time after school with students from your class? 11. What suggestions do you have for improving the EAP program? 12. Would you recommend the course to others? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Was the EAP course specific to your course of study? 2. Did you learn anything that might help you in your disciplinary courses?

Table 3 Questions for students at mid-point and end of first university term

Questions for students at mid-point of first university term	
<p>To answer Research Q. 1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have you noticed any connections between things you learned in your EAP course and your disciplinary courses? 2. What are the similarities/differences in the assignments? 	<p>To answer Research Q. 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What challenges have you experienced, particularly at the beginning of term? 2. What language problems have you encountered in your disciplinary courses? Do you think you need further language support? In what areas? 3. Are you able to keep up with the readings and assignments? 4. Do you have the opportunity to speak in your classes?
Questions for students at end of first university term	
<p>To answer Research Q. 1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Looking back on the EAP program after completing your first term, do you think the EAP program was useful? 2. What did you find the most useful? 3. Was anything a waste of time? 	<p>To answer Research Q. 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What language-related problems did you have in your courses? 2. What skills are required in your university courses that you feel you have not learned well enough? 3. Did you spend time with students from your classes? 4. Do you think you were better prepared for university courses than those students who didn't take the EAP program? 5. What would you recommend to new international students to improve their experience at a Canadian university?

Table 4 Questions for EAP instructors

Questions for EAP instructors	
<p>To answer Research Q. 1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is challenging about the EAP program for students? 2. Can you tell me about the materials you use in class? 3. Do you teach for both grammar and content? 4. What do you expect from students before they come to class? (eg. readings? assignments?) 5. Do students always speak English? 6. How do students feel about having to take EAP? 	<p>To answer Research Q. 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does the EAP program meet the needs of students from different disciplines (i.e. Arts vs Sciences)? 2. What do you expect will transfer to the students' disciplinary courses? 3. What challenges do you foresee for the students in their disciplinary courses?

3.7.2 Documents

The documents I collected included the course syllabi from the two EAP classes and a variety of the students' disciplinary courses and samples of students' written assignments from the EAP course and one disciplinary course. The syllabi were from seven disciplinary courses, including three different sections of first year Economics, Geography, Geo-biology, English and a 100 level Science course on scientific writing. All eight participants provided me with between two and four writing samples from the EAP program, ranging in length from 500 to 800 words for essays and 150 to 290 words for summaries. I did not specify which assignments the students should give me and I received a wide variety, including survey reports (both individual and group projects), persuasive essays on the topic of choosing a major, process essays describing the recovery of a whale skeleton for museum display, compare/contrast essays about Chinese vs. Western medicine and summaries of news stories and "TED Talks." In total, I received 26 writing samples from the EAP program. At the end of the fall 2015 disciplinary courses, one student provided me with his assignments from his English course, including a summary (573 words), research proposal with annotated bibliography (795 words) and research term paper (1530 words).

3.7.3 Observations

The observations took place in the second week of the program in the morning section, which was the reading/writing class. I observed one class from 8:30 to 10:15 and the second class from 10:30 to noon. I mostly sat at the side of the classroom, where I could view the teacher and the white board and also the students. I took handwritten notes of the lesson content, mode of delivery and student activity. While the students were engaged in pair/group work, and

the teacher was circulating in the class to offer help to students, I also walked around to observe and listen as the students completed the activities.

3.8 Data analysis

I examined each case for data analysis. Having more than two cases in this case study allowed for easier analysis and “more robust” findings (Yin, 2013, p. 164). To make it easier to compare findings of each case and determine if there were shared profiles and common themes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003), I created a table to compare different topics (Yin, 2013). These included students’ strengths, weaknesses and expectations as they entered the EAP program, the students’ perceived benefits and drawbacks of the EAP program, and experiences in disciplinary courses including any transfer of learning from the EAP and challenges they faced in disciplinary courses (See **Table 5**).

Table 5 Findings for cross-case analysis

	Lulu	Anna	Sara	Sisi	Bramwell	Mason	Amy	Jerry
At start of EAP program:								
Expectations	-get used to listening to native speakers, essays, presentations	-write papers, practice essays	-writing: format, style of essays -get used to listening to the pros	-all four skills, make friends, help each other improve	-thinks program will be helpful -learn to speak well -academic skills	"I don't expect to learn anything. I just want to pass – that is the only way to go to UBC."	-improve speaking -familiar with local culture/Canada -relax & make friends	-improve English -academic vocabulary
Weakness	-reading	-writing -speaking	-listening -writing	-listening	-pronunciation	-writing	-grammar is weakest point -critical thinking -not very confident	-reading -listening -pronunciation
Strength	-"doesn't mind" writing	-listening -reading	-reading	-speaking -writing is ok but needs improvement	-speaking	-speaking -listening	-reading	-likes writing (essays) & discussion
Would like to improve	-speaking, but thinks EAP won't help, students can't correct each other	-writing in complete sentences -conversation -grammar	-listening -writing	-listening & reading because important in university study -writing	-pronunciation -vocabulary	-writing	-speaking	-reading -listening
At end of EAP program:								
Were expectations met	-yes, 2 presentations teacher said great job -teacher talking, useful for listening -made friends & talk with them in English	-EAP very useful -especially for writing, how to write essay (format, especially the grammar)	-final listening test "I got 95%. I never expected that." "So I think the program did help." -can speak more frequently & feel more comfortable	-no chance to meet native speakers -writing improved most -wrote essays every week, feedback from teacher to improve	-pronunciation improved, eg. sounds like "V" or "L" -grammar improved, fewer mistakes than before	"I didn't expect anything but in the second half of the course I learned a lot." -discussion skills, due to gambits	-more comfortable to speak now than when first came -learned about local culture	-not as much as expected -some words seemed not useful -memorized vocab & did some quizzes, didn't help much
Improved skills	-listening -speaking -vocab from teacher & AWL -writing	-made progress in writing -wrote long essay 600 or 700 words	-listening & speaking -less nervous speaking to native speaker	-writing helped improve the most, weekly essays + feedback	-making presentations, from feedback	-discussion skills due to gambits	-pronounce correctly & speak fluently with Canadians	"I don't feel I improved but I'm sure I did because I did something!"
Useful class tasks	-presentations -essay -group work	-essay -pronunciation practice		-essays + teacher feedback	-presentations, essential skill for university -essay + teacher's comments	-essay	-presentations, greater confidence -essay, teacher feedback helpful	-presentations -group work, how to work with other people
Confidence level	"Now I know how this education system works ... so I feel more comfortable"	"Not excited, [to start fall] worried about it. I don't think I can keep up with the class."	-more confidence, but still a little worried -EAP different from disciplinary courses	-not confident to start fall, lack of vocab	-feels confident but not from EAP program – just his personality	"I got full marks on 3 out of 5 of my essays so I feel confident."	-more comfortable speaking now, but in general not very confident	"I think that [taking fall courses directly] would be really hard. I feel more confident."

Mixed feelings about program			-first month was waste of time			-reading/writing class didn't learn new skills	-writing/reading subject lessons not useful, repeat of high school	-sometimes waste of time, especially first week was easy, but got more challenging
Multicultural class	-one serious problem, all Chinese students in one class	-all Chinese students has advantages & disadvantages, speak Chinese in & out of class, but easy to communicate	-a mix of cultures is okay or not, "It's up to you if you want to speak."	-in class spoke English, not problem but after school spent time with Chinese friends & spoke Chinese	-fewer non-Chinese than expected, a little bit disappointed at first	-good to have non-Chinese because you want to know about other cultures & speak English more	-our class all Chinese no chance to meet other people, disappointed about this	-didn't like when students sometimes spoke Chinese for a long time
English environment	-100% at school -not comfortable speaking English with Chinese people	-class 100%, after 50%, breaks/lunch 100% Chinese, weekend 100% Chinese -group can't stop speaking Chinese	-school 80%, home Chinese only, Chinese roommates	-school 100%, lunch both English & Chinese	-class 100%, lunch Chinese, Home: Chinese roommates, 100% Chinese	-school 100%, home 50%, Canadian roommate -"Chinese people don't like to speak English to each other."	-school 100%, weekends 100% Chinese -all Chinese together speak Chinese	-school 90%, roommates speak English, weekend 50%
Exposure to native speakers			-don't know where to find non-Chinese, can't walk up to someone on street & say "Hey, talk to me."	-only Chinese students in class, no chance to meet native speakers -in Sept., new roommates & make friends in lectures	-September is "formal time" for school so didn't meet native speakers in summer		-difficult because class all Chinese, no chance to meet other people	
Training in subject-specialist vocabulary	-reading was weakness but improved in that area, esp. vocab. from teacher in class -AWL really useful	-not good at vocabulary	-more confidence but still worried -profs will use words related to the major, worried won't understand	-vocabulary is problem -vocab test every week, "I think sometimes [benefit] is temporary."	-would like to improve vocab		-"There are so many vocabulary in [biology & chemistry] so it's a little difficult for me to study Nutrition."	-improved academic vocab but not as much as expected
Difficulty level of EAP program	-could have been more challenging	-a little bit easy, maybe writing a bit difficult in a good way, felt challenged.	-program not easy, but test is easy "We think everyone passes because the old students told us."	-level is okay.	-not really hard.	"Not too difficult, not too easy"	-not difficult "If the level is higher maybe it's more stressful so... I don't think it's good for us."	-easy for the first week then got harder
In first term of disciplinary courses:								
Benefits of EAP: similarity of tasks/transfer of learning	-listening helped a lot	-grammar & format from EAP helpful, -reading strategies helped, listening skills useful, summary helped annotated Bibliography, worked with classmate	-group encouraged to discuss answers in Geography class		-students compare solutions in physics class	-group work Spanish, German class -English class group discussion -presentation	-2 presentations -easy because did presentations in high school & EAP	-reading, pre-reading helpful.

Challenges of disciplinary courses: lectures (profs + classmates)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - jokes in lecture easier than material -lectures getting easier, after few weeks -first few weeks can't understand accent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -prof always speaks quickly, sometimes can't catch words, missed homework -no accent, just speak quickly -hard to understand jokes but after 1 or 2 classes, got used to it -EAP listening lessons helped prepare for listening in fall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -“If I can't understand the prof so how can I understand the students who asked the question?” -both Geo profs have accents -asks classmates, “What did he just say?” “I don't know either!”] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -sometimes can't understand profs' speech, need to look some words up -can't understand politics + some jokes “A lot of people laugh but I don't know what happened!” -students speak faster than prof -by end of term easier to follow, got used to it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -econ sometimes can't understand whole lecture -friends in 3rd year or 2nd year help me -get 50% jokes, some are related to the sound of two words or some religious jokes, can't get them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -difficult listening to classmates, doesn't know about pop culture, eg. hockey -Geo prof from Ecuador, has accent, occasional problems, makes jokes, misses some, class laughs but he doesn't know why 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -prof speaks a little fast, always uses difficult words -English prof, British accent, speaks very fast, -most difficult to get classmates, speak very fast. -by end of term, lectures getting easier 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -lectures really fast, sometimes don't get what prof says & jokes, don't get 50% -sometimes don't get when classmates ask about physics & chemistry & everyday language, -EAP teachers speak really clearly & really formally, so not hard to understand
Challenges of disciplinary courses: new system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -university totally different from both China & EAP, have to learn by yourself 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -hard to write essays in English -more specific in university than EAP “The way I think in China affects me a lot.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -students here have experience with independent work, doing experiments, but not in China 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -in physics, teachers don't teach in class, we only solve problems in class 			
Challenges of disciplinary courses: peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -people prefer to talk to person with same language -not much chance to speak to native speakers -EAP friends keep in touch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -see EAP friends once a week -met new classmates (from China) using WeChat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -friends from EAP introduce her to other students in classes, “It's like a snowball.” -very difficult to meet friends from other countries in first term -will try next term 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -this year too shy to make friends -made some Chinese Canadian friends but mostly talk about study/classes -if meet native speakers in class, not very familiar & don't have common topics -some EAP friends but don't talk often, don't take same class or same residence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -met lots of people in EAP -friends help you get into new environment -need to know more general terms, when chat with roommates, eg. “sick” means great not ill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -EAP friends still, in same residence with some & chats/meets them but not often, sometimes study together, plays soccer -new friends in classes, starts conversations & does labs together -works with partners in class but not a lot because class is big 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -no time to join clubs or social groups but meets EAP friends 1-2 times a week, has study groups, very helpful -domestic students very busy, no time to talk -really appreciate EAP program, met many nice people -1st week tried to meet native speakers but difficult, not much in common 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -should do more activity like clubs -need more conversational language -still contact with some EAP classmates -hard to make new friends, just see them in class, when class finishes, just leave
Challenges of disciplinary courses: different tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -not written anything, longest thing cover letter for co-op -labs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -in EAP wrote short research paper, just online resources, Google, now use library resources, not easy -at first didn't know how to use the online library, classmates helped a lot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “It's very different between writing an essay in the ELI & specific [disciplines].” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -not much writing, online, multiple choice, in lab write 2 or 3 pages -in EAP just learn some words, just practice writing -EAP doesn't relate to current studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -not easy to choose topic, emailed TA & teacher a lot about good topic, EAP didn't choose own topic -term paper, 1200 words, haven't written such a long paper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -hard to choose thesis topic -“overwhelmed” & asked for help -EAP & uni. courses, big difference -final paper 1200 to 1800 words, similar to high school -labs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -summary & 1 page research proposal -2000-wd. paper -EAP, “easy essays” 500 wds. “cannot compare”-EAP did research but not hard, already learned topic in class -lab report, 2 pages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -labs, lectures, solve problems, practice exercises -labs for physics & write paragraph -in science so don't write a lot

3.9 Validity and reliability

Case study research has sometimes been criticized for its lack of validity and reliability of findings (Merriam, 1998). To mitigate for these possible limitations, various measures have been taken. First, I have chosen to use a multiple-case design, which according to Yin (2013) “may be preferred over single-case designs” to allow for more “powerful” conclusions (p. 64). I have also provided a description of the typicality of the cases, contributing to the study’s external validity (Merriam, 1998).

Another problematic aspect of qualitative research is the question of replicability. Merriam (1998) argues that we should not expect to repeat the same results when collecting data from humans; instead, she argues that researchers should aim to demonstrate that findings are consistent with the data collected in order to increase their dependability. In this study, the data from the various sources was used to triangulate the main source of data—the student interviews—and an “audit trail” (Merriam, 1998, p. 206) clearly demonstrates the data collection methods and analysis, mitigating researcher subjectivity. Finally, for added support of my inferences, a colleague was asked to code 10% of my data and student participants were provided a draft copy of my findings and asked for their feedback on my interpretations. Two students responded with factual corrections of their biographies.

As mentioned earlier, various elements were included to increase validity and reliability of this study, such as a multiple-case research design, multiple data sources for triangulation, a clear description of methods of data collection and analysis and, finally, feedback from participants on my interpretations. As well, I believe that the participating students were not inhibited in any way when sharing their thoughts about the EAP classes or the university classes.

The students were aware of my role as a graduate student and not in any way connected to the EAP program or university courses and they were assured that their participation in this study would not have an impact on their grades or their relationships with their teachers. In addition, the participants were candid in sharing both negative and positive experiences, leading me to believe that they were not censoring the information they shared with me.

3.10 Summary

In this chapter, I provided a description of my research design, including a rationale for the use of case study, along with the affordances and limitations of this method. Then I introduced the context of the EAP course examined in this study and provided brief biographical profiles of the eight students who participated. Next, I described ethical considerations and the processes of data collection and analysis, with details of the procedure followed and the theoretical propositions that guided both data collection and analysis. Finally, I described the steps taken to ensure the reliability and validity of this study. In the next chapter, I will present findings and discussion of my first research question.

Chapter 4: Findings and discussion of students' experiences in the EAP program

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the relevant findings, along with a discussion of how the findings relate to my first research question and the previous research presented in Chapter 2. My first research question asks about the experiences of students in the EAP program. I was interested to know (1) what participants' expectations were as they entered the program, (2) whether those expectations were met, in what areas they improved over the course of the program and how prepared they felt to enter their university courses, and (3) in what ways they thought the EAP program could have better prepared them.

The primary themes that emerged in relation to Research Question One included both benefits of the program and challenges still faced by the students. In general, the students' expectations were met or exceeded; they all reported making improvements in some skill areas and felt the program had been useful, but they also had some suggestions for improving the program. Specifically, students experienced greater confidence that resulted from improved proficiency, familiarity with challenging tasks and exposure to Canadian life, but they also felt disappointment in the lack of opportunity to speak English with native English speakers or even students from other cultures and concern about their ability to keep up in disciplinary courses.

4.2 Expectations at the start of the program

Most of the students did not have a strong opinion about the fact that they had to take an EAP course; Bramwell even turned down full admission to another Canadian university because

it was his dream to attend this one, even though it meant he had to complete an eight-week English program. He thought the EAP program would be helpful but he was glad it was relatively short. Mason was also glad that he could “get [the program] over with” in only two months. He was the most vocal about his low expectations of the program: “I don’t expect to learn anything. I just want to pass.” Jerry also felt some frustration at having to spend a lot of money for two months just studying English. However, most of the students in this study did not express annoyance at having to attend this EAP program, unlike some students enrolled in pre-university English programs who are impatient to move on to mainstream classes and consider EAP to be an obstacle to their university life (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Evans & Green, 2007; Marshall, 2009). As the students began the program, they expected to improve their language proficiency, learn some academic skills and practice speaking English; they did not expect to learn disciplinary content or anything related to their major. They recognized that there were many different majors in the EAP program and did not think it was possible to focus the courses to suit the variety of backgrounds in the class. Responding to my question of whether they expected or hoped to learn things more specifically related to their major, the following students said:

SARA: I didn’t expect to. Too many varieties of majors [here]. In university it’s your job to find this knowledge.

JERRY: I think that there was not [anything related to] biology that I can use in my program and, in my opinion, it should not be focused on some areas. There are a lot of people from different faculties (among the students)... the book cannot cover everything, so I think the book should not focus on any areas.

Although they did not expect to learn disciplinary content, some of the students did believe that certain aspects of the program would transfer to their university courses, such as learning to work in a group or improving reading and writing skills.

*KARIN: Did anything specifically prepare you for computer engineering?
LULU: That's a tough question. I think this program is a general English program so it won't aim at any specific major. You won't learn any specific knowledge about the future major but you may learn how to work with others and this program will teach you how to succeed in the Western education system. That's important for me, so I think that's the real benefit to the students.*

*KARIN: Do you think this English course will help you in your fall courses?
BRAMWELL: Let's take reading and writing for example, I think reading does help me a lot—when you go to the university you need to read a lot of books and a lot of material and for writing, well, in science I think we don't have too many essays to write, not like in arts. But I think writing—the skill of writing is very important. Not only for the essays we do in university but also for the [Language Proficiency Index] test ... I think it's very useful.*

Even when the task will likely not be required later, the student may still see some personal benefit to performing it, as in Amy's case with making presentations.

*KARIN: In the fall, do you think you will be doing some presentations?
AMY: I asked this question to my [advisor] and he said there are not too many presentations in my university study. But maybe the prof will divide the students into many groups and you will present in one small group. I think it's also very good for me. I like to do the presentations because actually it's kind of difficult for me because I will feel nervous but I think I can improve a lot during this process.*

These students express a similar opinion to those in Leki and Carson's (1997) study who expected and are satisfied that the EAP writing tasks helped them develop linguistically, even though they were practicing writing in genres that “do not correspond to those used or needed for ... disciplinary classes” (p.62).

4.3 Positive experiences at the end of the program

4.3.1 Improved skills

All of the students were positive about the EAP program when I interviewed them at the end of the program and all of them reported improvements in their English skills over the course of the eight weeks, as well as increased confidence in their skills as they prepared to enter their disciplinary courses. The two students entering the Faculty of Arts, Mason and Anna, who would presumably need to do more writing than their classmates in Sciences and Engineering, reported weak writing skills at the beginning and said that they wished to improve them during the program. By the end, Anna felt that the writing was the most challenging aspect and the most improved, while Mason, ironically, felt his essays were “almost perfect” and instead thought his speaking skills had improved the most.

KARIN: Was the EAP program useful?

ANNA: Yes, especially for the writing. [The instructor] told us a lot of things about writing an essay and the format, grammar especially.

Feedback about grammar is very ... careful. He gave everyone his opinion.

For the students in Science, Forestry or Engineering, the focus was on improving listening and speaking, with the exception of Sisi, who had hoped to improve in all four skill areas, but thought only her writing had improved much by the end of the program. For Amy, improving speaking was a priority and by the end of the program she felt she had improved a little, especially due to the instructors' feedback.

AMY: Every session in the speaking class—every presentation—our teacher will give everyone paper with feedback on what's the point you need to improve and what's the point that you did very well.

Lulu and Sara were pleased about the improvements they had made in listening and speaking and Bramwell saw improvements in both speaking and writing.

KARIN: You said you felt your pronunciation improved over the course—how did you improve?

BRAMWELL: You know, “practice makes perfect,” and only by practicing a lot can I improve my pronunciation. And the teacher told us how to pronounce some specific sounds correctly like the “V” sound or the “L” sound.

Jerry was the only one who was unable to pinpoint exactly which skill area had improved: “I don’t feel I improved, but I’m sure I did because I did something!” From their comments, it is clear that they thought the detailed feedback contributed to their success in various skill areas, a conclusion that Storch and Tapper (2009) also reach in their study of graduate students’ writing skills; they credit the students’ improved accuracy to “targeted explicit teaching and systematic feedback on writing” (p. 218). The students in my study often make reference to the detailed feedback they received and how much they thought it helped them improve. This may be a result of dedicated class time that was spent addressing those corrections, plus the highly motivated nature of these students who needed to improve their writing skills to move on to regular university courses. This is supported by Ferris’s (2006) finding that students generally did attend to teacher corrections, especially with intermediate drafts in “a multiple-draft process-oriented context” (p. 98).

4.3.2 Useful class tasks

Students reported an improvement in their skills and confidence levels as a result of certain activities that were practiced in the EAP classes. Essays, presentations and discussions were the most commonly mentioned assignments that students felt had helped them improve.

Overall, writing essays was the task that students mentioned the most. Students wrote an essay per week and spent some time in class workshoping with classmates—getting peer feedback and rewriting drafts. The essays were based on topics that the students had studied that week in the textbook and required online research using a search engine, such as Google. Seven out of eight students specifically mentioned that the essays they wrote in class helped them improve their writing.

LULU: Essays... you know, before I came to this program I had no idea about essays because I think essays are really hard for me to write. But right now I think ... I know the rules of how to write it.

JERRY: I think I can handle all the group work, presentation, essays, etc. We wrote a lot of essays and it helped me a lot.

Similarly, students in the EAP cohort of Terraschke and Wahid's (2011) study also showed an improvement in their writing skills and an ability to talk about aspects of different types of writing, such as summary writing or report writing, much more than among the students in the non-EAP cohort.

During the EAP program in my study, students were assigned group presentations and engaged in many group discussions, which they reported as being beneficial for their speaking ability and increased confidence speaking in front of a group. The following are comments from Amy and Bramwell:

KARIN: Was it helpful? The presentations?

AMY: Yes, it was helpful for me because when we did the presentation we can be more confident and overcome our nerves. It can improve my confidence.

KARIN: Did you do a lot of practice speaking then?

BRAMWELL: Yes, absolutely, we did speaking presentations something like this to practice our pronunciation and the fluency in the English.

KARIN: Do you think that will be useful for you?

BRAMWELL: Yes, I think it has improved a lot and the presentations—maybe we don't have many presentations in the first year of university but I think it's quite essential skill for us to attend university so I think it's great.

KARIN: In class, did you work together with other students a lot?

LULU: Yeah, a lot. There was a lot of group work—every day. ... We have to play games together. It's a lot of chances to work with each other.

KARIN: Was that useful?

LULU: Yeah, because when you work with other people you know you have to express your opinion and tell other people your opinion, so it's also a good way to force you to speak.

Dooley (2010), similarly, found that activities such as class presentations helps to build confidence in EAP students' language abilities and gives students confidence to start their mainstream classes (p.189). Although, as Bramwell points out, students may not need to make many presentations in their first year, it seems to be an important skill to practice in the EAP classes as it is one that students find difficult (Evans & Green, 2007; Cheng, Myles and Curtis, 2004).

4.3.3 Increased confidence

An increase in confidence as students prepared to enter their regular university course was one positive outcome of the EAP program. Three of the participants said explicitly that they felt greater confidence overall. Lulu felt that being exposed to this type of “Western culture” in the class would help her adjust to the disciplinary courses: “Now I know how this education system works ... so I feel more comfortable.” She expected that being exposed to EAP teachers would provide confidence “to get you through another teacher [in the regular university courses].” Like Lulu, Jerry acknowledged that going directly into university would have been

really hard and Mason reported an increased confidence came from doing well in his essay assignments. The following is a comment from Mason.

MASON: I am more confident in writing now. I have a general idea of how to write an essay. I got full marks on three out of five of my essays, so I feel confident.

4.4 From negative to positive feelings about the program

Although they expressed positive feelings about the program, four students—Amy, Mason, Jerry and Sara—reported how they moved from negative to positive feelings about the usefulness of certain aspects of the program. Amy said that the writing and reading “subject lessons” were not helpful because she felt that they repeated the lessons that she had learned in high school, a common complaint for students who have taken many years of English classes (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Evans & Green, Marshall, 2009). However, Amy also reported later that nothing was a waste of time: “Every time it is very helpful.” In particular, she was glad to learn about Canadian culture and “how to speak fluently with Canadians.” Similar to Amy, Mason thought that his discussion skills improved as a result of what he had learned in the listening and speaking class, but not so much the reading and writing class, which he thought reviewed things he had already learned. Both Amy and Mason had attended high schools with Canadian curricula (BC, NS) which may explain their similar responses. However, Mason later said that the program was “perfect” and the assignments were just what he needed. He also appreciated the chance to get to know the city and campus and was the only student to mention that he enjoyed the class field trips to local museums. He was very enthusiastic about the program: “I enjoyed the whole program—in and out of class.” This is in contrast to his initial response to the program as an obstacle to his university career.

Like Amy and Mason, Jerry and Sara reported that, at first, the initial stages of the program seemed like a waste of time, but then later changed their minds. Jerry thought that the course started too slowly and was too easy in the first week, while Sara thought at the time that the first month was a waste of time. She said it was not clear to her what the benefits were: “The activities were not very specific.” But finally, in the second half, “it makes sense.” She explained: “At the beginning maybe I don’t understand why I should do this, but maybe later you can find what this benefit is to you.” Mason also expressed a similar opinion about the apparent usefulness of the course—in the second half he felt he was learning more because he was able to put into practice what he had learned in the first half.

Sara suggested that the program could improve by focusing more on the students’ needs and organizing the classes based on students’ strengths and weaknesses.

SARA: ...maybe [the program] can be more specific because different students have different weakness and if you can focus ... for example those students who have a low score on speaking can be grouped together and just focus on speaking.

Focusing on the needs of students is one of the hallmarks of ESP/EAP (Hamp-Lyons, 2001) and many studies have addressed it. In Leki’s (1995) study of NNES international students’ coping strategies, she recommends that instructors find out what skills the students bring to the class and build on them. Almost 20 years later, meeting students’ needs is still an issue; Fox, Cheng, and Zumbo (2014) call for more targeted instruction and suggest that EAP programs could have a greater impact if the needs and strengths of the students were considered more.

4.5 Some concerns

4.5.1 Lack of ability to do well in the disciplinary courses

Although the majority of the students reported feeling increased confidence in certain skills, four students expressed some anxiety around their general ability to do well in their university courses. Amy said she was more comfortable speaking English after the EAP program, but she was worried about the intensity of university life and wondered about her ability to manage her time well.

AMY: Actually, I think that I improved a little because I have been [here] for two months. Maybe it's more comfortable for me to speak now than when I first came here.

Similarly, Sara was concerned because she expected that the English course was not as hard as the disciplinary course would be. She was worried about how well she would be able to understand the professors, who would use a lot of discipline-specific vocabulary that she would not know.

KARIN: Are you more confident?

SARA: Yes, more confidence ... but still a little worried. English courses are different from the [disciplinary] courses. Professors talk more about the words in ...related to the major. I'm worried I can't understand those words.

Lack of vocabulary was also a worry for Sisi and Anna as they anticipated the disciplinary courses and Anna wondered if she would be able to keep up with the classes. Sisi had also heard that many professors were not native speakers and so was worried about her ability to understand lectures. Unlike the above students, Bramwell was very sure of himself at the start and said he was just as confident at the end of the program as he had been at the beginning

4.5.2 Limited English environment

Being in an English-only environment provided students with plenty of opportunities to use English. For example, the students reported that English was spoken the majority of the time at school with the exception of lunch and break times. This matched what I observed, although one of the EAP instructors said he had to make a “minor effort” to keep the students focused on speaking only English, and Anna said that if the Chinese students did not know how to express an idea in English, they would switch to Mandarin. Jerry, the only non-Chinese student, said that the other students speaking in Mandarin did not bother him much except when they spoke “for a long time” or sometimes made jokes that he could not understand, which he said made him feel “awkward.” If students do not use English outside of class, like the students in this study, then their exposure to English is limited to school hours. All of the Chinese students reported using Mandarin after class and say they would feel uncomfortable speaking English with their friends from China. Bramwell and Lulu suggested that it would be seen as “showing off” if they tried to use English with their Chinese friends, especially those who were not in the EAP program. Amy also said she did not speak English with her Chinese friends because “it is more convenient for us to explain our ideas [in Mandarin.]”

Cheng and Fox (2008) reported a similar attitude about speaking English with compatriots; one student from China said he felt he had to speak Chinese if the whole group was from China. However, in that same study, a Vietnamese student said that she and her friends tried to speak English with each other, so this may be a barrier that students have to overcome if they wish to increase the opportunities for practicing their speaking skills. Use of L1 may also create “clustering” of students from the same country, leading to less exposure to English in the

classroom (Dooley, 2010), or feelings of isolation among those in minority language groups, such as in Jerry's case.

4.5.3 Need for a multicultural class

One of the biggest disappointments students expressed about the EAP program was the lack of variety in the students' backgrounds. The great majority of the students came from mainland China and this mono-cultural make-up of the classes was mentioned as a negative by half of the students. Lulu, Bramwell, Mason and Amy had hoped for a more multicultural experience to get to know other cultures and also for greater opportunities to speak English.

KARIN: Were you disappointed that it was all Chinese (in the class)?

AMY: Actually, I was disappointed about this. I really wanted to meet different people, I wanted to improve my English but when all Chinese together we will speak Chinese but not in English.

KARIN: ... in the other classes there were a few non-Chinese?

AMY: I think it's really good for them. It was a really good situation for them to improve English. My friend's class had three non-Chinese people and they can be friends and they always go out and speak English and learn more from these people.

Lulu was the most vocal and passionate about the importance of a multi-cultural class, saying that she would not recommend the program if her class had consisted of only Chinese students and also that she would have asked to be transferred out to another class. For Lulu, the program needs to change its policy of grouping Chinese students together, even if it means including only one non-Chinese student. Learning how to work within the Canadian education system was important to her and she saw the EAP program as a training ground to get used to the Western system of education.

LULU: If I entered the all-Chinese class I won't stay there for two months. That's really important for this program. It's only because they want us to succeed in university right? They have to provide us [with an English

environment] ... I won't say we pay for this, but because we need to improve our English ... the only reason we came to this class is because we need to improve our language.

However, for Sisi and Anna, being in an all-Chinese class was less of an issue. Anna thought there were advantages and disadvantages to having only Chinese students as it made communication easier but also led to less English being spoken. According to Sisi, "In class we spoke English, so it wasn't a problem, but after school I spent time with Chinese friends and spoke Chinese." Sara was the only student who had no opinion, saying that it was up to the student to speak (in English) or not.

Working with students from different languages and cultures not only encourages the use of English but also presents the opportunity to learn how to work within a multi-cultural environment. The EAP course provides the students with group projects, presumably so the students can learn how to work collaboratively in a team, as well as have the opportunity to speak English. The fact that everyone in the group is from the same country may limit the opportunity such a task provides, as can be seen from Sara's description below.

KARIN: How did you manage the group assignments?

SARA: I say, "You do this part and you do this part." I say this to my group members and they bring the info back to me and I put them together. It's not really working together.

KARIN: Do you think the teacher wanted you to work together?

SARA: Oh, I never thought about that! (Thinks for a few seconds) I think they want you to work together, but I'm used to this way because in China in my university I did this and it's much more efficient. When people get together first people talk about topic and then get off topic—it's more efficient to have a list of tasks and tell people what to do. I'm a good leader maybe. (laughs) It was successful. We got high marks. We are all Chinese and we get used to this [way], but with someone from a different country it won't work maybe (laughs).

As Sara indicates, the group is all Chinese, so the potential for intercultural learning is limited and the students complete the task in the way they have always done it. However, Lulu, who was in a group that had a non-Chinese student, learned that not everyone will respond in the same way she is accustomed. She said that in her experience Chinese students usually avoid offering direct criticism, so she was shocked and hurt when a non-Chinese student in her group directly criticized the quality of the work that she had contributed. In the end, Lulu and her classmate discussed their problem after class and managed to resolve it and, as a result, she gained some skills that she thought would be helpful in later disciplinary courses. This experience is in contrast to those of the other Chinese students, who told me that they had experienced no conflict in their groups.

Cheng and Fox (2008) also found that students expected to benefit from being exposed to other perspectives. One student from China remarked, “When you have group work and this group will come up with, like, five Chinese people, I don’t think it’s wrong, but I don’t think it’s helpful because everyone thinks in the same way” (p. 318). The students in Dooley’s (2010) study also felt that mixing with students from other cultures in the EAP class would better prepare them for their university classes. Similar to Lulu, one student in that study thought that he was missing the chance to learn how to communicate with people from other cultures; his group had no conflicts and he saw this as a missed opportunity to learn some useful skills.

This is not to say that having a multi-cultural group will necessarily result in collaboration and intercultural communication; as both Dooley (2010) and Leki (2001) found, NNES students may be left out of the process altogether because the more fluent English speakers in the group sometimes ignored the contributions of NNES because of their perceived

lack of language proficiency. However, a multi-cultural EAP class may help the students gain skills to negotiate the type of conflict that often arises in group projects.

4.5.4 Lack of exposure to native speakers

Many of the students also expressed some disappointment at not meeting any native speakers during the EAP program, but they remained hopeful that in their fall courses they would have the opportunity to do so.

SISI: There are only Chinese students in our class so I had no chance to meet native speakers. I think in September when my new roommates come here I can ... and at the lectures I can make friends

KARIN: Did you interact with non-Chinese students over the summer?

SARA: Not really. No social things. All Chinese. I don't know where to find non-Chinese. You can't walk up to someone on the street and say "Hey, talk to me" (laughs). It's strange to go to a person and say "let's make friends." I met some Japanese friends in the workshops. But it's hard to understand their accent.

As can be seen from the students' comments, they had few opportunities to meet many non-Chinese or native English speakers, a situation that limited their ability to use English over the course of the EAP program. Benzie (2010) points out that international students often live and socialize with other international students, a situation that is made even easier if there is a large population of co-nationals at an institute (Andrade, 2009), as is the case of Chinese students at this university. The rise of social media may also contribute to this situation, making it easier to connect with those from the same country; four students told me that they connected with other Chinese students on Chinese social media sites WeChat and QQ for academic and/or social support. Myles and Cheng (2003) see "cultural mixing" (p. 259) as a means of helping students adjust to a new environment and suggest including domestic students, faculty and staff

in workshops or orientation sessions in EAP programs to provide students with the chance to interact with native speakers. In fact, many researchers call for institutions to take on a more active role to encourage integration of international and domestic students (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Benzie, 2010; Leki, 2001; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Sherry et al., 2010; Trice, 2007).

4.5.5 Lack of training in subject-specialist vocabulary

Students' lack of subject-specialist vocabulary as they prepare to enter disciplinary courses is a fairly common concern (Berman & Cheng, 2010; Counsell, 2011; Evans & Green, 2007; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011) and one that also affected the students in my study. Most of them mentioned a lack of vocabulary as a need or a source of anxiety as they prepared to enter university. While Jerry and Bramwell merely flagged vocabulary as something they needed to learn, Sara, Amy, Anna and Sisi expressed quite a lot of concern about their lack of vocabulary and how it might make their disciplinary studies challenging. Sara thought it would make it difficult for her to follow university lectures. Amy worried that she did not know enough vocabulary in biology and chemistry to be able to do well in her chosen field of Nutrition. Anna considered her knowledge of vocabulary to be "below the level" of the EAP classes, and she "always" needed to look up words or ask the teacher for definitions. Sisi considered her lack of vocabulary to be a problem because it affected her ability to speak more comfortably and created problems for her reading, writing and listening. She spent a lot of time memorizing vocabulary in the EAP program because there were vocabulary tests every week, although she wondered about the benefit of this: "I think sometimes it is temporary." Jerry also questioned the effectiveness of memorizing vocabulary for weekly quizzes and found it a challenge to know which words to use from lists of possible vocabulary when writing essays.

Solutions to this lack of vocabulary include the provision of glossaries with necessary discipline-specific vocabulary (Berman & Cheng, 2010), the adoption of more discipline-specific material or a move toward a content-based curriculum (Baik & Greig, 2009; Brinton & Snow, 1988; Counsell, 2011; Evans & Green, 2007; Hyland, 2002; James, 2006a; Kasper, 1994, 1997; Song, 2006). The EAP course in my study serves students from different backgrounds and, therefore, cannot adopt a content-based model, but could include in its curriculum assignments related to the students' particular disciplines.

4.5.6 Lack of difficulty of the EAP program

In general, the students did not find the EAP program very challenging. Only Jerry and Sara said that the courses were difficult, although in Jerry's opinion, the course was too easy in the first week and then got harder, which he was happy about.

JERRY: I love it [that fact that it was challenging] because I came here to learn English, so I don't want easy tasks. I want a challenge.

Sara said the courses were not easy, but she thought the final tests were. She told me that the students were not worried about passing the courses: "We think everyone passes because the old students told us." She said this removed the pressure, but students still worried and worked hard because they didn't want to be "the one" who failed. Amy thought it was not difficult and felt that there was not a lot of homework, but after studying hard in high school in China, she was happy to relax and not have too much stress. "If the level is higher, maybe it's more stressful ... I don't think it's good for us." Mason and Sisi thought the level was about right, but Bramwell and Lulu said it was not difficult. Bramwell said, "I don't think I need to work hard to pass [the courses]." Lulu was relaxed in her classes and thought they could have been more challenging.

Anna thought the courses were “a little bit easy” but felt that the writing tasks were somewhat challenging, and her competitive personality kept her motivated: “I don’t want to be the last one in the class so I have to keep up and I have to work hard.”

Dooley (2010), James (2006a) and Leki (1995) suggest that a challenging EAP classroom helps prepare students for subsequent disciplinary studies. On the other hand, some students are happy to find the EAP class a relaxed and welcoming space where international students may feel supported by others with similar experiences (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Leki, 1995).

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented findings connected to Research Question One from the interviews conducted at the start and end of the EAP program. The students’ responses to the program were overwhelmingly positive, with all eight students reporting improvements in one or more skill area, and an increase in confidence as they prepared to embark on their university classes. In particular, they mentioned the benefits of writing essays, making presentations and participating in group discussions in class. Many students reported that the detailed feedback they received from the teachers in both the presentations and essays was useful in helping them improve skills. However, the one disappointment that many students felt was the lack of opportunity to meet students from other cultures in order to broaden their experience and practice their spoken English more, especially outside of class time. The second area that many students expressed anxiety about as they prepared to enter university was a lack of academic vocabulary that they thought they would need to function in their disciplinary courses.

In the next chapter I will present the findings from Research Question Two, describing students' experiences in disciplinary courses and the impact of the EAP program on their performance in those courses, along with a discussion of the results.

Chapter 5: Findings and discussion of how the EAP program contributes to students' subsequent success in disciplinary studies

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the relevant findings and present a discussion of how the findings relate to my second research question and previous research presented in Chapter 2. My second research question asks how the EAP program contributed to the students' success in their disciplinary courses. I was interested to know (1) if a lack of language proficiency affected students' ability to manage their course work or interact with classmates and meet new friends, (2) if the tasks they did in the EAP program helped prepare them for disciplinary courses and (3) if they thought the EAP program could have done more to prepare them for university.

The two primary themes that emerge in relation to Research Question Two are students' ability to apply some of the skills and strategies they learned in the EAP program to their disciplinary courses and also their struggle to manage various aspects of the disciplinary courses. It is normal that students making the transition from secondary to tertiary education and moving from home to college will experience "problems and pressures," (Oppenheimer, 1984, p. 45). These challenges are intensified for those NNES international students attending an English-medium university in a foreign country for the first time; the students have difficulty understanding lectures, making friends with new classmates and adjusting to the expectations of a Canadian education system. This is in contrast to the students' experience in the EAP program, which, in the first university term, the students look back on as mostly "fun" and relatively carefree.

5.2 Transfer of learning from EAP program to disciplinary courses

5.2.1 Similarity of tasks: Presentations and group discussions

Making presentations was one of the tasks in the EAP program that students thought was helpful in developing their speaking ability and building their confidence and one that they thought would be required at some point in their future studies. In the first term, only Mason and Amy were required to make presentations, Mason in his English class and Amy in both biology and English; however, many of the students told me they will be required to take at least one English class in the second term and beyond and in those classes they will likely need to make presentations.

Both Amy and Mason had positive experiences, and Mason received one of his highest marks for that assignment. They said that to manage these presentations they relied on their high school experience as well as what they learned in the EAP program; because Amy and Mason had attended schools with Canadian curricula, they had experience making presentations, in contrast to other participants, who were doing this task for the first time.

LULU: If I didn't enter this program, I would have my new start in September, but I [wouldn't] have experience with anything like presentations or essays ... but right now I know how this education system works, how they want you to give [presentations], so I think I feel more comfortable with that. ... I won't feel panic before a presentation.

Like Lulu, Amy credits making presentations in the EAP program with providing her with increased confidence in her speaking ability and helping to “overcome our nerves.” Many of the students mentioned the feedback they received on the presentations as being helpful.

BRAMWELL: When we were doing the presentations, there were some evaluators. They tell you something about your strong point and your

weakness. And they are kind of feedback for the speaker. And you can improve a lot from their feedback.

AMY: Every session in the speaking class—every presentation—our teacher will give everyone paper with feedback on what's the point you need to improve and what's the point that you did very well.

Group discussions and group projects were also mentioned by the participants as helping to develop their speaking skills. This collaborative approach was a common feature of the EAP instructors' methodology, and as well as providing students with the opportunity to practice speaking English, they also prepared them for similar tasks in disciplinary courses. These courses involved a variety of collaborative tasks; students were sometimes required to compare solutions to calculations, such as in Bramwell's physics class, or explore topics together, as Mason did in his English class. Sara said that students in her geography class were encouraged to discuss answers prior to handing in assignments, and Amy and Anna were required to team up with other classmates to complete projects together.

While transfer of learning is clear from these examples, increased attention to target needs of students might encourage even more transfer between the EAP program and the disciplinary courses. This was highlighted by an experience that Mason described to me in his listening/speaking class. He had learned conversation gambits that he thought would help him to have discussions with his peers in his disciplinary courses, but at the mid-point of the fall term he reported that none of the native English-speaking students in his class used them; in fact, he said the only other person he heard using them was another student from the EAP program. However, although these expressions were not useful in the first term, they might be at a later point since

learning contexts and demands change as students move into more advanced classes in their third or fourth year (Fox, 2005).

5.2.2 Making connections between EAP and disciplinary courses

The participating students made various connections between the EAP and disciplinary courses. In fact, students were encouraged by the EAP instructors to make connections between the skills and activities they learned in EAP and their possible use in their future courses. For example, Anna said the EAP instructor pointed out that learning to work in a group would be helpful because she would have group discussions when she entered her disciplinary courses. She also noted that some strategies she learned in the EAP class were useful in the target situation.

ANNA: I have done a lot of reading in [my English class] and the reading strategies [from the EAP course] help me a lot.

In addition, Anna recognized that learning to write a summary in the EAP program was helpful when she was required to write a research term paper in her English class.

ANNA: I used some things from the summer like academic writing skills, especially the summary. When we write [our term paper], we have to write a literature review and we have to summarize the idea of the articles. So the summary helped a lot.

Lulu also made connections between aspects of the EAP program and the disciplinary courses; she realized that listening to the instructor was both helping her improve her listening skills and preparing her to listen to lectures in university courses.

KARIN: What kinds of exercises did you do that you thought helped your listening and speaking?

LULU: Teacher talking in the class. So I think that's really useful for our listening. It's not like content, like he taught us in the class. It's that the

things help us is that while he's talking we are listening so we are receiving the information, so that will help us.

KARIN: Like a lecture style...

LULU: Yeah, like a lecture. So that will really help us.

These examples of learning transfer underline the importance of maintaining awareness of the target situation in order to prepare the students to function in that context. For an EAP instructor who has not experienced an undergraduate class for a long while, it may be helpful to observe a class to understand the type of discourse that the international students will experience or invite some undergraduates into the EAP class and ask for their feedback on what types of expressions might be appropriate in a class discussion with peers. Johns (1997) acknowledges the limitations of the EAP class and suggests that teachers need to “visit, observe, interview, and reflect upon rhetorical contexts outside our own classroom...” (p. 115), as well as invite experts into our classrooms, such as discipline-specific faculty to talk about types of assignments and grading and experienced students who have moved on and can bring their insight to the new students.

5.3 Challenges encountered in the disciplinary courses

5.3.1 Difficulty understanding lectures

The one challenge common to all eight students was difficulty understanding the lectures, a problem that has also been reported in other studies of EAP programs (Dooey, 2010; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). The main difficulties were the professors' rate of speech, the presence of an accent (many students said that some of their professors were not native English speakers) and references to popular culture and jokes during lectures that students could not understand. Lulu alone said she understood the jokes better than the course content, perhaps a

reflection of her own facility with the language (she liked to practice English by watching movies and TV shows) and the difficulty of her computer engineering courses. Anna reported missing an assignment because she did not understand the professor when he assigned the homework orally in class and Sisi reported that one of her professors made reference to politics during the fall 2015 federal election, talking about not only Canadian politics but also the American system.

SISI: There's a lot of stuff I don't understand. I need to read the [textbook]. And sometimes he will talk about politics and some parties in Canada and I really don't understand how many parties and what kind of party... He even talks about American parties (laughs). It's difficult, although it's not on the exam!

Dooley (2010) and Terraschke and Wahid (2011) also found that students struggled to follow lectures that included references to local knowledge, such as political or social issues. The range of knowledge that is taken for granted by instructors can be quite broad, as Duff (2001) found in her study of ESL students' experiences in secondary school classrooms. She found that having knowledge of course content is not enough for students to be able to participate in class discussions; they also need “a knowledge of popular North American culture, a repertoire of newsworthy current events and an ability to express a range of perspectives on social issues...” (p. 120).

Some students also reported difficulty understanding their classmates. For some, accent was a problem—Lulu and Anna said that a lot of their classmates came from India—while for others it was knowledge of pop culture. In my study, Mason told me that his unfamiliarity with hockey, a popular topic of conversation among Canadians, made it more difficult for him to chat with new classmates. Another obstacle was his lack of knowledge of commonly used expressions

among young people, such as “hashtag.” Sara said she did not really try to follow her classmates, explaining that it was difficult enough just trying to understand the professor. She would ask her Chinese-speaking classmates when she did not understand something the professor had said, but since they were in the same position they could not offer much help.

As in my study, Dooley (2010) found that not knowing “local knowledge” was an “impediment” to completing certain tasks other than understanding lectures, such as creating rapport in group assignments (p.194). Cheng, Myles and Curtis (2004) reported similar findings—most of the students in their study found it hard to understand their native speaking Canadian classmates because of the speed of their speech and the use of colloquialisms.

Amy and Lulu developed strategies to help them manage the lectures; Amy found that searching for online videos (such as on YouTube) helped her understand difficult lectures in her chemistry class; she took notes and later looked up the confusing parts online. Lulu found that she needed to spend the whole day on Tuesday preparing for her engineering class lecture on Wednesday and that without that preparation she would not have understood the lectures. This is a strategy that Terraschke and Wahid (2011) also reported; the students in their study said they found it helpful to prepare for lectures by reading the textbook and lecture notes.

Anna and Lulu thought that understanding the fall lectures would have been much harder without the listening practice in the EAP program. Lulu considered herself to be better off than a classmate who did not have to take the EAP program.

KARIN: What about listening [practice in the EAP program]? Does it help you in the lectures?

LULU: Absolutely! It helped a lot. I’m so grateful that I got into the EAP program because without those few months I couldn’t understand the

lecture right now. My friend got 7 on IELTS but she couldn't understand what the lecturer said on the first day. She's struggling right now.

While Anna and Lulu saw the benefits of the EAP listening practice, Jerry wished they had had more practice during the EAP program.

KARIN: Looking back now, is there anything you wish they had taught you in the EAP program?

JERRY: Listening.

KARIN: More listening? What kinds?

JERRY: Because like the teachers from summer they speak really clearly and they speak really formally. So it wasn't really hard to understand. But you know when we talk normally we don't use proper grammar, and even Canadians they don't use proper grammar and formal language. I think this kind of stuff is really important.

KARIN: When you compare the [EAP] teachers to your fall professors, the way they speak, do you notice a difference? Do you think the [EAP] teachers were much clearer?

JERRY: A little bit slower. I mean the professors are faster.

Jerry makes an important point about not being exposed to natural speech. Students might be better prepared if the listening conditions in the EAP program were more similar to those in the disciplinary courses, that is, if it promoted transfer of learning. In James' (2006a) study on transferability, a student benefited from having an EAP instructor who spoke quickly because, as he says, "...no other instructor talks faster than him. He is the fastest. So that helps" (p. 799).

The issue of transferability also applies to the tasks that students did to practice listening in the EAP program. The students reported that the listening practice included Canadian TV shows and online "TED Talks;" however, while "TED Talks" are similar to a lecture in some respects, a lecture is usually not a polished performance that is wrapped up neatly in 20 minutes or less. The ways that students engage with these tasks is also different; in a class lecture, students are able to listen only once, perhaps while taking notes, while students watching a "TED

Talk” online have access to captions and the ability to stop and watch multiple times. As Flowerdew and Miller (1997) point out, real lectures delivered naturally are characterized by “messiness” (p.44) and students need to develop strategies for dealing with this. In addition, the students in my study would benefit from being exposed to a variety of accents for when they move on to disciplinary courses taught by non-native English speakers.

By the time of my final interviews at the end of the fall term, many of the students reported that listening to lectures had gotten easier, mainly because they were getting used to them, similar to the experiences of students in other studies (Dooley, 2010; Myles, Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). However, for some there were still challenges; Bramwell thought his understanding of lectures was not much improved and Jerry said he still had some difficulties with listening, especially with “not really good” pronunciation, and he reported that he needed to improve his listening skills the most.

5.3.2 Difficulty adjusting to a new educational system

Some of the students were also struggling because the method of teaching was not what they were used to, especially for Sara and Lulu, who were transferring from Chinese universities. After taking disciplinary courses for two months, Lulu concluded that the EAP courses were more similar to the “Chinese way of teaching” rather than what she was experiencing in the disciplinary classes. She explained that in her classes in China, the professor would tell the students exactly what to study, but here, she says, you have to learn by yourself. Sara, Sisi and Bramwell also expressed surprise about having to learn on their own.

LULU: In China the teacher talks about [something] and you go home and write—she will tell you how this works and you go home and do the assignment. But here all the things he said in the lecture you have to

[apply] it. I'm still getting used to this way. Here the instructor will prefer you to learn by yourself—they will encourage you to learn by yourself but I'm the kind of person used to doing what the teacher said. ... I don't know how to systematically learn by myself. I have to change myself maybe to fit into this study system.

SARA: It's just in China the teacher will give you a book and tell you page 25, 26 and 30 is the main part we will have test on, but here the teacher just gives you a book and [says,] "Read it. The exam will be on it." (laughs) I don't know which part to focus on!

BRAMWELL: But in physics I don't know why the teachers don't teach in class, we only solve problems in class. Like you need to do some pre-reading before class and in class I think the teacher doesn't teach at all. They only ask us to solve the problem and something like that.

SISI: Lecture [in physics] is okay but the lab is also difficult. I think I'm bad at applying something. Students here they have a lot of experience doing some experiment is high school or middle school, but in China we don't.

Sara also struggled to understand what the professors were looking for in the essays she was assigned in her Conservation classes. She said she knew she should be presenting an argument but felt it was difficult to change how she was used to writing an essay, which included not supporting one side of an argument too strongly and focusing mainly on government policy.

SARA: I think in my country I have to write essays, it has format but I don't know how to translate to English, seems no logic there. I have to do another way. It's uncomfortable for me.

...
I feel I was stuck in some place, like I don't know where I was wrong. It's just sentences, sentences, I don't know, I must have missed some part, still finding it. ... And sometimes the teacher just give you what you should write in the essay and I thought I understood, but ... during the writing, I still get confused.

...
In China our points are almost about the government and policy... The way I think in China affect me a lot.

Both Sara and Lulu thought the expectations of this university were different from the ones they had attended for two years in China. Sara told me she thought this university was

“strict” and when I asked her to explain what she meant, she said (laughing), “Like you have to do every homework.” She thought that for students straight out of high school, coming to this university would be easier because they would not have the expectation that it would be “loose.”

SARA: It's very strict in China while you are at senior school. And I think my knowledge and my IQ was at the highest in senior school so for somebody who just graduated and went here they will have a big advantage to study... In Chinese university, it's a loose atmosphere, so suddenly I have to come from a "freedom university" to a "strict university." And it's a little bit challenge.

Lulu had a similar expectation when she began her first term here. She told me that she usually did not do homework, that it was enough for her to review coursework before exams. But in her first lecture here she realized that the other students had done the pre-reading assignment and she was a bit lost.

LULU: In the first lecture a lot of students would ask questions but I didn't know where the questions came from! They came from nowhere! I didn't know the terms. I didn't know where they got the questions! It was on Connect (online site). I saw that but I didn't know it was SO important, you know. I just thought maybe you could read it in your spare time or something. I didn't know that it would affect your lecture or something. Right now I know! So stupid!

Especially for students who are transferring from a foreign university, it may be helpful to discuss in the EAP classes the expectations of this university as they relate to assignments in different faculties. This could be a subject for a guest speaker to discuss, either a disciplinary instructor or former student.

5.3.3 Difficulty finding social/peer support

Many of the students in my study maintained strong friendships with the classmates they met in the EAP program and those connections helped them feel less isolated when they entered

their disciplinary courses. However, at the end of the EAP program many of them expressed the hope or expectation that they would meet new native English-speaking friends when they began their university courses.

KARIN: Do you think that you'll continue to be friends with [EAP] classmates?

AMY: I don't think so, because in first year all of us are very busy, maybe we have no time to meet each other and maybe we'll meet new friends so we will not meet each other very frequently.

SISI: There are only Chinese students in our class so I had no chance to meet native speakers. I think in September when my new roommates come here I can ... and at the lectures I can make friends at the lectures.

However, by the mid-point of the fall term, the students all reported some difficulty making new friends. This seemed not to be due to a lack of effort on their part, unlike some international students who admit that they deliberately choose not to pursue friendships with local students (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Myles & Cheng, 2003), all eight of the participants in my study were interested in meeting students from other languages and cultural backgrounds but found various obstacles. Students reported a lack of opportunities, perceived language deficiencies, and lack of time because of “busy” lives on the part of domestic students, factors that have also been identified in other studies as barriers to creating friendships (Benzie, 2010; Trice, 2007). Jerry, Sisi and Amy all mentioned they did not have a chance to socialize with their new classmates outside of class. Jerry said that it was hard to meet friends in class because they only worked on assigned calculations together and then when class finished, they all went their separate ways. Sisi said she chatted briefly with classmates before and after class but mainly about topics related to the class itself. Amy described similar difficulties in her classes.

KARIN: Have you made any new friends?

AMY: Not too many. In the first week I tried to make new friends, such as native speakers. Actually in the following weeks I found it was a little difficult because we don't have too much common to talk about and we just have class together two or three times a week. No time for us to talk too much. ... We just say "Hi" and "Nice to meet you" and that's it. Everyone is very busy they don't have time to talk to you too much.

Lack of language proficiency also contributed to the challenge of making new friends.

Amy was struggling because she was in a class with many native speakers and no other Mandarin speakers and she felt it was hard to make herself understood, although she had positive experiences by the end of the term with her group projects.

AMY: Actually until now all of my classmates I meet in Bio and English are all English-speaking. I don't meet any Chinese students.

KARIN: So that must be helpful for you, right?

AMY: It's helpful, but it's a little difficult. Because sometimes I cannot talk to them very fluently, so maybe there is some difficulty for us to talk, talk, talk.

Amy experienced contradictory feelings about having English-speaking classmates; on one hand she was exposed to more English, but on the other, she was feeling somewhat isolated because of her lack of speaking ability. She also lost some confidence in her speaking ability early in the term when she tried to ask her teacher a question in class but he was not able to understand her and, finally, asked her to print out her question, which she found very embarrassing. Jerry reported at the mid-point of the fall term that he sometimes did not understand what his classmates asked him about the course content (in this case, physics and chemistry) and also when they talked about non-academic topics in "everyday language." Bramwell, Lulu and Sara also found that a lack of proficiency affected their ability to make friends.

BRAMWELL: I think I need to know more general terms, like, I don't know how to describe it but when I chat with my roommates... I remember the first time they said like, something is "sick" they mean good, but the first

time I thought they meant the original meaning—ill. I didn't understand them so I asked why did you say, like, this is sick and they told me it means it is "good" or "awesome."

KARIN: Are you meeting people? Are they friendly?

LULU: Yeah. (hesitates) When you are in a new country, your language is a problem—people will prefer to talk to somebody who has the same language as them. Right now if you say something with a word I don't understand, it's difficult for me. So [native speakers] will prefer to talk to someone who knows the language. When I talk with them and ask a question sometimes they don't have patience, because, you know, for engineering, this program is super hard and everyone's got a lot of work to do and so they don't have time to explain to you.

SARA: It's very difficult to meet some friends from other countries [during] the first term, I think. Next term I will try to make other country friends.

KARIN: So right now all your ... close friends are Chinese?

SARA: Uh-huh. Sometimes you just don't know how to say it in English.

Sara points to a lack of English proficiency that kept her from establishing friendships with non-Chinese classmates while remaining optimistic that the situation would change, a feeling that was echoed by other participants in the study, who did not indicate to me that they thought domestic students were unfriendly, as some studies have reported (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Dooley, 2010; Myles & Cheng, 2003). The students remained optimistic that in time they would be able to make friends and some of them found strategies to help them meet more people. Jerry was on the executive of two university clubs and said this was a good way to meet people and practice speaking English. Mason also joined some clubs and a choir, Lulu applied for a volunteer position at the campus radio station, Sisi attended a church service with a roommate and planned to volunteer in the second term and Bramwell joined a physics study group. In the meantime, all of the students kept up friendships with their classmates from the EAP program; some of them saw each other only occasionally because they were in different faculties and residences but

others said they remained close friends. Amy, Sara, Bramwell and Anna described the important role that the EAP program played in helping them to meet friends.

KARIN: Have you gotten in touch with people from the summer program?

AMY: Yeah, until now all of my friends are from the summer program. I really appreciate that I could take the EAP program. I met so many nice people there. My friends all come from the EAP program and we always go out together.

KARIN: How did you find the [study] group?

SARA: Mostly it's related to my friends I met in the [EAP program]. We have the same courses and I just meet someone who says, "I know so-and-so" and I say, "Oh, I know him too." It's like a snowball. "Do you have a friend studying in CONS 200? Okay I will introduce you."

BRAMWELL: By taking the EAP program I met lots of people. So that's the most important part, I think. Like your friends help you get into the new environment.

KARIN: Are you still friends with people from summer?

ANNA: Yes. I see them once a week, maybe. We usually hang out on weekends, except the mid-term week.

As the above quotes indicate, the EAP program played an important role in helping students establish a social network, and having friendships with other students was important to help the students adapt. Whether the friends are co-nationals, other NNES students, or domestic native speakers, students benefit from all of these relationships (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015). In fact, Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) suggest that having a balanced network is desirable because having ties with both co-cultural and domestic students has a positive effect on students' self-esteem. However, there are a number of barriers preventing NNES international students and domestic students from integrating more, such as lack of confidence in their speaking skills on the part of the NNES international students and lack of opportunity or time to spend together. Many researchers have called for more institutional

support to encourage integration (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Benzie, 2010, Myles & Cheng, 2003; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui., 2010; Trice, 2007).

The EAP program is an appropriate place to provide opportunities for NNES students to meet native English-speaking students as it may help them feel less inhibited to interact with domestic students when they later enter disciplinary courses. Some students in my study mentioned that they did not know what to say to domestic students to keep a conversation going, so meeting English-speaking students in an institutional setting where there is some support may facilitate this. And, as Bramwell and Mason point out, having some background on pop culture topics, such as hockey, may also be helpful.

5.3.4 Challenging tasks/assignments in disciplinary courses

As might be expected, the assignments in this eight-week general EAP program differed somewhat from the disciplinary courses in terms of type, length and complexity. The most commonly mentioned tasks and assignments in the EAP program were essays, presentations and discussions; however, in the disciplinary courses, essays and presentations did not figure prominently, perhaps because the majority of students were in courses that consisted of large lectures and, for science students, weekly labs. In the disciplinary courses, the most commonly reported assignments were lab reports, online or in-class problems/calculations and research term papers.

Many of the students did not have to do much writing in their fall courses, either because they were in science or engineering or, as in Anna's case, deliberately avoided registering for a particular class due to the amount of writing required. However, Bramwell, Mason, Amy and

Anna all took an English course and were required to write a research term paper, for which they needed to formulate their own thesis, a challenging task that most of them had not done before. As a result, Bramwell needed to email his professor and TA many times to get feedback on the appropriateness of his topic. These research papers were much longer than anything they were assigned in the EAP program, about 2000 words compared to 500. Amy compares the two tasks below:

KARIN: Did you do anything in the summer that prepared you for this kind of task?

AMY: No. In the summer course we just wrote some easy essays of 500 words. It cannot compare to this task.

KARIN: In the summer did you have to research?

AMY: Yeah, we need to research but it was not very difficult for us to research because we had already learned this topic in class. For example, each unit we have a topic and at the end of the week we have to write an essay on the topic.

While essays were the most commonly mentioned writing assignment in the EAP program, only Sara and Mason were assigned essays in their fall courses. Mason wrote a summary, which he said was similar to the types of tasks he did in the EAP class and Sara said she wrote two or three essays for her Conservation courses. Although they were similar in length to the ones she wrote for the EAP course, she said “it’s very different writing an essay in the [EAP course] and specific [disciplines].” She added that in the Conservation courses she needed to have “a lot of understanding” and “do many readings” and described the essays as “more specific.”

SARA: I think [the EAP lessons] did help. I will always think about what the EAP teacher told me ... “Don’t use ‘people’ don’t use ‘something,’ etc., little tips I always can remember. But for the general idea, no.

Although Sara was required to produce essays in both the EAP and the disciplinary courses, it is clear that the tasks in the EAP program could not prepare her for the task of writing essays in her

Conservation courses. Hyland (2002) argues that the essay genre is not all encompassing and warns that teaching one generic “academic English” to prepare students may lead them to think “they simply have to master a set of rules which can be transferred across fields” (p. 392). Because the EAP program in my study must cater to students from different disciplines, it may be helpful to point out that they will encounter differences in genres from one discipline to another or expose them to typical essays of their chosen discipline.

Jerry, Sisi and Lulu did very little writing in their fall term because they were mostly taking science and engineering courses and those usually involved lab reports, which required little writing. Sisi described the task as requiring “only two or three pages with some boxes that we fill in.” In her mid-term interview, Lulu said that the most she had written so far was a cover letter for her work term position. However, even though their classes did not require much writing, Lulu, Bramwell, and Sisi needed to write an essay to pass the Language Proficiency Index (LPI) test in order to register in required English courses in second term. By the end of the term, after three or more attempts, Lulu and Bramwell hired tutors, who helped them overcome this obstacle, but Sisi was still trying to pass.

The students’ experiences in their disciplinary courses indicate a range of writing assignments, with very few needing to write an essay. However, essay writing is often the most common type of genre practiced in EAL courses, a phenomenon noted by Johns (1997): “too many literacy classes are devoted to one kind of writing text, generally the pedagogical essay...” leading students to believe that “this is the only way to write” (p.122). She suggests that students learn to write texts from different genres and to different audiences under varying constraints, i.e., sometimes writing multiple drafts with peer review and at other times writing quickly under

pressure. This might have been helpful to the students in my study who needed to write in a variety of contexts, including writing under exam conditions without access to dictionaries or notes, which was required of the students in English courses and those taking the LPI test during their first term.

This general EAP program is constrained by its eight-week time frame and its mandate to teach to a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds; however, to better help students transition into disciplinary courses, tasks in the EAP classroom could be chosen to more closely match the assignments in those courses and authentic, relevant materials used to provide a closer match to the disciplinary context, such as using real lectures by professors, either live or recorded, with a variety of accents. Although instructors of general EAP courses cannot reasonably be expected to teach the particulars of every genre and provide students' with an immersion in their chosen subject matter (Spack, 1988), they may be able to focus more closely on the target goals of their students to help them master the types of tasks that they will likely see in the future courses.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented findings, along with a discussion related to Research Question Two. These findings show that the students were able to apply some aspects of the EAP program to their disciplinary courses, including language skills, strategies and academic skills. However, students also faced many challenges in their disciplinary courses, including difficulty understanding lectures and classmates, meeting new friends, especially English-speaking domestic students, adjusting to the expectations of a new educational system and learning to manage different, more complex tasks.

In the concluding chapter, I will discuss this study's implications for teaching NNES international students in generic EAP programs and make some recommendations for how these types of programs can more closely meet the needs of students. Lastly, I will make suggestions for future research and present brief concluding remarks.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 Summary

The findings of this study support previous research conducted on this topic—that EAP programs are useful for students and help them in their subsequent disciplinary studies (Dooey, 2010; Dyson, 2014; Floyd, 2015; Fox, Cheng & Zumbo, 2014; Storch & Tapper, 2009). Overall, the students in my study reported that the EAP program provided them with improved language proficiency, academic strategies and insight into Canadian culture, all of which helped them feel more confident as they entered their university courses. In particular, students mentioned the benefits of writing essays, making presentations and participating in group discussions in class. They also reported that the EAP program had provided them with the opportunity to build a network of peers whom they depended on for academic and social support during and after the program.

However, one of the biggest disappointments felt by many students was the lack of opportunities to meet people from other cultures in the EAP program, including international students from other countries and domestic English-speaking students. Some students told me that the reason they came to a foreign country was to broaden their experience and practice their spoken English more and were disappointed with this aspect of the EAP program. This lack of exposure may also have contributed to the students' later difficulty interacting with English-speaking classmates when they entered their disciplinary courses.

My findings also show that the disciplinary courses presented a number of challenges when students moved into their university programs. All the students struggled to understand lectures as a result of the professors' rate of speech, the jokes and pop culture references during

lectures and, in many cases, an accent that was unfamiliar to the students. Some students also felt that their lack of listening skills and idiomatic language impeded their ability to communicate with their native speaker classmates. In addition, the students struggled with the new and more complex tasks that they faced in disciplinary courses, especially those that required research skills, such as an annotated bibliography and a 2,000-word term paper. For some students, it was a big surprise that they were expected to learn content prior to their classes in order to discuss it with the professor/class, rather than have the professor teach them from the textbook. This was especially true for two students who were transferring from universities in China since they had already experienced university life and had certain expectations about what it entailed.

6.2 Recommendations and educational implications

Based on my findings, I make three recommendations to help students more easily transition into disciplinary courses. The first recommendation is based on the finding that students had few opportunities to interact with either international students from other countries or domestic English-speaking students. A major drawback mentioned by students in my study was that some of the classes in the EAP program consisted of only Chinese-speaking students, and, as a result, I suggest that the program include a more multicultural mix of students in the classes. If this is not possible due to administrative constraints, I suggest there be more organized social activities to encourage students to mix with those from other cultures. Most of the Chinese students in my study admitted that it was awkward for them to practice English with their compatriots. While this may be something that they will need to overcome if they wish to practice their English more, in the meantime they may benefit from institutional support to help them meet people from other countries. As well, these students reported not having the

opportunity to meet domestic English-speaking students during the eight-week program. Exposure to native speakers might boost the NNES students' confidence in their speaking skills before they enter their disciplinary courses, for example, some type of language or cultural exchange as part of the EAP program, perhaps with volunteers from a variety of faculties. This type of activity would also contribute to the integration of NNES international students and domestic students, a problem that exists on many campuses and prevents both the full engagement of NNES international students and the exposure of domestic students to different cultures (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Andrade, 2009; Benzie, 2010; Dooey, 2010; Grayson, 2008; Leki, 2001; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Trice, 2007).

The second recommendation relates to the students' difficulty understanding lectures and classmates. Some of the challenges that students faced in their first term of their disciplinary courses might be mitigated by the use of authentic and relevant materials and tasks that are more similar to those in the target situation, for example, listening to real lectures, either live or recorded, that include a variety of accents. Making use of authentic and relevant materials requires that EAP practitioners be familiar with the target situation as much as possible. To this end, instructors or course designers need to observe disciplinary classes, have discussions with professors or interview former students to understand what is required of students once they leave the EAP program (Johns, 1997).

The third recommendation is related to the finding that students were unprepared for certain demands of their courses, especially the expectation of independent learning. The EAP program should prepare students for these demands by, firstly, discussing in class the focus on independent learning and what that means in terms of professors' expectations, and secondly,

fostering independence by asking students to be responsible for their own learning. Students could be assigned tasks similar to those that were expected of them in their disciplinary courses, such as developing their own topics and thesis statements and searching for articles in the university library database. As well, since many students were required to write a research paper in their university English classes in their first term, EAP instructors could ask students to practice summarizing skills by writing at least one entry for an annotated bibliography, perhaps on a topic related to their future disciplinary field.

6.3 Future research

As universities in English-speaking countries around the world continue to actively recruit NNES international students, it becomes increasingly important to investigate NNES students' needs. Many studies have shown the need for EAP support programs and some have looked at the effectiveness of those programs; however, since my study was qualitative and included a small number of participants from two classes, I recommend the EAP program in my study conduct a larger quantitative study of students from all the classes in the EAP program to find if there are other trends that did not show up in this smaller qualitative study. For example, most of my participants were in faculties other than Arts and were taking a lot of courses that did not require writing and a larger study might indicate that students in the Faculty of Arts have quite different needs. Also, I would recommend conducting a longitudinal study, which some researchers have done to investigate the short- and long-term impact of CBI courses (James, 2006; Song, 2006). Monitoring the students' experiences over the course of their degree program would add to the depth of knowledge about international student experiences and also provide insight into the impact of general EAP courses at a time when many students are choosing more

discipline-focused options (Baik & Greig, 2009). Looking beyond the first term, which presents adjustment challenges for many students regardless of language (Oppenheimer, 1984), would allow us to observe how students' needs change and what types of support they may require to flourish in this environment and fully engage in university life.

6.4 Concluding remarks

In doing this research I was concerned about being overly critical of the EAP instructors. As a teacher myself, I am familiar with the demands of the work and know that teachers face many demands—teaching the curriculum, providing detailed feedback to students on written assignments, and in some cases, organizing social or sporting events for students. It is worth noting that the participants in my study had a very high opinion of their teachers and the majority of them volunteered their praise without my asking. In fact, not one negative comment was made about the teachers, which underlines the professionalism and dedication of the teaching staff in this program.

It is important for teachers to know that our time and effort will not be in vain; that what we are teaching will be useful to students as they embark on their university life. However, in my experience, teachers sometimes fall back on the “default position,” that is, doing what we have always done, or what is in the textbook, without questioning if it is still relevant. As a result, I hope this research can shine some light on students' needs subsequent to the EAP program and those aspects of the EAP program that most helped them make the adjustment to regular university classes. Understandably, as this program in my study is only eight weeks' long, instructors cannot provide everything that students might need; however, precisely because time is so limited, it is important to discover students' particular needs. I hope that this research may

provide teachers with some insight about the types of challenges that students face and also to encourage them to continue to conduct needs analysis on a regular basis to help students more effectively make the transition to disciplinary courses. It is time-consuming and perhaps difficult to change what we have always done, but in the end it makes our work more meaningful.

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