

TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES AND EFL STUDENTS ON ACADEMIC
PROBATION AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
OF SHARJAH

A THESIS IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

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by
LILIAN KAWASH
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TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES AND EFL STUDENTS
ON ACADEMIC PROBATION AT THE
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF SHARJAH

Lilia Kawash, Candidate for the Master of Arts Degree

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ABSTRACT

Although there is a lot of research on test-taking strategies (TTSs) and the effect they have on students' test scores, there is no specific research on why students at the university level are placed on academic probation. TTSs are essential to help students proceed through their studies at the university level with ease and understanding. As an academic achievement advisor (AAA) at the American University of Sharjah (AUS), I help English as a foreign language (EFL) students who face academic distress and who are placed on probation identify reasons for their poor academic performances and with them find solutions to promote better success at AUS. The purpose of this study is to investigate why so many EFL AUS students are on academic probation. Do these EFL students use TTSs? Do they approach test taking differently than more successful students do? If so, is that one of the reasons they are on probation? Through surveys, questionnaires, daily observations with high and low achieving students, and interviews with these students, instructors, advisors,

and administrators, this study investigated whether poor use of TTSSs is one of the reasons why EFL students are on probation.

The findings indicate that many EFL students on academic probation who meet with their academic achievement advisors received instruction on test-taking strategies. The training was effective and helped students improve their test scores that got them off academic probation. In addition, other factors that caused EFL AUS students to be placed on academic probation were students' attitude, poor time management and study skills, and inadequate test preparation.

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DEDICATION

I owe it all to Jalal; your support, patience, and encouragement kept me going. Thanks in believing in me. I did it!

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Purpose of the Study

There has been a great deal of research on test-taking strategies (TTSs) and the effect they have on students' test scores. However, there have not been any studies that have addressed the Arab/Middle Eastern situation and, more specifically, the unique situation of the American University of Sharjah (AUS) students. As an academic achievement advisor at AUS, I help EFL students who face academic distress and who are placed on probation. Is their placement on probation simply due to low language proficiency, or is their poor academic performance due in part to their study habits, or lack of study habits for that matter? Many studies claim that the lack of use of appropriate TTSs is a major cause of students' poor performance. TTSs obviously provide help, support, and guidance towards academic success and achievement. Therefore, TTSs are essential to help students proceed through their studies at the university level with ease and understanding.

I believe the study of AUS EFL students' test taking strategies is worthwhile because it can provide unique and useful information to students, instructors, advisors, and school administrators - especially in the Arab region. This study intends to help instructors to better understand students' educational experiences, especially students' use of TTSs. Also, through the findings of this study, academic advisors will have a better understanding of one of the reasons why students are on probation, and therefore find useful and appropriate solutions to help remove students from probation. In addition, this study provides essential information for administrators to aid in their awareness of the causes for a high number of AUS EFL students being placed on probation (see Appendix A). Finally, this study illustrates to educational institutions and their faculty members, as well as to their students, the importance of TTSs and their position in the learning environment.

Research Questions/Assumptions

Many EFL students at AUS perform poorly on tests, which hinders their academic achievement, and many of them end up on probation as a result of their poor performance. EFL students at the American University of Sharjah are placed on academic probation if at the end of a semester their cumulative grade point average (CGPA) falls below a C average, 2.0 on a 4.0 GPA scale. Students need to achieve a non-cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher, depending on their situation, to be allowed to continue their study at AUS. They are eventually removed from probation if they meet the goal of achieving and maintaining a CGPA of 2.00 or better.

Research suggests that test-taking instruction improves test scores and can be taught and learned (see Beidel, Turner, & Taylor-Ferreira, 1999; Coombe & Al-Hamly, 2003; Frederickson, 1984; Lugwig, 1999; Gray, 1999). But how can we be certain that students do not already possess these test taking strategies and simply choose not to use them effectively? More specifically, is the teaching of such TTSs beneficial to all students, and if so why do many EFL students remain on probation for two or more consecutive semesters? It was in response to such questions that this study was conducted. This research seeks to answer the following overall question: If students are aware of effective test-taking strategies, and perhaps even use them, then why do many remain on academic probation? This study also tries to answer the following sub-questions: (1) Why are so many EFL students at AUS on probation? (2) Do EFL students on probation employ TTSs? and (3) Do they approach test taking differently than more successful students do, and if so, is that one of the reasons they are on probation?

This study focuses on the problem of test taking in a second language, since most AUS students on probation do use English as their second language. I believe that if test-taking strategies are introduced and developed prior to or at an early stage of students' university study, these students make greater progress and a smoother transition throughout their academic careers. Thus, this investigation helps clarify to AUS students, instructors, advisors, and administrators at least one possible reason why EFL students might be placed on probation. Based on my experience, I believe the following: (1) EFL probation students who regularly meet with an academic

achievement advisor receive suggestions on how to employ effective test-taking strategies to help improve their test scores. These students will get off probation sooner than students who do not meet with an academic achievement advisor; (2) many EFL students who have poor academic performance in consecutive semesters are either unaware of TTSs or simply do not employ them for effective outcomes; and (3) honor students employ test-taking strategies more often and more effectively than those on probation.

In order to gain insight into these questions, data were collected from multiple sources and triangulated using a combination of quantitative data from a survey and qualitative data from interviews, observations, daily journal writings, and personal impressions from my daily contact with students and instructors. The rationale for choosing this topic lies within my position as an academic achievement advisor at AUS. I contact and consult with students who are placed on probation almost on a daily basis. These students need to put in a lot of effort if they truly want to improve and continue their studies at AUS. They voluntarily visit my office to discuss their problems and seek advice to help improve their grades so they can be removed from probationary status. I believe one of the best positions from which to investigate AUS EFL students' test-taking strategies is from the views and observations of an insider, that is, as an academic achievement advisor.

American University of Sharjah Background Information

The American University of Sharjah (AUS) is one of two American institutions in the United Arab Emirates. AUS "is a not-for-profit, independent, coeducational institution of higher education formed on the American model" (*American University of Sharjah Catalog*, 2004, p. 2). The university was founded in 1997 by His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Mohamed Al Qassimi, member of the Supreme Council, ruler of Sharjah, and president of the university. AUS was accredited in June 2004 by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of College and Schools, Philadelphia. It is also licensed by the Department of Education of the State of Delaware, USA, and the Ministry of Higher Education in the UAE.

Language and Cultural Situation at AUS

The official religion of the United Arab Emirates is Islam, and the nation is distinguished by its tolerance towards the variety of cultures and religious beliefs in its diverse community. AUS attracts students from around the world to its multi-cultural classrooms, American instruction, and openness to diversity. Presently, AUS has a large range of students from more than sixty different nationalities, and there are a number of cultural clubs and groups organized within the university. Studying at AUS is an alternative to studying in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom because of the current international conditions. AUS offers students the opportunity to experience an American education in the Gulf region. It also offers a learning experience which provides individuals with diverse knowledge and language learning experiences, and it promotes an environment for a variety of teaching and learning styles.

AUS Organization

AUS is composed of four individual divisions, the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), the School of Engineering (SOE), the School of Architecture and Design (SA&D), and the School of Business and Management (SBM). CAS also has a separate division, the Intensive English Program (IEP). The IEP offers preparation courses for students with low English proficiency.

Students are admitted into their choice of major only after successfully completing the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). All applicants are required to take the TOEFL test and cannot proceed to study in the mainstream courses until they pass the TOEFL test with a score of 500 or higher on the paper based test (or a score of 173 or higher on the computer based test). Students who score below 500 are required to attend the IEP. However, starting Fall 2005 students will be required to obtain a TOEFL score of 510 or higher to proceed into mainstream courses.

Intensive English Program

The Intensive English Program consists of five levels. Depending on TOEFL scores and other means of proficiency, students are grouped according to their language ability and admitted to the level that best matches their needs: Level 1 for beginners and Level 5 for advanced English abilities. These students take courses that focus on the four basic language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. A grammar course is also taken to better prepare the students for the TOEFL exam. Until students pass the TOEFL, they proceed to the next IEP level for more English practice. This process can be frustrating and demotivating for some students, but the process is considered necessary to help them obtain good performances in the mainstream English setting at the university level. The IEP provides a curriculum that helps students improve their English proficiency and helps them gain confidence to make the transition into university study a smoother one.

The IEP offers a course entitled “University Seminar” for all students in Level 5. According to one of the Level 5 instructors, the course focuses on developing reading, writing, and study skills necessary for an English-speaking academic environment. The course objectives mentioned in the syllabus include the following:

- 1) To improve note taking skills through the use of audio/video materials or campus lectures
- 2) To develop and utilize an effective time management plan for completing assignments and meeting deadlines
- 3) To develop skills for taking tests, and predicting and answering various types of test questions

It was interesting to later find out that the expected outcomes of the course include the following:

- 1) Ability to take notes, summarize, and outline lectures and readings
- 2) Improved listening skills for university lectures
- 3) Improved strategies for managing time

Surprisingly, there is no mention of improved test-taking strategies in the expected outcomes although this was included in the course objectives. The instructor admitted that although test-taking strategies is officially one of the objectives of the course, it

usually is not covered. The reason for this, he claimed, is because EFL students often struggle with developing a time management system and this takes a lot of time to develop and improve. This, therefore, results in taking time away from developing skills for taking tests.

Many EFL students enter regular English content classes as soon as they graduate from high school or complete a few semesters in the IEP. But this does not guarantee that their transition from high school/IEP into an American university will be smooth. It would be interesting to find out the strategies EFL students use to cope with the demands of university study, and if and how the lack of test-taking training for students in the IEP hinders their performance when they enter mainstream courses. This study does not attempt to provide an answer to these questions, but further study in these areas would be most interesting.

Freshmen Orientation: "Success @ AUS"

This study provides insight into one factor needed for academic success, that is, test-taking strategies. Although not many students are introduced explicitly to TTSs, as mentioned in many AAA meetings, when asked what they believe the ingredients for academic success are, many students, advisors, instructors, and administrators alike agree that at the university level a main factor for academic success is how well one does on tests. Testing is one of the main sources of identifying students' processes of learning. But what makes a good test taker? Research has pointed out that good tests takers use strategies that help them successfully pass tests (Fry, 2004; Loulou, 1995; Mehrens, 1989). So, it is essential that students are able to seek and find advice on when and how to use TTSs for effective outcomes. More specifically, both new and continuing students sometimes feel lost in a new environment and they need guidance and assistance from instructors, advisors, and administrators to help them feel more at home. AUS offers an orientation for all new students in the belief that it will help them get acquainted with the new environment and understand the expectations and experiences they will face at AUS.

After assessing the problem of freshmen students and obtaining feedback from academic achievement advisors, the Assistant Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs decided to include an informative orientation for all new students. In academic year 2004-2005, AUS offered an orientation seminar for the first time entitled "Success @ AUS" for all new freshmen students. The seminar provided students with useful information about the university's Information Technology Department and the Library, and it also included a mini workshop, "Time Management and Study Skills." The workshop briefly addressed the topics of adjusting to university life and the available course help sessions offered. The workshop encouraged students to adopt a time management system. Students were advised that if they wanted to be successful, they needed to practice good study habits by identifying their best learning styles (see Oxford, 1990; Reid, 1998). This included using different, yet effective, test preparation and test taking strategies.

It was assumed that students feel more secure and less afraid when they are told what to expect at the university level and how to keep up with its expectations. This is one of the main reasons why the orientation process was considered important for all freshman students to attend. The seminar provided students with the expectations of the English course content they would be directly immersed in. The Counseling Center was finally incorporated into the orientation for the first time in spring 2005. AUS's Health Center Services noticed that students face stress and even physical health problems during test time. Research from the Health Center indicated that many students get sick during exam time. This is an important factor to note, and that is why student counseling was added to the orientation as one component of academic support. The other component is the academic achievement advisors.

Moreover, the orientation highlighted major problems students tend to face during their first semester, and the workshop provided helpful information. This included announcing different support groups available on campus to help them overcome both academic and personal problems and find effective ways to minimize stress and anxiety while studying at AUS. As the Assistant Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs put it, "If you can't get Mohammed to the mountain, let's bring the mountain to Mohammed." She sees the orientation as one way to bring students'

attention to the support groups available on campus. She claimed, “I don’t care if students benefit from [the orientation], it’s still orientation. The fact we do it allows students to know [support groups, AAA, and counseling] exist. She added, “We know students do not read flyers and they forget, [so] by forcing them to go through a 30-50 minute orientation about time management and study skills, I think that is very important.” In addition, she sees academic achievement advisors as an important support group, not as a service. AAAs have become more visible than in previous years. Students are becoming more aware of what AAAs have to offer them.

Academic Probation

Students at AUS are placed on probation for one main reason: their cumulative grade point average (GPA) falls below 2.0 on a 4.0 grading scale. One important fact about probation is that the longer students show little or no improvement, the harder it is to increase their cumulative GPA. This is why it is important that students actively seek help to improve their academic performance. Otherwise, students are asked to leave the university for one or more semesters before they can apply for readmittance.

Probation students are required to sign a contract. The contract’s goal is to help students realize that they are in control and responsible for their past choices. It also helps students understand that they will need to learn better self management skills and develop a study schedule they will stick to, and it ensures that they make an effort to improve their test-preparation and test-taking skills. Students who have fallen under probation for the first time do not sign a contract. These students are labeled as probation one (P1) students. They can seek help from advisors, but are given the opportunity to adjust to the new environment on their own. Nonetheless, if the same students do not improve and remain on probation for a second consecutive semester, they are considered probation two (P2). A P2 student meets with the school or college’s Associate Dean to sign a contract. The Associate Dean identifies what courses the student must take and the GPA the student must achieve in that particular semester. Students with P2 contracts are restricted to taking only twelve credits, four courses, to ensure they have the opportunity to show improvement and increase their cumulative GPA to 2.0 or higher.

If after the second semester the students still remain on probation but show improvement and have met their P2 contract goal, they sign a second contract similar to the first. Those who do not meet their P2 contract goals may write a petition and meet with the Assistant Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs to discuss their progress and request approval to continue to study at AUS. This is known as the Academic Dismissal Contract. The only students that are approved to continue are those who are generally close to a 2.0 GPA, or were unable to complete the semester for personal and/or health reasons.

The AUS students' handbook notes that the reasons for the contracts were that, in the past students signed contracts that allowed them to repeat courses to get a better grade, but even though the students were improving and did meet the requirement, technically in the system they were still on probation. So the Registrar's Office decided to find a way to help students get off probation in a timely fashion.

In the most recent catalog, 2004-2005, the AUS Registrar's Office announced a new rule regarding repeating courses. The new rule is open for all students, but most specifically to help those students on academic probation to get off probation sooner. The new rule states that when a course is repeated, only the last grade and credit is calculated in the cumulative GPA, and the other grades and credits for that course are exempted from the calculation. This means the course grades that forced a student to be on probation are no longer considered in the GPA calculations. These past grades, however, still remain on their academic transcripts. Now students can get off probation within just two semesters if they repeat the course(s) they failed or received a poor grade in. According to the Registrar's Office, with this new rule, the institution has "cleaned" the system, and thus the contracts are used to allow administrators to bring students back into the system. Not only have the students benefited from this rule, but so has the administration. The new rule allows administration to be more objective in dismissing students.

The Role of an Academic Achievement Advisor at AUS

Each school/college at AUS has either one or two academic achievement advisors (AAAs) trained to help students on academic probation. These individuals

are trained to help students with difficulties keeping up with the demands of university life and maintaining a GPA above 2.0. AAAs provide guidance, feedback, and helpful suggestions for students to help with their language learning and academic progress. They also help students develop independent learning strategies needed for a successful experience and study at AUS. One of the goals of these advisors is to help students come to realize that they are in control of their own learning.

As an Academic Achievement Advisor, my role is to ensure that students set realistic goals and use effective strategies to reach them. Typical areas discussed in a 15-25 minute one-on-one session with a probation student include the following:

- Identifying ways to improve individual behavior
- Creating a time management system
- Developing successful study skills
- Using techniques to reduce stress and test anxiety
- Make students aware of effective test-taking strategies

Many of the students I work with struggle with developing a time management system. So many sessions include encouraging students to take control over their time management system. Students need to know how to set priorities and develop a reasonable balance between their studies, family, and friends. Setting a time schedule includes setting up a study plan. With an effective study plan, students can develop strategic ways to prepare for tests and ensure that they use effective test-taking strategies.

Students' success at AUS also depends to a large extent on their results on tests, which in turn determines their GPAs. Therefore, preparing for and taking tests should not be taken lightly. Students are encouraged to seek help before or as soon as a problem is faced. Students are also advised not to be afraid to ask for help. I try to stress to them that there is no shame or weakness in seeking help. Students learn best from their mistakes, but they need to understand if they do not take the opportunity to practice good learning strategies, and change their behavior, they will eventually be asked to leave the university due to their poor academic performance. In the end, however, AAAs can only guide and support students to try different study and test-taking strategies to help them do better in test-taking situations.

AAAs help students focus on what went wrong that made them end up on academic probation. Students are asked to identify ways they plan to change their behavior and address what actions they plan to take to achieve success. I have found that most students realize they need to change their behaviors and develop good habits to improve their performance in class and on tests. One important issue students face a problem with is managing their time.

Planning a study schedule can be a challenge for many students. Peer pressure is tempting, but students need to be strong and stick to a realistic schedule. For instance, they need to understand that class attendance is important and must be set at a higher priority than having coffee with friends. Attendance is one of the main problems for students on probation. Many of the schools and colleges expect that their faculty take attendance. If students miss 15% of the course meetings, they may be withdrawn from the class with a “W” or a “WF.” If they are withdrawn or dropped after week ten, the final chance to withdraw without a grade penalty, the “WF” (withdrew failing) counts as an “F” and is included in their GPA calculation.

Students need to understand that it is a full-time job to be a student. They need to realize that they cannot be late or absent from “work,” since this usually hinders their performance on tests. Thus to ensure a good “working” environment, students need to realize that preparing for tests starts as early as attending the first lecture. One student who has been on probation for three semesters noticed his absences were one reason for his poor performance on tests. He told me, “I go to my classes and find that my test scores are better.” When he started attending classes more frequently, he noticed that his professor actually provided helpful suggestions for taking tests, and even gave practice tests during class time. So the students who attended class benefited from the lecture, and it showed in their tests results.

Students must comprehend that they are responsible for the consequences they face, yet some tend to put the blame elsewhere. For instance, when some students get a poor grade on a test, they complain that the teacher was too harsh rather than admitting that they missed too many lectures or were not adequately prepared to take the test.

I have also discovered that some probation students I work with do not follow their contracts. They either drop courses or do not meet the required semester GPA. Most students are honest with me, however, and explain their reasons for not meeting their contract requirements. Although students come for advice on how to improve their academic performance at AUS, some admit that their attendance was poor, they lacked preparation skills, and they did not improve their study habits. This reveals that students do not always practice the advice they take with them after each AAA session. However, many students who ask AAAs for assistance do appreciate that someone is interested in them doing well, so they are often more motivated to change their behavior to do better.

According to the AUS Health Center staff, the AUS student body is generally more stressed while preparing for and taking tests. Currently at AUS the final exam period lasts ten days, but a new proposal has been made to reduce the total number of exam days to five. In doing this, the administration hopes to reduce students' stress levels during exam periods. Although students may claim they have less time to study, the Assistant Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs hopes that reducing the exam period will help students "see the light at the end of the tunnel much faster and maybe this may actually help them psychologically." She further explained, "I hope these changes, will be implemented next year, and will actually affect students positively, hopefully in terms of taking tests." In the United States students can have up to three separate tests on the same day. However, if AUS does something similar, reducing test days and allowing students to take more than two tests a day, she said, "This may certainly double the failure rate. It's already not working with two, how on earth will it work with three?" Thus, AUS has to maintain their current practice of no more than two exams a day to cater to the AUS student body.

Review of Chapters and Appendices

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature. It discusses the topic of communicative vs. academic competence. It also provides a review of current research on test-taking instruction and test-taking strategies. Then, in Chapter 3, the methodology and the analysis of the current study is discussed. Chapter 4 takes a look

at the findings obtained from the instruments used in the study: surveys and interviews. The findings are interpreted and comments about the whole test-taking situation at AUS from students, instructors, advisors, and administrators are also included. The final chapter, the conclusion, summarizes the findings and provides recommendations for further research, the main issue being the awareness of test-taking strategies. It discusses and suggests that test-taking training is effective and helps academic probation students know how to employ test-taking strategies to be better test takers, which ensures better academic performance as an EFL student at AUS.

There are eleven appendices. Appendix A provides a chart that lists the number of students per college/school on probation for the last two and a half academic years. Appendix B provides the survey used. Appendix C shows the statistical analysis of the survey results for the probation group, and Appendix D does the same for the honor students. Appendices E-J provide survey analysis of the statements grouped into six different categories. These sections include a variety of graphs to highlight response differences between EFL students on academic probation and EFL honor students. Finally, Appendix K lists the semi-structured interview questions used in student, instructor, advisor, and administrator interviews.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This thesis discusses the relationship between test-taking strategies and academic success of EFL students in an American institution in the United Arab Emirates, the American University of Sharjah. Much of the research described in this review draws particularly on students' test-taking performances after they have been trained to use a variety of test-taking strategies. Most studies investigate the relationship between test-taking training and test scores of an experimental group against a control group. The findings suggest that one way to improve students' test scores is to provide them with instructions on test-taking strategies. Research supports this claim that test taking strategies help students increase their test scores. This research points out the main issue of test-taking strategies and how it influences students' academic performance.

Researchers might look to the literature on language proficiency and academic performance for help in determining appropriate English levels of learners. Unfortunately, there are known criticisms about the literature that reveal there is no direct relationship between English language proficiency and academic success. One would expect language proficiency to be only one among many factors that affect academic success. Much research has provided a great deal of literature about the many factors that do affect academic success. These factors are briefly illustrated in this chapter and later emphasized in Chapter 4. These factors that influence academic success include language proficiency, attitude, support, time management, and test preparation, to name a few, in addition to test-taking strategies.

Communicative vs. Academic Competence

Saville-Troike (1991) notes that to understand how language relates to academic achievement, one "needs to consider that relationship in terms of language development as a more comprehensive cognitive process" (para. 3). Saville-Troike studied the test scores of low English proficiency (LEP) children. Linguistic differences were claimed to be the causative factor in the low academic achievement

of LEP students in American schools. Her study suggests that testing procedures and interpretations need to be altered; more specifically, her research showed that scores by LEP students on certain tests “should not be taken uncritically at face value” (para. 45). Saville-Troike recommends that debriefing interviews be conducted to check students’ comprehension and reasons for their responses on the test. These findings seem to explain some of the difficulties AUS students face in adjusting to their new learning environment. Students at AUS may have near native English speaking skills, but they may still misinterpret words, transferring them from their first/native language. Students attending AUS come from many backgrounds, each having different experiences and knowledge. This may cause complications in test taking in content courses because of varying schemata.

Moreover, Shohamy (1996) emphasizes that “in the act of testing, more than in the natural use of language (in non-testing situations), the performance component, (or ‘error’) is compounded” (p. 149). Shohamy also quotes Canale and Swain’s (1980) definition of communication competence as consisting of “grammatical, sociolinguistic and discourse competence, and strategic competence” (p. 143). According to Shohamy, strategic competence refers to “the possession of coping strategies in actual performance” (p. 143). Strategic competence includes compounding two components, the “ability to use” and “knowledge.” Bachman’s (1990) model also contains both components of strategic competence: knowledge, also referred to as competence, and the capacity for implementing the knowledge in appropriate communicative language.

According to Shohamy, “Competence refers to ‘unobserved,’ underlying knowledge, while performance reflects overt behaviors” (p. 149). Competence is the ability trait, and performance refers to the actual execution of the task. Shohamy notes that it is important to remember that testing is unique; it reveals sources of variation which are different from the variation found in non-testing tasks. Thus she concludes that there is a need to “differentiate between variation that reflects competence and the variation which is a result of performance (answering multiple choice questions, for example)” (p. 149).

In addition, Cummins (e.g., Cummins, n.d., 2000, 2001a, 2001b) introduces a distinction between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Cummins (2001a) notes that “Individual differences in CALP are strongly related to the academic process, whereas individual differences in BICS are largely unrelated to academic process” (p. 114). He studied the time period that low achieving students required to catch up to their peers in everyday face-to-face aspects of proficiency as compared to academic aspects. Cummins (n.d.) found that “not all aspects of language use or performance could be incorporated into one dimension of global language proficiency” (para. 4). More specifically, in second language acquisition contexts, L2 learners acquire the target language at very different times to catch up to their peers in everyday face-to-face aspects of proficiency as opposed to academic aspects (para. 4). He notes that the failure to take into account the BICS/CALP distinction has been reflected in “discriminatory psychological assessment of bilingual students and premature exit from language support programs into mainstream classes” (para. 1). This is evident in the AUS students’ situation. Students are admitted to the university once they have received a TOEFL test score of 500 or higher. Thus many AUS students’ English speaking skills are near native; however, they do not perform to their potential when they write content tests.

Although the distinction between BICS and CALP remains controversial, educators should know that students’ language proficiency does not necessarily predict their academic achievement. In addition, cultural and linguistic mismatch are emphasized by Cummins to be important contributors to academic failure among bilinguals. Cummins (2001b) also notes that “L1 cognitive/academic proficiency is more strongly related to the acquisition of L2 academic skills than are personal factors, whereas the opposite is true for the acquisition of L2 face-to-face communication skills” (p. 145). Cummins concludes that it takes individuals more time to achieve context-reduced academic communicative proficiency than to achieve context-embedded communicative proficiency. For instance, his research suggests that typical EFL learners need five to seven years of English language learning before they can cope in a mainstream classroom. In the AUS situation many EFL learners are

not ready for regular content courses and are required to enroll in one or more semesters in the IEP to improve their English proficiency.

Test-Taking Instruction

Grades at the university level are to a large extent determined by students' test results. Tests are usually developed to test what students really know but may also test how well students take a test. There are a number of relevant findings in the literature about test taking instruction. However, a large amount of research has investigated the use of test-taking strategies (TTSs) in lower educational levels, for instance by children at the elementary or middle school levels (e.g., Andrews, 1998; Beidel, Turner, & Taylor-Ferreira, 1999; Bowker & Irish, 2003). There have also been studies in which the subjects were taught TTSs for college preparation tests (e.g., Blair, 2000). Regarding students at the university level, however, although there is a considerable amount of literature that attempts to teach college and university students survival tricks for taking tests (e.g., "Academic Advising," n.d.; Allen, 1997; "Survey Uncovers," 2004; "Survival Strategies", n.d.; Thompson, n.d.), there is no specific research about the effects of TTSs of EFL university students placed on probation. Many studies claim that the lack of use of appropriate TTSs is a major cause of students' poor performance. This study will add some insight into TTS training of EFL students on academic probation in an American institution in the United Arab Emirates.

Much research on the effects of TTSs has also investigated students' improvement rate when instructed to use effective TTSs. Ritter and Idol-Maestas (1986), for instance, conducted a study involving 56 grade six children taking social studies reading comprehension tests. The study used a learning strategy approach to teach how to take tests. The researchers investigated whether students benefited from the instruction of TTSs. The subjects were divided into two groups, an experimental and a control group. The experimental group was instructed to use a self-instructional approach called SCORER - "an acronym to remind the learner of the tasks to be accomplished" (p. 351). This was new to the students. They were taught to do the following as they took the test: schedule your time, clue words, omit difficult

questions, read carefully, estimate your answer, and review your work. The results provide empirical support for teaching groups to use a learning-strategies approach; all experimental students' improved on their posttests, while only three in the control group improved and the others' grades remained unchanged.

Andrews (1998) conducted a master's thesis research project also to determine if TTSs affected the test scores of 40 Ritchie County Middle School students in Ellenboro, West Virginia. She used an instructional procedure based on the acronym PIRATES. In this study, students were taught to do the following as they took the test: prepare to succeed, inspect the instructions, read - remember - reduce, answer or abandon, turn back, estimate, and survey. Andrews's data also supported the conclusion that when students are trained to use TTSs, their test scores improve. Andrews found that the students in the experimental group, who received the test-taking strategy training, improved on their posttest scores more than the control group who did not receive any TTS training.

Bowker and Irish (2003) conducted an action research project that encouraged teachers to instruct junior high students in central Illinois to increase their use of TTSs and to motivate students to do well on standardized tests. Bowker and Irish kept observation checklists of students while taking tests and found that students lacked the following TTSs: erasures, preparedness, and tracking. Tracking is the act students display to ensure that the question they are answering matches the question number on the score sheet. A teacher survey showed little or no attention was given to TTSs before tests. However, the study supported the claim that TTSs can be taught in the classroom and test scores improve with the overall awareness of approaches to test taking.

Roth, Paris, and Turner (2000) investigated the use of positive and negative TTSs by students from grades two through eleven through the use of a 20-item survey and a 40-item questionnaire. They found that the use of positive strategies did not vary across grade levels. For example, all students said that they relied on prior knowledge of the subject and enjoyed taking tests because they offered a challenge. However, the study showed that older students reported more negative strategy use than younger students. For example, many older students reported that they did not go

back and check answers when they finished early and also had trouble concentrating, which affected their test scores.

Research has also shown positive effects on students' testing performances with test-taking training. Mehrens (1989), like many other researchers (e.g., Andrews, 1998; Barrass, 2002; Roth, Paris, & Turner, 2000), states that it is appropriate to spend some instructional time teaching test-taking skills. There are various sources (e.g., Fry, 2004; Pauk, 2001; Shimota, 2004; Tracy, 2002; Thompson, n.d.) that provide suggestions for "long-term successful learning techniques and test taking strategies, not quick 'tricks'" (Coombe & Al-Hamly, 2003).

According to Matter (1986), teachers can provide support for their students by offering strategy instruction that is woven into the regular teaching process. For example, teachers may demonstrate how to use a given strategy to make the task at hand easier to approach and complete with success. Teachers may also encourage students to employ such strategies and help them identify whether the strategy has aided in better test performance or not. This should also include how to aid students in varying strategy use to ensure maximum improvement in test results (Fry, 2004). The goal here is to enrich students with new and useful strategies that will become automatic and virtually effortless in their university studies and in preparing and taking tests. For instance, instructors may provide suggestions to help students adjust to university life and succeed. McKee (2003, pp. 10-11) provides the following suggestions to use "smart" test taking strategies:

- Learn as you go
- Don't leave your studying until the night before the test
- Think about what questions your teacher might ask, and test yourself by answering these questions
- Be sure you know what type of test format the teacher will use; this will help you approach your studying
- Practice taking tests; this will help to build your confidence in test taking
- Look over the entire test paper before starting
- Do a "memory dump" (i.e., write down formulas, ideas, key words for each question that you will need to include in the answer)

Test-Taking Strategies

During a test, students are not only being evaluated for their knowledge of the subject material but also how well they take tests, in other words, their use of effective test-taking strategies. Different students use different combinations of skills and strategies. Skills represent linguistic processing abilities that are automatic in their use and their combinations, whereas strategies are a set of abilities, methods, or careful plans for achieving a particular end. When skills are put into practice they are defined as strategies. According to Oxford (1990), learning strategies “are especially important for language learners because they are tools for active, self directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence” (p. 1). Strategies may be defined as a plan, a step, or a conscious action toward achievement of an objective. They are also defined as specific actions taken by a learner to make learning easier, efficient, enjoyable, self-directed, effective, and transferable to new situations which improve proficiency and self-confidence. Therefore, strategic test-taking is not only a matter of knowing what test-taking strategy to use, but also knowing how to use a strategy with a successful outcome.

Cohen (1998) defines test-taking strategies as “those test-taking processes that the respondents have selected and of which they are conscious, at least to some degree [and] the notion of strategy implies an element of selection” (p. 92). Some students may not be aware of test-taking strategies, but instead use shortcuts to arrive at answers. In such cases, Cohen claims that “respondents may be using testwiseness to circumvent the need to tap their actual language knowledge or lack of it” (p. 92). For instance, students may respond to questions on a reading passage without reading the passage and instead look immediately for the answers.

Test-wiseness is a well-established concept and has been defined as a student’s “capacity to utilize characteristics and formats of the test or test-taking situation to receive a high score. Test-wiseness is logically independent of the examinee’s knowledge of the subject matter for which the items are supposedly measured” (Millman, Bishop, & Ebel, 1965, p. 707). Test-taking strategies in some literature refer to the idea of test-wiseness. Test-wiseness can also be defined as choosing an answer based on the clues revealed by how test questions are structured.

Fredrickson (1984) adds the following to test-wiseness: question preparation skills, time management, error avoidance, and guessing strategies. Students who can figure out what the logic of the question is, or what is in the teacher's mind, can often accurately guess the correct answer. In other words, students who are practicing test-wiseness do not seek real and meaningful understanding of the material, but instead learn how to appear smart without rigorous study or thinking. These are also useful skills for academic success; however, test-wiseness strategies must be used with caution. Such strategies may work in some test-taking situations and not so well in others. Therefore, although students are taught test-wiseness strategies they need to be cautious when applying them.

Preparing for and taking tests, especially in a second or foreign language, is many students' worst nightmare. However when students are introduced to strategies that may be used to aid in successful test taking, they become less anxious about the whole testing experience. Test-taking strategies (TTSs) are part of academic competence that some EFL students have not mastered even though their language proficiency is relatively high. Thus, preparing for tests and test-taking training is essential to help low-achieving EFL students with their test-taking strategies. TTSs, if used effectively, can help improve students' performance on different content tests. This includes preparing for exams and being able to apply effective strategies to increase academic performance. Such TTSs also include managing time, lowering anxiety, and preparing for tests to ensure students approach tests with confidence and ease, as well as to ensure test scores reflect what a student really knows (Boyd, 1988).

Although all students know that their grades are based on their test scores from content based tests (Hughes, 2003), they may not realize that taking different tests requires different strategies to complete them with success. For example, multiple choice exams are structured differently than essay exams, so they require different attention and should be approached differently because they have different purposes. I have observed that students find it useful to know the type of test they will be asked to complete. This allows them to prepare accordingly, either by studying in detail to recall information, or to study the material and link the importance of main concepts.

Are TTSs useful and effective? Research tells us that learners who struggle with tests are usually unaware of strategies that will help them in test-taking (e.g., Andrews, 1998; Beidel, Turner, & Taylor-Ferreira, 1999; Blair, 2000). So, how can teachers encourage EFL students to implement these strategies? Students need the ability to take strategic steps to solve problems. These steps can be taken through certain actions before, during, and after taking a test. Teachers and students need to be aware of the demands of completing a test successfully in order to make choices about effective strategies. Matter (1986) suggests, “Ideally, test preparation activities should not be additional activities imposed upon teachers. Rather, they should be incorporated into the regular, ongoing instructional activities whenever possible” (p. 10). An example of how this concept can actually be put into practice comes from an International Studies Professor at AUS. He provides his students with a list of strategies he would use if he had to take the class midterm. The professor explained, “Providing students with such a list gives them an idea of what concepts and ideas are important to study.” He has found that this is a great tool for students to use as a guide to prepare for tests. However, teachers need to be aware of the disadvantages of providing too much help for their students. For instance, another instructor said she used to provide study sheets for her students but is determined not to use them again because she felt her students became too dependent on them. Students used these sheets as a study *aid* and not as a study *guide*, as was intended. Students need to learn to be independent and not study only from the study sheets. The Assistant Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs noted that teachers need to keep in mind that “too much help is just as bad as no help at all.”

Moreover, instructors need to be aware of the advantages as well as the disadvantages of encouraging test-wiseness techniques to their students. Although test-wiseness is a strategy used to try and obtain a higher score on a test, instructors preparing students for the TOEFL test should avoid the temptation of encouraging their students to be merely test-wise. For example, if students are advised to choose the longest multiple choice options whenever they do not know the answer, students may take it for granted that this strategy always works and answer all questions using this strategy. Of course such a strategy does not work in all situations, and this

misunderstanding can affect students' performance on a test. Students should also be encouraged to use critical thinking skills and not only simple guessing techniques.

Coombe and Al-Hamly (2004) suggest that "effective test taking strategies are synonymous with effective learning strategies" (para. 33). Each student carries with him or her different learning strategies. This is one of the factors that separates good test takers from poor test takers; some students are just better test takers than others. Coombe and Al-Hamly go further and state, "The key to successful test taking lies in a student's ability to use time wisely and to develop practical study habits" (para. 33).

Many college preparation texts and much test-taking research offer students suggestions on how to do better on tests. Such materials provide students with suggestions on how to prepare for tests and how to sit for a test. The following is a small sample of strategies that experts suggest students should consider before, during, and after a test situation (see Fry, 2004; Thompson, n.d.):

Before the test:

- Get a good night's rest
- Arrive early/Wear comfortable clothing
- Talk positively to yourself
- Avoid distracting conversations
- Have all your supplies with you
- Do deep breathing to get yourself focused
- Read over the entire test before starting

During the test:

- Read directions carefully
- Do easy questions first
- Do multiple choice questions first
- Keep track of time
- Ask questions to clarify
- Check answers

After the test:

- Evaluate progress
- Reward yourself for accomplishments

Fry (2004) offers suggestions on “how to ace” any test. He includes tactics for taking objective tests as well as subjective tests. The following are some test taking strategies he offers his readers.

For multiple choice tests:

- Learn to “discriminate and eliminate” (that is, if you do not know the answer, start to cross out the options that are wrong, and you will have a better chance to get the question right)
- Ensure that you carefully read all options before choosing the best one
- Check for key words, e.g., “not” and “always”
- Fill in the answer sheet carefully, making sure the question number you are answering is the same as the number you mark on the answer sheet (also known as “tracking”)

For essay tests:

- Outline your essay before you begin to write
- Identify clues some questions provide to help with other questions on the test
- Make sure you really know what the question is asking, and pay attention to the verbs used in the question; don’t “explain” when it tells you to “argue”

Boyd (1988) claims that good test-taking skills will not guarantee that students get an “A” on every test, but it will make sure that their test scores reflect what they really know. In addition, Cohen (1998) points out that “students may get an item wrong for the right reasons or right for the wrong reasons” (p. 91). This illustrates the difference between using effective test-taking strategies versus merely guessing and using test-wisness. Nonetheless, test-wisness can be developed and helpful if used with precaution. Frederickson (1984) provides the following four strategies to develop test-wisness that have been shown to improve test performances:

- Preparation: using anxiety-reduction techniques (e.g., deep breathing exercises, body relaxation, and humor)
- Time-use Strategies: allocating time to be spent on each test question, as well as how one will approach the test, i.e., which questions to start with first
- Error-avoidance Strategies: read questions carefully, and pay close attention to directions

- Guessing Strategy: notice consistency in multiple choice questions, eliminating options with key words such as “all” or “never,” and notice resemblance in answer options and the question stem

A review of the literature offers important facts about how the training of effective test-taking strategies helps students perform better on tests. However, little research offers insight on why so many EFL students at the American University of Sharjah are placed on probation for their poor academic performances. This study investigates whether EFL AUS students are aware of test-taking strategies and how their performance is affected when they employ such strategies while taking tests. In addition, survey responses from academic probation students are analyzed and compared with honor students' responses to get an idea of how students feel about preparing for tests and taking tests. This research will add to the literature by addressing the question of whether AUS students are aware of and use effective test-taking strategies, and if so, why many of them remain on academic probation.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

Design of the Study

This study focuses on the problem of test-taking in a second language and seeks to answer the following overall question: If students are aware of effective test-taking strategies and perhaps even use them, then why do many remain on academic probation? It also addresses the following sub-questions: (1) Why are so many EFL students at AUS on probation? (2) Do EFL students on probation employ TTSs? and (3) Do students on probation approach test taking differently than more successful students do, and if so, is that one of the reasons they are on probation?

In order to triangulate, data were collected from multiple sources using a combination of quantitative data from a survey and qualitative data from interviews, observations, daily journal writings, and personal impressions from my contact with students and instructors. First, the sixty participating honor and probation students were asked to complete a forty item survey. Each statement's focus was on the students' knowledge and use of TTSs and how they prepared themselves for tests. They were asked to read each statement on the survey and respond as honestly as they could by ticking the box that best represented them. The scale used was a four response option Likert scale utilizing the response options "Always," "Usually," "Sometimes," or "Never."

Second, an interview process involved uncovering emic perspectives (e.g., Brown, 2001; Dornyei, 2003; Hopkins, 2002) from multiple insights and points of view of the AUS situation, including what the insiders—students, instructors, advisors, and administrators—knew about the probation situation. Interviews were arranged with students from each group who indicated at the end of the questionnaire that they would agree to be interviewed. The interviews were recorded after the oral consent of the participants had been obtained. Students were asked semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix K) dealing with their academic performance at AUS and their use, or non-use, of effective TTSs.

The Participants

The participants in this study were EFL students selected from a population of undergraduates at AUS in the Spring 2005 semester. The students came from a variety of countries including Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Germany, and the Emirates. The sixty respondents ranged in age from 18-26 years old. They were divided into two different groups. The first group consisted of thirty students, 16 females and 14 males, who were mainly freshmen and sophomores. These were all students who were on probation and regularly met with their assigned academic achievement advisor in the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Business Management, or the School of Architecture and Design. The second group consisted of thirty honor students, 17 females and 13 males, with outstanding academic performances. These students were mainly junior and senior students who maintained a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.50 or above. They were specifically selected and referred to me by their instructors.

Development of the Instruments

Student Survey

The main data collection tool used in this study was a 40 item survey “Preparing for Tests and Test-taking strategies” (see Appendix B), which followed the guidelines found in Dornyei (2003). Some of the guidelines that were incorporated include planning the survey, organizing the layout, asking standard demographic questions, choosing and using an appropriate rating scale, and piloting the survey. Although Dornyei suggests that surveys usually should be translated in the participants’ L1. I decided not to translate the student survey for two reasons. First, there were more than eight different languages represented, so I would have needed to create survey forms in all of those. Second, because AUS is an English-medium institution, I felt students should be able to answer the survey statements using the English language. The survey solicited the following background information from both groups of thirty participants: gender, age, school, major, number of semesters in IEP, and TOEFL scores. The actual questionnaire included 40 statements that related to the students’ perceived level of test preparation and test-taking strategies, both in

multiple choice tests and in essay tests. For example, two of the statements included were “I read all options on a multiple choice question before choosing the best answer” and “I outline my essay before I start writing.”

The 40 survey statements were, for analysis purposes, later categorized into six separate groups. These groups were labeled as follows: (a) Language Proficiency: students’ English language abilities; (b) Attitude: students’ motivation level, alertness, and active participation in their learning process. (c) Support: statements about seeking help and instructor’s guidance; (d) Time Management/Study Skills: aspects of concentration and procrastination; (e) Test Preparation: areas of predicting test questions, asking questions, and meeting with the instructor; and (f) Test-taking Strategies: taking objective tests/subjective tests.

A first draft of my survey was given to my three thesis committee members to review. Three additional academic achievement advisors at AUS were also asked to review the survey’s relevance and practicality. These colleagues were able to pinpoint useful and effective key factors of developing a good survey and suggest improvements. Their suggestions specifically included avoiding wordiness, ensuring terminology would be familiar to all students, and that the length of the survey was appropriate.

After the review process, the survey was then piloted by a random selection of eight AUS students who were not involved in the final survey. The pilot process helped to identify a number of problems in the survey that needed to be adjusted in order for it to be more effective. Some areas for improvement indicated included the surveys’ layout, the order of statements, and the answer scale. This stage also helped me to eliminate some repetition and ensure the statements addressed the main concern of test preparation and test-taking strategies. With suggested changes made in the format and content, the survey was considered ready for use in the study.

The survey was administrated by the researcher herself and two additional AAAs, one from the School of Architecture and Design and the other from the School of Business and Management. They gave the survey to their probation students that they regularly meet with. Also, a few instructors from different units, the College of

Arts and Sciences, the School of Business, and the School of Engineering, were asked to give the survey to their academically successful students.

Interviews

The interview process was completed in three different phases.

Phase One

In phase one, three academic achievement advisors were interviewed. They provided a great deal of insight into what kind of assistance and guidance they provided their students, how they provided study and test-taking training for their probation students, what sorts of questions they asked, and also whether they believed in the importance of test-taking training for students.

Phase Two

In phase two, four instructors were interviewed from the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Architecture and Design, and the School of Business and Management. Questions regarding students' attendance and performance in the classroom were addressed and were included in the semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix K). They were also asked what they thought about TTS training and the importance of it in the AUS EFL university setting. The interview process helped me understand whether the instructors were concerned about their students' achievements and whether they actually offered TTS training to support their opinions. These interviews also provided information about whether the instructors felt that students are open to instructors' suggestions and whether they take the advice seriously and actually practice what was preached to them.

Phase Three

The final phase involved interviewing 20 students, 10 who were on probation and 10 honor students, who agreed to participate in the interview process. More than fifty percent from each group noted they do not mind to be interviewed. I randomly choose ten from each group by reviewing their responses to the survey statements and

identified who I thought would provide me with more detailed reasoning for their responses. I believe these students did provide insightful quotes that I use to support my findings. I contacted these students and asked to meet with them for 10-20 minutes to discuss their responses to selected statements from the survey in more depth. I made sure that I developed rapport with the students by explaining what the research was about and reminding them that they were not being tested. This ensured that they were comfortable and felt at ease. I believe building such a relationship with students allowed them to speak honestly about their performance at AUS. The participants seemed relaxed and I believe they felt they could trust me and felt free to discuss their behaviors, habits, learning experiences, mistakes made, and achievements as an EFL student in an American institution.

During the interview process, I asked the honor students what strategies they use before, during, and after a test and how they were introduced to such strategies. This provided me with information about whether they felt TTSs helped them to be successful and how TTSs aided them to maintain their excellent academic achievement. Students on probation were asked questions about their study habits and ways of improving their academic standing. This process allowed me to develop more insight into their own opinions and viewpoints about the reasons why they were on probation. In particular, I tried to identify their needs for TTSs and whether they felt TTSs could help them gain confidence and self awareness towards an improved and more positive academic experience.

Data Analysis

The information obtained from both quantitative data from the survey and qualitative data from the interviews, observations, daily journal writings, and personal impressions from my daily contact with students and instructors were collected and analyzed. The data from the student survey are analyzed and the results are demonstrated with pie and bar charts in the next chapter. In addition, data from the interviews with students, advisors, instructors, and administrators are used to provide further support for major findings of the student survey results.

The complete results of the survey completed by the thirty EFL academic probation students and the thirty EFL honor students at the American University of Sharjah are given in Appendix C and Appendix D, respectively. The averages of the students' responses were calculated for each survey statement using the following scale: Always=4, Usually=3, Sometimes=2, and Never=1. The rationale for using four response options rather than five for this study was to ensure students do not have the opportunity to "sit on the fence" and choose the neutral option. The survey statements were divided into six categories related to test-taking and language proficiency. Appendices E-J provide tables and figures of the results of the probation students' responses compared to the honor students' responses within each category. The categories are the following: (1) Language Proficiency, (2) Attitude, (3) Support, (4) Time Management/Study Skills, (5) Test Preparation, and (6) Test-taking Strategies.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

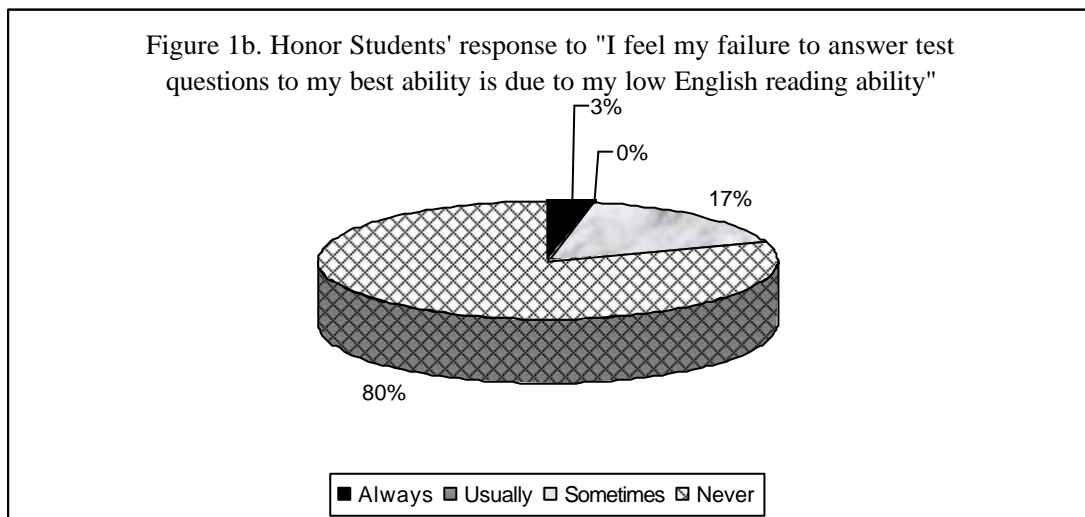
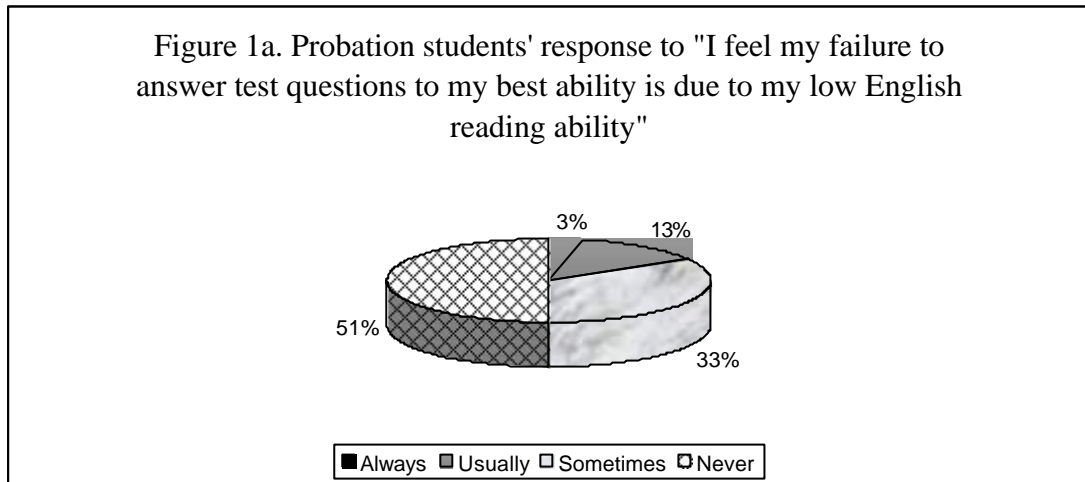
The survey statements were divided into six categories related to test-taking and language proficiency. The major findings in each of these categories are outlined and discussed in the following order: “Language Proficiency,” “Attitude,” “Support,” “Time Management/Study Skills,” “Test Preparation,” and finally “Test-taking Strategies.”

Language Proficiency

At the American University of Sharjah, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is used for determining when students should make the transition into mainstream university courses. However, according to Lucas and Wagner (1999), TOEFL results “do not account for the complex factors that influence students’ degree of readiness for the transition” (p. 6). According to Cummins (2001b), the lack of English proficiency and linguistic differences are both causative factors in students’ low academic achievement. Could this be the case for the participants in this study? The participants were asked to provide their TOEFL scores. The probation students’ average TOEFL score was 547, with 500 being the lowest reported and 627 being the highest score. The honor students’ TOEFL scores were obviously higher, having an average score of 607, with 507 being the lowest reported and 673 the highest score. As might be expected, probation students’ TOEFL scores were generally lower than honor students. This does not mean students with a lower TOEFL score cannot be an honor student; some honor students achieved great academic success even though their TOEFL scores were as low as a 507.

Appendix E presents the findings of students’ responses to the particular statements regarding “Language Proficiency.” When students responded to the statement, “I feel my failure to answer test questions to my best ability is due to my low English reading ability,” only 51% of the probation students noted that this is never the case, compared to 80% of the honor students. Figures 1a and 1b show the

percentage of students (probation and honor) who felt that their English reading ability is low and that this causes them to do poorly on a test.



In addition, when students responded to the statement, "I feel my English reading and writing ability is lower than other students in my class," the following results were found: 30% of the probation students always/usually felt this was the case, whereas only 10% of the honor students felt this way. Figure 2a and 2b show students' responses to this statement.

Figure 2a. Probation students' response to "I feel my English reading and writing ability is lower than other students in my class"

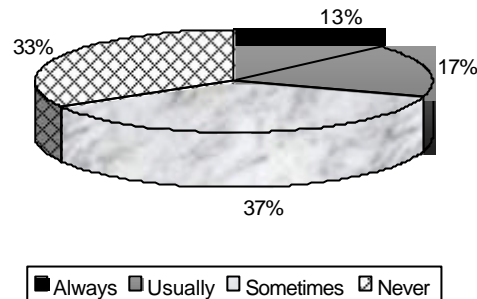
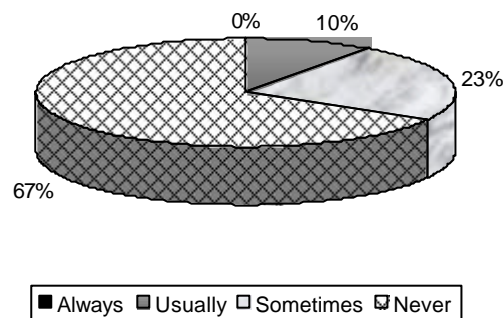


Figure 2b. Honor students' response to "I feel my English reading and writing ability is lower than other students in my class"



The results of the students' responses to this survey statement indicate that probation students were much more likely than honor students to feel that their English proficiency level is lower than that of their classmates.

We can conclude that 30% of the probation students believed that their relatively poorer language proficiency, compared to their peers, always/usually contributed to their underachievement. Perhaps, these students have trouble eliminating interfering thoughts, emotions, and feelings about their past poor performance. Self awareness is essential for these students to promote good concentration skills, improve attention, and understand and monitor their comprehension to create a meaningful learning experience that promotes success and academic achievement at AUS.

Attitude

The category, “Attitude,” included statements about students’ behavior and motivation to learn in an American institution as an EFL learner. (Refer to Appendix F for results of students’ responses to the particular statements regarding attitude.) Students’ attitudes reflect much of their own desire and dedication to study at AUS in their specified majors. University study is different from high school study. AUS is a new environment filled with high expectations and new experiences. Although many of the honor students felt that the first two years at AUS were easy, or “simply a review of high school,” as one student put it, they also seemed to know how much work is needed to maintain a good GPA.

Studying at the university level is a challenge for many and easily adapted to by others. For instance, an honor student coming from the IEP expressed the following opinion to a room full of current IEP students:

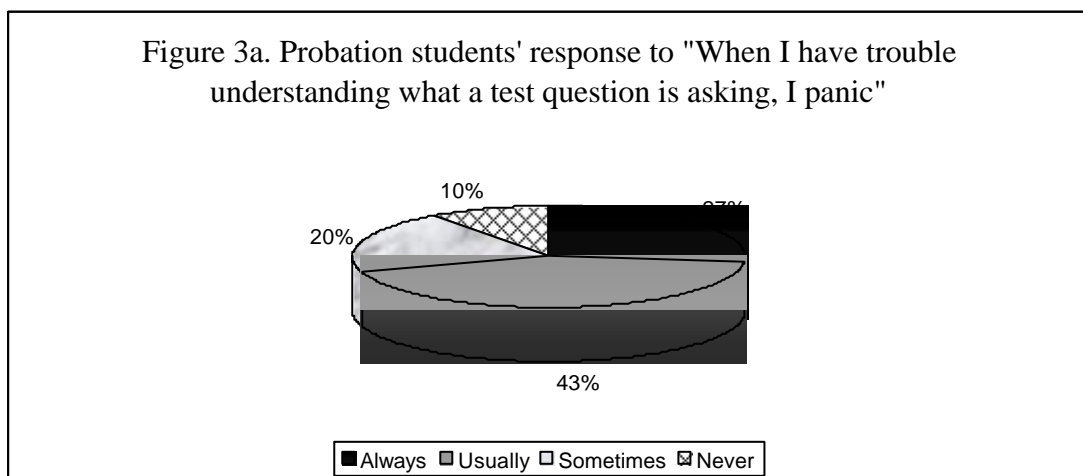
IEP was heaven. You may feel that you have weekends to yourself now, but it will not be the same when you leave the IEP. You have homework, assignments, readings, studying... the weekend is very busy, you no longer have a social life.

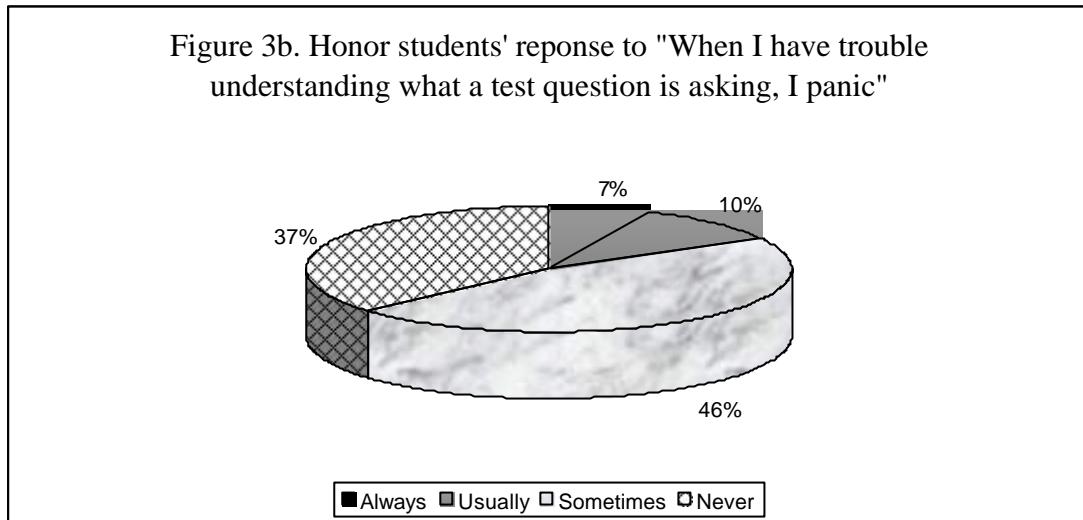
This student shared her experience of going into the mainstream courses after completing two semesters in the IEP.

High school study usually has students memorize material more than study it. Therefore, many students indicated that they have difficulty understanding content area material and tended to memorize in order to do well on a test. Nonetheless, university tests are different than those students are used to. Many university tests assess students’ understanding of the subject material; students are expected to think critically and respond with intellectual understanding. One probation student noted, “There are a lot of chapters on a test with a lot of memorizing. I tend to forget or mix up answers.” I advised this student to start studying earlier so he learns the material as opposed to memorizing it. When I asked an honor student what she would advise this particular student to do in this situation, she noted that he needs to “start early so the material can be remembered.” Students need to avoid cramming and build the habit of doing work regularly and consistently over the entire academic year.

Although some students work better under pressure, I believe it is not a healthy strategy to continue using throughout university study. Students become tired and highly stressed. An honor student said, "Studying one hour before an exam is definitely not enough, cramming is not a good strategy...no time to understand the material." Another noted, "I only stress before but never during an exam. I never study just enough. I always study more than I have to. Even though I always understand the material, I also memorize. In case I panic, I know I will not forget what I've studied." This student uses the strategy of memorization as a back up plan and not as the main study tactic.

Many students said they usually panic during a test even when they know the material. Figures 3a and 3b show that probation students reported that they tend to panic more than honor students during a test. 70% of the probation students said they panic when they always/usually have trouble answering a test question, and only 17% of the honor students said they always/usually panic in a similar situation. Students who panic during an exam may be in a state that affects their test performance negatively.





Figures 4a and 4b demonstrate the percentages of probation and honor students who responded they feel that their nervousness causes them not to answer test question to their best ability. The majority of the probation students felt that their failure to answer test questions to their best ability is due to their nervousness. On the other hand, 40% of the honor students never felt that failure to answer test questions is due to their nervousness. Panic and nervousness are signs of test anxiety ("Test Anxiety," n.d.). These feelings usually appear because of the lack of preparation, fatigue, and worrying about past poor performances. One student said, "I always get nervous before an exam because I know I need to get at least a B to stay in the course. I did not do well on the last test. So, I worry that if I do not do well on the next test I will be asked, or even forced, to drop the course."

Figure 4a. Probation students' response to "I feel my failure to answer test questions to my best ability is due to my nervousness"

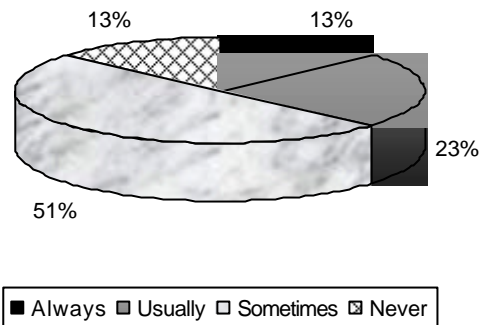
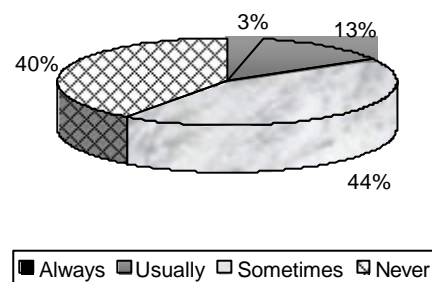


Figure 4b. Honor students' response to "I feel my failure to answer test questions to my best ability is due to my nervousness"



Worrying during a test interferes with a student's concentration. The findings from the survey statement, "I worry about doing poorly on a test and this interferes with my concentration," are found in Figures 5a and 5b. These figures demonstrate the percentage of students who lose their concentration due to worrying about doing poorly on a test. The results show that probation students felt that this is a problem they face when taking a test. A probation student stated, "I always feel nervous before entering a test, which is very bad because sometimes due to that my brain blocks and I can't remember or think of anything."

Figure 5a. Probation students' response to "I worry about doing poorly on a test and this interferes with my concentration"

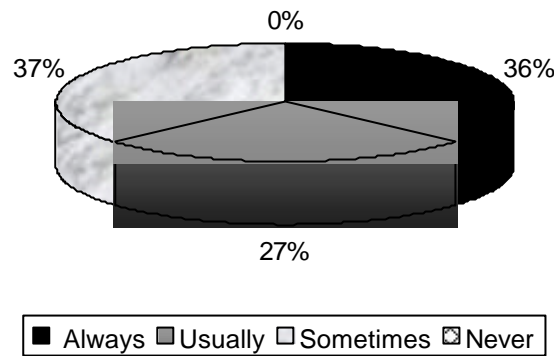
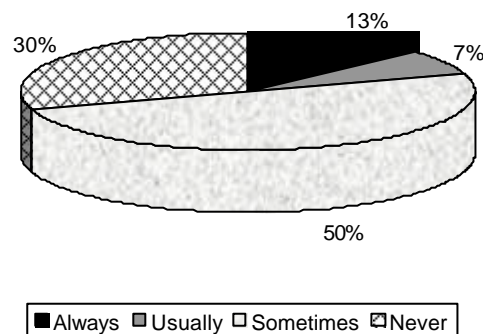


Figure 5b. Honor students' response to "I worry about doing poorly on a test and this interferes with my concentration"



Low self-esteem and a low level of confidence can also be observed in many probation students at AUS. Self-esteem and confidence may also be considered as elements that affect students' attitude. 56% of the honor students reported that they usually/always feel confident when they enter an exam room, but only 33% of the probation students felt this way. Some students who worried about doing poorly realized later that this interfered with their concentration. Therefore they changed their habit of dwelling on poor performances and became more confident about what they can do with a little hard work and a lot of dedication. Independent learning strategies are needed to help students realize that they are in control of their own learning process. One honor student explains that even though she "screws up" on a

test, she blames herself: “I blame myself, and I am more motivated for the next test.” This student admits that she learned from her mistakes and used her past experiences to prepare for better performances on future tests. A probation student mentioned, “I realized that I have to study more in depth to get the scores I wanted.” This student noticed that he had to put more attention towards his studies if he wants to achieve. He further explained, “I did not study last year. I do not spend as much time in Starbucks [now].” This student has learned from his past mistakes and made sacrifices to change his behavior to be a better student.

As stated in Beidel, Turner, and Taylor-Ferreira (1999), students who feel a sense of competition with others and compare themselves with how others are doing (either before, during, or after a test) may be less motivated and highly anxious, which can result in their poor test performance. However, a student on probation for three consecutive semesters claimed, “I see others excel and I want to match them. I like to prove myself to the professor that I can do it, that I am motivated to do well and want to do well.” This student indicated that he has the incentive to do better. This student realized that he is in control of his learning process, and if he wants to get a good grade he needs to put in the time and effort to succeed. An honor student majoring in Business Management explained, “As time passes, one’s test-taking strategies tend to improve. Personally, I have learnt a lot about test-taking strategies during my three years at AUS. I become less nervous before tests, I stopped comparing my performance to that of others, and most importantly I learnt to give my best shot on a test and accept the results whatever they may be.” This student has accepted the fact that she is responsible for her own learning process and takes her mistakes seriously and learns from them.

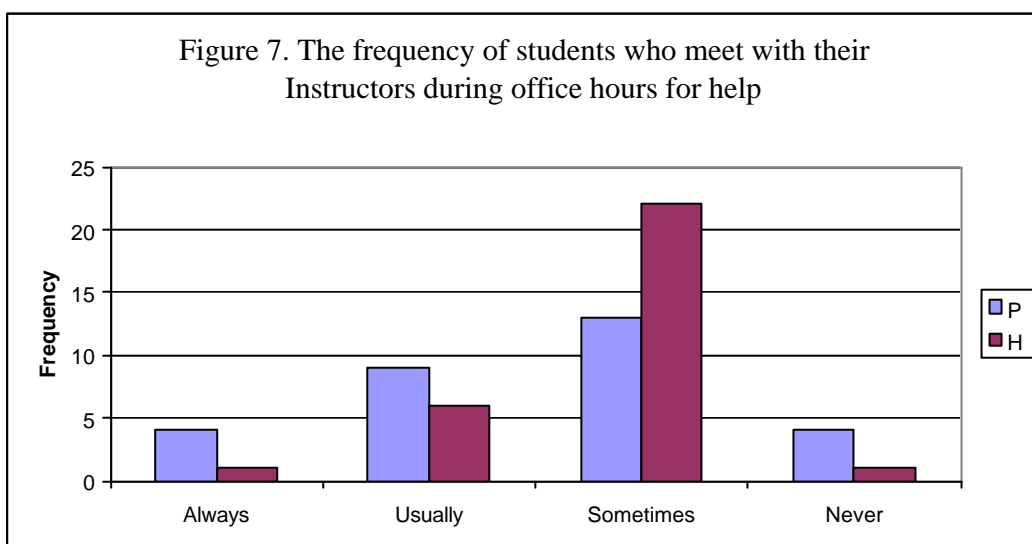
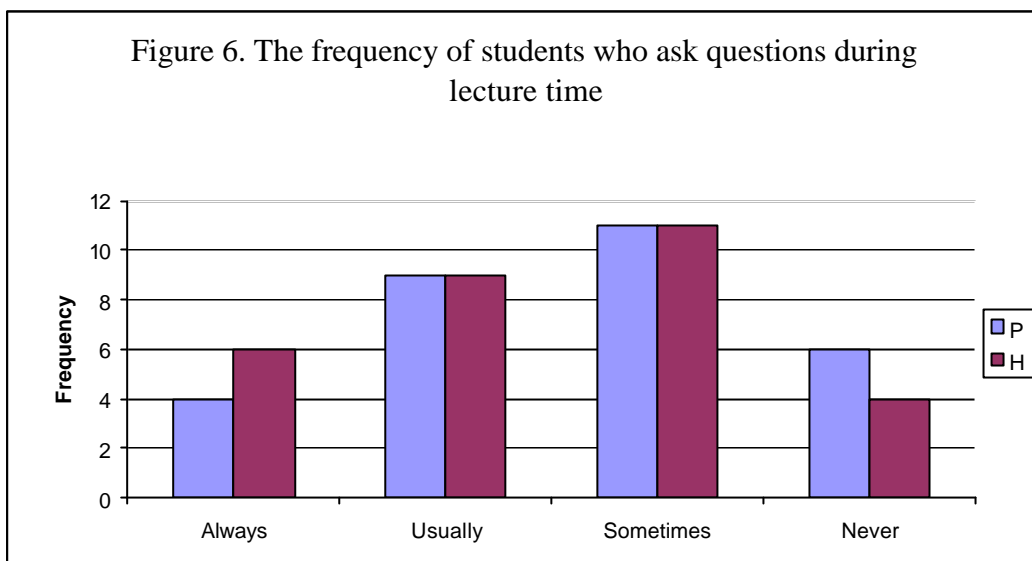
Support

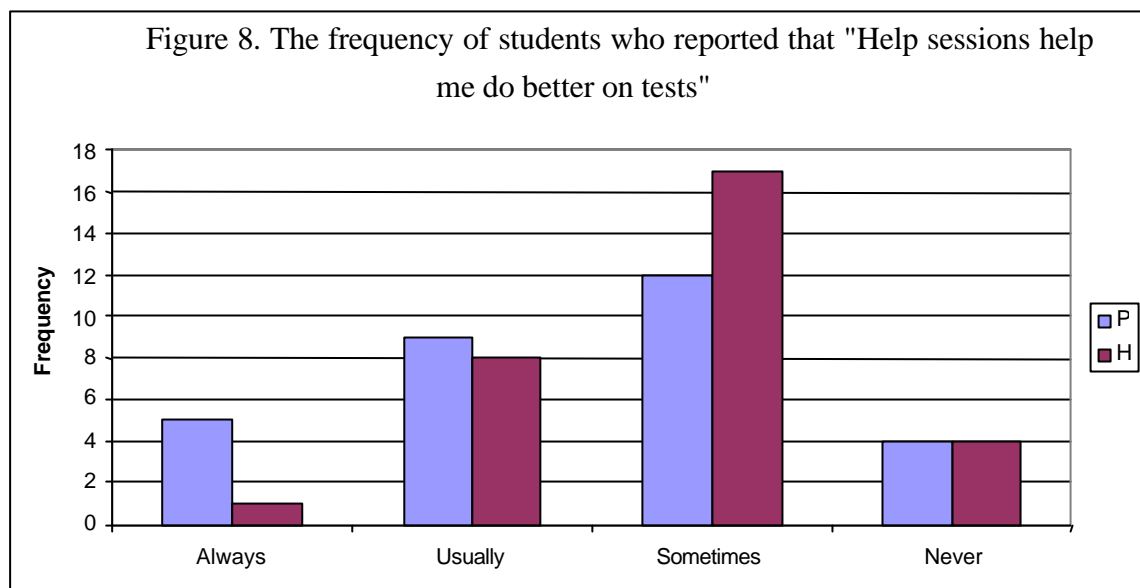
The third category, “Support,” included survey statements that focused on students’ opportunity to seek help either by study/help sessions or meeting with their instructors during their office hours. (Refer to Appendix G for statistical results of the survey questions in this category.) Most of these statements are also found in other categories discussed later. For instance, working in a group is discussed more fully in

the Time Management/Study Skills category. Nonetheless, two important statements regarding support include seeking help from professors and attending help/study sessions.

Figure 6 shows that 6 of the 30 honor students (20%) said that they “Always” ask questions during the lecture, whereas only 4 of the 30 probation students (13%) reported that they ask questions during lecture time. However, Figure 7 shows that students on academic probation meet with their instructors during office hours for help more than honor students do. One honor student said, “I do not like to ask questions in class. But I do meet with my instructor during his office hours.” Again it may all depend on individual preferences and comfort zones. Nonetheless, one probation student stated, “I am afraid to meet with my professor because of my absences.” Sometimes building rapport with an instructor seems difficult for students because of their poor behaviors in class.

The results indicated that probation students reported attending more study/help sessions than honor students did. In addition, Figure 8 shows that probation students also believed that they benefited more from these study/help sessions than honor students did. Journal data collected over the course of four semesters supports the belief that honor students tended not to benefit much from the help sessions. In most cases, senior honor students are administering these study/help sessions. Many probation students admitted that they do not attend these sessions because they feel they will not learn much from another student. They would rather attend a session administered by an instructor. One probation student explained, “I do not attend the help sessions because I know I will not learn much from a student lecturer. I would rather go to a help session that is given by my instructor.”





Time Management and Study Skills

Students need to organize their time and set priorities to develop an effective and realistic study plan. By analyzing students' responses to the statements in the "Time Management and Study Skills" category, I hoped to identify how students organized and prioritized their time, as well as how they developed and maintained a study schedule. (Refer to Appendix H for frequency of students' responses to the statements in this category.)

Many students do not realize that being a student is a full time job, and that it is important to come to "work" on time and not to be late or absent. Class attendance is a critical part of controlling one's time and setting priorities. Figures 9a and 9b show the percentages of students who reported that they attended all their classes. The results show that honor students reported attending their lectures more often than probation students. 70% of the honor students reported that they "Always" attended their lectures, but only a surprising 40% of the probation students reported that they "Always" do. In fact, interview data also strongly indicated that honor students tend to set a higher priority on attending classes than probation students. One computer science major student, for example, said, "If I miss a class I know I will miss some important information. I would rather write my own notes during class than getting it from someone else."

Figure 9a. Probation students' response to "I attend all my lectures"

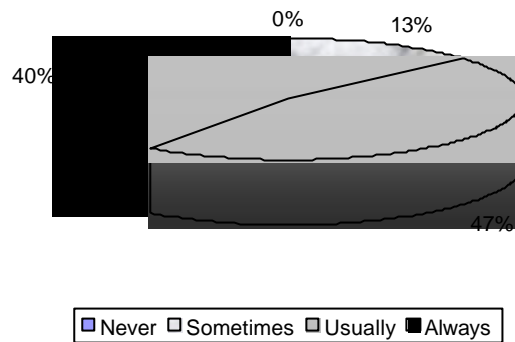
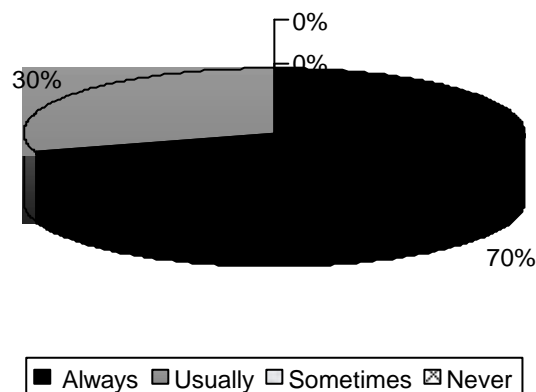


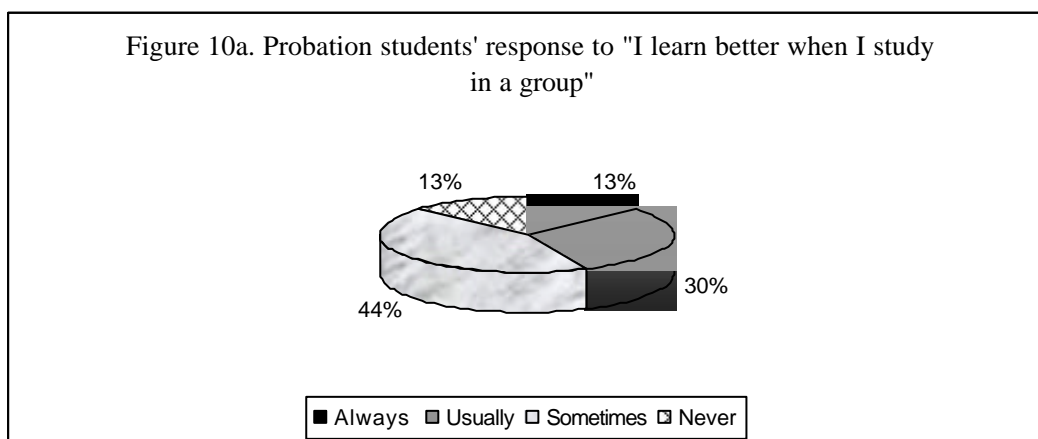
Figure 9b. Honor students' response to "I attend all my lectures"

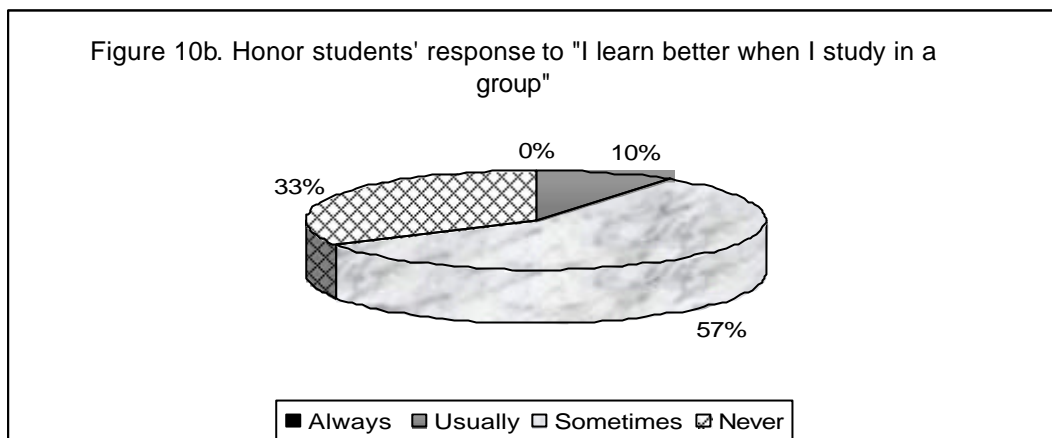


The chair of the Writing Studies Department in the College of Arts and Sciences also expressed his opinion on this: "Students have no sense of time management. They feel that the time spent in class is all they need." When students were asked whether they studied at least a little every day or night, one probation student said "Never," and only 33% stated that they "Always" do.

It is usually assumed that working in a group can be a useful study strategy for some students. In fact, the interview data with instructors and advisors indicated that they ask students to work in groups because they believe it helps them understand the

material better. Figures 10a and 10b show the percentages of probation and honor students who said they learn better when working in groups. Figures 10a and 10b suggest that students on probation seemed to believe that they learn better when they work in groups. 13% of the probationary students reported they prefer to study in groups, and none of the honor students reported that they learn better in a study group. One economics major honor student mentioned, "Studying in a group slows me down." This student went on to explain that she feels that studying in a group is more of a social activity than a study session. However, one probationary student noted, "Some professors complicate things more than they are! When I study with friends taking the same course with a different professor, I understand more and better from them than from the instructor." It may depend on an individual's learning style and preference when it comes to options about studying in a group or not. But the results from this study seem to indicate that some probationary students' learning styles may differ from those of honor students. For example, 33% of the honor students reported they never learn better in a study group, while 13% of the probation students answered "Never." Another honor student majoring in English noted, "I often do 90% or more of the work [in a group]. I need to work with reliable and responsible group members."





Moreover, in response to the statement, "I think that note taking is a waste of time," most students in both groups reported it is never a waste of time to take notes while reading. 73% of the probation students and 60% of the honor students responded "Never" too this statement. However, one computer science honor student suggested in an interview that it *was* a waste of time for him. He admitted that he would rather write in the margins of the text while he read. He felt that this was more practical: "I never take notes while reading. I usually just make notes on the sides [margins] of the text. I think it is more useful than taking notes on a separate paper. I can easily look at these notes when I review for my test."

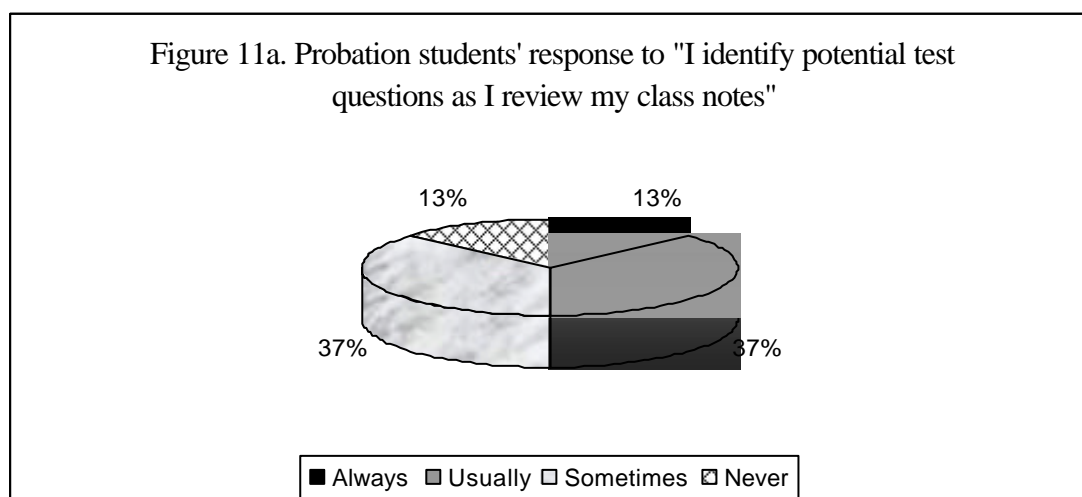
Test Preparation

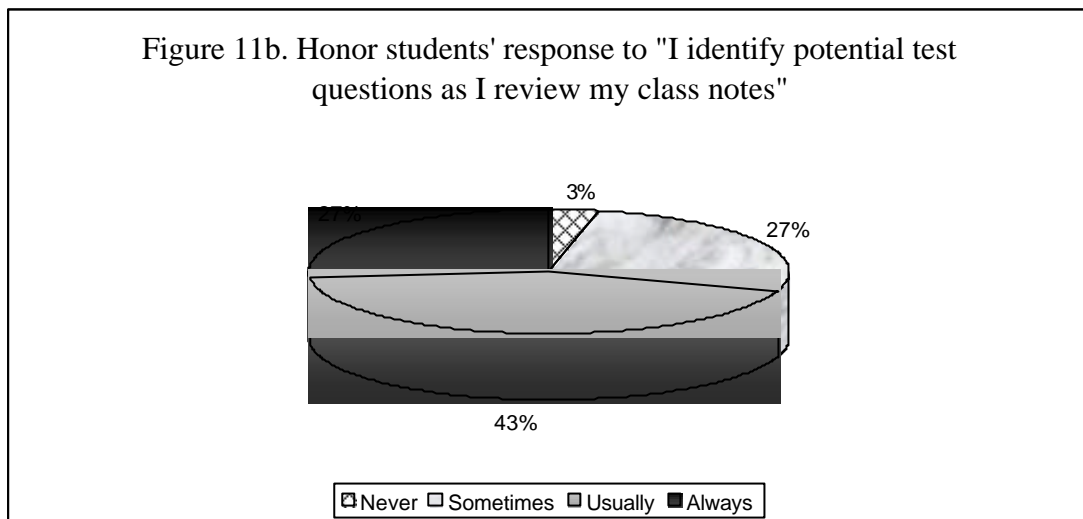
The fifth category, "Test Preparation," included survey statements that focused on students' behaviors in preparing for a test, in other words, the strategies employed before a test. (Refer to Appendix I for more detail on how both groups responded to the survey statements in this category.) Test preparation includes a variety of strategies that are very important for students to develop and use to ensure good test performance. Such strategies include reviewing notes, reading text material, and creating and completing practice tests, to name a few.

When students were asked whether they rewrite their notes in their own words for review material, probation students said they practiced this strategy more than the honor students. Results indicated that only 13% of the honor students rewrote their notes, whereas 37% of the probation students did. Is rewriting a waste of time? Most

honor students believe it is. They relied more on the textbook and felt that the class notes are just guidelines to follow.

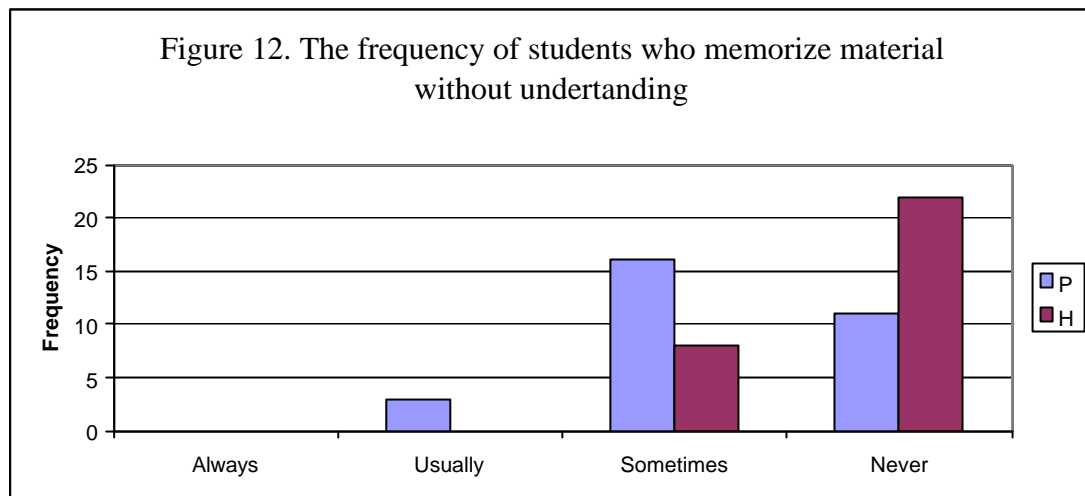
When students were asked whether they identify potential test questions as they review course material, Figures 11a and 11b show that honor students responded that they identified potential test questions while they review their text material more than two times more than the probation students. 70% of the honor students noted that they always/usually do in comparison to only 26% of the probation students who said they practice this strategy. When asked whether they complete and practice their own practice test, 10% of the probation students replied “Always,” but none of the honor students replied that they always do. In addition, 67% of the honor students noted they never create or complete practice tests. One honor student claimed, “I think [practice tests] will confuse me more.” This student was referring to her teachers’ past tests. She felt that practice tests limit her study material and she only comes to find a totally different test when she sits down and takes the real test. Most honor students said they do identify and answer potential test questions while reading. This is an indication that they do prepare practice tests, but instead of creating them on paper they indicated that they practice test taking while reading and answering questions mentally or orally. An honor student explained, “While reading the test material, I try to answer questions I face during reading the material.”





At the university level, test questions are usually presented in two different formats, multiple choice questions or short/long answer essay questions. Multiple choice tests usually require students to recognize information, whereas essay tests expect students to recall information. Many students prefer multiple choice tests because they feel they can recognize the correct answer from the available item choices. A probation student remarked that she prefers multiple choice tests because she can usually link questions and answers straightforwardly. This student, like many others, tended to memorize more easily than study for understanding.

Survey statement 37 investigated whether students memorize material without understanding. Figure 12 shows that honor students reported that they do not practice this strategy as much as probation students. While 19 of the 30 probation students (63%) reported that they sometimes/usually practice this strategy, 73% of the honor students said they never do.

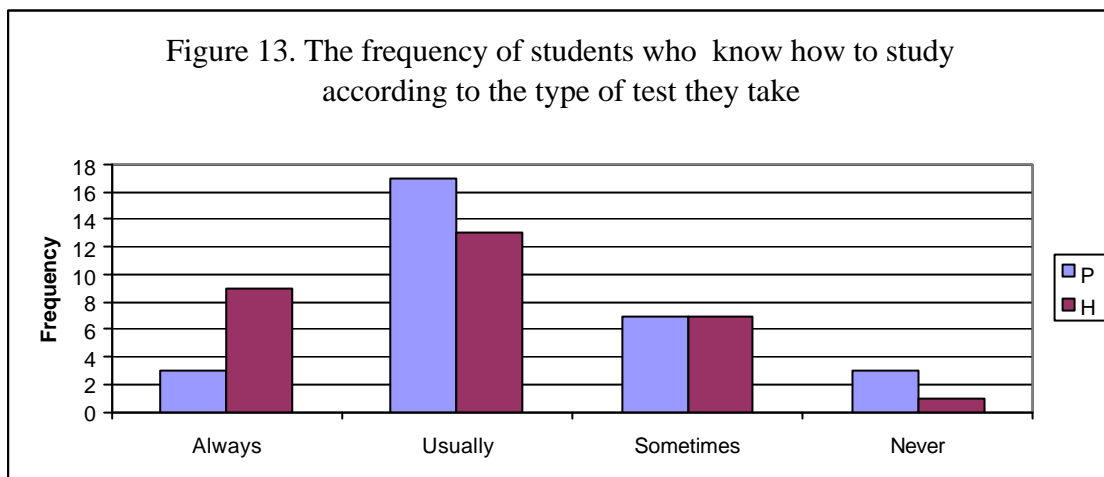


Many AUS students come directly from the traditional high school curriculum, where memorization is a key factor in learning, and where critical thinking is encouraged very little or not at all. One probation student remarked, “OK, the problem with me is that I don’t memorize, I can’t, so if I want to do well in something I have to be fully understandable of the whole things.” She does not seem to understand that this is a *good* thing; understanding the material gets her better marks than memorizing it. Another honor student said multiple choice tests limits one’s knowledge. She explained, “Students are expected to study key points and not try to know content of the topic.” This student prefers to use “logic to try to answer” a test question rather than simply using rote-memorization.

In the interview sessions with students, I noticed that students on probation seemed to feel that cramming for a test is a useful strategy. According to the survey, too, 13% of the probation students responded cramming is always a useful strategy, while only 6% of the honor students responded “Always.” However, when they responded to the statement, “I leave my studying until the night before the test,” both groups responded equally. 30% in each group said “Never,” and 6% said “Always.” This may indicate that students are aware that cramming is not the best way to go, and thus studying over 2-3 days before the exam is preferred to eliminate procrastination and reduce stress and test anxiety.

Nonetheless, students can better prepare for a test when they know what type of test they will be taking. When the students were asked whether they know how to study according to the type of test they were taking, Figure 13 shows both groups

most frequently responded “Usually.” They all seemed to realize that when students are aware of the test type and/or format, it makes studying the material more straightforward. However, three times as many honor students (30%) answered “Always” in response to this statement as probation students (10%).



Effective test performance depends on both preparation strategies and test-taking strategies. Students are at an advantage when they know how to prepare for the type of test they will be taking and how to employ effective test-taking strategies to ensure successful test performance. The last category discusses findings of this study’s particular interest, “Test-taking Strategies.”

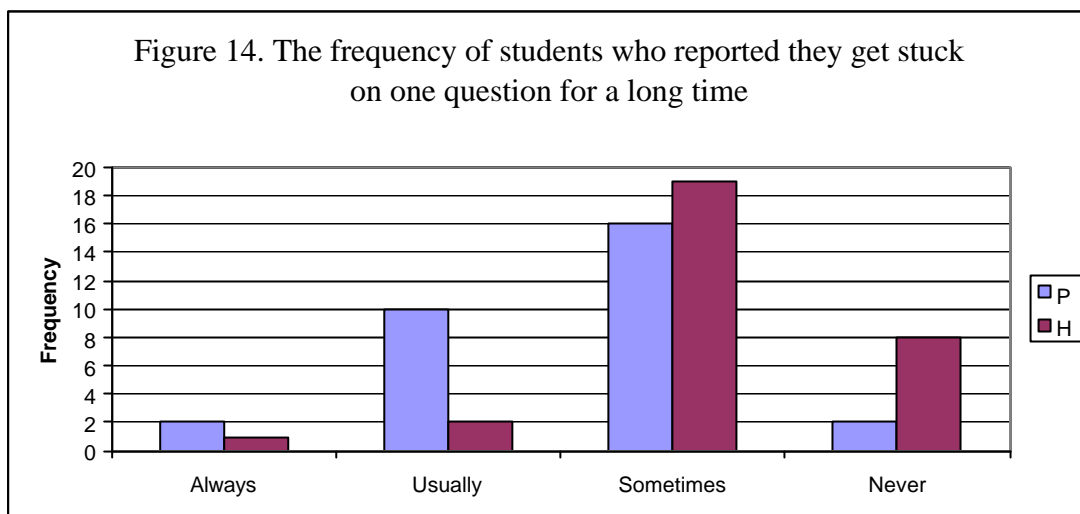
Test-taking Strategies

The survey statements in the “Test-taking Strategies” category were meant to help identify how TTS practices of EFL students on academic probation differ from those of students with high academic success. (Refer to Appendix J to view the statistical analysis of the particular survey statements that focus on student’s strategies employed during a test.)

One important TTS that is stressed in many test preparation and TTS textbooks and articles (e.g., Fry, 2004; McKee, 2003; Pauk, 2001) is reading over the entire exam paper before starting to write. This is seen as an advantageous strategy to employ during any testing situation. Results show that 33% of the honor students and

40% of the probation students reported they “Never” practice this strategy. One probation student explained he felt that if he read over the exam he would become more anxious, and this would make him more worried because he would come across some questions he was unsure of. On the other hand an honor student noted she usually, if not always, looks for questions she does not know and tries to recall important information to help her answer such questions while answering other test questions. She explained, “I allow time for my mind to recall and link information to help me do well on the questions I am not certain about.”

When students are unsure about a question, they tend either to move on to the next or get stuck on one test question for a long time. Figure 14 shows that most of the participants in both groups said they sometimes get stuck on a test question for a long time. Furthermore, 100% of the honor students said they always/usually recall what they have studied during a test, whereas only 76% of the probation students reported they are able to recall studied material during the test. In other words, 24% of the probation students claimed they were not able to recall what they had studied during the test-taking situation. These students face what is often referred to as “brain block.” This is basically the tendency to go blank and then remember answers to test questions as soon as the paper has been submitted. One probation students mentioned, “I study really hard and I never get what I expect.” This student indicated that although she knows the material well she still receives a low test score. She knew she needed to control her nervousness, an effect of text anxiety. For instance, she realized she dwelt on past performances and this caused her to be more nervous, so she eliminated these thoughts when taking the next test and performed better.



There seemed to be only a slight difference in both groups' approach in many test-taking strategies. For example, most students in both groups indicated that they outlined their essays before starting to write. Only 13% of the students in both groups said they do not practice this strategy. However, 33% of the honor students responded that they always do, and 27% of the probation students responded "Always."

More than half of each group's respondents said they read all options on a multiple choice question before selecting the correct one. Only one of the probation students said he does not do this. He stated, "I read the options and choose the one that is correct. If I see the correct answer I will choose it and move on to the next question." This student may or may not have identified a correct answer, but he needs to realize that reading through all options will ensure he chooses the most accurate answer.

A student may sometimes choose the correct answer by taking an educated guess. While 53% of the honor students and 40% of the probation students reported they sometimes guess at a question that they do not understand, only 10% from both groups reported they always guess when they have trouble understanding what a test question is asking.

In summary, the findings from the student survey, interviews with students, instructors, advisors, and administrators, and daily observations of students attending academic achievement advisors' sessions suggest that the use of test-taking strategies do help to increase students' academic performance. In general, the probation students

in this study indicated that they used fewer test-taking strategies than honor students, and they also used strategies suggested by experts less often than honor students. Specifically, probation students reported that they worry and panic more than honor students and claim that this interferes with their performance. Language proficiency may be assumed to play a role in students' academic performance. However, in this study, the honor student participants did have higher TOEFL scores than the probation students, but this does not mean that they are better learners. Many students with low TOEFL scores can also be found among those with academic success. Nonetheless, many students on probation reported that they fail to answer test questions to their best ability due to their low English reading and writing ability. In fact, these students claim to perceive themselves as having a lower English proficiency than their classmates, which they feel is the reason why they have poor academic performance.

Probation students also reported that they rarely practice the following study habits or skills: reviewing material before class, studying at least a little every day or night, identifying potential test questions as they review their class notes, and knowing how to study according to the type of test they will take. In addition, probation students seem to get stuck on a test question for a long time and are usually unable to recall studied material during an exam more often than honor students are.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

Conclusions about the six categories relating to test-taking and language proficiency are discussed in this chapter. This chapter provides an objective summary that supports this study's finding. It also includes limitations and directions for future research, as well as implications for advisors, teachers, and administrators.

Attitude and Support

There is a great deal of research on the role of attitude and motivation in second language learning (i.e., Deci & Ryan, 1991; Dornyei, 1994; Gardner, 1985). It seems that students benefit from positive attitudes, and negative attitudes may lead to a decrease in motivation. Students' attitudes towards their studies and their motivation for academic success have a great impact on their attentiveness to study. If students' goals and attitudes about themselves are not identified, students have difficulties with concentration, attention, and other factors that promote good study habits. In order to develop good study habits, students need to generate a level of motivation to help them take on the responsibility for their own learning and for managing their own study activities.

Motivation plays a large part in students' academic achievement and success. Gardner's (1982) classic research on motivation describes two components of motivation. These components are integrative and instrumental motivation. Students who are characterized as being integratively motivated have the desire of learning for personal growth and cultural enrichment, whereas students who are instrumentally motivated have the desire of learning for practical goals, more specifically perhaps to obtain a good job and receive a high salary. Deci and Ryan (1991), however, focus on the source of learners' motivation. They point to an important contrast between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Students who are labeled as intrinsically motivated are driven to seek challenges and achieve academic success, whereas students who are extrinsically motivated are ones who desire to receive external rewards, such as good

grades or to avoid punishment. Students need to enjoy the whole learning experience, take risks, show enthusiasm and interest, and also be creative to help themselves feel self confident about their own learning process.

Students need to be self-motivated and convey an “I want to” attitude rather than an “I have to” attitude to ensure the best possible academic success. Lightbown and Spada (1999) point out that depending on learners’ attitude, EFL learners are learning either as a “source of enrichment or source of resentment” (p. 56). If the reason for EFL students on probation learning is external pressure (e.g, parents or family), internal motivation may be minimal and general attitude towards learning may be negative. Moreover, Dornyei (1994) proposes that the basic components of the learning process are language, learner, and learning situation levels, which include integrative motivation, self-confidence, and the appraisal of the teaching environment. According to Dornyei, the basic elements in the learner component are the need for achievement, anxiety, self-efficacy, and self confidence.

This study’s participants included probation students who regularly met with their academic achievement advisors (AAAs). These participants were involved in identifying what sorts of study habits and test-taking training they received to improve their performance at AUS and how, if at all, they employed effective test-taking strategies. The students who met with their AAAs took the opportunity to find solutions to increase their awareness of facilities and help centers that were available to prepare them for a more successful university experience. Some students improved their behavior and were open to changes in their life style to better prepare them to study and succeed as EFL learners in an American-structured institution. For example, one probation student decided to set priorities and attend his lectures and meet up with friends for a coffee *after* class time, not *during* class time. This student became more motivated in his studies and had a positive attitude. He attended class first and made time for socializing afterwards.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether EFL probation students use effective test-taking strategies. Results from the students’ survey supported the hypothesis that those students who attended AAA meetings received test preparation and test-taking training to help them do better on tests, increase their GPAs, and

eventually get off probation. Thus, most probation students, after meeting with their AAA, do practice TTSs and are utilizing them in their daily student lives.

In short, students who met with their AAA got off probation at a rate much higher than those students who did not. Table 1 compares the number of students who regularly attended CAS AAA sessions to those who didn't. It also shows the number of probation students that got off probation in relation to the number of students who did not. The latter students perhaps did not get off probation because they did not attend AAA sessions. The table shows that more students got off probation after meeting with an AAA. For example, in the Fall 2004 semester, 32% of the students who regularly met with an AAA got off probation, but only 14% of the students who did not meet regularly with an AAA got off probation. It should be noted that although some students did not meet with their AAA, they were still able to get off probation. It is possible that such students either knew what to do to get off probation or were not too far from a 2.00 GPA and managed to get off probation within one semester on their own. For instance, during the Spring 2004 semester, of the 19 students who did not attend AAA sessions, 10 students improved their performances; that is, they increased their GPAs, and five got off probation. The findings show that effective use of TTSs improves students' self-confidence when they develop self-efficacy and achievement after they overcome bad test-taking situations. Students learn from their mistakes and change their attitude about the whole AUS test-taking experience, and learn from their mistakes to promote better test-taking encounters.

Table 1. Probation students' performance with and without attending advisor sessions

	Total No. of Probation students on my list	Students who did not attend AAA sessions	Total No. who improved GPA	No. who got off Probation	Students who attended AAA sessions	Total No. who improved GPA	No. who got off Probation
Fall 2002	n=36	7	3 (28%)	1 (14%)	29	20 (72%)	7 (24%)
Spring 2003	n=36	5	- 0%	- 0%	31	23 (77%)	6 (19%)
Fall 2003	n=55	24	7 (29%)	5 (20%)	31	9 (29%)	10 (32%)
Spring 2004	n=49	19	10 (53%)	5 (26%)	30	19 (62%)	4 (13%)
Fall 2004	n=35	7	3 (42%)	1 (14%)	28	17 (64%)	9 (32%)

The secondary purpose of this study was to determine whether AUS EFL students who were placed on probation for poor academic performance for two or more consecutive semesters were either unaware of TTSs or simply did not employ them for satisfactory outcomes. The findings from my daily contact with the College of Arts and Sciences probation two (P2) and academic dismissal students showed that 45% of the students who did not meet with me as their AAA did not improve academically (refer to Table 1). I believe one reason for their lack of performance is due to insufficient consciousness of effective TTSs. I believe that the students, after meeting with an AAAs and being introduced to TTSs and how to use them effectively have a better chance of getting off probation. Of the 149 students whom I regularly met with between Fall 2002 and Fall 2004, only 17% did not improve or get off probation. My records show that the majority of these students admitted that they were aware of such strategies but decided not to apply them, or were not applying them appropriately. For example, one student remarked, "I know I have to set time aside to prepare for an exam so I do not procrastinate, but I always end up studying the night before and do bad on my tests." These findings suggest that many AUS EFL

students, who remained on academic probation for more than two semesters and even though they were aware of possible TTSs did not apply them successfully.

Time Management/Study Skills and Test Preparation

The third purpose of this study was to determine whether honor students employed test-taking strategies more often and more effectively than those on probation. The results illustrated that honor students did employ effective test-taking strategies more often than probation students. For instance, honor students were less likely than the probation students to face the following problems during test taking: lose points on a test because they misread the question, get stuck on one test question for a long time, be unable to recall what they had studied during the test, feel nervous, and/or change their test answers just before turning in their test paper. Probation students, on the other hand, were much more likely to not read over the entire exam before beginning, have problems recalling material during the test, get stuck on questions for a long time, not ask questions, experience high levels of anxiety and nervousness, and/or have low levels of concentration.

Additionally, honor students seem to use all the time allowed for the test more often than the probation students did. However, some honor students admitted that they made less of an effort to employ test-taking strategies than those on probation because they felt more in tune and were used to the whole testing experience at AUS. Many students are simply better test takers than others. We can also conclude honor students rarely faced severe levels of anxiety during test taking. Such students seemed to have found a way to control their levels of anxiety to a minimum to ensure anxiety does not interfere with their test performances; thus honor students tended to be less likely to feel nervous or panic during a test. Honor students had little to gain by improving their test-taking strategies because they were already at their highest academic potential, and were able to maintain their test performances with little additional effort, whereas students on probation had a lot to gain from TTSs. Their GPAs are low and their effort in using effective TTSs leaves more room for improvement.

Effective test-taking performances depend on both preparation strategies and test-taking strategies. The following section discusses the implementation of effective test-taking strategies by probation and honor students.

Test-Taking Strategies

The student survey and the interview process provided insights into how AUS EFL students on probation feel about their academic performance. The interview process with advisors, instructors, and administration provided interesting views on TTSs and the importance of teaching them to EFL students at AUS. Based on the survey responses and the interviews, we can reasonably conclude that with time and practice test-taking strategies have beneficial effects on students' academic performance. When strategies are practiced and used effectively, students become better test takers, who are also engaged in feeling more confident and feeling better about themselves. Students can realize that anything is possible if they put in the effort, develop and maintain a realistic study plan, and practice good study habits. They can become conscious that time management, preparing for tests, and using effective test-taking strategies help them to improve academically. In addition, teaching TTSs to students provides them with the opportunity to do well on tests because they employ the following TTSs: seek help as soon as possible, build the habit of asking questions, prepare mentally and physically for a test, practice relaxation techniques, have a system of time management, use critical thinking, follow directions, read questions carefully, and check their answers, to name but a few.

Poor test-taking strategies or a lack of test-taking strategies is only one of the many factors that may hinder an EFL student's academic performance. In addition, some other factors, also a part of the student survey, that affect students' success at AUS and may also be reasons why students are placed on academic probation include the following: poor English proficiency, lack of a time management system, poor study skills and test preparation skills, lack of motivation, and having a negative attitude about the whole AUS experience. Other factors that are not included in the student survey and may also hinder students' academic performance include the

following: learning disabilities, lack of a basic study foundation, not being happy with the selected major, taking more courses than they can handle, and dropping courses halfway through a semester when stress is unmanageable.

Moreover, in this study, some AUS instructors identified their opinions and viewpoints about the importance of TTS instruction and whether they felt that TTSs are essential in an L2 teaching and learning environment. Most of them acknowledged the importance of TTS training in the AUS EFL environment. Instructors were also concerned with their students' performances, and some actually supported and guided their students' needs for test taking. However, when teaching students to prepare for and take tests, some instructors felt that students often relied too much on teachers to provide study notes. Many professors, teachers, and advisors feel that most of their students, before coming to AUS, were used to the "spoon feeding" approach, where everything was spelled out for them. But once admitted to AUS, students realized that they were expected to be independent language learners and have a sense of autonomy. It's not easy for all students, but pain makes one move and feel more passionate about work. In other words, the use of TTSs can be tedious at times but in the long run all that hard work truly pays off. Students' academic performance is improved and can be observed in their test scores and GPAs.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study focused on EFL students' test-taking strategies at AUS. If there had been more time, follow up interviews after the spring term would have been conducted. This process would have offered interesting feedback on how students on probation performed on their final tests, whether they repeated courses, and how their GPAs and academic standing were affected. This would have also given useful information about whether the new rule for repeating courses has minimized the number of students on academic probation. In addition, a study comparing the students' behaviors before and after being on probation would provide insights to answer the question of why so many AUS EFL students are placed on academic probation. Over two to four semesters, such a study could observe whether students previously on probation maintained their good academic standing, and more

specifically how test-taking strategies were used to help them maintain a CGPA above 2.00. The number of students who fall back into probation would also have provided useful information. These results would provide an awareness of whether TTS use is always a concern or is just one of many factors that hinders students' performance level.

Another possibility may be to adapt the student survey statements by adding more TTSs statements and/or perhaps conducting and observing students' behavior in a real testing situation. So, instead of collecting students' views of test-taking, a researcher may place students in a real test situation and observe their test-taking tactics to find out what test-taking strategies are actually being used. Research methods that might be used include verbal or think aloud protocol. This technique is a major tool in gathering data on TTSs and is either used while answering test items or immediately afterwards.

Although this study covered some other factors that may contribute to students' academic performance, future research could provide more insight into how factors such as attitude, language proficiency, support, and time management and study skills relate to EFL academic success. Thus, researchers may decide to investigate these factors and others that hinder students' TTSs.

A follow-up study could also build on what this study has to offer. For example, a study could investigate and distinguish the varying students' responses from different majors in AUS, and hence in different content areas. Each school or college covers different domains and content areas, some more complex than others. This was not taken into consideration, and it might be a factor that limits students' test performance, even if they have developed effective and useful TTSs. Also, a researcher may decide to investigate how cultural and contextual factors might affect academic achievement. Thus, further research is necessary to identify such factors as the social and economic status of AUS students which may affect their academic performances.

There are limitations to this study that should be considered. First the sample size was small. For a more reliable and valid study, more participants would be needed. Second, the validity of the survey items was not adequately established. This

was the first time the survey was used. Although the survey was a useful tool for the present study, more TTSs statements would have made it more functional. Placing more emphasis on TTSs before, during, and after test taking would have had more impact on the results. Also, I assumed that the participants understood the meaning of the word “cramming.” A few students asked for its meaning, so this statement cannot be taken seriously because some students may not have known the meaning of cramming, even though the term is used in workshops and is mentioned in the AUS “Adjusting to University Life” handbook, which all freshmen received during their orientation process. How much time is necessary to study for a particular test? Students on probation find that cramming for a test is a useful strategy. However, when students responded to the statement, “I leave my studying until the night before the test,” both groups responded equally; 30% said never and 6.67% said always. This shows that students may have been aware that cramming is not the best way to go, and thus studying over 2-3 days before the exam is preferred to eliminate procrastination and reduce stress and test anxiety.

In addition, honor students were asked to complete the same survey the probation students completed, and their responses were compared. Another useful study may be to conduct a similar study that compares responses of students presently on probation with responses of students who recently improved and got off probation.

However, this study is the first to study test preparation skills and use of effective test-taking strategies by probation students at an English-medium university in the Middle East. This study has provided some insight about AUS EFL academic probation students. It has also opened new doors to expand on the reasons why students are placed on academic probation. Therefore, this study provides a good basis for other studies to build on. Further test-taking research in similar contexts should incorporate EFL students’ use of their L1 in their classrooms. This would provide interesting findings about whether students study using the English language or not, and whether they translate their texts into their native language. Conducting such a study may help students, faculty, advisors, and administrators understand whether translation is helpful and beneficial in test-taking situations, or whether it causes more problems and leads to students’ failure. This is another approach

researchers could take in identifying the reasons why so many EFL students show poor test-taking performance at the university level. In addition, future research can also be conducted to investigate whether students' L1 test-taking strategies are transitioned into their L2 test-taking strategies.

The research showed that EFL probation students are aware of TTSs used in a testing situation, but still need time to practice and use them effectively. The number of probation students is declining, whether it is because of the new rule of repeating courses or because they are more aware of the advisors, counselors, workshops, and office hours available on campus. Further research is needed to clarify the effects of these factors. Other factors that help students achieve include having a positive attitude, being motivated, and being prepared to take on the challenge at the university level. With a positive attitude, an adequate level of motivation, a willingness to take on responsibility for their own learning, knowing how to prepare for tests, and knowing how to employ effective TTSs, EFL learners have the potential to survive as students at an American institution

The next section offers some suggestions for academic achievement advisors, as well as for teachers and school administrators, to help promote and improve the academic performances and success of their EFL students who are studying at the university level.

Implications of the Study

Implications for Academic Achievement Advisors

During the interview process with other advisors at AUS, they mentioned that they are teaching their students the benefits of using TTSs. Such instruction encourages students to realize that these strategies are helpful and increases their overall awareness of their usefulness in any test-taking situation. Advisors also noticed that students realize that these strategies are helpful and increase an overall awareness of the strategic approaches to any test-taking situation. If students are serious about their study at AUS, they are advised to use effective TTSs to help improve their test scores.

If students are willing to attend one-on-one meetings with an AAA for help, I believe they can use this opportunity to seek help to improve their academic performance and study habits, and proceed with their study at the university level with success and confidence. Many students are not aware of the efforts needed to contribute to their own learning success. One obvious effort is seeking and admitting that they need help with organizing their time, and setting a realistic study schedule that encourages them to change their behavior to better match the demands of university life. Many university students strive to achieve their fullest learning potential, but some don't. It is also advisable that teachers communicate regularly with counselors and administrators to discuss progress and difficulties and to provide support services that students need to help promote academic success, e.g., regular help sessions. AUS offers a variety of study/help sessions throughout each semester. Workshops are also presented which include topics on time management, study skills, stress management, and preparing for and taking tests. Along with these workshops, course help sessions are available, usually before test periods.

Many students are not aware of the help sessions available, either because they do not pay attention to the posters advertised all over campus, or because they simply ignore the suggestions made in class about available course help sessions and do not request and ask about them. One student noted, "I think there should be a help session for the course, so that if students do not understand the subject they could go and get help." I usually advise my students to ask their instructors about possible help sessions, and if there are none available, students are advised to ask their instructors if a list of senior student tutors is available. I believe what these students really want are hints and clues from the instructor, not merely a review session. I was surprised when one of my students told me, "They [departments] are no longer catering to our needs...there are no more math help sessions...I want to drop math, this is affecting my motivation and GPA." AUS addresses the need for help sessions, but students need to realize that help sessions are only one mode of support. Other modes include forming a study group, meeting with the instructor during office hours, and asking for tutorial help, maybe from a senior student.

I encourage advisors and teachers/instructors, to make explicit to their students that if students want to improve, it is their own responsibility, and if they have the power and will to work hard they will improve at their own realistic pace. Students who are committed to doing better usually attend regular AAA sessions for help and support. They also find ways to face their fears and learn from their mistakes to ensure better future experiences. AAAs and their workshops are one great way to offer students strategies to improve their study skills and increase their motivation for a successful learning experience at the university level. A psychologist at the university also presents such workshops each semester. She feels that students do benefit from the conscious use of learning strategies and understanding how they learn best.

As an AAA, I hear many students claim that they will study more, but this is not good enough. Therefore, I usually ask them how they plan to accomplish this. I tell them that they need to set aside time specifically for important activities such as studying, reviewing, reading, and preparing for tests. Students are also reminded that they need to develop and stick to an effective study schedule. I believe their poor time management yields poor test preparation skills which interfere with effective test-taking strategies. Nonetheless, students and advisors need to work as a team to find helpful suggestions to improve time management, study skills, test preparation, and test-taking strategies.

The strategy that I, as well as other advisors and instructors, especially those in the IEP program, have found that students lack is the skill of managing time. For example, EFL probation students often have poor preparation skills which hinders their performance on tests. Students need to develop a regular time management system that enables them to organize their time and may help them build good study habits and thus prepare them for tests and for using useful TTSs. Trouble with managing time is one other factor that limits students' performance at AUS.

Students need to realize that it is important to study on a regular basis and to be consistent in their study practices, for example, studying at least two hours every day or night. Students should be advised by AAAs, during the orientation and meeting processes, to break down their study load into smaller manageable parts. This would

encourage them to complete tasks without feeling overwhelmed. Otherwise, some students might give up when they find the task is too much for them. One architecture instructor with more than 10 years experience said she trains her students to do just that, divide work into smaller tasks. She believes that by doing this the amount of stress is distributed over the entire semester, and not just at test time.

Advisors have a role too; they should try not to make students' life more complex and frustrating. Students do not like to be forced and told what to do. This usually tends to have the opposite effect, so that instead of encouraging and motivating students, AAAs sometimes unintentionally annoy and demotivate students. Therefore, in order to encourage students, advisors should not be too forceful. It takes some students more than two semesters to change their habits and increase their chances of removing themselves from academic probation, and it takes time to learn how and when to use TTSs appropriately.

Implications for Instructors/Administrators

While students' GPAs are the most commonly used criterion of academic success, some researchers have noted that it is not always a valid indicator of academic success (Graham, 1987, p. 506). Graham argues that GPAs do not account for the number of courses taken; for example, many students may be able to handle only up to three courses at a time, and GPAs will not reflect this. In addition to students' GPAs, Graham's research also shows that the relationship between English proficiency and academic success is complex and unclear. He suggests that language test scores, e.g., TOEFL, "should not play a disproportionate role in admissions decisions" (p. 516). Such claims should be heeded, and I believe teachers should be familiar with current research about the relationship between language proficiency and academic performance. Are EFL students ready to learn cognitively demanding academic content in the mainstream? Some practices and procedures that have been identified and should be in place to ensure that transition meets students needs include preparing students to take tests with success. Lucas and Wagner (1999) suggest strategies that will promote students' success before, during, and after the transition process. They provide ten factors considered to be appropriate criteria for determining

when English language learners are ready to be transitioned into mainstream courses. These include such factors as reading and writing skills, self-concept and personal inclination towards transitioning, and family support.

It is also important that administrators and teachers consider differences among EFL learners as they plan instruction for their students. These differences include academic background and academic language proficiency (Freeman & Freeman, 2003, p. 5). Thus, administrators, instructors, and advisors should cater to students' needs and use a comfortable pace with each individual student. Students do not want to feel under too much pressure. Teachers are encouraged to increase their knowledge and sensibility about teaching "linguistically diverse learners" (Lucas & Wagner, 1999, p. 12). Teachers cannot expect too much from their students after only a short period of time. Students can start off slowly and gradually change their bad behaviors at a realistic rate to meet their needs. For instance, one student mentioned that she gets stressed out when her AAA tells her what to do and for how long: "[My advisor] stresses me out when she tells me, 'You have to study 24 hours a week.'"

According to experts' opinions, developing a student-teacher relationship creates a better learning atmosphere. During the student interview process I found that when students have an opportunity to discuss their feelings and rationalize their anxieties about test taking, it builds and creates a trust between students and teacher. Most of the teachers' interviewed during this study said they employed this strategy and found it to be very effective. They found that students became more familiar with the teachers' expectations and teaching styles, and were more in tune with their learning responsibilities. Students felt more at ease to discuss their problems and ask for suggestions to do better in their teachers' class and on tests when a relationship was developed between students and teacher. However, many students are not concerned with building a relationship and tend to feel less comfortable asking questions or clearing up any misunderstandings about the subject matter.

Students are advised to meet with their instructors and build rapport. This ensures that the students become more comfortable when asking questions and meeting the instructors for additional support. Sometimes building a rapport with an instructor seems difficult for students because of their poor behaviors in class. For

example, a probation student admitted she was embarrassed and afraid to see her professor during his office hours because of her poor attendance. She knew that the professor was not too keen about students who missed classes, and she felt this was a factor against her. I advised her to meet with the professor and assured her that she had nothing to worry about. She took the advice and when she met with her instructor, she came back and told me that he was nice and easy to talk to, and he even gave her some tips on how to do better on his tests. This student was amazed with the instructor's response. Although he did mention her absences were not acceptable, he provided some suggestions to help her progress better in his class, including attending more often. This may be considered as one means of support. I believe when teachers employ this strategy, their students become more confident learners. I believe when teachers acknowledge the beneficial outcomes of building student-teacher relationships, their students will develop a sense of appreciation and confidence that there is room for improvement. This type of support helps students adjust to a new environment and helps them create confidence that allows them to value education and themselves as learners.

Many students are surprised to find out that they all have different individual learning styles, so some methods work better for some than others. For instance, I usually advise students to try working in groups, and suggest that if it helps them they should continue. Otherwise, they are told this method is probably not the best for them, so students are then encouraged to try a different approach. For example, they can try working in pairs, or create test questions and solve them on their own.

Moreover, when a student tells me that he studied for 20 hours for a test while his friend, who received a better grade, only studied for five hours for the same test, I tell him that we all have different learning strategies and that it is not about how much one studies but rather *how* one studies. One Business Management instructor reminds her students, "It's not about the grade." She wants her students to forget about the grade and pace themselves better to actually get the work done. A common reason for students' poor academic performance may be addressed initially to the simple fact that students practice ineffective study habits. Students might be told that they are actually preparing for a test from day one of their classes. I tell my students that

attending lectures is the first step in preparing for a test, and of course attending in an active and alert state of mind is important. Obviously, many teachers enforce this in each of their classes, as was recorded during daily observations; they make it clear to their students that attending classes is an important factor that affects students' performance on tests. Attending class and taking good notes are some strategies that help students receive optimal test scores.

Another suggestion instructors are encouraged to practice is to provide explicit recommendations to their students that reading assigned text material is an important part of learning the course content. Instructors and advisors should advise their students not to rely only on class notes, but also to refer to the course textbook for additional information and clarification about course content. Most textbooks provide study questions at the end of each chapter. Students may also find that some instructors give clues within the test to help their students answer other more difficult questions on the test.

Nonetheless, teachers should provide clear, accurate information to their students about how they will be tested. This is known as transparency; students should know the expected content and format of the test they will be taking, the time they are allotted to complete the test, and how the test is scored, in other words, what grading scale will be used. In addition, teachers should make students aware that practice tests are created and are available to give some guidance and should not be taken at face value; that is, make it clear that instructors will definitely change their testing content but still stick to a similar testing format. On the other hand, probation students are advised to practice taking tests; this is one way they can get comfortable with test taking procedures. Students often feel that the act of memorizing material is the best way to achieve a high score on a test. This is wrong; it is best to encourage students to understand what they are reading instead of merely memorizing it.

When probation students seem to get stuck on one test question for a long time, they are advised to skip and move on to the next question when they face a question they cannot answer. They may practice an effective TTS and return to a marked question at a later time. Many students come to realize that when they move

on, other test questions trigger key words and concepts to help recall information to correctly respond to a previous unknown question.

Most of the time when students move on to the next question, other questions help them recall important ideas or concepts needed to answer a skipped question. In this study, 24% of the probation students said they were not able to recall what they had studied during the test-taking situation. These students faced “brain block.” This is basically the tendency to go blank and then remember answers to test questions as soon as the paper has been submitted. This may be due to their poor test preparation strategies or just the fact that they were too anxious and worried about doing poorly on the exam. Such students are encouraged to find ways to reduce their test anxiety and not to dwell on past poor performances. It may be the case that when students cannot recall information they studied during a test they may be fatigued because they have “procrastinated” and “crammed” the night before a test. Many students who come to my office admit this is very typical of them. So they are advised to change their ways, and study at least a little every day or to eliminate any possibility to procrastinate.

Another factor identified that limits students’ test scores includes worrying about doing poorly on the test they are about to take. This factor usually tends to leave students with low concentration. One probation student complained that she always worries about doing poorly on a test, even though she felt she understood and studied the material well. She was asked to approach test preparation and test taking differently; for example, she needed to find the reasons why she becomes nervous and work out a solution to minimize them. This student claimed that when she enters the exam room she automatically worries about not doing well and thinks of her past poor performances. She was advised that she would be more confident if she prepared for the test more wisely and did not dwell on past performances. If she is ready and well prepared she will do her best and receive the grade she deserves. Advisors have identified this approach to be very effective. Teachers should try to employ this approach because once students have identified the reasons why they feel the way they do, they are able to face and control their emotions and concentrate on the task at hand without dwelling on previous poor performances.

Helping students overcome their anxiety takes time. Teachers are encouraged to understand students' test anxiety as a factor that shapes their performances on tests. Many, if not all, students fear taking test. Students' level of anxiety usually is at its peak during test time. The fear of test-taking is part of the experience university life has to offer. Some students who have adequately prepared for a test claim that anxiety interferes with their test-taking, which affects their grades. Although a moderate level of anxiety is needed to motivate and excite students to do well on a test, a problem arises when a student has too much anxiety and cannot reduce it to a manageable amount (Shields, 2001).

Some students may also become very nervous when preparing for tests and during the administration of the test. Again, in order to reduce test anxiety, students should be advised to start early, set a regular time for daily homework, review notes on a daily basis, study for a period of time over several days to avoid cramming, learn to concentrate, use relaxation techniques, and build confidence in themselves, because anything is possible if students are dedicated and work hard. In addition, instructors may provide further suggestions that will help reduce levels of text anxiety so it does not interfere with their potential to do well on tests. For example, they need to encourage students to attend classes in an alert state of mind and be active listeners, participate in class, take good notes, and ask questions when appropriate during class lectures. Moreover, students should be frequently told that after class is a great time to read over notes and rewrite or summarize them for a better understanding of the material. Practicing good study skills includes studying at least a little almost every day or night. This may include forming a study group and meeting with instructors to review the new material and get answers to any questions to clarify understanding of the material. Developing good study habits ensures students' ability to face tests with confidence and with a positive attitude.

Test-taking places students in a stressful situation, and some deal with stress better than others. Some factors that cause students to be stressed include not being well prepared, trying to do too much at one time, and trying to complete a test within a certain time frame. Some suggestions for helping students reduce levels of stress during a test include coming prepared, ignoring other students' conversations about

test material before entering the test room, managing time, doing deep breathing exercises, realizing limitations, and practicing positive thinking. Nonetheless, when students are aware of effective TTSs, use them, students can improve their test scores, increase their GPAs and be removed from academic probation. AUS students are becoming more and more aware of what AAAs have to offer. For example, in Spring 2003 about 29% of the probation students were coming in to see me, but the following year 45% were coming to regular AAA sessions. These students who attended regular AAA sessions were aware of the benefits of TTSs, employed them, and came to approach test-taking with more confidence and with less anxiety—just as most honor students approach test-taking situations.

According to Lucas and Wagner (1999), “Obviously, students who complete tasks, turn in assignments [on time], and attend classes regularly get better grades than those who do not” (p. 10). From my observations of regular progress reports received from AUS professors, I would agree with many of their comments in that students’ test scores are best improved when students take realistic control of their attendance, time management, and test preparation, and of course employ effective test-taking strategies.

Many students feel that AUS is one of the best educational institutions in the UAE, and perhaps even in the Middle East, at which to study and receive a highly qualified university degree. They feel studying at AUS is a privilege. For example, one Saudi Arabian student I interviewed remarked, “It was my dream to come to AUS.... I have no other choice... [since I] do not want to go back home.” This study has highlighted the importance of test-taking strategies to students’ success. Academic achievement advisors, instructors, and of course students need to work together to ensure students do not miss the opportunity to fulfill their dreams because of poor test-taking skills. Students need not only to learn *what* test-taking strategies to use but also *how* and *when* to use them for better test results. TTSs obviously help students improve their test scores. However, many students need time for preparation and orientation before using TTSs effectively. It is the students’ responsibility to seek help, which teachers and advisors should provide. This help includes providing students with guidance and models, as well as encouragement to use TTSs to achieve

academic success. This study has highlighted that effective test performance depends on both preparation strategies and test-taking strategies. Therefore, students are at an advantage when they know how to prepare for different types of tests and how to employ effective test-taking strategies to ensure successful test performances.

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Appendix A: Summary of the Number of Students on Academic

Probation for the Last Two Academic Years at AUS

AUS Students on Academic Probation per College/School per Semester
(Source: AUS Office of Institutional Research)

	Fall 2002	Spring 2003	Fall 2003	Spring 2004	Fall 2004
CAS	92	35	84	51	73
	20	59	14	61	15
	13	25	19	32	22
Total	125	119	117	144	110
SA&D	39	11	38	19	23
	8	24	7	20	7
	2	3	4	2	6
Total	49	38	49	41	36
SBM	181	62	135	72	118
	43	91	26	80	28
	19	20	13	13	23
Total	234	173	174	171	169
SOE	91	58	100	64	124
	24	66	30	59	32
	9	15	13	9	18
Total	124	139	143	132	174
IEP	68	43	91	32	79
	9	10	7	22	3
Total	0	0	0	0	0
	77	53	98	54	82
Total Undergraduate Enrollment	2972	2958	3388	3378	3888

Legend:

CAS: College of Arts and Sciences

SA&D: School of Architecture and Design

SBM: School of Business and Management

SOE: School of Engineering

IEP: Intensive English Program

P1: Probation 1

P2: Probation 2

AD: Academic Dismissal

NOTE: From top to bottom, each box provides the number of students on P1, P2, and AD, respectively.

Appendix B: Student Survey- Preparing for Tests and Test Taking Strategies

Student Survey- Preparing for Tests and Test-taking Strategies

This survey will help me understand AUS students' test taking strategies.

I would appreciate having the following information. Please tick the appropriate boxes.

Please note that all personal information will remain confidential.

Gender Male: Female:

Age: _____ First Language: _____

Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

Major _____ ID # _____ (optional)

In which country did you study high school? _____

Was your high school private? or public?

How many years have you studied English in school? _____

Did you attend IEP ? Yes No

If yes, how many semesters in IEP: _____

Please provide your TOEFL score _____

Would you like to be part of the interview process? This will involve discussing, in depth, your answers with me for about 10-20 minutes. This process may also help you learn more about your test taking strategies and how to do better on tests.

Yes, I would like to be interviewed.

If yes, Name: _____ Mobile: _____

No, I would prefer not to be interviewed.

Please read the statements and place a tick (✓) in the box that best represents you.
Please be as honest as you can be in responding. The results will be used for analysis to complete a thesis in the Masters in TESOL Program.

The boxes represent

Always:	all the time
Usually:	most of the time
Sometimes:	every now and then
Never:	not at all

Item	Statement	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
1	I review my notes before class				
2	I learn better when I study in a group				
3	I rewrite my notes in my own words for review material				
4	I identify potential test questions as I review my class notes				
5	When reading, I highlight parts I think are important				
6	I use index cards to review important definitions				
7	I outline my essay before I start writing				
8	I worry about doing poorly on a test and this interferes with my concentration				
9	When I have trouble understanding what a test question is asking, I panic				
10	I read all options on a multiple choice question before choosing the best answer				
11	When I have trouble understanding what a test question is asking, I ask the teacher for help				
12	When I have trouble understanding what a test question is asking, I guess				
13	I feel my failure to answer test questions to my best ability is due to my low English reading ability				
14	I lose points on tests because I misread the question				
15	I find cramming for a test to be a useful strategy				
16	When I enter the exam room I feel confident				
17	I prepare for each class as if there will be a pop quiz				
18	I feel anxious during an exam even when I know the subject matter well				
19	I do not do well on tests when I do not like the subject				
20	I leave my studying until the night before the test				
21	I ask questions during the lecture				
22	I meet with my instructors during office hours for help				
23	I attend all my lectures				
24	I study at least a little every day or night				
25	I feel my English reading and writing ability is lower than other students in my class				

Item	Statement	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
26	I get stuck on one test question for a long time				
27	I know how to study according to the type of test I am taking (i.e. multiple choice, essay, short answer)				
28	I use all the time allowed for a test				
29	I run out of time during a test				
30	I read the entire exam before I begin				
31	I create and complete my own practice tests				
32	During an exam I am not able to recall what I have studied				
33	I attend study/help sessions				
34	Help sessions help me do better on tests				
35	I think that taking notes while reading is a waste of time				
36	I go to class but tend to daydream				
37	I memorize material without understanding				
38	I come to class unprepared				
39	I feel my failure to answer test questions to my best ability is due to my nervousness				
40	I change my answers just before I turn in my test paper				

Please feel free to add any comments about your test taking strategies and maybe comment on your experience studying at AUS.

Appendix C: Survey Results – Frequencies of EFL AUS Probation

Students' Responses

Calculating the average: Always =4, Usually=3, Sometimes=2, Never=1

	Survey Statements	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never	Mean
1	I review my notes before class	3	9	15	3	2.40
2	I learn better when I study in a group	4	9	13	4	2.43
3	I rewrite my notes in my own words for review material	11	5	10	4	2.77
4	I identify potential test questions as I review my class notes	4	11	11	4	2.50
5	When reading, I highlight parts I think are important	15	9	5	1	3.27
6	I use index cards to review important definitions	4	4	9	13	1.97
7	I outline my essay before I start writing	8	9	9	4	2.70
8	I worry about doing poorly on a test and this interferes with my concentration	11	8	11	0	3.00
9	When I have trouble understanding what a test question is asking, I panic	8	13	6	3	2.87
10	I read all options on a multiple choice question before choosing the best answer	18	9	2	1	3.47
11	When I have trouble understanding what a test question is asking, I ask the teacher for help	7	11	6	6	2.63
12	When I have trouble understanding what a test question is asking, I guess	3	10	12	5	2.37
13	I feel my failure to answer test questions to my best ability is due to my low English reading ability	1	4	10	15	1.70
14	I lose points on tests because I misread the question	3	5	15	7	2.13
15	I find cramming for a test to be a useful strategy	4	4	12	10	2.07
16	When I enter the exam room I feel confident	1	9	16	4	2.23
17	I prepare for each class as if there will be a pop quiz	7	5	11	7	2.40
18	I feel anxious during an exam even when I know the subject matter well	7	9	12	2	2.70
19	I do not do well on tests when I do not like the subject	10	8	9	3	2.83
20	I leave my studying until the night before the test	2	4	15	9	1.97
21	I ask questions during the lecture	4	9	11	6	2.37
22	I meet with my instructors during office hours for help	4	9	13	4	2.43
23	I attend all my lectures	12	14	4	0	3.27
24	I study at least a little every day or night	10	10	9	1	2.97
25	I feel my English reading and writing ability is lower than other students in my class	4	5	11	10	2.10
26	I get stuck on one test question for a long time	2	10	16	2	2.40
27	I know how to study according to the type of test I am taking (i.e. multiple choice, essay, short answer)	3	17	7	3	2.67
28	I use all the time allowed for a test	10	9	9	2	2.90
29	I run out of time during a test	2	4	16	8	2.00
30	I read the entire exam before I begin	1	5	12	12	1.83
31	I create and complete my own practice tests	3	3	13	11	1.93
32	During an exam I am not able to recall what I have studied	1	6	21	2	2.20
33	I attend study/help sessions	3	6	11	10	2.07
34	Help sessions help me do better on tests	5	9	12	4	2.50
35	I think that taking notes while reading is a waste of time	0	2	6	22	1.33
36	I go to class but tend to daydream	2	5	13	10	1.97
37	I memorize material without understanding	0	3	16	11	1.73
38	I come to class unprepared	1	7	14	8	2.03
39	I feel my failure to answer test questions to my best ability is due to my nervousness	4	7	15	4	2.37
40	I change my answers just before I turn in my test paper	2	4	16	8	2.00

Appendix D: Survey Results- Frequencies of EFL AUS Honor

Students' Responses

Calculating the Mean: Always =4, Usually=3, Sometimes=2, Never=1

	Survey Statements	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never	Mean
1	I review my notes before class	1	6	16	7	203
2	I learn better when I study in a group	0	3	17	10	177
3	I rewrite my notes in my own words for review material	4	6	11	9	217
4	I identify potential test questions as I review my class notes	8	13	8	1	293
5	When reading, I highlight parts I think are important	17	3	9	1	320
6	I use index cards to review important definitions	0	1	6	23	127
7	I outline my essay before I start writing	10	6	10	4	273
8	I worry about doing poorly on a test and this interferes with my concentration	4	2	15	9	203
9	When I have trouble understanding what a test question is asking, I panic	2	3	14	11	187
10	I read all options on a multiple choice question before choosing the best answer	19	10	1	0	360
11	When I have trouble understanding what a test question is asking, I ask the teacher for help	5	13	12	0	277
12	When I have trouble understanding what a test question is asking, I guess	3	8	16	3	237
13	I feel my failure to answer test questions to my best ability is due to my low English reading ability	1	0	5	24	127
14	I lose points on tests because I misread the question	2	4	14	10	193
15	I find cramming for a test to be a useful strategy	2	6	15	7	210
16	When I enter the exam room I feel confident	6	11	10	3	267
17	I prepare for each class as if there will be a pop quiz	2	4	8	16	173
18	I feel anxious during an exam even when I know the subject material well	5	7	12	6	237
19	I do not do well on tests when I do not like the subject	4	4	13	9	210
20	I leave my studying until the right before the test	2	10	9	9	217
21	I ask questions during the lecture	6	9	11	4	257
22	I meet with my instructors during office hours for help	1	6	22	1	223
23	I attend all my lectures	21	9	0	0	370
24	I study at least a little every day or night	11	6	13	0	293
25	I feel my English reading and writing ability is lower than other students in my class	0	3	7	20	143
26	I get stuck on one test question for a long time	1	2	19	8	187
27	I know how to study according to the type of test I am taking (i.e. multiple choice, essay, short answer)	9	13	7	1	300
28	I use all the time allowed for a test	12	9	8	1	307
29	I run out of time during a test	1	0	19	10	173
30	I read the entire exam before I begin	0	6	14	10	187
31	I create and complete my own practice tests	0	1	9	20	137
32	During an exam I am not able to recall what I have studied	0	0	19	11	163
33	I attend study/help sessions	2	1	19	8	190
34	Help sessions help me do better on tests	1	8	17	4	220
35	I think that taking notes while reading is a waste of time	1	4	7	18	160
36	I go to class but tend to daydream	0	0	18	12	160
37	I memorize material without understanding	0	0	8	22	127
38	I come to class unprepared	1	8	15	6	213
39	I feel my failure to answer test questions to my best ability is due to my nervousness	1	4	13	12	180
40	I change my answers just before I turn in my test paper	2	2	18	8	193

Appendix E: Students' Responses to the Language Proficiency Survey

Statements

Survey Statements Related to Language Proficiency

13	I feel my failure to answer test questions to my best ability is due to my low English reading ability
25	I feel my English reading and writing abilities is lower than other students in my class

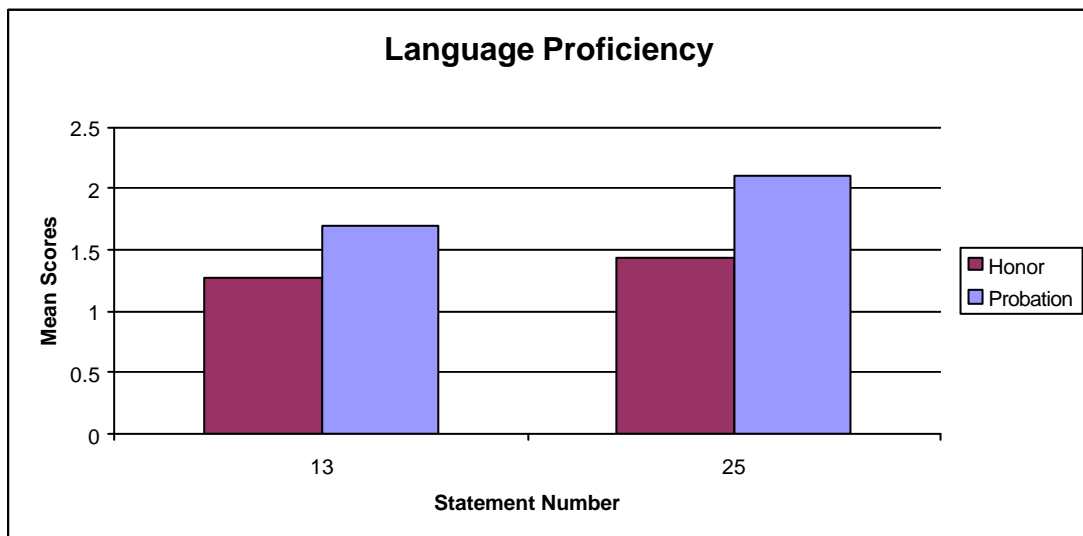
1) Frequency of EFL Students on Academic Probation responses to these statements

#	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Mean
13	15	50%	10	33%	4	13%	1	3%	1.70
25	10	33%	11	37%	5	17%	4	13%	2.10

2) Frequency of EFL Honor Students' responses to these statements

#	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Mean
13	24	80%	5	17%	0	0%	1	3%	1.27
25	20	67%	7	23%	3	10%	0	0%	1.43

Mean scores for each statement under category 1: Language Proficiency



Appendix F: Students' Responses to the Attitude Survey

Statements

Survey Statements Related to Attitude

8	I worry about doing poorly on a test and this interferes with my concentration
9	When I have trouble understanding what a test question is asking, I panic
13	I feel my failure to answer test questions to my best ability is due to my low English reading ability
16	When I enter the exam room I feel confident
18	I feel anxious during an exam even when I know the subject matter well
19	I do not do well on tests when I do not like the subject
25	I feel my English reading and writing ability is lower than other students in my class
34	Help sessions help me do better on tests
36	I go to class but tend to daydream
38	I come to class unprepared
39	I feel my failure to answer test questions to my best ability is due to my nervousness

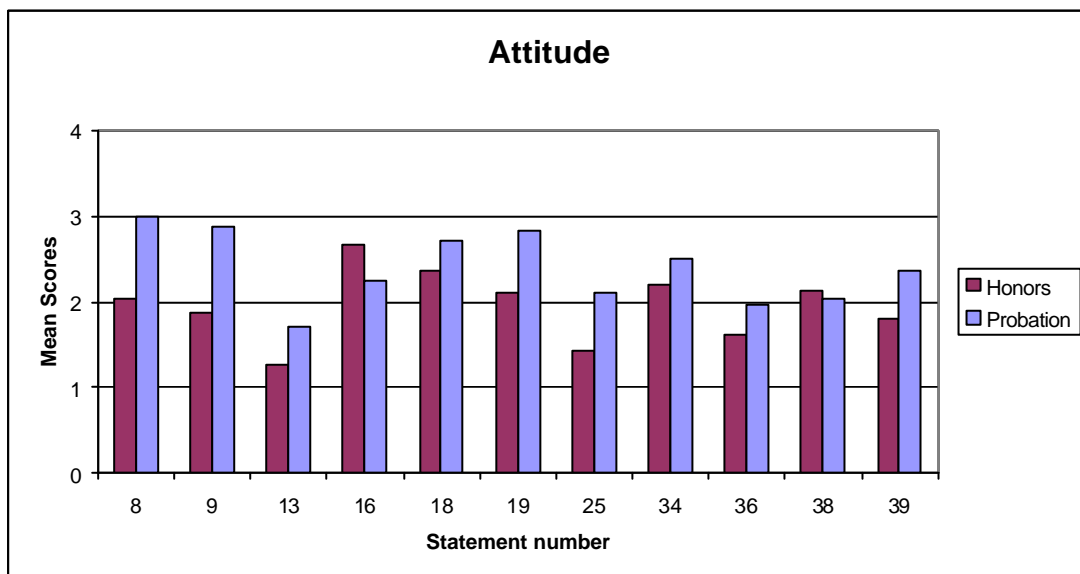
1) Frequency of EFL Students on Academic Probation responses to these statements

#	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Mean
8	0	0%	11	37%	8	27%	11	37%	3.00
9	3	10%	6	20%	13	43%	8	27%	2.87
13	15	50%	10	33%	4	13%	1	3%	1.70
16	4	13%	16	53%	9	30%	1	3%	2.23
18	2	7%	12	40%	9	30%	7	23%	2.70
19	3	10%	9	30%	8	27%	10	33%	2.83
25	10	33%	11	37%	5	17%	4	13%	2.10
34	4	13%	12	40%	9	30%	5	17%	2.50
36	10	33%	13	43%	5	17%	2	7%	1.97
38	8	27%	14	47%	7	23%	1	3%	2.03
39	4	13%	15	50%	7	23%	4	13%	2.37

2) Frequency of EFL Honor Students responses to these statements

#	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Mean
8	9	30%	15	50%	2	7%	4	13%	2.03
9	11	37%	14	47%	3	10%	2	7%	1.87
13	24	80%	5	17%	0	0%	1	3%	1.27
16	3	10%	10	33%	11	37%	6	20%	2.67
18	6	20%	12	40%	7	23%	5	17%	2.37
19	9	30%	13	43%	4	13%	4	13%	2.10
25	20	67%	7	23%	3	10%	0	0%	1.43
34	4	13%	17	57%	8	27%	1	3%	2.20
36	12	40%	18	60%	0	0%	0	0%	1.60
38	6	20%	15	50%	8	27%	1	3%	2.13
39	12	40%	13	43%	4	13%	1	3%	1.80

Mean scores for each statement under category 2: Attitude



Appendix G: Students' Responses to the Support Survey

Statements

Survey Statements Related to Support

2	I learn better when I study in groups
11	When I have trouble understanding what a test question is asking, I ask the teacher for help
21	I ask questions during the lecture
22	I meet with my instructor during office hours
33	I attend study/help sessions

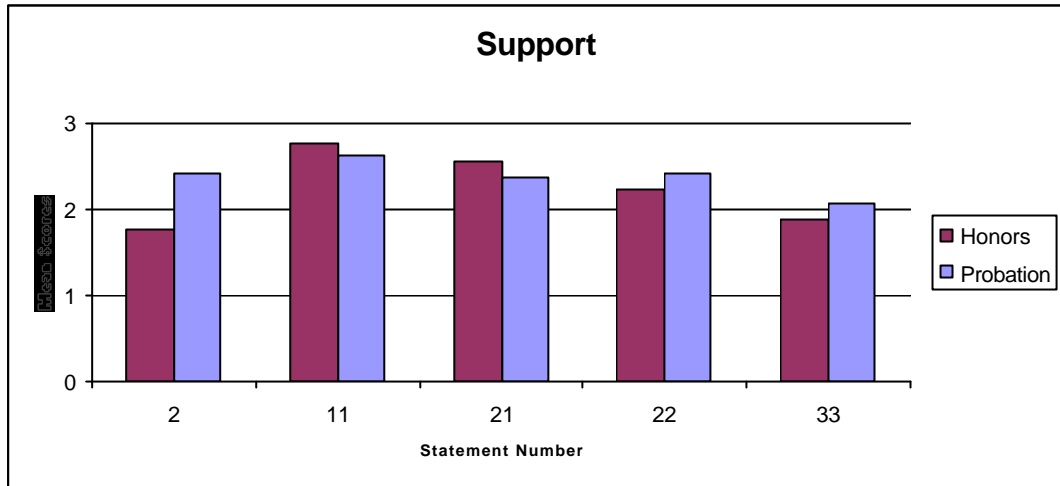
1) Frequency of EFL Students on Academic Probation responses to these statements

#	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Mean
2	4	13%	13	43%	9	30%	4	13%	2.43
11	6	20%	6	20%	11	37%	7	23%	2.63
21	6	20%	11	37%	9	30%	4	13%	2.37
22	4	13%	13	43%	9	30%	4	13%	2.43
33	10	33%	11	37%	6	20%	3	10%	2.07

2) Frequency of EFL Honor Students' responses to these statements

#	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Mean
2	10	33%	17	57%	3	10%	0	0%	1.77
11	0	0%	12	40%	13	43%	5	17%	2.77
21	4	13%	11	37%	9	30%	6	20%	2.57
22	1	3%	22	73%	6	20%	1	3%	2.23
33	8	27%	19	63%	1	3%	2	7%	1.90

Mean scores for each statement under category 3: Support



Appendix H: Students' Responses to the Time Management/Study Skills

Survey Statements

Survey Statements Related to Time Management/Study Skills

1	I review my notes before class
2	I learn better when I study in a group
5	When reading, I highlight parts I think are important
17	I prepare for each class as if there will be a pop quiz
21	I ask questions during the lecture
23	I attend all my lectures
24	I study at least a little every day or night
29	I run out of time during a test
33	I attend study/help sessions
35	I think that taking notes while reading is a waste of time

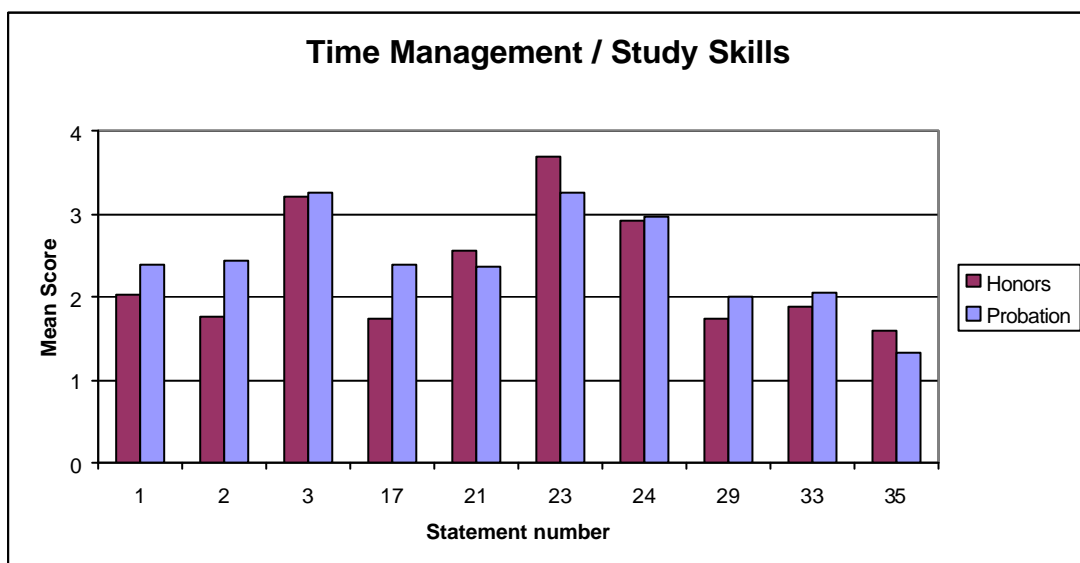
1) Frequency of EFL Students on Academic Probation responses to these statements

#	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Mean
1	3	10%	15	50%	9	30%	3	10%	2.40
2	4	13%	13	43%	9	30%	4	13%	2.43
5	1	3%	5	17%	9	30%	15	50%	3.27
17	7	23%	11	37%	5	17%	7	23%	2.40
21	6	20%	11	37%	9	30%	4	13%	2.37
23	0	0%	4	13%	14	47%	12	40%	3.27
24	1	3%	9	30%	10	33%	10	33%	2.97
29	8	27%	16	53%	4	13%	2	7%	2.00
33	10	33%	11	37%	6	20%	3	10%	2.07
35	22	73%	6	20%	2	7%	0	0%	1.33

2) Frequency of EFL Honor Students' responses to these statements

#	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Mean
1	7	23%	16	53%	6	20%	1	3%	2.03
2	10	33%	17	57%	3	10%	0	0%	1.77
5	1	3%	9	30%	3	10%	17	57%	3.20
17	16	53%	8	27%	4	13%	2	7%	1.73
21	4	13%	11	37%	9	30%	6	20%	2.57
23	0	0%	0	0%	9	30%	21	70%	1.90
24	0	0%	13	43%	6	20%	11	37%	2.93
29	10	33%	19	63%	0	0%	1	3%	1.73
33	8	27%	19	63%	1	3%	2	7%	1.90
35	18	60%	7	23%	4	13%	1	3%	1.60

Mean scores for each statement under category 4: Time Management and Study Skills



Appendix I: Students' Responses to the Test Preparation Survey

Statements

Survey Statements Related to Test Preparation

3	I rewrite my notes in my own words for review material
4	I identify potential test questions as I review my class notes
6	I use index cards to review important definitions
15	I find cramming for a test to be a useful strategy
20	I leave my studying until the night before the test
27	I know how to study according to the type of test I am taking
31	I create and complete my own practice tests
37	I memorize material without understanding

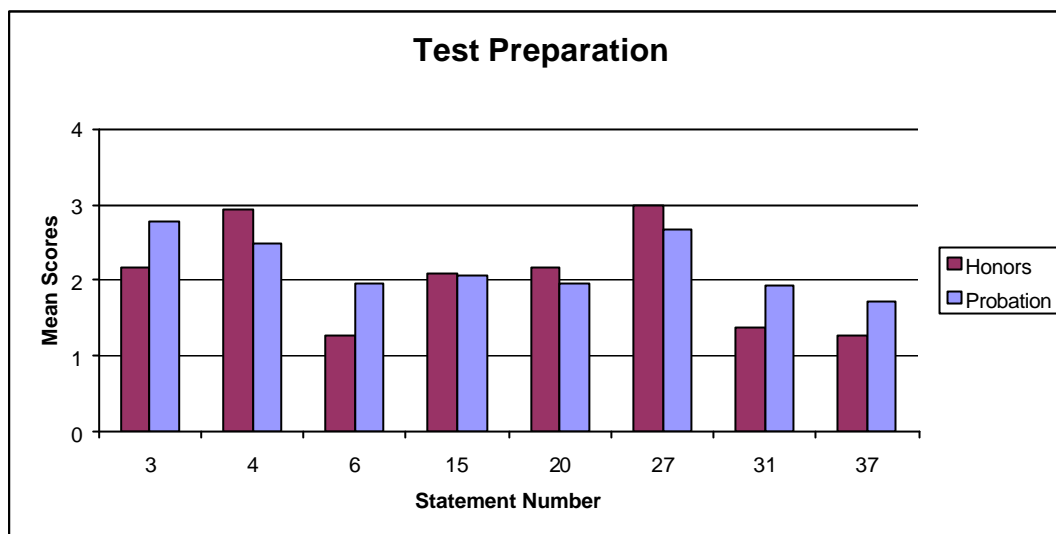
1) Frequency of EFL Students on Academic Probation responses to these statements

#	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Mean
3	4	13%	10	33%	5	17%	11	37%	2.77
4	4	13%	11	37%	11	37%	4	13%	2.50
6	13	43%	9	30%	4	13%	4	13%	1.97
15	10	33%	12	40%	4	13%	4	13%	2.07
20	9	30%	15	50%	4	13%	2	7%	1.97
27	3	10%	7	23%	17	57%	3	10%	2.67
31	11	37%	13	43%	3	10%	3	10%	1.93
37	11	37%	16	53%	3	10%	0	0%	1.73

2) Frequency of EFL Honor Students' responses to these statements

#	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Mean
3	9	30%	11	37%	6	20%	4	13%	2.17
4	1	3%	8	27%	13	43%	8	27%	2.93
6	23	77%	6	20%	1	3%	0	0%	1.27
15	7	23%	15	50%	6	20%	2	7%	2.10
20	9	30%	9	30%	10	33%	2	7%	2.17
27	1	3%	7	23%	13	43%	9	30%	3.00
31	20	67%	9	30%	1	3%	0	0%	1.37
37	22	73%	8	27%	0	0%	0	0%	1.27

Mean scores for each statement under category 5: Test Preparation



Appendix J: Students' Responses to the Test-taking Strategies Survey

Statements

Survey Statements Related to Test-taking Strategies

7	I outline my essay before I start writing
10	I read all options on a multiple choice question before choosing the best answer
11	When I have trouble understanding what a test question is asking, I ask the teacher for help
12	When I have trouble understanding what a test question is asking, I guess
14	I lose points on tests because I misread the question
26	I get stuck on one test question for a long time
28	I use all the time allowed for a test
30	I read the entire exam before I begin
32	During an exam I am not able to recall what I have studied
39	I feel my failure to answer test questions to my best ability is due to my nervousness
40	I change my answers just before I turn in my test paper

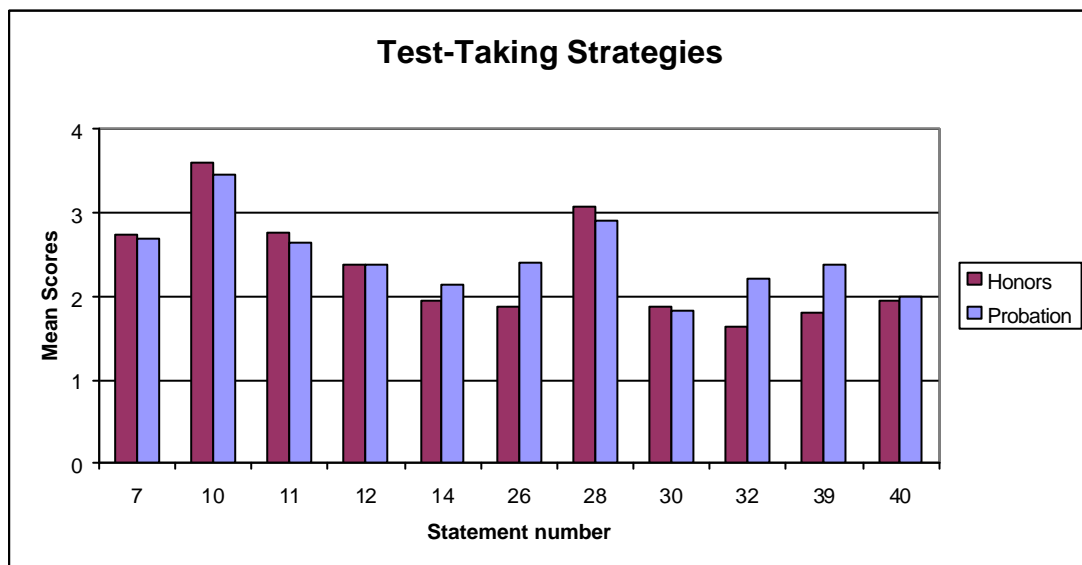
1) Frequency of EFL Students on Academic Probation responses to these statements

#	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Mean
7	4	13%	9	30%	9	30%	8	27%	2.70
10	1	3%	2	7%	9	30%	18	60%	3.47
11	6	20%	6	20%	11	37%	7	23%	2.63
12	5	17%	12	40%	10	33%	3	10%	2.37
14	7	23%	15	50%	5	17%	3	10%	2.13
26	2	7%	16	53%	10	33%	2	7%	2.40
28	2	7%	9	30%	9	30%	10	33%	2.90
30	12	40%	12	40%	5	17%	1	3%	1.83
32	2	7%	21	70%	6	20%	1	3%	2.20
39	4	13%	15	50%	7	23%	4	13%	2.37
40	8	27%	16	53%	4	13%	2	7%	2.00

2) Frequency of EFL Honor Students' responses to these statements

#	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Mean
7	4	13%	10	33%	6	20%	10	33%	2.73
10	0	0%	1	3%	10	33%	19	63%	3.60
11	0	0%	12	40%	13	43%	5	17%	2.77
12	3	10%	16	53%	8	27%	3	10%	2.37
14	10	33%	14	47%	4	13%	2	7%	1.93
26	8	27%	19	63%	2	7%	1	3%	1.87
28	1	3%	8	27%	9	30%	12	40%	3.07
30	10	33%	14	47%	6	20%	0	0%	1.87
32	11	37%	19	63%	0	0%	0	0%	1.63
39	12	40%	13	43%	4	13%	1	3%	1.80
40	8	27%	18	60%	2	7%	2	7%	1.93

Mean scores for each statement under category 6: Test Taking Strategies



Appendix K: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Students

- 1) What do you feel are your strengths and weaknesses as a student at AUS?
- 2) According to you what are TTS's? What are your attitudes towards such strategies? Effective? Helpful?
- 3) What are appropriate remedies for poor test performance?
- 4) Are language learning and content objectives met?
- 5) Do you speak in your L1 with St/T/peers to better understand material/ discuss...
- 6) What are some reasons you drop a course?
- 7) Students opinion/ views on TTS in their academic success
- 8) What strategies do you use BEFORE_ DURING_ AFTER?
- 9) Has TTS helped with your performance/ confidence in taking tests?
- 10) Why do you think you are on probation? What are you doing to improve your study habits- better perform on test and improve your GPA?
- 11) Do you feel teachers are obliged to help you with study habits/test preparation/ test taking strategies?

Instructors/ Faculty

- 1) Do you use multiple methods in your lectures? (videos, PPP, transparencies, blackboard- technology)
- 2) Does your department provide course help sessions?
- 3) Do you provide your students with guidelines for test preparation?
- 4) Do you give time management suggestions to your students?
- 5) Do you offer strategy training? Do you weave it into your regular teaching? Do you demonstrate how to use given strategy to make task at hand easier? I.e. answering multiple choice questions or outlining essay before responding to the question.
- 6) Do you have regular office hours? Do students visit you during this time? What are some of the questions they ask, more specifically about preparing and taking your tests?
- 7) Do you help students determine what's important? (or tell them everything is important?)
- 8) What do you expect from your students?
- 9) What recommendations do you give your students? i.e. for learning course material as apposed to memorizing it
- 10) When students see you to discuss their test performance, what sorts of questions do they ask, and what responses/suggestions do you offer them?

Advisors

- 1) What support/services do you provide your students?
- 2) Do the probation contracts help students' awareness of their own responsibility at AUS? Do they take AAA advice more seriously?

- 3) Are the workshops attend by your probation students, what % attends the workshops (time management, study skills, and stress management)
- 4) Are the AAA sessions effective?
- 5) What do you think are the sources/causes of EFL students on academic probation?
- 6) How do you Identify students problem and address it?

Administration

- 1) When was the AUS freshman orientation “Success at AUS” first offered?
- 2) Was the orientation a success?
- 3) What do you think are the sources/causes of EFL students on academic probation?
- 4) What is the role of an AAA? Has the introduction of AAA been effective? Helpful?

VITA

Lilian Kawash is an academic achievement advisor in the College of Arts and Sciences at the American University of Sharjah. She has a B.A. in Linguistics from the University of Calgary, Canada. She presented *Reading strategies: An active process toward comprehension* at the 10th TESOL Arabia Conference 2004: Standards in English Language Teaching and Assessment in Dubai, UAE, with her colleague Habiba Dhaouadi, and *English for academic purposes: Test-taking strategies* at the 11th TESOL Arabia Conference 2005: Teaching, Learning, and Leading in Dubai, U.A.E.

Publications include “Reading strategies: An active process toward comprehension” in *Proceedings of the 10th TESOL Arabia Conference* and a book review, “Writing simple poems: Pattern poetry for language acquisition” by V. Holmes, & M. Moulton, in *Perspectives*, 2004, 12(1).

She also prepares and presents workshops each semester at the American University of Sharjah, including sessions on “Managing Your Time” and “Preparing for and Taking Tests.”