Linnéuniversitetet
Kalmar Växjö

Degree project

Are Nordic students prepared for university courses taught in English?

Comparing the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish pre-university English language syllabuses with international requirements for university entry.

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Abstract

Due to globalization and the importance of having a single lingua franca in academia, the number of international university courses taught in English—so called English medium instruction (EMI) has been steadily increasing. All students, national and international, are required to pass a certain linguistic threshold in order to be able to apply for a university program. Concerning Nordic universities, international students are required to take one of many international proficiency tests, such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Test System (IELTS) in order to prove their English language competence. On the other hand, for Nordic students there is no such test, instead Nordic pre-university English syllabuses are assumed to meet the demands of English proficiency as set by the universities. There is some research that suggests that Nordic students are able to fully cope with EMI in higher education—in some cases, at the same level of proficiency as native-speakers. However, other research suggests that Nordic students are unable to cope with EMI due to insufficient academic language competence. Given this uncertainty regarding Nordic students' readiness for EMI, this study sets out to investigate the extent to which students are prepared for coping with EMI at a university level. This is achieved by analyzing the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish pre-university English language syllabuses in terms of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) skills. By applying the same interpretive method used for Nordic syllabuses to international tests, and comparing the two sets of findings to the Common European Framework, this study is also able to highlight the extent of which Nordic syllabuses are able to prepare its students. Findings suggest that Nordic countries vary in how well they prepare students and what skills are taught in upper secondary school. Also, the study was able to highlight similarities and differences between the language competences referenced by the domestic syllabuses and those expected of international students.

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List of Abbreviations used in this project

EMI - English medium of instructions, is a term describing teaching in English in a country or region where English is not the mother tongue.

CLIL - Content and Language Integrated Learning is term describing the teaching of content and a second language.

TOEFL - Test of English as a Foreign Language is an international proficiency test used to determine students' English language competence in order for them to be able to apply for international studies.

IELTS - International English Language Test System is an international proficiency test used to determine students' English language competence in order for them to be able to apply for international studies.

CEFR - Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. A European framework used to determine the proficiency level amongst second language learners.

BICS - Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills. A term coined by Jim Cummins describing language skills targeting colloquial use.

CALP - Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency. A term coined by Jim Cummins describing language skills targeting academic use.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Globalization and the interconnectivity brought by technology have had a noticeable impact on how we conduct ourselves in the modern world. Since the turn of the 20th century, more and more people have been turning to English as a global language. As a result, non-native speakers are looking to enhance their English through education, media or other channels. Graddol (2006) argues that this has led to English becoming a lingua franca in most aspects of everyday life. Another aspect of globalization is the increased mobility of university students. Due to this, most students tend to use English to communicate with one another. Moreover, since the English language is globally used, publishing in English enables research communities to reach a wider audience (Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012). Thus, Bolton and Kuteeva (2012) suggest that universities need to adapt in order to meet the demand of an increasing numbers of second language learners. One such adaptation is that English-language textbooks and lectures are becoming more common in international universities (Wächter & Maiworm, 2002; 2008; 2014). Thus, greater demands are being placed on students' ability to cope with university courses taught in English, which in turn has led to an increased demand on the learner and his/her ability to transition pre-existing English education in upper secondary school to higher education.

In the Nordic context, Sylvén (2013) highlights the fact that Sweden takes pride in its introduction of English at a relatively low age, resulting in citizens who are highly proficient in English. Although there are clear benefits of this high proficiency in terms of university studies, Hellekjær (2009) argues that the English language students have learnt may not be enough or of the right kind. In his study, 66 % of Norwegian upper secondary students were unable to acquire a sufficient grade on international proficiency tests, designed specifically for academic purposes (Hellekjær, 2009). In contrast, Shaw and McMillion (2008) conducted a study, investigating the reading comprehension of native speakers of English and Swedish students in biology courses at a university level. Their findings showed that there was no measurable difference in proficiency, besides the fact that Swedish students needed extra time to read the English literature (Shaw & McMillion, 2009). The conflicting findings of Hellekjær (2009) and Shaw & McMillion (2009) suggest that there is an uncertainty in regards to how well Nordic students are prepared to deal with university courses taught in English.

Cummins (1999) obtained, through observations, evidence that suggested a difference between the everyday English taught in schools, and the language skills needed for university study. He introduced two constructs: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins. 1999). Only the latter, CALP, targets student ability to cope with the English used in higher education. This study will use Ranney's (2012) definition of CALP to analyse the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish pre-university English language syllabuses in order to establish the extent to which upper-secondary English courses in the Nordic countries prepare students for university courses taught in English. These results will then be used to compare national requirements to the requirements placed on international applicants. In order to apply for a Nordic university program, foreign students are required to obtain a sufficient grade in one of many international proficiency tests. For this study, the International English Language Test system (IELTS) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) will be used to compare international minimum requirements to requirements put on Nordic students. In order to make this comparison, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) descriptors will be used as a standardizing measure to compare the IELTS and the TOEFL descriptors with Nordic pre-university English language syllabuses.

1.2 Aim and research questions

The primary objective of this study is to investigate to what extent Nordic students graduating from upper-secondary school are prepared for non-language courses taught in English at university level. In order to achieve such a goal, this paper, will use BICS and CALP (Cummins 1999) to analyse pre-university English syllabuses in four Nordic countries in order to differentiate between skills targeting colloquial use and skills targeting academic English. The secondary objective is to investigate similarities or differences between national requirements compared to international requirements for acceptance to a university program. Therefore, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. To what extent do the syllabuses of the upper-secondary English education in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden appear to prepare students for university courses taught in English?

2. What are the similarities/differences regarding the minimum English Language requirements for international compared to national university applicants in the Nordic countries?

1.3 Outline of paper

The first part of this thesis will present Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). This study will use BICS and CALP as analytical tools to determine whether or not the skills described in Nordic syllabuses target EMI at a university level. This part is vital in order to comprehend how a syllabus is structured in terms of which language skills are targeted. By using BICS and CALP to analyse the Nordic English syllabuses, the extent to which these syllabuses prepare students for English Medium Instruction (EMI) at university can be estimated.

In order to answer the second research question, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) will be presented and compared to the national requirements. This is relevant since the Nordic countries use one or both of these as minimum requirements for admission to universities for international applicants. Also, the IELTS and TOEFL minimum grades will be converted to the equivalent of the CEFR descriptors to further explain the minimum requirements needed to attend a Nordic university program.

2. Theoretical background

In this chapter, the study will present an extended description of BICS, CALP, TOEFL and IELTS in order to provide the reader with an sufficient understanding of the abbreviations used. Furthermore, this chapter will also present previous research conducted on the topics of EMI in higher education and English for academic purposes.

2.1 BICS and CALP

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) were first proposed by Jim Cummins in 1979. Cummins had observed situations where proficient language speakers were unable to perform well during academically and cognitively demanding tasks. Cummins suggested a difference between colloquial language and the language used for academic purposes (Cummins, 1999). BICS skills are acquired during a learner's experience with language, mostly used for colloquial purposes. CALP skills on the other hand, target academic English and focus on the learner's ability to use language to perform academic tasks (Haynes, 2009). Interestingly, for the L2 learner, BICS and CALP skills are not acquired at the same rate. Cummins therefore suggests that educators should focus on implementing cognitively demanding tasks that enable the learner to acquire CALP skills. These tasks are the ability to *analyse*, *explain*, *infer*, *draw conclusions*, *synthesize*, *persuade*, *compare* and *contrast* together with the use of *strategies* which are considered to be cognitively demanding (Ranney, 2012:564).

2.2 TOEFL and IELTS

In order to apply for studies at a Nordic university, international students are obliged to obtain a grade in one of the commonly used international proficiency tests. Most Nordic university admission services use either the International English Language Test System (IELTS) or The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) for application purposes. In regards to international applicants, one has to obtain a minimum score of 72-101 on the internet based TOEFL test and 6.5 to 7.0 on the IELTS in order to apply for a Nordic university program (Study in Europe, 2016). The IELTS and TOEFL differ in terms of testing and validating an L2 learner's language skills. For example, the TOEFL test uses 4 different tests targeting each language skill, speaking, writing, reading and listening. Each test can give the test-taker a maximum of 30 points (ETS, 2016).On the other hand, IELTS test-takers are given 6 different tests, Listening, Academic Reading, General Reading, Academic Writing, General Writing and Speaking. Interestingly, the IELTS speaking test is assessed using a company official.

Upon completion, a test-taker will be given a grade, ranging from 0 to 9, with 0 being the lowest and 9 the highest (IELTS, 2016). All Nordic universities accept grades in either of these two tests. In order to apply for Nordic university programs, international students are required to obtain a minimum grade of 6.5 on the IETLS or 72-101 points on the TOEFL internet-based test.

2.3 Previous research

In order to fully understand the demands that university courses taught in English make on L2 learners, one has to consider students' acquired language skills in relation to their ability to cope with academic English in all four language skills. Due to the nature of this study, research conducted on the topics of *English for Academic Purposes* and *Academic English* has been selected because of the relationship between the expected outcome and acquired language.

2.3.1 Readiness of international students

In order for an L2 learner to study abroad, a sufficient grade on either the IELTS or the TOEFL is needed. Students are required to obtain a certain grade used to apply for international university programs. Tests such as the TOEFL and IELTS have the sole aim of effectively and accurately describing a foreign student's level of English proficiency. Moreover, these tests are designed to prepare students for university courses taught in English, using advanced, academic language. Although the aim of standardized international proficiency tests is to accurately measure proficiency levels, research has suggested some inconsistency in the relationship between expected outcome of tests and actual academic performance (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006).

Yates and Wahid (2013) highlighted several inconsistencies between expected outcome and the performance of Chinese exchange students attending Australian university programs. In their study, several Chinese students were interviewed about their experience with Australian university programs where English is the predominant language of instruction. These students were accepted into Australian higher education due to their acquisition of acceptable grades in the IELTS or the TOEFL. Even though all students were able to acquire sufficient grades, many struggled with their university programs. Chinese students in particular had insufficient language proficiency and their inability to fully understand academic English meant that most of these students had difficulties passing courses leading to many them dropping out completely (Yates & Wahid, 2013).

Concerning international students and their inability to fully comprehend university instruction in English, Chou (2014) highlighted the fact that if the topic of discussion was unfamiliar to Chinese students, they were unable to cope with the material. In his study, several Chinese students were interviewed and asked questions about their experience with EMI and English used for communication with university staff and lecturers. Several students were able to understand the general points if the topic of discussion was familiar. On the other hand, if students were exposed to new material they were unable to fully comprehend the new information. As a result, the study highlighted Chinese students' inability to successfully perform during class discussion, speaking to university staff and to lecturers (Chou, 2014).

Grabe and Zhang (2013) highlighted similar results to those presented by Chou (2014). In their study, L2 learners' inability to write scientific research articles for academic purposes was highlighted. Often, international students attending university programs abroad are expected to be able to synthesize and analyse data in order to conduct research. As a result of the IELTS and the TOEFL tests, international students are expected to be able to write formal and advanced English targeting higher education. This study presented an inconsistency between the L2 learner's ability to write academic English and expectations put on the L2 learner by the university. Due to the insufficient opportunities to practice one's academic writing abilities, international students were unable to write acceptable research articles (Grabe & Zhang, 2013).

Expecting international students to cope with English textbooks at university level is related to skills supposedly acquired in order to pass one of the international proficiency tests. Once admitted to a university program abroad, international students are expected to perform academic tasks, such as reading journals and research articles. Park and Ro (2015) conducted a study to investigate the expectations put on international students and their ability to read and comprehend English textbooks at a university level. In their study, students at the University of Hawaii had their reading ability tested in order to investigate to what extent they were able to perform academic reading tasks. The study suggested that L2 learners' ability to read academic English is related to their proficiency level. In scenarios where the language level of scientific journals and research papers were above that of students' proficiency level, most students were unsuccessful in their ability to fully comprehend content, resulting in undesirable learning outcomes (Park & Ro, 2015).

In summary, due to the international requirements put on foreign students in terms of the IELTS and TOEFL tests, international students are generally expected to cope with academic English used at international universities. The research conducted on this topic highlights an inconsistency in terms of the assumed relationship between test results and foreign students' readiness to cope with academic English. This calls into question the accuracy of international proficiency tests the reliance on them as sole indicators of English language competence.

2.3.2 Readiness of Nordic students

Unlike international students, Nordic students are not required to pass the TOEFL or the IELTS in order to apply for a national university program. Instead, students are obliged to obtain a sufficient grade in one of many English courses taught in the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Although there are many courses with different syllabuses, Nordic students are only required to pass English courses such as the Swedish English 6 course, the Danish English B stx course, the Norwegian Vg1 English course for general studies and the Finnish English 1 and 2 courses in order to apply for a university program. Although Nordic upper-secondary students are not held to the same standards as international students, in regards to proficiency tests, the assumption is that the aforementioned English courses do in fact prepare students for higher education. In relation to the latter, Sylvén (2013) claims that Nordic students are well-equipped in terms of their ability to cope with most aspects of the English language. Due to English education starting in the earlier stages of education and the exposure to American and British culture, Nordic students are familiar and comfortable with the English language. As a result, Nordic user of English are considered to be highly proficient users of English. Although this is true, Sylvén (2013) warns that high proficiency does not necessarily equate to success, especially in the context of education.

Due to globalization, the amount of English used in Nordic countries has increased. In higher education, the importance of English is growing and students are expected to cope with new material based on the assumption of high proficiency (Sylvén, 2013). Some researchers, such as Shaw and McMillion (2008) suggest that Swedish students are able to cope with courses taught in English. In their study, Swedish students' ability to comprehend an English textbook in a university biology course was compared to the ability of native speakers to read the same textbook. Interestingly, although Swedish students needed more time to work with the English textbook, their level of comprehension was almost equal to the level of native speakers. Students were asked to answer questions regarding the biology textbook used in the study.

Swedish students were able to answer questions as proficiently as native speakers, but needed more time, suggesting no effective difference in dealing with university courses taught in English (Shaw & McMillion, 2008).

Commenting on their findings, Shaw and McMillion describe the difference in reading comprehension as follows:

> If, however, university students in Scandinavia, as advanced L2 readers of English language textbooks, are less than 75% as efficient as the L1 readers of the same textbooks, but cannot put in the necessary extra time then clearly they are at a disadvantage when competing with their L1 counterparts (Shaw & McMillion, 2008:141).

In contrast to the study conducted by Shaw and McMillion (2008), several research articles suggest that a high level of proficiency does not necessarily equate to success (Sylvén, 2013). Vinke (1995) conducted a study on Dutch students and their experience with courses taught using English as the medium of instruction. She investigated to what extent Dutch students were able to cope with EMI. Students were asked about their experience with EMI and the teacher was asked about his/her experience with presenting using a second language. The study concluded that Dutch students were unable to fully focus during presentations if the teacher was speaking English. Furthermore, students concentrated more on taking notes and less on participating in class, resulting in undesirable learning outcomes (Vinke, 1995). A similar phenomenon was observed by Airey (2006). His study investigated student experiences in courses taught using EMI. Although Swedish students are proficient users of the English language, this study highlighted several issues regarding misunderstanding, the inability to fully understand content as well as a decrease in the amount of interactions occurring in lectures. Like Vinke (1995), Airey's (2006) study highlighted the fact that students were less inclined to participate in interactions with the lecturer. Fewer exchanges were made during lessons and this was seen to be due to students' inability to fully understand the material and their insecurity with the English language. Furthermore, several students were afraid of speaking English due to the fear of revealing their lack of knowledge. Interestingly, Swedish and Dutch students were both unable to fully participate in class if the lecturer used English due to their focus on taking notes (See Airey, 2006; 2009; 2016; Airey & Linder 2006; Klaassen, 2001).

The research by Airey (2006) and Vinke (1995) suggests potential problems in national students' ability to cope with courses taught using English as the medium of instruction.

Concerning Nordic students, a study conducted by Hellekjær (2009) revealed worrying results regarding Nordic students' ability to cope with English in higher education. International students applying for Norwegian universities are obliged to obtain a certain grade using international proficiency tests, such as the IELTS or the TOEFL. These tests target academic studies due to their description of the L2 learner's English language proficiency targeting higher education. In this study, Norwegian upper secondary students were asked to obtain similar results to their international counterparts. Alarmingly, 66 % of Norwegian upper secondary students were unable to acquire a grade higher than 6 on the IELTS test. For most Norwegian universities, international students have to at least obtain a minimum grade of 6.5 on the IELTS in order to be accepted into a university program in Norway. Thus, assumptions about Norwegian English education were considered inconsistent with the expected outcome of attending English courses in Norway. The study by Hellekjær suggested three explanations for the negative results of Norwegian test-takers. Either, Norwegian education does not provide its learners' with the language skills needed for higher education, or Norwegian students are less prepared than international students in terms of their ability to cope with university English, or the IELTS test does not measure what it is supposed to. Either way, the study exposed a potential problem with the entrance requirements for Norwegian English education (Hellekjær, 2009).

In summary, Nordic students are highly proficient English users due to their extensive pre-university English language education. However, some suggest that high proficiency does not equate with success. Results obtained by researchers on this topic are inconsistent, therefore this study will further investigate each Nordic syllabus to highlight course objectives in order to compare Nordic students' readiness to international requirements.

3. Methods and materials

This chapter will present the methods and materials used in this study to divide syllabuses into BICS and CALP as well as comparing national requirements to international requirements.

3.1 Method

The main purpose of this study is to investigate to what extent Nordic students are prepared for university courses taught in English in the Nordic countries. In order to investigate this, methods suitable for research on academic English are valuable. As previously suggested, the relationship between the ability to cope with EMI at university and CALP skills seems clear. Thus, this study will use Ranney's (2012) definition of CALP, where the abilities to *analyse*, *explain*, *infer*, *draw conclusions*, *synthesize*, *persuade*, *compare*, *contrast* along with the use of *strategies* are seen as CALP skills. As a result, the study will attempt to identify those course objectives in the English syllabuses in Nordic upper-secondary schools that target these CALP skills. By identifying course objectives targeting CALP, this study will be able to estimate the extent to which Nordic syllabuses prepare students for university courses taught in English. Moreover, comparisons between countries will be made and the similarities or differences between requirements for domestic and international students will be discussed.

Concerning the second research question, national students are obliged to obtain a minimum grade in order to attend a domestic university program. International applicants, however, can only apply for Nordic universities if they have acquired a sufficient score on international proficiency tests, such as the IELTS or TOEFL. Comparing these different entry requirements for the two groups of students using the CEFR descriptors will enable the study to present similarities and differences in the required proficiency for university studies for the different groups.

3.1.1 Qualitative research - interpretation and analysis

In relation to the previous paragraph, presenting results using an interpretation of course objectives and syllabuses would be considered qualitative research. Here, interpreting course objectives using Cummins (1999) BICS and CALP makes it possible to qualitatively compare the academic language skills that are integrated into each Nordic syllabus, resulting in an overview of the types of BICS and CALP skills emphasized in each syllabus. In order to achieve this, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) propose the use of assigning data according to labels, BICS and CALP, and interpreting these using a distinct definition (Creswell & Plano

Clark, 2011). Ranney's (2012) definition of BICS and CALP will be suitable in order to answer the first research question. To facilitate this to aid the reader, each course objective targeting CALP will be highlighted in **bold**. These will also be called CALP selectors for the benefit of the reader.

3.1.2 Analysing course objectives and international requirements

In order to properly answer the study's two research questions, a two-step process was used to analyse course objectives. First, the focus was on finding Ranney's defined CALP skills - the ability to *analyse*, *explain*, *infer*, *draw conclusions*, *synthesize*, *persuade*, *compare*, *contrast* and the use of *strategies* - in the Nordic syllabuses. Thereafter, the study focused on finding course objectives similar to the above, for example, objectives using different terminology to describe the same CALP skills. This process was also applied on national/international minimum requirements and the TOEFL, IELTS and CEFR descriptors. These are the documents analysed in this study:

- The Norwegian syllabus - English Vg1 for general studies
- The Danish syllabus - English B stx
- The Finnish syllabus - ENA1 and ENA2 (both courses are mandatory)
- The Swedish syllabus - English 6
- IELTS descriptors
- TOEFL descriptors
- CEFR descriptors

These findings were then used to predict how prepared Nordic students are for EMI in higher education. Additionally, the same approach was used to determine similarities and differences in national course requirements and international test requirements (appendix 1, 2 and 3).

3.2 Validity and Reliability

A study's validity is based on its ability to measure what it is supposed to measure (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This study set out to investigate whether or not Nordic students are able to cope with university courses taught in English. Also, the study set out to highlight similarities and differences between national and international language requirements in order to attend Nordic universities. It can be argued that using official documents such as Nordic course objectives, national and international requirements (IELTS, TOEFL and CEFR

descriptors) will result in a high level of validity. Simultaneously, it could also be argued that CALP skills could be defined by other definitions and descriptions, resulting in lower validity. This study's validity is based on its ability to measure whether or not Nordic students can cope with EMI in higher education in terms of using Ranney's definition of CALP skills or skills useful in an academic setting.

The level of reliability is measured by how "repeatable" the results are (Creswell & Clark, 2011). As already mentioned, this study intends to investigate assumed outcomes of attending Nordic English courses, in terms of students' readiness to cope with EMI. Measuring to what extent students are able to cope with EMI will enable the study to reach a certain level of reliability by using mixed methods. Concerning this study, using a specific perspective on CALP skills only enables the study to reach a certain level of reliability. This is due to the use of one definition of CALP skills. The use of other perspectives might give a more detailed description of students' readiness, but it is likely that another study using the same data and analysis would reach the same results.

3.2.1 Limitations

As a result to the timeframe, this study is limited in its investigation of different definitions of academically appropriate language skills and the teaching of these in Nordic classrooms. Using one definition is still considered valid because it is based on the research conducted by Cummins (1999). Also, the inaccessibility of the Norwegian and Finnish assessment criteria limited the study in its ability to compare Norwegian and Finnish requirements to those put on international applicants. Still, the study was able to collect a sufficient amount of data to answer the two research questions, excluding Finland and Norway.

3.3 Materials

Materials used in this study consist of official documents, such as Nordic syllabuses and the TOEFL, IELTS and CEFR descriptor (See appendix 1, 2 and 3). Moreover, scientific articles on the topics of *academic English* and *English for academic purposes* were used to compare results of the study to results obtained by other researchers.

4. Results and analysis

In this chapter, the reader will have the opportunity to overview the use of materials and methods coming together to present results obtained in the search for answers to the two research questions. The first part of this section presents results related to the first research question. The second part focuses on presenting results related to the second research question. Due to the inaccessibility of the Norwegian and the Finnish grading and assessment template, this study will not be able to compare those to the international requirements needed for attendance at Norwegian and Finnish universities. Throughout the results section, CALP skills will be highlighted in **bold**.

4.1 The Swedish syllabus - English 6

Swedish upper secondary students are obliged to pass the English 6 course with a minimum grade of E in order to apply for national university programs. The Swedish National Agency for Education is the main government body working with various areas of domestic education (Skolverket, 2011). As previous research suggested, there is conflicting evidence concerning expected outcome and high proficiency. With regards to Swedish students' readiness for university-level EMI, the English 6 course contains several CALP selectors as well as an extensive implementation of learning strategies. For example, the English 6 course highlights the use of strategies in three course objectives. These require the students to use:

> **Strategies** to search for relevant information in larger amounts of text or longer sequences of spoken language and to understand perspectives and implied meaning (Skolverket, 2011).
>
> **Strategies** for source-critical approaches when listening to and reading communications from different sources and in different media (Skolverket, 2011).
>
> **Strategies** for contributing to and actively participating in argumentation, debates and discussions related to societal and working life (Skolverket, 2011).

These course objectives use strategies in order to create a learning environment where students are exposed to different learning strategies useful in an academic setting. As Ranney (2012) suggested, strategies are useful tools aiding the L2 learner in his/her experience with advanced English, mostly found at a university level. The course objectives present evidence of upper secondary education targeting CALP. Concerning individual CALP skills, besides

the use of strategies, the English 6 syllabus also requires students to practice and acquire a wide range of skills useful in higher education. For example, attending the Swedish English 6 course requires:

> Oral and written production and interaction in different situations and for different purposes where students **argue**, **report**, **apply, reason**, **summarise**, **comment on**, **assess** and **give reasons** for their views (Skolverket, 2011).

This extract from the English 6 syllabus clearly highlights the importance of a range of different CALP skills. The course provides students with a learning environment where they are able to be exposed to cognitively demanding tasks, enabling students to acquire a wide range of useful CALP skills. At university level, most students come across research papers and articles. The students' ability to comprehend these is dependent on their ability to use CALP skills (Grabe & Zhang, 2013). Although the distribution of BICS and CALP skills is in clear favor of BICS, six CALP skills were evident amounting to approximately 33 % of the course objectives in the Swedish English 6 syllabus.

4.2 The Norwegian syllabus English Vg1 For general studies

In order for Norwegian students to apply for a university program, they are required to pass the Norwegian English Vg1 course for general studies. If students are attending vocational upper secondary school programs, they are required to pass a specific course targeting vocational graduates. Both courses are mandatory in order to apply for higher education in Norway. Concerning the assumed outcome of attending upper secondary English courses and the proficiency demand put on students, the English Vg1 course has several course objectives and aims targeting the students' acquisition of CALP skills. Unlike its Nordic counterparts, the Norwegian syllabus highlights one specific course objective, targeting academic vocabulary. A student attending the English Vg1 course should be able to:

> Understand and use a wide general vocabulary and an **academic** vocabulary related to his/her own education program (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2016).

According to the extract above, Norwegian upper secondary students are taught to use vocabulary for different purposes. Related to this study, students are able to use vocabulary aimed towards higher education, specifically university courses taught in English.

Concerning CALP skills, the Norwegian English Vg1 course highlights the use of strategies. The use of strategies is considered a CALP skill. By attending the Vg1 course Norwegian students will be able to:

> Evaluate and use different situations, working methods and learning **strategies** to further develop one's English-language skills (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2016).

> Evaluate and use suitable reading and writing **strategies** adapted for the purpose and type of text (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2016).

> Evaluate and use suitable listening and speaking **strategies** adapted for the purpose and the situation (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2016).

In regards to the extracts above, Norwegian students are expected to be able to use strategies for different purposes and situations. Also, students should have the ability to develop their language competence as well as the ability use writing, reading and listening for academic purposes. Although course objectives are in favor of colloquial language skills (BICS), 9 out of 27 course objectives (33 %) target CALP.

4.3 The Danish syllabus - English B stx

Students considering higher education in Denmark must acquire an acceptable grade in the Danish English B course. In order to do so, students have to participate in education and possess a certain level of language proficiency. Concerning CALP skills, the English B course prepares its students to some extent for university courses taught in English. Unlike other Nordic syllabuses, the Danish syllabus describes course objectives using paragraphs, few containing CALP skills. Instead, additional documents highlight the importance and use of CALP skills in Danish upper secondary education. Danish students attending the English B stx course should be able to:

> **Analyse** and describe the English language using relevant terminology[1] (Undervisningsministeriet, 2010).

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[1]My translation

> **Analyse** and interpret literature, non-fiction and others using
> professional/**academic** terminology[2] (Undervisningsministeriet, 2010).

The extracts above indicate that Danish upper secondary students are expected to be able to use their analytical skills in various situations. Students should be able to analyse and interpret different aspects of the English language as well as the ability to analyse fiction and other texts, using academic vocabulary. In the Danish syllabus, the use of strategies is highlighted because it enables students to process and be critical towards information. In summary, out of 20 course objectives, three target CALP (15 %).

4.4 The Finnish syllabus English A

In order for Finnish students to be able to study on a domestic university program, they have to obtain a sufficient grade in one of the mandatory English courses. Several English courses are taught at upper secondary school but only two are mandatory for all students. The ENA1 and ENA2 course enables students to learn:

> […] the use of **strategies** in order to plan his/her language education in regards to future studies
> and work, national as well as international (OPH, 2016).

The extract above indicates that Finnish students are expected to be able to use strategies to consider their educational path of one's acquired English. Out of six course objectives, one targets CALP skills (16 %).

4.5 Minimum requirements—international students

Swedish admission services require international students to reach a score of 6.5 on the IELTS or 72-101 points on the internet-based TOEFL test in order to apply for a Swedish university program. The assumed aim of international proficiency tests is to study at a university. This IELTS descriptor below describes the requirement of the score 7:

> The test taker has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies,
> inappropriate usage and misunderstandings in some situations. They generally handle complex
> language well and understand detailed reasoning (appendix 2.) (IELTS, 2016).

---

[2] My translation

This descriptor describes the international students assumed ability to use the English language is various situations. Also, it describes the student's ability to understand details in language and it corresponds with the TOEFL score of 72-101 points:

> Speech is generally clear, with some fluidity of expression, though minor difficulties with pronunciation, intonation, or pacing are noticeable and may require listener effort at times (though overall intelligibility is not significantly affected (appendix 1.) (TOEFL, 2016).

If these requirements were translated into CEFR descriptors - the C1-B2 level - the assumed outcome of the extracts above would enable the international student to:

> […] understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and **explain** a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options (appendix 3.)(CEFR, 2016)

In contrast to the international requirements, Swedish upper secondary students are expected to reach a minimum grade of E in the Swedish English 6 course to be able to apply for a domestic university program. The assumed outcome of reaching a sufficient grade enables the student to:

> [...] choose and with some certainty use **strategies** to search for relevant information and assess the reliability of different sources (Skolverket, 2011).

> In oral and written interaction in various, and more formal and complex contexts, students can express themselves clearly with fluency, and with some adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation. In addition, students can choose and use essentially functional **strategies,** which to some extent solve problems and improve their interaction. Students discuss in basic terms some features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used, and can also make simple comparisons with their own experiences and knowledge (Skolverket, 2011).

Regarding CALP skills, the Swedish English 6 syllabus emphasized the use of **strategies** in two different grading criteria. Out of the three international proficiency tests used in this study, only the CEFR contained a CALP skill, specifically the ability to **explain**.

Similar to other Nordic minimum requirements, Danish students have to pass the English B stx course in order apply for Danish universities. Concerning international students, the same minimum requirements are needed for all Nordic universities. In order to compare international requirements (Appendix 1, 2 and 3), one must interpret and analyse the English B stx minimum requirements. To obtain the sufficient grade, students are asked to perform certain course-specific tasks, not required in the other Nordic countries. For example, the English B stx course requires students to pass an oral exam, where they are assessed by their ability to prepare and present a specific topic. To acquire the minimum grade, a student should demonstrate sufficient qualities in his/her ability to argue and **analyse**. An acceptable grade equates to student's ability to use the CALP skills needed for academic purposes. Moreover, in writing, students should display an accepted level of summary and the ability to plan his/her learning in order to enhance one's language. Although the Danish approach is similar to the TOEFL test in assessment, it still requires students to display a wider range of CALP skills such as the ability to **analyse** and use **strategies**.

Due to the inaccessibility of the Norwegian and Finnish assessment and grading documents, it is impossible to compare national minimum requirement to international requirements.

4.6 Analysis

As mentioned in the methods section, CALP skills were used to determine the extent of course objectives targeting academic English, potentially preparing students for university courses taught in English. Besides CALP skills, the use of strategies was a prominent feature in most studies presented in previous research.

Below, Figure 1 will present the distribution of BICS and CALP skills in each Nordic syllabus. The figure is merely an interpretation of course objectives using Ranney's (2012) definition of CALP skills and abilities.
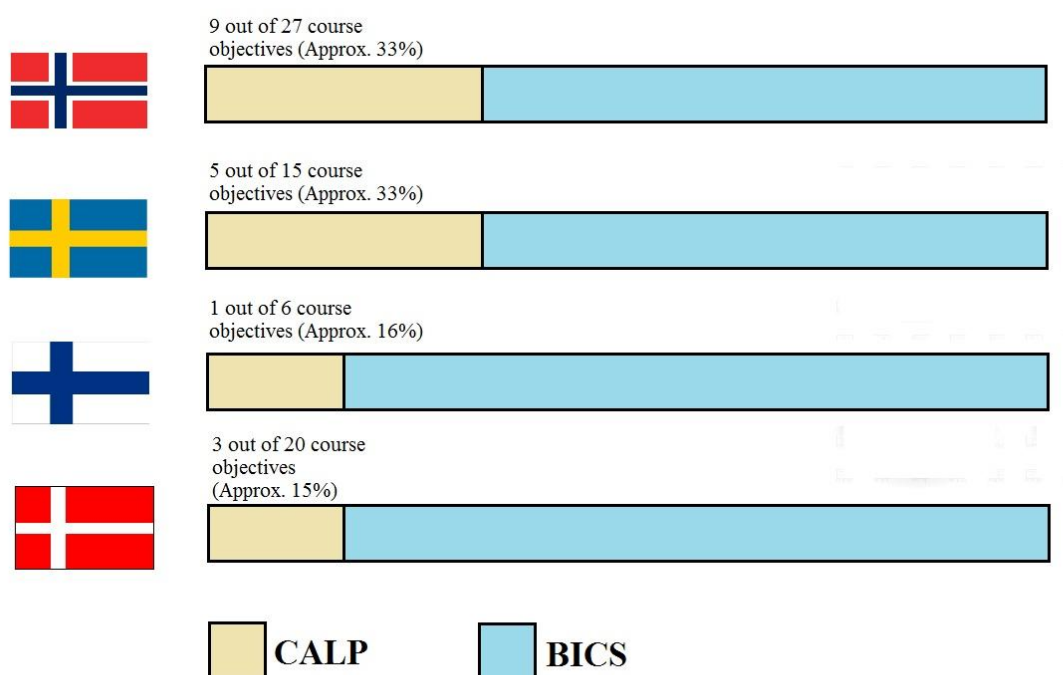

Fig 1. The distribution of course objectives targeting colloquial (BICS) and academic language skills (CALP) in each Nordic syllabus using Ranney's (2012) definition of academic language.

Research by Hellekjær (2009) suggested that Norwegian students are not able to match their international counterparts, in terms of acquiring a satisfactory grade on the IELTS (Hellekjær, 2009). On the other hand, Shaw and McMillion (2008) claimed that there is no difference in terms of proficiency between Swedish students and native-speakers (Shaw & McMillion, 2008). As a result, questions concerning Nordic students' ability to cope with EMI in higher education are a matter of whether or not national English courses are effective in their teaching of CALP skills. Concerning the effectiveness and accuracy of English syllabuses in the Nordic countries, projected outcomes of attending courses could describe whether or not Nordic students can actually cope with university courses taught in English. Assumptions

about the proficiency level of Nordic students are irrelevant to their success at a university program. Sylvén (2013) claimed that CLIL-programs in Sweden and Finland were unable to effectively teach students new language. Due to this, the teacher's ability to enhance students with academic language was investigated. Findings suggested that the teacher should provide opportunities for students to practice new language, especially language targeting academic studies. If the teacher is uncertain about his/her proficiency level, this could impact the students, resulting in undesirable learning outcomes (Sylvén, 2013). Similarly, Vinke (1995) suggested that students were not able to fully concentrate during class if the lecturer presented in English (Vinke, 1995). As Cummins (1999) suggested, CALP skills are not acquired at the same rate as BICS. The ability to acquire CALP skills is dependent on the learner's initial age and proficiency level. If the L2 learner is exposed to CALP skills in the earlier stages of education, the student will have a higher chance of succeeding in higher education. Moreover, Ranney (2012) implied that the learner's ability to cope with academic English is related to when the acquisition of CALP skills started, i.e. early exposure is preferable to later exposure (Ranney, 2012).

Concerning Nordic syllabuses, the projected outcome and proficiency level of students should enable Nordic students to cope with EMI to some extent. All Nordic countries have some degree of CALP implemented in their respective syllabuses. Fig 1 illustrates the distribution of BICS and CALP skills in each syllabus. This would imply that the English syllabus in each country predominantly targets colloquial language skills. This is contradictory to the aim of the courses, which is to prepare students for university. Due to globalization and the integration of English as the lingua franca in academia, Nordic students are expected to cope with English at a university level, at least to some degree (Sylvén, 2013). Fig 1 implies that students are more prepared for colloquial English and less for academic English. Furthermore, each country varies in its emphasis on CALP skills. For example, Finland, Norway and Sweden emphasize the use of strategies while Denmark prefers the student's ability to analyse. Regarding Ranney's definition of CALP skills, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish students are at a clear advantage in their use of strategies compared to Danish students.

On the other hand, the Danish syllabus highlights students' ability to apply analytical competences to one's language proficiency. Interestingly, this level of emphasis on analytical competence is only evident in the Danish syllabus, which could imply that Danish students are better at using their analytical abilities in higher education. Here, Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) have suggested that approaching cognitively demanding tasks using analytical

competences could have a positive impact on the ability to cope with university studies (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006).

Regarding the use of strategies, all Nordic countries emphasize them to some extent. Norway and Sweden are more extensive in their use of course objectives targeting students' ability to acquire strategies compared to Denmark and Finland. The ability to use strategies is considered a CALP skill due to its demanding nature on the L2 learner's cognitive learning process (Ranney, 2012). Hong-Nam & Leavell (2006) and De Silva (2015), amongst others, highlighted the importance of acquiring strategies before attending a university program. The use of strategies directly corresponds with the student's ability to solve cognitively demanding tasks, usually found in higher education. For example, De Silva (2015) suggested that L2 learners should use strategies to enhance their learning experience. Her study investigated to what extent L2 learners were able to apply strategies in order to solve tasks targeting Academic English. Prior to their academic writing task, students were asked to structure and plan it. Results implied that students, who were aware of how to use strategies, were more likely to succeed with their academic studies (De Silva, 2015).

Research on international students' readiness is somewhat indecisive in regards to whether or not they can actually cope with EMI in higher education. Some researchers suggest that international students are able to cope with EMI if the topic is familiar. On the other hand, if international students are exposed to unfamiliar material, they are at a deficit, in regards to language competences (Chou, 2014). As mentioned previously, Yates and Wahid (2013) highlighted that Chinese students were unable to cope with Australian university programs due to their inexperience with Western academia.

Whether or not international students can cope with international university programs is a question of reliability and accuracy of international proficiency tests, such as the TOEFL and IELTS. Harris (2014) implied that a single test can never account for a lifetime of learning. Her observations of international students unable to perform in British universities led her to believe that tests are not accurate enough in their description of the L2 learner's proficiency. For example, Harris points out that the TOEFL writing test requires the student to write a 250-word long essay on a certain topic and this should provide enough evidence of the test-takers ability to write for academic purposes. Students can easily bypass the system by memorizing academic phrases and vocabulary. As a result, instead of accurately describing the test-taker's

ability to write academic texts, the test tests the learner's ability to regurgitate memorized material (Harris, 2014).

In conclusion, Nordic students and international students' readiness for EMI in higher education is dependent on two main aspects of acquiring language competence. First and foremost, the fundamental aim of Nordic English courses and international proficiency tests is to enable students to study at a university program. However, somewhat surprisingly, all the Nordic countries put great emphasis on the teaching of BICS skills. Similarly, international proficiency tests consist of descriptors mostly targeted at colloquial use of English. As a result, unprepared students may struggle with university courses taught in English. Finally, there are a large number of CALP skills needed for EMI in higher education. Students are expected to acquire CALP skills for academic writing, reading, listening and speaking in education before attending a university program. Ranney (2012) suggested that if students are unable pursue their academic careers previous education has failed in its attempt to educate them about CALP skills (Ranney, 2012). Questions about the accuracy of proficiency tests and the expectations put on national and international students to cope with EMI in higher education remain.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to investigate to what extent Nordic students are prepared for university courses taught in English. The secondary objective was to highlight differences and similarities between national and international minimum requirements.

1. To what extent do the syllabuses of the upper-secondary English education in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden appear to prepare students for university courses taught in English?

Concerning the first research question, this study was able to obtain findings showing that students are perhaps less prepared than expected. These results did not coincide with some of the previous research mentioned in this thesis.

The assumed outcome of attending any of the Nordic English courses is that students should be equipped with the ability to cope with academic writing, reading, listening and speaking. Based on the results of this study, each country has its own strengths and weaknesses. Results obtained in this study highlighted an alarming aspect of Nordic students' readiness. All Nordic syllabuses primarily emphasize the teaching of BICS skills to various degrees. Norway and Sweden are the two Nordic countries with largest emphasis on CALP skills in course objectives while Denmark and Finland have the least. Furthermore, Norway and Sweden emphasize the use of strategies to a far greater extent than Denmark and Finland. If we take these results at face value, Swedish and Norwegian students are potentially better prepared for their use of English in higher education.

Interestingly, the Danish and Finnish syllabuses have a different approach to learning competences associated with academic studies. The Danish English B stx course highlights the student's ability to use analytical competences and Finnish students are expected to analyse their own language proficiency in order to make decisions about future studies. This would suggest that Danish students are perhaps better at using analytical competences than their Nordic counterparts, whilst, Finnish students are perhaps more aware of their individual language proficiency than Danish, Norwegian and Swedish students.

Issues regarding Nordic students' readiness are complex and not easily determined. The inconsistency in previous research further complicates this issue. In spite of this, the study managed to locate some CALP skills in each Nordic syllabus, pointing to differences in the degree of CALP skills in each syllabus. In summary, with respect to research question one, this study was able to highlight the different approaches to CALP in Nordic syllabuses,

suggesting that Norway and Sweden are superior to Denmark and Finland in terms of teaching CALP and preparing students for EMI in higher education.

2. What are the similarities/differences regarding the minimum English Language requirements for international compared to national university applicants in the Nordic countries?

This study only managed to answer the second research question to some extent, due to the inaccessibility of the Finnish and Norwegian course requirements. It was, however, successful in answering the question regarding the Swedish and Danish minimum requirements. What is more, the results appear to contradict the work of Hellekjær (2009) by suggesting that Nordic students are perhaps better prepared for EMI in higher education than international students.Regarding the IELTS and TOEFL tests, less CALP skills were found to be present than in the Nordic syllabuses. Furthermore, Nordic minimum requirements are more precise in their description of what is regarded as a pass grade, excluding the Norwegian and Finnish syllabus. The inconsistency between the aim of the IELTS and TOEFL and previous research suggests that these tests are not accurate descriptions of an L2 student's language competences. The TOEFL and IELTS descriptors are vague in their description, leaving room for student errors and uncertainty. Previous research on this topic suggests that many foreign students seem to struggle once accepted to a university program abroad. In some cases, cultural and social interference might be the sole factor of a student's inability to cope with Western academia. In other cases, insufficient language skills determine whether or not the student will be successful. In order to circumvent these issues, some countries have shown great success in using pre-departure programs. These programs use tasks, objectives and material used in the target country. As a result, students are able to more easily transition to an international university setting. Given these points, this study was able to answer the second research question, suggesting that the Swedish and Danish English courses are better at preparing students for EMI than international proficiency tests.

In summary, some conclusions can be made about the level of readiness amongst Nordic students based on this study. Most likely, Nordic students are better prepared at dealing with EMI in higher education than international students. A lifetime of learning should not be condensed into a handful of different tests conducted within a set timeframe.

Recommendations for future work

For future studies, this study highlighted the importance sufficient training of CALP skills. Students who are introduced to CALP in earlier years have a higher chance at success, regarding EMI at a university level (Ranney, 2012). To facilitate this, education should provide students with plenty of opportunities to practice and acquire CALP skills. With the emergence of more and more university courses in English, students need to be better prepared to deal with EMI in higher education. Legislators and politicians should revise national English syllabuses in order to focus on CALP skills rather than simply assuming that proficient speakers are able to cope with academic English. As Cummins (1999) points out, there are vast differences between colloquial and academic language skills. Therefore, to meet the demands of the future, syllabuses should be revised and more CALP skills should be included.

Pertaining to further research, one could interview Nordic and international students about their experiences with pre-university English education. This could possibly give an insight into what CALP skills are acquired and to what extent students are exposed to opportunities to practice them. Moreover, one could investigate differences in actual teaching, showing local and national differences in the approach to the teaching of CALP skills.

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Appendix 1. Internet-based TOEFL grading descriptors - minimum requirements

Independent Writing Rubrics

- Addresses the topic and task well, though some points may not be fully elaborated
- Is generally well organized and well developed, using appropriate and sufficient explanations, exemplifications and/or details
- Displays unity, progression and coherence, though it may contain occasional redundancy, digression, or unclear connections
- Displays facility in the use of language, demonstrating syntactic variety and range of vocabulary, though it will probably have occasional noticeable minor errors in structure, word form or use of idiomatic language that do not interfere with meaning

Integrated Writing Rubrics

- A response at this level is generally good in selecting the important information from the lecture and in coherently and accurately presenting this information in relation to the relevant information in the reading, but it may have minor omission, inaccuracy, vagueness, or imprecision of some content from the lecture or in connection to points made in the reading. A response is also scored at this level if it has more frequent or noticeable minor language errors, as long as such usage and grammatical structures do not result in anything more than an occasional lapse of clarity or in the connection of ideas.

Independent Speaking Rubrics

- A response at this level is generally good in selecting the important information from the lecture and in coherently and accurately presenting this information in relation to the relevant information in the reading, but it may have minor omission, inaccuracy, vagueness, or imprecision of some content from the lecture or in connection to points made in the reading. A response is also scored at this level if it has more frequent or noticeable minor language errors, as long as such usage and grammatical structures do not result in anything more than an occasional lapse of clarity or in the connection of ideas.
- Speech is generally clear, with some fluidity of expression, though minor difficulties with pronunciation, intonation, or pacing are noticeable and may require listener effort at times (though overall intelligibility is not significantly affected).
- The response demonstrates fairly automatic and effective use of grammar and vocabulary, and fairly coherent expression of relevant ideas. Response may exhibit some imprecise or inaccurate use of vocabulary or grammatical structures or be somewhat limited in the range of structures used. This may affect overall fluency, but it does not seriously interfere with the communication of the message.
- Response is mostly coherent and sustained and conveys relevant ideas/information. Overall development is somewhat limited, usually lacks elaboration or specificity. Relationships between ideas may at times not be immediately clear.

Integrated Speaking Rubrics

- The response addresses the task appropriately, but may fall short of being fully developed. It is generally intelligible and coherent, with some fluidity of expression, though it exhibits some noticeable lapses in the expression of ideas. A response at this level is characterized by at least two of the following:

- Speech is generally clear, with some fluidity of expression, but it exhibits minor difficulties with pronunciation, intonation, or pacing and may require some listener effort at times. Overall intelligibilityremainsgood, however.

- The response demonstrates fairly automatic and effective use of grammar and vocabulary, and fairly coherent expression of relevant ideas. Response may exhibit some imprecise or inaccurate use of vocabulary or grammatical structures or be somewhat limited in the range of structures used. Such limitations do not seriously interfere with the communication of the message.

- The response is sustained and conveys relevant information required by the task. However, it exhibits some incompleteness, inaccuracy, lack of specificity with respect to content, or choppiness in the progression of ideas.

Appendix 2. IELTS grading criteria - minimum requirements and band scores

Competent user, grade 6:

- The test taker has an effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriate usage and misunderstandings. They can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.

Good user, grade 7:

- The test taker has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriate usage and misunderstandings in some situations. They generally handle complex language well and understand detailed reasoning.

Writing task 1.

- covers the requirements of the task
- presents a clear overview of main trends, differences or stages
- (GT) presents a clear purpose, with the tone consistent and appropriate
- clearly presents and highlights key features/bullet points but could be more fully extended
- logically organises information and ideas; there is clear progression throughout
- uses a range of cohesive devices appropriately although there may be some under-/over-use
- uses a sufficient range of vocabulary to allow some flexibility and precision
- uses less common lexical items with some awareness of style and collocation
- may produce occasional errors in word choice, spelling and/or word formation
- uses a variety of complex structures
- produces frequent error-free sentences
- has good control of grammar and punctuation but may make a few errors

Writing task 2.

- addresses all parts of the task
- presents a clear position throughout the response
- presents, extends and supports main ideas, but there may be a tendency to over-generalise and/or supporting ideas may lack focus
- logically organises information and ideas; there is clear progression throughout
- uses a range of cohesive devices appropriately although there may be some under-/over-use
- presents a clear central topic within each paragraph
- uses a sufficient range of vocabulary to allow some flexibility and precision
- uses less common lexical items with some awareness of style and collocation
- may produce occasional errors in word choice, spelling and/or word formation

- uses a variety of complex structures

- produces frequent error-free sentences

- has good control of grammar and punctuation but may make a few errors

Speaking

- speaks at length without noticeable effort or loss of coherence

- may demonstrate language-related hesitation at times, or some repetition and/or self-correction

- uses a range of connectives and discourse markers with some flexibility

- uses vocabulary resource flexibly to discuss a variety of topics

- uses some less common and idiomatic vocabulary and shows some awareness of style and collocation, with some inappropriate choices

- uses paraphrase effectively

- uses a range of complex structures with some flexibility

- frequently produces error-free sentences, though some grammatical mistakes persist

- shows all the positive features of Band 6 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 8

Appendix 3. CEFR descriptors - minimum requirements

Independent user B2 level

- Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and **explain** a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

Proficient user C1 level

- Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, **academic** and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.