

INITIAL SURVEYS: BUSINESS ENGLISH CHOICE OF UEH AND COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Phan Xuan Thao, M.A.

I. Introduction

A. Background

UEH, one of the most prestigious universities in the field of Economics, Management and Business in Vietnam, has had high admission scores in the National High School Leaving Exam up to now. In the 2015-2016 academic year, UEH has recruited a new field of study: the English Language, Business English (BE) major. A new BE curriculum has been developed and uploaded on the School of Foreign Languages for Economics (SFLE) website. Among more than 600 students who registered online in order to be accepted at SFLE, Course 1, majored in BE, has attracted more than 80 students to satisfy the requirements for admissions to the School of Foreign Languages for Economics, UEH. Similarly, with UEH training prestige in the Business field, these BE students also attain high university entrance entry scores in comparison with those of BE students at other well-established universities shown in the following table.

University	Foreign Trade	UEH	Education	Saigon	Banking	Finance-Marketing	Open	Social Sciences & Humanities	Law
Entry scores	33,50	31,67	31,33	30,25	29,74	29,50	28,25	24,0	20,25

(source: government electronic information HCMC)¹

B. Research questions

This study aims to investigate the two main issues concerning BE students who attain high university entrance entry scores at UEH as follows.

- (i) who are the students and what is BE choice of UEH?
- (ii) what are their BE course expectations at UEH?

Thus, the stage is set for the Methods section that follows.

II. Methods

A. Participants

The orientation session for new students was on 26th September, 2015 on Campus B. The writer took this opportunity and conducted a quick preliminary survey on some main issues. For the last fifteen minutes of the session, a total of 86 questionnaires (Appendix A) were distributed to the two BE classes after one week of class contact hours at the university and 80 questionnaires were returned.

B. Survey Instrument

To answer the above two research questions, the writer developed a questionnaire of 10 questions. The two parts function as (i) brief biodata, self-ratings and (ii) feelings/impressions, course expectations.

Firstly, brief biodata typically elicit biographical background data from the respondents. Such data include each respondent's name, age, class number, place of birth, sex, and English certificates.

One more part functions as self-ratings which typically require the respondents to rate their own abilities, interest levels, motivations, and so forth. Such ratings can provide practical insights into the self-image of the individuals, even if the ratings themselves are not 100 percent accurate. Such self-ratings include their language strengths and weaknesses, reasons for choosing UEH's BE and use of English at work in the future.

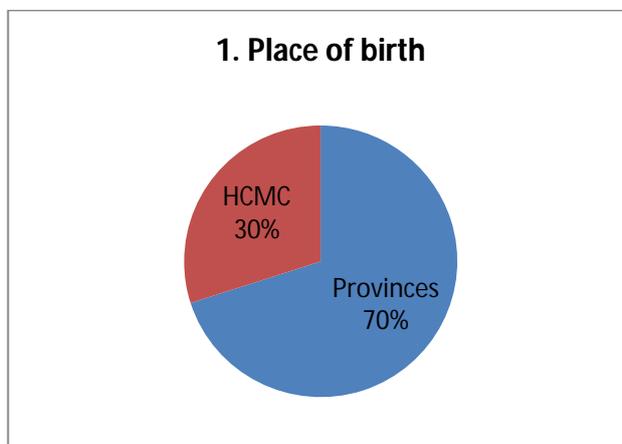
In the last part, the feelings/impressions questions seek to investigate the respondents' emotions or emotional reactions, impressions and thoughts on various aspects of Market Leader coursebook - pre

¹ Tổng hợp số liệu tại cổng thông tin chính phủ TPHCM có địa chỉ: <http://hochiminhcity.vn/diem-chuan-nhieu-truong-dh-tai-tphcm-cao-chot-vot>

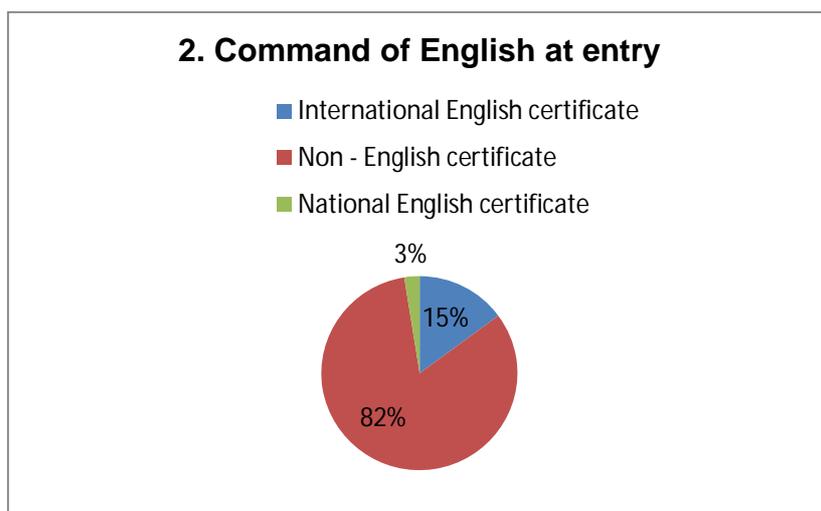
intermediate, the language skill teachers, the teaching methods, the classroom activities, the language classroom (A 308), the skill(s) they like most and their special hopes for the four-year course (K41).

III. Results and discussion

The Results and Discussion section, which follows directly after the Methods section, provides a technical report of the statistical results of the study on the Excel software and direct answers to the two questions posed at the beginning of the study. For the sake of clarity and brevity, each question will be discussed respectively.



In chart 1, about 30% were born in HCM City whereas approximately 70% of freshmen come from provinces throughout the country from Hanoi, Nam Đĩnh, Quang Tri, Binh Đĩnh, Phu Yen to Vung Tau, Ben Tre, Binh Duong.



In chart 2, more than 80% do not have any English certificates and the rest have national and international English certificates such as A,B,C; IELTS, TOEIC, TOFEL. Three students of them have 7.5 IELTS scores; one has 7.0 IELTS scores; three has 6.5 IELTS scores; one has 5.5 IELTS scores. Only one has 610 TOEIC scores. Only one has 106 TOFEL scores.

Question 3: Language strengths

Skill/Knowledge	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Grammar	Pronunciation	Vocabulary ²
students	19	20	35	11	74	32	72
%	24%	25%	44%	14%	93%	40%	90%

² General vocabulary in high school English textbooks

Question 4. Language weaknesses

Skill/Knowledge	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Grammar	Pronunciation	Vocabulary
students	46	38	22	31	2	12	4
%	58%	48%	28%	39%	3%	15%	5%

Of the four language skills, the freshmen can read the best while their weakest listening skill accounts for more than 60%. Almost 50% really want to improve their speaking skill and about 40% are motivated to polish their writing skill. The current state of language strengths and weaknesses in present Vietnam is obvious in TESOL seminars, journals and language conferences. In Vietnam National Foreign Language Project 2020, the development of practical communication skill and listening skill is rarely reflected at the classroom level, where the emphasis is on the development of reading comprehension, vocabulary and structural patterns for the purpose of passing the end-of-school and university entrance examinations into colleges or universities (Hung, N.2013).

Question 5. Main reasons for choosing BE at UEH

Reasons	Prestige/Fame in business training	Interest in Business English major	Recommendations from parents, UEH students, alumni, close acquaintances	Campuses in central locations	Others: website, success stories, etc.
Students	18	42	26	16	5
%	23%	53%	33%	20%	6%

The main reason for choosing BE major at UEH is that UEH is one of the most prestigious universities in Vietnam in the field of Economics, Management and Business. Their real interest and high motivation are both English competence and knowledge of Economics, Management and Business with the hope that they will have many educational and employment opportunities. This total accounts for about 80%. One interesting thing about their trust in UEH education and training is that their parents, relatives, friends, UEH students, alumni, and close acquaintances who used to be students or are now studying at UEH make their recommendations with about 20%. Moreover, 10% of the students choose UEH because the campuses are in central locations. Moreover, some BE freshmen admire many successful businessmen and influential officials who have graduated from UEH. A few refer to UEH's informative and professional website. Other reasons are that they can get involved in the active environment, develop personally and academically, and get jobs easily with a BE degree.

Question 6

Use of English at work in the future	Students	Percentage
In foreign companies, Vietnam-foreign joint ventures, multinationals and international institutions	66	83%
Being an interpreter or a translator	22	28%
Teaching BE	9	11%
Transferring to business-related majors in English	6	8%
Being a tour guide	2	3%
Studying abroad	2	3%
Others: studying for MBA, being a secretary, a diplomat	2	3%

Answers to Question 6 show that (i) more than 80% want to work in foreign companies, Vietnam-foreign joint ventures, multinationals and international institutions; (ii) almost 30% would like to become interpreters or translators; (iii) 5% can be Business English teachers; (iv) 8% really want to learn Business- and Management-related majors in Vietnamese or in English; (v) 3% can be tour guides or study abroad; (vi) 3% can be studying for MBA, a secretary or a diplomat.

Question 7. Feelings / impressions on Market Leader

Level of difficulty	difficult	moderate	easy	no comments
	12	67	4	1
	15%	84%	5%	1%
Level of interest	interesting/novel	uninteresting		
	75	5		
	94%	6%		

Question 7 deals with their feelings on Market Leader core coursebook by Pearson - preintermediate in terms of its difficulty level. More than 80% say the core coursebook is neither difficult nor easy. Regarding its interest level, about 90% find it novel, unfamiliar but attractive, compelling.

Question 8. Feelings on teachers in charge

In Question 8, almost all of them appreciate SFLE teachers in charge because they are strongly convinced that they are well-qualified, friendly, devoted and nice. However, three students say that the teachers speak English fast and teach lessons very quickly.

Feelings	well-qualified	teaching quickly	friendly, devoted
students	73	3	76
%	91%	4%	95%

Feelings on teaching methods	exciting	not exciting
students	74	3
%	93%	4%

94% agree that the teaching methods are exciting, but 4% of them don't. Interestingly, they explain they work a lot in pairs and in groups, listen and discuss many different issues, interact with each other and report them back in front of class. They also get feedback from teachers and make sense of what has been learned. Technically, the task-based, topic-based, skill-based and communicative approach has been applied. Although these pre-experience learners are open-minded, they lack confidence in their ability to deal with business subject matter and they haven't had any experience or content to contribute effectively to meetings, negotiations, presentations, reports, etc. (Ellis, M. & Johnson, C. 2000).

The most favourite skill(s)	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing (not yet learnt)
Students	33	46	10	
%	41%	58%	13%	

Clearly, they prefer listening and speaking skills to reading skill because mainly they are asked to read a lot at high school and get bored. As experienced BE teachers at UEH, we should raise student awareness of the fact that reading business concepts, texts, articles, and materials is the most important skill for business basics and fundamentals and also the best way to learn business words and expressions in contexts. Generally speaking, most of them are impressed by the way the SFLE teachers in charge conduct the classroom activities.

Unsuitable classroom activities	Students	%
Making presentations in the first year	2	3%
Speaking without teacher correction	2	3%
Teaching business vocabulary fast	1	1%
Lack of technical terminology in Vietnamese	1	1%

Only six students think the unsuitable classroom activities include giving presentations in the first year, speaking without teacher correction, teaching business vocabulary fast, and lack of technical terminology in Vietnamese. It can be said that, with some justification, these freshmen are not aware of the pedagogic purposes.

Question 9

Room A 308	small	very cold	bad LAB system
students	18	7	5
%	23%	9%	6%

Question 9 shows that physically the classroom (A 308) is small for a class of more than 40 and it is difficult to move. The freshmen in the last rows complain that they can't see the flipchart. Sometimes, the air conditioning is not set at the right temperature level, so some students feel very cold. That is a well-equipped Lab room, but the LAB operating system doesn't work. One more thing to consider is that the Lab room is not suitable for interactive and communicative classes when there is a need for role plays, simulations, presentations, debates, discussions, etc.

Question 10

Student expectations of a four-year course	Students	Percentage
1. proficient user in BE	80	100%
2. specialist/technical knowledge in English	80	100%
3. working part-time	1	1%
4. Japanese	11	14%
5. studying an extra major at UEH (HR management, International Trade, etc.)	6	8%
6. student support services	76	95%
7. learning with a native speaker of English	2	3%
8. activities, workshops, seminars	68	85%
9. practising in companies and having student exchange with schools inside and outside Vietnam	2	3%
10. expecting to be recommended for references in learning English and technical subjects	3	4%
11. partaking in outdoor activities: camping, making videos, etc.	1	1%

Question 10 is a kind of open-response questions, so it has a wide range of possible answers, and it is exploratory in nature. However, it is relatively difficult to analyze and some answers tend to be rather subjective.

Almost all of them wish to be provided with solid linguistic foundations, broad specialist knowledge of Economics, Management and Business theory and practice and specialized terminology. Interestingly, one student says, "It is fun to learn English and content in English."

More than 80% who are highly proficient and highly motivated are looking forward to rich, colorful activities, workshops, and contests. More than 10% suggest the second foreign language should be Japanese instead of French. Approximately 10% wish to learn an extra academic discipline in UEH with the purpose of having a competitive advantage in job seeking. 3% need to be introduced to part-time work. In addition, 3% want to practise in companies and have student exchange with schools inside and outside Vietnam to get practical, authentic experience so that they have enough skills when they go to work. A few expect to be recommended for references in learning English and technical subjects.

IV. Implications:

Based on the Result / Discussion section above, there will be some implications for BE curriculum development, materials development, teaching methods, procedures and activities.

1. Through the results of the 80 questionnaires in a quick preliminary survey on some main issues in comparison with the BE curriculum on the SFLE website, the writer strongly believes there is a good match between BE curriculum development and freshmen's needs and preferences. More importantly, in Question 8, almost all of the freshmen (more than 90%) appreciate the SFLE teachers in charge because the students

are strongly convinced that they are well-qualified, friendly, devoted and nice. In practice, the teachers are regarded as the most decisive factor for the success and good quality of the curriculum.

2. Based on the responses to Questions 6 and 10, the students really need Economics knowledge when they choose BE at UEH. To make the most of the opportunities for Economics - related content and language content, the implication is the perfect and successful combination of the content teacher and the language teacher.

3. The teaching of BE at pre-intermediate level from the start is neither difficult nor easy. One more implication is that this has made the freshmen develop the highest aspirations and motivation in the classroom activities and it is easy for the teachers to promote learner autonomy outside the classroom.

4. The most important thing is that the freshmen have a good linguistic knowledge of English, especially grammatical structures, but find it very difficult to express themselves appropriately in business situations in spoken and written discourse. To maximize the effectiveness of these productive skills, the implication is the team teaching between Vietnamese teachers of English and native teachers of English with a background and experience in business.

5. The amount of course time is limited. Most important in BE teaching is deciding on the balance of teaching time to be spent on input and output. These able students can be given business vocabulary, detailed and lengthy reading and listening material to study in their own time rather than wasting valuable class time focusing on the printed page. This has an implication for a much larger proportion of the course time for output than input.

V. Limitations of the initial survey

1. In the schedule, writing skill will be learnt after the students finish Listening, Speaking and Reading skills, so the feelings and impressions on writing skill are still unknown.

2. After one week's class contact hours, the study focuses on gathering general information about who the students are and what their course expectations are, so brief biodata, self-ratings and feelings/impressions questions have been formed. Over the years of academic study, their needs and expectations may change and become perceived clearly.

Judgement/opinion/view/value/attitude/problem questions and other information-gathering tools will be formulated later in full-scale research and all aspects of the teaching and learning of BE at UEH will be investigated.

REFERENCES

1. Brown, J.D.(1995). *Understanding research in second language learning*. CUP
2. Allwright, D. & Bailey M. L. (1996). *Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research for Language Teachers*. CUP.
3. Weidenborner, S & Caruso, D. (1994). *Writing Research Papers. A Guide to the Process*. Library of Congress Catalog Card Number:92-62780.

APPENDIX A (ENGLISH)

Biodata and first impressions questionnaire for BE freshmen K41

Please take some time to answer the following questions. We need your feelings/impressions so that we can meet your needs. Many thanks for your help.

1. Full name: _____ Class: _____ Age: _____
Place of birth: _____ Sex: _____
2. Command of English at entry:
 - a. International English certificates: _____
 - b. National English certificate: _____
 - c. Non - English certificate: _____
3. Language strengths:
 - a. Listening b. Speaking c. Reading d. Writing e. Grammar f. Pronunciation c. Vocabulary
4. Language Weaknesses:
 - a. Listening b. Speaking c. Reading d. Writing e. Grammar f. Pronunciation c. Vocabulary
5. Main reasons for choosing BE at UEH:
 - a. Prestige/Fame
 - b. Business English major
 - c. Recommendations from parents, UEH students, alumni, and close acquaintances
 - d. close to house
 - e. others: _____
6. Use of English at work in the future:
 - a. in foreign companies, joint ventures, multinationals and international institutions
 - b. being an interpreter or a translator
 - c. teaching BE
 - d. transfer to business-related majors in English
 - e. being a tour guide
 - f. studying abroad
 - g. others: _____
7. Feelings / impressions on Market Leader core coursebook by Pearson-preintermediate:
+ difficulty level: a. difficult b. moderate c. easy d. no
comments
+ interest level: a. interesting/novel b. uninteresting
8. How do you feel about
+ the SFLE teaching staff in charge?: _____
+ their teaching methods?: _____
+ the classroom activities?: _____
+ the most favourite skill(s)?: _____
9. What are your classrooms (A 308) like physically?
+ size:
+ air conditioning:
+ equipment:
10. Student expectations of the four-year course (K41). Please describe: _____