

# The ECOSTAR Student, EAP Instructor and Content Lecturer Needs Analysis Surveys



English as the Cornerstone  
of Sustainable Technology and Research



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## Introduction

In order to develop the ECOSTAR CEFR-Aligned Framework for English in Higher Education in Israel, partners from Tel Aviv University (Work Package 1) first studied the CEFR in detail, and then conducted a needs/situation analysis of three key stakeholders in HEIs throughout Israel. In order to gather information about the current situation of EAP in Israeli colleges and universities as well as about students' needs, three surveys were conducted:

- Student survey
- Survey for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instructors
- Survey for content lecturers

In this summary report, we will present the main results of the surveys.

## The Measures

The measures used were online surveys (using Lime Survey), approved by the Tel Aviv University Research Ethics Committee. Links to the surveys were sent out to heads of English programs in HEIs throughout the country with a request to send them out on email distribution lists at their institutions. The student surveys were available in three languages: Hebrew, Arabic and English; the EAP instructor survey was in English; and the content lecturer survey was in Hebrew. Each survey included a brief introduction about the purpose of the survey, background about ECOSTAR and a contact email address for those requesting additional information. Participation was anonymous and voluntary. Participants were asked for their informed consent before beginning the surveys and were told that they could stop participating at any time.

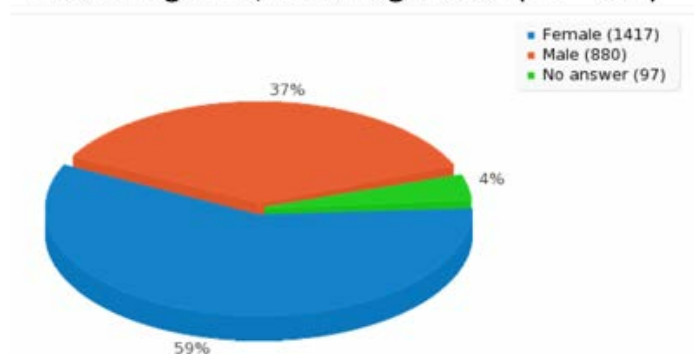
## The Student Survey

- Student survey: 2394 full responses (out of 6260)
- 1) Demographic data

A total of 2394 full responses were received out of 6260. As seen in Figure 1, the median age was 26; the mean age was 28.9 (SD = 9.4). Figure 2 shows that 76% of the students surveyed were native speakers of Hebrew, 9% of Arabic, and 7% of Russian.

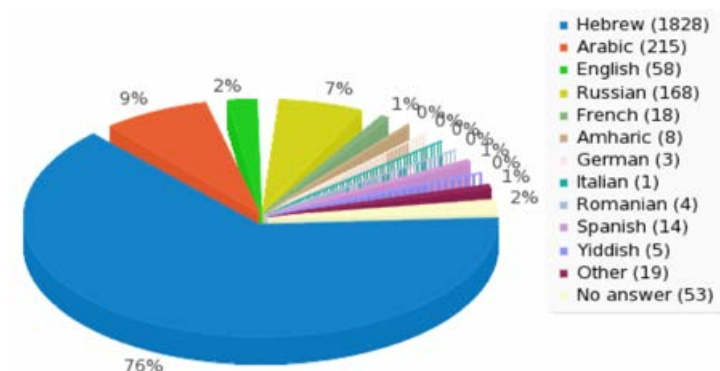
### The Student Survey

- Median age: 26; Mean age: 28.9 (SD = 9.4)



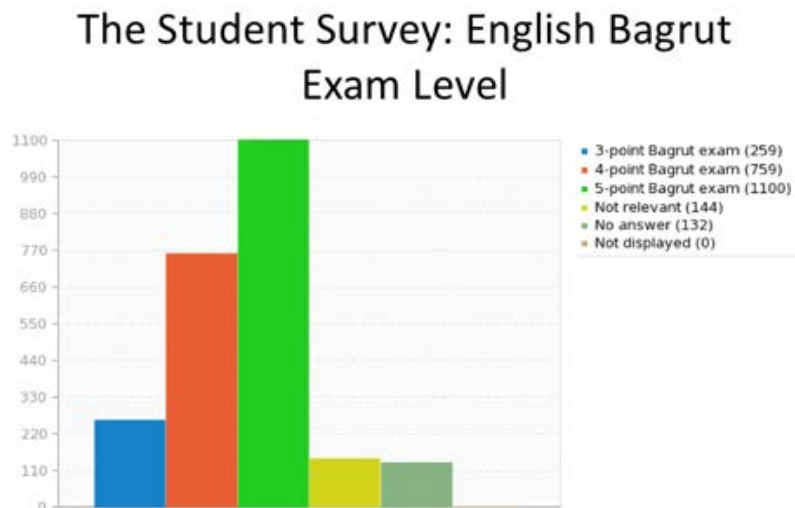
**Figure 1 Students - Age**

### The Student Survey: Native Language



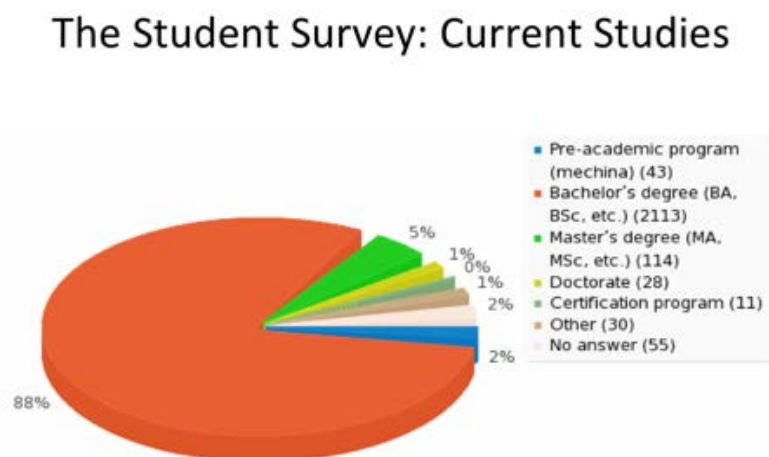
**Figure 2 Students - Native language**

- 2) The majority (45.9%) of students reported having a 5-point *Bagrut* exam (the highest level of the High School Matriculation exam) in English. 31.7% had a 4-point and only 10.8% had a 3-point *Bagrut* (Figure 3).



**Figure 3 Students - Level on English Bagrut (Matriculation Exam)**

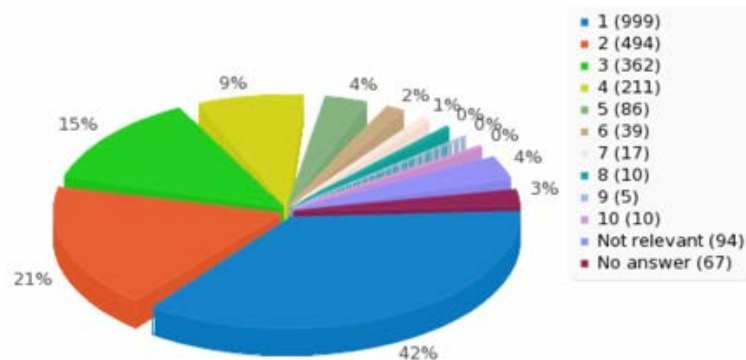
- 3) The majority of students (88%) were undergraduate students (Figure 4).



**Figure 4 Students - Current studies**

- 4) Regarding year of study (Figure 5), the majority of respondents were first or second year students (42% and 21%, respectively). It is important to note that in Israel, most undergraduate programs are three years and not four.

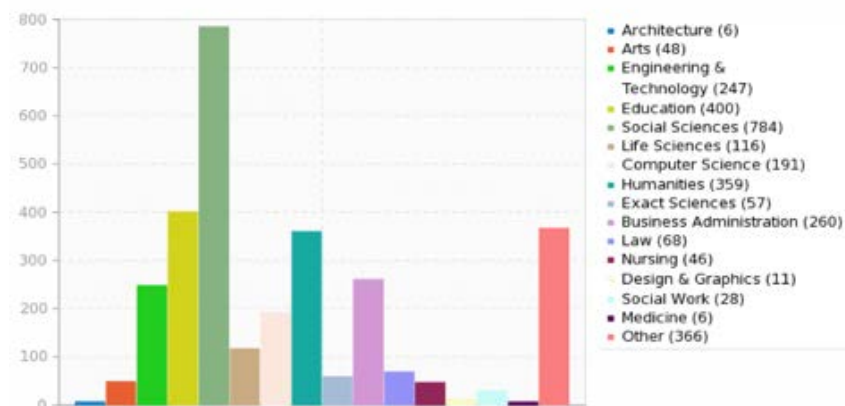
### The Student Survey: Year of Study



**Figure 5 Students - Year of study**

- 5) Regarding field of study (Figure 6) the vast majority of students were from the Social Sciences (n=784), followed by Education (n=400), 'Other' (n=366), and the Humanities (n=359).

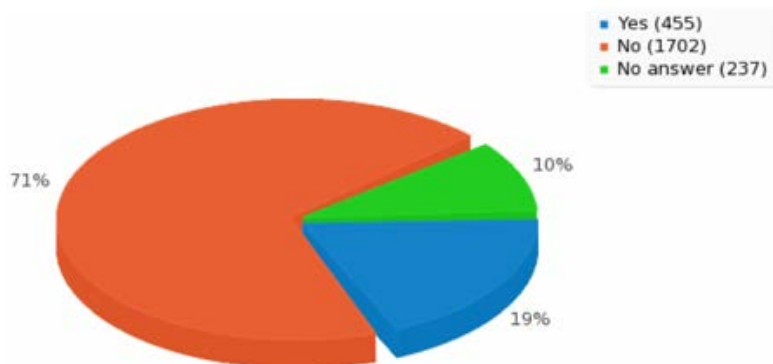
### The Student Survey: Field of Study



**Figure 6 Students - Field of study**

- 6) However, when asked whether they had received an exemption from English courses based on their Psychometric exam score (Israeli entrance exam for studies in HEIs), 71% of students reported that they were not exempt (Figure 7). This shows that the highest-point level of the *Bagrut* exam does not guarantee a high level of English proficiency as measured in the English section of the Psychometric exam.

### The Student Survey: Exemption based on the Psychometric / AMIR / AMIRAM exam score

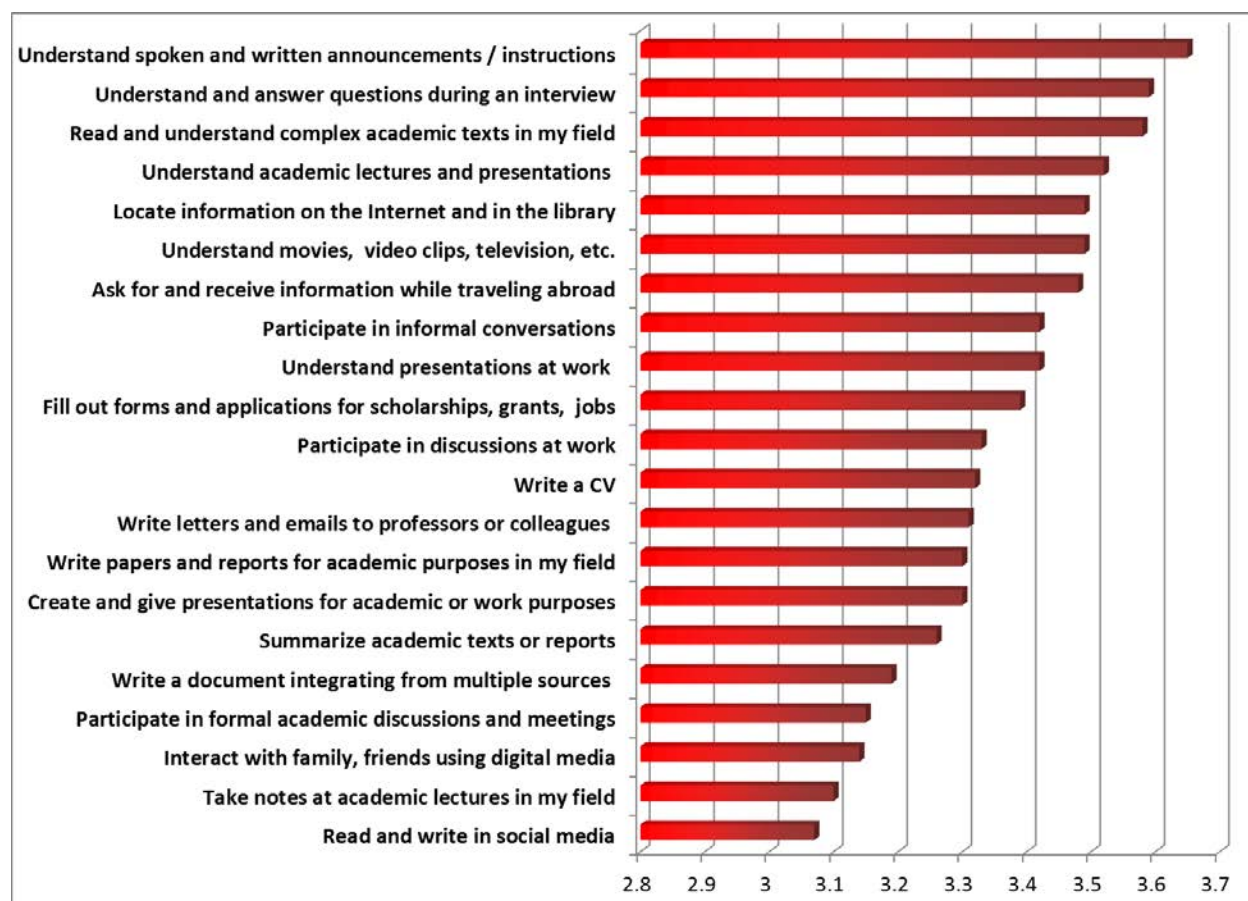


**Figure 7 Students - English exemption (includes English section on the Psychometric exam, and the AMIR (pen and paper) and AMIRAM (computerized) exams that include the English section only)**



- 7) Ranking of collapsed CEFR can-do statements: In order to ascertain students' perceptions regarding the can-do statements, the Tel Aviv partners used expert judgements and picked what they felt were relevant CEFR can-do statements for the Israeli educational context. To make the number of items on the survey manageable, these can-do statements were further collapsed into 21 can-do statements. Participants were asked to rate the relative importance of each of the 21 items when considering what a graduate of an Israeli institution of higher learning should be able to do in English. Rankings were on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not important at all) to 4 (very important). Results are in Figure 8 below.

## Student Needs Analysis



**Figure 8 Student ranking of collapsed can-do statements**

As can be seen above, participants ranked all the language activities between “important” and “very important”, indicating that they see a wide variety of language activities as crucial for their studies and work. These activities go beyond the traditional scope of EAP reading comprehension programs.

We asked students, lecturers, and EAP instructors about the same set of can-do activities, asking them to rank the activities from 1 (“not important at all”) to 4 (“very important”).

- All the items are within the range between 3 (“important”) and 4 (“very important”). Nevertheless, some trends and differences can be discerned (see Figures 23-25).
- Some differences are minor and fall within the margin of sample error.

8) Finally, students were invited to express their views in an open ‘additional comments’ item at the end of the survey. Representative quotes follow:

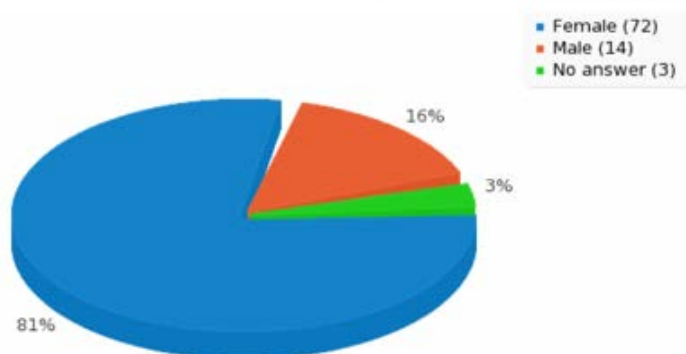
- “English lessons should focus on topics that are relevant to the students, so they are more engaged.”
- “English is difficult for us in the Arab sector. It’s a third language and most have problems getting a degree because of English.”
- “I don’t feel I received enough tools for coping with the academia. I was only taught reading, and once I have to write papers in English I will be lost.”
- “What’s really important is to improve speaking, not so much writing.”
- “We need professional courses, not just courses of the English language. We’ve already [learned the language] at high school.”
- “I think [learning English] is superfluous... English is something you either have or don’t have.”

## The EAP Instructor Survey

- 89 full responses (out of 135)
- 1) As seen in Figure 9, the mean age of EAP instructors was 53.7 (SD = 11). This figure is quite representative of the EAP field in Israel.

### The EAP Instructor Survey

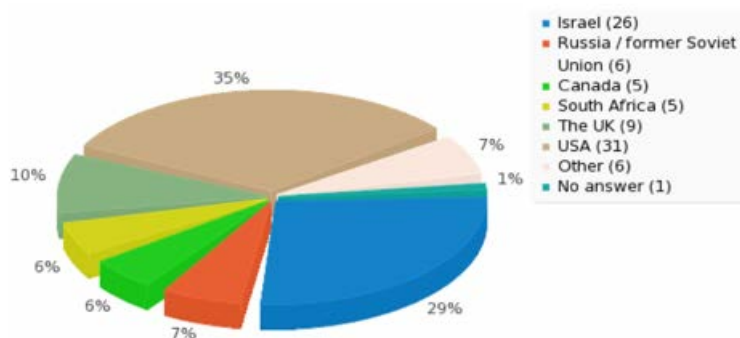
- Mean age: 53.7 (SD = 11)
- Mean years of teaching: 24.21 (SD = 11.08)



**Figure 9 EAP Instructors – Age**

- 2) With regard to country of origin, 35% were from the USA and 29% from Israel (Figure 10). EAP teachers were also from Russia and English-speaking countries (Canada, South Africa and the UK).

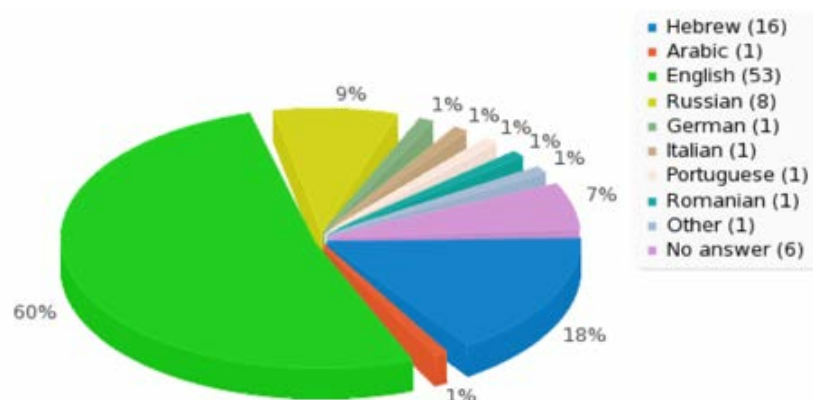
### EAP Instructors: Country of Birth



**Figure 10 EAP instructors - Country of birth**

- 3) The vast majority of respondents were native English speakers (60%), followed by Hebrew (16%). Only 1% of respondents were native Arabic speakers (Figure 11).

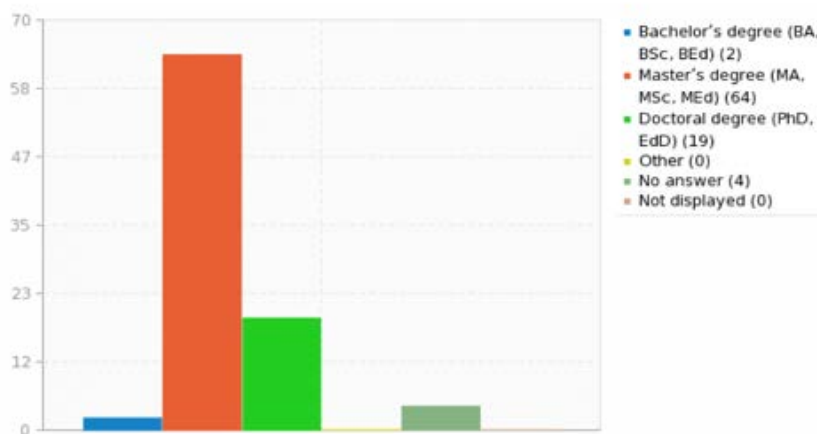
### EAP Instructors: Native Language



**Figure 11 EAP Instructors - Native language**

- 4) The majority of respondents (n=64) reported having a master's degree; 19 had a doctoral degree. Only 2 respondents reported having a bachelor's degree (Figure 12). In most HEIs in Israel, the minimal degree required to teach in EAP programs is a master's degree.

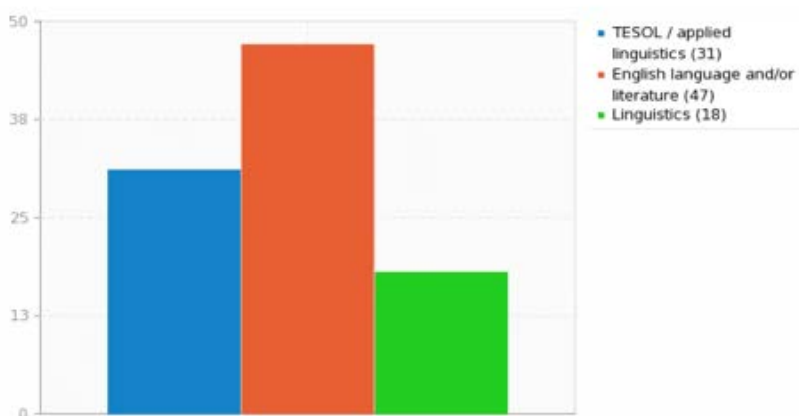
### EAP Instructors: Formal Education



**Figure 12 EAP Instructors - Formal education**

- 5) As can be seen in Figure 13, respondents reported academic degrees in English language and/or literature (n=47), TESOL/applied linguistics (n=31) and linguistics (n=18).

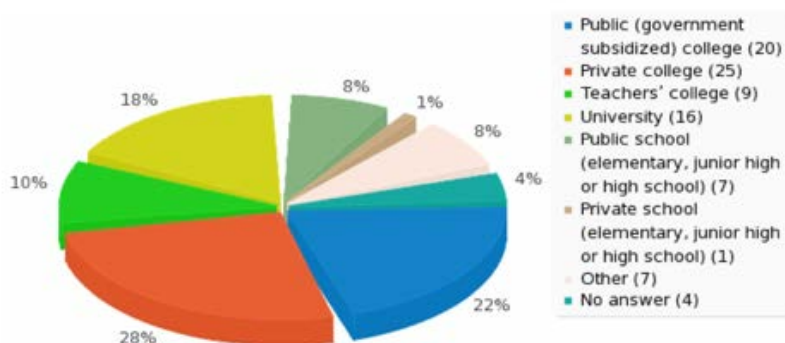
### EAP Instructors: Academic Degree in Any of the Following



**Figure 13 EAP Instructors - Academic degree**

- 6) According to Figure 14, 50% of respondents teach in private colleges or public (government subsidized colleges), while 18% teach in universities. It is important to note that at present there are 63 HEIs in Israel, including 7 universities. Therefore, teachers from universities are overrepresented in the study.

### EAP Instructors: Type of Institution



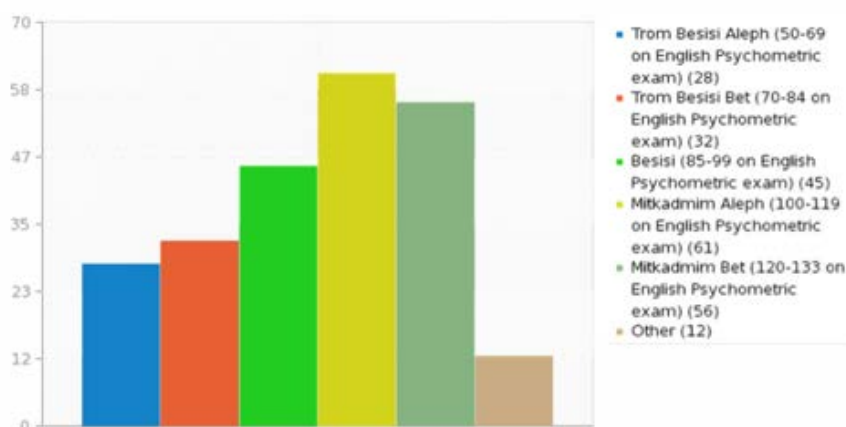
**Figure 14 EAP Instructors - Type of institution**

7) The proficiency levels as prescribed by the Israel Council for Higher Education (CHE) that respondents have taught in the last four years are presented in Figure 15 below. Approximate corresponding exit levels according to the CEFR are as follows:

- Trom Besisi Aleph and Trom Besisi Bet (Pre-Basic A and BE -A1)
- *Besisi* (Basic - A2)
- *Mitkadmim Aleph* (Advanced A - B1)
- *Mitkadmim Bet* (Advanced B - B2)

The minimum entrance levels to be accepted in Israeli universities is *Mitkadmim Aleph*; in many colleges, the requirement is lower.

### EAP Instructors: Levels Taught in the Past 4 Years

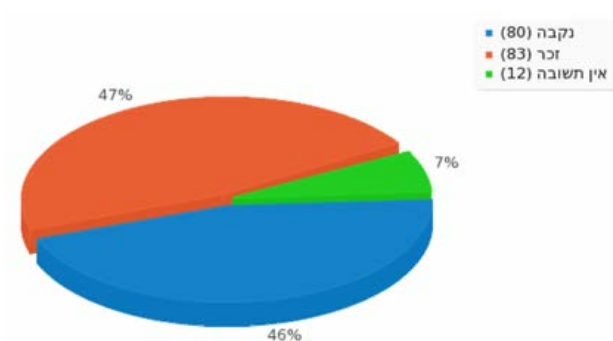


**Figure 15 EAP instructors - Levels taught in the past 4 years**

## The Content Lecturer Survey

- 175 full responses (out of 438 respondents overall)
- 1) The gender of content lecturers was evenly split between males (47% - red) and females (46% - blue), while 7% of the respondents did not answer the question (Figure 16).

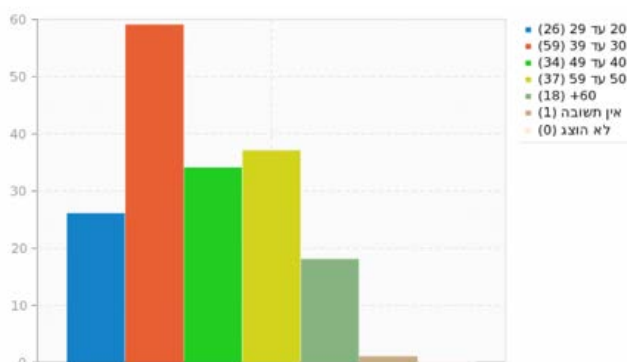
EMI Survey: Gender



**Figure 16 Content lecturers - Gender (blue = female; red = male; green = no answer)**

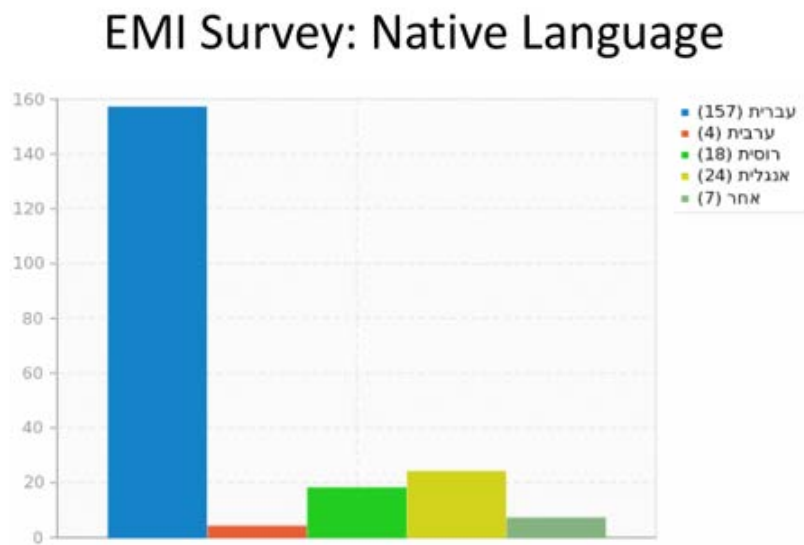
- 2) With regard to age, 33% are between 30 and 39, 22% are between 50 and 59, and 20% are between 40 and 49 (Figure 17).

EMI Survey: Age



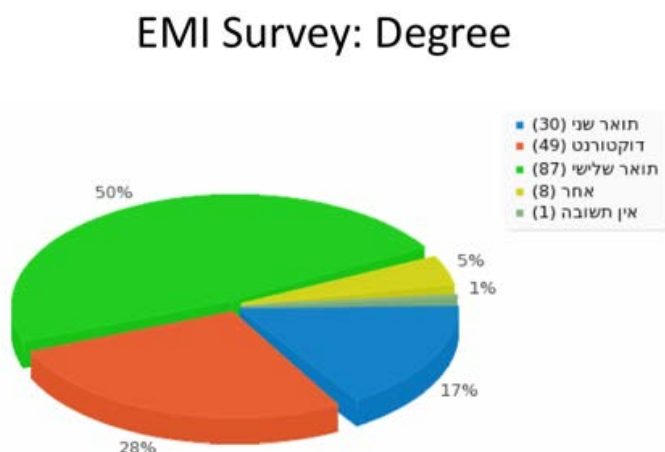
**Figure 17 Content lecturers – Age**

- 3) The overwhelming majority of content lecturers are native Hebrew speakers (78% -blue). Additional languages (from left to right) are Arabic (2%), Russian (9%), English (11%) and 'Other' (Figure 18).



**Figure 18 Content lecturers - Native language (from left to right: Hebrew, Arabic, Russian, English, Other)**

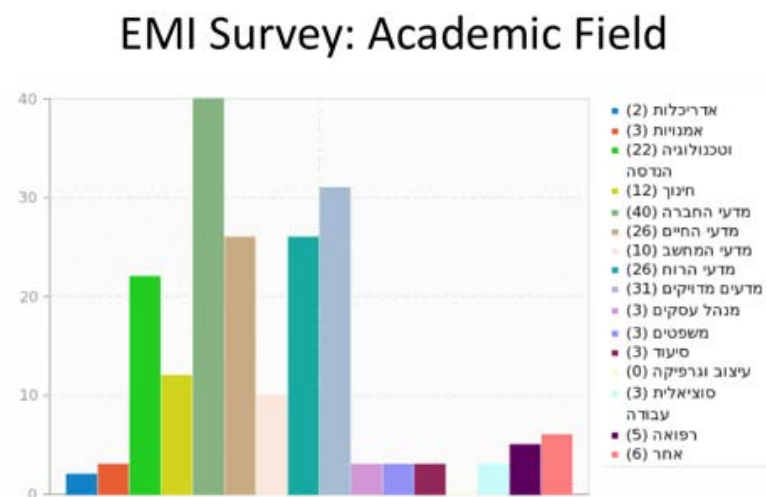
- 4) The majority of respondents reported having a 3<sup>rd</sup> or doctoral degree (50% - green and 28% - red respectively). 17% of respondents reported having a master's degree, while 5% reported 'Other' and 1% did not answer (Figure 19).



**Figure 19 Content lecturers - Degree (from top to bottom: MA, Doctorate, 'Third degree' (PhD), Other, No Answer)**

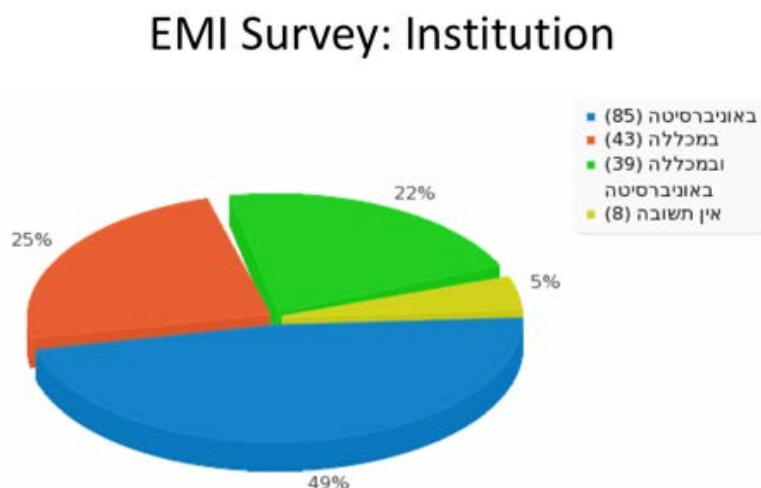


- 5) Content lecturers were from a wide range of academic fields (Figure 20), the top three being the Social Sciences, Exact Sciences and in third place, Life Sciences and Humanities.



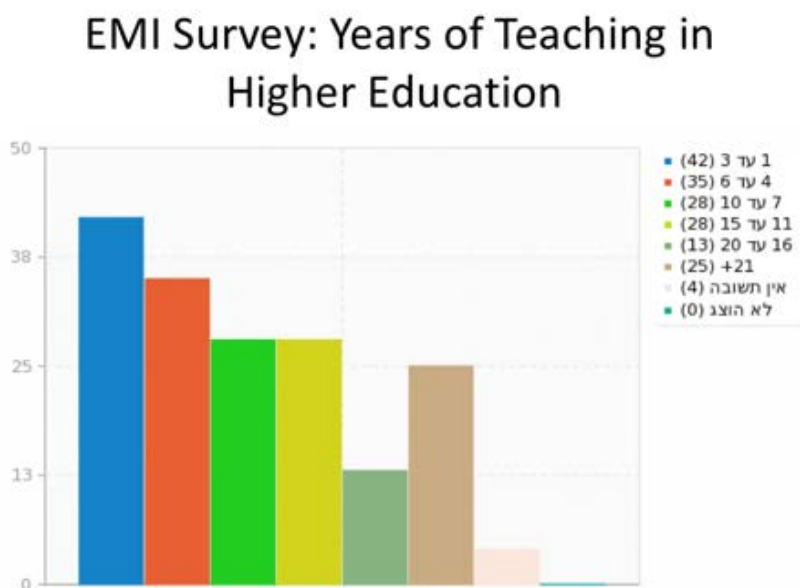
**Figure 20 - Content lecturers -Academic field (top 3 = 1. Social Sciences, 2. Exact Sciences, 3. Life Sciences and Humanities)**

- 6) According to Figure 21 below, 49% of respondents are university lecturers, 25% college lecturers, and 22% teach in both a college and a university.



**Figure 21 Content lecturers - Institution type (blue = university; red = college; green = college and university; yellow = no answer)**

7) With regard to years of teaching in higher education, 60% have taught up to 10 years, and 38% have teaching experience of more than 10 years (Figure 22).



**Figure 22 Content lecturers - Years of teaching in higher education**

As stated previously, the three groups of stakeholders were asked to rank the same set of collapsed can-do statements. Below are comparisons among the various stakeholders.

## A Comparison of Preferences and Needs by Domain, Activity Type, and Medium

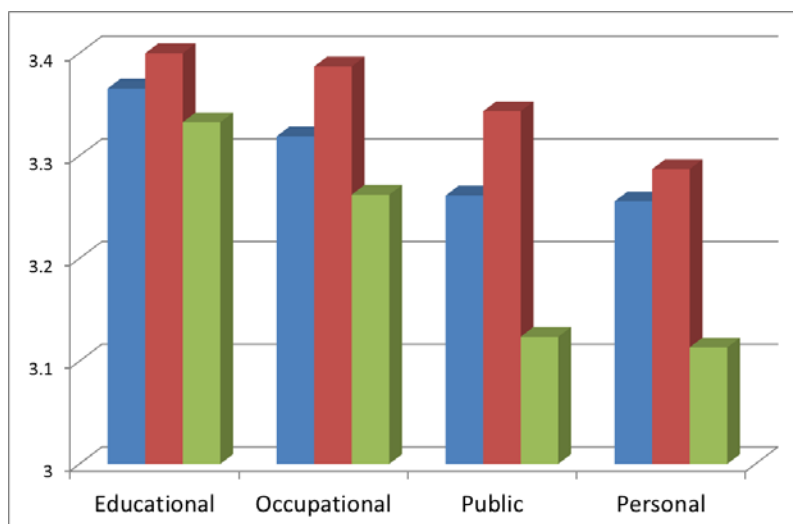
- We asked students, lecturers, and EAP instructors about the same set of can-do activities, asking them to rank the activities from 1 (“not important at all”) to 4 (“very important”).
- All the items are within the range between 3 (“important”) and 4 (“very important”). Nevertheless, some trends and differences can be discerned.
- Some differences are minor and fall within the margin of sample error.

**BLUE:** Students

**RED:** EAP teachers

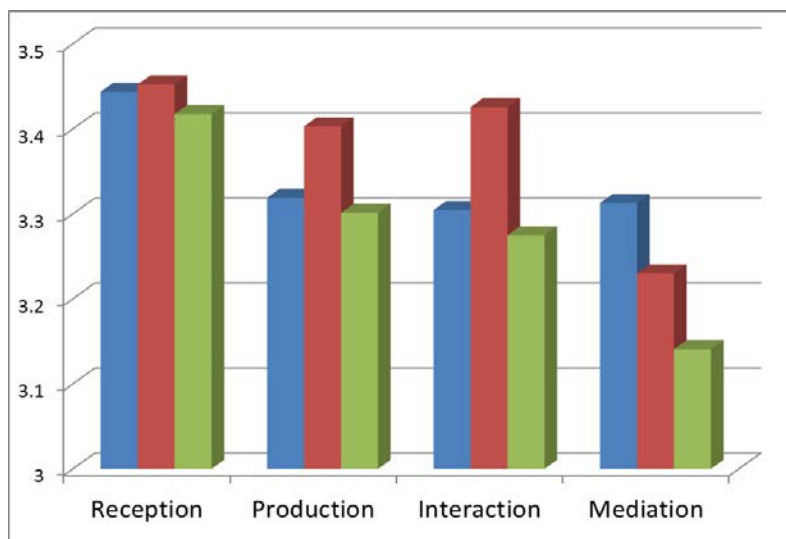
**GREEN:** Lecturers

- 1) We examined the activities students, EAP instructors and content lecturers were asked to rate in terms of the various domains of language use. The findings show that EAP teachers ascribe the most importance to all language activities, followed by the students. All three groups ranked activities in all four domains between important and highly important, but they tend to see the educational and occupational domains as slightly more important than the public or personal domains (Figure 23).



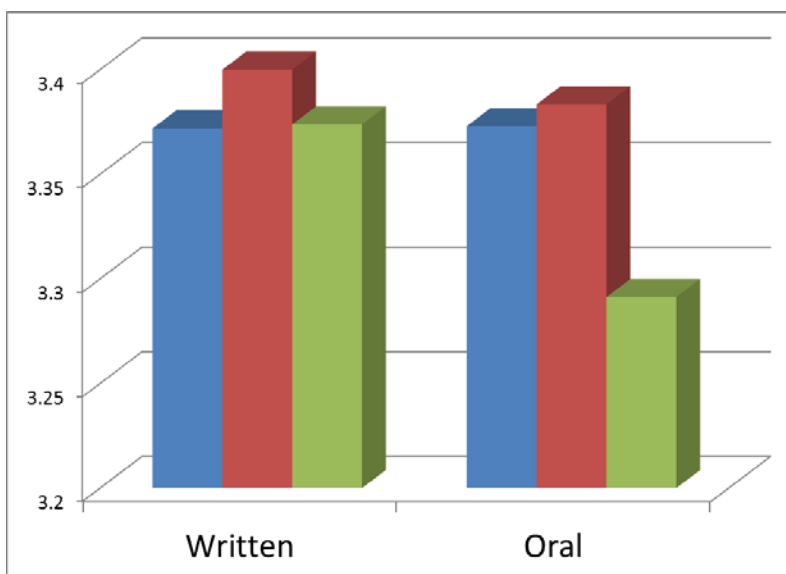
**Figure 23 Comparison of preferences by CEFR domains (blue = students; red = EAP instructors; green = content lecturers)**

- 2) In terms of activity types (Figure 24), students rate all of them between 3.3 and 3.4 (3 being “important”, and 4 being “highly important”). EAP teachers rated each the highest while content lecturers consistently rated the lowest. However, note that the range is very small (3-3.5).



**Figure 24 Comparison of preferences by CEFR activities (blue = students; red = EAP instructors; green = content lecturers)**

- 3) In terms of language medium, while content lecturers seem to appreciate written skills more than oral skills, students and EAP instructors alike ascribe equal importance to both (Figure 25).



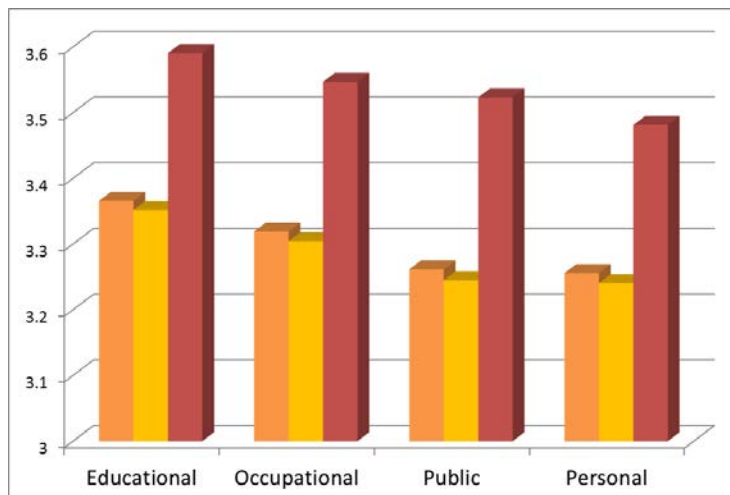
**Figure 25 Comparison - Ascribed importance of written vs. oral medium (blue = students; red = EAP instructors; green = content lecturers)**

## A Comparison of *Mechina* and BA Students with Advanced Degree Students

A comparison between *Mechina* (preparatory pre-academic programs) and first degree students with advanced degree students shows that the more advanced the academic level of studies is, the more students appreciate all the language domains and activities included in the survey. It seems that advanced-level students become more aware of their actual needs in English.

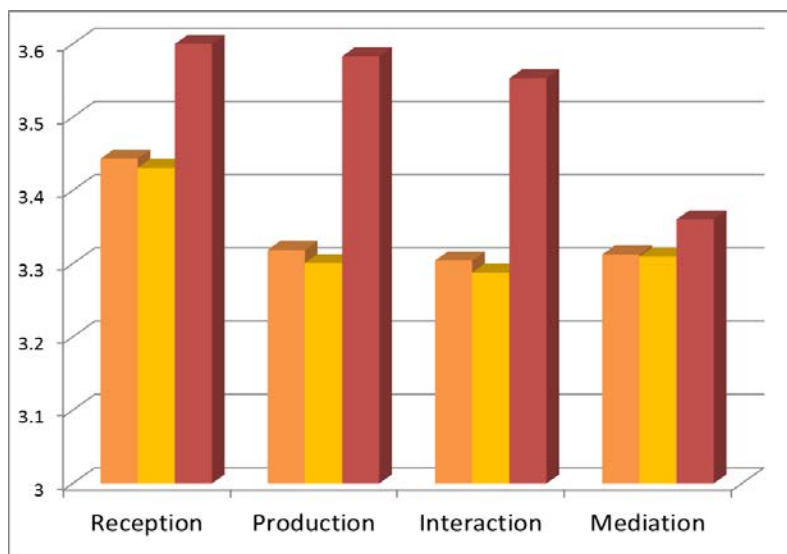
- *Mechina* and First Degree (Undergraduate) Students: N = 2147, mean age = 28.1 (SD = 8.8)
- Advanced Degree (Graduate) Students: N = 142, mean age = 36.2 (SD = 10.7)

1) Graduate students consistently rank the relative importance of the four CEFR domains higher (Figure 26). However, note that the range is small (3-3.6).



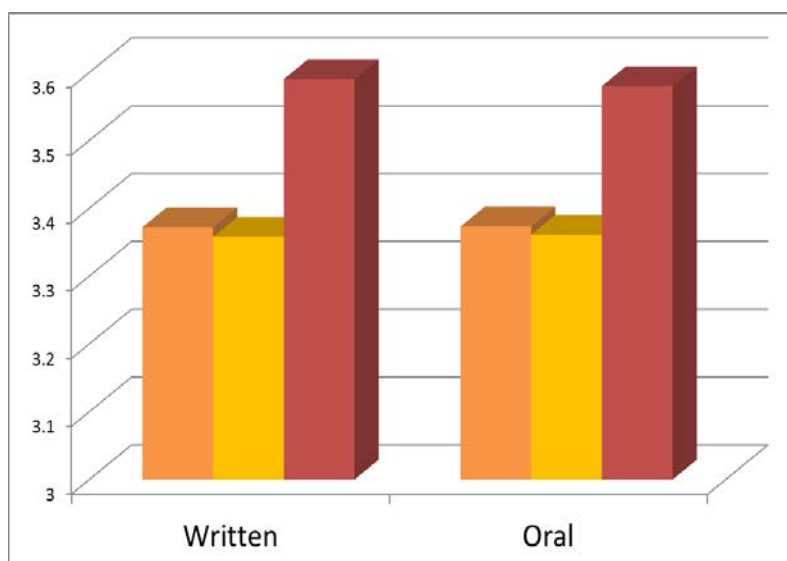
**Figure 26 Comparison of CEFR domains (orange = all; yellow = mechina and undergraduate degree; red = graduate degree)**

2) Figure 27 shows that graduate students also consistently rank the CEFR activities higher (again, note the small range from 3-3.6).



**Figure 27 Comparison of CEFR activities (orange = all; yellow = mechina and undergraduate degree; red = graduate degree)**

3) Graduate students ascribe higher importance to both written and oral skills (Figure 28).

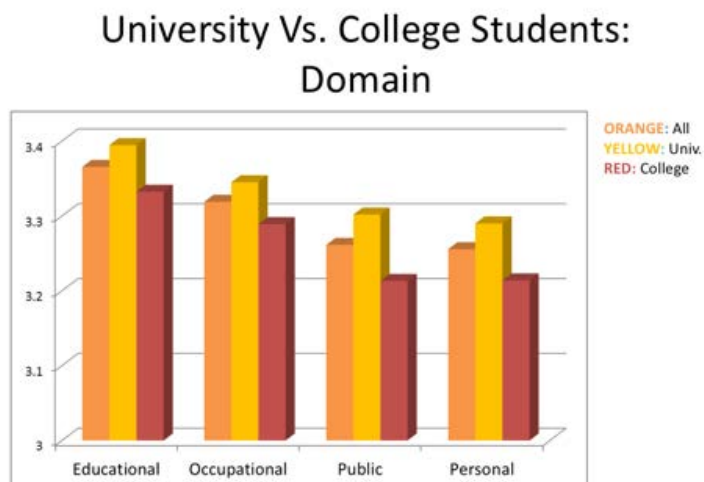


**Figure 28 Comparison of written vs. oral medium (orange = all; yellow = mechina and undergraduate degree; red = graduate degree)**

## A Comparison of University and College Students

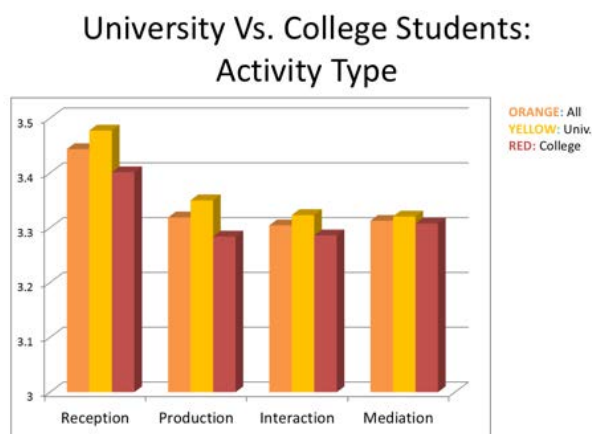
Our analyses revealed that university students ascribe higher relative importance to English in terms of CEFR domains and activities than college students. However, the differences are relatively small, within the range of 3-3.4 or 3.5.

- 4) A comparison of university and college students (Figure 29) also reveals that university students attribute greater importance to all four CEFR domains (range of 3-3.4).



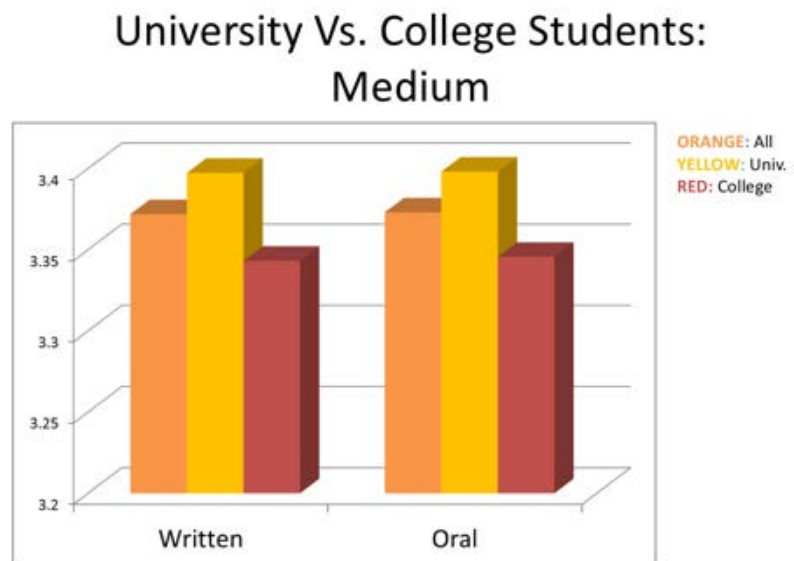
**Figure 29 University vs. College Students by CEFR domains**

- 5) Again, as seen in Figure 30, university students ascribe higher importance to all of the four CEFR activities:



**Figure 30 University vs. College Students - CEFR activities**

- 6) University students ascribe higher importance to both the written and oral modes of communication (Figure 31).



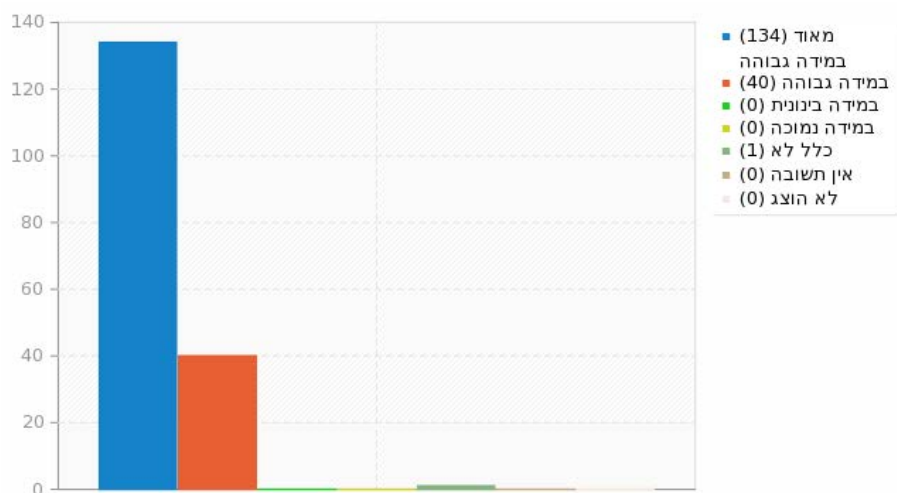
***Figure 31 University vs. College Students - Oral vs. written medium***



## EMI Component on Content Lecturer Surveys

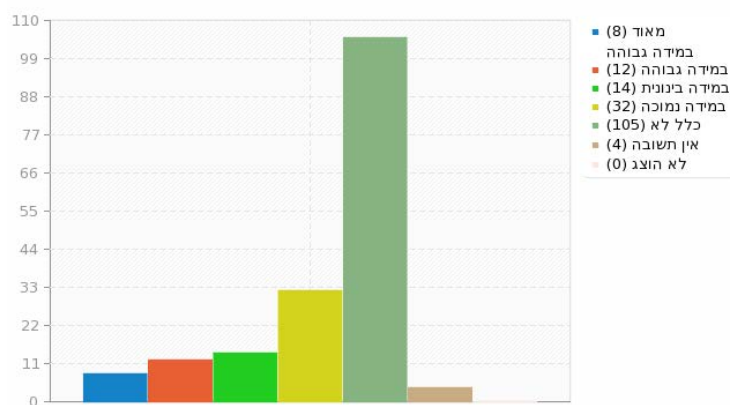
In addition to demographic items and ranking the can-do statements, content lecturers were asked to share their perceptions regarding EMI. They were asked to rank their (dis)agreement with a number of statements according to a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree to do not agree at all.

- 1) When asked if they agree with the statement that knowledge of English is critical in the academic world, the overwhelming majority of respondents strongly agreed (Figure 32):



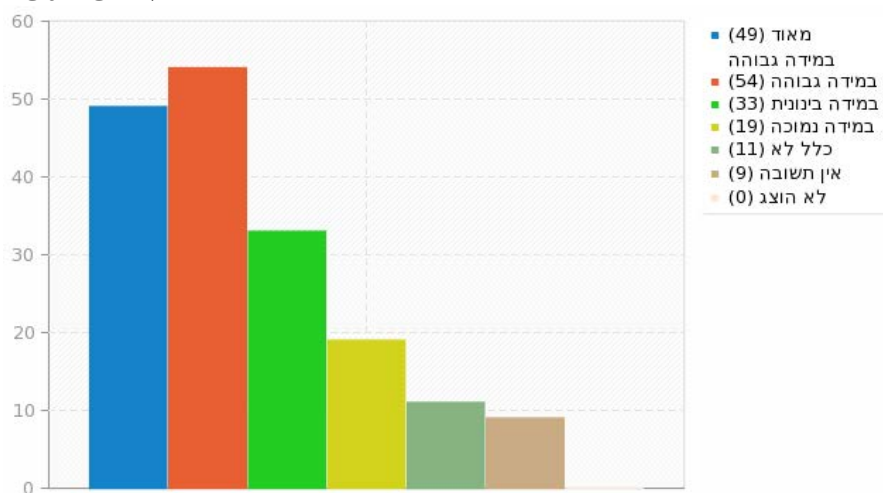
**Figure 32 Content lecturers - "Knowledge of English is critical in the academic world" (blue = very strong agree)**

- 2) When asked if EMI courses would pose a detriment to students' level of Hebrew (Figure 33), only 8 respondents strongly agreed (blue), while the vast majority (105) replied 'not at all' (green).



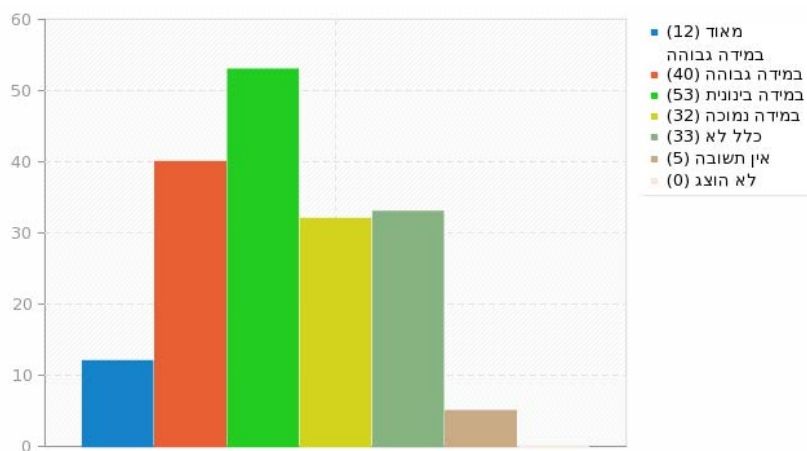
**Figure 33 - Content lecturers - Will EMI courses be a detriment to students' level of Hebrew?**

- 3) As seen in Figure 34 below, the majority of respondents felt that EMI courses would enhance the reputation of the academic institution (blue=very strongly agree; red=strongly agree):



**Figure 34 Content lecturers - EMI courses enhance the reputation of the academic institution**

- 4) Finally, despite the overall positive attitude towards EMI, content lecturers were concerned that course contents might be watered down, a concern that is consistent with other studies. See the responses to the statement: Because of difficulties with English it is probable that EMI course content will be watered down (Figure 35), ranging from blue (to a very great extent), to the green to the far right (not at all), where brown is 'no answer.'



**Figure 35 Content lecturers - Because of difficulties with English it is probable that EMI course content will be watered down**

- 5) EMI Component on Student and Content Lecturer Surveys: On the student survey, respondents were asked if they would be interested in taking an EMI course in the future. Results are presented in Figure 32:

To what extent would you be interested in taking a course in your field that is taught in English?(N= 2394)

Answer	Count	Percentage
not interested at all	651	27.19%
not very interested	418	17.46%
somewhat interested	687	28.70%
very interested	553	23.10%
No answer	85	3.55%

A small majority (51.8%) of respondents are somewhat or very interested in taking such a course, whereas a smaller percentage of respondents (44.65%) are not very interested or not at all interested in taking it.

**Figure 36 Student survey - Interest in taking an EMI course**

On the content lecturer survey, respondents were asked: How important is students' participation in EMI courses as part of their university/college studies (N= 175, closed and open questions). Results are presented Figure 33 below:

### Lecturers: Importance of EMI courses

Importance	N	%
Not important	12	6.86%
Important to a limited degree	13	7.43%
Mediocre importance	37	21.14%
Very important	41	23.43%
Vital	69	39.43%
No reply	3	1.71%

Almost 63% of the lecturers believe that participation in EMI courses is either very important or vital, while 25% do not see it as important

**Figure 37 Content lecturer survey - Importance of EMI courses**

- 6) Content lecturers were invited to share their perspectives regarding EMI in an open 'additional comments' item at the end of the survey. Comments were analyzed for categories. Findings included:

The benefits of EMI were similar to those already cited in the literature:

- **Overall:** global 21<sup>st</sup> century needs of students
- **Institutional:** prestige, economic benefits, international exchange
- **Students:** improves language skills, enhances potential and increases future opportunities

However, content lecturers also shared their concerns regarding EMI. The following points were salient in responses. Representative quotes (translated from Hebrew to English) are included below:

- Local linguistic diversity: Why English only?
  - Super diversity: "We have students from different place so why English? It is important to know English on the level of understanding articles, participation in conferences etc. But the language of instruction should be Hebrew (that even here many find it difficult)"
  - English linguistic academic imperialism: Reflects *"an obsequious attitude to the academic world."*
- **Ideological concerns:** Negatively affects the status of Hebrew, and is particularly discriminatory against Arabic and other language speakers
  - "The 100 year old battle to revive the Hebrew language changes direction."
  - "Eliezer Ben Yehuda [father of Modern Hebrew] is turning in his grave."
- Student readiness and the need for support mechanisms:
  - "Students need to be taught basic skills before we require compulsory attendance in an undergraduate course in English."
  - "Need for preparatory summer courses..."
  - Need for bilingual lecturers: "In case there is a gap in the lexicon the student will be able to understand."
  - Lack of preparation K-12: "As long as students don't enter academic studies with a satisfactory level of English – there is no sense in teaching content courses in English."
- Issues of equity:
  - Possible discrimination: "I think that an academic institution cannot discriminate between students and empower those who began with a native level English."
- More relevant for some fields and degree levels:
  - "Engineering studies are difficult enough without adding to them..."
  - "Important in some fields of study, less in others..."
  - "I think it is needed more in advanced degrees."

- Affective factors:
    - EMI requirements may “dissuade”, “intimidate” the students.
    - There is a potentially positive impact of the experience.
    - “They [the students] don’t know English, fear the influence, have to try it...”
    - “The need to cope with the course tasks in reading and listening and writing would alleviate the fears that some students have of English...”
    - “...enhancing the confidence to use the language...”
    - Need to enforce the courses for “most students will not do it out of free choice.”
- 7) However, when asked if content lecturers need to take responsibility for students’ English language abilities (and lack thereof), there was a reluctance to do so (Figure 34).

**However: Reluctant to take responsibility for students’ English proficiency**



**Figure 38 Responsibility of content lecturers for students' language needs**

- 8) Implications for EMI: In sum, content lecturers expressed reservations despite a generally positive view of EMI. Pre-requisites include a) solid foundations and long range policy planning, b) K-12 language preparation, c) catering to linguistic minorities and immigrants, d) support for the lecturer in terms of language repertoire and pedagogy, and e) the need to examine EMI models in light of local settings and to adapt and cater to their needs. Any top-down implementation that does not pay need to these voices and local concerns will not succeed.

## LIMITATIONS

It is important to note that the surveys included self-selected samples, who might have had particular interests in English in higher education. In addition, the samples were not representative of the 63 institutions of higher education in Israel. Finally, as with all self-report measures, caution should be taken in interpreting the results.