Supporting international students: discovering why many AIBS students from the Far East are encountering difficulties in achieving success in their degree at ARU, what can be done to improve their performance, and devising a strategy to implement the support they need.

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‘This Strategy document does not reside in isolation but rather it links with and integrates a wide range of other policies – such as the Human Resource Strategy and quality assurance and enhancement processes. The concept of a separate e-learning strategy has been rejected and is to be found here as an integral part of supporting and enhancing students’ experiences of learning, teaching and assessment.’

Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2007—2010, Anglia Ruskin University

‘The focus of our work is now on preparing students to engage more effectively with our learning and teaching practices, an even greater concentration on specific English language skills needed in the classroom, and on staff development to ensure that our academic community is aware of best practice in the sector.’

Vice Chancellor’s Briefing No 20, March 2010 Anglia Ruskin University

Abstract

AIBS has more international students now than at any time in its history according to the Vice-Chancellor’s Briefing Paper of June 2010. An increasing number of these have been coming from the Far East. They have been actively recruited from partner institutions and through agents in countries including China, Taiwan, Malaysia and Vietnam. Many of these students, however, have found the learning culture and what is expected of students at British universities to be very different from what they have been used to in their home countries. Many of them have not succeeded and this paper describes the research carried out to investigate why they have been failing and what action could be taken to ensure that students from the Far East are helped to achieve their potential during their undergraduate or postgraduate studies.

We first explore the background to the study - the student experience and the staff experience at AIBS. We then provide an outline of the research project with an analysis of our findings. The paper concludes with recommendations for Academic English for Business provision for the next academic year and over the next 2 years, recommendations for the support of Far East students in general and in particular, for those coming from China and Hong Kong. The final aim of this project is to provide the Business School with a model for AEB for Far East students that will make a qualitative difference to the student experience and to create a more level playing field for our international students and further, to work with and provide support for colleagues in the Department through efficient communication (see Appendix 1).

The Student Experience

There are clear differences in the way that students from the Far East approach their academic studies and indeed, in the way that they are taught in higher education institutions in their countries. There are also enormous linguistic and cultural differences, and the ability
to cope with these varies widely from student to student. Despite these hurdles, for both economic and cultural reasons, students are drawn to study in the UK to learn how to think critically, to problem-solve, to become fluent in what is still regarded as the world’s most spoken language, and to understand the wider world beyond their countries’ borders. ‘225,720 students are from overseas, representing 12.3% of all student enrolments. Overseas students make up 40.4% of the full-time postgraduate students in the UK.’ Higher Education Statistics Academy figures for 2000-1 (HESA, 2001). More recent figures indicate that though there are other large national groups taking up university places this current academic year, ‘Students from mainland China remained the largest overseas group at 47,035 - up 3.7 per cent on the year before.’ (Times Higher Education, 1 April 2010).

Learning styles and approaches also vary widely, and the contrast between the way learners approach their learning in Western cultures and the way it is approached by Far East students is particularly pronounced, as explained by Ng (2007):

‘The differences in learning styles may be more pronounced in the case of Far East students, particularly those with Confucian backgrounds. Far East cultures are generally considered to have different approaches to philosophy, knowledge and debate, and to exhibit different habits of mind. Despite some reservations (e.g. Ortner, 2003), Nisbett’s (2003) review of numerous research papers in experimental psychology demonstrates that the Western Aristotelian-based attitude is based in the need to control others and the world through the creation of mental models by categorizing objects and events to answer the questions of ‘why?’ and ‘who is right?’. This attitude focuses on attempting to obtain underlying principles through debate, and is linked into thinking that education is good in its own right. In contrast, the Eastern, Confucian-based attitude is not concerned with control of others or the environment, but is rather concerned with self-control. Debate is discouraged as leading to discord, and there is often a willingness to concede merit in the other person’s point of view. There is not really an interest in ‘why?’ or ‘who is right?’ but rather in answering more pragmatic ‘how’ questions. Education, in this regard is valued for the practical consequences of action. A compilation of the differences between ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ habits of mind arising from this attitude is presented in Table 1(authors’ note: see Appendix --). Admittedly, there are differences between Asian countries, as well as gender differences which interact with culture (just as it is similarly flawed to consider Westerners as a homogenous group). Yet broad differences exist, and it is not surprising that a learning/teaching gap may exist when Far East students study in the UK.’

Noor (2006, p.65), in his study of Malaysian students describes the difference between the Western approach to learning and that of the Far East students’ approach which he studied:

‘A deep approach (authors' note:Western) is associated with intrinsic motivation and a focus on understanding the meaning of the learning material. In contrast, a surface approach (authors' note:Far Eastern) focuses on memorizing discrete items in isolation resulting in superficial understanding of the learning material.’

Suffice it to say that the differences in approaches to learning for Far East students can be marked, and as such may present difficulties for learners. That, along with a possibly low level of English ranging from around 5.5 IELTS for entry for undergraduate students to 6.0 or 6.5 IELTS for post-graduates, partnership university students arriving to take up their third year of studies with little knowledge of the modules they are to study, and it is not difficult to imagine their problems with coping with their heavy workloads.
This paper will ascertain to what extent all the above observations are genuine problems for Far East students studying at AIBS, whether they contribute to poor student retention for students from this region of the world and finally, what AIBS and the Academic English for Business staff can further provide in order to improve the Far East student experience.

The Staff Experience

The experience of these students' lecturers and module leaders has also contributed to this study and its recommendations. In response to comments from our colleagues despairing at the weak language abilities of Far East students, their apparent inability to understand what was expected of them in assignments, and of some students, their disappearance from lectures after a few weeks, it was clear to all that AIBS needed a decisive pro-active approach. AEB has been running for over 12 years at AIBS, and has always prided itself on providing modules which met the language and academic needs of all international students. However, the researchers believe that some students have not made full benefit of the support offered and that a more effective model is required to meet students' needs in the future.

Methodology

Over a period of a year several discussions have taken place with focus groups of students from the Far East studying at AIBS; additionally, individual questionnaires were completed which ask them to compare and comment upon their experiences of studying at ARU compared with studying in their home country at school or university.

The researchers have endeavoured to find out why students have not been able to perform well in assignments (for example, 15-20% of students failed Marketing Communications and a quarter of these failures were Far East students), what barriers exist for them to be successful students and to what extent their expectations have been met during their time here.

The researchers also contacted several lecturers teaching these students and asked their views of the students' learning and their performance in assessment.

Findings

Following on the information which emerged from these discussions and the questionnaires, the researchers have attempted to construct a coherent strategy that could be put in place to enable students to adapt more successfully to learning, teaching and assessment styles in AIBS; they would thus ultimately achieve higher grades in their assignments and leave the UK with considerably greater knowledge and skills for their future careers in the world of international business. Students would also hopefully be able to leave ARU with the satisfaction that they had earned a worthwhile degree; the sacrifice many of them make in terms of leaving family and friends, usually also investing a considerable amount of time, effort and money in their UK university education, would then have been a fulfilling and personally rewarding one. At the current time there are many who are not succeeding with integrity and who leave after their time at ARU without the qualifications they hoped to achieve or who have a difficult and stressful experience during their academic course. However, there are some Far East students who seem to have achieved high marks but these are only a small proportion. It would be useful to examine the reasons why they have succeeded where most others have not.
Barriers to Success

This research has found that the barriers to success can be divided into different groups: firstly, in recruitment and the problems with entry qualifications in academic subjects and in English Language; secondly, the problems of learning to adapt to a totally different structure at ARU from what they have been used to; thirdly, accessing staff and systems which are in place specifically to help international students to succeed in their studies; fourthly, the problem of students arriving late and entering courses as late as five weeks after the start of the course; fifthly, the difficulties in understanding clearly what they are required to do in following instructions and completing assignments set and finally, being able to acquire and use the skills which enable them to fulfil these assignment requirements.

English Language Requirements

Entry qualifications have proved to vary from the officially required ideal for AIBS of IELTS 5.5 (undergraduate) and IELTS 6.5 (postgraduate) (see Appendix 2). This is partly because not all these students have taken IELTS qualifications; many are accepted through arrangements with partner institutions and specialist EAP staff have rarely been personally involved in on-site testing abroad; even those students with IELTS qualifications may not all have acquired them recently: some may have bought falsified certificates or had other students impersonate them in exams. All of these malpractices have come to light during the research. Some students whose English was inadequate have been accepted onto EFL courses in ARU in the hope that at the end of the course they would be possess the required level of English to be able to join an undergraduate or undergraduate course. Two students from Thailand on a postgraduate degree in AIBS fall into this group: one was put on an Intermediate level EFL course and the other onto an Upper Intermediate course; the end result at the end of these courses would not be high enough to undertake the complex tasks demanded of postgraduate written and oral work and to improve reading skill to a level required for their research. Inevitably these students struggled to read, write and speak in English. This situation is seen to be the case around the UK, according to the Guardian Weekly, (19.06.09), 'The evidence gathered by the QAA from administrators, academics and students in England suggests that some students are struggling even though they have met their institution’s English-language entry requirements. As a result, the QAA has recommended that universities review the way they use English language tests, such as IELTS and TOEFL...'

Even those with a valid, genuine IELTS score at the required level may find that this is inadequate for the demands of their assignments. The IELTS score is in fact a composite of four individual scores in the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. On investigation, several students were found to have quite low writing scores and other skills had compensated for this to produce an overall score at the required level. The IELTS writing test consists of a 250-word essay and a report task; the first writing assignment at ARU is an assessed assignment of possibly between 3,000 and 5,000 words involving complex analysis and discussion. Few lecturers have the time or the energy to set and mark formative assignments involving writing of this length. Nor in the Academic English for Business classes is writing of this length practised, and in any case students would not want to spend time producing work of this length which did not count towards assessment.

Academic Practice - a cultural and linguistic mismatch

Another obstacle to learning involves the different academic practice and structure at UK universities compared with those in the Far East, according to the students interviewed. Lectures there were based mainly on one core textbook and the students were expected in their examinations to reproduce the lectures based on that textbook. Regurgitation is the key
here. Assignments did not require searching different sources and acknowledging analysing, comparing and contrasting these. The requirements of assignments in UK universities make quite different demands of students and it is difficult for Far Eastern students to realise this. Lecturers have stated that students have handed in work without any bibliography or references, or had only one or two references. There are many instances of translation of work on the topic found on the internet in their own language and used as if it were their own work. Understanding what academic scholarship involves is a major step for these students.

In many Far Eastern universities oral presentations and group presentations are not common forms of assessment as at ARU. Examinations are much more common (and require far less research skills, much less writing, less “deep” learning and quite different skills as required in undertaking either oral or written assignments). Some non Far Eastern students have frequently complained that they cannot understand the Far Eastern students when they speak and many Far Eastern students themselves are often reluctant to speak English in seminars or indeed in social situations because of their lack of practice in this skill and custom of listening rather than discussing in university classes.

In 2009 the AIBS office was telephoned by Immigration officers at Heathrow who were unable to believe that two Far Eastern students were returning to do their second semester on a postgraduate course at ARU as their spoken English was unintelligible. One student complained that she could not hear the lecturer as she did not speak loudly enough; as this student was in the front row, it was not the volume level of the lecturer’s voice that prevented comprehension, but the language and the content that the student could not understand. Thus a level of and a use of speaking and listening skills are demanded at UK universities which are not required to the same extent at their home universities.

Staffing Structure and Academic Roles – a confusing picture for students

Another barrier to learning which was unexpectedly found was that the structure and roles of academic staff are different: students said they found it difficult to know who was in charge of their courses and their modules and found staff difficult to contact; they believed that the personal tutor they were allocated to in ARU should help explain their lectures. They could not understand that the role of the personal tutor at ARU is not an academic one and that the personal tutor would not usually be one of their lecturers. They expected to be able to find their lecturer after the lecture in his or her office and to be able to go and talk to them about any part of the lecture they needed explaining further; lecturers were always full-time and on the premises in their offices to be available to students during the working day and the working week; many AIBS staff are increasingly part-time, different part-timers take the module seminars on modules with large numbers and are not easily available to see students; in any case these part-time staff have nowhere to see students for one-to-one help in private as there is one staffroom for all part-time lecturers and seeing students there would disturb other staff trying to prepare classes. Several staff are in their offices infrequently and are busy on their research or travelling or working abroad. Students have expressed how difficult it is to find staff when they want to discuss their work and sometimes are told that staff are too busy to see them. Obviously staff are supposed to put up times of three hours when they are available to see students but for students used to much more availability in their home schools and universities of full-time staff who are on premises at last 9 to 5 five days a week these three office hours seem totally inadequate to Far Eastern students; part-time staff do not have office hours. The personal tutor concept is not a familiar one for Far Eastern students and the role of the Student Adviser and mitigation is also unfamiliar; it would seem that students are not allowed to give excuses for inability to hand in work on time and the practice of extensions which is becoming increasingly common is apparently unknown in the Far Eastern institutions from which the students interviewed come from.
Contact hours and Student Expectations

A further problem is that students from the Far East, and indeed most international students, when they first arrive find that the number of taught contact hours is very much lower than in their institutions back home where they may be taught up to as many as forty hours a week. It is a great adjustment to have so much “free” time and this would seem to be a major cause of failure for those students who sleep in the mornings rather than attend their classes; students also find paid work of a brain-deadening nature, as a supermarket employee for example; they are not accustomed to having the majority of their time for their own self-study, research and preparation for lectures. The help that the ARU library offers in terms of weekly seminars at different times useful topics such as assignment preparation, writing essays, research skills, etc are not taken advantage of. Many of these useful sessions attract only a handful of students. After a while far from complaining there are not enough hours, weaker students start failing to attend the few hours of lectures and seminars they do have. Students told us the university should have more hours of lectures and be far stricter on attendance as in China.

Two Chinese students in their third year studying a module on the Japanese Economy attended only two classes in that module and inevitably failed the assignments, one through plagiarising. Some students admit that they are not worried about failing or not even turning up to an exam or giving in an assignment as they could resit later; as the students who submitted assignments on time would have had them marked and returned by then and as the same assignment was set for the resit, they could copy the assignment a friend had done who had passed. In some cultures copying a friend’s work would not be a major offence; in fact it would be worse not to help a friend or relative with their work. Several students in a Marketing module handed in an assignment which was not on the company set; one student handed in an article taken from the Economist and of no relevance to the assignment set.

Late Enrolments

A fourth barrier to success is late enrolment. Perhaps because of visa problems or making their application late students arrive sometimes several weeks into a course and may miss up to a third of the course. They do not then undergo the same carefully thought out comprehensive induction and familiarisation process their fellow students who were there for induction week and the start of the course have undergone and often miss vital information given out during that time. Thus several students said they were not aware of the Academic English support classes and had not been tested as were the other students; this had a marked adverse effect on some of the weaker students.

Assignment instructions

A fifth difficulty for Far Eastern students, and perhaps for all students, is understanding and following the instructions given in assignments. This would seem to vary from lecturer to lecturer; in fact, in a recent case a student claimed that two of his lecturers stated that there were no marking criteria for assignments and that lecturers could mark how they liked; they were unable to explain why this student had not obtained the marks he had expected. Additionally, several students stated that lecturers varied considerably regarding their requirements: some were adamant that the students must write using good English; others were prepared to ignore English errors and just try to decipher the content. Students tended to be more diligent in their work for the former type of lecturer. As Cortazzi and Jin explain
Many lecturers are unsure whether to make allowances for students' weak English, marking what they think is meant and deciphering what is actually written (Cortazzi and Jin 1997). The university policy on the standard of English for assignments did not seem to be clear or consistent to these students.

Lack of language skills

However, the greatest barrier to success is the lack of language skills. According to Carroll (2008), there are serious concerns amongst academic staff regarding how to assess international students due to their often limited language skills. To complete assignments successfully requires a level of academic English which is very high in terms of vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, the ability to summarise etc. all of which are difficult for many students for whom English is their first language, let alone foreign students with a language that is very different from English. It is in fact remarkable what the international students are able to achieve and one wonders whether native speakers write assignments to the standard required if they attended a Chinese university. Even in the former language degrees at ARU dissertations could be written in English rather than the language studied. Students need to have practised skills involving paraphrasing, which requires a very advanced vocabulary, the ability to compose complex sentences, a familiarity with using the type of language academic work required for introducing quotations from researchers, summarising others' work without plagiarising, discussing and critically analysing differing viewpoints.

All these language skills are necessary but few students possess them, particularly if their IELTS score is below 7.0 in writing. No writing practice at length in preparation for written assignments is carried out prior to tackling assignments even if attending the AEB class. In fact it is only when the assignments are written and then brought to one-to-one sessions with the AEB lecturers that they are worked on together with a native speaker expert and then students do begin to learn to use the requisite language. This is a view also shared by Cortazzi and Jin (1997): lack of time is a problem - it takes time to teach the necessary skills, to provide practice and offer feedback, and international Far Eastern students take a longer time to read and write than native speakers, yet have the same deadline. This evidence has also been observed by a number of researchers, e.g. Koda, (1999), who have indicated that Chinese speakers may read by visually mapping Chinese logographic symbols, so that reading English requires more effort to decode words on the page or screen, and this has also been commented on by Chinese students studying at AIBS. Students who really need help avail themselves of it either in the Academic English classes or the one-to-one tutorials, particularly if they are taking a long time to acquire the content of assignment set and are unable to finish their work ahead of time. Although attendance has improved considerably over the last year many students drop out if the class is too large and also cease attending as assignment work builds up. Of course the weakest students then often resort to plagiarism to escape their predicament and hope that lecturers are too busy with heavy loads of marking to deadlines to take more time to go through the time-consuming scanning and investigation of plagiarism procedures. Such students resort to plagiarism in desperation as it is the only way they can meet deadlines. Many Chinese students download material from Chinese websites and then translate it with difficulty. Some students give up altogether, defeated by the immense task before them. This perhaps explains the number of non-submissions listed at the beginning of the module mark sheets.
Recommendations

What then should be the strategies for improving these students’ performance and their experience in AIBS? How do we prepare ‘students to engage more effectively with our learning and teaching practices’ (Thorne, 2010)?

Our experience in AEB over the past few years along with our recommendations from this research project indicate strongly that greater academic success can be achieved when:

1. All incoming students, including late arrivals, are tested within AIBS by the AEB specialist staff.

2. Students who have been identified by the AEB staff as needing additional language skills to succeed in their studies are required to attend the Academic English Skills for Business classes.

3. In recognition of their attendance and achievement students are awarded with an Academic English Skills for Business certificate from the University which will enhance their employability.

4. Students are additionally offered the opportunity to prepare for the University of Cambridge Business English Certificate or the International Certificate of Financial English, both of which are qualifications internationally recognised by the business world.

5. Students are provided with a carefully structured AEB timetable tailor-made to their academic and study needs as they go through the academic year; this involves class tuition and one-to-one individual guidance.

6. Close liaison exists between the AEB staff within AIBS and the specialist subject lecturers; for example, module programmes are discussed with AEB staff and the skills needed for assignments taught in co-ordination with the teaching and assignment schedule.

7. Specialist subject lecturers ensure their assignment instructions are clear and consistent across the Business School and that there is academic parity in their expectations, particularly concerning the level of English required.

8. Sessions are designed to help students with preparing for assignments by going over the structure of the assignment, the linguistic resources required, giving sufficient targeted practice in the necessary language skills.

9. A Chinese mentor is appointed from the existing cohort of students to act as the interface between AIBS and new students from China so that new students could benefit from his or her recent experience and knowledge of the systems, structure and practices of the university and the Business School.

10. AEB staff are accorded the status and recognition due to their crucial role in training the students in the skills they require to pass their assignments by granting them permanent appointments. From the researchers’ experience of working with AIBS students, marks are noticeably higher if they attend the AEB sessions and student confidence is greatly improved.

11. A specialist resources and tutorial room is allocated in the new Business School building at Cambridge for the AEB staff and the Chinese mentor to assist students individually and in privacy throughout their studies.
12. The specialist service provided by the AEB staff will contribute to increased retention of students, improved performance and enhanced student experience and an even higher level of international student satisfaction; it will also reduce stress for staff struggling to understand students whose English is not of the required standard.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Ashcroft International Business School
International Student Academic English for Business Model

September: Final consultations with specialist subject staff on module outlines and assignments to ensure materials in AEB programme are covered at relevant points in course

Continuous process throughout academic year

Students arrive

Induction week

Information about AEB

Language testing and needs analysis

Communication with specialist subject staff

Late arrivals introduced to AEB staff

Semester 1

Formal classes in tandem with module programmes

Individual tuition

Semester 2

Formal classes, individual tuition in latter part

Post-semester individual consultations

A version of this model is currently running. The recommendations of this report are that this model be adopted by AIBS as policy to ensure that AEB staff can deliver a substantially more effective programme.
Appendix 2 : What does an IELTS score really mean?
The IELTS exam is the English language qualification most widely accepted by UK universities. IELTS classifies students by language proficiency into band scores ranging from 1 and 9. IELTS 6.0 – 7.0 is the band range most commonly required for university entrance. Below is a sample of descriptors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IELTS score</th>
<th>Overall band descriptors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>Has generally effective command of language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed arguments well.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note that the band widths are very wide, so students at the low end of a band 6 may perform quite differently on language-related tasks than a student at the high end of the same band. In addition, the overall band score is an average of four separate proficiency ratings in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Therefore, while one student may be strong in listening – 7.0 and weaker in writing – 5.0, he will have the same overall score as a student who has scores of 6 in all four skill areas. Thus, the students in your modules will vary considerably in their language ability.

Another key point is that the IELTS exam assesses only language proficiency. This is also true of other language exams commonly used to meet university admissions requirements. They do not provide any information on students’ ability to apply their language knowledge to academic study tasks or of their ability to cope in a new culture. This is a major reason why research that attempts to use language test scores to predict student performance on university degree programmes is generally not very informative.

In sum, you will encounter students who have met the university’s English language entry criteria but are not familiar with British academic culture or well-practiced in the types of study tasks required by your programmes. These students may still experience significant challenge with language and study skills as they work towards meeting their course requirements.

Vocabulary

Native-speaker vocabulary size is not easily determined, but there is general agreement that an adult native speaker of English knows between 15,000 and 20,000 word families. In contrast, an EFL student entering university may know as few as 5000 words. Research findings estimate that English language learners need to know at least 5000 word families to manage texts written for native speakers. Students studying at university must supplement this with the specialist vocabulary of their discipline.
A word family is different from a word in the following way. A word may be realised by a single token, for example \textit{sheep} is one word.

A word family is made up of a single token plus all of its grammatical inflections and derivations.

\textbf{See the word family for predict.}

Research shows that even when EFL learners know one member of a word family they may not know or be able to use all of its other family members. This means that these students have fewer words at their disposal for comprehension and production.

Vocabulary knowledge is important because it is the springboard for learning new vocabulary, particularly the technical vocabulary of a discipline. If students do not have a strong base vocabulary, enough to cover 95\% of the words in the texts they are reading, then they will have difficulty learning new words without explicitly studying them.

\textbf{Grammar}

It is true that many EFL students have spent years studying the grammar of English. But it is also the case that the methods of study common in many parts of the world taught them more about how to describe the grammar of English than to use it practically in speaking or writing. This means they can explain the rules of verb tenses, prepositions and conditionals, but they may not be able to use these fluently. This is especially true when they are writing under exam conditions where they have to give most of their attention to subject content.

Students coming from Asian and Eastern European countries, in particular, may have had little opportunity to write in their English language classes. Writing practice in many parts of the world often consists solely of translating sentences. It is not uncommon to hear students say that the 250 word essay question on the IELTS exam was the longest piece of writing they had done in English prior to beginning their pre-sessional English or degree course studies.

\textbf{Fluency}

Time limits and the need for speed are key features of exams. They are also the features most likely to lead to bias against EFL students. EFL students typically read more slowly than native speakers; they may read as much as three times more slowly.

EFL students also write more slowly than native speakers. Research clearly indicates that when more attention is given to fluency, accuracy and grammatical complexity tend to suffer.

http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/hr/eod/guides/exams/

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