

# A New Generation: Profiling Hong Kong Tertiary English Learners

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**Abstract.** The new tertiary curriculum in Hong Kong has resulted in the emergence of a new generation of learners who, compared with previous generations, enter university with one year less prior exposure to English. This paper reports a subset of questionnaire findings from a large-scale profiling study which has a particular focus on understanding these new learners' English learning experiences. Questionnaire surveys were administered at the beginning and end of the students' first semester in university. The first looked at their secondary school English learning experiences and the second at their English language experience within the university. Their language needs and exposure to English both in and out of class were investigated because besides academic interaction, university education should include opportunities for social networking. The results provide crucial information for pedagogical development of language support for these learners and a picture of their English language environment.

**Keywords:** English learning experience, profiling, academic and social interaction, Hong Kong

## 1 Introduction

The educational reforms leading to a new tertiary curriculum in Hong Kong have been in place for two years, resulting in the emergence of a new generation of learners who commence their tertiary studies one year earlier. Thus, compared with previous generations, they are younger and have had less prior exposure to English. These new learners also undergo a rather different English learning experience by being prepared for the Hong Kong Diploma in Secondary Education, a high-stakes public examination administered for the first time in 2012 and taken by nearly 80,000 candidates each year thereafter (Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2014).

In addition to entering university with rather different English learning experiences, these learners also need to navigate through various learning contexts presented by tertiary institutions which have undergone a wide array of reforms in response to recent changes in the socio-political environment in education. These changes include 'fine-tuning' of language policies in the secondary education sector, an expansion of tertiary places, an increase in global mobility as a result of internationalization initiatives, technological advancement and diversification of learning approaches. These changes will be detailed in the following sections.

### 1.1 Changes in Language Policies

The current study is contextualized in the post-colonial period. Since the handover of sovereignty in July 1997, there have been several important changes in the language policy in education in Hong Kong (Poon, 2004) including the implementation of the Chinese medium of instruction policy in secondary schools, the later fine-tuning of the policy and the Native English Teacher scheme. The impact of these and similar innovations on the English standards of local students has been widely discussed in the media but the holistic effect on university entrants has not been fully investigated.

### 1.2 Expansion in Tertiary Places

Opportunities for entry to tertiary education in Hong Kong have increased from 2% before 1994 to about 21% at present (Census and Statistics Department, 2014; Drew & Watkins, 1998; Ho, Watkins, & Kelly, 2001; Kember, 2010). In addition, there has been a diversification of routes into tertiary study. The expansion of sub-degree courses, for example, has provided a popular springboard for university entrance. However, this associate degree route is typically associated with previous poor academic performance which may include English proficiency. This raises concerns for students entering English-medium universities. Almost no data are currently available to gauge the level of proficiency of learners who enter via the new routes.

### 1.3 Internationalization of Universities

Internationalization has become one of the key strategic plans for universities in Hong Kong as a way of enhancing their global competitiveness. It is realized by boosting student mobility through exchange programmes which ‘swap’ Hong Kong students for foreign students for one or two semesters, and by expanding the recruitment of international students directly into the regular degree programmes of Hong Kong universities. For instance, in the 2013/14 academic year the university within which the current study took place hosted nearly 1,400 exchange students (from about 300 institutions) and had over 9,500 international students enrolled on its full-length programmes of which one-third were undergraduates (University of Hong Kong, 2014). These international students not only bring diversity to the student profiles, but also challenges to pedagogies, particularly English language teaching and learning. While many of them possess native or near-native proficiency, they are not necessarily adept at academic English. Concomitant with the diversified demographics of students is the issue of integration, both academic and social. In this context, a common language, or *lingua franca*, is often needed to facilitate communication. While English is the *de facto* medium adopted for academic communication in the universities of Hong Kong, how such a policy is being enacted by students and academics is unclear and under researched. Even less well explored in previous studies is the role language plays in the social aspect of integration on university campuses.

#### **1.4 Technological Advancement and Diverse Learning Approaches**

The popularization of the Internet and other multimedia resources has revolutionized educational experiences and provided new avenues for information transfer; the impact on English teaching and learning cannot be overlooked (Jarvis, 2001; Kekkonen-Moneta & Moneta, 2002; Yuen, 2003). Technological advances have facilitated learning beyond classrooms and have prompted developments in areas such as ‘flipped’ classrooms, self-access learning and the fostering of autonomous learners. This diversity of approaches helps accommodate the diversity of the student body and is consistent with the paradigm shift from teacher-led to learner-centred pedagogies.

## **2 Relevant Studies**

A number of studies have been conducted which are relevant to the research reported here. Littlewood and Liu (1996) conducted a large-scale two-year study to profile students entering universities in Hong Kong. They looked at students’ language competence, English learning experience and their attitudes to English learning and use. Data were collected from senior secondary students, Year 1 university students and teachers through questionnaires, interviews and language tests. This was a very comprehensive profiling of entrants to Hong Kong universities. While this study is still informative today it is dated by the fact that at the time of the study almost every undergraduate student in a Hong Kong university was Cantonese speaking and native to Hong Kong. This situation has changed enormously in the intervening years. The study was also conducted at a time when access to universities was more restricted than today and so, in a sense, was dealing only with an elite group of students. Two smaller-scale and more focused studies looked at the English language support profiles of Hong Kong tertiary students identifying their need for English for Academic Purposes (Evans & Green, 2007) and suggesting that tertiary students recognized the value of EAP instruction in terms of their academic success within the Hong Kong context (Hyland, 1997). While these studies have important points to make about Hong Kong students’ needs for EAP they were not intended to produce a broad profile of students. In a more recent longitudinal study conducted at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Evans & Morrison, 2011a, 2011b), a small group of undergraduate students were followed over three years to discover the English language difficulties they encountered in their academic studies in that English-medium university. Although the group only consisted of 28 students, findings were enhanced by a parallel questionnaire survey with 3,000 students. This study contributes significantly to understanding the language problems that Hong Kong students face in an English-medium learning environment and how they overcome them. However, it places little emphasis on profiling students’ pre-university experience. The study, of which the research reported in this paper is a small part, builds on the above research and hopes to supplement it by broadening the scope of profiling in terms of looking backwards and forwards, as well as looking across a wider range of students (in terms of origins, ethnicities, educational backgrounds and first languages) than has been previously attempted.

### **3 Methodology and Data**

The results reported in this paper are from an on-going profiling study taking place at the University of Hong Kong. The data are from questionnaire surveys at the beginning and end of the first semester of study with 63 first-year freshmen. The first questionnaire focuses on respondents' English learning experience in secondary school. In addition to demographic information, the questionnaire consists of 84 items covering self-perceived English learning needs, preferences and styles, learning and use of English in and out of class and self-perceived levels of proficiency. The second questionnaire consists of 50 items about respondents' experiences of learning and using English in and out of class at HKU and their self-perceived levels of proficiency. Descriptive and inferential statistics (such as dependent sample t-test and Pearson product-moment correlation) were employed to analyse the data.

### **4 Findings**

The following sections cover three main areas of findings: (1) respondents' self-perceived English learning needs and preferences; (2) exposure to English in and out of the classroom; and (3) self-perceived English proficiency. All of the statistical data reported below are based on questionnaire items using a 5-point Likert scale.

#### **4.1 Self-Perceived English Learning Needs and Preferences**

It is important for students to understand their own learning so as to know their weaknesses and develop personalized short- and long-term goals within the contexts of their studies and of their future careers. It is equally important for them to know their learning preferences to make appropriate choices of strategies and activities, especially when working beyond the classroom. Understanding students' needs and preferences also facilitates the development of pedagogical materials.

In their perceived needs for learning English (Table 1), respondents leaned towards those generated by academic studies, within both the immediate context (e.g. pursuing university study (4.86) and communicating with professors (4.51)) and longer term such as going abroad for study (4.87). Relatively high motivation for English learning also related to professional purposes such as work after graduation (4.7) and competitiveness in society (4.75). A lower priority was given to learning English for social purposes such as: participating in hall/society activities (3.05), or activities organized by the university (3.71), or activities organized by units outside the university (3.32)). Perhaps students perceive these as peripheral to their academic life.

Among the preferred English learning methods of those respondents who had learned English as a foreign language (Table 2), the most popular was chatting with foreigners (4.59) but they were less interested in learning through emailing them (3.9). Despite advancements in technology, students of the new generation still prefer the traditional methods of learning English reported by Littlewood and Liu (1996), particularly those with high entertainment value, as can be seen from the following

preference ratings: watching English TV channels (4.49), reading books (4.44) watching foreign movies (4.41), reading newspapers or magazines (4.24) and listening to radio/podcast/itunes (4.12). Surprisingly, despite the popularity of the Internet, related methods such as watching clips from YouTube (3.92) and surfing the internet (3.78) were not as highly rated as more traditional methods. The least preferred methods were grammar exercises (3.41) and visiting the English section of the Learning Commons (3.4). A few of them were not aware of the English support services provided in the Learning Commons.

**Table 1.** Perceived needs for learning English in priority order (N=63). Source: Survey 1.

I need English to...	Mean	S.D.
– go abroad for study	4.87	.38
– pursue my university study	4.86	.35
– increase my competitiveness in society	4.75	.65
– work after graduation	4.70	.59
– understand foreigners and their culture	4.57	.53
– communicate with my professors	4.51	.67
– travel overseas	4.49	.74
– see and understand the word in a different way	4.14	.88
– communicate with my course mates	3.92	.81
– make myself sound more knowledgeable	3.9	1.07
– participate in activities organized by university	3.71	1.02
– surf the internet	3.67	1.02
– participate in activities organized by units outside the university	3.32	1.13
– participate in hall/society activities	3.05 (N=61)	1.01

**Table 2.** English learning preferences (N=59). Source: Survey 1.

I prefer learning English by...	Mean	S.D.
– chatting with foreigners	4.59	.70
– watching English TV channels	4.49	.75
– reading books	4.44	.77
– watching foreign movies	4.41	.70
– reading newspapers or magazines	4.24	1.04
– listening to radio/podcast/itunes	4.12	.85
– attending classes	4.08	.90
– discussing with my classmates	4.08	.82
– watching clips from YouTube	3.92	.92
– emailing foreigners	3.90 (N=58)	1.02
– participating in group work with others	3.81	.94
– surfing the internet	3.78 (N=58)	.84
– doing grammar exercises	3.41	1.22
– visiting the English section (Zone R) of the Learning Commons	3.40 (N=55)	.91

Other aspects of learning preferences which warrant attention are concerned with the context of English lessons. The items in this section of the questionnaire were deliberately grouped in pairs to determine whether correlations existed between potentially related items, that is, whether a respondent's preference for a particular learning style (e.g. I prefer the teacher tell me the instructions) is matched with a negative rating for the style at the other end of the spectrum (e.g. I prefer learning by participating in activities). It is important to note that the mean scores of these "classroom-based" items (Table 3) fall into a more restricted range than for the generalized learning preferences discussed above (Table 2) and the means tend to be comparatively lower. Negative correlations were found between "I learn more when studying with a group" and "It is more effective if I study on my own" (Pair 2), and between "I feel more comfortable working with group mates with a similar level of proficiency" and "I prefer working with group mates with a higher level of proficiency than myself" (Pair 4). The  $p$  values indicate that the correlation coefficients for these pairs are statistically significant. Within these pairs the mean scores are similar but the correlations are strongly inverse. This suggests that there are distinct groups of students with diverse preferences for the ways they study and that the respondents are able to articulate those preferences clearly and distinctly. Pair 5 shows that despite the largest difference (0.37) between the mean scores of paired items, the correlation between "I prefer a native speaker to be my English teacher" and "I prefer a bilingual speaker (English and Chinese) to be my teacher" is very low and did not prove to be statistically significant. Such a result implies that those who preferred a native English speaker would not necessarily hold a negative view towards a bilingual speaker and vice versa. This issue of student preferences for a native or bilingual speaker appears to be complex and warrants further investigation.

**Table 3.** English learning preferences during English lessons (N=59). Source: Survey 1.

During an English lesson...		Mean	S.D.	Pearson Correlation
Pair 1	I prefer the teacher tell me the instructions	4.07	.68	.20
	I prefer learning by participating in activities	4.12	.83	
Pair 2	I learn more when studying with a group	3.66	.98	-.33**
	It is more effective if I study on my own	3.56	1.10	
Pair 3	I learn better when the teacher gives a lecture	3.60 (N=58)	.90	.19
	I learn better if the teacher uses multi-media resources	3.88	1.00	
Pair 4	I feel more comfortable working with group mates with a similar level of proficiency	3.95	.90	-.37**
	I prefer working with group mates with a higher level of proficiency than myself	3.95	.95	
Pair 5	I prefer a native English speaker to be my teacher	4.05	.91	-.16
	I prefer a bilingual (English and Chinese) speaker to be my teacher	3.68	.97	

\*\*  $p < .01$

## 4.2 Exposure to English in and out of the Classroom

The extent and depth of exposure to a target language, including opportunities to learn and practice it, are important contributors to developing competence and confidence with the language. Therefore, in profiling the English learning experience of the new generation of tertiary learners it is important to document this exposure. The study reported here takes a holistic view by considering out-of-class experience as well as the more traditional in-class experience. To gain the broadest picture, participants in the study were asked in the first survey to look back at their pre-university English learning experience and then in the second survey (after completion the university English course) to comment on their exposure to English at the university. Thus, two snapshots were produced which will be described and compared below.

Most striking about the first snapshot which looks back at the school English learning experience (Table 4) is that the mean scores are generally more subdued than those for responses about needs for learning English (Table 1) or preferred methods of learning (Tables 2 and 3), most of which were above a mean score of 4 and none of which were below a mean score of 3. This suggests that many respondents did not consider themselves to be particularly deeply engaged with their English learning experience at school. This apparent relatively modest level of exposure to English may also have been influenced by the medium of instruction of the school.

Despite the highest mean score being for respondents' claims of having been active learners of English at school (3.52) the supporting evidence is not strong. Most items indicating attempts to be proactive or independent as learners, and which are typically practiced as out-of-class activities, fall in the bottom half of the table while the top half is populated by items which seem to relate to teacher- or school-directed activities (with the possible exception of the use of YouTube in English).

**Table 4.** English learning experience at school (N=59). Source: Survey 1.

During my secondary school life...	Mean	S.D.
– I was an active learner of English.	3.52 (N=58)	1.01
– I watched clips from YouTube mainly in English.	3.51	1.32
– My English teachers used a wide range of resources to teach.	3.45 (N=58)	1.06
– I had a lot of opportunities to use English.	3.49	1.22
– I enjoyed school activities relating to English (e.g. English Day)	3.47	1.15
– I listened to radio/podcast/itunes in English.	3.44	1.11
– I often spoke and listened to English.	3.39	.98
– I exchanged messages (SMS, Whatsapp, Line, etc.) with my friends mainly in English.	3.36	1.31
– I always read the English newspaper/magazine.	3.07	1.08
– I did a lot of grammar exercises.	2.95	1.17
– I emailed my friends mainly in English.	2.93	1.28
– I took part in extra-curricular activities related to improving English.	2.91 (N=58)	1.14
– I constantly chatted with my schoolmates in English.	2.31	1.10

When commenting on their English learning experience in and outside of class at the university (Table 5), respondents expressed strongly their perception of the university as an institution where the medium of instruction is English (4.54) and that the Core University English course (CUE) was applicable to that context (4.19). They also indicated positively that there were many opportunities to use English in their classes (4.11). Although somewhat less highly rated, other aspects related to the use of English around the campus and in class, and to support for English were all scored positively and all but one were rated more highly than any of the items from the first survey which related to their English learning experience at secondary school (Table 4). However, the lowest mean scores in relation to the English learning experience at the university (the bottom three items in Table 5) all concern the use of English within the university context but outside the strictly academic arena. This demonstrates that many respondents were not in favour of using English for communication in contexts which are non-academic (e.g. social gatherings) or even semi-academic (e.g. informal meetings of classmates). Many respondents did not agree that English should be used as a primary language in university residential settings (2.93) and many believed it was not currently used in such settings (2.53), which is consistent with their generally low motivation to learn English for social purposes as mentioned before. The proportion of students who communicated with classmates in English outside the classroom setting was also relatively low (2.65) and contrasts with the mean of those who did communicate mostly in English with classmates while in class (3.35). This distinction between seeing English as an academic *lingua franca* and as a social *lingua franca* is one we will return to later.

**Table 5.** English learning experience at university (N=59). Source: Survey 2.

Exposure to English in and out of class at HKU...	Mean	S.D.
– English is the medium of instruction of HKU.	4.54	.62
– The skills I learnt from CUE are applicable to my study at HKU.	4.19	.56
– I have a lot of opportunities to use English in my classes at HKU.	4.11	.83
– I am comfortable using English when I need to.	3.89	.79
– I found the CUE out-of-class learning component useful.	3.82 (N=62)	.78
– The signs on campus are mostly written in English.	3.76	.86
– I am given enough help to improve my English.	3.71	.73
– I can find a lot of resources to improve my English.	3.7	.80
– I feel comfortable talking to my friends in English.	3.65	.94
– I mostly communicate with course mates in English in class.	3.35 (N=62)	1.04
– English should be the primary language used in all hall/society activities.	2.93 (N=58)	1.15
– I mostly communicate with course mates in English outside class time.	2.65	1.15
– English is mainly used in hall/society activities.	2.53 (N=53)	.87

Some comparisons within the data sets are instructive. Firstly, it is clear there is a clear distinction between perceived opportunities to use English at school (3.49) and in



the academic settings of the university (4.11). A dependent-samples t-test showed a significant difference ( $t = -3.80, p < .01$ ), and the magnitude of the difference in the means was medium (Cohen's  $d = 0.5$ ). This suggests that participants in the study perceived a real and positive difference in opportunities to use English within the context of the university. Secondly, for a comparison of perceived opportunities to use English in classes at the university (4.11) with whether communication with classmates at the university was mostly in English (3.35), only a weak correlation is found ( $r = .354, p < .01$ ) which suggests that the recognition of the opportunities may not always have translated into making full use of those opportunities, at least not in terms of in-class discussion. Finally, it is worth noting that despite the high level of agreement that English is the medium of instruction within the university (4.54) and that opportunities exist to use English in class at the university (4.11), the correlation between these items is weak and the result is not significant ( $r = .17; p = 0.20$ ).

### 4.3 Self-Perceived English Proficiencies

Respondents self-assessed their own English proficiency in the four language skills (writing, speaking, listening and reading) in both surveys in order to identify any perceived differences after taking their first university English course. No assumptions were made about potential changes and care was taken with item wording to avoid inadvertently encouraging assumptions among respondents. Indeed, it seems unlikely that changes would be great given the short interval between the two surveys (around 12 weeks) and that the content of the university English course was different from that of school courses. Tables 6 to 9 show the mean scores of proficiency-related items from both questionnaires (i.e. before and after the university English course). It should be noted that although perceived changes in listening and reading proficiency are small, the respondents' perceptions of their proficiency in those skills are generally higher than for writing and speaking. This suggests that students generally feel stronger in receptive skills than productive skills.

**Table 6.** Perceived changes in English speaking proficiency (N=63). Source: Surveys 1 and 2

Speaking	Mean (1 <sup>st</sup> )	S.D. (1 <sup>st</sup> )	Mean (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	S.D. (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	Mean difference
Use idioms and colloquial expressions	2.87	1.01	3.14	.95	+0.27*
Deliver an academic presentation	3.43 (N=62)	1.18	3.62	.81	+0.19
Pronounce words correctly	3.78	.89	3.83	.79	+0.15
Participate in in-class discussions	3.97	.74	4.08	.68	+0.11
Express prepared ideas or arguments in class	3.98	.77	4.03	.72	+0.05
Participate in spontaneous speaking	3.65	.88	3.68	.80	+0.03
Raise appropriate questions or comments in class	3.67 (N=61)	.93	3.67	.84	Nil
Respond to comments or questions in class	3.87 (N=62)	.76	3.84	.78	-0.03
Participate in informal conversation	4.13	.91	4.05	.83	-0.08
Use correct grammar	3.53 (N=62)	.88	3.44	.86	-0.09
Communicate successfully (with preparation)	4.05	.75	3.92	.83	-0.13

\*  $p < .05$

Respondents' self-perceived proficiency in spoken English had risen for six items by the end of the course with differences in pre- and post- means ranging from 0.13 to 0.27 (Table 6). Dependent-samples t-tests indicated that only the item about the use of idioms and colloquial expressions showed a significant rise from the beginning of the semester ( $M = 2.87$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) to the end of the semester ( $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = .95$ ),  $t(59) = -2.424$ ,  $p < .05$ , the magnitude of the difference in the means was medium (Cohen's  $d = 0.3$ ). There was a decline in the perceived proficiency in spoken English on four items, although the means differ only within the range 0.03 and 0.13.

Respondents rated their written proficiency higher in five items in the second survey (Table 7), with mean differences ranging between 0.06 and 0.44. Statistically significant differences relate to items about writing assignments with an academic tone and format ( $M_{1st} = 3.45$ ,  $SD_{1st} = .97$ ;  $M_{2nd} = 3.89$ ,  $SD_{2nd} = .72$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Cohen's  $d = 0.5$ ) and citing relevant resources to support the arguments ( $M_{1st} = 3.81$ ,  $SD_{1st} = .93$ ;  $M_{2nd} = 3.98$ ,  $SD_{2nd} = .76$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Cohen's  $d = 0.4$ ). These changes, with a medium magnitude of differences, are strongly consistent with the focus the first-year English course on academic writing and plagiarism. Respondents rated themselves lower in the second survey on communicating thoughts or ideas successfully and using correct grammar. This change was statistically significant. It may relate to a raised awareness of the difficulties of clear communication or that the stakes are higher in a university.

**Table 7.** Perceived changes in English writing proficiency (N=63). Source: Surveys 1 and 2

Writing	Mean (1 <sup>st</sup> )	S.D. (1 <sup>st</sup> )	Mean (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	S.D. (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	Mean Difference
Write assignments with an academic tone and format	3.45 (N=62)	.97	3.89	.72	+0.44**
Citing relevant resources to support the arguments	3.58 (N=62)	.93	3.97	.76	+0.39**
Paraphrasing (rewording) ideas	3.81	.88	3.98	.71	+0.17
Organise ideas or arguments coherently in essay-/report-type assignments	3.76 (N=62)	.82	3.82 (N=62)	.76	+0.06
Use idiomatic expressions	3.13	1.01	3.22	.85	+0.09
Use correct vocabulary items	3.84	.87	3.70	.78	-0.14
Use correct grammar	3.87	.92	3.68	.82	-0.19
Communicate your thoughts or ideas successfully	4.10	.69	3.87	.83	-0.23*

\*  $p < .05$     \*\*  $p < .01$

Respondents expressed a general increase in their perceived English listening abilities, with the mean score differences from 0.02 to 0.19 (Table 8). The item related to understanding different accents showed a significant difference ( $M_{1st} = 3.52$ ,  $SD_{1st} = .80$ ;  $M_{2nd} = 3.71$ ,  $SD_{2nd} = .96$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and the magnitude of the difference in the means was medium (Cohen's  $d = 0.3$ ), which could be explained by greater exposure to a variety of accents given the large numbers of international students and faculty members from overseas.

Respondents' perceptions of their proficiency in reading varied slightly between the beginning and end of the semester (Table 9) but none of the changes were statistically significant. There is currently no data to explain why this skill area changed the least although it is under further investigation.

**Table 8.** Perceived changes in English listening proficiency (N=63). Source: Surveys 1 and 2

Listening	Mean (1 <sup>st</sup> )	S.D. (1 <sup>st</sup> )	Mean (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	S.D. (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	Mean difference
Understand different accents	3.52 (N=62)	.80	3.71	.96	+0.19*
Understand informal conversation	4.00	.86	4.19	.67	+0.19
Identify key information	4.11	.79	4.19	.67	+0.08
Recognize the less important information in class, e.g. jokes	4.11 (N=61)	.84	4.13	.83	+0.02
Understand spoken English delivered at normal speed	4.29	.68	4.25	.69	-0.04

\*  $p < .05$

**Table 9.** Perceived changes in English reading proficiency (N=63). Source: Surveys 1 and 2

Reading	Mean (1 <sup>st</sup> )	S.D. (1 <sup>st</sup> )	Mean (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	S.D. (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	Mean difference
Guess the meaning of unfamiliar words	3.57	.92	3.83	.85	+0.26
Identify key points/arguments in a text	4.22	.85	4.22	.63	Nil
Identify the relationship among ideas, e.g. main/supporting ideas and examples	4.16	.79	4.14	.67	-0.02
Understand key vocabulary or concepts in various kinds of texts	4.05	.89	3.90	.82	-0.15

## 5 Conclusion

This paper has looked at tertiary students' perceptions of their English learning proficiency, needs and preferences, and their exposure to English in and outside the classroom. This was done within a framework of two snapshots looking back at the secondary school English learning experience and reflecting on the university experience after one semester (which included their first English course). The paper has identified key points in the group profile of these students. Firstly, they have a very strong concept of their need for English which revolves almost entirely around performing well in their university studies and in their future careers. This concept extends beyond success in assessments and interviews to encompass broader areas of intellectuality and communicative ability. Secondly, despite technological innovations some preferred approaches to language improvement remain unchanged. Thirdly, there is diversity in students' learning preferences and awareness about their own learning styles which will enable them to find their best learning strategies.

This study reveals that respondents perceive themselves as receiving a better English learning experience in the university than at school and that they are engaging, to an extent, with English outside the classroom. However, while accepting English as an academic *lingua franca*, considerable resistance remains to its use as a social *lingua franca*. This will cause difficulties for the continued internationalization of the university.

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