

1-12-2011

# Literacy Experiences and Cultural Negotiations in Transnational Academic Context: The Case of Israeli Study Abroad MBA Students in an American University

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LITERACY EXPERIENCES AND CULTURAL NEGOTIATIONS IN  
TRANSNATIONAL ACADEMIC CONTEXT: THE CASE OF ISRAELI STUDY  
ABROAD MBA STUDENTS IN AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2010

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Title: Literacy Experiences and Cultural Negotiations in Transnational Academic

Context: The Case of Israeli Study Abroad MBA Students in an American University

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This qualitative research examines literacy in a transnational setting. More specifically, this study explores the literacy experiences and cultural negotiations of 15 Israeli MBA study abroad students in an American University in three phases: the application process, the academic coursework, and the on-campus employment seeking. The multiple case study design utilized document and interview data analysis.

This study elucidate that the participants' discourse is replete with myths, misconceptions and misinformation about the nature and objective of their business training and the context in which it operates. These myths and misconceptions are significant predictors of how the participants experience the program.

Findings show that the literacy experiences of Israeli study abroad MBA students are closely linked to the students' previous literacy experiences, study abroad motivations and attitudes toward academic experience as a literacy event and the way they cope with the challenges it poses. At the same time, students' attitudes toward the literacy are shaped by the cultural perceptions the Israeli students bring with them, the way they interpret the target culture and their willingness to adapt their previously acquired skills to a new context.

The analysis indicates that despite a mismatch between the literacy repertoire Israeli MBA students acquired in previous discipline and the literacy they are required to demonstrate in the program, students have high estimation of the literacy abilities. However, being very factual and practical, the Israeli students undermine the academic experience and the networking opportunities, viewing it as a financial investment that will bring about a change in the graduate's compensation potential in the job market. This choice of foci, which is rooted in cultural beliefs and hegemony of misconceptions about the essence of the graduate business education experience and the target culture, create a false perception that they are ready for their professional life in a globalized economy.

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## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

### How I Got to My Dissertation Topic

The primary goal of this research is to investigate the ways in which international students negotiate literacy practices. It sets out to explore the literacy experiences and the cultural negotiations of international students in transnational settings in order to illustrates some of the struggles international students' experience, the strategies they use to cope with them, and the implications that these can have for the construction of academic knowledge. Specifically, the study aims at studying the literacy of Israeli MBA study abroad students in an American University.

Although research on literacy in transnational setting has made prominent contributions to our understanding of the psychological, linguistic, and cultural gains of study abroad, there is a lack of balance in regards to the interrelations of literacy and study abroad for students from various nationalities in professional programs. More research is needed to examine the role of previous literacy experiences in study abroad context and how international students in specific disciplines deal with it in the context of international education. More information on how specific groups of international students perceive literacy negotiations during study abroad will enrich this body of knowledge. For example, to date, no research presently exists on the population of Israeli study abroad students in the U.S in study abroad context.

In addition, as will be shown later in the chapter, a pilot study I conducted also evoked a strong need for researching literacy in study abroad context. The study I report on in this introductory chapter demonstrates that although a review of the literature suggests that academic success in study abroad programs is typically related to level of

English proficiency, educational L1 literacy knowledge also had a significant contribution in that experience. A students' cultural background is also likely to affect the ways in which they interprets literacy practices in an academic framework. Although language difficulties are marked as the main obstacle to academic success of international students in the available literature and by the participant in this study, the analysis proved that academic success was strongly related to previous literacy knowledge and the way this type of knowledge interacts with L2 literacy practices in specific disciplines.

For this particular study I chose to focus on the MBA setting as it is the most frequent program of study for Israeli study abroad students. Therefore, the overarching research questions this study attempts to address are:

1. What characterizes Israeli study abroad students in an MBA programs in the U.S?
2. What are the literacy requirements Israeli study abroad students cope with in this programs?
3. What are literacy experiences of Israeli study abroad students in this setting?
4. How do Israeli study-abroad students handle cultural negotiations in the MBA study abroad context?

Answering the above questions will elevate our awareness about the complexities of the reading and writing processes which goes beyond the causal relationship between academic success and target language proficiency on arrival and opportunities to interact with speakers of the target language. Despite the discourse of study abroad, which foregrounds the social implications of the experience, the fact that international students sometimes come from a totally different educational experience has serious ramification on their academic success.

This study is an attempt to understand in-depth second language literacy in study abroad context from such a perspective. If we are to understand better how second language literacy is constructed in second language context, and if we are to understand better the interaction of previous educational experiences and reading and writing practices in specific disciplines, we have to uncover both personal and communal literacy practices and assumptions and how these intertwine with the discipline-specific literacy knowledge. This paper is a first step in this direction.

### Insights from a Study Abroad Narrative of an Israeli in the U.S

*It ordinarily comes in a form of a letter. The salutation of which reads “I am pleased to inform you that following a competitive review of your credentials, you have been admitted to the graduate degree program”. He reads it with a sinking heart. He blinks, takes a deep breath, and closes his eyes to signal his gratitude to the providence. Nevertheless, in the midst of all his excitement he is nervous about the new challenge. “Do I have what it takes? What would I need to have within me in order to succeed?” He asked himself. He has to thrive. After all, it took a lot more than this one shot to get into grad school. He moves his gaze from the letter to me and hands me the letter. It is at this point that I feel my heart shrinking and the second after I am rejoicing.*

There is a commonly held assumption that language is the predominant barrier for international students (Davie, 1996, Mulligan & Kirkpatrick, 2000, Briguglio, 2000, Tseng, 2002, Spencer, 2003, Crump, 2004, Tatar, 2005). The underlying assumption is that students arrive at their study abroad programs with a given set of language skills to build on; therefore, most of the scholars of the study abroad literature have uncannily focused on the linguistics gains in Study abroad contexts. I argue that a study of literacy in international education context must begin by recognizing the educational history of

study abroad students who have a rich and diversified system of language aptitudes to address literacy events.

The purpose of this chapter is to argue by means of illustration that international students are not linguistically handicapped. The interview I conducted with an international student denotes that the literature may paint international students as deficient and lacking linguistic proficiencies but it doesn't mean that they lack knowledge and experience. International students can also come from a place of strength, and some of the exemplifications from this case study are not consistent with the dominant discourse. This tangible anomaly I am about to present enunciates how based on his literacy experiences, an Israeli study abroad student refines his meaning making strategies in a new cultural setting. By relating back to knowledge, techniques and strategies he gained in previous educational and academic settings, he assiduously employs literacy tools to cope with literacy practices in his convoluted journey of studying abroad.

His name is not Ethan, but for the sake of his privacy, that's how I'll refer to him. Ethan is 33 old Israeli male who immigrated to the United States in August of 2003. A year later he started a PhD program in Administration and Leadership Studies at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He is an international student and nonnative speaker of English among his classmates and colleagues. Prior to coming to IUP, Ethan lived his entire life in Israel. He earned his bachelor's degree in Philosophy and Political Science and his Master's degree in Political Communication at Tel Aviv University. He is a certified computer programmer and holds a certificate in Entrepreneurship, Management and Innovation.

I asked Ethan about his life as a literate person and about how he copes with the literacy practices in his graduate program. His responses indicate that he had varying access to literacy practices before attending IUP. A transfer of meta-cognitive literacy proficiencies from the strong language is evident along Ethan's narration of the study abroad experience. The major strategies he uses are questioning the readings, relating new information to existing ones, and utilizing knowledge of the genres he has been exposed to so far. Although he has a fairly high self confidence, his narrative points to the need for a tutor who functions as a cultural mediator.

### *Critical Reading Skills*

One of the difficulties international students struggle with is critical reading (Spencer, 2003; Ridley, 2004). International students who have different literacy knowledge that was acquired in different educational settings do not always view reading as an act that questions assumptions, explores perspectives, and critiques underlying social and political values or beliefs. Rather, they tend to read only for comprehension. To illustrate, it has been pointed out that "most of them come from cultures in which the student is expected to passively receive lecture material and produce memorized information verbatim (Spencer, 2003, p.165).

This assumption stands in complete contradiction to Ethan who was and still is influenced by the literacy techniques he practices in high school. As he graduated from a religious high school he was trained in the Orthodox Jewish way of reading the Talmud (The Talmud was written by Rabbis in Babylonia and includes a compilation of "Jewish laws"). The Talmud is written in a very concise way, almost in point form. Therefore it can be very hard to understand. Because it is so concise and because its arguments are

often complicated, studying Talmud is a real intellectual exercise. It is learned some of the time with a “chevruta” (a study partner), and some of the time in a large group with the Rabbi. Talmud study begins with figuring out what is going on as it has very little punctuation that makes it difficult for the reader to follow the lines of argument. The common assumption is that the religious text is the truth and the reader needs to figure out what’s going on in it. The way to do it is by sorting through the different ways and levels of interpretations. “The Torah has 70 faces”, Ethan tells me, “and the investigation itself is the Mitzvah”.

“How do you read? What’s going on in your mind when you read a text?” I ask Ethan. “I don’t know”, he says. “Every time I read a text, I keep asking myself what hasn’t been said, what has been left out, and these are the points that I am further exploring”. This example tells us that with this background, Ethan most widely uses this critical reading strategy to his advantage as a system of inquiry and exploration for every text he comes across.

To illustrate the essence of critical reading and the relationship between this skill and the reading of Jewish text, I would like to cite a passage from the chapters of the fathers that Ethan mentioned in our conversation. The chapters of the father is one out of the six volumes of the Mishna, one of the best known and most cited of Jewish texts which consists primarily of short statements and ethical principles most often attributed to rabbis who lived around the beginning of the Common Era.

*Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai Had Five [Outstanding] Disciples. They Were: Rabbi Eliezer Ben Horkenus, Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Chananya, Rabbi Yosay The Kohen, Rabbi Shimon Ben Nesanel, And Rabbi Elazar Ben Arach. He Used To Enumerate Their Praiseworthy Qualities: "Rabbi Eliezer Ben Horkenus - A Cemented Cistern Which Does Not Lose A Drop; Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Chananya - Happy Is She Who*



*Bore Him; Rabbi Yosay The Priest - A Chassid; Rabbi Shimon Ben Nesanel - Sin-Fearing; And Rabbi Elazar Ben Arach - Like A Spring Which Flows With Ever-Increasing Strength." He Used To Say: "If All The Sages Of Israel Were On One Side Of The Scale, And Eliezer Ben Horkenus Were On The Other, He Would Outweigh Them All." Abba Shaul Said In His Name: "If All The Sages Of Israel, Including Even Eliezer Ben Horkenus, Were On One Side Of The Scale, And Elazar Ben Arach Were On The Other, He Would Outweigh Them All."*

The meaning of this passage is twofold. First, each of these students possessed a merit in which he surpassed all others. As a teacher, Rabbi Yochanan did not push them all in a single direction in an attempt to seek universal conformity. Instead, he appreciated their uniqueness and endeavored to give each the opportunity to develop his own potential unique gift. Second, we should all aspire to be that spring which steadily increases its flow. It's a symbol for being able to read critically and construct new meanings. It is the ultimate measure of literacy at least in the academic world. Bringing up this anecdote in our talk, Ethan is aware of that measure when perusing any text he is exposed to. True, this is Ethan, but my sense is that we rarely do think of international students as complex individuals as presented here.

Similarly, Ethan's undergraduate degree in Philosophy is a major literacy asset he has at his disposal. Essentially, his bachelor's degree in Philosophy, he suggests, has trained him with doubting skills, rational investigation and a certain critical analytical way of thinking. As he points out, "I don't accept what is being said only because it has been said by someone who has authority. I always question, criticize, explore, especially the writer's basic assumptions in an attempt to search for a truth I can live with as no objective truth exists." He goes on to tell me: "I have to identify the writer's presumptions, because it helps me organize the information I am dialoguing with. If I disagree with the basic premises the text is based on, I have a big problem with the ideas

it presents”. Ethan’s reference to the routine he follows when encountering with written text demonstrates how for international students, cultural as well as educational knowledge may assist in English for academic purposes practices.

### *L1 - L2 Interconnectedness*

In his famous article Tony Silva (1993) wrote that the main cognitive differences between first and second language writing are the limited fluency that make it harder for second language writers to generate ideas, and the overloading on their working memory due to linguistic concerns. Researchers have explored this idea claiming that literacy practices in L1 have an impact on L2 literacy skills (Bosher, 1998; Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999; Taillefer, 2005). Bosher, who focused on writing performance of study abroad students, found that the level of proficiency in the L2 does not predict the ability to generate and synthesize ideas. Rather, the educational background makes a difference in the writing processes and the way writing in the first language was taught. Taillefer (2005), who compared the L1/L2 reading performances among British, French and Spanish international students, has strengthened this argument when he found that those who were strong readers in the L1 had the most developed literacy practices in their L2. And Angelova & Riazantseva (1999) furthered the discussion by explaining that students’ attitudinal, cognitive, social problems when writing in English that derive directly from their previous experience with writing in their L1.

Two striking instances in Ethan’s reflection demonstrate the way discourse is embedded in attitudes and values of the individual, the institution and the surrounding community. The most significant points to emerge from Ethan’s account about his

experience was how school as a site of secondary discourse acquisition is entirely interrelated with the discourse of the community.

The first involves the acquisition of the concept of bureaucracy. In his brief reference to the difficulties he faced during classes he mentioned that the context in which he acquired the term stabilized and fossilized the acquisition of other meanings. Although now he understands that bureaucracy refers to a clear hierarchy of authority, the existence of written rules of procedure, salaried officials, and striving for the efficient attainment of organizational goals, the meaning of the term in Israeli context meant a negative organization of social order.

On another occasion a direct link is made between cultural knowledge and application of interpretations. This time it referred to the acquisition of the concept of technology. Ethan had a difficulty grasping technology as the application of knowledge to develop tools, materials, techniques, and systems to help people meet and fulfill their needs or as the practical application of knowledge. His Master's degree in Political Communication, as well as his training as a computer programmer, narrowed his perspective of technology to mechanisms for distributing messages, including postal systems, radio and television broadcasting companies, telephone, satellites and computer networks. Again, we find here example to the idea that discourses are embedded in institutions and cultures, and that one cannot divorce himself from his cultural discourse patterns and interpretive tools. And “it may be difficult for some monolingual lecturers to appreciate the complexity of studying in a second or even a third language and the problem this creates” (Mulligan & Kirkpatrick, 2000, p.325)

These examples elucidate how Ethan's previous knowledge sometimes both assists and limits his ability to fully grasp new concepts since he appears to interpret information through his own literacy knowledge and schemata. In other words, the examples corroborate that second language literacy is inevitably, ineluctably being amalgamated with previous reading and writing experiences in whichever languages the learner is proficient in. We see how students' prior educational experiences impact the ways they make meaning and that every meaning making event relies on background knowledge. And yet, while we can explain something of the process and mechanism that informs this phenomenon, it's all about connecting new knowledge to old knowledge.

### *Coping Strategies and Tactics*

Although international students are depicted as ones who are challenged by adapting to unfamiliar learning styles and cultures (Ridley, 2004), Ethan seems to develop helpful coping strategies. When being called for it, He utilized knowledge about genres. When he needs to write he activates his restored plans about specific types of texts in order to cope with the assignments. In relation to this type of literacy knowledge, Ethan mentioned two academic genres: research paper and case study research. Claiming that a research paper is new to him, he tries to figure out what this genre is all about. In addition, he is looking for formulas for each genre, a certain repetitive pattern he could use to construct one for his leadership course. For example, he said clearly: "when I read any types of text, I always look for the thesis statement".

In many cases, study abroad students use mentoring and tutoring as valuable strategies (Briguglio, 2000, Cruickshank, Newell & Cole, 2003). Similarly, Ethan is aware of the fact that in order to be able to publish his work, he needs assistance. He

indicates that during the early stages of his education he needed support with schoolwork. By sharing with me his attempt to publish an article, he disclosed how he felt: “one of the reviewers wrote that it is obvious that the author is not a native English speaker. He also suggested that I get help in revising the article. This incident made me understand that in order to be understood, I need to cooperate with someone who is closer to the American culture than I am”. Working with a mediator, a successful learner who shares the same linguistic and cultural background, Ethan has been able to arrive at literacy purposes he would not achieve on his own as writing does pose the hardest challenge for international students (Briguglio, 2000).

To wrap this subsection, Ethan’s narrative illustrate some of the coping strategies that international students actuate as Dewey (2004) writes, “as learners struggled to function in the SA setting, they became accustomed to copying with less familiar situations, developed a variety of skills for managing these situations and were therefore more confident tackling even the unfamiliar” (p.320).

### *Self- Perception and Multi-Cultural Consciousness*

One of the most popular phenomena associated with study abroad is acculturative stress (Constantine, Okazaki, and Utsey, 2004; Hashim & Zhiliang, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Regardless of culture or country of origin, researchers say that it’s quite common for international students to experience stress in one level or another, with academic performance as the main source of stress. What is truly remarkable about Ethan is that he truly enjoys the challenge. Ethan describes the experience of studying abroad as the first framework that pushes him to utilize a full capacity of thinking. It is also interesting to note that although Ethan appears to be adopting a challenge approach to his studies, he

seems to adopt a creative visualization technique to cope with what study abroad entails when he expresses the avowal, “I see myself publishing articles.”

Thus, if, according to the contemporary approach study abroad is associated with acculturation stress, then it is fair to say that Ethan’s case is contrasted with it. It is interesting to see, then, how this process of imagining positive things happening to him helps him building up the connectors between cultures and being able to succeed despite the difficulties. This personal trait is also used for getting him in touch with his inner guide. This important finding that international students present their study abroad experience in positive terms contradicts previous research that discussed the experience in terms of conflict and disconnection.

Although the anticipation was that the learner’s own perception of his skills would present a less positive picture, this learner has a fairly high opinion of his literacy skills for the schoolwork that he does. This does not, of course, mean that he considers them to be high, just that he considers them to be adequate for the work required at school. Unlike the majority of international students that feel that their literacy skills fall short of what is required, the learner states that his writing skills will not limit the chance of success at the university.

Despite this mode, it is also clear that Ethan is still influenced by specific conceptualizations, such as L1 proficiency is the target. It is impossible not to notice the facets of grammar and vocabulary that are key elements in his narrative. As a nonnative speaker of English, Ethan’s view of his English proficiency is strongly attached to the manner in which he learned to talk about second language difficulties. Who could blame him? That is to say, I think, that the discourse of second language acquisition involves

vocabulary and grammar as the major difficulties in the process as students “tend to evaluate their own performance in the L2 according to the classroom-based view meaning that successful L2 use is measured by correct grammatical form and target expressions” (Pellegrino, 1998, p.97). Nevertheless, Ethan reports that while writing, he is not concerned with these while writing as most second language writing indicates. This

Ethan does not view himself only in terms of his limited English status. Rather he has developed a unique transnational consciousness which is composed of the awareness of himself within the program’s community. This awareness of how he relates himself to the world motivates and stimulates him to succeed academically. But beyond that, his responses suggest that knowing a second language allows one to access the views and ideas of another culture rather than being trapped in the conceptions of one’s own culture.

It bothers me that study abroad discourse suggests that international don’t feel as members of a social group and that this perception may lead them invest less effort to participate (Pellegrino, 1998; Ridley, 2004, Tatar, 2005). In his study Ridley (2004) states: “although many students may be aware of the unfamiliar approaches to learning in the particular academic discourse community in which they find themselves, they may not have the confidence or the life experiences to participate easily”(p.95). Alongside these dominant beliefs, in an article titled “How much do they understand? Lectures, students and comprehension” (Mulligan & Kirkpatrick, 2000), it is reported that international students are “ill-prepared for listening to lectures in Western universities in a second languages” and that international student experience difficulties understanding lecture materials, not to mention taking notes during classes.

It is surprising that in a complete opposite to these suggestions, Ethan adduces strength, richness and resourcefulness when he extravagantly overstates, “I feel I’m one of the leading students in the program” and “I participate more than any other student in my classes; I think it’s fair to say that in every 3-hour class my air-time is at least 30 minutes, which is a lot, I think”. Ethan feels like an insider in regards to literacy experience of the program’s community, and this dramatic example illustrates the uniqueness of this individual and the discrepancy between the dominant discourse and this idiosyncrasy of this case study.

### *Gender and Personality Issues*

Several studies provide insights into gender differences in relation to stress (Hashim & Zhiliang, 2003; Misra, Crist & Burant, 2003). Female students had higher scores of reactions to stress than male students. However, the comparison stress sources between male and female students, exposes only minor differences (Hashim & Zhiliang, 2003). One possible explanation for these finding is that women are more behaviorally expressive and emotional of their stress, this doesn’t mean that they experience more stress, rather it means that they are more likely to rate stressful events as negative events (Misra, Crist & Burant, 2003).

Accordingly, I hypothesize that the fact that Ethan is a male has to do with this finding in addition to specific personality characteristics. Ethan’s narration clearly demonstrates that he has always been an extremely ambitious and ardent student. His positive reaction to difficulties and challenges as well as his aplomb and optimism are admirable. At the same time, he is aware that he has worlds to conquer to be able to do



that. Although it is hard to locate the personality issues I believe they are there, for we are not simply the cultural settings and communities in which we grew up in.

### The Significance of the Study

Ethan has both helped and forced me to think differently about international students. To consolidate, his study abroad narrative suggests four themes that appear repeatedly and express the uniqueness of his story: (1) Educational L1 Literacy knowledge plays a cardinal role in L2 literacy practices (2) The need for mediation and collaborative writing are consistent features in the informant's narrative (3) Multicultural consciousness and social connectedness strongly contribute to meaning making processes and (4) Gender and personality have a pivotal role in explaining how individuals perceive study abroad experience as a whole.

This small exploratory study evinces that one reason why international students have difficulties in understanding literacy work may be that they use different cultural references when attempting to interpret them. Although it has been argued elsewhere that academic success in study abroad programs is typically related to level of English proficiency, my study showed that educational L1 literacy knowledge also had a significant contribution in that experience. A students' cultural background is also likely to affect the ways in which he or she interprets literacy practices in a graduate framework. Although language difficulties are often marked as the main obstacle to academic success of international students in the available literature and by the participant in this study, the analysis stressed that academic success was strongly related to previous literacy knowledge and the way this type of knowledge interacts with L2 literacy practices.

More importantly, this case study I was investigating evoked a strong need for researching literacy in study abroad context. I believe that literacy in study abroad setting is important to further research because it will heighten our awareness about the complexities of the reading and writing processes which goes beyond the improvement of students' English proficiency and the length of the study abroad program. Clearly, previous research offers contributions, but I don't think the available literature pictures the complexity of the phenomenon for different study abroad groups in specific professional programs. It is still an inchoate body of knowledge and the discrepancies between the dominant discourse and Ethan reaffirm the significance of this study.

Reading the interview transcription has opened up more questions for me and has made me want to interview more international students about how their past educational literacy experiences have limited or helped them in their programs of study abroad. For this particular exploration, I decided to focus on Israeli MBA students who on one hand form the largest group of Israeli study abroad students in the United States, and are considered talented and dexterous on the other hand. I believe that specificity in student, background and discipline is important because it will enable us to assess how a nationality-specific group of students who arrive in their study abroad classroom with a copious repertoire of literacy knowledge that was garnered in the cultural context they grew up surrounded by, functions in a specific program of study and is able to generate ideas and connect new ideas to previously acquired ones.

In fact, Ethan's narrative reveals example after example that the notion that international students lack language resources is fallacious. I don't necessarily disagree that limited proficiency in the language of instruction poses challenges. No doubt it does.

But rather than adhering to the reprehensible mindset that international students are incompetent of performing specific tasks, rather than assuming that their difficulties arise from their language proficiency in English, what if we instead view international students as resourceful literate individuals? This study propounds that the discourse of illness be healed; it submits that our dogmatic current research perspective does an injustice to the rudimentary principle we claim to be so consecrated to us; that literacy is embedded in social context. Now, no one particularly like to challenge the dominant paradigm, but to do it takes courage because changing a paradigm may mean changing a political vision.

Indeed, all this caught me off guard. As odd as it seems to me now, what surprised me about this case study research was that any text an international student listens to, reads or writes is not just an instance of spoken or written language that help individuals communicate. It is a meaning making event, therefore analyzing context and the participants is simply not enough. Participants' previous literacy and educational knowledge needs to be taken into account as well. It is the paradox discourse puts us through. On the one hand, language makes us free, but on the other hand, the rules of discourse we grew up with and the experiences we lived debilitate our freedom and force us to respond in certain ways.

So this, perhaps, is what we're left with. Surely, study abroad is a fascinating phenomenon, and a great deal has been written about the psychological, linguistic, and cultural gains of study abroad. Despite the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon, there is a limited referencing to the role of previous literacy experiences and how international students in specific disciplines deal with it in the context of foreign study. Denying

students' previous literacy experiences, declaring them as insignificant experiences is a form of oppression

The philosophy described here suggests that when thinking about study abroad and literacy, it's important to consider more than whether or not students are making gains. Researchers need to look beyond these issues and explore students' previous literacy knowledge. This means looking at the tools available to students when they enter their programs. We need to ask what in the learner's background will interfere with or contribute to the special challenges presented by the study abroad situation. When we have more knowledge about these interactions, it will become easier to address the connection between the learner and the context.

Hence, the present study aims at envisaging the literacy of Israeli study abroad students in professional programs as they adapt to a second language environment. More specifically, the main focus of this research is to deepen our understanding of the ways in which international students negotiate literacy practices. It sets out to investigate the enigmatic meaning making strategies of international students in transnational settings in order to delineate some of the struggles international students' experience, the strategies they use to cope with them, and the implications that these can have for the construction of academic knowledge. This research will provide an additional part in the puzzling nexus of literacy and the context of international education.

Thus, the obvious research questions here, at least as I see it, are: What characterizes the literacy experiences of Israeli MBA students in the U.S? What characterizes academic literacy in foreign study setting for Israeli study abroad students in the MBA program? How do Israeli study-abroad students in MBA programs function

as language users in the academic context? And, what are the cultural negotiations of Israeli study abroad students? More specifically, how do literacy experiences in Hebrew as a first language, English as a second language in Israel and in the States influence study abroad student's acquisition of the MBA discourses? What are the difficulties faced by Israeli students and what are the strategies they use to cope with the literacy demands in their programs of study?

Significantly, Ethan's case study also helped me make sense of the research method that is suitable for this study. It underlined the importance of a focus on international students' experiences of study abroad as the research on study abroad lacks the voices of the international students and their experience. My purpose is to emphasize the uniqueness of the individuals' storied lives during a study abroad situation.

Finally, in the interest of full closure and recapitulation, I will admit that this research, above all, is a chance for me to sort it all out. I clearly remember that late spring day, when I first heard that I was accepted to a doctoral program, how I felt I could do it. That was seven years ago, but still today I want to understand. What is this study abroad experience all about for other Israeli study abroad students in the U.S? Is there a similitude between other Israeli study abroad students' experiences and Ethan's? While the findings from Ethan's case study are suggestive, it cannot be assumed without further study that they apply to other Israeli study abroad students. Are there any more anomalies I can speak to? What role do previous academic experiences play in the literacy experiences of Israeli study abroad students? Of course, there will always be new questions. I seek out answers.

## CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

The aim of the present chapter is to both demystify and capture the phenomenon of study abroad by delving into the existing empirical data available on the topic. However, my conception of study abroad is shaped fundamentally by the fact that I live it out. I am sure there are other ways of conceptualizing the study abroad phenomenon, but my view of study abroad is organized around three key parts. It takes us from a definition of study abroad as a life changing experience through the experiences itself all the way to evaluating the gains of international education.

In the balance of this chapter, in part 1 I provide general information about study abroad. The section includes statistics about the current status of study abroad as well as an overview of the available types of study abroad, and the motivations that lead students to pursue educational goals in a foreign and new cultural setting

Part 2 explores the study abroad experience from the point of view of the students. After all, the raw material is human wants, beliefs, emotions and interpretations. The first section in part 2 describe the struggles and challenges international students are facing during the experience of studying abroad. The second section highlights the coping strategies international students are using to deal with the associated difficulties. Although it is difficult to make generalizations about the international student experience, the way international students experience college life in the U.S is tightly connected to their familial, racial, geographic, religious, linguistic, political and cultural background.

Part 3 moves to introducing the transformational nature of study abroad and mainly addresses the gains international students garner during this multifaceted journey.

Each section in part 3 reflects on a distinctive skill that is developed as a result of a study abroad experience. It focuses on a discussion of the interrelationship between second language acquisition and study abroad contexts and draws on the oral as well as the literacy gains, cross-cultural skills, personality-related changes and identity formation processes.

This chapter is an attempt to characterize what an international student is going through in moving from one cultural setting to another, and all the ramifications this change involves. It may seem irrelevant to review studies that address the non-linguistic aspects of study abroad, yet it is the premise of this chapter that one must consider how these interrelate with the linguistic facets of study abroad.

### Setting the Frame with General Information about Study Abroad

The phenomenon of study abroad is one manifestation of the global movement. It is a cross-regional phenomenon and its popularity is steadily growing. Study abroad, also known as international education or lately as transnational education, is a situation in which students are located outside the geographical boundaries of the country of origin ([www.nafsa.org](http://www.nafsa.org)).

According to Open Doors 2009 (<http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/page/25072/>), the annual report on international education published by the Institute of International Education ([www.iie.org](http://www.iie.org)) with support from the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, in the academic year 2008/09, 671,616 international students were enrolled in colleges and universities around the U.S. This is an 8% increase from the previous year's totals.

Open Doors 2009 reports a wide variation in the patterns of enrollment from different places of origin. The report shows that Asia remains the largest sending region with 56% of the total International enrollment. The leading countries that send the largest numbers of International students to the U.S are India, China, and South Korea. Europe is in the second place with 6.5% and Latin American with 5.2% of the total number of international students in the U.S. The total number of students from the Middle East cannot be summed up as only Saudi Arabia is mentioned in the top 25 places of origin.

International students brought \$17.8 billion dollars to the U.S. economy last year in money spent on tuition, living expenses, and related costs, according to the NAFSA: Association of International Educators. Open Doors 2008/09 data from campuses indicate that nearly 70% of all international students reported their primary source of funding coming from personal and family sources or other sources outside of the United States.

California is the leading host state for international students, followed by New York, and Texas. University of Southern California hosts the largest number of international students followed by NYU, Columbia University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Purdue University. The most popular fields of study for international students in the U.S. are Business and Management, followed by Engineering, Mathematics and Computer Sciences.

### Study Abroad Models

Three major study abroad models are mentioned in the literature (Coleman, 1998). The first is short-term study abroad. This category includes trips taken for the purpose of attending specific courses or seminars. Short-term study abroad is focused. Its goals are varied and often include the development of linguistic fluency. The second is



the year abroad. This term usually refers to the British model. According to this model, students enrolled to modern languages programs are required to spend a year in the culture he is learning. The third category is long-term study abroad. In this type of study abroad students take a full program of study for a whole degree at an institution abroad.

### Study Abroad Motivations

Several motivations for study abroad are listed in the literature (Ono & Pipper, 2004; Pimpa, 2003; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Brown, 1996). The four most frequent are: the belief that international education is more qualitative than a local one, the unavailability of local program, the desire to learn more about the target culture and language, and the intention to immigrate after graduation from the program (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

It should be noted that the different motivations to studying abroad vary according to the country of origin. For example, students from rich countries are motivated to explore new cultures (Goldsmith & Shawcross, 1985), while students from poor countries may go abroad in order to contribute to their country's technological and economic development (Matsui, 1991).

In a study by Ono & Piper (2004), the researcher raises our awareness to the role of gender in students' motivation to aspire for overseas education. More specifically, in their study, Ono & Piper (2004) wanted to investigate the gender differences between Japanese males and females' drives for study abroad. The results of the study add a new motivation to the above list – “to break out of the vicious circle of gender inequality” (p.116), as Ono & Piper (2004) point out:

Many of the women interviewed experienced the constraints imposed by social norms and expectations of what a Japanese woman should and should not be.

Although such norms are changing, the notion of good wife and wise mother still influence the behavior and values of many Japanese women even today (p. 112).

As the above quote demonstrates, students' motivation may as well be gaining self-fulfillment that they cannot achieve in their country of origin.

In regards to the choice of the host country, the most frequent motivations are the popularity of the country and the amount of knowledge the student has about it. Nevertheless, as making the decision to study abroad requires large amounts of information, agencies that provide information services about the international education as well as peer persuasion play a significant role in the making these crucial decisions (Pimpa, 2003).

Additionally, it has been found that what influences students' choices of the specific institution, are: the institution's reputation for quality, an institution's links with other institutions familiar to the student, an institution reputation for high-quality staff, an institution alumni base, the number of students enrolled at the institution, and the willingness of the institution to acknowledge the student's qualifications (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Finally, Brown (1996) in article titled "Surfing for international opportunities; How the Internet shapes students' choices" makes the point that the Worldwide Web has an increasing effect on students choices of International education destinations as

Colleges and Universities use these medium to both share information, inform students and attract more clients.

As for the motivations of Israelis to study abroad, Ritterband (1969) explored this population a decade ago. The central claim of his research is that students' motivations mostly depend on social class, and the type of high school the student graduated from. Ritterband (1969) shows that the higher the social class origin is, the more likely that the student will earn a degree in Israel, unless he graduated from an academic high school.

The structure education in Israel also impacts the motives of study group to study abroad. Because the number of places in universities in specific faculties is very limited, many Israelis choose to study in the United States. For example, if a student's focus in high school was exact sciences and he graduated from an average high school, his/her chances of getting into the 'Technion' (Israel's premium Science institution) are slim. Because in Israel higher education is in partly subsidized, the faculties where the cost per student is the highest are the most competitive ones.

### Study Abroad as Conflict

International students have mixed experiences of international education. While students consider study abroad as an eye-opening, horizontal-broadening and worthwhile educational, cultural linguistic and personal experience, this journey is certainly not challenge-free. Even on the way to the new territory, side by side the enthusiasm and energy lay uncertainty and fear from the new place.

The review of the literature, that echoes the voices of the students, points to the assumption that language proficiency is the source of all types of difficulties international students go through. One of the puzzles I will explore in this section is the types of

difficulties international students encounter with during foreign study. Nevertheless, in the discussion of the obstacles international students have to get through, a discussion of the strategies they use to deal with these obstacles is followed.

### *Academic Challenges*

In spite all the academic resources international students bring with them to the study abroad experience, the metaphor of academic handicap is invoked frequently in the coverage of the issue. Indeed, international students wrestle with various problems in the academic arena. Not even the most talented language learner can easily deal with every potential academic requirement. New teaching and assessment methods, unpleasant surprises, unexpected challenges, and possible struggles lurk in the undergrowth along almost every student's path (Hills & Thom, 2005; Kingston & Forland, 2008). This idea is expressed in Bacon's (2002) who writes: "The normal, open-minded, intelligent student may well meet all the qualifications for study abroad and yet still have to experience conflict in order to adjust (p.645). But one thing that separates good from great students is the extent to which the great students are able to develop appropriate strategies to deal with the unexpected.

### *Oral Discourse*

International students struggle with listening comprehension tasks due to various reasons. The first, as Mulligan & Kirkpatrick (2000) indicate, some international students reported that they did not understand a lot of the lecture because instead of listening, they are busy note taking. The two assignments are too demanding for their cognitive system, and by choosing one they also have difficulty identifying topic changes. Additionally,

international student find lectures very difficult to follow claiming that the lecturer talks to fast. Consequently, they have problems taking note during classes (Spencer, 2003).

Another explanation for international students' incomprehension of lecture material is that often time lectures are based on the learners' background knowledge which is always culturally and historically situated (Mulligan & Kirkpatrick, 2000). This explanation is also acknowledged by Huxur (1996):

Another learning difficulty often experienced by international students is the practice by host academics of grounding concepts with practical examples derived solely from the host environment or culture. Some international students feel excluded from seminar discussions because the subject being discussed is so closely connected to the host cultural context that it is difficult for them to comprehend the concept, even when they are familiar with its underlying principles (p.9).

The above quote illustrates the fact that students coming from different cultures are likely to hold different sets of values through which they make meaning of lecture material.

This may, in fact, be why some international students resist participating in class discussions (Tatar, 2005). Thus, the ramification of the above difficulties with listening skills is students' reluctance to produce spoken language. International students don't feel confident in their second language speech and perceive their language as broken and incorrect. The willingness to communicate in a foreign language is strongly related to perceptions of one's perceived competency in the foreign language (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide & Shimizu, 2004). That is to say, to have self confidence in an L2 is a prerequisite to willingness to communicate in that L2.

### *Written Discourse*

One of the most bedeviling and frustrating predicaments international students find themselves in is functioning in a discourse community according to a set of rules without realizing that this community does not follow these rules. International students are faced with the challenge of adapting to new literacy practices and dealing with a new learning style and culture as different cultures have different ways of constructing knowledge. This may sound obvious, but its implications are not.

Different cultures hold different literacy practices. Taillefer (2005) raises our awareness to such differences in a study she compares the literacy practices of British, French and Spanish international students. The British, writes Taillefer (2005) view literacy practices as an internal part of studying. The translation of this view into actual doing is seen when students report reading before lectures and expectations for well stocked libraries. Spanish students reported the least amount of reading and information seeking and instead relying on notes taken during lectures. French students expressed a combination of the first two literacy habits. On the one hand, they don't rely on textbooks, but they report on reading a lot outside the area of their studies. Taillefer (2005) adds that the academic challenges international students experience depends upon the literacy habits and practices in the first language as it significantly influence reading comprehension in the second language.

Three major concepts pose the most difficulty: critical reading, analysis and interpretation, and genre knowledge. First, international students often times come from a culture that does not train them in questioning the materials they encounter with, therefore their critical reading and critical thinking abilities are underdeveloped (Ridley,

2004; Spencer, 2003). In some cultures students are used to be spoon-fed, and don't get to interact with the material, the lecturer or other students to generate and express new ideas which in some cultures is de-emphasized (Ying, 2003).

Second, it is very hard for international students to analyze and interpret written discourse. For example, students report on a difficulty to analyze the assignments they're required to fulfill or search for relevant information because they have a set of different associations that are based on their very different past experiences and the discourse communities they come from (Ridley, 2004). Similarly, in Littlemore's (2003) research that focused on the effect of international students' cultural background on metaphor interpretation, the researcher proved that cultural differences were most likely to cause comprehension and misinterpretation.

Third, international students struggle mostly with writing because they lack the genre knowledge and the discourse conventions that pertain to specific writing tasks they are required to complete. For example, in a couple of articles students express a lack of knowledge in regards to whether or not to use the first person in an academic paper or when to reveal one's own voice (Ridley, 2004) or what needs to be included in a literature review (Briguglio, 2000).

Bosher (1998) followed the same line of thinking claiming that when students encounter a literacy practice that is different from the ones they have on their repertoire, they have to negotiate it. How do students negotiate new literacy practices? When writing in a second language writers rely on their literacy skills from their first language. In her, Bosher explored the factor of educational background in the writing processes of three Southeast Asian students. Using interviews, recall protocols about what the participants

were thinking about while writing, the researcher concluded that there are differences in the writing processes and problem solving strategies of the writers and that the level of proficiency in the L2 does not predict the ability to generate and synthesize ideas. Rather, the educational background makes a difference in the writing processes and the way writing in the first language was taught.

Indeed, Angelova & Riazantseva's (1999) study demonstrate the significance of previous educational experience. In their work, the researchers have studied the literacy journeys of four international students in the U.S. In their ethnographic they used interviews of the students and their professors; think aloud protocols, and journal entries, study they wanted to find what problem these international students were facing, and how they addressed them in an attempt to become members of a new discourse community. The results of the study reveal that the students had attitudinal, cognitive, social problems when writing in English that derive directly from their previous experience with writing in their L1.

Although for most international students tutoring services are offered, some international are feeling that they were only recruited by institutions due to financial reasons (Habu, 2000). The students from Angelova & Riazantseva's (1999) study reported that received very little help from the professors. It is suggested that while professors thought that helping international students in their writing is not part of their job, students, on the other hand, did not feel comfortable approaching a professor with a problem outside of class.

A further point to consider is that in a study that evaluated the effectiveness of these services, it has been found that these were not helpful due to various reasons. In



some cases, tutors did not help students academically because they were not trained properly and their role is poorly defined (Koskinen & Tossavainen, 2003). In other cases miscommunication between the tutor and the tutee took place and as a result the goals of the session were not achieved (Briguglio, 2000). It's noteworthy that for International students with disabilities, the academic and cultural hurdles are more severe (Mathhews, Hameister & Hosley, 1998; Mclean, Heagney, & Gardner, 2003).

### *Cross-Cultural Adaptation*

Study abroad is an intercultural experience. Therefore the phenomenon that is most associated with it is culture shock which is part of the acculturation process that international students go through while adapting to a new cultural setting. Although it is assumed to be less of a problem when the destination country and the country of origin share cultural similarities, (Huxur, 1996), sooner or later, all international students experience culture shock at one level or another.

The first few months are reported to be the most stressful and difficult ones. In "The shock of the strange: The shock of the familiar" Levy (2000) explains:

Culture shock involves complex feelings and reactions of both loss and change which can ultimately lead to personal growth: loss in terms of homesickness, loneliness for friends and family, and the absence of the familiar - familiar sights, sounds, food, objects that makes us feel comfortable, and interpersonal communication styles (p.76).

As noted above, the development of interpersonal relationship is a great concern of many international students. Students' lack of friendships as well as their difficulty to make friends is a genuine challenge from the point of view of the students. International

students indicate that during classes they feel that their peers are their friends, but the minute they leave the classroom they don't have any friends. For that reason they prefer to take classes with students from their home culture (Scheyvens, Wild & Overton, 2003; Briguglio, 2000; Twombly, 1995). It is also suggested in that women students had more difficulty than male students to form new friendships with students from the host culture (Twombly, 1996; Scheyvens, Wild & Overton., 2003).

In "Study abroad from the participants' perspective: A challenge to common beliefs" Sharon Wilkinson (1998) unveils the gloomy truth about international students' cross-cultural experiences when she writes:

When we listen to the voices of the participants themselves, we find that the process of adapting to foreign linguistic and cultural norms was far from a linear progression toward fluency and deep cultural understanding. Instead, the students' perceptions and interpretation of their experience filtered through classroom-bred beliefs, often lead them to negative stereotyping of their hosts and to increased tendency to congregate among themselves (p.34).

A possible explanation for the social seclusion international students may feel is their lack of knowledge of the rules of communication. Scheu-Lottgen & Hernandez-Campoy (1998) state that intercultural communication involves pragmatic knowledge about when to talk, what to say, prosodic patterning, listenership, formulaicity, politeness, organization of discourse, accent accommodation, and swearing, insults and irony. This article demonstrates the complexity of cross-cultural communication and may serve as a partial explanation to international students' difficulty in forming interpersonal connections in a new cultural setting.

Knowing the rules of communication is especially important for completing academic tasks in groups. Stahl et al. (2010) who empirically explored the effects of cultural diversity in teams exposes that on the one hand, cultural diversity can pose communicational challenges by creating conflicts, and on the other hand it can lead to creativity, academic gains and satisfaction depending on the context.

Not knowing the norms of interacting may result in negative views towards group work. Montgomery (2009) who studied international student's perception of mixed group collaborative work. In a set of three studies from, 1998, 2008 and 2009, she mainly looked at the change in students' point of view regarding group work and found that with time social cohesion increases. If in the 1998 the main difficulty between International and local students was cultural, in the 2009 study it was mainly about the differences between the academic disciplines the students came from. Although the studies were conducted with different populations, Montgomery concluded that students are beginning to acknowledge the positive outcomes of diversity and see cross-cultural work as important learning experience.

In a study that re-conceptualizes the model of cross-cultural competence, Johnson et al (2006) note that it is the gap between knowing and doing that hinders cross-cultural competence. The writers claim the cross-cultural competence has to go beyond knowledge. Rather, it should be focused on performance and behavioral learning that is characterized by application of in real-life situations.

Another possible explanation for this phenomenon is the unfavorable attitudes of local students toward the international student community. According to Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern (2002), intercultural communication emotions, general affect,

consensual stereotypes, and perceived threats significantly correlate with attitudes toward foreign students. Although one would expect a change in the attitude when social contact takes place, prejudice took over the intercultural experience and affected the attitudes.

Findings from Lee (2010) and Gonzales (2006) reveal a more depressing picture. In a quantitative study that surveyed 501 international students in an American university, Lee (2010) showed that many International students feel discriminated in host institutions, what ultimately causes them not to recommend the program to their fellow friends in their country of origin. A study by Simpson and Tan (2009) confirms this finding by reporting that the relationship with the academic staff is more important to International students than the content of the courses or the quality of the degree sought.

### *Psychological Challenges*

Stepping into a new culture can be a terrifying experience. For that reason, one of the most popular phenomena associated with study abroad is acculturative stress. A consistent feature of the coverage is that regardless of culture or country of origin, all international students experience stress in one level or another.

Stress and anxiety are often associated with second language use. Using poetry as a research method, Hanauer (2010) lets us into international students' most private sentiments regarding their study abroad experience. In his book Hanauer (2010) examines a collection of international student's poems that were written in an undergraduate writing class and that were collected over a period of six years. Analysis of the poems that deal with second language usage and classroom unearths feelings of embarrassment, fear and anxiety as a result of loss of status as language users.

While the most obvious source of acculturative stress for international students is English language proficiency, there are other significant variables that presage acculturative stress. Clearly, when the language is not a barrier and when there are similarities between the culture of the study abroad destination and the culture of origin, less stress is developed, and the experience as a whole is more enjoyable (Langley & Breeze, 2005). However, when the target culture is more diverse from the culture of origin, more stress is likely to be experienced.

There is a debate in the literature in regards to the most common source of stress in study abroad. In some articles, a direct link is made between the issue of academic performance and interpersonal relations as the main sources of stress (Constantine, Okazaki, and Utsey, 2004; Scheyvens et al., 2003, Hashim & Zhiliang, 2003). That is to say, international students often feel frustrated by failure in achieving academic goals, and low academic performance. In other studies adapting to a new cultural environment is mentioned as a variable that mostly predicts stress among international students (Ye, 2006; Misra, Crist & Burant's, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Several studies provide insights into gender differences in relation to stress. While Ye (2006) suggested that men have higher levels of reported stress, few have expressed the opposing idea that female students have higher scores of reactions to stress than male students (Hashim & Zhiliang, 2003; Misra, Crist & Burant; 2003). However, the comparison stress sources between male and female students only exposed only minor differences. Researchers have hypothesized that women are more behaviorally expressive and emotional of their stress, and therefore this finding doesn't mean that they experience

more stress, rather it means that they are more likely to rate stressful events as negative events (Misra, Crist & Burant, 2003).

A couple of articles feature discussion of race as a factor of acculturation stress in study abroad but their results are contradicting Hashim & Zhiliang (2003) compared African and western students in Chinese colleges, and although no significant differences existed in the total perceptions of four categories of stress, there were differences in the cognitive evaluations of sub-categories. While Western students reported higher stress in interpersonal clashes with roommates, African students marked reading and writing as the most stressful situation. In comparison to American students, international students report less academic stress and fewer reactions to stressors. In Misra & Castillo (2004), however, the findings of the research show that American students reported higher levels of academic stress.

A few articles marked the program of study as a factor that influences the study abroad student psychologically (Thortenssen, 2001; Andrews & Henze, 2009) the writers point to the fact that business students are prone to being more stressful due to their tight curriculum, financial obligations. In other words, career-oriented programs of study pose more psychological challenges to study abroad students.

### *Post-Graduation Challenges*

A couple of sources in study abroad literature explore the determinants of labor market success for study abroad students both in their country of origin and the abroad. Gardner, Steglitz and Gross (2009) found that employers don't necessarily value study abroad as a useful experience compared to other curricular activities. To make this

connection more direct, students have to unpack the experience and articulate the benefits of living in a different cultural setting.

Wiers-Jenssen (2008) and Storen and Wiers-Jenssen (2010) quantitatively investigated the likelihood of International students to find a position in the study abroad destination. The results show that only 1 out of five study abroad students will still be employed in the host country 5 years post graduation, as most international students return home shortly after graduating. Moreover, a high-risk of unemployment and over-qualification for non-western immigrants regardless of their local education, their level of foreign language proficiency or the length of residence abroad.

Urias and Yeakey (2009) investigated the legal barriers to employment of international professionals in the post 9/11 United States. In their study they found that international students who graduate from American university may be restricted from getting jobs because of the in security sensitive areas or research institution due to concerns of national security. They conclude that a balance between national security concerns and a welcoming environment for International students must be found.

### *Coping Strategies*

Despite a general lack of research interest in international students' coping strategies a number of studies deal with the manners in which both foreign students and the academic institution/program address the difficulties study abroad poses. Broadly speaking studies about strategies can be classified into two categories: academic strategies and strategies for well-being.

### *Academic Strategies*

It is often assumed that in order to cope with academic requirements students will try very hard to acquire the target discourse. Yet, Kline's (1993) dissertation shows that students developed a new strategy of creating a mixed subculture that helped them get through the study abroad experience and the challenge of becoming literate in a foreign culture. This new discourse was gender specific. While women showed more willingness to immerse themselves in the new culture, men sustained their old habits.

In more recent research it has been found that international students develop their own appropriate strategies to cope with the challenges and achieving educational purposes. According to Angelova & Riazantseva (1999) and Tokowicz, Michael & Kroll (2004), a widely used strategy is writing in L1 and translating to English,

In addition to the translation from the dominant language to the non-dominant language, Angelova & Riazantseva (1999) found that students use other strategies such as: consulting with peers, looking for appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures in published work, compiling lists of ready to use expressions which were crucial for the students' success in completing the requirements of their courses.

In many cases, study abroad students use mentoring and tutoring as valuable strategies. Students indicate that during the early stages of their education they needed support with schoolwork. Working with a mediator helps international students arrive at literacy purposes they would not achieve on their own especially when it comes to writing (Briguglio, 2000; Cruickshank, Newell & Cole, 2003).

It is known that students learn best when they work collaboratively with their peers, and that regardless of the subject matter, students working in small groups tend to



learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats. When it comes to international students, says Crump (2004), this is very true as “a collaborative learning environment is widely believed to enable students to co-construct more powerful understanding than they could alone (p.33)”.

Acknowledging the academic challenges international students face, institutions offer support services for international students such as orientations. According to Thorstenssen (2001) who investigated the academic experience of six international MBA students in an American university, found that these preparatory sessions are insufficient.

However, as Kingston and Forland (2008) found that attendance rate is very low for these workshops due to a heavy workload. Nevertheless, the latter study notes that under no circumstances different measures or standards should be developed for International students. Rather, the writers offer a cultural synergy that would prove beneficial for all involved in the international education experience.

Finally, there is evidence from Li & Stodolska’s (2006) study that aimed at identifying factors related to the transnational status that affected leisure experiences of interviewed Chinese international graduate student, that there is another coping strategy that international students use. The strategy of putting an emphasis on schoolwork and having very limited leisure, Li & Stodolska’s (2006) claim, “served as a buffer that helped students to cope with the pressure and tension spilled over from the study and work” (p.52)

### *Strategies for Well-Being*

There are number of ways in which cross-cultural and social difficulties can be handled. By adapting socially and culturally, I do not mean accepting the status quo, or resigning ourselves to a new and bad situation. What I mean is developing the capacity to meet problems successfully and learn better ways of coping with the situation by interpreting it and analyzing it in the larger context. It also means learning to live with things that cannot be changed and taking responsibility for those that can.

In a qualitative analysis of interview data Tseng (2002) exposes eight strategies international students' use to increase their well being: (1) understanding of home and host culture (2) building personal friendships and relationships (3) gaining more general knowledge of the world (4) asking for help when it is needed (5) establishing social networks (6) create professional relationship with advisor and instructors (7) invest in increasing foreign language proficiency (8) let a problem or concern go.

It has been documented that international students who reflect on their study abroad experience adjust better to their new environment (Bacon, 2002; Mclure, 2001). In part it means to emotions and viewing them as a resource rather than an impediment, as Mclure (2001) indicates: "the process of reflecting on, and retelling the narratives of their educational journey to postgraduate study would help students to acquire a greater sense of self-direction and autonomy" (p.147). Bacon (2002) adds that "by writing their impressions and feelings they give themselves time to reflect, and they may even return to them later to analyze why they were initially critical" (p.645).

In a quantitative analysis that studies the influence of emotion recognition and emotion regulation on intercultural adjustment Yoo, S., Matsunoto & LeRoux, J.

(2006) found that emotion regulation was positively correlated with recognition of disgust, happiness, and total recognition score, and that high emotion regulation was associated with better adjustment. The analysis also indicates that better recognition of anger and disgust was associated with better adjustment.

Another pragmatic, practical survival strategy is focusing on interpersonal relationships with people from the same culture (Ye, 2006). Some international students feel that by developing and maintaining a network of friends from their ethnic group, they could gain emotional support. And in order to avoid being outsiders, international students may choose to socialize within themselves (Kenway & Bullen, 2003).

### The Transformational Nature of Study Abroad

Although the literature doesn't discuss the standards by which the study abroad experience is measured, the majority of the literature about study abroad is focused on the multiplicity of benefits international education leaves the individual with. Study abroad is described as a transforming experience. It's not portrayed as a minor change, but as a profound and radical metamorphosis of students' inner personality. The discourse of study abroad gains also makes it sound like study abroad creates a new version of the students. However, it seems to me that each the gains each student takes with him mainly depend on his uniqueness. Still, the most researched benefits of study abroad are second language proficiency and cross-cultural understanding.

### *Study Abroad and L2 Learning*

Linguistically, studying abroad significantly contributes to the student's target language proficiency, as residence abroad is the optimal environment for second

language acquisition (Brecht, Davidson & Ginsburg, 1993; Brecht & Robinson, 1993). During a study abroad experience the student is exposed to countless opportunities to interact with native speakers of the target language that lead to a successful language acquisition. However, it's important to note that not all linguistic features are developed equally, if at all.

Two rudimentary concepts in the study of second language acquisition are input and interaction. According to Krashen's (1985) indisputable basic assumption, "humans acquire language in only one way – by understanding messages or by receiving 'comprehensible input'" (p. 2). According to Long's (1983) famous interaction hypothesis, interaction plays a significant role in the development of a second language for two reasons: first, interaction is the medium where the learner recognizes a gap between the knowledge he has about the target language and the correct use of the target language; Second, Through interaction the learner receives new knowledge about the target language.

In light of the above assumptions, it is understood why there's such a wide agreement that being in a study abroad situation is the best way to acquire a language as it has direct influences on the learner's oral and written abilities in the second language. However, the nature of the study abroad program, and the level of English proficiency the student came with determine the extent to which learners linguistically benefit from it, and not necessarily the length of stay.

### *Oral Gains*

While the some articles supported the claim that study abroad has a significant impact on students' language proficiency in the second language, others are a lot more

cautious and careful in the arguments they are making about the role of the context of learning on the language proficiency.

Study abroad learners seem to make some improvements in the pronunciation of the target language (Stevens, 2001; Diaz-Campos, 2004). Yet, in a study that compared the grammatical and lexical development of study abroad students and at home second language learners, Collentine (2004) argues that the study abroad context does not cause better grammatical and lexical competencies than the at home environment. On the contrary, the at home learning environment was more beneficial to the acquisition of grammatical knowledge.

Another common issue woven throughout the literature is that the characteristics of the study abroad program seem to have an effect on the oral linguistic gains of international students (Freed, 1995). In other studies Huebner (1995) and Lafford (2004) concluded that only if the program is structured towards extensive amounts of input in the second language and plenty of opportunities for international students to interact with native speakers in a meaningful real-world context, then students' oral fluency increases.

To illustrate further, Segalowitz & Freed (2004) examined native English speakers who studied Spanish and found that in study abroad context there are more gains of oral performance, yet interactions in and out of class did not contribute to these gains. It is the initial oral abilities the students came with that influence the level of out of class interactions. However, the results of the study indicate that oral gains may depend on the cognitive ripeness to gain from the opportunities available in study abroad context.

Siegal (1995) attempted to define the nature of the interactions that lead to gains in oral abilities in the second language. In his article he writes:

Learner participation does not automatically ensure that the learner will understand or comply with the implicit discourse conventions of particular speech events. Yet, involvement in events such as ‘cross-cultural exchanges’ does provide venues for learners to both learn, practice, appreciate and observe socio-linguistically appropriate Japanese (p.241).

Despite the acknowledged oral performance gains, for example in the acquisition of sociolinguistic knowledge (Marriot, 2001; Marriot, 1995; Regan, 1998), second language acquisition in a study abroad context is not a linear process. In a longitudinal study that involves 200 participants by Matsumura (2001), the researcher suggested that the impact of study abroad on the acquisition of pragmatic competence do not necessarily correlate with the length of stay. This doesn’t mean that study abroad programs should be shorter but it means that the argument that the longer the stay, the better language use may be only true for those international students who are willing to be exposed to the target culture.

A final factor to mention distinction is the effect of the living accommodations of the student on language gains. A common distinction made in the literature is between the homestay environment and the dorm-stay. From reviewing the articles that discuss the effect of each environment on the oral linguistic gains, I gather that although one would expect that students who stay with host families have more opportunities to communicate in homestay is not necessarily a positive predictor for speaking and listening gains. This is due to the limited proficiency, frustration and ultimately the inability of the students to communicate with the hosts in the destination language (Rivers, 1998).

### *Literacy Gains*

While oral proficiency, especially listening comprehension, is more likely to develop in study abroad context, when compared with at-home environment, with the literacy gains the answer portrayed by the existing literature is not clear cut. While some claim that the gains are significant, others caution that they are very marginal when existed.

Huebner's (1995), for instance, found that reading development in study abroad has been proven to increase only at the early stages of literacy development. Huebner asserts that students with a low L2 proficiency have more urgent need to become more literate and develop competency in the language of the new place.

By contrast, in an article that summarizes a doctoral dissertation research (Dewey, 2004), no significant differences exist between the reading developments of study abroad students and immersion students. Dewey's (2004) measured three variables: monitor understanding, show affective reaction, and self-assessment of reading, only the first was significantly between the two groups. The results show no significant difference in the first two variables. There's an indication for a significance difference in the third variable that is growth in SA students' confidence in reading. Dewey interpret this finding by offering that it could be associated with experienced reading but might also be associated with an overall increase in self-assurance in terms of general linguistic competence. As learners struggled to function in the SA setting, they became accustomed to coping with less familiar situations, developed a variety of skills for managing these situations and were therefore more confident tackling even the unfamiliar" (320).

As for written fluency, according Freed, So & Lazar (2003) it does not seem to develop as oral fluency does as a result of study abroad. In their research it is stated that study abroad students' overall written fluency was not better than the at home's students. The researcher do point out, though, that study abroad students' length of written utterances was influenced by the study abroad context.

Contradictory studies that support the idea that written proficiency is positively affecting written proficiency were also found. Analyzing data from texts, writing behaviors, recall-protocols and interviews, the Sasaki (2004) investigated the changes in Japanese students' English writing behaviors over a period of 3.5 years. Even though the results revealed that during two semesters of process-writing instruction both study abroad and at home students' English fluency and confidence have improved, it was concluded that the students' overseas experiences played a significant role in improving writing abilities and creating motivation to develop effective L2 writing strategies and as a result write better compositions.

In a continual research Sasaki (2007) further investigated students of similar background at home and in study broad setting, but in the course of a shorter period of time. Key results indicate that the English writing quality and fluency of study abroad students, whereas at home students did not improve L2 written proficiency. The reason for this difference according to at home students was less opportunities to write. Moreover, the study abroad students were English-related major on their third or fourth year.

Finally, a study of Spanish speakers in English speaking environment, Perez-Vidal and Juan-Garau (2009) add further evidence to the positive effect of study abroad



on written literacy, particularly in fluency, lexical complexity, accuracy and grammar complexity. However, these effects are short-term and decline shortly thereafter and don't last over time.

To recap, not much research has been done on the literacy gains of study abroad students. Yet, no one would deny that the literacy gains for international students are mostly shaped by the program of studies undertaken and its literacy practices.

### *Cross-Cultural Gains*

It is well-established that international education enhances cross-cultural sensitivity (Ruddock & Turner, 2007; Langley & Breese, 2005; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Kitsantas, 2004; Sizoo, 2004; Koskinen & Tossavainen's, 2003, Hayden, Rancic & Thomps, 2000; St. Clair & McKenry, 1999). It is sometimes referred to as global understanding, international mindedness, open-mindedness, or flexibility of thinking. It is described as a three-phase process: transition from one culture to another, adjustment to the difference, and gaining intercultural sensitivity.

Gu (2009) describes the cultural perspective that study abroad students gain in identity terms. The article suggests that on the cultural level, study abroad students experience "personal expansion" that is born out of the "interaction of these learners with their particular living and studying environments" (48).

Study abroad not only results in expanding international students' knowledge of the target culture, people, and history (Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004), but the greater the cultural distance between the student's home country and the host country, the greater the increase in cross-cultural sensitivity or world-mindedness (Douglas & Jones-Rikkens, 2001).

Intercultural sensitivity is not linear and does not necessarily increase with the length of stay. It's a skill that can be learned, and in order to develop intercultural sensitivity, the individual needs training and support as Sizoo (2004) argues:

Intercultural sensitivity does not significantly increase by simply living in a foreign country, or by getting older, or by taking an overview course in international business. It requires specific cross-cultural skill training that addresses both the intellectual and experiential aspects of cultural differences (p.166).

Although international students may have both positive and negative attitudes towards people from different cultures, the international education experience helps students to think of other national groups in terms of characteristics that reside in individual people rather than in terms of characteristics that reside in ethnic or national groups (Drews, Meyer & Perefrine, 1996). This doesn't mean that study abroad produced naïve individuals who like all human beings, but it does suggest that study abroad interferes with dehumanization and the creation of enemy images”.

Because international students acquire the ability to perceive other national groups in “personal” terms, they have the tools to not be affected by stereotypes delivered in the media. Hill & Thomas (2005) claim that international students are more critical of the stereotypes of the host culture conveyed by the media. The researchers further opine that “a carefully planned cultural and linguistic immersion program can contribute to a reduction in ethnocentrism” (p.209). In other words, study abroad experiences may also challenge the categorical structure the media plants in our heads.

Hence, through the study abroad experience, learners are able to develop a less stereotypical perception of individuals from other cultures, they are more prepared for “cosmopolitan citizenship” (Osler & Starkey, 2003). This doesn’t mean rejection of national identity, but recognition of one’s own national and global context.

One study (Sizoo & Serrie, 2004) disagrees that living abroad automatically leads people to be culturally-sensitive. It suggests that cultural sensitivity does not significantly increase as a result of spending time in cross-border education setting, but rather that to develop cross-cultural skills one needs to be trained specifically for this purpose by following particular practical and effective methods.

Another gain that is mentioned concerns creativity. Based on theoretical literature, Muddux and Galinsky (2007) conducted a set of 5 empirical studies in order to research the connection between living abroad and creativity. A positive correlation was found, i.e. the more time participants spent living abroad (not travelling), the more creative they are likely to be. This is especially important in the fields of education and business in a globalized world.

### *Identity Construction*

One of the central research areas in international education research is identity formation. This may appear intuitively plausible as the quest for identity is a basic human need that involves structuring the self in relation to others and creating connections to the past and the future. Identity is not a fact about us but a construct that keeps changing through the process of exploring the individual experiences.

Identity studies permeated into study abroad research due to the belief that through transactions with discourse and meaning making processes individuals become

aware of our personal and social identities (Fecho, 2002, p. 114). Students come to the classrooms with a dynamic combination of identities that is usually built through the wider society. As reading does not happen in vacuum and all literacy practices are reflections of the socio-cultural processes and knowledge of the learner.

The formation of new identities in study abroad setting has produced a number of studies in recent years. A frequent reference is made to the identity extensions transnational education creates by making you more aware of the values and traditions in your home country, as Dolby (2004) points out: “national identity shifts from a passive to an active identity in the global context” (p.162). Through the course of studying abroad international students develop a meaningful understanding of their national identity by forming multiple articulations of that identity (Dolby, 2004).

Study abroad may as well function as a vehicle for students to learn more about their heritage culture and develop their ethnic identity. In Morgan, Mwegelo, & Turner (2002), the researchers suggest that African American women who participated in study abroad programs in Africa gained a knowledge and “appreciation of the diversity of African American cultures while linking their own identity from racial, gender and cultural perspectives” (p.343).

When in transnational setting international students form several integrated identities, then, and it is the context which dictates which identity is going to be at work. “We switch smoothly between our multiple, complex, hyphenated selves, evoking our situational and fluid local, regional, national and transnational identities (p.277), Ghosh & Wang (2003) when self-reflecting on and interpreting their own migration narratives.

Although identity construction is individualistic, several variables predict the ability of students to form transnational identity. According to Ghosh & Wang (2003), the factors are: students' previous social identities, his individual and familial system of values, psych of departure, sense of perceptions and expectations of the host and home societies, material circumstances and social connections in the target culture and back home.

### Summary

Study abroad is one aspect of the global movement. The number of international students on the globe is constantly increasing. Despite the decrease in the number of international students in recent years, it is widely agreed that the United States is still a popular destination for international students in higher education. Study abroad is considered a valuable lifetime experience. Regardless of the type of program, university or country, studying abroad is both a challenging and satisfying experience, as it exposes students to different systems of higher education, expands their perspectives, and prepares students for global citizenship.

This chapter has looked into study abroad by focusing on the structure and dynamic of the phenomenon. The struggles and challenges international students are facing, the coping strategies and the benefits of international education have been reviewed. The above overview shows that much of the available research focuses on language acquisition in study abroad context, the causal relationship between the learning context and the second language proficiency and personal and cross-cultural gains that are developed within of the individual as a result of the study abroad experience.

Despite the discourse of study abroad, which foregrounds the social implications of the experience, the fact that international students sometimes come from a totally different educational experience has serious ramification on their academic success. Several sources acknowledge that the way students experience study abroad goes back to previous literacy experiences. However, more knowledge about what characterizes students' previous literacy experiences and how they negotiate the new literacy practices can be utilized in learning more about the overall complexity of the interconnectedness of literacy in context-specific study abroad setting.

My description of the study abroad literature suggests that if there is a single theme that runs through this chapter, it is that the present indispensable study needs to be conducted to provide an in-depth investigation, description, analysis, and interpretation of the literacy negotiation patterns of international students U.S colleges and universities. A theory of literacy negotiation in study abroad context will need to account inter alia for the nature of the literacy knowledge that international students have and the mechanism of reconciliation of prior and new literacy experiences.

### Research Questions

The goal of this study is to expand the body of research on literacy in study abroad context, and based on this literature review, the overarching research questions posed are the following:

1. What characterizes Israeli study abroad students in professional programs?
  - What is the profile of the Israeli study abroad student?
  - What are the most common programs for Israeli study abroad students?

2. What characterizes literacy requirements for Israeli study abroad students in an MBA program?
  - What are the reading and writing requirements necessary to complete the program?
  - Are there any accommodations for international students?
3. What are the literacy experiences of Israeli MBA study abroad students in a study abroad setting?
  - What are their L1 writing experiences, L2 writing experiences in Israel, and L2 writing experiences in the US?
  - What are the difficulties faced by Israeli students and what are the strategies they use to cope with the literacy demands in their programs of study?
  - How do previous literacy experiences influence study abroad students' writing abilities?
4. What characterizes the cultural negotiation of Israeli study abroad students in an MBA program in the U.S?
  - How do cultural experiences influence study abroad students' literacy abilities?
  - How do Israeli students in the US perceive the differences between living in Israel and living in the States?

## CHAPTER THREE

### WHAT CHARACTERIZES THE ISRAELI STUDY ABROAD STUDENT

#### Introduction

United States is a preferred destination for international students. Although the number of Israeli study abroad students in the U.S has increased considerably in the past and is actually still growing, data concerning characteristics of these individuals undergoing the process studying abroad is lacking. As the respondents in this research are Israelis, it is helpful to have a thorough insight into the characteristics of this population.

The current chapter seeks to answer the first research question posed in the previous chapter: What characterizes Israeli study abroad students in professional program in the U.S? In order to answer the question the chapter (1) describes findings from a database including 1006 Israelis who used the services of the USIEF study abroad center in Tel Aviv and succeeded in being admitted to an academic program in the US between 1993 and 2005; and (2) conveys the sociological profile of the Israeli study abroad student in the U.S. This has assisted me in selecting a sample for further qualitative analysis.

#### Access to Community

Access to community was gained through the study abroad center of The United States-Israel Educational Foundation (USIEF). USIEF was founded in 1956 to administer the Fulbright Program between the United States and Israel. The Foundation is governed by an eight-member Board of Directors consisting of an equal number of American and Israeli representatives. The U.S. Ambassador to Israel serves as the Foundation's Honorary Chairman.



Supported by the American and Israeli governments, USIEF has helped American and Israeli scholars and students to pursue research, lecture and study at leading institutions of higher learning in the two countries. The Foundation also houses an Educational Information Center that provides unbiased information and counseling on study opportunities in the U.S.

The study abroad center provides information on educational opportunities in the United States. The advising help prospective students find the choices for students' specific needs by offering services and information on over 3,600 universities and colleges in the U.S. They also offer a reference library that contains reference guides, computerized search information, school catalogues, scholarship information, and instructive videos on American institutions of higher learning.

#### Data Analysis

The analysis in this study makes use of survey data drawn from Fulbright's study abroad center. The survey covered 1006 respondents who started their study abroad academic program from 1993 and 2005.

The following data was obtained from the survey: state, institution, starting year, first name, last name, telephone number in Israel, program of study, and degree sought. The survey also indicated whether or not the student was a Fulbright grantee.

In addition to the information provided in the survey, three additional items were available for the researcher who was born and raised in Israel until the age of 30. The first, through respondents' first names, the researcher along with another Israeli, who speaks Hebrew as a first language, could identify the gender for most of the respondents, as some Hebrew names are used for both male and female. For those cases the sex was

classified as unknown. Moreover, whenever there was a disagreement between the researcher and the consultant, the gender was also classified as unknown. The second item that inferred from students' surnames was student family's country of origin. The process of identifying this item is similar to the process of identifying the sex. In addition, through telephone numbers' area codes, the researcher could identify the geographical areas in Israel the students came from.

The data was organized as follows. Countries were grouped to four categories: Northeast, Midwest, West, and South. Reported programs of study were grouped into 8 major categories on the basis of the type of sciences the programs belonged to. The categories are: humanities, social sciences, exact sciences, life sciences, management, health sciences, art, and food studies. The reported degrees were classified to bachelor, master, doctoral and post-doctoral. Descriptive statistics including frequencies were generated for all data available.

Before beginning the analysis, some background on Israel demographics in general and students in Israel specifically, with particular attention to demographics which is related to information provided in the survey.

### Israel Demographics

Israel is located in the Middle East, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, between Egypt and Lebanon. The total area is 20,770 sq km, and the total population is 7,233,701. The sex ratio for the total population is: 1 male(s)/female (2010 est.). The ethnic groups in Israel are: Jewish: 76.4%, and Arab: 23.6% (end of 2002). Among Jews, 67.1% are Israeli-born. 22.6% were born in Europe and America, and 10.1% came from Asia and Africa (<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/is.html>).

Traditionally, Jews are grouped into two groups. The first is Ashkenazim Jews whose ancestors lived in Germany and eastern-Europe. Most immigrants to Israel from North and South America, Russian, South Africa and Australia are Ashkenazim. The second is Sephardim Jews whose ancestors lived in Spain, Portugal, and North Africa. The latter category often includes Mizrahim, which are near-eastern or Oriental Jews, people who descend from ancient Jewish communities in Muslim lands. Although the gaps between Mizrahim/Sephardim and Ashkenazim has narrowed due to cultural assimilation and intermarriage, Sephardic Jews in Israel still constitute the lower socioeconomic ranks of the Jewish population in Israel.

Hebrew and Arabic are the official languages, and English is the most commonly used foreign language. As of 1992, 97.1% of the population age 15 and over can read and write (*male*: 98.5% and *female*: 95.9%).

### Student Demographics and Recruiting

Education between ages 5 and 16 is free and compulsory in Israel. The school system is organized into kindergartens, 6-year primary schools, 3-year junior secondary schools, and 3-year senior secondary schools, after which a comprehensive examination (Bagrut) is offered for university admissions.

In Israel, the matriculation certificate (Bagrut) is awarded to every high-school graduate who successfully fulfills all the educational requirements of the Ministry of Education. The certificate is awarded by the examination board, which is responsible for holding the external state examinations, and by the schools.

Israel has one of the highest per capita rates of university graduates in the world. The average first year undergraduate Jewish student tends to be older, post army, 21-22

years old. The Council of Higher Education accredits all new institutions and programs and authorizes them to award academic degrees. The growing number of entering BA students during the last years has changed the profile of Israeli higher education. The growth in the student population has led to the establishment of new "colleges" to meet the demand of qualified students. These colleges are accredited and must offer the same quality of education as the BA's taught in the local universities. Still, the seven universities focus more on graduate and research level studies (USIEF)

Today, institutions of higher education in Israel include 8 universities, 8 regional colleges associated with universities, 23 other regional colleges, 22 teacher training colleges, 12 institutions that offer a diploma recognized by the Ministry of Education, 11 art schools, and 53 technological colleges.

Israeli students learn about study abroad opportunities in the US through the U.S Commercial Service which organizes study abroad conferences in the big cities. These events attract thousands of visitors. American universities, colleges, correspondence schools, and other educational service providers are invited to participate in the American Embassy booth at the exhibition and to provide promotional literature, tapes, and any other relevant promotional materials. Participating institutions and companies also send their representatives or opt to be represented at the event by local alumni.

## Results

Between 1993 and 2005 1006 Israelis of those who used Fulbright's study abroad center, were successful in being admitted to an academic program in the US. However, the total number of respondents varies in each table due to incomplete information. From 1993 to 1999 there has been an increase in the number of Israeli students in the US. As

reflected in Table 1 the largest number of Israeli study abroad students in the US was in 1999. Although 2000 was a slow year, Table 1 indicates that 2001 marks a sharp decline.

Table 1:

<i>Number of Israeli Students abroad by Starting Academic Year</i>		
Year	Number of Students	Percent
1993	1	1
1995	18	1.8
1996	49	4.9
1997	123	12.3
1998	128	12.7
1999	153	15.2
2000	122	12.2
2001	90	9.0
2002	92	9.2
2003	97	9.7
2004	106	10.6
2005	25	2.5
Total	1004	100.0

As noted in Table 2, more than 60% of the Israeli who come to study in the US are from the center and Tel Aviv districts of Israel which are known to populate the middle and upper classes of the country. These geographical areas are known as the elite dens, where the socio-economic status of the residents is the highest in the Israel. It is also worth noting that the rural cities, such as Tiberias, which is located on the northern part of the country, and Eilat, which is located in the southern edge of Israel are the least frequent categories. These areas imports together only 5% of the Israeli study abroad community in the US.

Table 2

*Number of Students by City of Residence in Israel*

Israel cities	Number of Students	Percent
Jerusalem	106	12.1
Tel Aviv	388	44.4
Haifa	138	15.8
Tiberias	22	2.5
Beer-Sheva to Eilat	20	2.3
Rehovot, Yavne	57	6.5
Herzeliya, Ramat Hasharon	142	16.3
Total	873	100.0

*Gender Differences*

Of the 1006 subjects, 59% are male, 32% are female, and 9% were not classified as either one due to inability to detect the sex from the student's first name. Tables 3 reports gender differences within academic degree and program. The table indicates that the average ratio between male and female students in the bachelor, masters, and doctoral levels of study here is 0.63/0.37. However, this ratio changes to 0.8/0.2 on the post doctoral level.

Table 3

*Gender Distribution within Academic Degrees*

Gender		Academic Degree				Total
		Bachelor	Master	Doctoral	Post Doc	
Males	# students	144	223	172	33	572
	% within gender	25.2%	39.0%	30.1%	5.8%	100.0%
	% within degree	61.3%	66.2%	62.3%	80.5%	64.3%
Females	Count	91	114	104	8	317
	% within gender	28.7%	36.0%	32.8%	2.5%	100.0%
	% within degree	38.7%	33.8%	37.7%	19.5%	35.7%
Total	Count	235	337	276	41	889
	% within gender	26.4%	37.9%	31.0%	4.6%	100.0%

It can be seen in Table 4 that except for the social sciences, where there are more female students, for all other academic programs, there are more male students. For the life sciences, the division is almost 50/50. Overall, it is more likely for female students to pursue a degree in one of the social or the life sciences, whereas a male is more likely to seek a degree in management or the exact sciences.

Table 4

*Gender Distribution within Academic Programs*

Gender		Academic programs									Total
		huma nities	Soci al Scie nces	Exac t Scie nces	Life Scien ces	Man age ment	Healt h Scien ces	Art	Law	Foo d Stud ies	
Male	Students	41	77	121	23	163	22	63	73	2	585
	% within Gender	7.0	13.2	20.7	3.9	27.9	3.8	10.8	12.	.3	100
	% within program	56.9	46.4	85.8	48.9	69.1	64.7	59.4	74.	50.0	64.7
female	Students	31	89	20	24	73	12	43	25	2	319
	% within Gender	9.7	27.9	6.3	7.5	22.9	3.8	13.5	7.8	.6	100
	% within program	43.1	53.6	14.2	51.1	30.9	35.3	40.6	25.5	50.0	35.3
Total	Students	72	166	141	47	236	34	106	98	4	904
	% within Gender	8.0	18.4	15.6	5.2	26.1	3.8	11.7	10.8	.4	100

*Preferred Institution, Specialization and Academic Degrees*

58.7% of the Israeli students who came to study in the U.S between 1993 and 2005 were enrolled to universities in the northeastern part of the country. The most frequent states within this region are New York 28.5% and Massachusetts 13.9%, and surprisingly, the most frequent universities within these states are expensive institutions such as: NYU with 6.6%, Harvard with 6%, and Columbia University with 5.4%. 17.3% of the Israeli students chose the west as their destination region in the U.S. Most of the students in this area are located in California, and the most common institution is University of California-Berkley. The Midwest and the South share only 25% of the total



population of Israeli students with 12% each. The most popular states in the Midwest and the South are Illinois and, Florida, respectively.

Table 5

*Frequencies of Academic Programs*

Program	Frequency	Valid Percent
Humanities	78	7.8
Social sciences	178	17.9
Exact sciences	152	15.2
Life sciences	48	4.8
Management	263	26.4
Health sciences	39	3.9
Art sciences	124	12.4
Law	111	11.1
food studies	4	.4
system missing	9	.9
Total	997	100.0

Table 6

*Frequencies of Degrees Sought*

Degree	Frequency	Valid Percent
bachelor	268	27.3
master	369	37.7
doctoral	301	30.7
post-doctoral	42	4.3
Total	980	100.0
System	26	
Total	1006	

Tables 5 suggests that the most common program of studies for Israeli study abroad students in the US is management, as more than a quarter of the Israeli study abroad students choose to study business. The second most frequently mentioned

program is social sciences and the third is exact sciences. This finding is consistent with the results of the table 6 that shows that largest number of subjects appears in the master degree. If one looks at the sub categorization of this level of study, it is evident that the MBA is the most frequent.

Table 7

*Number of Students by Program and Degree Sought*

Academic Programs	Academic Degrees				Total
	Bachelor	Master	Doctoral	POST DOC	
Humanities	12	10	52	3	77
	28	49	93	6	176
Social Sciences	58	24	49	15	146
Exact Sciences	4	7	24	12	47
Life Sciences	61	159	32	2	254
Management	11	11	10	3	35
Health Sciences	89	26	7	0	122
Art Sciences	1	81	28	1	111
Law	1	0	2	0	3
Food Studies					
Total	265	367	297	42	971

Israeli undergraduate students typically apply for architecture, film, design, business, computer science, psychology, communication, and political science. On the master's level of studies, Israeli students are usually enrolled to business administration, law, psychology, communication, political science and sociology. Studies on the doctoral level for Israeli students includes fields such psychology, computer science, political science, engineering, history, English literature and philosophy.

## Discussion

During the last years, as a result of the hi-tech financial crisis, the limited job market, and the current security situation, Israelis are looking to expand their horizons both personally and professionally and are seeking opportunities to study abroad. The numbers of study abroad Israeli students in the U.S increases every year. Higher education institutions in the U.S cater Israeli students' needs due to the high standard of education they offer, the wide choice of specializations and the experience of living in the United States.

The year of 2001 marks a sharp decline in the number of Israeli students. This finding may be attributed to the effects of 9/11 and the post-9/11 visa rules (USA Today, 11/10/2004; Education Week 1/19/2005; Black issues in Higher Education 12/2/2004; USA Today, 11/15/20004). The latter also reports on the disruption of the international scientific collaborations and academic conferences from U.S. visa requirements. He claims that entry restrictions after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks is resulted in increase in applications for European academic positions on the one hand, and absence of foreign postgraduates and research assistants in U.S. laboratories on the other.

Although the male and female ratio in Israel is 1 male(s)/1 female, within the population of Israeli students there are 2 males for every 1 female. There are double as much male students in all levels of academic studies. However, among the post doctoral candidates 80% of the students are males. This finding may be attributed to the idea that women are probably married and have children by the time they have a doctoral degree, and therefore wouldn't consider such a step. This finding also reflects the inequalities

that are characteristic of gender relations in the social and economical spheres of life in Israel.

Most of the Israeli study abroad students originally come from geographical areas in Israel which are associated with the privileged dens: the center of Israel, especially Tel Aviv. This finding also explains why almost all undergraduate students who go to study in the United States pay their own way, as only 15% are Fulbright grantees. In addition, the more advanced the degree, the more chances to get Fulbright scholarship which is given to 5.4% of Master's students, 32.2% of doctoral candidates, and 81% of the postgraduate students.

Another variable which is salient to the socio-economic profile of Israeli study abroad students is ethnicity. Even though it was limited by students' surnames and the ability of the researcher to type of data that in the Fulbright survey, the analysis reflects a between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews, as Ashkenazi Jews constitute the vast majority of Israeli study abroad students. This is in accordance with the finding that the largest numbers of Israeli students are located in the most expensive institutions in the United States.

Typically Israeli students apply to universities situated in cities with large concentrations of Jews where they can be close to a Jewish community. The whole aspect of coming from a different culture adds to the feeling of insecurity and stress. This underlines the importance of being part of a community. Therefore, the highest numbers of Israeli students are in New York, Massachusetts, and California. The most popular institutions in these states for Israeli students are NYU, Harvard University, Columbia University, Boston University, and University of California – Berkeley. In addition, these

institutions are the most well-known universities in North America. These institutions are revered by Israeli students for whom these universities symbolize U.S. academia.

Israeli students are interested in American undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate studies. The percentage of students in master's programs is 37.7%. 30.7% studied for a doctoral degree, 27.3% were undergraduate students, and 4.3% were enrolled to programs at the post-doctoral level.

The most popular programs for Israeli undergraduate students are architecture, business, computer science, and psychology. Masters students usually apply for business administration, law, and psychology. Studies on the doctoral level for Israeli students mainly include psychology, computer science, and engineering. Post docs popular programs are biology and engineering. This is not a surprising finding, and although the chosen bachelor, master's and doctoral programs are offered in Israel, Israeli students seek to study in the U.S. The reason for this choice is the situation of the Israeli job market and the status of the English language in Israel as the most common and prestigious foreign language. Because these professions are highly valued by Israelis, the only way to create an advantage over other university graduates is to study in an English speaking university.

Within the past decade, as a result of developments, the needs of the population are changing. Today, masters of business administration must be able to demonstrate a global understanding of the American market as well as competency in the English language. For this reason many Israelis seek MBAs in the U.S.

## Conclusion

To recap, this chapter utilizes descriptive statistics to define the participants involved in the research study, as well as the types of study abroad experiences represented by the respondents.

Even though the number of Israeli students in North America has grown substantially, literature in this area is lacking. This chapter addressed this gap, describing the Israeli study abroad student. I specifically wished to study the demographic characteristics of this student as enhanced understanding of the demographic and social characteristics of Israeli study abroad students, their choices of academic program and the degrees they seek to earn is a logical step toward making sampling decisions.

The analyses contained in this study evince several conclusions: first, the analysis seems to support the following generalization: the characteristics of Israeli study abroad students reflect preferences in regards to US region, academic institution, and academic program. The descriptive findings suggest that business, psychology and engineering are the most frequent disciplines Israeli study abroad students choose to pursue a degree in. Another key finding is that most of the Israelis that are enrolled to universities in the US either seek a masters or a doctoral degree. A third important finding of this study is that men are more likely to experience studying abroad than women.

It appears that the sociological profile that emerges from this study is that Israeli male study abroad students, who usually comes from the center of Israel, elects to pursue a degree in one of the most prestigious universities across the nation. He or she is likely to be enrolled to undergraduate studies in architecture, a Master's degree in business, PhD in psychology, and post doctoral studies in engineering.

These results emphasize the need for learning more about the experiences of Israeli study abroad students in these high frequency categories, in an attempt to characterize second language literacy for Israeli students within these disciplines.

Although this is a limited survey with a limited number of respondents, it still helps describing the Israeli study abroad students in terms of gender, degree, program of study etc'. It is limited by its examination of only those Israelis who used the services of Fulbright's study abroad center. However, it's the Future research would benefit from increasing the sample size and including students who did not need the mediation services Fulbright's study abroad center offers.

Additionally, the available data is also missing information regarding the age and the marital status of the subjects. The records may not be up to date, and some students may have left the United States for various reasons.

## CHAPTER FOUR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

To review, the goal of this research is to investigate meaning making strategies of international students in transnational settings in order to illustrate some of the struggles international students' experience, the strategies they use to cope with them, the way they negotiate culture interactions, and the implications that these can have for the construction of academic knowledge.

Essentially, the study is based on an initial quantitative analysis of the population that directed me to look at students from a specific professional program. Based on the findings of chapter 2 the participants who were selected to be interviewed for the study are MBA students from one of the top ten business schools in the United States.

Some key questions the chapter aims at answering are: what methodology is best suited to answer the research question? Who are the participants that informed the study? What instruments were used and how reliable are they? Finally the role the researcher assumed in conducting this study will be discussed.

### Research Questions

As the previous chapter answered the first research question regarding the characteristics of Israeli study abroad students in professional programs, and the profile of the Israeli study abroad student, the remaining 3 research questions the study will further explore are:

1. What are the literacy requirements for Israeli study abroad students in an MBA program?



- What are the reading and writing requirement necessary to complete the program?
  - Are there any accommodations to international students?
2. What are the literacy experiences of Israeli MBA study abroad student in study abroad setting?
- What are their L1 writing experiences, L2 writing experiences in Israel, and L2 writing experiences in the US?
  - What are the difficulties faced by Israeli students and what are the strategies they use to cope with the literacy demands in their programs of study?
  - How do previous literacy experiences influence study abroad student's writing abilities?
3. What characterizes the cultural negotiation of Israeli study abroad students in an MBA program in the U.S?
- How do cultural experiences influence study abroad student's literacy abilities?
  - How do Israeli students in the US perceive the differences between living in Israel and living in the States?

### The Qualitative Aspects of the Study

Because there has to be a match between the research question and the research method of investigation, for this exploration, the design was primarily qualitative. Essentially, qualitative inquiry is employed when a phenomenon is looked at holistically. In comparison to quantitative line of inquiry that examines specific variables and the interrelationships between them, qualitative analysis relies on the constructivist

assumption that there is no absolute reality but multiple realities, interpretations or ways to make sense of our world (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Qualitative analysis is best to examine personal experiences and views, especially in an ethnic minorities or populations that have not been investigated thus far. Qualitative research is focused on “diversity among, idiosyncrasies of, and unique qualities exhibited by individuals” (Mertens, 2005). However, one must remember that this focus on the uniqueness of individuals is always accompanied by the personal interpretation of the researcher that constantly shapes the study (Creswell, 2003)

### Case Study Research

Of the multiple methods qualitative research offers, this research will adopt a multiple case study approach which looks at a phenomenon from various different angles. In case study research four components can be identified: setting, actors, events and processes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The setting includes the way a particular MBA program in a particular university handles its international students. The actors are the students who need to function within the particular setting described. The events in this specific study are literacy events, and the processes refer to the evolving experiences of the actors. A combination of these four aspects captures the multiple realities and meanings of the academic literacy and cultural negotiations of a specific group of international students in a professional program. Using the above case study framework of analysis, this study offers depth rather than breadth. Through being exposed to the experiences of these actors, we synthesize ideal types and enter their world (Rosenwald, 1988).

For that reason, when conducting a multiple case study research, it is important to choose good examples that expose the internal structure of the social phenomenon. In other words, instead of randomly selecting participants to take part in the study, it is highly significant that reflective, opinionated and diverse subjects will be involved in the study. For that reason, in this type of analysis “a given synthesis is contingent on the conditions and participants creating it” (Rosenwald, 1988, 259).

Although multiple case study research doesn’t produce general truths about social phenomena, it is valuable in many ways. Because it is not aimed at revealing the truth, it is focused on the multifaceted nature of reality, it offers richness and complexity and a deeper contextualized understanding of the research participants and the truths of their accounts (Power, 2004).

Often times, in case study research, investigators use multiple methods of data collection to increase validity. In other words, by using more than one instrument to gather information and triangulating the data sources, the researcher forces himself to observe reality from different angles. However, according to Meeto and Temple (2003), if data from different methods yield the same findings, this doesn’t automatically mean that the study is valid. Rather, the question that should be asked in this context is: Is the marrying if these methods of data collection instruments appropriate to answer the research question?

To sum up, although the claim that case study research lacks rigor is still heard every now and then, when done properly, and quality of data interpretation is ensured, it is a scientific research method for empirical research questions (Kyburz-Graber, 2004).

## Setting

The sampling procedure is based on Fulbright's study abroad center database from 2005. The database covered 1006 respondents who started their study abroad academic program from 1993 and 2005. Through a quantitative line of analysis using SPSS I conveyed the sociological profile of the Israeli study abroad student in an attempt to select a sample for further qualitative analysis. The data drawn from the surveys has been analyzed statistically. The descriptive statistics method which provides a system of quantifying the characteristics was employed and based on the findings which are presented in Table 8, I have decided to narrow down the population of Israeli study abroad students in the U.S. As Table 8 shows MBA is the most frequent program for Israeli students abroad therefore I decided to focus on this group of students.

Table 8

<i>Number of Students by Program and Degree Sought</i>					
Academic Programs	Academic Degrees				Total
	Bachelor	Master	Doctoral	Post Doc	
Humanities	12	10	52	3	77
	28	49	93	6	176
Social Sciences					
	58	24	49	15	146
Exact Sciences					
	4	7	24	12	47
Life Sciences					
	61	159	32	2	254
Business					
	11	11	10	3	35
Health Sciences					
	89	26	7	0	122
Fine Arts					
	1	81	28	1	111
Law					
	1	0	2	0	3
Food Studies					
Total	265	367	297	42	971

Based on the findings presented in the table, the population that was selected for the study is Master students of Business administration, as this is the most frequent program of study for Israeli international students.

### Sampling

The population of Israelis was chosen to further our understanding of the experiences of a population that hasn't been represented in the literature. Despite the increase in the number of Israelis studying abroad, very little is written about them or known about their experiences, as there is no study which systematically documents this population in the context of North America higher education system.

Data was collected from January thru April of 2009. The specific university was chosen because of the increasing interest by Israeli students. Furthermore, living in the area at that time enabled greater access to participants.

Participants were contacted using purposive, snowball and convenient sampling (Maxwell, 1996; Patton, 1999). I used my contacts in the Jewish community center to contact the first participant who was gracious enough to tell his classmates in the MBA program about my study and invite to participate in the study. Nevertheless, to some extent it may also be considered purposeful sampling because when I talked to my contact person I specifically asked him to contact people with different views of the study abroad experiences that would be willing to sit through a long interview and share information about themselves and their study abroad experiences. Once he got their permission, he then provided me with the potential participants' phone numbers and I called each one to arrange for the meeting.

The selection of participants was also a representative sample because it was the bulk of the Israeli MBA students in the program (15 out of 18). Though the sample may have been small, the diversity of the students' educational backgrounds was wide including degrees in law, economics, computer science, biology, psychology, education and medicine. The variety of backgrounds provided an understanding of the Israeli MBA student experience in the specific institution chosen.

Participants were asked to volunteer for the study. They participants were not compensated for participation. They understood they could withdraw from the study at any point. It was made clear during the interview that any published material would not include the participants' names or any other identifying characteristics. Students were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity when quoting.

#### Informants' Profile

Participants in this study are native speakers of Hebrew from one of the top ten business schools in the U.S studying for a Masters degree in Business Administration. All participants had studied English as a second language in Israel for at least 8 years prior to the beginning of their study abroad experience.

As seen in Table 9, one of the informants' demographics is similar to the sample of Israeli study abroad students discussed on chapter 3, as there were more Israeli men in the MBA program examined than women. In the entire sample of Israeli study abroad students (not just MBA) the ratio was 1 female/2 males.

Table 9

*Participants' Demographics*

Participant	Gender/Age	Marital Status	Educational Background	Year in Program
Reuben	M/35	Married+1	Law (England)	2nd
Levi	M/33	Married	M.A Economy	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Lea	F/31	Married	M.Sc Biotech	1st
Judah	M/30	Single	Computer Science/Biology	1st
Asher	M/31	Married	Industrial Engineering/management	1st
Abraham	M/31	Married	Psychology/Biology	1st
Naftali	M/35	Married+2	Law	2nd
Dan	M/30	Married	Biotechnology Engineering	1st
Joseph	M/30	Single	Computer Science	1st
Jacob	M/35	Married+2	Medicine (partial)	2nd
Zebulun	M/28	Single	Computer Science	1st
Benjamin	M/31	Single	Computer Science/Biology	2nd
Gad	M/32	Married+1	Education/Economics	1st
Issachar	M/30	Single	Computer Science	2nd
Shimeon	M/35	Single	Law	1st

The population of the study included 15 Israeli MBA students between the ages of 28 and 35. The average age was 31.8. All but one, were males. 3 were married and came along with their spouses. 5 were married with children and brought their families with them. The average size of their families is 3 members. All but one got their bachelor

degrees in Israel. 2 of the respondents had a master's degree from their home country as well. All 15 respondents came to the U.S several weeks before school started on the first week of September. 5 were second year students and were about to graduate. 10 were first year students and were on the program for 6 months already. This composition was appropriate because it represents the ration of first and second year students in the population of Israeli students in the MBA program at the time of the study.

### Data Collection

In the interest of getting a more complex picture of second language literacy for Israeli study abroad students in the U.S, the data that is relevant to the phenomenon under investigation was collected through more than one method. Specifically, to increase internal validity the study used two sources of evidence. Each instrument has its own focus and illuminate on a different element of the phenomenon.

### *Documents*

One source of data collection is documents that indicate the literacy requirements of the MBA program. This enables a detailed description of business school program requirements and expectations. Because the study aims at understanding the departmental and university expectations and requirements from international MBA students, a description of the department and university is provided.

The documents that were collected in order to understand the literacy that these students are facing with are: application essays, course descriptions, syllabi, assignment sheets, cases, textbook chapters, articles from business magazines, problem sets, power point presentations, balance sheets, industry and firm analyses, quizzes tests, case analyses, memos, resumes, business emails, and cover letter.



3-5 samples were collected from each type of text. The reason I wasn't able to collect more text samples is that it is unc customary for business students to share their work.

### *Interviews*

Interviews are a fundamental source of data in qualitative research methodology. As opposed to the traditional view of this instrument of data collection, constructivist approach according to the interviews are no longer seen as a process in which knowledge is transmitted to interviewers from interviewees, but as an act in which meaning and knowledge are created in a collaborative work of both parties. In postmodern interviews, interviewers and interviewees together construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. In any case, both are active creators of knowledge (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003).

Moreover, the new form of interviewing that is widely used in qualitative inquiries may benefit the participants (Hiller & Diluzio, 2004). In this specific study, the interview provided the participants an opportunity to conceptualize and reflect on the effects of their previous literacy experiences and the way these are practiced in a transnational second language academic setting. Some of the participants acknowledged that feature of the interview, noting that it makes them search for knowledge they haven't processed before. This reflects the participants' perception that they receive some reward for participating in the research.

To capture the complexity of the intertwining of literacy in professional transnational education, data for this study were collected using in-depth interviews. The interviews were unstructured for the most part and included mostly open-ended

questions. As in other qualitative research projects the design was emergent (Erlandson et al, 1993), i.e. the researcher developed a question checklist to use in the interviews, but the interview itself was very respondent-centered and the respondents could take the interview into direction they wanted. Sometimes an interviewee would raise an issue the researcher hasn't thought about, and the interviewer would ask about this issue in subsequent interviews. This approach allowed the researcher focus on the particular phenomenon under study rather the differences between things and their explanation (Maxwell, 1996).

Face to face interviews were conducted in a variety of settings according to the participants' preferences. I met Reuben at my house because it was the most convenient location for him. My interviews with Gad, Asher, and Judah were conducted in a reserved room at the business school. Abraham and Benjamin offered to meet me at the Starbucks coffee shop close to the campus. Jacob, Naftali, Shimeon and Joseph chose to talk at Caribou coffee house, which is located next to the neighborhood where they lived. The interview with Zebulun was conducted at the community clubhouse. Lea preferred meeting at my office on campus. Issachar wanted to meet at the Lobby of the business school building, and Dan was interviewed at the cafeteria area of the business school.

Each interview took approximately 120-150 minutes. All of the participants were interviewed individually. The language of the interview was Hebrew. There were three overarching sets of questions guiding the interviews: cultural negotiations, literacy experiences and literacy requirements that corresponded to the research questions the study posed.

During the interview, students were queried about their initial expectations and literacy abilities. The questions that aimed at eliciting responses regarding this issue illuminate the starting points of the Israeli students, i.e what they knew as far as English literacy is concerned; how they acquired English literacy in Israel; what they knew as far as disciplinary literacy goes; and what their expectations were before starting the program. This set of questions also investigates how the students got from where ever they started from to fulfilling the requirements of the program. The difficulties they faced are essentially the difference from their starting point and expectations to the actual real requirements of the new department in the US. It aimed at understanding how they solved the problems they faced. What was it that they actually did to overcome this. Another part of the interview aimed at investigating students' experiences of living in a new cultural setting, their misconceptions, the struggles and challenges of adapting to the American context and the ways they cope with them.

It is noteworthy to mention that the researcher recognizes that the responses provided in the interviews were shaped in the light of the participants interactions, their previous experiences and knowledge and their sense of obligation as contributors to a research project (Knapik, 2006).

Together these resources allow me to get a picture of literacy practices of Israeli MBA students. While the data gathered from documents portray the literacy requirements for each program and level of study, the interviews enable me to study the informants' beliefs about difficulties and coping strategies when working with literacy practices in transnational setting.

## Data Analysis

The samples were carefully examined for the purpose of providing a detailed description of the genre. Based on a theoretical review of the concept of literacy and genre research paradigms, I describe the prototypic language patterns and structural aspects of each genre, the cognitive process of understanding and creating each type of text and the its educational function (Hanauer, 1999, Hanauer, 1998). Despite the variations I attempted to characterize each genre based on the more general features and its most typical qualities.

The interviews were recorded and digitally stored on the computer. They were transcribed carefully eliminating all identifying characteristics of participants. The transcription job began half way through the interviewing phase. A peer assisted in documenting the interview and afterwards the written transcripts were compared to the recorded data by the researcher. Any inaccuracies were immediately corrected.

Data analysis for qualitative research studies is an ongoing process of reflection about the data gathered (Creswell, 2003). However this reflection requires the association of two forces that may seem contradictory. “Interpretation is an act of imagination and logic. It entails perceiving importance, order and form in what one is learning that relates to the argument, story, narrative that is continually undergoing creation” (Peshkin, 2000).

Data analysis was inductive and data-directed. Participants’ responses to the interview questions were analyzed using the categorical-content method. The procedure to be followed with data analysis is usually a three step process: creation of thematic categories, verification and modification of the initial categories, and evaluation of the reliability of the coding system by another peer who proofreads the analysis.

The first stage began during the first interview due to my familiarity with the topic and my experience as an Israeli in study abroad context as Schwandt (2000) notes “analysis in qualitative inquiry is recursive and begins almost at the outset of generating data” (7) Initial themes about literacy experiences and cultural negotiations started to emerge as more interviews were conducted.

The second stage started once all the interviews were transcribed. While reading the transcriptions, carefully I jot down comments in the margins. During this process I had a very vague idea of the categories that can be extracted from the data, but as I read the interview transcriptions over and over again, I started to notice that the information can be classified to three main domains, pre-program literacy, and literacy during the program and employment seeking literacy. Working thoroughly on each domain I used colored markers to sort out the different sub-categories. For examples, when I worked on the pre-program literacy I immediately noticed that all the participants talked in length about their motivation to study business abroad, their previous experiences with English in Israel and the challenges of writing application essays. During this process that I repeated for the two remaining domains as well, more categories were added; others were modified until all the data pertaining to the research questions was highlighted using my markers. A different colored marker was used to highlight all the data that related to a specific code. When I had the final categorization system, I worked in selecting representative quotes that recurred in the interviews and that I can use to support my analysis. Interpretation of each category took place when I examined the data in light of the wider ideological, social, political and cultural contexts.

The third stage was completed when an external reader read the initial analysis, and commented on it. Because the study aimed at investigating the literacy experiences and cultural negotiations of Israeli MBA study abroad students in an American University, and illustrate some of the struggles and challenges this sample of students experience cope with them, the study included this data analysis procedure.

The professor who took part in the process of verifying the coding system and the interpretation of results is familiar with the context that is at the center of this research project. He has been teaching Accounting courses in various levels in top Business Schools in the U.S for the past 14 years. These business programs pride themselves in diversity and multiculturalism, therefore his familiarity with the learning environment, teaching methods, academic requirements, and cultural context international students function in. For example, this professor would give more background and explanation to the perceptions of the participants, trying to pinpoint the differences between the study sample, other international students and the local students. More specifically his familiarity with the Hebrew language, the Israeli culture and the Israeli study abroad MBA students who took his classes, made his contribution to the study significant in increasing the reliability of the coding system and the interpretation.

Based on the comments the analysis was completed. This stage was very important in verifying the coding system, as the reader's distance from the study and his familiarity with the setting added to the credibility of the project.

Undoubtedly, correspondence and meetings with my advisor who commented on the content-categories also establishes analysis reliability.

## Validity and the Researcher's Role

In qualitative research validity means “whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant or the readers of an account (Creswell and Miller, 2000). How does the qualitative researcher increase the validity of his study? Creswell (2003) recommends 8 strategies: triangulation, member –checking, using rich descriptions, clarifying the bias of the researcher, presenting discrepant information, spending prolonged time in the field, peer debriefing, and using an external auditor (196).

Because in qualitative research, the researcher is the data collection instrument (Mertens, 2005), with my motivations for conducting the study and the role I assume, I bring certain biases to this study. The reason for choosing Israelis was rediscovering my personal study abroad experience and revealing myself through the participants' study abroad narratives. In this study, I took the role of the involved narrator as my own experiences provided the motivation for the research.

As a qualitative researcher I realize I cannot separate between the descriptions or interpretations of theirs and my own experiences. I acknowledge concerns regarding the fact that I play here the dual role of the researcher and an involved narrator, yet I believe that the nature of the research question necessitated an individualistic and subjective approach. Every researcher is inevitably interpreting data through the lens of his culture, language, experience and expectations. Having the advantage of an insider who understands the nuances of the participant's responses, I acknowledge that there are more interpretations to the one possibility I presented here. Yet, every effort has been made to ensure highest levels of objectivity.

Hence, to ensure quality of data analysis, data was collected through both documents and interviews. Literacy requirements as well as the experiences of participants were described in great detail. Discrepant views were not eliminated. Rather, these “cognitive islands” (Rosenwald, 1988: 245) in the sea of data were the most fascinating responses to read and analyze. In addition, the data was shared with a peer researcher and an experienced researcher that reviewed the entire project from afar, yet with a critical eye for credibility and authenticity.

### Summary

To review, the purpose of the study is to investigate the ways in which international students negotiate literacy and cultural practices. It sets out to explore the meaning making strategies of international students in transnational settings in order to illustrates some of the struggles Israeli MBA students’ experience in transnational setting, the strategies they use to cope with them, and the implications that these can have for the construction of academic knowledge.

The research methodology for this study use qualitative methods, more specifically, it employs a case study approach which utilizes two sources of data collection instruments: documents and interviews. The analysis of data was assisted by an expert check that increases the validity of the results. Still, the emphasis in this project is on the specific manner in which 15 Israeli study abroad students experience literacy and culture in a foreign professional academic context.



## CHAPTER FIVE THE LITERACY REQUIREMENTS IN THE MBA PROGRAM

### Introduction

The primary aims of this chapter is answering the second research question regarding the literacy requirements of the MBA program and providing the background and setting to the data. This chapter characterizes the MBA program the research participants study in, providing statistics and demographics about the student population in the department. Furthermore, drawing upon an explanation of the concept of literacy, it discusses the literacy requirements the respondents need to satisfy. Specifically, it focuses on the reading and writing assignments international students have to undergo from the application process through the program's curriculum to the job hunt phase.

### Description of the Program

A brief introduction to the program is a key frame of reference in understanding the environment in which the research participants function in. As noted earlier, this MBA program is located in one of the top ten business schools in the country and is highly desired by both internationals and Americans. To illustrate, the number of MBA applications for this school for the 2008-9 academic year was 2697, out of which only 23% were accepted.

The popularity of the program does not indicate its affordability. The total direct cost, that includes tuition and other required fees of the entire 20-month MBA program, varies according to residency. While tuition for residents is \$85,979, nonresidents pay \$95,979. Expected living expenses for residents is \$63,053, with a recommended additional annual budget for nonresidents is \$68,053.

As noted before the tuition is very costly. The percentage of Full-time MBAs, who applied for financial aid for the current academic year, was 74 %. The percentage of Full-time MBAs who received financial aid in the current academic year was 74 %. The mean MBA financial aid package for the current academic year was \$52,308, and the median MBA financial aid package for the current academic year was \$62,000. Scholarships are awarded on the basis of a combination of need and merit.

Fifty percent of the applications received were from international students. Yet, only 30% of the full-time students entering the class of 2009-2010 were international students. The percentage of applications received from women was 28 %. However, of the total enrolled students 33% were women. As for marital status, 15% of the students who enrolled to the program were married.

In regards to some demographics concerning the places of origins, international students who entered the school in 2009 came from the following regions: Africa: 1%; Asia: 17%; Eastern Europe and Central Asia: 1%; Latin America and the Caribbean: 7%; Middle East: 3% ; North America: 68%; Western Europe: 2%. As for U.S citizens, the distribution is as follows: Northeast: 5%; Mid-Atlantic: 20%; South: 5%; Southwest: 3%; Midwest: 51%, West: 15%.

Percentage of U.S. students in the 2009-2010 class is: African American: 8%; Asian American: 20%; Hispanic or Latino American: 4%; Native American: 1%; White (Non-Hispanic) 60%; Chose not to report: 7 %.

As specified in the school's website, to be considered for admittance, students need 5 years of work experience. Indeed, the mean months of work experience of students admitted to the class of 2009-2010 was 62. The requirements to have 5 years of

work experience goes in line with the age of the students who seek such a degree.

Statistics indicate that both the median and the mean of the students entering the past academic year were 28.

### Literacy Practices during the Application Process

To be considered for admission into the MBA program, prospective students must submit an application. The application elements are: GMAT score, resume/work experience, application essays, interview, recommendations, and undergraduate transcripts. All these elements have an equal relative importance to the application process.

According to the official GMAT website (<http://www.mba.com/mba>) , applicants are required to take the GMAT test. The GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test) is a 3-1/2 hour standardized exam designed to predict how test-takers will perform academically in MBA programs. The Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, New Jersey develops the test questions, administers the test, and reports test scores to the schools. Each graduate business school develops and implements its own policy concerning the use of GMAT scores in making admissions decisions. In the business school the respondents study in the GMAT scores for the past academic year ranged from 640 to 760. The mean was 701, and the median was 710.

The GMAT seeks to measure three broad areas of ability by way of its different test sections: (1) Analytical Writing Assessment (two 30-minute essay sections); (2) Quantitative Ability (one 75-minute multiple choice section); (3) Verbal Ability (one 75-minute multiple choice section). Each skill is awarded a separate score.

International students are required to demonstrate a minimum score of English proficiency to be considered for admission. The English language proficiency tests accepted are: a Computer Based, an internet-based or a Paper-based TOEFL. The minimum paper-based TOEFL score required for MBAs at the university discussed above is 600.

In addition to the standardized tests, most schools want to know more about the applicant and why he/she wants to pursue an MBA in their specific business school. Therefore, a cardinal component of the application is the essays. Essays are used to foresee how candidates will benefit from a program and contribute to it. In most cases 4-5 essays are required. This gives the applicant an opportunity to portray themselves and express their goals.

Another way of to get to know the applicant is through a personal interview. Applicant interviews go by invitation only. Interviews are conducted via the phone or in person during campus visits or by alumni in the applicant's home country or another convenient place for both parties. The percentage of applicants (admitted and denied) who were interviewed last year was 55%.

### The Coursework

Typically, during the first year of MBA study, core classes are taken with the intent to lay a foundation for the rest of the student's business school education. Though the curriculum can vary from school to school, students are required to complete core courses regardless of specialization. While most business schools consider core classes mandatory in the first year of MBA study, other schools are more flexible. It is important to note that most MBA's often admits people without formal business backgrounds, and

that for some students the core course that usually deal with the basics of finance, accounting, marketing, strategy or operations management is a new kind of literacy to acquire. To accommodate the various backgrounds, the courses in the MBA program are shorter (6-7 weeks as opposed to the standard 13-14 week semester course) in time and more intensive in content coverage.

After completing the MBA core curriculum, students have a good understanding of business concepts, students are permitted to choose from a variety of electives at the business school as well as other professional programs to reach a total of 57 graduate credit hours. In the last semester students are also required to conduct a team-based action field study. The purpose of the field study is to strengthen the connection between the acquired theoretical knowledge and the business world.

A description of the core courses is provided in Appendix B.

#### Communication Waiver Exam

In addition to the courses, MBA students are required to pass a communication exam. The MBA Communication Waiver Exam tests managerial writing abilities. The Exam presents MBA students with a communication case involving a critical management situation that requires a written response. The writing abilities required for management are different from those needed for academic, journalistic, or creative writing. Managers use writing to get work done. The Exam is designed to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the writing sample, not to focus on grammatical or syntactical errors. For example, students may be asked to provide arguments in favor of keeping a sales training program or to advocate for a change in policy at work.

Students' written responses to the MBA Communication Waiver Exam are evaluated for managerial writing ability. Each response is read with the following question in mind: To what extent does this student demonstrate competency in selecting, developing, and organizing content; employing language choices; and using persuasive appeals to achieve management goals? Evaluators use the following four criteria areas to assess the responses: content development, audience adaptation, organizational strategy, and language control.

A sample of the exam is provided in Appendix C.

### The Case Method

Many of the courses are taught using the case method. This teaching method utilizes a class discussion of hypothetical as well as real-life situations companies may encounter with. Case-based learning simply places the student behind the manager's desk and gets him in the habit of analyzing data, and making business decisions accordingly. The rationale behind the case method is that it packs more experience into every hour of learning than any other instructional approach. Case studies stimulate students' thinking, challenge their capabilities, and prepare them for future managerial decision making.

### Literacy Requirements of the MBA Program

#### *The Concept of Literacy*

Beyond the basic definition of literacy as an ability to read and write, literacy is a collection of language abilities that are used to understand, and produce various kinds of texts for a range of personal and social purposes. Literacy is not a neutral skill, but an ability that is developed in social context, hence a distinction between primary discourse, the one a person is born and raised with, and secondary discourse, the one people acquire

that gain access to community, professional, social, and other groups, must be made (Gee, 2000). Following Gee, Street (2001) clarifies that literacy practices are viewed as socio-culturally determined ways of thinking, doing, reading and writing in different cultural contexts.

Genre theory seems to have great relevancy to the understanding of literacy because it is focused on identifying the relationship between the forms, way of handling, and social purposes of similar texts. The genre theory assumes that to enact literacy, people activate previously acquired schema of text, or a set of conventions (Kamberelis, 1995). That is why a person's past learning experience plays such a central role in the processing and producing of the text he is making sense of or creating, which may change and adapt itself with every new problem solving situation.

Genres are characterized with dynamic feature. That is, genres, including texts, are constantly changing; and an individual adapts and adjusts to the new concepts until it is no longer new and strange. People have the ability based on some culturally and historically based set of concepts to design and redesign the already existing genres.

However, today, one cannot talk about literacy but multi-literacy as a leading theory to handle the many kinds of texts. Recent years have produced more than written texts only. For example, a text can be visual (pictures, graphic designs), audible (TV and songs) and linguistic (a written text of any kind). New styles of texts convey many different meaningful, culturally and socially relevant messages. These messages cannot be understood without the various kinds of codes that construct the text (Kress, 2000).

Barton and Hamilton (2000) summarize literacy using a set of six propositions: (1) Literacy (practices, events and texts) is a social practice; (2) There are different

literacies (e.g. computer literacy) associated with different domains of life; (3) Literacy practices – what people do with literacy –are patterned by social institutions and power relationships; (4) Literacy practices are culturally and socially related and purposeful function (a means to some other end). Further, practices in different cultures and languages can be regarded as different literacies; (5) Literacy is historically situated. Texts are fluid, dynamic and changing; and (6) Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and formal education (p.8).

In addition to the six propositions, Barton and Hamilton (1998, 2000) introduce another basic concept, literacy events, which are activities where literacy has a role. A literacy event, in which written texts are crucial part of, is an observable episode, which arise from practices and is shaped by them. Furthermore, they claim that texts can have multiple roles in an activity for the different participants in a literacy event, and there are social rules about who can produce and use particular literacies.

New technologies and new mediums also transformed the discourse in the medium (Warnick, 2001, p.62). In order to attract readers' attention, authors have to change the nature of the language to fit it to a specific audience in a specific culture, as Ong (1982, p.135) emphasizes in his notion of the primary and secondary oralities. As a result, individuals are no longer seen as users of an existing stable, static system of elements and rules. Rather, today's communication has brought major changes in forms of texts, in uses of language, and in the communicational and representational potentials of all elements of 'literacies' (Kress, 2000a, p.154). Since language is not seen as stable



anymore, individuals' needs call for change, adaptation and modification of the representational resources (George and Shoos, 1999, p.115).

Drawing upon these needs, the Multi-literacy Project was born. At the core of the Multi-Literacy Project (Kress, 2000a; Kress, 2000b) is the increasing complexity and interrelationship of different modes of meaning that are delivered through the linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and multimodal designs (The London Group, 2000: 25). As a result, schools should reconsider the needs of literacy pedagogy in order to meet the changes that have been taking place in personal and professional domains (The London Group, 2000).

Following the literacy and genre research paradigms, this section of the chapter will describe the prototypic language patterns and structural aspects of each genre the participants in this study are required to interact with in each stage of the business training experience: the application, the coursework and the job search. For reading assignments, the cognitive process of understanding each type of text is provided, while for writing tasks the procedure is specified. The educational function of both the reading and writing assignments is indicated (Hanauer, 1998a, Hanauer, 1998b). As mentioned in the theoretical portion of this chapter, texts are dynamic entities; therefore the characterization of each genre is based on the general features and most typical qualities, though there may be variations to the prototype.

### *Application Essays*

*Structural aspects.* Widely used in North American higher education institutions as a tool to evaluate the uniqueness of the candidate and to assess his potential contribution to the program. In most cases 4-5 essays are required in each application.

The length of most essays is 500-1000 words depending on the prompt. The essays adopt a personal tone, and for the most part tell a personal story that pictures the candidate in a specific way and highlights a positive trait or talent.

*Procedure.* The process of writing the essays involves a brainstorming stage, outline building, writing, and revising based on feedback. Most MBA applicants use the services of professional editors that not only review mechanics and organizations but also emphasize the admission drivers that readers extract from the essays.

*Function.* Essays are required by most graduate business programs to assess the candidate's motivations for applying to the program and their ability to benefit from it and contribute to it. Admission essays are also utilized to learn about the candidate's writing abilities and analytical skills.

Here are the essay questions for the 2008/2009 application year at the university where the respondents study as they appeared on the program's website:

1. We believe one of the keys to effective leadership is the ability to transform ideas into action through people. Please describe a professional leadership accomplishment in which you transformed an idea into action. How did your leadership impact your organization? (500-word maximum)

2. Describe the initiatives you have taken over the past two years to develop professionally. (500-word maximum)

3. What career goals have you set for yourself and how will a Ross MBA support the achievement of these goals? How will you utilize the opportunities at Ross to co-create an MBA experience that is right for you? How will you enhance the experience of other members of the Ross community? (500-word maximum)

4. Describe a situation where your professional ethics were challenged and how you came to terms with the situation. What did you learn from this? (500-word maximum)

Optional Questions (You may answer one, both or neither of these questions).

1. Describe a situation in which others with whom you were working on a project disagreed with your ideas. What did you do? In retrospect, is there anything you would have done differently? (500-word maximum)

2. Please feel free to elaborate on any other information that you believe is important for the admissions committee to access your candidacy. (500-word maximum)

### *Reading*

#### *Cases*

*Structural aspects.* On a very basic level a case is a true story about a company, an executive, an employee or a market. Each case is focused on a specific theme. Some key topics are: Job satisfaction, employee retention, conflict management, employee motivation. This story is spiced up with data presented in the form of dry facts, quotes from the people who are involved in the case or copies of financial statements. Cases may include information such as: company profile, executive bios, company history, internal memos, or correspondences between stakeholders or between managers of different branches. The text ends with questions the student is asked to answer. Cases can be short (3-5 pages) or long (20-30) pages. It may include high frequency of business, financial, and economic terminology. Below are examples for the questions that appear at the end of the case:

- 1) GE's two decade transformation jack Walsh leadership. Question: 1. what portfolio of business did GE have in 1980? What were the methodologies for the shift during the next 20 years? 2. Was value created, and were there distinct phases and priorities. 3. Is the new portfolio sustainable?
- 2) Apple Inc, 2008. Question: 1. What were Apple's competitive advantages in the early years? 2. How have the underlying dynamics of the PC industry changed? Is more coming? 3. Where does Apple fit in this picture? What was the strategy followed by Sculley? By Jobs after 1997? 4. How important is the iPod business? Is the success sustainable? 5. what are the next steps that the company should follow?

*Cognitive process.* Cases are hard to make sense of for three reasons: first, there is a lot of data, some of which is irrelevant, and the students need to be able to sort the main from the marginal. Second, not all the data is provided in the text and the student is often required to make assumptions and fill in the gaps. Third, this type of text includes information that is culturally- based and there are underlying assumptions and expectation that the reader understands the local business world and lingo. So, the distance between the text and its meaning is the source of the difficulty.

Cases are read in a non-linear fashion. Hence, while reading a case, the reader has to constantly be aware of the messages that are being transferred in non-linguistic manners such as numbers in tables and figures. Based on the combination of the linguistic and non-linguistic data the case presents, the reader has to imagine themselves as if they were the manager of this company. For example: based on the data given in the

case, should the manager fire his best salesperson? What should this manager do to increase the company's revenue or should the manager give this employee a raise?

*Educational function.* Cases are used to connect between the theoretical knowledge students acquire in the classroom and the reality of the business world. Cases are often created to help the student identify with the manager of a company and get in the habit of making informed business decisions that can be supported using data that either appears in the data or can be inferred. Cases are also used as contents for class discussion.

*Criteria for evaluation.* According to the syllabus of Management Operation (p.3) cases are graded using the following criteria:

- (1) Theory: apply appropriate conceptual materials from the readings and class discussions,
- (2) Data: utilize specific evidence (e.g., from research, course readings, case materials) to develop your analysis, to make appropriate inferences, and to support your arguments,
- (3) Analysis: integrate theory and data to develop a coherent analysis and assessment of the key behavioral issues
- (4) Recommendations: translate your analysis into a specific action plan that goes beyond general recommendations, and address implementation issues, and
- (5) Organization and Writing: clear, well organized, and professional-quality your write-up.

### *Textbook Chapters*

*Structural aspects.* Textbook chapters introduce the definitions, themes and core concepts of the business arena. While some present verbal information on how to analyze and interpret business situations, others are targeted toward teaching students how to read and construct financial documents or how to use statistical methods to make business

judgments. Chapters from business textbooks vary in length and are considered standard academic texts that facilitate the interaction between teachers and students.

*Cognitive process.* When reading a textbook chapter the teacher is confronted with information presented in a theoretical form. To make sense of it, the reader is forced to pause at times and reconstruct the operational meaning of abstract explanations. However, the text is read in a linear fashion and unlike the process of reading cases, the meaning of the text is extracted from the text itself. The reader is not expected to offer interpretations or assign new meanings.

*Educational function.* The importance of the role of the textbook is certainly recognized by professors as a 'framework' or 'guide' that helps them to organize their learning both inside and outside the classroom during discussions in lessons, while doing individual assignments and group projects. Because the case method takes the lesson where it will, and the less control the better, textbook chapters enable learners and teachers to know where the lesson fits into the general pattern of things and focus the discussion on relevant themes.

### *Balance Sheets*

*Structural aspects.* A balance sheet is a snapshot of the company's financial position at a single point in time. This genre is characterized by information mostly presented in numbers using visuals such as tables, charts, figures and diagrams. A balance sheet is broken into two sides. Assets are on the left side and the right side contains the company's liabilities and shareholders' equity. Another interesting aspect of the balance sheet is how it is organized. The assets and liabilities sections of the balance sheet are organized by how current the account is. So for the asset side, the accounts are

classified typically from most liquid to least liquid. For the liabilities side, the accounts are organized from short to long-term borrowings and other obligations.

*Cognitive process.* A balance sheet, also known as statement of financial position, needs to be read along with complimentary reports such as income statement, cash flow statement, and shareholders' equity statement. Because the balance sheet is broken into two sides, when reading a balance sheet, it is important to make sure that the value of the assets equals the combined value of the liabilities and shareholders' equity. When reading a balance sheet, the challenge is extracting linguistic meaning from non-linguistic signs and by making connections between these signs. The relationship between the sections of the balance sheet and the balance sheet as a whole is crucial to the understanding of the text.

*Educational function.* The balance sheet is the most important document as business decisions are taken based on the information that goes in it. It is introduced to students so that they are familiar with this type of text. Business students are taught how to use balance sheets because it's a document that gives the manager the big picture regarding the financials of the business he is leading. It is the face of the business to the world

#### *Articles from Business Magazines*

*Structural aspects.* Business magazines articles are reports of events that took place in the business world. These may be stories of entrepreneurs, companies, relationship between two or more companies, mergers, reports about new inventions, innovation, and advances in technology, stock market analysis, statistics and profiles of people and other reports of events that impact the business world in some way. The

articles usually include a headline, body text, photos, and tables or figures. Reading business magazines and periodicals help the reader get a sense of how companies deal with the kinds of issues they are likely to be faced with. Business Magazines utilize a very precise and concise use of language. On the other hand, they assume a very high level of familiarity and understanding with not only high-register language, but also the more complex usage of professional terms in the fields of business, economy, finance etc.

*Cognitive process.* A business article is very much like a newspaper article, though it is more professional. The reading process is initiated by looking at the headlines to see what is of interest. The remaining of the text is read with the objective of getting information and a construction of an understanding of the text. It is considered a fairly easy read. These articles discuss real world referent that the text speak of, so on the one hand the reader assumes that the report is objective, but on the other hand, as with any media material, the reader is expected to doubt the truthfulness of the text.

*Educational function.* To get into the field of business, students are encouraged to read as many business magazines as possible. Pieces from the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, Yale global, the Economist, Business week, Financial Times can be found in almost all the syllabi of the MBA coursework. In addition, to stay updated and demonstrate knowledge in job interviews, MBA students follow publications on specific companies in the industry they hope to find a position in.

### *Writing*

#### *Problem Sets (individual)*

*Structural aspects.* A problem set is essentially a math problem. It is a short text (roughly 10 lines) that provides very little and specific verbal and numerical information



followed by a series of several mildly difficult questions problems or exercises based on previously taught material, which the student is expected to figure out in writing. Below is an example for a problem set.

A Honolulu restaurant owner must decide whether or not to expand his restaurant. He thinks that the probability is 0.6 that the expansion will prove successful and 0.4 that it will not be successful. If it is successful he will gain \$100,000. If it is not he will lose \$80,000. If the restaurant is not expanded, no gains or losses are expected.

- a. What is the expected monetary value to the owner of expanding his restaurant?
- b. Would a risk neutral owner choose to expand? A risk-averse owner? Briefly explain. State any assumptions and/or additional information you need to answer the question.
- c. calculate the probability of success that would make a risk-neutral restaurant owner indifferent between expanding and not expanding the restaurant.

*Procedure.* When reading a problem set the reader is supposed to identify the information and how it is measured, translate the wording into a numeric equation, and then solve the equation. When writing the solution, graphs and tables assist the verbal explanation. These clarify the process the student follows. No further reading is required, and the objective is to become familiar with the material and practice solving typical problems.

*Educational function.* A problem set is a teaching tool used by many universities. Most courses in physics, math, engineering, chemistry, economics and computer science will very often utilize problem sets. Though most professors stress that students work on their own individual problem set, many students like to work in groups to solve them.

### *Case Analysis (individual/group)*

*Structural aspects.* Case analysis can be defined as a project that requires learners to diagnose, or examine scenarios and present results or recommendations for strategic actions using the information given about actual companies, organizations or an entire industry. This text that the students are producing is usually 3-4 single spaced pages long. It provides direct answers to the questions posed at the end of the case itself. Answers are numbered with correspondence to the question. Most of the information presented is the form of words. There's a high frequency of "I"s and conditional sentences as the writer often clarifies what he'd do, if he were the manager.

*Procedure.* There are different approaches to go about the case analysis project. While some assignments require a specific analytical procedure to examine an organization or a situation; others allow a less structured approach, expecting students to develop the analysis on their own. The professor is the one to determine the specific approach to take through the questions at the end of the text. Case analysis can be done individually or in a group and requires choosing a specific business strategy and justifying the choice.

*Educational function.* Case analysis is one of the most frequent assessment tools professors use in management courses. The assumption behind the use of this evaluation instrument is measuring the learner's ability to recognize and figure out organizational problems using the skills he acquired in the course.

### *Industry and Firm Analysis (Group project)*

*Structural aspects.* A firm or industry analysis is a 20-30 page research project that is usually done in groups. The project is divided into sub-sections and each student is assigned a section. Some frequent sub-sections are: a brief history, factors that affect growth, government regulations, and leading businesses in the industry. The analysis aims at answering questions like: Who are the major businesses in the industry? Where are they located? How long have they been in business? What is their market share?

*Procedure.* When conducting an industry analysis, the group is asked to choose a company and address the following key factors in the analysis: geographic area, industry size and trends, outlook, product, target customers, regulatory environment and company information. A Library search needs to be conducted in various printed and online resources that vary from industry surveys and encyclopedia of emerging industries, to a literature search of newspapers, journals, and magazines, local library publications and online databases. These sources are then read and summarized. One student is responsible for putting all the sections together and the editing job.

*Educational function.* Professors use this assessment method to see how well students apply appropriate conceptual materials from the readings and class discussions to analyze real-life business situations.

### *Quizzes and Tests*

*Structural aspects.* Most tests usually consists of multiple choice questions or short- answer items with open notes and course materials. The length of the text is 3-5 pages. Other tests have a different structure due to technologies and new mediums that have changed the medium of the questions that now include videos. The students'

responses to the questions utilize multiple modes of literacy and include mostly linguistic materials, but also visuals such as charts, graphs, tables, equations and math sentences, causal models that describe the components of a business dilemma and the relationship between them.

*Procedure.* It can be an in-class, take home exam or online exam. Collaboration or consultation is strictly forbidden. Take home exams are expected to be completed within 3-4 days.

*Educational function.* As in other fields of study, the central assessment tools through which educators measure knowledge, skill or aptitude in business education are exams and quizzes. The majority of the courses utilize midterms as an instrument to evaluate the student at the midway point of the semester and a final exam as method of providing summative assessment.

### *Memos*

*Structural aspects.* In a number of course the course assignments involve writing memos. A memo is a short to the point communication conveying the writer's thoughts, reactions or opinion on something. Although the format of this genre is not specified in syllabi, as with all memos, the shorter the better. It can be a game reflection memo - student's observation and impressions from a hands-on simulation game the students and the instructor will play in class. Another form of memos is the minute memo. A minute memo is written at the end of each class, In this memo students are required to write a minute memo on an index card about the most important take away points from the class. This type of text has high frequency of the first person pronoun.

*Procedure.* To write a memo the writer needs to address the way he personally experienced an event. Rather than discussing the event itself, the focus of the writing should be what meaning the writer assigns to the event, how he felt during the event, and how the experience shaped his ideas and understanding regarding events of this sort. The author is welcome to offer his own interpretation and philosophical explanations about the nature of the event.

*Educational function.* The purpose of writing memos is to make the writer aware of the effect a certain event created in his mind. It is a widely used educational tool that teachers use to help students make the connection between the concepts, ideas or theories they have acquired in class and professionally name what they observe outside the school setting.

### *Speaking*

#### *Cold Calling*

*Structural aspects.* Cold calling is known to be the process of calling customers or clients who are not expecting the call or have not specifically asked to be contacted by a salesperson. The idea was adapted to the context of business education to train students to think fast and construct well-informed responses.

*Cognitive process.* In the context of b-education it is one of the most terrifying experiences MBAs, either American or international students dread. Cold calling is when a professor asks a student to recite a case or answer a question about the material with the student knowing about this in advance. This is a challenge, especially for international student who feel they need demonstrate perfect English spontaneously. Most students are

terrified by this practice because they don't want to look foolish, hear a no, to say the wrong thing or blow it.

*Educational function.* To ensure a high quality learning experience, students are required to prepare thoroughly before each class meeting, and be prepared to address, argue, and defend their answers in class. Class participation is worth 20%-30% in the final grade for each course to encourage active learning and regular attendance. Since materials are not read in class, the purpose of cold calling as a form of mandatory class participation is extending the assigned reading materials and develop a class discussion that will model for students the thinking process they need to be engaged in and the type of questions that need to be address when encountering similar business scenarios.

*Criteria for evaluation.* Based on the syllabus for the Management Operation course class participation is:

Evaluated in two ways: (1) Engagement and substantive contribution to other's learning in experiential learning activities, and (2) Quality (not quantity) of contribution to class discussion. Specifically, we will consider the extent to which your comments:

- Reflect an accurate and thoughtful understanding of the case or readings,
- Do not just repeat what others have said (a sign you haven't listened),
- Provide new insights and draw on relevant personal experiences,
- Provide a thorough and well-thought-out analysis of the questions posed for each class,
- Move the discussion in productive directions (e.g., do not monopolize class time, side-track issues under consideration, ask questions more appropriately addressed outside of class, or otherwise distract the class)
- Rely on facts, evidence, and logic (not just opinion),
- Contribute to an environment of open dialogue, informed debate and learning.

### *Power Point Presentation*

*Structural aspects.* Information is required to include linguistic data as well as numeric data, flow charts, or tables. Power point presentations come in different lengths. While some presentations utilize just a few slides, others stretch over up to 40 slides. The text on each slide is short and succinct. The use of colors and designs attracts the audience and enhances the message.

*Procedure.* When creating a power point presentation, the writer uses multiple ways to attract the attention of the audience. This is usually done by including as many visuals as possible. Thus, the majority of the messages are shown rather than told using words. While presenting the slide the student provides complementary explanations and at the end he must be ready to answer questions and manage a class discussion.

*Educational function.* In the business school academic setting, power point presentations have two aims: the first, to report on projects conducted by students individually or in a group, and second to train the student in public speaking.

## Literacy Practices for Job Hunting

### *Writing*

#### *Resume*

*Structural aspects.* A resume is a one page document that contains a summary of relevant job experience and education. Resumes typically have three main sections: educational, work experience, and additional. The second section takes up about two thirds of the space. In each section information is presented in bullet points. Bullets are followed by past tense verbs that describe the contributions of the employee to the company he was employed at and the starting and ending month of the employment

period. The language of the document puts great emphasis on results and the \$ effect that the employee achieved for the company. In addition, because it is typically the first item that a potential employer encounters regarding the job seeker, language perfection is expected. The assumption is that no typos or grammatical errors are likely to be tolerated, and will result in automatic rejection as it shows poor attention to detail.

*Procedure.* To write resumes templates are often used. Although most resumes have shared characteristics, knowing what to write and how to write it is culturally-specific. In American context, the focus should be on how a potential employee can add value and address the company's specific needs. In Israel it is the responsibilities that were given to the employee. As a result, resumes need to be enhanced with 'quantifiable accomplishments' which is a new concept for International students. The underlying tone needs to be spiced up with interest, passion and enthusiasm.

*Function.* Resumes are written for potential employers with the goal of convincing the reviewers to invite the applicant for an interview, therefore, these types of texts are written with the intention of showing the unique value the applicant brings to the table.

### *Cover Letter*

*Structural aspects.* A cover letter is an introduction, which is sent with a resume to an employer, to communicate the background and interest of a prospective employee. It is a 1-page text that attracts the potential employee to read the resume. The cover letter allows a more personal touch than the resume and gives the writer the opportunity to demonstrate communication skills, both of which will impress employers. Like the resume, a cover letter, though more personal, is not meant to be informal. It should still



sound as professional as possible. Using grammatically correct sentences and perfect spelling and grammar is expected. Slang, spelling errors, and incorrect punctuation must be avoided.

*Procedure.* As with resumes, cover letters writers utilize templates that they adapt to compose their own cover letter.

*Function.* Because applicants should never assume that resumes are self-explanatory, they write cover letters. It is a space in the application for the employee to adopt a more personal tone and recreate his professional identity to the reviewer.

### Frequency of Reading and Writing Assignments

As seen in the table below, the MBA coursework requires students to mostly read textbook chapters that comprise more than 58%. This is not a surprising finding in light of the heavy reliance on textbook materials in U.S. academia. It is important to mention that according to syllabi, professors suggest a fair amount of enrichment reading for students who are interested to further explore of the topic discussed in each lesson. To connect the theoretical concepts from textbooks reading cases is frequently assigned in each course (33%). As MBA are considered not purely academic, only 3% of the reading materials are journal articles. It is important to mention that while completing writing assignments, mostly group projects, students read additional texts, what may change the distribution of the genres presented above.

Table 10

#### *Frequency of Reading Materials*

Type of reading	Frequency	Percentage
Required Text book chapters	94	58%
Cases	53	33%
Magazine Articles	10	6%
Journal Articles	6	3%

The following table presents the individual and group writing assignment based on the syllabi of the core course of the MBA program. As can be seen, more than third of the writing assignments in the MBA program are done in groups. The most frequent writing assignment is the case analysis which can be either one of the class assignments or an examination. The case is also the only assignment that can be both an individual assignment and a group project. Overall use of cases is in 44% of the writing assignments. Among the individual writing assignments tests and quizzes are also very commonly used in MBA courses (44%). As for the group projects, and as can be inferred from the table, half of the group assignments involve case analysis and most are also presented in class.

Table 11

<i>Frequency of Writing Assignments</i>				
	Type of writing assignment	frequency	% from individual/group assignments	% from total writing assignments
Individual Tasks 64%	Case- based final exam	5	16%	10%
	Problem set final exam	4	13%	8%
	Case-based midterm exam	2	6.5%	4%
	Problem set final exam	2	6.5%	4%
	Multiple problem sets	8	26%	16%
	Case analysis	6	19%	12%
	Financial report	2	6.5%	4%
	Memo	2	6.5%	4%
Group Tasks 36%	Case analysis	9	50%	18%
	Power point presentation	7	39%	14%
	Long paper	2	11%	4%

## Summary

This chapter described the literacy international students are required to cope with in an MBA program. It attempted to understand the educational context in which the participants function in. The chapter included a description of both the types of assignments the students are expected to complete in the different courses as well as the literacy tasks job seekers encounter with. For each type of texts I have specified the structural aspects, cognitive and technical procedure and educational function.

The descriptive analysis shows that MBA students are faced with a variety of literacy requirements and that the literacy practices are bound by the discipline of business. The chapter indicates that the program broadens the respondents' range of genre awareness and literacy practices, demanding students to figure out schemas of genres they have no experience with. Some commonly used tasks include reading cases and writing answers to exam questions that are also case-based. A significant amount of the writing assignments is done in groups and involves oral literacy in addition to written literacy.

It is important to note that no special accommodations are given to International students who speak English as a foreign language. Simply put, when the student's communicational skills are exercised, American students have a clear advantage, but since most international students plan to function in English-speaking business environments, it's reasonable to expect them to be able to fulfill the literacy requirements as any other student in the program.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE LITERACY EXPERIENCES OF ISRAELI MBA STUDENTS

#### Introduction

In this chapter I address the third research question by presenting the respondents' perspective on their literacy experiences in the study abroad setting. It provides a summary and interpretation of the results of the research study.

To make the discussion concrete, the analysis of the respondent's literacy experiences is organized into two chronological stages: before the program, and during the program. In each stage the analysis is divided into two domains. Literacy experiences before the program including both memoirs of previous literacy experiences in the acquisition of Hebrew as a first/second language, and the acquisition of English as a second language in Israel. Literacy experiences during the program include both the lived stories about language-related issues the students encountered while completing coursework assignments and their literacy experiences during the processes of searching a post-MBA position.

This chapter will show that the Israeli MBA business student is an idiosyncratic case as far as literacy concerns. The interview and the document analyses from this specific sample shows that the participants are driven by job seeking and therefore invests more time in literacy activities that relate to this practice in comparison to the literacy practices that relate to formal academic education. The way these specific students experience the program is a function of the interaction between the Israeli culture and the norms and values of the new setting.

However, before looking at the actual literacy experiences, it is essential to apprehend the driving forces that led the respondents to pursue an international graduate business degree. Understanding these motivations will shed light on the way students experience the literacy in this context.

### Why an International MBA Degree?

I began each interview by asking the respondent to briefly tell me his study abroad story and describe for me how they ended up here, what jobs they held in Israel, and what academic programs they graduated from. Despite the fact that the stories had some variations, the prevalent motivation that runs through most of the narratives is the dream.

MBA has always been in the back of my mind. I remember that when I met my wife, the first thing I told her was “let’s not waste time”. I am going for an MBA abroad, and if you want to be with me, you will have to relocate to the States. Reuben

I have always known that I would get an MBA sometime in the near future. I have always wanted to do this, and when the opportunity opened up for me, I went for it all the way power. Although I wasn’t accepted the first time I applied, I kept trying until I got in. Zebulun

The decision to get an MBA, for most of the respondents, has been made a long time ago. Regardless of the different motivations that led them to take this step, the question that came to my mind while we were discussing this was: so ‘why in the U.S? Many of the respondents expressed the opinion that getting an MBA in Israel is not as valuable as getting it from a North American institution. Judah spoke for several others about the fact that Israeli business schools are not among the leading institutions in the field.

I have always wanted to do study abroad. Now, a B.A has no added value if you do it abroad. But when you are talking about an MBA... its different because the business schools in Israel are not recognized, they are not even in the top 100. MBA is a classic degree and it fits my personality. I like to know a lot of main ideas about a lot of things. I don't like to dig into a specific topic. There are thousands of schools who give you an MBA, and they all teach you concepts of marketing and finance, and strategy etc. the added value is the school as a brand and its alumni network

This is not necessarily true and depends on your goals. It is very likely that an Israeli MBA won't get you the desired position at an international company since the business schools in Israel are not among the first 100 elite universities in the world. In a report of the best 400 universities in the world published Feb 25 in [www.usnews.com](http://www.usnews.com) the Hebrew University's global rank was 102, Tel Aviv University's ranked 114 and the Technion reached the 132th place. However, one already has a position in Israel, and they'd like to enrich their theoretical background and practical skills in business administration, getting an MBA at Tel Aviv University or the Hebrew University which are two premium universities in Israel, should suffice. It is noteworthy that enrolling in an MBA program in Israel is almost like taking a second job. Night classes are offered and most don't quit their job and attend the program full time, but rather add it to their daily lives.

A closer examination of the above response reveals that as in many other study abroad stories, students do not disclose the fact that his true motivation is living and working in the States. ' The United States of America is known to be the place where dreams come true, at list from the point of view of many Israelis. In Israel, many consider the U.S as the country that offers the best life quality, and the most freedom, hence,

getting an education there is probably the simplest and most reputable way of being a part of the place and the great dream associated with it.

When evaluating the students' motivation by their real goal, getting an MBA abroad can be considered a fair view. A business professor also confirms that he always advises Israeli students that they should only invest in an MBA in the US only, if they want to stay and work in the United States. Getting an MBA in the States, he explains, and going back home is not a great investment.

Being vague about their motivation, which is living and working in the United States, is understandable, in view of the unpatriotic many way native Israelis view people who leave Israel. As Friedberg and Kfir (2008) state: "The very act of emigration represents the antithesis of the idea which is at the heart of Zionist ideology – namely that the Jewish national renaissance depends on the settlement of the land of Israel (836). Based on this, to say that one leaves Israel because they don't want to live in Israel anymore is less palatable than saying that it's for educational purposes and that it's permanent. From my personal experience and the business professor's, who reviewed the data, it was somewhat surprising that no one said that they got tired of living in Israel and needed a few years break. Getting away from the Israeli stressful environment is often a significant factor in the decision to go and study abroad.

As someone who was born and raised Israel, the intensity of life may have played a role in the subjects' decision to study abroad. I know it did for my family when we decided to leave Israel and pursue graduate education abroad. That is because life in Israel is tough. If you listen to the news on the radio, it's all murder, rape and private tragedies from start to finish. If that's not enough, then there's the Israeli Palestinian

conflict which produces endless media events and crises. This political reality is also connected to the fact that in Israel men have to serve in the army reserve a number of days every year, and that's on top of the mandatory three full service years between the ages of 18 and 21. For example, during the time the participants started preparing the application, taking tests and researching study abroad opportunities, a public opinion survey conducted by the The Guttman Center (Who wants to stay in Israel, 2007) in which numerous questions were posed concerning the desire to remain in Israel revealed that immediately following the Second Lebanon War in the summer of 2006, there was a dramatic decrease in the percentage of young Israelis who wished to remain in Israel.

The fact that none of the participants complained about how hard life in Israel in terms of finding employment is surprising and expected at the same time. In the online version of the widely read Hebrew newspaper "Yedioth Ahronoth", it was recently reported that there has been a considerable increase in the number of educated people who are emigrating from Israel to complete studies and work on their specialism overseas. This is a well-known phenomenon that the Israeli government is trying to address, and recently, a national plan aimed at curbing the brain drain problem afflicting Israel and attracting expatriates from the academic world back to the country was approved (Sofer, 2010).

Also, it's strange that no one mentioned the legal issue of having a visa to stay in the United States. An MBA in the US is a legal way to enter the country and then stay and work on a student visa for another two years or so. The business professor who verified the analysis adds that after the two years, most get a legal working visa. It should be noted, that it's almost impossible to fulfill the dream of moving into the US otherwise.



It is known to everybody that leaving Israel as an international student is one of the few ways to enter the target country legally, so people do it, but they don't talk about it.

Now, unlike M.A or M.S as well as other graduate programs that aim at broadening the student knowledge of a certain field of study, MBA is more of a professional degree with a goal of admitting practicing professionals and, in a two-year program, enhance their general skills in business and improve their skill set when they return to the marketplace. Since, the objective of an MBA program is making you a better practitioner, applicants have to work in an organization setting prior to enrolling in the program to fully comprehend and appreciate the full potential of MBA.

This is officially evidenced in the goals of MBA education, as presented in <http://www.hbs.edu/mba/hbsadvantage/>. According to the Harvard Business School webpage, MBA is an intense period of personal and professional transformation that prepares the student for leadership challenges in the world. The goal of MBA is to prepare the manager to make a decision that will lead to a change in the world. For that reason, the MBA is crafted to help the student develop a capacity for analysis, assessment, judgment, and action in a complex and changing environment. At its core, the MBA experience is enriched with school-based events such as club events, student organizations, guest speakers, seminars, sports, conferences, and more, which is aimed at encouraging collaboration enriched by diverse perspectives for a richer learning experience, and a network of support.

The basic assumption is that MBA from a top ten institution appeals to employers; it is a boost for your career prospects. As a general rule, if you are accepted to one of the most selective and prestigious graduate schools in the U.S, you shouldn't let

costs stop you. The assumption is that your degree from any top school will make you a strong candidate no matter where you live after graduation. This rule is true in the United States, though, not in Israel. For example, top business programs such as Harvard, Stanford, or Wharton (PA) are the iconic business schools. A direct result of this status is that a top business school affiliation is immensely valuable, and as a result its grads have better chances of getting jobs than their counterparts' at universities which are ranked lower. At least that was the case up until not too long ago. However, because of economic slowdowns, graduates aren't getting jobs as quickly as in the past.

That's why; the interviewees discuss going to business school as a business decision. If you listen to the way participants portray this decision, you understand that this may very well be the first life-changing business decision an international student makes abroad. From the respondent's point of view, it is considered an investment, and because there's always the question: "Is a business school degree worth the considerable investment?" the only way to judge it is using criterion of the payback. Since historically, 90%-95% of top ten business program graduates had a job offer on graduation day, and because the average grad almost tripled their pre MBA salary five years out of school, getting an MBA from a prestigious institution was considered by the respondents, until not too long ago, a good deal.

Student's beliefs that business education is known to be translated back into dollars and cents were widely reflected in the interviews. However, this belief is replicated in a range of responses, some are more moderate than others. Reuben's radical response to my question regarding his motivation for the study abroad generated the following text:

I will tell you how I see business schools. Business schools are top prestige organizations that provide employment services to companies like Goldman Sachs, Lehman Brothers etc. They do the filtering, they choose the top and then they invite the companies and tell them “Come on guys, come and choose from the best”. This is a 90% employment services company and 10% academic institution. It’s not like I don’t study, I do, but the recruiting takes up so much of my time. That’s my focus. Reuben

This is clearly an extravagant overstatement and underscores the attitudinal difference between the American and the Israeli students in the program. As an insider to this context, the business professor who reviewed the chapter explicated that while most American students view MBA mostly as an educational experience and, more importantly, as an important place to start their networking connections, the study group puts greater emphasis on the outcome of MBA – a good paying job. The professor concurs that Reuben is right in protesting that recruiting takes a disproportionate amount of time. However, most students would assign more than 10% to the academic portion of the experience.

According to the data presented, most students underestimate the academic experience. However, what the majority of students may not consider the contribution of the school work to their success in finding a job. Passing a required course may lead to a false perception that the student is ready for his post-graduation professional experience. This view may resonate the scrutiny that the study group is practical and frequently doesn’t appreciate an experience unless it has a clear and defined goal. This suggestion is substantiated in Sela-Sheffy’s (2004) research about the Israelis’ self-perception of their culture, where the researcher points out in the analysis section that the study group is motivated by materialism, greediness, competitiveness and excessiveness.

While many of the interviewees describe the decision to go to business school as an investment, some stress the experience and the exposure to people from other cultures.

Reuben, for example, explained that the MBA is his second study abroad experience.

This is not my first study abroad experience. After the army, I wanted to get a degree in law. I had two cousins and a friend who graduated from the University of Sheffield in England, and they told me about the program. I wanted to be exposed to something beyond Israelis. Reuben

Evidently, going through the process of applying to business school, students have probably come across this idea in each business school webpage they surfed in, and every convention they attended. This is one of the selling points of an MBA program, expounds the business professor who remarked on the above piece of data. It is the characteristic that makes it attractive to students, and it is stressed in advertising and marketing of MBA programs. The global angle of the MBA program and the exposure to people from other cultures and their views on business is constantly emphasized and is drilled into people's minds since the very early stages of the application process.

Shimeon provides an interesting perspective and describes his motivation quite differently. When we talked about his motivation, unlike some other students who viewed this journey as an investment, Shimeon suggested a more internal motivation.

Before I came here I used to work as a lawyer. There were good days and bad days, but after a while I realized that it doesn't make any sense that I will pass my life in Tel Aviv and have the most conventional life. I felt that the office is too small for me, and that my short life are unfulfilling, so I went to my boss and I told her that I can't take it anymore. She was very receptive and said she understood how I felt, and then I left. I wasn't married and didn't have any children, so I said to myself that I will be unemployed until I find my way. I believed that every person owes himself an odyssey, and it may mean different things to different people, but a person needs to extend himself and go beyond the known and the familiar. Shimeon

From the standpoint of a business professor, the above quote is a good general depiction of international students' view. They are all highly motivated, he exclaims, sometimes more than the American students, and appreciative of the global experience. One of the possible reasons for this positive attitude is that they are investing a huge sum of money, and had to leave a job, family, friends behind. In addition, in the US they are 'disconnected' from their previous life and immerse themselves in the MBA experience.

The use of the term odyssey is noteworthy here as this refers to the title of probably one of the best known Greek epics. This epic describes the ten-year travels of Odysseus as he tries to return home after the Trojan War and reassert his place as the rightful king of Ithaca. On each land he arrives at on this long journey, Odysseus encounters challenges, and as he successfully handles them he learns about himself. When he is offered immortal life, he chooses to remain human and go home to his aging wife. This metaphor symbolizes the inner struggle within Shimeon, who on the one hand feels like a courageous hero, and on the other hand, the misplaced wanderer who is waiting to go home.

A recurring pattern among a number of respondents was that they believed that international education, particularly an MBA gives you a global perspective and understanding of other cultures. Many of the students commented on the 'edge' that people who experienced other cultures have. Shimeon also alluded to this aspect of study abroad when he said:

I always believed that those who spent a few years abroad have some added value, they have a different perspective, they know how things are done in other places and they know how to handle people from different culture I wanted that. You see, you sit in a room with a group of people from all over the world and they don't understand the same things, and they hold different beliefs and that's when you discover that there are

ideas you didn't think about, and you understand that the Israelis are the only smart people in the group. Growing up in the Israel, you are being taught that we are the chosen people and that we are the smartest and when you get here you understand that this is not the case that there are other chosen ones. Shimeon

Although this is a representative general view among international students, the Israeliness of the students is reflected here as well. This study group, similarly to other national groups, can be very much ethnocentric. From a young age they are led believe that Jews are the chosen people, and that they are the best and the smartest. The origin of this response may be the biblical concept that views the Jewish people as the 'chosen people' or as the bible says "Am segula, kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus, 19:6). The experience of studying abroad shapes their understanding regarding their supposed intellectual superiority, forcing them to contextualize their Israeliness within the global human thought.

In addition to the motivations already identified, a common motivation among respondents was improving their English language skills through studying and living in the country where the language is spoken. Many respondents believed that international education would take their English to the next level because it will provide an opportunity for natural acquisition. Reuben, for whom this is a second study abroad experience, admits:

Although I have good English, I want to improve my proficiency. I have good English and not because of school. I just have a knack for English. I don't know about other languages, because I haven't tried any other languages. Reuben

As it will be shows further in the analysis, there's discrepancy between how students view their English and the motivation reflected above. This inconsistency exposes that students' perception of their English proficiency is not very solid. Even

though they feel that that it is adequate, they would like it to be better, and they see international education as a way to achieve this goal which is tightly connected to their desire to have an American dimension in their identity.

#### Literacy Experiences before the MBA Program

##### *Memoires from EFL Context in Israel*

A lot of students believe that they have good English. When I asked them about challenges with English, all of them said in one way or another “I have good English. I am really not a good example for your research”. Lea’s response to my question reveals that the underlying assumption is that one has to have good English to embark on a study abroad experience, and that if one doesn’t have good English they are definitely in the wrong place.

I am not a representative example because I grew up in Ra’anana, and 70% of my classmates were English speakers. And because the advanced English was so challenging, most of the English speakers sat in a regular class. So, all through high school I sat in class with so many English speakers and that affected my language skills. Lea

The analysis of the responses about previous experiences with English study in Israel shows that respondents feel that their good English is not the product of mainstream English instruction in Israel. It was interesting to find that most of memories from English classes include grammar instruction and drilling, though not surprising. Terms like ‘present simple’ and ‘present progressive’ were very common when I asked about the main activity in English classes.

Very few students mentioned communicative activities or class discussion. Clearly, in regards to memoires from English classes, the students had a perception that did not match their performance. The notion that English was technical and boring

exposes the respondents' subjective point of view that learning a language means mastering grammar rules. I suppose this misconception about the focus on grammar instruction is perpetuated in part by a traditional and perhaps common way of thinking about language learning in Israel. Early discussion of foreign language pedagogies theorized that to learn a foreign language requires mastering a set of rule and practicing written exercises. This notion has been dispelled by changes in language education methodologies showing that grammar instruction has to be offered in context and with the intention of consciousness-raising. However, popularly held beliefs are slowly influence by the advancement of the public knowledge.

As someone who acquired English as a foreign language in the Israeli educational system, and as a former high-school EFL teacher in Israel, I can say that this is a false perception. It may be that there was more focus on forms, but to say that the way English is taught in Israel is through grammar drilling, or to use “present simple” or “present progressive” as representations of what English classes were all about is a very extreme opinion which is simply false. During the years the respondents completed their secondary schooling, the high school EFL curriculum included discussions and analysis of fiction by James Joyce, Bernard Malamud, W. Somerset Maugham. It utilized a play by Arthur Miller and poems by Frost that in one way or another reflected the cultures of the English speaking world.

This is evidenced in the introductory section to the national EFL curriculum in Israel written by the members of the curriculum writing committee (Professor Bernad Spolsky, Ms. Dvora Ben Meir, Dr. Ofra Inbar, Dr. Lily Orland, and Ms. Judy Steiner).

In this curriculum, language learning and teaching are divided into four domains: social interaction; access to information; presentation; and



appreciation of literature and culture, and language. This classification is different from the one based on the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing that has for many years been used to organize foreign language learning in Israel. Changing from skills to domains allows us to characterize more clearly the goals and levels that we believe have become the basis of the curriculum for English teaching in Israel. The four domains are viewed as a tapestry of interwoven areas of language learning; that is, the four domains are interrelated and do not operate in isolation. ([http://www.education.gov.il/tochniyot\\_limudim/engl1.htm](http://www.education.gov.il/tochniyot_limudim/engl1.htm))

In comparison to formal EFL classes in high school, previous experiences outside of the formal English classes were associated by students with positive feelings. It is possible that students are romanticizing extra-curricular EFL experiences because these were free of the constraints of curriculum. From the point of view of the students when formality is removed, that's when they felt English classes are interactive and fun.

Benjamin describes EFL enrichment classes as:

It was a small group in the teacher's home, and there were lots of books and tapes and the atmosphere was fun. The entire lesson was in English and even our names were in English. That's what gave my English the main boost and the T.V has helped me too. This was very different from my formal English lesson in school which was boring. There were 40 students in the class and very little individual attention. I remember a lot of the present simple present progressive stuff and closes. Benjamin

Some students attribute their advanced proficiency to the fact that they started learning the language in informal programs earlier than their peers. Although English in Israel is compulsory from 4<sup>th</sup> grade, respondents falsely believe that when it comes to learning foreign languages, the earlier you start, the better you are off. From my experience, this is a direct result of the growing advertisements of private English programs which brainwash young parents (and frustrated EFL learners) and the fact that in many schools parents pay extra so that English is included in the first grade curriculum.

What the respondents neglect to consider is that early English study has to be done more naturally through songs and games rather than formal instruction of linguistic structure and not before the first language is established. This is a misconception that is often heard in Israel. Others provide another explanation by saying that some of their “success story” as Speakers of English as a foreign language is a function of an aptitude for language learning one may or may not have. It may be that when people think about a difficult skill to master, it is more convenient to convince themselves that they either have it or not. Frank alluded to this in part. Benjamin and Judah described the ‘added value’ of early acquisition of English when they explained why they are proficient English speakers.

I was lucky. My parents sent me to private lessons when I was a first grader, and when you start learning a language early, you are better off.  
Benjamin

I started learning English two years before everybody else, so it gave me a lot of self confidence. Judah

This perception of gap between public schooling and private tutoring also reflects the way the Israeli education system is viewed by the public in Israel, mostly the parents. The educational system in Israel is often criticized as it faces a number of challenges, mainly in terms of the quality of primary and secondary education, equity of educational opportunities for Jewish and non-Jewish citizens, and the availability of necessary resources for improvement.

In Israel, teachers in general are not perceived as quality educators. In Reichel and Arnon’s (2009) article titled “A Multicultural View of the Good Teacher in Israel”, the researchers state that teachers in Israel do not enjoy a positive image in the Jewish-Israeli

community because they are not seen as social-cultural leaders. This is because of “the low status of the Israeli teacher in society as well as an inferior position on the professional ladder of prestige expressed in teachers’ low salary in an era when salary is a criterion for success” (19). Because the low status of teachers is reflected in the compensation they receive for their hard work, the public thinks that those who choose to study education and become teachers do it because they don’t have any other choice. All this has created a negative perception towards public education and this is the basis for the students’ perception that their English is the product of classroom instruction in the formal classroom.

And indeed few students do mention the communicative language teaching that was utilized in the schools. Yet, it exposes although there were opportunities for communication in English. The problem was that there were psychological barriers that prevented them from taking up on this on these opportunities – more fluent English speakers. Judah’s response exemplifies this idea:

I remember a lot of grammar. I think it’s good that they teach English well in Israel. I remember that the teacher always tried to encourage us to talk and we would discuss things in English. The problem was that in each class there was this student whose parents relocated from an English-speaking country, and he would take over the discussion. Eventually, those who talked were students who spoke fluent English, and those who didn’t, didn’t get enough practice. Judah

Despite the different reasons respondents provide for the positively perceived English skills, one thing that helps the study group is that in Israel English is heard a lot. TV shows do not have subtitles and voice dubbing like in most Europe. That helps the study group learn the spoken American English while watching TV.

However, when I asked the respondents about writing during English classes, the recurring theme heard in the interviews was that because English classes mainly focused on grammar and reading, writing and speaking were very much neglected practices.

Judah's response to my question modeled other comments:

I can't remember any formal instruction of writing. I used to work with text and I wrote texts because I was a psychometric test instructor so we wrote texts for our books. What I had in mind about writing was that you shouldn't let your reader lose interest, if you are writing your arguments and you start adding stories you make your reader not understand what you are trying to say. You can't let that happen. Judah

Simeon is an example of a student who has always been extra motivated to learn the language, especially the skill of writing. When I asked him about his past memories from English classes, he voluntarily offered information regarding his attitudes toward the English language and how it has always been a skill he enjoyed developing.

For me English has always been a hobby. I loved English; I read a lot in English regardless of what I was assigned to read in school. I loved books and poems and I took the language rather serious. I remember that my friends used to laugh at me and never quite understood why I was so excited to speak English and use the language. In high school I had a teacher that nurtured this. She noticed that this is something like, so she told me that that's what I'll do. So I started writing in English, and she gave me feedback and I learned a lot from her comments. I loved it when could say "I understand" in 6 different ways. I thought it was so cool. And I don't know why but I am a better writer in English than I am in Hebrew. Shimeon

By regardless of the context in which the interviewees acquired their English, the key questions that need to be addressed are: what is that English that the respondents remember learning? Is it sufficient? What does it mean to know English? Based on the external reader's comments and from my experience as a second language learner in Israel, there is a big difference between knowing English and knowing how to speak

“American”. As Israelis abroad, both the business professor and I feel that the study group comes to the United States knowing grammar and thinking that they know how to speak the language. But as non native speakers of English they quickly find out that living in the US required a different kind of language skills that the one they acquired in Israel. It involves speaking English in a way that American understand it, which is quite different than speaking in a way that your English teacher understands. It involves understanding people from all different walks of life, different accents, slang, expressions, abbreviations, etc. Mainly it involves understanding the culture and then tailoring your English to it.

The direct result of this gap between what it means to speak English in an Israeli EFL classroom, and what it means to speak English with an American in the United States, is cultural clashes. Most of us translate what we want to say (at least in the first few years) from Hebrew to English, says remarks the professor, and then wonder why Americans don’t understand us.

### *The Struggles and Challenges of Writing Application Essays*

To put the discussion in perspective, I shall first describe the stated role of application essays in U.S academy for undergraduate studies and MBA. Admission essays are widely used in North American higher education institutions as tools to assess the extent to which the applicant is a good fit for the program.

Admissions committees put the most weight on your high school grades and your test scores. However, selective colleges receive applications from many worthy students with similar scores and grades—too many to admit. So they use your essay (along with your letters of recommendation and extracurricular activities) to find out what sets you apart from the other talented candidates.

(<http://www.princetonreview.com/college/essay.aspx>)

As stated above, to get accepted to an undergraduate program in the U.S, in addition to psychometric test scores and official transcripts from high school, application essays are required for admission officials to evaluate the uniqueness of the candidate and his potential contribution to the program.

For MBA, the objective of the admission essay is slightly different and aims at assessing business talent through a set of defined criteria, also known as ‘admission drivers’, as stated in the Harvard business school webpage:

Instead of looking for an "ideal" candidate, HBS invites MBA applicants who exhibit a variety of skills, accomplishments, and temperaments. The true common characteristics of our students are demonstrated leadership potential and a capacity to thrive in a rigorous academic environment. Indeed, to create the most stimulating environment possible for all students, we consciously select a diverse student body, one that not only reflects a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and nationalities, but a wide range of personal interests and professional ambitions.  
(<http://www.hbs.edu/mba/admissions/admissioncriteria.html>)

Both for undergraduate studies and MBA, there are hundreds of possible topics that applicants can be asked to write an essay on. Some of the common ones are: describe your strengths and weaknesses, your career goals, events that shaped your personality, past academic experiences, reasons for choosing a field of study or a specific institution.

Going back to students’ experiences of writing application essays, the most frequent theme that emerged from the data is that writing the application essays was a very challenging process. Throughout the interviews it was clear that respondents view the essays part of the application as a mountain they had to climb. That writing is the most difficult language skill to master, is a known fact. Yet, at the same time, the use of the adjective ‘Sisyphean’ in one of the responses illustrates the notion that reaching the top of that mountain is almost impossible. Though the application phase had occurred

over 18 months ago, many of the respondents still had very strong and vivid memories of the process of writing admission essays, and assured me that they had never experienced such an application process in the history of their academic career.

It's a very Sisyphean process, and you don't know what to tell people because you are not sure you are going abroad. Issachar

When you attend all the MBA forums and events and you see all the sample essays, you say to yourself, I'll never write like this. Levi

Writing the essays was a very challenging task. You are limited to 400-600 words and you have very general questions that you can take to different directions. Gad

Shimeon said it was so frustrating to look at that mountain in the beginning of the process and that he almost gave up trying. The way he remembers this experience is that if it hadn't for his friend who convinced him that it was doable, he would have abandoned the idea. When I asked Shimeon how he overcame the writing anxiety, he disclosed that his friend motivated him to keep going.

In the beginning I didn't think it was possible, and I remember talking about it with my friend that has this unique trait. He has the ability to make things look simple. When I told him that I saw the prompt for the essay on leadership, his response was: "leadership schmidership, just make up a story and don't make a big deal out of it (Adding schm to the second word in a repetition indicates contempt or dismissiveness. In other words, "leadership isn't important! Who cares about leadership?"). That's what motivated me. It made me feel I could do it. So I took the GMAT and I decided to take it step by step, but back then I didn't realize that once you're on this train, the next stop is the specific state where the school you got accepted to is. Shimeon

Although the expectation was that this group of talented people whose self evaluation of their English capacity is high, the respondents felt that this section of the application process was a barrier. This perception is probably linked to the fact that while American middle and high schools focus a lot on writing skills, in Israel it is a

neglected skill. Not only is the practice of writing drilled into the American student from a young age, but as mentioned earlier in the chapter, they also had to write admission essays as part of the undergraduate college application.

Specifically, through the participants' responses it is clear that the widespread belief is that as second language users they will never write as they would have liked to. The point of comparison is the American student whose level of writing proficiency is incomparable to theirs. The implication of the perceived difficulty was that regardless of the source of this barrier that can be academic, psychological or emotional, in order to overcome it, support is needed, whether from a peer or a professional.

Although the students are focused on the difficulties of second language writing, they are mistaken in emphasizing this as the main obstacle to an impressive MBA application. Again, writing in English may not be the biggest challenge in writing the essay. Rather, the difficulty is to figure out what is required and what kind of an essay would stand out and get you in is much greater.

While the difficulty of writing in English is understood, I believe that what the students are really reporting as challenging is the expressing of ideas in a coherent and efficient way and according to the conventions of academic writing. They would have similar difficulties if they had to write it in Hebrew due to their lack of training in this skill. When Levi and I spoke about the origin of the writing difficulty he claimed that the challenge lies in the way the message is sent and not the content.

It was very difficult for me to write the essays. It took me time to get in the mindset of evidence based arguments. You are competing against Americans who always exaggerate. Just like a recommendation letter... everybody who receives it automatically discounts 20%. Levi



A number of respondents doubted the necessity of the essays in the application for business school claiming it is not as valid and reliable as the GMAT. They were very critical of the essays topics and the strict guidelines. In reflecting on why this may have come up in the responses, I concluded that the foundation for the view is the misconception that for many people in Israel, knowing math means you are smart and the way to assess intelligence is standardized testing. Such a belief is also related to the idea that the humanities are not worth to invest in as they do not offer sufficient employment opportunities or economic benefits. For example, an examination of the undergraduate application for admission information on the Tel Aviv University webpage specifies that to earn a double-major degree in the humanities, a minimum score of 450 (out of 800) on the psychometric exam is required. To compare, a minimum score of 600 is required for applying to the law school.

This perception is still very common in Israel where the humanities are undervalued in both the community and schools. Unfortunately, this generation was not educated with the notion that the integration between the arts and the other sciences creates a well-rounded person. Hence, the focus on exact science and practical programs of study lead to unconscious bias against the majoring in the humanities and developing literacy.

Furthermore, it seems that the study group tends to be very factual and succinct in their writing for they are caught in the exact sciences assessment procedures they were trained to complete. While in math, economics or computer science the outcome of the studies are easily measured, in humanities education, it is underrated and considered to be an inexact way to measure the learning outcomes because differing judgments intervene.

So, while in American culture, the application essay is a central device for the assessment of student's research and writing skills as well as his/her critical approach, in Israeli academia the ability to express thoughts in writing is not assessed in the application process.

Because the practice of writing application essays is foreign to the study group, they don't see it as a tool they can leverage to establish themselves as well-rounded people a diversity of interests and knowledge bases. As someone who got a bachelor degree and a master's in an elite academic institution in Israel, I don't recall any requirement to include an essay to a college application or any other sample of writing for that matter. Perhaps that's the reason Zebulun is so passionate about his refusal to accept application essays as useful tools to assess candidates' suitability. In his opinion, standardized tests such as the GMAT and the interview do the job better.

The essays shouldn't be part of the application to business school. It shouldn't be an indicator whether or not someone will get accepted to an MBA program. There's the GMAT and the interview but writing the essays is ... I don't see its benefit. People make up fictitious stories to stand out. Zebulun

There is probably no other statement which is a better indication that the respondent doesn't understand the objective of application essays. Zebulun's comment is a critique of the use of stories as a way of making meaning and illustrating arguments. Analysis of the interviewee's responses exposes that they don't value personal writing as a way of organizing and sharing individual experience. According to respondents, this genre of personal writing suffers from lack of credibility as they are made up to fit false traits and spurious talents that admission officers look for when reading application essays to determine whether or not to accept an applicant.

Conversely, I was particularly delighted to hear Shimeon's perspective when I asked him about the writing part of the application process, mainly because so many of the respondents interviewed had very different perceptions of the application process, particularly the essays part. As opposed to the widespread opinion that writing the essays was an aggravating burden, Shimeon who had always enjoyed writing, characterized the process and its outcomes as creative, enjoyable and even empowering.

I enjoyed the process very much. I am a writer. That my thing. I love the idea that I need to create a character that I need to get across through the essays. I asked for feedback from friends and family and then someone who speaks English as a first language went over it, but generally, the essays reflected who I am, they were very authentic in saying: that's who I am, if you want me – good, if you don't – I am moving on. Shimeon

#### *The Nature of Support Needed for Writing Application Essays*

A central theme expressed throughout the interviews was that writing is a creative process, and it is something you either have or don't have. This perception reflected in the interview data completely ignores the fundamental role of composition instruction and the change it brings about in the learner's analytical skills. It also ignores the rich repertoire of literacy experiences the respondents were engaged in during their long years of schooling that certainly play a large part in the individual's writing ability. And yet when I asked Zebulun about the experience of writing the application essay he said:

I am bad at writing. I only know how to be concise, short and to the point. I can't spread a message of one sentence over 2 pages. For example, if I need to say that I went to work, than that's exactly how I'd say it. I wouldn't say "I walked down the street, it was a beautiful day, I took the bus downtown, enjoying the smell of spring flowers, a beautiful woman sat beside me and so on and so forth. Zebulun

To make up for the perceived lack of knowledge, which is more a lack of practice and insecurity, the respondents felt they needed professional help and guidance through

the process. That's when the professional editor comes into the picture. And because of their insecurities, they were willing to invest significant amounts of money to get this support. This insecurity resulted in excessive use of professional support every step of the way. The followings quotes provide a testimony to the nature of support Judah and Benjamin got to complete the essays.

I got the prompts and I thought of relevant stories. I then met my editor who interviewed me and wrote down everything in points. She then assessed if there was enough "meat" for each essay and if the stories were interesting enough. She knows well the different programs and she knows well if a specific university look for more analytical people or more team leading people, and she helped me wrote the essays based on that knowledge. The thing is that only time will tell how helpful your editor has been. If you're in that he must have done a good job. Judah

The process starts in a conversation between the applicant and the editor. You are being interviewed about what you've done... it's a brainstorming session and then you are sent home to create a list of bullets and for each bullet you have to write the context, the action and the results. After you have a draft the editor shrinks it from a 1000 word essay to a 500 word essay. Benjamin

My basic English was good but needed the help of the editor mainly for my peace of mind. I don't know if I could a better job without him. I am not a person who writes and it definitely helped me produce better essays. The people I am surrounded by don't have experience in reading or writing in English, so I don't think their comment would be helpful; but I don't know if using the editor was a must. Judah

The central question now being asked is: What is the nature of the help sought by the participants of this study? The role professional editors played in the process of completing application essays can be characterized in three ways: language editing, cultural mediating, and marketing communication.

At a first glance, because of the discrepancy between the way respondents perceived their English writing skills what they really were, and because of their

insecurities as near-native speakers of English, the common perception among participants was that they thought it was crucial that their essays were grammatically correct, free of spelling errors or flaws in sentence structure. This opinion was dominated by the majority of the students. For instance,

What the editor did for me was mostly changing the sentence structure and the grammar because my English didn't sound good. Some other comments were: "this part shouldn't be here, move it up" or "expand on that". Zebulun

Although, today spelling is not an issue and grammar is something you can overcome using computer software, and there's Morfix and Babylon to help you avoid being repetitive in the vocabulary you use, I wanted a native speaker to go over the English. Benjamin

It is not uncommon to think that as speakers of English as a second language, writers will seek professional help – after all an error-free neat-looking application essay will serve them well, mainly because they are competing against native speakers. However, what respondents didn't take into consideration in the beginning of this process is that writing grammatically correct compositions is just one piece of the puzzle. An equally important issue is the effect of the essay on the reader.

And indeed, digging deeper into these responses, I found that the hired editors did a lot more than just correcting spelling, grammar or sentence structure mistakes. The truth of the matter is that the interaction with professional editors introduced the respondents to an additional service they were in need of. The guided writing process raised the respondents' awareness to cultural differences. Hence, respondents who perceived editors as closer to the target culture than they were convinced of the need to pay for cultural mediating that facilitated the communication and mutual understanding

between the applicants and admission officials that clearly have different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Being acquainted with the international student community in his program, the business professor shares that this is a point that is usually underappreciated by the study group relative to other international students. These respondents won't go out of their way to make people feel good. Rather, they think that they'll manage and that people from other cultural will adjust to the Israeli way of doing things. Being incredibly presumptuous of the study group to think that people of the host culture will adjust to its cultural norms, it could be that because the editors were part of the process and their high motivation to embark on this journey, the respondents made an exception. They understood that to be admitted to the program they had to make sure they deliver culturally sensitive messages. Judah, Levi and Benjamin alluded to that when they commented on the process.

The way the essays should be written is so American. It's very different from how we write. You are required to take a nice story and spread it over 2 pages and show how you demonstrated leadership. So Israelis have the army and we are not used to boast about commanding a team of 10 soldiers, but that's exactly what you have to do if you want to stand out. The Americans are used to this and you know what they say: When in Rome do as the Romans do. Judah

Some people want to include information about experiences in the army, but here it's less normative. They look at military experience different than we do. They don't want to hear that you've killed people or that you were wounded in the battlefield. Benjamin

It was very difficult for me to write the essays. It took me time to get in the mindset of evidence based arguments. Levi

It is surprising that all the students mentioned the cultural interpretation of written text, but none of them attributed the same characteristic to spoken language, since the

same challenges exists in oral discourse. This can be explained by the assumption that respondents are recreating what the editors told them without taking into consideration that the same adaptation is needed when they communicate, either in writing or orally, with any person whose culture is different than theirs.

Although respondents referenced the belief that the application essay had to be written in ‘the American way’, a closer look into the responses reveals that there was a discrepancy between what the students perceive as their difficulty in writing application essays and the true hardness they had to overcome, which is the difference between the genres that they were trained to produce during their bachelor degrees and the application essays. This difference was understandably more academic than cultural. Because most of the respondents had backgrounds in engineering, biotechnology, computer science, mathematics, they were not used to writing papers that required developing arguments and supporting them.

Respondents did not take into account that no matter what the writing project is, a writer should always target an audience in his/her writing assignment. In addition to knowing the audience, a writer needs to consider how the audience will use the information. Audience analysis is crucial especially in persuasive writing as it affects decisions regarding what information to include or exclude, what kinds and levels of details to include, what background information to provide, how to organize the information, what words, tone, and style to use to communicate with your audience.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of students in this study used professional writers that had the audience or an intended reader profile in mind. As the most difficult situation to face as a writer is writing for unknown audience, once the

respondents were convinced that this lack of knowledge has to be made up for, they were willing to spend whatever time or resources they were charged (up to \$170 per hour as specified online) in order to have access to intelligence about the audience's background.

In light of the fact that many American students also use editors to make sure they hit the right points, as the business professor assumes, it is expected that to compensate for this knowledge gap international students would do the same. The editors, who are in most cases, MBA graduates that MBA applicants look up to, are believed to have insider's information about each school and the admissions drivers the school is looking for in the essays. Hence, although the respondents' motivation in seeking editing services was improving the language and mechanics of essays, under this framework the editor also functioned as a marketing communication expert by making the essay fit the school. Levi's responses specify the criteria by which editors chose what content is put or left out.

In each application to any business school students have to include flawless essays with no spelling mistakes or grammar mistakes. So most students use editing services, but the editors also take the essays to the next level by making sure that they reflect the desirable admission drivers. For example: when I worked on my essays I wrote that one of my goals is to improve my English, and my editor thought it was a bad idea, saying that it's not unique and that everybody writes that. Besides it doesn't make any sense to write this when your essay is written in perfect polished English. Levi

These editors take a story about someone who played soccer on a beach in Thailand, and made it such a leadership success story that he is for sure the next CEO of IBM. These are people with background in theatre with highly advanced verbal skills and they are creating "something" out of "nothing", and they not only deal with the content, they also deal with the way to present it. Levi

Students reported that the writing process started with the editor interviewing the applicant. Responses were then analyzed and a specific customized communication was



planned for the applicant. This procedure that was occasionally uttered by participants exposes is a testimony to their writing insecurities. Thinking “I don’t really have anything suitable for this prompt”, the editor helped the applicant find the right contents and forms to convey his messages, communicate with the school, making admission officers understand how the school can benefit from having the student in the program, motivate them to take action and accept him. Essentially, the essay students are asked to produce is a persuasive text that aims at convincing the reader to accept the applicants to the program. Gad, Judah and Levi’s reaction to the topic of editing application essays indicate that while it may sound as an easy task for the American students, it must be pointed out again, that unfortunately, for an Israeli, it’s quite puzzling.

Editors know well the different programs and she knows well if a specific university look for more analytical people or more team leading people, and she helped me write the essays based on that knowledge. The thing is that only time will tell how helpful your editor has been. If you’re in that he must have done a good job. Judah

I went to this professional editor because neither I nor my wife had the business jargon. It is marketing communication... the goal is to sell yourself, so he takes words from finance or strategy like ‘hybridization’ and you use them in your essay. Gad

I think that the way we sell is different from the way the Americans buy. If an Israeli interviews an American who says that he did this and he did that than the interviewer will think he is full of S. We Israelis appreciate humility and our messages are more modest because if you take too much credit than you are thought to be too pretentious. In the States taking credit and exaggerating is common and if you don’t do it you are defeatist. Gad

Prospective students don’t present themselves through in the essays. Even if you did all the research and all the networking, it’s not enough. You need to come with a story that specifies why a specific school is a perfect fit for you in terms of what it does and where it will take you, and you have to drop names of professors... not everybody understands that. Levi

In addition to making sure the writing targets specific audience, the perception of the respondents is that the editor makes sure there is a consistency of messages and that all the essays in each supplication share the same style and tone. To a certain extent, this assumption is correct, given the fact the life stories are used by editors to systematically construct the applicant's identity through the essays. This is reflected in a quote from Benjamin's interview.

What Israelis need help with is making sure that the essay fits the school and that all your essays are in line and that there's a personal style that runs through the papers. They mostly help you tell the important from the secondary. Benjamin

Although I expected this view to be echoed by more participants, only one interviewee verbalized the literacy benefits of the process of writing application and essays made him a better writer, that the comments from the editor actually taught them some principles of academic writing such as constructing a profile of an audience and thinking what information the audience will need to understand. When I asked Judah to describe for me the process of working with the editor on the application essays, he immediately stated:

I learned from my editor that when you write an essay you have to write it as if it's the only essay you write. For example, every time you mention the company you worked for you have to give its description, for example, Microsoft, the leading provider of bla bla bla... so I would write it over and over in each essay because maybe different people read the essays and these are the types of comments I got from my editor and over time I learn to edit my own essays. Judah

For certain, all of the respondents learned from such a guided writing experience even if the benefits are not realized. Perhaps, the recognition of benefits has shown itself in subsequent writing tasks that are probably handled efficiently.

Gad was one of the few respondents who spoke about the writing process in great detail. As the only respondent with academic background in the humanities, specifically in education, he described the cognitive process of planning his application essay. The detailed account is probably trailed back to both the guided writing of the application essays as well as Gad's academic background. Because Gad had previous experiences with evidence-based writing, he didn't need the professional editor until the very end of the process. As opposed to other participants who started the process with the initial interview with the professional editor, Gad had a perspicuous idea of what messages he'd like to get across and how he would achieve the goal.

I looked at the essays very holistically. I planned the set of messages I wanted my reader to receive and that included both my strengths and weaknesses. After mapping all the ideas I wanted to include the essays, I decided how much space to devote to each one. For example, I got a high GMAT score, so I knew I wouldn't use up too many words to stress that I am good at math, that's quite obvious. However, I knew I needed to explain my limited work experience. And what was left to do was to invent stories that will deliver these messages or in other words my characteristics and traits. Gad

I always start with an outline in Hebrew. I have always done the thinking in Hebrew. However, because my English is o.k. I started writing in English instead of drafting in Hebrew and then translating. For each essay I had at least 6 draft and always made sure that I had 20% more words than allowed. The next step was sharing it with my wife who speaks English as a mother's tongue. She gave me feedback, and changed a few things, cut down the words. The final step was sharing it with a professional editor. Gad

Gad's comments illustrate a very systematic writing process, with an evident perception of audience in writing. He is aware of his strengths and weaknesses and utilizes the application essay to stress specific events or occurrences that made him the person he is today while fogging information he doesn't want his reader to focus on. He

is aware of the advantages of getting feedback on your writing and used it for making his essays stronger.

### Literacy Practices during the Program

#### *“You Can’t Fail MBA. It’s Not Academic”*

All of the students interviewed in this study shared the misperception that there are slim chances to fail MBA. Both the first year students and the second year students were very confident that they would pass all the courses even if they didn’t work so hard. In fact, given the grading system in the business school, students had very good reason to believe that they had little to worry about in terms of failing courses. This view was reflected in Zebulun’s comment when he said:

Most Israelis will tell that it’s a very stressful framework, but the stress is not the courses. If you do a good job you’ll get ‘excellent’ or ‘good’, if you do ok you will get ‘good’ or ‘pass’. If you do less than ok you will get ‘low pass’. But you won’t fail. You have to make a real effort to fail a course. Because it’s not like you have a scale of grades that ranges from 0 to 100. ‘s. There are only 4 options, and there are always the overachievers but it isn’t so competitive. Zebulun

This is an accurate description of how grades are given in this program. The following is a typical grading section that can be found in syllabi:

Final grades will approximate the distribution below in accordance with the school’s established grading norms for core classes. This is the maximum allowable for each category.

Excellent 25%

Good 35%

Pass 35%

Low Pass 0-5%

Fail 0-5%

A business professor confirms that while there is some truth to the fact that MBA students rarely fail core courses, it is essential to keep in mind that top business schools

only admit very smart and capable students, so it's not the sample of population that is likely to fail.

Shimeon might have been one of the few students who had a difficulty with this new way of thinking of not having to excel. His description reveals that he learned the hard way the assessment culture or the spirit of evaluation in the American business school. In accordance with the motivation to pursue business education abroad, the perception that was prevalent in the data was that grades are unimportant, yet that they don't reflect success. Success is measure by a different scale – the number of job offers one gets. Shimeon explains this principle:

In the first semester I worked very hard. I sat in the library for hours, but in the second semester I slowed down significantly because I realized that whatever I do I will pass the course because that's the way the system works. Grades are not important and true, it is nice to have high grades but it's much nicer to have a job and low grades. And it's not my cup of tea and it's hard for me to work this way. Shimeon

The business professor verifies that this is a myopic point of view as students who invest more in learning will do better in job interviews and are also likely to get good grades. Yes, grades may not be the more informative signal about students' ability; but a student with a low grade likely spent less time studying and did poorly on class assignments and exams; and is less likely to find a job than a student that studies hard. The perception in these quotes that one can find his dream job without working hard is false.

Perhaps, the perception of respondents about the chances of failing had a great deal to do with their view of the application process. Because getting accepted to one of the top ten business schools in the States was such a long a Sisyphean process, the interviewees think that once one's in accepted they can relax. The use of the Latin

expression ‘via dolorosa’ in Reuben’s text is a metaphor to how hard it had been to fulfill all the requirements of the application, mainly the essays which brought about true grief.

Reuben also describes it as a long stressful process with an unknown ending.

Whoever gets into the MBA program and went through this “via dolorosa” after investing so much in the application and writing the essays, will graduate. Nobody will fail the program unless you deliberately do things that will make you fail, such as not submitting papers. If you hand in a bad assignment, you will get a ‘low pass’, and no professor will flunk you.  
Reuben

This is an incorrect response and shows great misunderstanding of the objective a graduate business program. First, according to a business professor in this program, students do flunk in the core courses. Second, it’s probably worse to get a ‘pass’ grade when many others get ‘excellent’ than to fail and retake the course. Contrary to the widespread belief, flunking, to a large extent, is irrelevant and is the wrong focus; Business school education is more about distinguishing yourself as a super smart future business leader among a group of very smart people.

A common view among the respondents was that MBA is not an academic program. Some respondents viewed it as a vocational school suggesting that it’s like a training program your boss sends you to, while others saw it as an employment-based human resources organization. Like several other respondents Gad noted:

In my opinion MBA is not an academic program. You have to make a switch when you come here. I came here to get knowledge but this knowledge is financial tools. During my B.A when I studies education I took courses and I learned about cutting edge research of what’s going on in the field of education for example, how autism is defined and so on. There is no such thing in an MBA program. Yes. Professors publish articles but we don’t study them. There’s no empirical research. It mostly bla la bla... MBA is like a training program your boss sends you to. Gad

It is probably true that an MBA program is not purely academic. By looking at the frequency of the reading and writing assignment MBA students are required to complete (presented at the end of chapter 5), one can infer that this is not a classic graduate degree that focuses on research. Yet, academics play an important role. Research is required for the bigger projects and there's emphasis on the academic honor code. Furthermore, as in other top business schools, this program hires research active faculty who tend to publish in highly prestigious business journals, and a business professor affirms that some of that research is somehow brought into the classroom, even if the students don't realize it.

Another reason for this perception is that MBA has to accommodate the different backgrounds and interests of the students. The academic degrees of the respondents vary greatly, and not all of them have, as one would expect, math-related educational background. In addition, because there are many specializations (investment banking, general management, consulting, healthcare, high-tech, bio-technology etc.) in the business world, courses have to remain rather general. Like several other respondents Levi alluded to this feature of a business program.

This is not an academic program. You see, the academic experience is fascinating, but it is highly individual in relation to the student and in relation to the program. As far as the student concerns, each one comes from a different background. I, for example, came with a Master's degree, so for me it was very easy. Out of 4 core courses I got a waiver for 2 and I could get a waiver for another one because I wanted to feel I belong to a group. Levi

Jacob also notes this when he explains that a business program gives you hands-on experience and not so much theoretical background as other graduate degrees.

MBA studies are not academic. It's a program that gives you a very applicable and practical skill: finding a job. If I wanted an academic degree I would do a PhD. The academic here is very market-oriented and I think it's good because in many professions there is big difference

between what the school teaches you and you are required to do on the job. Jacob

It is probably true that as a professional program, the goal of the MBA is to teach a variety of skills with the academics being a (non-trivial) part of the overall package. For example, they spend a significant amount of time implementing their business skills in the MAP project off campus:

MAP teams consist of 4-6 MBA students solely dedicated for a seven week period to work together at the company site as well as in Ann Arbor to provide solid recommendations and solutions to business opportunities or challenges as defined by the sponsoring company/organization (<http://www.bus.umich.edu/MAP/Dev/WhatisMAP.htm>)

*My English is not Perfect, But It's Better Than Other International Student.*

A central theme expressed throughout the interviews was the respondent's assessment of their English proficiency. Interestingly and not surprisingly, nearly all the participants perceive their second language proficiency as good. They all said they had very good English and gave ample reasons for their special skills.

Attempting to explain the high self-estimation of their language abilities, I noticed that it was that the comparison group that determined the level of satisfaction respondent had by their English proficiency. For example, when they had an international MBA student in mind, they felt good about their English, as Shimeon noted:

I have never had a problem with reading or writing in English. I think Israelis in general have a very positive opinion on their English and on the surface they are right because the English proficiency of the average Israeli in comparison to the average Chinese or the average Chinese or even the average French. Shimeon

This is a valid assertion based on the point of view of a business professor who assures that Israeli students who get admitted to the MBA program have good command



in English. Unlike other nationalities, they are also less concerned about their English when choosing to participate in class.

By contrast, when the study group juxtaposed their English with the native English speakers', that's when they start describing how challenging it is to communicate in a second language in an academic setting. Using English as native speakers do is still the goal for them. Shimeon's statement expresses this view.

To say that Israelis have good English is an exaggeration because you only need to say 2-3 sentences before you are labeled as a non native speaker. Shimeon

Although in the essays students need to demonstrate professional English, it was prevalent in the data that many students believed that the level of English needed to complete the requirement of the program is lower than the English presented in essays for example. One of the themes that appeared in the interviews was the perception that one doesn't necessarily need good English to complete the assignments and cope with the literacy requirement of the program. Benjamin refers to that when he says:

Objectively, I don't think that an Israeli who ended up here is the average Israeli. I, for example, came here with good English. To write a 500-word essay concisely and fluently is a skill not everybody has, and it's OK, and I don't think that's a skill that should determine if a person should or should not get accepted to the program. The basic assumption is that you can read and write. But if you want to get a good grade on your writing, your essays must be accurate, focused and fluent. Benjamin

It is true that international students can get by without demonstrating exceptional foreign language capacities. Table 11 that specifies the writing assignments MBA students are required to complete provides an adequate explanation to this finding. The division to individual and group assignments shows that the long text-based assignments are mostly completed in mixed groups and since it was often mentioned in the interviews

that the Americans often fulfill the role of editing, international students with a fair proficiency of the language can manage.

Additionally, some respondents are of the opinion that this editing is unnecessary because professors don't pay attention to mechanics and only care about the contents. Nevertheless, a business professor assures that respondents are mistaken about this as contrary to the widespread perception, professors do pay attention to the quality of the written English when grading assignments.

Naftali was the only respondent who admitted to have come with English that was significantly weaker than he would want it to be. It was instructive to hear this perspective because as opposed to so many of the respondents interviewed, he had very different perceptions of the language proficiency he started the program with. He was the only one who said it loud and clear.

English has always been a challenge for me. I remember that we moved to a different city and that the English in my new school was more advanced because they started learning English a year before me. Naftali  
It is interesting that Naftali chose to share this weakness with me.

While all of the respondents had a very-high self assessment of their English, this piece of data corroborates that to pass MBA courses, a mediocre English proficiency is sufficient. I assume this also explains what held him back from achieving his fullest potential, but at the same time, it shows that he was cleverly able to hide overcome these hurdle and achieve his goal.

### *The Role of Previous Academic Experiences*

One of the common categories that the participants sounded during the interviews was that there's too much reliance on emails. In other words, writing as a channel of communication was more frequently used in the new setting in comparison to the

capacity in which it was used in their home culture. Reuben describes the intensive reliance on writing when he said:

They depend too much on emails here. In Israel the personal connection is stronger. It's unbelievable, they do everything by email. You want to schedule a meeting, "send me an email", you have a question, "send me an email. Email, email, email. On the first day of school I got 60 emails... the Israelis were overwhelmed, asking themselves: why do they do everything by email?" And you have to answer and you have to learn how to write... and no one is used to this. In Israel you make a phone call and schedule a meeting, and here it's more formal. Here It's absurd... people send emails to someone who is sitting in the next office. It's totally ridiculous. Reuben

This response is a reflection of the difference between the more pragmatic American culture and the informal Israeli customs. While in the United States communication is a practice that has a concrete objective, a practice that is directed towards making something specific happen, in Israel it's less goal-oriented. Based on the fact that the workplace in Israel is characterized by fewer formalities and many business acquaintances develop into friendships, it seems odd to the respondents that written communication replaces informal personal interactions. Obviously, Reuben doesn't consider that the goal is to get the job done.

Nearly all of the respondents in the interviews expressed a very strong concern about writing, specifying the barriers to writing high-quality writing assignments. It was apparent in the data that many of the respondents were overly worried about issues of form in their writing. Juda, Jacob, Naftali and Lea overemphasized the issues of grammar, syntax, spelling etc. For them, to write well and to be successful in composing academic papers means not to make any surface-level mistakes.

When I write in Hebrew I need fewer words to express the same idea I want to express in English. You're more careful when you put sentences together and word choice is more difficult. You also need to make sure that you don't repeat the same ideas in your paper. Judah

The difficulty is not the words you need to choose, it's more the fluency. I don't have the stream line. I can't write freely without caring so much about tenses, and it takes away from my focus on the case analysis. Jacob

When I express myself in English writing is definitely the biggest challenge, because when you speak body language is part of the communication so you can tell when you are understood and when you're not, and you understand your mistakes. When you write a word that sounds like the word you really wanted to write, you will be misunderstood and you won't catch it. In speaking you immediately know that something is wrong. Naftali

When you have to write about a case it's much more difficult because we still think in Hebrew, I saw cases analysis that received 'excellent' ... I could never write like that in English. All the ideas I also thought about were there but every word has been chosen carefully, and if you write one extra word or one unnecessary word, the professor crosses it off. Lea

That writing academic papers is without a doubt a difficult skill to master is a well-reasoned argument. However, the respondents' difficulties with writing are not unique. They are shared by many international students. But the preposition that the goal of the non-native speaker is to write as the native speakers is unacceptable and is rooted in the cultural context respondents come from. This is a direct result of living in the discourse of second language.

Several respondents didn't focus on the language mistakes when I asked them how they cope with the literacy requirements of the program. Benjamin and Asher didn't mention any grammar or sentence structure errors, rather they viewed the writing process globally and stressed that the challenge is the thinking the assignment requires, especially when completing a case analysis assignment.

Writing is definitely the biggest challenge because you are asked to write very long papers, sometimes 20-30 pages long. I am going to be frank with you. I don't like to write essays. It requires deep thinking. When you speak, you move your mouth. When you read, you move your eyes.

Listening is a type of intake. And writing is a more complex output.  
Benjamin

When you write papers in 'Strategy' you have to analyze the reports and not just use them as sources. So you have to look at the reports and think for yourself where the company stands in comparison to other companies in the industry, what they do right, what they do wrong, what they can aspire for, and this is difficult because you have to think. Asher

Evidently, respondents have not used writing as a way to exercise analytic and critical skills thus far and for that reason they perceive this as a complex skill to master. Engaging in more writing tasks reshapes the respondents' perception of what writing is, making them aware of the fact that at the very least writing is not a technical practice. The more cases they had to analyze introduced them to the wondrous development of discovering what you wish to say through writing as opposed to transcribing ready-made thoughts.

However, in addition to the difficulty of writing academic papers in a foreign language and the complex cognitive abilities it requires, another aspect that was very prevalent in the interviews is that the difficulty in writing also results from limited background knowledge and practice in writing academic papers. The educational background of the student dictates the way he/she may approach the writing task. Hence, if the student had a background in the social sciences he would likely to have more tools to deal with the task, but if the foundation is a bachelor academic degree in the field of engineering, computer science, bio-technology or mathematics, training is lacking the genres in demand of production in the new academic context. Lea, Judah and Abraham recognize this when they evaluate their abilities to meet the literacy requirements.

We had a really big paper to write and when we got it back we were disappointed in the grade. The only Israeli who was able to do an excellent job in 'strategy' had a background in English law. Lea

There's a problem to write in English. I am not a lawyer and I never had to write too much. Judah

I think that here focus is on totally different things. Writing during my bachelor degree was very theoretical. In other words, you claim something and then you support it using research that was done in the past and then moves on in a logical way. "Here the logic is different because everything you say has to be based on numbers. Here you used only numbers to support your claims. Abraham

### *Tradeoffs of Group Work*

One of the most prevalent and powerful norms found in the data was that there was no need to edit writing assignments. This view stands in complete opposition to the level of perfection of their application essays. This isn't surprising given the discourse of incentive that repeatedly appears in the data. As opposed to application essays which had been revised edited and polished, writing assignments during the program were not deserving of serious editing. The guiding principle among Dan, Lea and Zebulun's responses is utilitarianism.

When you write papers, no one expects you to have perfect English. They know you are foreign and you try to use good English but nobody expects you not to have spelling mistakes and if the content is good enough than it's good. It's clear that if your writing is good you'll probably get a better grade, but the same is true in Hebrew. You can spend hours revising your papers. Is it worth the time? Probably not. Dan

Spelling is a challenge. But you don't lose any point for spelling mistakes. The professors don't care about spelling mistakes. They only look for the content. But I care. When I write I think to myself "is this how the word spelled?" But it's getting better. Because now the spell check marks one spelling every six lines and when I got here it used to be in every sentence. Lea

Our next project is a 20 page paper and it doesn't sound so appealing but it seems that I am not that bad at it after all. I really don't like it though. I will write what I think like I do in tests and I'll let them deal with that.  
Zebulun

One of the recurring themes heard in the interviews was that because many of the projects are done in groups, the American members of the group are usually in charge of the editing. However, in some cases when the Americans revise their work, the respondents thought it was unnecessary. As Issachar notes, this preoccupation with language doesn't necessarily improve the grade or the quality of the work. This is perhaps the way the Issachar claims his voice.

The problem in group work is that we write and the Americans edit or change what they don't like. There's always a group member with a minor in English and they always do the writing. But sometimes they exaggerate with the editing because they replace each and every word with a fancy word and although it sounds amazing, you don't really need to do it, and you don't have the time to learn from it. You get the file you click 'accept all changes' and you move on because there's no time. Issachar

Another possible explanation for this finding is that respondent view language as a control instrument in addition to it being a communication tool. Group work is a type of a literacy event and the text produced has different roles the different participants. It may be a tool for the Americans in the group use to practice and maintain power.

Although respondents suggested that editing for schoolwork purposes is superfluous, the business professor who was involved in the data analysis brought to my attention the opposite view. He adds that from his experience, Israeli students tend to choose to be part of diverse groups that are likely to contain Americans and that through these shared projects the writing skills of the study group are enhanced. As opposed to international students from other nationalities that often form their own groups and as a result benefit less from the writing of a more experienced student, I actually think that the

study group takes the time and try to learn from the writing of their American group members.

### *Strategies for Writing*

As seen in the previous chapter, writing assignment vary greatly in length and process. Among the various strategies second language writers employ, references to the outline as a writing strategy was a frequent theme in the data with many respondents describing it as a tool that maps and summarizes the information that will be included in a paper. On the one hand, the outline helps novice writers in keeping their focus. On the other hand, Jacob and Judah's reference to this tool exposes their belief that writers need to know everything in great detail before they begin to put words on the page.

When I analyze a case I start with an outline of all the points I want to include in the paper. Then I develop the points to sentences and paragraphs. so what I do is I write however I can and then I start organizing it and correcting grammar and as time pass this editing becomes more and more marginal and I am not scared of writing. I still make mistakes and the Americans I work with make funny mistakes as well. Jacob

When you write a case analysis you are usually required to answer a question like: "what should the company do? What options does the company have? What would you choose if you were the CEO?" So I start with an introductory paragraph that present the problem and suggests the solution. Then I write a few paragraphs that explain why I chose this solution. Sometimes I don't declare the chosen solution, because the requirement is to analyze all the options, so I give my opinion on each and every possible option. It depends on the assignment. Judah

It's seems that when the proficiency is low that first language is dominant as a resource and then transferability becomes an issue, although it cannot account for all the errors. For example, Naftali explains how he copes with the writing assignment.



I write an outline in Hebrew and then I develop it in simultaneous translation from Hebrew. I use the spell checker and there's Babylon, so you look for the words you need, you translate them and put them in. Although I hate it I make myself go over what I wrote one more time and then I forward it to another Israeli student who always does the editing for me because his English is very good. Naftali

Shimeon, for example, keeps the planning part of writing to a minimum. Unlike the majority of the respondents who started out the writing with a clear plan of what each section of the paper will include Shimeon starts writing by writing. According to his view, through the writing he discovers his idea. Although Shimeon doesn't actually know where the words will take him, holding himself open to new ideas makes more ideas come to his head. Further, he doesn't like to be labeled as a person who does outlines, as if he is saying that writing from an outline is no fun.

I am not the kind of person who starts with an outline. I just sit and start writing and then I read what I wrote and I refine it, and while I am writing ideas are coming on after the other. I don't have a plan. I don't know what I need to write. I just start writing. I have the first sentence and then step by step it develops. There is no method. The method is unorganized, but that's how I do it. Shimeon

So, why, of all the great strategies the process-approach writing pedagogy has left us with, respondents choose to mention "the outline"? One possibility is that they weren't taught many writing strategies. Another possibility is that people going into business schools have little real appreciation of the humanities and creative practices. Hence, although they were probably taught several planning strategies such as freewriting, for example, having background in math, engineering, computer science, the outline is one of the fewest strategies that can be reconciled with the way information is stored for them. It is a simple but effective way of organizing material; whether it takes

the form of a table, a flow chart, doesn't matter, the aim is to get the information on the page using proper reasoning and logic, as if it was a formula or an algorithm.

When I asked the respondents for specific examples of writing tasks they completed recently, an interesting view came up. The notion I got from the respondents was that most of the types of writing assignments they are required to complete in the program are not very difficult. This stood in complete opposition to the response I got when I asked them about writing in general. Examination of Zebulun, Asher, Issachar and Gad's responses uncovers a technical description of the stages one needs to complete in order to produce the desired genre.

When you need to write about a case you mostly use the internet. You look for data on the company and it's not real writing. You take a text from here and a text from there and you combine them and then you add your own conclusion. It's more like a summary. It's not something I like to do but it wasn't that difficult to do either. Zebulun

To complete most of the papers you don't need to do much. Basically, you just need to search for a few reports that you combine together and add your own opinion, as a conclusion. Asher

We are connected to all the data bases in the world. The school gives us the access for free, so when you need to write a project, you send an email to the librarian and she tells you exactly which data base to go to and what words to put in the search box. Once you have the sources, all the rest is pretty much cut and paste. Issachar

I don't use the library, I use Google. When I need information about a company I look for financial reports. If it's a public company, it has to be available for everybody to read. If it's not a public company, it may be found in data bases and I have access from home. It's not academic so you don't even need to cite it. I don't need to defend this project in any way. Gad

I am positive that the majority of students could successfully perform on the tasks they are required to fulfill, and during the 2 years they are asked to write a very large and diverse number of reports, from memos, individual case analysis, to a 10 page industry

and firm analysis project and even a 30 page project. Yet, as a writing instructor and based on the comments of a business professor, it is certain that it's easy for instructors who grade these projects to assess whether this is an original quality work or whether it's putting a bunch of sentences from various resources together.

Additionally, I have screened all the syllabi and in each one I identified a section regarding the academic honor code that the program abides by. As seen below, the language of the section is loud and clear.

Personal integrity and professionalism are fundamental values of the School community and this course. To ensure that these values are upheld and to maintain equitability in the evaluation of your work, this course will be conducted in strict conformity with the current academic Honor Code. The code and related procedures can be found at the school's website

**\*\*As per the Communities Values policy, claimed ignorance of this information will be considered irrelevant should a violation take place.**

Not falling into the trap of this provocation that writing is an effortless endeavor, I asked participants if there's any writing course they are required to take. I came across different responses depending on the status of the respondent in the program. Whereas first year students said that they will take it next year because they don't have the time for it, second year students admitted they found the course quite helpful and that they wished they took it earlier. Issachar, a second year student describes his experience in the course.

The only writing course I took here was managerial writing. It's a course that teaches a new type of writing every week. Sometimes we would write during class and sometimes there was homework, but what I mostly liked about this course was that we were sitting with a partner and gave comments to each other because you learn better this way. Although this was a 6 week course I did learn something and that how to deal with every types of writing. I won't tell you I focused on every little detail she taught us but I did something out of this course and I apply it when I write emails. Issachar

In short, respondents have high estimation of their language abilities that they believe have served them well thus far; therefore, they are not motivated to invest time in what they view as a side skill, or a service course. That's because for the study group writing is not the thing itself, it is just the medium to deliver a message, and the message is often time a problem-solving situation, so content is more important.

*What is a Case and How Do You Read One, Anyway?*

It didn't take the respondents a lot of time to understand that reading the most frequent type of text, the case, is very different from any reading they have previously done before or the textbook chapters they are assigned to read during their studies in the program. It was definitely a new genre to master and practice was needed as Abraham notes:

In the beginning I was completely lost. They try to help you by directing you to specific questions and you read the case several times and you try to answer the questions one after the other. My first case analysis was very intuitive and unstructured. I did not use enough numbers and didn't base my answers on the numeric data the case included. I got a low grade, everybody did and then I looked at papers that were good and saw the differences. Abraham

It is logical to think that students' success as readers is connected to the quality of reading instruction they receive, so my next question was: weren't you taught how to read a case? Didn't they tell you what to focus on? Levi's comment best represents the respondent perception when he said:

They give you an article of the day first of class in each course and this article is supposed to teach you how to read a case. It's a fascinating article but no one implements what it teaches because it's fantastic yet unpractical. It says that to read a case you need to read the intro and then skim and scan the rest while asking yourself what the main idea is. Then look at the Appendix and when you're done, read the case two more times. Now, who has time to read a case three times? We barely complete the skimming and scanning stage. Levi

The fact that the respondents view this article as worthless in making the students better readers of cases, this finding can be explained in different terms. Respondents may not be ready for this instructional article on how to read case studies. With their background in exact and life sciences, most of them have probably never practiced critical reading which is mostly gained through experience.

Then again, a more cultural explanation is that for the study group, there's heavy reliance on "I'll manage somehow" or "I'll find a way to bypass the extra work". This is an adequate description of how many individuals on the study group go about doing things which is mainly characterized by the concept of shortcuts and avoiding hard work at all costs because hard work is not the key to success. Based on my experience as an instructor in an academic institute in Israel, when the participants can avoid taking a class or completing an assignment, then that's exactly what most of them will do.

Without a doubt, no one mentioned the language as the reason for the difficulty in reading cases. A conceivable reason for this finding may be that in such a reading, it is more getting used to dialoguing with a new type of text that creates the challenge. Reading a case required complex thinking as the reader doesn't just search for the information, but simultaneously asks himself what it means and what's left out of the text, and fill the gaps accordingly. The views expressed in Benjamin, Judah and Abraham's comments were shared by many participants:

Reading a case is different from reading a textbook chapter or an article. When you read a textbook chapter your takeaway has to be the main point of the chapter and how to apply it to understand the case. When you read a case you have to analyze the company and the industry and the take away from a case is the framework. Benjamin

Reading cases is not like a math problem that has a clear answer. There is a lot of room for personal judgment and personal opinion and how you understand what is written. You get a very vague question and you need to think how you answer it, and sometimes you need to ask more questions and dig deeper to be able to answer this question, and many times your answer is as good as your friend's although it's totally different because you decide where you want to take it and as long as it's logical it's ok. Judah

When you read a case you have to get used to a different way of thinking. On the one hand you have to be efficient in covering everything. On the other hand you have to use your common sense. If something is described in the case you constantly have to ask yourself what it means or what the implications are in the real world, even if this piece of information is not mentioned in the case. For example, if the case is about a company that transports cement, you have to take into account that cement is heavy and therefore hard to transport... and these are the things we talk about during class and you get used to thinking about what information the case doesn't include. Abraham

It must also be pointed out that most students were unaware of the advantages of reading cases in groups. Reading that is preformed through social interaction increases readers ability to make sense of things. When students are involved in group discussions or study groups to prepare for class, they enhance their understanding the case because with so many perspectives, group members will always bring up ideas and thoughts you'd never considered. It is classic to utilize this learning strategy as the different background each student brings to the table forces students to alter their old ways of thinking and be open to new perceptions. Abraham did try it and admitted it was worthwhile:

In the beginning it was very difficult to read a 20-30 text and the first thing that went on my mind was that this feels like first year in the psychology department and how I used to read all the articles in English before we divided the translation work between classmates. If you read by yourself it takes a lot of time and you can't dig deep not because of the language but because you have to get used to a new way of thinking and it's better to do it with other people. It's a new discipline you need to familiarize yourself with. Abraham

So, how should a case be read? Reading a case does not only involve looking quickly through the text to get the main idea or look at headings, and topic sentences as students are used to. Rather, as specified in chapter 5, when reading a text the reader is also expected to be able to think about what the reading means in the context of other pieces of information, how ideas and numerical or visual are connected, how the ideas make sense and what business decision the situation the text portrays is called for.

Of the different strategies for effective reading, a commonly mentioned strategy was highlighting that helps to promote better reading comprehension by identifying the central points in the text, what ultimately leads to greater learning. Many of the respondents interviewed mentioned the strategy of highlighting while reading. However, their responses reveal that they don't always know how to highlight effectively. Ostensibly, highlighting may not necessarily be an efficient technique when the text is a case, as it causes passive rather than active reading. The belief that reading is for comprehension, not a critical or an analytical practice of making meaning is reflected in Joseph, Abraham and Issachar's responses:

In the first few cases while reading the case I would write comments in Hebrew in the margins. When I became more experienced I started writing the comments in English. I learned from other cases that we did in class that when I read I need to think about ten steps further and that's what I wrote in the margins. Joseph

When I read I highlight and write comments in the margins, if I have an insight that does not appear in the case and I think would be interesting to use I write it down too. Every case includes a number of tables and graphs so I take the time to look at them and mark important numbers. After I am done reading the case I read the questions I need to answer in the paper. Abraham

In the beginning I highlighted all the information that seemed important to me. But over time, you learn from the professor not to look at the obvious

stuff that is described in the text, but what's happening behind the scenes within a company. Slowly you understand the professor's way of thinking and you stop highlighting because the idea is not to talk about the specific case but the more global meaning. Issachar

Some students used other strategies they knew from before to complete reading assignments, adapting them to the particular genre they were required to make sense of. Judah, for example reported using principles of pre-reading and global reading versus close reading, which are common techniques of academic reading. Quickly he learned that this strategy wasn't really suitable for case reading.

When I read a case I do what I usually do when I read an article. A case it's very similar to an academic article in structure, you have the introduction and the subtitles, so that's how I start. I read the introduction and then go over all the subtitles. I then look at the questions at the end and then I make up my mind what to read. With time I learned that I devote too much time to the words and less time to the graphs and the figures. Reading a case took me 2 hours and I was so tired when I was done that I didn't have the energy to really understand what the numbers meant. So I understood this was not a good reading strategy because most of the important information is in the graphs and tables and I learned it in class because when we had discussion about cases, the main point was always in a graph or a table. Judah

Apparently, reading and preparing a case requires a lot of experience, as the students argue. This is one reason why instructors encourage group work on these cases; they are not meant to be solved alone, but are aimed for a group discussion. For instance, it is specified in the Management Accounting syllabus that "The case analyses can be done individually or in groups of *absolutely no more than* five (5) people. We do not recommend doing the analyses on your own"(p.3). Solving cases together better resembles real-life situations, and respondents who participate in mixed nationalities group discussions of cases learn more than students who read cases by themselves or participate in groups discussions that are of more homogenous background.



*I am a Fluent Speaker... hum... Except For Cold Calling*

The self-evaluation of the respondents' speaking skills is a function of the context in which oral proficiency is practiced. When I asked students about their speaking skills, many students said they came with good oral abilities. As with other language skills, when respondents they compare their English with other non-native speakers, they feel that their English is suffice with the requirements of the program. Lea's comment is a good example for this principle.

Among the Israelis there's no problem in speaking. No Israeli stutters and you can students that stutter among other nationalities, but among the Israelis, I don't have such example. All the Israelis came with good English and if they got stuck in the beginning, it was no longer an issue within several weeks, and we're Israelis and we make a lot of noise and it's good. 4 Israelis are presidents of clubs and you can be a president of a club if you can't speak well because people vote for you and you need to be able to present your agenda once you win the elections. Lea

But when I asked specifically about cold calling, they all shared how hard it was, especially, in the first few weeks. Indeed, cold calling is one of the most uncomfortable experience a student experiences in American business schools. This view was evident in the way Lea characterized the experience.

Cold calling is difficult for both international students and Americans. We are just not ready for the level of aggressiveness professors demonstrate. I remember that on the first class he said he would be the devil's advocate and he promised not to let go until you are completely exhausted. I participate a lot but sometimes after ten minutes of back and forth I feel completely worn out and I just tell the professor "there's nothing else I could say" or I have nothing else to add". Lea

Shimeon's description of the event provides a sense of just how traumatic the experience had been for him. Shimeon felt humiliated and embarrassed because he believes that the way one expresses himself is an indication of his social identity, and

those people who don't speak well are labeled as outsiders, or different. In addition, when they are caught unprepared, they feel their social status is damaged.

Class started when the professor called my name, but because she mispronounced my name, I never realized she was calling me. When I did realize she was calling me, I was sure that there was some administrative business she wanted to notify me of. It didn't take more than a few second before I understood what it was all about because she went: "Shimeon! Can you please tell the class what we did last class? As soon as she completes her sentence, I feel the smoke gets in my brain, I mean I was present in the previous class, but do you know how many things passed through my brain since the last class? So I am saying something very general and she wants me to focus and she wouldn't let go. Instinctively I am catching a glimpse on my notes, but when she sees that, she tells my neighbor: "could you do him (me) a favor and cover his notes? So he does as instructed and covers my notes. I ended up saying that I don't remember although I knew 70 people are going to think I am an idiot. Shimeon

Judah gives us an insight to why this experience can be so frustrating. From standpoint, MBA students, who are usually successful learners, are not used to look idiots, and they don't quite get how professors can do this to international students after everything they have been through.

I think that speaking is a challenge. Take for example the students who used to be lawyers. Their power of expression was their bread. All they had was their rhetoric and here they compose weird sentences and they can't use their strengths. People who graduated from a program in Mathematics can bring in their strengths here but those who were the masters of words... Judah

Levi and Gad reflected the view of a number of respondents, and most likely many international students. They explain that the problem is not that Israelis have nothing to say, but that the way they say it, in comparison to the way Americans do, makes them look idiots. The perception that their comments expose is that what you say isn't really important. What's important is the way you say it, how you wrap it and not the content it carries.

This is America. Everything here is “Oh, my God”. If the professor asks you a question and you give a short good answer, and then he asks the American, and the American gives the same answer but he speaks vividly and enthusiastically, then you sound like an idiot. We want to talk, but our answers are short. Levi

Speaking is significantly more difficult because it's on the spot. It's here and now. In speaking, the Americans have a clear advantage over international students. If in writing I am relatively equal to American, than in speaking I am out of the game. They are so full of S and they speak like they say so much, but don't say anything. I can't do that. That's their specialty. They are politicians; they learn how to do it from the day they are born. We are direct and straight forward and they don't like it. For that reason I prefer not to speak. Gad

While this may be a nice idea in the world of marketing, it does not hold up to logic in the academic arena. As mentioned in the previous chapter, professors specify in the syllabus the criteria by which contributions to class discussions are assessed. Unquestionably, professors can tell the difference between a cold calling responder that “talks a lot and says nothing” and a speaker that expresses a serious and thoughtful argument. This false belief causes participants a great deal of damage because they focus on the ‘how’ rather than on the ‘what’.

It also seems that their criticism of the way American students speak arises from their inability to match these skills, states a business professor, who guarantees me that they would have loved to be able to speak like an American and because they can't, they choose to criticize it in their response. Moreover, as specified in syllabi, most professors really don't care much about the grammatical quality of the response, but rather the content. It is further emphasized that cold calling is part of the preparation needed for their real professional lives. This is a required skill in the business world and most instructors assign part of the grade (sometimes up to 30%) to participation.

It is also vital to keep in mind, that as with writing, Americans, as opposed to Israeli kids are trained to speak in front of an audience from a young age. The Israeli educational system doesn't focus on public speaking in either Hebrew or English and this produces lack of confidence that is usually built up with practice. If you add to the equation that the study group typically values quick action to resolve problems, and tend to choose improvisation over careful planning and process orientation, you get a disorganized chaotic response to cold calling.

As an international student myself, I remember carefully designing and practicing my responses to the readings that professors assigned to avoid the embarrassment of misusing the language. Unfortunately, the respondents extenuate the importance of this practice and are not even aware of the fact that because of their lack of training, they need to work harder and design their contribution to class discussions. This lethargic attitude makes participants shy away from participating in class and as a result inhibits their professional training.

While this view of cold calling was widely reflected, there wasn't a universal agreement about it. Jacob was one of the respondents who had a different perspective. I was particularly interested in his view since he was the oldest among the respondents. Jacob's view of this practice wasn't negative at all. He didn't perceive the situation or the professors as intimidating or threatening in any way on his social status. This view was reflected in Jacob's comment when he said:

It takes time to make your English more fluent because many times you want to say something and you look for words and you get stuck. I think that in this sense the school is a warm friendly environment to practice your English. All the professors understand what kind of audience they are dealing with because they know that 30% of the students are international, so during cold calls they don't pressure you to give an immediate answer.

They help you express yourself. These people have been exposed to other cultures, so you are surrounded by a multi cultural environment that wants to help you. The problem is that an American will never correct your English. If you make a mistake they will never give you feedback, they will just smile and move on. You have to be very active to receive these feedbacks: positive or negative in one level or another. Jacob

Jacob explains that cold calling is an opportunity students should take advantage of. In his mature point Jacob conceptualizes cold calling as essential claiming that without bad experiences we wouldn't grow. He also offers a strategy that helps him cope with cold calling.

As someone who sits himself the goal of doing an internship in investment banking I knew I would have to work hard and the school tells you that you will have to work hard. What concerned me was how I am going to express myself. My English is good but it's not perfect and when the classes started I felt that I had things to say and I started talking and as soon as I starting talking I broke the barrier. As someone who immigrated to Israel at the age of 13 without knowing a word in Hebrew I was very aware of the fact that you must talk so I did and I participated in class and I asked questions and I did well in the courses despite the recruiting that started on the second week of school. Jacob

In the beginning it was very stressful but later on we found that when we know the answer it's better to volunteer an answer and not wait to be caught off guard. Jacob

Jacob goes on to explain the reasons for his unusual view. During the interview, he volunteered information about his experience as Russian immigrant and how going through a similar process as a child shaped his view. I assume that lessons from his childhood immigration experience as well the fact that he was the oldest participant in the sample and a second year student led him adopt a different perspective compared with the other participants.

## Literacy Practices during the Job Search

Most of the research on literacy and study abroad that discusses experiences from their points of view of the students is focused on how international students cope with in-school literacy requirement. No account of what literacy they experience outside school is discussed, particularly in relation to the literacy activities they are engaged in during a job search. The students' responses highlight that the bulk of literacy practices consisted completing reading, writing and speaking assignments with the hope of finding a position in corporate America.

Early in the interviewing stage it became apparent that finding a job in American business school context is a process in which rules needs be carefully observed, and norms ought to be specifically followed. One of the recurring themes that emerged from the interview data us that students perceive this process is like a ritual or a set of actions, performed mainly for their symbolic value, not understanding what the real story at the root of this procedure is.

### *The Art of Networking: If You Lack Social Skills, You are Doomed to Failure*

The view of the importance of networking was repeated by respondents. This skill is important throughout all the stages of the study abroad process, yet it is the most crucial when looking for a job, as Shimeon noted.

Networking is the main skill here even before you get here. If you have it, then everything is built on it. All the rest will take care of itself. There is a website, it's called MBA chances.com, and there's a forum and people ask questions and recommends workshops and books etc...if you are not proactive and you don't work to gather the information, you will fail. You have to get out of the box and search for it. There are so many pieces of information scattered around. Shimeon

Coming from the Israeli culture, the respondents stress that the art of networking is foreign to them. They see it as a knowledge gap they have to make up for, a skill they have got to learn although sometimes they don't want to take the time to do so.

According to Reuben, Asher, Issachar and Dan, international students are at a disadvantage when encountering with this process which they see as a ritual.

We Israelis don't understand the meaning of the word "networking". In fact, if you are not an American, you are clueless about what it means and what it entails...and we don't understand the importance of sending out thank you notes and follow up emails to people you have just met in a presentation, and it comes down to the fact that you spend your entire day on your computer, sending and receiving messages. And you have to learn how to ask questions, and how to behave, and you have to be social but not to use Hebrew, and you can't eat too much in recruiting events, and you have to have a name tag, and if you don't act according to the rules you will never be on the closed list of potential interviewees. There are workshops that teach you how to do this, and these are offered every two weeks or so, so you don't miss it. Reuben

Finding a job is a 4 stage religious process. It's very different from what we know. In Israel you send your resume and you get the job or you don't. Here it starts with a presentation and all the students who are interested in a position with that company are showing up. After the presentation there are circles. This means that the recruiter is standing in the middle and students are asking him questions. The thing is that you have to ask smart questions and to really stand out if you want the recruiter to remember you and add you to the closed list of potential interviewees. This is a very stressful situation because it's hard to do the small talk. We are not used to this. We have our list of questions and it's easier to stick to something you memorized. Now the Americans can easily do it. They are taught how to do it from preschool. So you try a question and sometimes it doesn't work because when you are not from the industry you can't possibly say something worthwhile no matter how many wall street journal articles you'll read about the company. When it does work and you see that you got him interested, then it's very stressful because he answers your question and then you have to think quickly what to say next. These people are trained in remembering people's names and you left a positive impression and you remember to send a follow up email, you have a good chance of being on the closed list of interviewees. Asher

You have to play the game in their field and it's not that you can't talk but the topics... I will give you an example. You stand in the circle with the

recruiter in the middle and the American wants to make it informal so he takes it to football or where you did your undergrad and if they find that they graduated from the same school, he goes on to ask what dorm you lived in, and when he tells him what dorm he stayed in then the other one says: “oh my God, my sister lived there” and you don’t know the school and it’s so frustrating and after a 10-minute talk about this or about their favorite football player, you stick your question and ask: “can you please tell me about the consulting program in your company? And you feel dumb because you got a very brief and laconic answer. They tell you to create rapport with the recruiter but how are you supposed to do that? And it’s not that I don’t like football, but I don’t know every insignificant corner and I decided not to go in to these circles ever again. Issachar

Israelis don’t take networking seriously enough, and this is the main reason we have hard time finding a job. Instead of going to presentations and ask smart questions we go there to eat and mingle among ourselves. They tell themselves: why do I need to ask smart questions. He doesn’t want to answer them anyway. We Israelis don’t want to take the time to play the game. The problem is that you can’t go to a recruiter and ask “do you have a vacant position?” that would never work here, you have be indirect and you have to learn how to do it. Dan

Issachar’s anecdote indicates that the study group doesn’t understand the rules of communication in the job market context. The cultural gap makes the norms of this process seem disingenuous and fake. Interestingly, when they are on the other side of the table and take the role of the interviewer or the evaluator, they use the same norms they found indirect and dishonest.

Many companies have access to our resumes and one day I got a phone call from a company who invited me and 50-60 other people for a talk. Now I have been in the presentation this company gave, I already asked questions, I knew everything about the company and had no questions to ask. So we’re sitting in little tables and the girl who was sitting next to me ask questions I know she knows the answers for because we’ve been together in office hours, and I am shocked that she is asking questions I can answer, but she got an interview and I didn’t. And when I thought about it later I understood that the guy felt that I am not interested in the company and I am not enthusiastic about it. I may be a strong candidate but the passion in the eyes is something big that we value. And I do the same when I interview a student for the school. If I don’t see that spark in his eyes that he wants our specific school, I don’t recommend the guy.



One girl told me she wants to ski in the area and this tells me that she didn't bother to read about the school and it affects you. Issachar

A business school professor hypothesizes that part of the problem is that the study group tries to get the system to adapt to how they behave instead of trying to understand the American system and adapt to it (after all they are in America). Many forget that they moved to a country with a different culture and, if they want to succeed, they need to learn the local rules, instead of trying to criticize it and trying to force the Israeli approach on the system. Of course, if they were in Israel they would call someone who served with them in the army and get this person to call a potential employer. The notion that the interview process is unfair is ridiculous and very Israeli; it's not unfair; it's different because they are in a different country which shouldn't come as a surprise to them.

Another common theme that arises from the response is the lack of reference to coping strategies. While they constantly volunteer criticism of the system, they rarely say how they try to cope, adjust, and respond to these challenges. A business professor gives away that it's very Israeli to blame it all on the system rather than taking responsibility. Hoping for different responses he says: "with the networking, I wish someone had said something like 'once I figured out the system, I made sure that I have some starters for a small-talk conversation'." The discourse gap presented here illustrates that the study group doesn't come up with adaptation strategies, perhaps because as many other Israelis, they are sure that that they can stretch the boundaries of the new academic and professional environment. On the one hand they dream of being part of it, but on the other hand, they want to do it in their own unique way. This is understandable in light of

the notion that in cross-cultural interactions, the target culture is always judged by the home culture (Naylor, 1998).

*Writing is Adapting Other People's Work with Slight Changes According to Your Needs*

The ritual extends itself to written material. There are rules of written communication for networking, and they need to be followed carefully. Gad and Lea's response addresses the difference between writing an email to an Israeli and an American.

When you write an email to an American, you start with: "I hope you are well and that you enjoyed your vacation with your family", or "I hope this email finds you well...". Only then you can get to business and ask your question. When you write to an Israeli you get to the point right from the start. For example, Hi X, do you know anyone in Google (Israel)? Lea

I have a little book and I write down all the names of people I met in recruiting events and when I write them emails, I always mention something personal. I also keep a file for each company I am in touch with, so every time I write them an email, I look at past correspondence and include something from past emails. Lea

These emails have to be manipulative; you have to catch the reader's attention. You can't tell him about your idea in a 300-word email. There are rules you need to follow. First you write 2-3 lines. If you get the ok to write more, you add more information and at a certain point you can call him and you can't say I wonder if you have a job offer. It has to be I want to ask your advice about internship opportunities. Gad

Although the subjects describe the writing process as mechanic and technical, it has a very creative and inventive element. Even though it is clear from the responses that respondents are certain that resumes and cover letters writing is done by following a stencil and adapting it to their needs, during this experience the writer has to reinvent himself and create a new business persona for himself through the text for the purpose of

justifying positions with 6 digit salaries and fat bonuses. Naftali, Shimeon and Dan discuss this type of writing:

There's a big difference between writing a resume in Israel and in the American business school. While in Israel there is more focus on responsibilities, here they stress results. For example, if you are an accountant and you are looking for a job, then in Israel you will write that you analyzed reports, but here you need to specify what the analysis of the reports brought to the company in US dollars. Naftali

When you write the resume you take a schematic structure and you make things look bigger than they really are and you reinvent yourself over and over again. The cover letter is the elevator pitch. You have to give a concise explanation about who you are what your strengths are and why this company should take you. This is your way of walking them through your resume and help them avoid the things you want them to avoid, and if I don't want them to devote much time to my army service than I put the focus on my work experience because it doesn't matter if I were a tank commander or an infantry soldier. I like writing the cover letter because you have room to maneuver your reader and you color it the way you want to. Naftali

In my case it was very challenging to write the resume in the American way because I was a lawyer. I couldn't just say I managed client files and I did this and I did that. In the American way you have to quantify your achievements. So you say that you did the due diligence that gave a green light to a merger that brought this much % to the company, and you have to show that without your work the transaction wouldn't have been carried out. And it's a nightmare because you don't know how to give a \$ value to everything. Shimeon

Writing the cover letter is different. First of all, in Israel there's no such thing as a cover letter. So when you need to write one you look at other people's cover letter and you adjust according to your stories and your needs. I am not going to invent the wheel here. Dan

An inspection of the above responses divulges that respondents view writing for employment purposes as merely technical because they mistakenly think of the resume and cover letter as a boring and formulaic historical synopsis of their past. True, business communication should follow the guidelines of the discipline, but every resume is a one-

of-a-kind marketing communication, and should aim at making the candidate stand out as a superior candidate for a job and win the desired interview. Most respondents also forget that cover letters provide you with an opportunity to brand yourself with an identity you want to be known by.

*Edit! Edit! Edit*

In the addition to adhering to writing conventions, when writing employment-related documents such as CVs, cover letters or business email, emphasis is put on grammar and mechanics. As opposed to writing for academic purposes, when communicating with potential employers or recruiters, the text is carefully screened sometimes by more than one reviewer. Dan, Gad and Jacob's comment is an evidence to the belief that potential employers expect correspondence to have perfect English or they won't be considered for a job.

The cover and the resume have to be perfect. There shouldn't be any spelling or grammar mistakes. It has to be flawless. If it isn't perfect you are perceived unprofessional. The same is true for every email that goes out to a recruiter. Everything has to go through editing. Sometimes it's a friend, and sometimes it's someone at the career development center. But someone has to look at it before you send it. Dan

I am sorry for repeating this but when you write an email the incentive to use editing is clear. If you are perceived a less articulate you are thought to be less smart and the goal is to impress in minimum words. Recruiters are very busy, they get 1001 emails every minute and if you write more than 2-3 sentences you can count on it that they won't read it. When I write such an email my wife looks at it, my American friends give me feedback and it gets better and better and in the process you learn how to do it yourself next time. Gad

Business communication is not just reading or writing because you meet people in presentations and it requires verbal communication. You have to talk to people and a lot, and you have to be sharp with your messages and then you have to continue the relationship or the contact in correspondence by sending than you notes or emails with questions that came up from your readings on the company, and this communication has

to be in a very high perfectionism level. No one gives you any discount because you are an international student, so you work with templates and you recycle them and you make sure someone edits it for you and in the beginning it took me 4 hours to write a short email. Jacob

It should be taken as axiomatic that allowing typos, misspellings, or incorrect grammar or punctuation into an employment-related piece depicts the applicant as amateurish and sloppy. The students are right to suppose that because these texts reflect their ability to write and communicate, they need to be sure in of the highest quality before sending it out. Otherwise, employers will suspect that the applicant's attention-to-detail skills are certainly lacking.

### *Ritualistic Speaking During an Interview*

Understandably, a job interview is one of the most formidable stages in the process of finding a position. The most frequent theme that can be drawn from the data is that respondents see it as a pre-designed and automatic activity that leaves no room for improvisation. Jacob, Naftali and Lea report that during job interviews they recite information they have memorized.

You prepare yourself to what you are going to say and you know exactly what answer or what story to give for each question and you have a short version and a long version for each question. It doesn't leave room for spontaneity. Everything is designed to details, even the small talk. You have no choice but to start reading the sports news and you are clueless in football or baseball but you learn... and you have to be up to speed and you have to be an active participant in the conversation because you don't want your interviewer to think "who is that guy who is incapable to hold a conversation"? And again, it takes away your spontaneity but slowly you start to feel more confident and you listen to conversations between Americans and like kids you imitate them. Jacob

When you use a language you need flexibility, In English you are constantly searching for the right word. It's much more stressful. I love crossword puzzles but I can't do them in English...you lose the richness of the language. My Hebrew is high register and I'd always borrow phrases from biblical Hebrew or Bialik's poetry, and in English I still look for

words that would help me get the message across... and your sharpness disappears... and you lose your sense of humor, and by the time I put a sentence together, it's not relevant anymore... and these things are important at work especially management. And you may be a little bit funny, but you're in delay, and it's not it. Naftali

You come to a job interview and I had lots of job interviews in Israel. You basically present yourself, you give your story, and if they like you, they take you. Here it's very different. Everything has to be organized according to the CAR model – context 30%, action 30% and result %30. Each sentence you utter has to be quantified. And at first you don't get it. What difference does it make if I give the result 60% or 30%, but it does make a lot of difference, because the Americans are used to this way of thinking, so what we do is do mock interviews and then record them to see if our responses were put according to the required model. Lea

While in Israeli context respondents feel it is acceptable to come to a job interview with little preparation or not preparation at all, in a new cultural setting, they understand that they can't afford to come unprepared to answer questions employers may ask in an interview. This discrepancy between these two perceptions reflects the basis for the interviewer-interviewee interaction in each culture. While, in the American setting the amount of preparation you invest mirrors the candidate's motivation to work in the company, in Israel the personal connection that sets the tone of the interview.

The difference between the contexts of a job-related conversation may be extended to topics that are appropriate in one setting and inappropriate in another. In the Israeli context, interviewers might ask you questions that seem direct and tactless or even discuss topics that are uncommon in interviews elsewhere: How old you are, what your marital status is, and whether you are planning on having kids soon, and so on. This lack of formality is often the basis of communication that may start in the correspondence stage, i.e Israelis indicate their date of birth and marital status on their CVs.

According to Lea, Naftali and Shimeon, the educational system acknowledges these differences and nurtures this ability to sensitively interact with recruiters by giving students the necessary resources to do specific literacy tasks or to do a whole range of tasks or language actions. This includes compiling lists of possible questions and answers and memorizing them, conducting mock interviews with peers, and reading about the company in the news to be prepared to discuss current issues and “small talk”.

I have a list of 40 questions that I got from the office of career development at the school and I composed an answer for each question. Before the interview I memorize the answers and I know it sounds dumb because everything is so structured and you have ready-made answers. I believe American do it too to some level, but my guess is that they are not memorizing the answers word-for-word. Lea

Every interview starts with the classical question “walk me through your resume” and it’s extremely important that you memorize the answer to this question word-for-word for two reasons and it doesn’t matter if you are a native English speaker or not. First of all you don’t want to forget any of the points and second, that’s the first impression you give your interviewer and that includes the level of English your interviewer believes you have. Naftali

To prepare for an interview you do mock interviews. In the mock interview you practice your ability to tell a story and spin that story when needed, for example: I have a specific story I usually give when I am asked about my leadership abilities. In an interview I need to be able to adapt this story and make it fit a question about an incident that demonstrated an impact beyond your job description, so you take your readymade story and you change it according to your needs. Now if you used up all your stories you can’t answer any more questions, so there’s a limit. Shimeon

Before each interview you have to read a lot about the company you are going to interview for. So you read all the research that has been done on the company, market analysis and you have to think of intelligent questions to ask about based on the data available on the company. For that I use Google alerts, so every time something is published on that company, I get it directly to my email. I don’t have time to read it every day but before the interview I do go over all the articles and I try to take out the interesting information. Lea

Once more, students view the job-related oral and written communication as a ceremonial procedure or a formal routine, but then, they forget that when a recruiter makes 40 interviews a day, they will find students that respond better even though all students had memorized their responses. The idea is that the respondents close their eyes to and disregard is that in order to succeed they have to be noticeable, and to be noticeable means hard work that they are not always willing to do.

#### Studying for an MBA in a Time of Economic Crisis

A subset of this examination of the views respondents had regarding the MBA study abroad experience was the significance respondents assigned to the implication of the economic situation in the United States on their careers. It has shown that the respondents attribute the hardness of finding a position to the economic slowdown North America is currently experiencing. For those who have dreamed about an international accredited MBA and a managerial position in a prestigious American corporation following the completion of the program, losing this dream in this manner was particularly painful.

#### *Is the Psychological Contract Dead or Did Someone Change the Rules?*

As noted in the section about motivations, members of the study group don't just get the MBA to have it. Their motivation is instrumental, i.e based on past observations they believe that it would increase their social mobility and enable them to live and work in the States. Undoubtedly, finding a job, regardless of the economical situation is hard work, but as more companies are shutting down in the U.S, finding a position in the current job market is even more difficult.



The theme that repeatedly recurs in the data is that the conditions of the unwritten contract students make with MBA programs have changed. Previously to the economic recession, the “contract” was that the student invests around \$100,000 and gets in return a degree and a very good paying job. However, the situation is different now. Naftali and Shimeon explain that the psychological agreement has been violated, and the dream is no longer attainable.

Last year companies were willing to take you even if your English isn't perfect. If you had a high GMAT score and an interesting resume they agreed to give you that adjustment period. Unfortunately, today they are not willing to do it anymore. Naftali

The most difficult challenge is realizing that it's beyond your control. You understand that what is happening is not up to you. It's up to the economy. So you are interviewed for a position and you are used to being rewarded for your work, but now it's different. It's like Michael Jordan is on his way to the basketball court, but right before he got there. They took the baskets apart and cancelled the game. It's a very uncomfortable feeling, and you are not to blame. Shimeon

People who come here need to understand that nothing is waiting for you on a silver platter and that the chances to fail are greater than the chances to succeed. It's very frustrating because it wasn't like that. Last year all the Israelis found jobs and not because they are better than us, it's because the rules have changed. Shimeon

We are foreign workers. We are like the workers from Thailand who come to work in Israel and send money to their families. The recruiting is much more difficult for us. And when something goes wrong like it did with the economy, the international students are the first to take the hit. There are rules in the senate that specify that banks that get governmental assistance will have hard time issuing H1b visas, and therefore will less likely to hire internationals. Naftali

Unfortunately, the description of these difficulties is fairly accurate. Today's economic environment has changed the rules of hiring new employees. Instead of filling a position with a person who is qualified for the job, one that has most of the skills

needed and train him on the job, they are looking for an overqualified person that can perform an outstanding job on the first day of work. As a result, many capable people are now unemployed, and that's because the rules have changed. The surplus of perfectly qualified employees for any particular job hinders the hiring process of international MBA graduates who face yet another challenge – immigration. In addition to the challenges of getting a work visa that the events of September 11 created, the economic crisis in the U.S has made the process even more acute and menial.

### *The Ramifications of the Economic Crisis*

This situation has serious ramifications for the learning and psychological experience of the students, who have the financial burden of paying off their tuition loan. This dark cloud is wafting through the air the whole time shaping the student's foci and priorities. From Asher and Reuben's reflections, the priority is clear.

Finding a job is the main focus right now with the economy being so bad, and for that reason the courses are marginal. It creates a situation where school projects are not taken seriously. There's a textbook, but nobody reads it. There's just no time. You got to find an internship for the summer. Asher

School work can never be the main issue here. There's no time for school work around here. I wish I could invest more time in school. I wish I could be active in another club. But I need a job. I feel like a failure and it's so frustrating that we don't have jobs now. Reuben

One impact is that students feel that in order to succeed in getting a job, the students need to outperform their American peers in parameters that are crucial to employers. The problem is that the fundamental factor here is the art of networking that gets the candidate on the closed list of interviewees. This is a skill that the study group, as perhaps other international students, needs to acquire because it is not part of their set of

cultural norms that they are bringing with them, and due to the economic slowdown, the sooner, the better as Levi says:

Networking is much more important when the economy is bad as it is now, because the market is flooded with potential candidates. Levi

Another implication of the economic reality that the study group is facing these days is stress. The comments below illustrate some of the difficulties the participants are facing. The notion that is prevalent through Levi and Reuben's responses below is of deceit and betrayal.

There is a lot of asymmetry and misinformation about MBA. When you are in Israel there are things they don't tell you because they are selling you a dream. You are meeting admission officers who are basically salespersons or MBA graduates who forgot what they went through and they don't talk about the difficulties and nobody likes to talk about the difficulties. But when you get here the experience is super individual. Levi

I would never think that an MBA would feel like that. It's a conspiracy of silence. No one tells you how stressful it is. People break into pieces. People collapse. It's not a rose garden. People are scared to death. You have to understand what you are getting yourself into. There is no time for games. You come here to work. When you are not busy working, someone else is getting ahead of you and you are out of the game.. and people ask me how you do it. You have a family. There's no choice, you have to do it. And you learn about yourself. My wife knows that if she wants to drive me crazy, all she has got to do is say to me: you just go to school. I don't just go to school. I have the burden of recruiting, and a group meeting, and a workshop, and a class, and I have a loan of \$160,000 to pay back. If my dad was a millionaire, I wouldn't care. Reuben

That students are stressed out about money is plausible. However, many Americans are now feeling the crunch of financial stress. What is more, it may be hard for the interviewees to separate the stress coming from the MBA experience and the job seeking practice and the one arising from the move to a new country, loss of professional status and being far away from the emotional support of family and friends.

Although it may seem that the perspectives of the students in regards to the economic context are negative, often times, as an interpreter you must listen to what is not said; what is left out of the students' narratives. Implicit in what has been said in this case is that although the picture portrayed here is of misinformed or victimized individuals who wrongly overestimated the power of a state of the art MBA from a marketing-oriented research institution, the theme emerging here is *Carpediem*, e.g. seize the day; don't wait for the future. Strong nostalgia thought of going back to Israel or quitting the program after one semester has not been considered by any 1<sup>st</sup> year participant. Put differently, the process may be more important for them than the outcome; the experience of living abroad they yearned for is more meaningful than finding the longed for job.

#### Summary

The research question that guided the above chapter was: what are the literacy experiences of Israeli MBA study abroad students in an American university? This chapter was aimed at identifying how respondents deal with the linguistic requirements they had to satisfy from the application process to the job search, and how they feel about it.

The theme that sews through all the interview data regarding literacy experiences is that for the study group, literacy is a means to an end. Before the program they invest in literacy because they want to be accepted to the program, and they use unlimited resources that will assist them in achieving this goal. During the program writing is a minor issue because there is no incentive in investing in it. This is a direct consequence

of the needs of the students and the grading system in the typical American business school. During the job search, literacy, again, is very important.

The view reflected by most respondents was that in the business world money is the name of the game. By and large, the analysis shows that students have no economic incentive to invest in literacy practices for the benefit of their literacy development. They believe that creating immaculate written work is worthwhile only when it is profitable to do so, meaning only when it is in their individual self-interest to do so. Respondents are encouraged to take the time to revise their work to support their non-literacy long-term goals. For them, literacy inevitably tends toward instrumentalism. Although this may seem like a rational strategy, this is not the normative principle for a graduate student to adopt. The basic assumption is that graduate students are more motivated to excel.

Although students believe that they get by not immersing themselves in the educational experience, their training is damaged due to poorly chosen foci. Instructors, administrators, and recruiters are much more sophisticated than students realize. They have developed methods to deal with and screen large numbers of students in what appears to the student as a ritual, but, in fact, a carefully designed process to identify the appropriate students, teach them the correct material using different methods (e.g., cold calling, case wiring), and hire the right ones. It's important to recognize that these responses only reflect the students' narrow point of view and not necessarily reality, though reality is always a construct.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE CULTURAL NEGOTIATIONS OF ISRAELI MBA STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS

#### Introduction

This chapter aims at answering the forth research question by presenting the students' perspective on cross-cultural negotiations in study abroad setting. It characterizes the interaction between the respondents and individuals from the host culture as well as other international students from the program. Through this chapter we procure a better understanding of the respondents' adjustment to life in a new context.

The chapter also explores the gap between the cultural perceptions (or misperceptions) the respondents came to the new setting with and the perceptions they developed during the transnational experience. Clearly these perceptions were shaped by the specific experiences each and every participant underwent.

#### The Misconceptions

One of the most frequent themes that repeated sounded in the responses is the preconception that American culture is a model of admiration as far as businesses, culture, lifestyle and technology. For many Israelis in Israel it is considered as the dominant power culture that influences the media and the market. The American way of life is perceived by many people in Israel as the way of the future. Sela-Shffy (2004), who analyzed 295 responses of Israelis to the question: "what makes one an Israeli?" found that an admiration for worldly and popular cultures, mainly for American was a common theme.

Another assumption held by the respondents is that Israel is very much like America culture-wise. Prior to embarking on this journey, respondents shared the

presumption that Israelis are like Americans in the way they communicate or personally interact. More than once the sentence “Israel is the 51st state of the U.S” was used to illustrate this belief. Benjamin describes his view of the cultural nexus between the study group and the Americans.

Israelis have an advantage over other international students. They are more western in their mentality in comparison to the Indian or the Chinese. I think that the American culture is more open to people who look like Americans appearance-wise. We are the 51<sup>st</sup> state of America and we look more like Americans, and it's only natural that people feel comfortable among people who look like them. There are cultural differences but in comparison to students from other nationalities, Israel is the closest. Benjamin

Diamond (2000) refers to this misconception point when he writes about the visible similitude between the Israeli and the American culture.

If we mean manifestations of American culture that are visible to the naked eye, then it is easy to make the case that, in recent years, Israel has indeed become a veritable 52nd state (the 51st being Canada, as most Canadians will unhappily aver). Israel today not only has McDonald's, but Kentucky Fried Chicken and Dunkin Donuts, too. There are malls and galleries that look and feel American. There are "named freeways" There has been the abandonment of socialism and Labor Zionism in favor of a market economy, privatization, capitalism, and free enterprise. The kibbutz has survived as an institution in name only. And then there are the media: Israeli radio -- with call-in and talk shows, drive-time traffic reports, and local stations -- sounds less like the staid BBC now and more like what one hears in the United States. Israeli television, with cable channels and such expressions of American hochkultur as MTV, clearly takes its cue from the American market, as do election campaigns nowadays. And of course, there is always Hollywood. If these are all signifiers of Americanization, then, yes - the influence of America on Israel has been, and is, decisive. (330)

The discrepancy between the way they perceive American culture and what it really mirrors is how many Israelis envision “the land of the free and the home of the brave”. In Israel, the common pervasive grasp of what American are like is that they are liberal, accepting, and pluralist. Yet, it is clear that America is not a unified society and

that while some parts are liberal and pluralist, others are private and conservative.

Realizing this discrepancy requires adapting to the new culture and changing the initial plan of action.

### Signs of Culture Shock

To break the ice and consolidate the new group of students accepted enrolled at the MBA program, the school usually organizes activities during the summer before school starts some of which were the orientation week and the trip. Although this was a good opportunity for students to introduce themselves to the other students in the program, the interviewees didn't like most of the activities the school organized for this week. The perception about the orientation week has been influenced by the motivation of each student to complete the MBA. Because the majority of students had the pure instrumental motivation to be professionals in the global economy they were not interested in this introductory mini-course to American culture. Reuben's was one of them.

A week before school started they brought us in for some activities that will forge team spirit. So there was a day with a chef, a day with games... and we're about a group of 420 people divided to 6 sections of 70 people each, and you get a list of all the people in your section, and because you don't know anybody, they do this. For me it was a waste of time... It was childish. There were a few sporadic events it was worthwhile to take part in, but mostly, it was stupid. For example, there were challenges...one activity required that we split into team and do rope pulling. And after that we had this big discussion about how we felt and why we did this and why we did that, and let's talk about it as a group, and I wanted to tell them "guys! What are you talking about? It's a 'F' rope. You are making it sound like it was... and the Americans loved it. And they took the competition rather serious. And there was cheering, and each team had to come up with a slogan and I thought it was grotesque. I did not take part in it. But the Americans were very much involved. Some international students at some point gave it a try, but most of them were not into it.

Reuben



Also, the activities themselves were described by respondents as childish possibly because of the experiences of male Israelis in the Army. The Israeli army experience is characterized by such activities that are usually carried out in the beginning stages of becoming a soldier. It is reasonable to postulate that for the study group, pulling a rope or cooking together for the purpose of getting to know each other or building team spirit is not the added value they were expecting when they paid tens of thousands of dollars. It might be surmised that the idea about studying abroad they had in mind is completely different than army-like games for recruits.

The fact that the study group complained about the aimlessness of the activities is surprising given the assumption that they were still going through what is known to be the honeymoon state. This disappointment from the pre-academic program may be assigned to the fact that in Israel studying for a graduate degree is usually combined with a full time job. In the US it's time off your normal life to enrich yourself. It takes respondents a few weeks to realize it.

The interviews also uncover that openness to diversity has not yet developed as most of the respondents were first year students and have spent just one semester in the program. This may be attributed to the fact that there was a dozen of Israelis in the class of 2009-2010, what generated negative feelings toward the get-to-know-your-classmates activities. It probably allowed more passivity on the part of respondents. Had the group been smaller, it would have required participants to become more immersed in the host culture, be more active and involved in the new environment. Dan refers to this:

I don't speak English that much, and there is a community of 18 Israelis with their families, and your interaction with the outer world is very limited. But mostly we speak Hebrew. Dan

However, as in any immigration setting, it doesn't take long before reality hits you in the face and you experience culture shock that manifest itself in different ways. Out of the various metaphors that can be used to describe the experience of learning the cultural rules of a new environment, Issachar chose to use "get the bomb" to illustrate how traumatic this experience has been for him.

On the second and third week, when we were on the M-trek I got the bomb. That's when you experience culture shock because many times people say that Israel is the United States and it is so not true. Issachar

When I saw that Issachar was eager to share this cross-cultural experience, I asked him to elaborate this point further about the M-trek. That was his response:

Generally speaking the M-trek was a bad experience. In this trip, I learned that the culture of American Jews is very different from the culture of Israeli Jews, though they share the same religion. We were having dinner... we were 16 students, 3 internationals, and 4 second year leaders. I was busy talking with my Polish friend, and missed the explanation about the menu, so I am asking Terry, this Jewish American what kinds of pizza they have. She replied that she took the second pizza he listed and after that she stopped listening. Now, I couldn't order the pizza she ordered because it was with Ham that's not kosher, and because I didn't want to ask him to list all the pizzas again, I just ordered a simple cheese pizza. When everybody got their specialized pizzas, my Polish friend asked me why I ordered cheese pizza and not something more special, so my answer was "because Terry wouldn't repeat the list of pizzas for me. Now it was clear to me and to him that it was a joke because she told me that she stopped listening after she picked the second one. But the girl started crying; she got up and started yelling at me. I asked her to calm down, but she left the restaurant and started walking back to the hotel. You have to understand that there is a crowd of 20 people watching us and the ones who didn't hear what it was all about think that I did something like "killing her father. Now I am a person that wouldn't hurt a fly. I have never offended anyone, so I sat quietly for the entire evening. And after dinner they all wanted to go the pub and I said that I needed to call home. From that moment on I was unmotivated to socialize with the Americans. I followed the leader and was later one of the Americans approached me and explained that I was too aggressive. Issachar

This story exposes another convoluted hypothesis held by the study group – that the culture of American Jews is closer to the Israeli culture. In Israel there is a common belief that American Jews are very supportive of Israel and that there is a special linkage between American Jews and Israelis. However, the above story illustrates that although these two Jewish communities share the same religion, they don't share the same culture. In the text above, the respondent used Israeli humor to communicate with the American Jew with the assumption that she will understand that he is joking. Obviously, he was wrong and to make this point, an American came up and made it clear that Jewish Americans are Americans and not Israelis.

It is important to note that Shimeon completely denied experiencing culture shock. The notion I got from his response was that people are universally the same. It also denotes the high motivation he had to hold on to the original plan and achieve the final goal and ultimately the dream.

Culturally, I have to admit that I didn't go through all this process of culture shock. I went to Fulbright and they all of these workshops that prepare you for cultural differences. I have never experienced any of that. They describe a state of Euphoria and I didn't have that or the honeymoon phase. There were people I liked and people I didn't like. I felt socially comfortable, never isolated. I was surprised that Americans were different than what I was prepared for. They told us that Americans are hypocritical, and I have never met hypocritical Americans. I always knew who like me and who didn't. Listen; there are people with a very rosy perception of the United States. I knew that no one is going to welcome me with a box of chocolate bonbons, and it helped me cope better. Shimeon

As we know culture shock comes in many disguises. When I asked Shimeon how he felt during the first few weeks here, it was interesting to hear the following two stories that clearly articulate the sense of frustration the respondent experienced. The reflections

below from Shimeon's interview illustrate the feeling of being misunderstood, an outsider, that he did not really find his place in the new culture.

The first encounter I had with the American culture was at the airport. On the day I arrived at New York, one of the airport custom officials asked me how much money I had. I answered that I had less than \$10,000 (I knew that was the limit amount I could bring in). Soon I learned that this was a wrong answer because his reply was: "I didn't ask you if you have more or less than \$10,000. I asked you how much money you have. Are you aware of the consequences of lying to an immigration officer?" And now he directs me to the blue room where I meet an Indonesian. He too is wearing gloves. He commands me to empty my pockets and reminds me not to forget the nickels and the cents... and he is counting the money and the total is \$9992.5. That was my first encounter with the American bureaucracy. Shimeon

It was my first week in the States, One night I came to my rented apartment after a long tiring day, and I turn on the light, but the light wouldn't turn on, so I checked in another room, and it still wouldn't turn on, so I call the electric company and I tell the representative that I don't have electricity. The guy on the phone tells me that they didn't get the fax requesting the change of name on the account that I sent them last week. Now I am asking him if there was something he could do, but he says that he is sorry and that there is nothing he could do to help. So I put red candles in the bathroom and took a shower by candle light and went to sleep. So I get up in the morning resend the fax and call them and the guy asks me for a SSN and since I don't have one, he replies that it will take 8 days to reconnect me. And I say: does it make sense to you that I sit in the dark for 8 days?" So he tells me to try and send the fax through my landlord. To make a long story short, it's like in the airport. If you have an American citizenship, then you're there, you exist. If you don't you, you are a foreigner, you are nobody. Shimeon

The stories also describe the respondent's encounters with U.S authorities. In this context it is crucial to understand the assumptions many hold regarding official experiences. Based Sela-Sheffy's research (2003), for many Israelis the notion of strict rules is foreign. Rules are things one can bend because they are not often enforced. Also, the media teaches Israelis that Americans and Israelis share this everlasting brotherhood and friendship. The American government provides Israel with financial support, and this

leads the study group to think that between friends it's ok to bend rules and cross boundaries. And this stands in complete opposition to the perceptions of rules in the U.S.

### Cultural Stereotyping and the 'We versus Them' Mindset

Another aspect of culture shock is the 'we' vs. 'them' dichotomy expressed in the interviewees' narratives. Interestingly, when examining the number of responses for each camp, the 'them' was more present than the 'we'. This way of characterizing the interaction of the two cultures had a direct implication on the friendship patterns as the respondents express a clear preference towards same-nationality bonds as opposed to cross-cultural relationships. Issachar, Judah, Naftali and Reuben allude to this point when they say:

Israelis are much more aggressive. We say what we think, and we have no mental blocks. We use black humor and this is something they don't like here. They have the culture of politically correctness... and before they say no they hug you. Issachar

There are cultural differences between the Americans and the Israelis, and it's much easier for the Israelis to socialize with other international students. The Americans are... they are much more... sometimes there's a difference between what they say and what they do. There are less direct and less honest many times but you get used to it. I mean, we don't separate between our life at work and life after work, because when you change jobs, it takes too weeks before you feel you have known your new friends for almost all your life. Here it is inappropriate. There is work and there is life, and you don't mix them. Even in school it's the same. At the university in Israel you feel very comfortable with your classmates, but here there are codes you have to go by when you are with your university peers. That's their culture. Judah

There are big differences in mentality and many times you don't even expect it. I will give you an example, last year my two Israelis friends who sat next to each other in a class had a cold and their noses were running. So in the middle of class time one of them got up and went to the bathroom and got a roll of toilet paper and put it on the desk for them to share. He didn't even realize what a mistake he made. It's one thing to share but can't you buy the folded tissue paper like normal people? Naftali

Let's describe a hypocritical meeting of Israelis and Americans... the Israeli will ask direct questions and the American will indirectly answer you going around and around.... And the Israeli will say that it's not like this, and the American will be hypercritical and when you are not around, he will say behind your back that you are dumb and won't understand how you dare speak to him the way you did. Because there are things that Israelis see as natural and Americans don't. All this diversity is BS. We don't trust them. Reuben

As noted earlier, 30% of the student population in this MBA program is International students. And indeed when you wander around the hallways of the business school or walk by the lobby, you can't help hearing foreign language because international students tend to sit in group by nationality: Israelis with Israelis, South Americans with their own, Chinese with their own, and so forth. Reuben's comments remind us that it was easier for the respondents to interact with people from their own culture.

The school split all 420 students to 6 sections and they make sure that the mixture of internationals and American is similar in each section. But if you walk in the hallway you'll see the Americans with the Americans, the Chinese with the Chinese, and the Latin Americans and the Spanish with the Israelis. Reuben

It's easier for us to communicate with the Latin Americans and the Spanish...they are hot temper like us and much more open and direct. With Americans you have to be careful, you may hurt them. Reuben

Despite the fact that there's no cultural homogeneity among Americans, the discourse of generalizations is very common in the respondents' comments. It is natural for human beings to generalize, theorize, and label to make sense of the reality they observe. Zebulun's comment is a good example for this tendency.

I noticed that all the Koreans and Japanese are quiet and won't say more than hello. The Latin Americans are open. West coast American are more open than those from the East coast. New Yorkers are very tough. Zebulun

Criticizing the culture and people in the new country or praising everything from your own culture, while denying any good in the new culture was a common theme in the interviews. Although one would expect that when these two opposing cultures collide, adaptation will take place, it seemed that the fear to lose too much of their own cultural identity promotes their solipsism and at the same time hinders their ability to accept the dissimilarity and embrace it rather than judge it using the criteria of their own culture.

The following statements from the interviews with Benjamin and Levi are revealing:

Another advantage Israelis have is their ability to improvise and their courage to dare. I am not talking about being rude; I am talking about a mild chutzpa (rudeness). Benjamin

The average Israeli digs deeper. We are more out of the box. I will give you an example. On the first week of school we were taken to a deserted house in Detroit. They told us that nobody lives there but homeless people and drug addicts use the premise and the neighbors asked the municipal officials to knock down the house. So they brought us to do the demolition. Now, you stand in front of the house and you ask yourself: why knocking it down? Can't you use it for some other purpose? But the Americans, they don't even stop to think. You tell them to knock it down; they are ready with the equipment. I understand that this is the only way to manage a 300-million people empire. You need people to execute your order not people to doubt them. Levi

The above quote shows that Levi assumes that the people who ordered to knock down the house didn't stop to think about creative ways of using the property, which I am sure they did. But as Sela-Sheffy (2004) shows in her study about how Israelis perceive their own culture, an Israeli always knows better than anyone else, thinking that he has an out of the box way of seeing things.

Another prevalent generalization in the data was that "we are better than them" regarding the host culture. In this context, it is noteworthy to mention Lea whose resistance to Americans sets her identity apart and enhances the preservation of her

cultural identity and her resistance to the hegemony of the American culture. Lea's response to this topic quote provides such example.

I don't like Americans. I don't like the way they talk and their hypocrisy. It's much easier for me to socialize with other international students, not necessarily Israelis. I am a very direct person and in this culture it is not that accepted. I can't accept the fact that I don't know who my neighbors are and that my neighbor is afraid to come into my home, and if her kids play in our backyard than she is gets all hysterical, "Relax! Let them play. We even have a dog that loves kids". Lea

More specifically, one of the repeated themes respondents referred to in the interviews is that the Israeli students view Americans as insincere. Levi, Abraham and Benjamin explore how study group feels when interacting with their fellow Americans.

It's just like if you and I finish this interview and I tell you: "wow! This was a lot of fun", it is more than clear to you that I have just said that this was a complete waste of time, and I am probably never going to see again, because if I did, I would tell you "wow, you have to meet my kids and my wife, take out your calendar and tell me when you can, these differences are something you need to learn. Levi

Recently I have learned that Americans use understatement, in other words what they tell you have different meanings. An American once told me that he like to watch the Simpsons and that it's such an excellent show that uses so many cultural references that it's impossible to get all of them, And what he really meant was that because I am Israeli I can't get the cultural references and I don't understand the show. Another example is a professor that recommends that you do something. You have to understand that it's not really a recommendation. This is something you have to do, and if he STRONGLY recommends that you it, it means that you must do it NOW. Abraham

There's a lot of phoniness in the American culture. Everybody smiles at you and it's all good... and "I am so happy to see you"... and sometimes you just don't feel like communicating according to the rules of the American culture. Let's say, someone is working for a company I am interested in getting a job at, so you don't send your resume to this person and ask if they are looking for an employee. You'll say that you want to learn more about the company, even though both of you know the real reason you approached him. Benjamin



As seen in the quotes above the study group criticizes the American culture and seem to prefer the alternative Israeli way. This is expected based on the anthropological assumption the one's own culture is a platform to evaluate new cultural values, as Naylor (1998) states:

Once a culture is learned, it becomes the measure of any other culture. Members of the group judge the ideas and actions of other groups based on what they have learned. This is because culture is learned as truth. No culture group teaches its members that someone else's culture is more correct than theirs (8).

However, as the business professor notes, the respondents forget that the "Israeli Way" can be sometimes rude, intolerant and obnoxious. They ignore the fact that it's a different culture and their lack of confidence manifests itself in the criticism. It would have been more constructive if they would try to turn their "Israeli advantage" into an advantage in the U.S. Sela-Sheffy's (2004) research confirms this point about the Israeli culture by finding that Israelis often see themselves as rude and often violators of social norms.

### When Two Cultures Collide

Another theme identified in the respondents' answers was the perception that their hosts try to change them and make them more Americanized. The study group learns the norms of behavior inductively through cultural interactions they take part in. Issachar, Reuben and Benjamin's responses reveal that for the study group, it's a strange practice because they are used to being upfront and direct in communicational settings.

I don't think the main problem here is English. I shop in English. It's a little bit difficult in the beginning because you do get stuck and can't find the right word. Issachar

One day while I was sitting at the office of career development, talking to someone, he asked me what I would do if there's an overlap of an

interview and an exam, and my answer was “there’s no question. Of course I’d go to the interview. I came here to find a job”. The manager of the office of career development overheard me say that and responded: “I don’t believe you have just said this. How dare you say this? This is an academic institution. I am not going to invite you to the panel”...nobody says it upfront. Wake up guys. We are here to find a job. It’s a race. Reuben

If you disagree with someone, you can’t say that upfront. You can’t say “this is a bad idea” or “I don’t think it’s a good idea”. You have to understand who you are talking to and tone it down a bit. You have to say “I think that this is a great idea, but I suggest that we do ...” This is very common here, and it helps avoid clashes. Benjamin

Many times you are sitting with a group on a project and you’re arguing for 6 hours, and at a certain point I said “no” to one of the girls to show disagreement, and she muted. So I suggested that we divide the work, so the Americans are in one group and all the internationals are in another one. So they give me the Singaporean and we said we’d meet Friday night and when we talk I find out that he used to work a company which was competing with the one we needed to analyze. And he is so quiet and never participates and nobody lets him speak, and sometimes you just want to tell them: “shut up, let him talk, he knows what he is saying”. So we sat and talked and I tried saying “no” when I disagreed with him and after 10 minutes we had an idea we went to the group with, and they all approved it and we were done. And I just don’t get it: why do I need to hug you with 17 sentences before I can disagree with you when I can just say no? And my friends were laughing at me asking: what’s the APD (Americans per day) count? In other words how many Americans did I hurt today? Issachar.

The directness in Israeli culture has been previously documented in the Literature. In Blum Kulka et al, 1985 and Blum Kulka & Olshtein, 1984) the researcher found that the Israeli culture appears to be more straight forward, direct and rude to non-Israelis based on the examination of naturally occurring requests and a discourse completion test. Furthermore, it was found that people choose when to activate the directness in their speech (Katriel, 1986).

While the majority of the participants feel that Americans try to change them, the anecdotes they shared with me say exactly the opposite: the study group is the one to

impose its norms of behavior on both American as well as other international students. This can be explained by a finding from Shechtman and Kenny (1994) who found that people function in accordance with their own cultural behavior rather than in response to the feedback they receive from others. As an example, it is interesting to compare how Shimeon views the challenges of completing course projects in mixed groups.

When you choose the group, you choose people that are friendly and easy to work with, but when the group is assigned, you may end up with all kinds of people, and that happened to me before, and it was a learning experience. There were thinkers who think in very broad and general terms, and there were those who didn't care because it was a low priority for them (it is always more important to invest in finding a job). The problem is that there's no way to manage them...and you understand that there's a deadline and you have to finish the project and somehow you need to find a way to get this wagon moving. I am a very executive person. I get an assignment and I get right to work. I don't think forever but they don't cooperate with you. You try to be practical and suggest that we do this and that but you can't yell at them, this is not the army. So everybody express their opinion and we end up not agreeing on anything, so I am pushing that we put our ideas on papers, and they say "here comes the nuisance". Shimeon

While some respondents attribute the struggles described in this context cultural, Abraham completely ignores the cultural factor and analyzes the situation using universal characteristics and different personalities, as shown by the following quotations.

Many times the projects are done in groups and I can tell you that you need a lot of patience when you work with other people. It really depends on the group you fall in. When the professor assigns the groups randomly, there may be problems. And I am not talking about cultural differences. I am talking about the problem of overlap of talents. Abraham

While this explanation may sound credible, it is unexpected when the question being asked is: What are the cultural challenges do you face in completing group projects? Possibly, that is a politically-correct version of the reality of team work.

## How to Survive the Adjustment Process

Different respondents describe different ways to deal with the cultural challenges. Some believe that by being involved in more situations, they will acquire the culture. At the same time it is important for them to preserve their home culture. Jacob's assumption is that he can contribute because he came from a different culture. Jacob's view clearly indicates the opinion of the respondent regarding this issue

I believe we need to give them cultural flavor from the places we come from, and start by saying: "Listen, guys, I am going to be very direct now and if you are not comfortable with that, let me know and I'll stop". This is how you make them realize that you are a different cultural entity, and if you prepare them, they understand. If you bring them to a situation where they experience immediate shock, you get nowhere. Jacob

For Issachar who took the other end of this continuum, it led to a post traumatic behavior of individualism as they decided to avoid Americans at all cost. These people isolated themselves from the host country's environment, which they come to perceive as hostile. The following comment captures the experience that led this participant to isolate himself. Issachar doesn't want to be part of this give and take relationship with people from the host culture. He doesn't want to have anything to do with them.

At a certain point I said 'no more group work". So I only took courses with individual assignment. I would go over all the syllabi and choose only the electives without group work. I just couldn't take it anymore. What's happening in study groups is that people are not prepared to do work, so it starts out with the fact that they're late for meeting and they don't come prepared, so they ask for 20 minutes to go over the case. So you sit there like an idiot checking your emails while they are reading what they had to read before the meeting. So those who read the case at home and answered the questions lead the discussion and they are so far ahead, and the ones who just finished the first reading are angry that they are not part of the discussion and they think it's your fault and there's always the Chinese who can sit through the entire meeting without uttering a syllable, and it doesn't work. And the school is proud to emphasize team work but it doesn't work like this in the business world.

You can't possibly assign 6 people to do the exact same job, besides someone has to say "cut! We are doing this". Issachar

### Summary

This chapter examined the cultural, institutional, and educational learning of a community of learners. The learners' assessment of the new cultural practices depends on their own cultural framework, and their assumptions and beliefs about the nature of human interaction. Despite the misperceptions respondents bring with them to the study abroad experience and the culture shock they undergo; the analysis evinces their desire to participate in a business community of practice, unsuccessfully at times.

It is important to note that there's a difference between first year students and second year student. First year students are still observing and describing situations, and acquiring cultural knowledge while making sense of the new reality. They have yet developed strategies to deal with the struggles of challenges of cross-cultural communications. In other words, the experiences still shape their perceptions about this unique interaction.

Second year students who have spent more time with in the program and garnered experiences with people from other cultures have already developed strategies to copying with cross cultural communication experiences. Their cultural knowledge is represented by an ability to solve new problems. These strategies vary greatly and can be placed somewhere on the continuum that ranges from the strategy of being involved in more and more cultural interactions to the strategy of completely avoiding cross-cultural interactions.

Those who invest in schoolwork and succeed in practicing the new norm are those who quickly adapt to the new culture, and find their place in the job market. In other

words, to succeed, the requirement is to be an American because diversity doesn't really work. When they want to they can behave like Americans, but it's time consuming, it's a lot of work and they don't feel like doing it, so they pick and choose. If they have an incentive they do it. If there's no incentive, they wouldn't. In addition, the study group wants to teach the Americans but the culture of capitalism reminds them the opposite. So, it's not a matter of "Would You Hire an international?" as much as *"Would You Hire an International who doesn't respect the modus operandi of the American business setting?"* The fact is that in many cases they just can't.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

To review, the intent of this study was to gain understanding of students' views of the literacy and cultural experiences during study abroad. This final chapter communicates to the reader a summary of main findings of the current research by addressing the four research questions the study posed. The study's key findings are also synthesized with the issues raised in the pilot study and former research in the field. I will end this section with some reflections on the limitations of the study as well as some suggestions for future research.

#### Research Question 1: What is the Profile of the Israeli Study Abroad Student?

Using descriptive statistics to define the population from which the study sampled participants, this study attempted to describe the Israeli study abroad student. Based on the demographic and social characteristics of Israeli study abroad students, their choices of academic program and the degrees they seek to earn sampling decisions were made.

So, who is the Israeli study abroad student? Several inferences can be made based on the analysis. The first, Israeli study abroad students reflect preferences in regards to US region, academic institution, and academic program. They mostly come from the big cities in the center of Israel and apply to internationally recognized and prestigious institutions in the U.S they have heard of such as Harvard, Stanford etc that are located in big cities that the US is known for through the media such as New York, L.A etc.

Another key finding is that most of the Israelis that are enrolled to universities in the US either seek a graduate degree. The descriptive findings also suggests that Master of business the administration is most frequent program Israeli study abroad students

choose to pursue a degree in as 25% of the entire sample were MBA seekers. Lastly, an important finding of this study is that men are more likely to experience studying abroad than women.

#### Research Question 2: What are the Literacy Requirements for Israeli MBA Study Abroad Students?

Literacy is a collection of language abilities that are acquired and used in specific contexts. It is a dynamic set of language abilities and is influenced by the changes in the different settings of society. Hence, researchers have acknowledged the notion that a more accurate leading theory for literacy research is multi-literacy to handle the many kinds of texts that have been added to the linguistic text.

In accordance with literacy, genres are characterized with a dynamic nature. People have the ability based on some culturally and historically based set of concepts to design and redesign the already existing genres; therefore the characterization of each genre is based on the more general features and most typical qualities though there may be variations to the prototype

Following the literacy and genre research paradigms, this chapter described the prototypic language patterns and structural aspects of each genre the participants in this study are required to interact with in each stages of the business training experience: the application, the coursework and the job search. For reading assignments, the cognitive process of understanding each types of text is provided, while for writing tasks the procedure is specified. The educational function of both the reading and writing assignments is indicated.



Broadly, MBA students are engaged in a variety of reading, writing, and speaking practices. They are expected to make sense of and produce a series of genres. Yet, the literacy practices international students are required to cope with in an MBA program are bound by the discipline of business. The vast majority of the types of texts they get familiar with during the program are new to many respondents. The challenge these pose is not linguistic but rather the fact that they are culturally-based and discipline-specific.

The MBA coursework requires students to mostly read textbook chapters. The level of difficulty of processing the information elicited from this type of reading is fairly easy although the load is heavy. As opposed to textbook chapters, the second most frequent type of reading is more challenging and involves higher levels of analysis of the different evidence presented in the text. Very few texts that are purely academic are assigned for readings, which reflect the objective of MBA programs.

To model the way business decisions are taken in real-life situations, group writing assignments are widely used, and the most frequent group writing assignment is the case analysis which can be either one of the class assignments or an examination. A case is a text that describes a real-life managerial dilemma the students are required to diagnose and solve. A power point presentation usually accompanies the written product. This type of text that includes visual images is now widely used and requires the student to combine several sets of literacy. A case may take the form of a take-home or an online exam that is still used as the main assessment tool in the program.

Dealing with cases is reflected across the different language skills. While, it requires a different approach to reading and writing, it demands a quick and less monitored articulation of thoughts during class discussion. It is important to mention that

no special accommodations are given to International students because the assessment system eliminates the factor of linguistic background.

### Research Question 3: What Characterizes the Literacy Experiences for Israeli MBA Study Abroad Students?

The literacy experiences of Israeli study abroad MBA students are closely linked to the students' previous literacy experiences, study abroad motivations and attitudes toward academic experience as a literacy event and the way they cope with the challenges it poses. At the same time, the attitudes toward the literacy is shaped by the cultural perceptions the respondents bring with them, the way they interpret the target culture and their willingness to adapt their previously acquired skills to a new context.

Commencing with students' motivations to pursue international MBA education prompted the investigation and served as a baseline to learning about the perceptions regarding literacy experiences. Examining the key questions: why did students choose to study overseas? Why did they choose a particular country or a specific university, several motivations that run through the interviews were found. While few are in essence the selling points of MBA and are integrative in nature that stress the experience, exposure to people from different cultures and polishing a foreign language, the vast majority are purely instrumental as highlighted by Mazzarol & Soutar (2002). It's interesting to note that studying business or learning to be a better manager was missing from the array of motivations reported by the participants. Another hidden motivation was the goal of living and working in the United States, for that reason doing the MBA in Israel was not even considered as it doesn't serve the genuine motivation, and the explanation that

business schools in Israel are not among the first 100 elite universities in the world is just an excuse.

In general, studying abroad is a springboard to being an international business professional. It's a career booster and the end here is clearly the financial compensation MBA is translated to as a ticket to the high-status job market. Participants cited the reason of finding a job at an international company as the main reasons for choosing an American MBA program. Although this motivation is described in previous research, the way it is portrayed in this study is passionate and fantastic. Living (and hopefully working) in the U.S is a dream come true for the respondents and the only legal way of to bypass the barriers of immigration is enrolling in a graduate program.

In view of these findings, it seems that students who come from the same country share the same motivation for studying abroad, a conclusion supported by Goldsmith & Shawcross (1985). However, this study points that this study group doesn't conform to the suggestion made by Matsui (1991) that students from poor countries go abroad in order to contribute to their country's technological and economic development nor that their counterparts from rich countries go abroad to explore other cultures. Though no one mentioned it directly due to a shared unspoken agreement, getting away from the stressful Israeli everyday context has also played a role in the decision to go abroad.

The study group holds the extreme view that MBA is for the most part an investment that will bring about a change in the graduate's compensation potential in the job market. As opposed to focusing on the educational experience and the networking opportunities, the study group which includes very practical individuals puts greater emphasis on the outcome of MBA – a good paying job while underestimating the

academic benefit. This creates a false perception that they are ready for the addressing on the job business challenges.

Finding from this study suggest mostly positive attitudes towards English learning in general which mirrors the nationwide enthusiasm for English study in Israel. At the same time a clear distinction is made between the formal English classes in schools and informal afternoon programs. The respondents' do not attributed their success in mastering the language to curricular English instruction since memories from ESL classes in Israeli schools reveal more focus on form, grammar drilling and receptive skills. The main practices reported are reading and listening with very little language production. By contrast, previous experiences in after-school or private enrichment lessons are remembered as fun and experiential, mostly due to the focus on productive skills. Hence, a clear correlation is made by respondents between their success as EFL students and out-of-school English programs. Additionally, respondents' advanced proficiency is attributed to the fact that they started learning the language in informal programs at a younger age.

This above distinction between formal and enrichment foreign language education in inexact and stems from three sources: the first is a traditional and perhaps common way of thinking about language learning that ignores changes in EFL schools of taught and practical teaching methodologies. The second is the disappointment of the public of the Israeli educational system, and the third is the false belief that when it comes to learning foreign languages, the earlier you start, the better you are off. These three social perceptions lead the respondents to be overconfidence in regards to their English

proficiency not realizing that knowing a language involves understanding the culture and then tailoring your English to it.

My analysis suggests that the respondents viewed the essays required to get into the MBA program very challenging and Sisyphean also because of the misconception that writing is a gift of nature that one either possesses or lacks. Clearly this view is at the same time a reflection of the frustration students feel as second language writers and a reason for them criticizing the use of such a tool to screen prospective MBA students.

Also, because the members of this study group are not trained in writing college essays, their resistance to application essays is evident in the data. Contrasted to the average American who is drilled the five paragraph essay format, for example, from elementary education all the way through high school, in the average Israeli school, the practice of composition writing is very much ignored. Also, because MBA seekers are more likely to have bachelor degrees that are more career-oriented than liberal arts-oriented, their repertoire of literacy practices are within the borders of the academic discipline they functioned in. This preposition confirmed that the educational background of the student plays a key role in the way writing is perceived and practiced

The fact that second language academic writers need support is acknowledged in the literature. This study characterizes and defines the nature of the assistance MBA applicants necessitate. This study has identified three models of support: language editing, cultural mediating, and marketing communication expertise. The latter is the most needed depending on the respondents' previous literacy experience. The students interpreted the difficulties as second language-related. However, they are mistaken in emphasizing this as the main obstacle since the difference between the genres that they

used to write during their bachelor degrees and the application essays dictated the nature of support needed, but was mostly more academic, field-specific and cultural than language-based.

Since many students have bachelor degrees in exact or life sciences, they lacked knowledge about how to write a liberal arts genre and tended to be very factual and succinct in their writing. Because in Israeli academia the ability to express thoughts in writing is not assessed in the application process, the study group misunderstood the objective of the application and the way admission officials use it to assess the suitability of the candidate to the program. The concept of accepting or rejecting candidates based on their writing skills is foreign to the respondents who for the most part value standardized tests only as predictors of academic success.

It is remarkable that the field of second language academic literacy that is dedicated to the struggles and challenges faced by study abroad students hasn't devoted any attention to literacy difficulties prospective students are faced with during the application process, a stage that is rich in complex literacy practices. This study highlights an area of increasing need for study, as literacy in study abroad context is practiced prior to the physical relocation.

Several themes surfaced with respect to the respondents' transnational academic literacy experiences during the MBA. First, the study group is very much goal-oriented; therefore the language used both for school-based tasks and career advancement is purely functional and incentive-dependent. The respondents' approach to literacy shows significant preference in their investment in career-related literacy as opposed to academic-based literacy. The rationale for this preference is the common false

assumption held by respondents that nobody fails MBA and that one can find his dream job without working hard. The views that uncover this assumption are: (1) The grading system in the business school; (2) It provides hands-on experience and not so much theoretical background as other graduate degrees; (3) It accommodates the different backgrounds of students; and finally, (4) MBA is perceived as an employment-based human resources organization. By holding to these beliefs the study group misses the focus of business school education which is distinguishing yourself as a super smart future business leader among a group of very smart people.

In regard to the respondents' self assessment of their English abilities, it is fair to say that the complexity of the program's literacy requirements is not critical to their performance in the study abroad environment. Although some describe how overly worried they are about being correct, the majority say the literacy is not so demanding. This gap points to the fact that they talk about foreign language acquisition using the terms they have acquired in their cultural and academic settings in Israel.

However, the perception of English proficiency depends on the criteria of comparison. When the standard is other international MBA students, the evaluation of English proficiency is high; when the exemplar is the native English speaker, the self-perception English competence is gloomier. It may be postulated that the program's cultural and linguistic diversity is a factor that influences the international students' self perception of English proficiency.

The findings of this research indicate that the extent to which Israeli MBA study abroad students feel academically and culturally challenged by the complexity of the issues involved in functioning in a transnational setting is largely depends on the Israeli

discourse regarding the aim and practice of graduate education. To exemplify, when in Israel enrolling in a graduate program means keeping your full-time job while attending classes, in the U.S, it means taking time off your career and devoting yourself to the educational experience.

Although the hurdles of study abroad are largely ascribed by researchers to the low levels of foreign language proficiency, I found that Israeli International business students' second language proficiency is sufficient to the programs' needs. One reason is that some assignments are done in mixed groups and the study group relies on their counterparts Americans to take care of the language polishing job. Another reason is the false perception that professors don't pay attention to mechanics and only care about the contents or that they are unable to tell the difference between an original work and a 'cut and paste' job. This misperception is rooted in the study group's assumption that rules are often not too often enforced

While most reading and writing assignments are not perceived as hard to write, there are exceptions to this assertion - the case analysis. This genre is not a technical practice as problem sets, for example. Limited background knowledge and practice in writing academic papers seems to be the main obstacle depends on what their B.A is in. The language proficiency is not the reason for the difficulty in reading cases. It is more getting used to reading critically and dialoguing with a new type of text preferably through interaction. Although it has been claimed before international students are not trained in critical reading and writing because it is de-emphasized in the cultures they come from (Ridley, 2004; Spencer, 2003; Ying, 2003), this study found that the reason



for this is previous discipline-specific educational experience and not so much the culture.

In accordance with Tatar's (2005) study and not surprisingly oral literacy practices during class were found to be a source of stress for the population studied. In this context, the language barrier is used by participants to explain the uncomfortable situation an international student experiences in American business schools because it's influences the person's perception of his social identity. Findings from this study reveal that rather than focusing on the content of the response, the study group criticizes the way the response is uttered, feeling in comparison to the way Americans do, makes them look bad as Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide and Shimizu (2004) pointed previously pointed out. The willingness to communicate in a foreign language is strongly related to perceptions of one's perceived competency in the foreign language. What came up in the current study is that the study group doesn't just feel at a disadvantage concerning their speaking skills but they also criticize the way American students speak which obviously arises from their inability to match these skills.

In line with previous research, different strategies are applied by the study group to cope with literacy practices. The strategies the study group employed to cope with the literacy demands are based on what reading and writing tactics they possess in their three Rs' tool box, and the problem solving techniques they grew up with. In some cases the realization that previously used strategies are of less applicability makes they employ process of trial and error through which they constructively adjust the strategies to the new academic and disciplinary context. In other cases, as they try to bypass the challenge

by cutting short and avoiding hard work with the hope those things will work out for them.

Broadly, what became clear through the research was that MBA students who invest in certain literacy practices and not in others because of the way they perceive the essence of business education and its objective in a globalized economy. For that reason, they adopt a client-based approach are concerned that they received value for their money. The value is translated to support, and compromise in academic standard they were expecting. Furthermore, because they perceive themselves as paying customers and the program as service-providers, they allow themselves to meet compromised standards and work to get best grades at minimum effort.

Recognizing the vast literature on the academic challenges of study abroad, results of this study fall into the conceptual framework, that puts a considerable weight on past literacy experiences in understanding literacy in study abroad context. However, going back to the pilot study that motivated this doctoral dissertation, the most striking discovery this research confirms is that in the particular context of International academic education for the study group, discipline-specific academic L1 Literacy knowledge has a critical role in the L2 transnational literacy practices during the application, the formal curriculum and the career opportunity search. Being an international student myself, I felt compelled to explore the nature of the transnational experience. In particular, I attempted to answer the questions that framed the research: Do other Israeli students in the U.S hold the same beliefs? Is Ethan's case Idiosyncratic? Is there a similitude between other Israeli study abroad students' experiences and Ethan's?

Side by side the similarities, I have seen that there is a substantial variation between the single-case pilot study and the respondents. The variation reflects the gap in the amount of literacy events between a PhD student who had a liberal arts academic background and a dedicated reader of theological texts. It is also marked by the different literacy demands of the study abroad.

When it comes to employment-related communication, the respondents' investment in literacy is understandable. Naturally, allowing typos, misspellings, or incorrect grammar/punctuation into employment-related piece marks the candidate as unprofessional. Similarly they understand they can't afford to come unprepared to interviews without memorizing answers to questions employers may ask them. And because the incentive here is clear they are trying to adapt to the new norms.

In the context of finding a post-graduation job, mastering new literacy tasks is critical to performance. Finding a job in American business school context is a culturally specific process in which rules need to be carefully observed. The art of networking is a highly significant component, because if you lack social skills you are doomed to failure. The problem is that the respondents don't necessarily understand the rationale behind the rules of this communication in the job market context, and this discrepancy makes the norms of this process seem disingenuous and artificial.

Another perception of literacy that is emanated from this study is that language use is seen by the respondents as a ritual in the sense that it is not only structural and non-creative, but it is also fake and staged. The most prevalent finding in regards to the literacy experiences during the job hunt is that respondents view them as pre-designed to the smallest detail. It is not seen by them as a meaningful mode of expression but rather a

mechanic practice one masters by adjusting commonly used patterns to their own needs. For instance, cover letter and resumes are primarily written according to templates that the student modifies as needed. Answers to potential interview questions are memorized word-for-word similarly to the small talk which in most cases is automatic or improvised. At the same time, they don't realize that the purpose of this technical endeavor is ironically a reconstruction of their professional identities, and that their job is to create communication that would make them stand out and at the same time respecting of the rules of the surrounding they want to part of rather than trying to make the surrounding adjust to their cultural norms.

Although I had no specific research question about the influence of the economic situation on the study group, this was a frequently brought up topic. In addition to the fact that international students have a high-risk of unemployment and over-qualification regardless of their local education, their level of foreign language proficiency or the length of residence abroad, and that the vast majority return home (Wiers-Jenssen, 2008; Storen and Wiers-Jenssen, 2010), current international student are faced with economic slowdown that makes it even harder. The most common perception is that the rules of the game have changed. Put differently, the conditions of the unwritten contract students make with MBA programs have changed. This is unfortunately a fair view as according to the new rules, the added value of studying abroad in finding a job is limited to students with specifically desired skill, knowledge and experience, not career switchers.

This situation has serious ramifications for the learning experience of the students as well as students' self-image. Students feel that because they have the financial burden of paying off their tuition loan, school work is pushed down in the list of priorities.

Moreover, stress and frustration are constantly mentioned, yet, the source of stress in this study is not so much cultural like the literature shows (Langley & Breeze, 2005; Constantine, Okazaki, and Utsey, 2004; Scheyvens et al., 2003, Hashim & Zhiliang, 2003) as it is economic, although sometimes it's hard to tell what the origin of stress is. Still, similarly to Andrews & Henze, 2009 and Thortensson, 2001, this study indicates that business students have a high risk for stress due to financial obligations.

It is important to note the specificity of the business context in which this research was carried out, and this is perhaps a finding that is unique to this study that the business aspect of business education has penetrated the academic arena. Whether or not to invest in the educational experience has become a business decision controlled by cost-benefit analysis. It could be assumed that in a time of economic prosperity, reflections on literacy and cultural study abroad experiences would be different.

#### Research Question 4: What Characterizes the Cultural Negotiations of Israeli MBA Study Abroad Students?

Previous research has already well described how international students struggle in a foreign cultural environment. As opposed to previous research that describes the process through which international students adapt to the American culture, the most striking finding this research highlights is that some respondents tried to make the American adapt to the Israeli cultural conventions. They constantly criticized Americans and American culture. This may be attributed to the fear to lose their own identity and the fact that in the time interview were conducted there was a group of 20 Israelis in the MBA program.

Mirroring previous empirical work, the discourse reflected by the subjects in this study shows that the study abroad experience raised the subjects' awareness to cultural differences between the Israeli and the American culture. Frustration due to gaps between what they thought and what they faced has produced language that is rich in misconceptions that are turned upside down during the first few months. For instance, before coming to the U.S they wrongly share the idea that Israel is the 51<sup>st</sup> State of America and that Israeli culture is very similar to America culture thanks to a growing global trend of Americanization.

Thanks to media the U.S often appears exotic in the eyes of the study group. And although there are many different culture patterns in the U.S, and although diversity is perhaps its chief characteristic, for the study group, it's a utopian idealized symbol. It is in the period of the study abroad that this illusion explodes, and it doesn't take them long to understand that they misperceived the American context. As a result, they experience culture shock that is manifested in different forms, some of which are unconscious.

The observations of this study are consistent with the much discussed concept of culture shock that is central to the experience of becoming familiar with a new environment. Culture shock, for the particular participants, was expressed in multiple ways such as: understanding what lies in-between the literal messages, learning what is appropriate to say or do, when and how, and learning new norms of behavior, most of which seemed strange and awkward. Yet, no indication of discrimination or racism was evident in this sample as other studies have noted (Lee 2010; Gonzales, 2006). This can be ascribed to the fact that the college town environment is usually more tolerant.

As the differences between American and Israeli culture starting to be more clear the ‘we versus them’ mindset as well as prejudice and stereotypes started to present themselves. This has a clear implication on group work as suggestion by Stahl et al. (2010) and Montgomery (2009). As a result, friendship patterns that are mainly characterized by same-nationality relationship as identified by Scheyvens, Wild & Overton., 2003; Wilkinson, 1998; Twombly, 1996 ) or cultural closeness as shown in this study.

On the whole, the way the respondents experience the cultural interactions is a function of their own cultural framework, and their assumptions and beliefs about the nature of human interaction. The study group, perhaps similarly to other national groups, tend to be unaware of others but at the same time they are unaware of their own beliefs and behaviors. Because they are unaware of the acquisition process of their own culture (after all, all they did was live their own culture), they forget that cultures are learned and that the ideas behind their behaviors are acquired through an individual’s life experience.

Yet, it is important to note that there’s a difference between first year students and second year student. While first year students are still observing and describing situations, acquiring cultural and making sense of the new reality, second year students have developed cultural sensitivity, which is widely explored in the literature, as well as strategies to coping with cross cultural communication experiences.

Nevertheless, the Interview data the study is based on also reveals that the cultural negotiations of the study group is a means to self and group identification. Dolby (2004) notes that identity extensions transnational education creates by making you more aware of the values and traditions in your home country. The subjects in this study

demonstrated multiple and dynamic identities. It was clear that their cultural negotiations were tied to previous cross-cultural interactions and social identity construction processes. While at times they adopted American standards, in other occasions their Israeliness was more evident. A third model was a combination of the two which is known as a ‘glocal’ identity (Ailon-Suday & Kunda, 2003; Tubin & Lapidot, 2008). This shift of going back and forth and in-between identities is exemplified in the statement: “an Israeli is someone who wears an Israeli shirt while in the US, and changes into an American-flag shirt when arriving in Israel” (Tubin & Lapidot).

#### Implications of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze students’ literacy and cultural experiences on three different stages of their business training. As an Israeli myself, I don’t mean to overgeneralize nor to stereotype. I know that by doing that I exclude other groups that contribute to the diversity of the Israeli culture. But this study elucidate that the participants’ discourse is replete with myths, misconceptions and misinformation about the nature and objective of their business training and the context in which it operates. I think that these myths and misconceptions are significant predictors of how the participants experience the program.

Unfortunately, many respondents in the study group misjudge the focus of the academic experience and the importance of adapting to the new culture. Many are not even aware of the influence it has on their chances of getting their professional training. This respondents’ often naive attitude has not received enough attention to prevent its negative impacts.



Clearly, in this study, the students had perceptions that often did not match the assessment of the other party involved. I don't intend to provide an exhaustive discussion of the various components of the Israeli culture. That would make me unprofessional and irresponsible and I frankly lack the expertise of portraying a multifaceted and multifarious phenomenon such as the Israeli culture. Still, because the respondents do feel a bond with each other and because their literacy is deeply rooted in social context, it is apprehensible that the origin of the respondents' misconceptions is the Israeli communal context in which they grew surrounded by.

One implication for policy making is for elementary, high school and higher education institutions in Israel that should be aware of the literacy preparation they equip their students with to face the challenges of education in the "global village". From my professional experience, as a teacher of undergraduate and graduate-level EFL composition and research writing classes at Israeli academic institutions, I often hear the complaint that writing is an underrated skill and that my course really "taught them how to write". I think this is a badge of shame to the Israeli educational system, and devising a solution is required to address this problem.

On another level, this study can be particularly useful to institutions of business education that are interested in learning about their international students' perceptions of the curriculum. MBA programs should be aware of this research and consider these findings in evaluating their coursework as well as their practicum. First, Students' perceptions of the aim of MBA education is influenced more by what the program does than by what it officially states in website, syllabi and other official document. To produce this discrepancy in perceptions, professors should be aware of how well they

model ideal learning. Second, faculty should develop pedagogical strategies to address the potential false perception of the students' regarding the literacy skills the program requires versus what is required in the business job market.

If graduate-level business education is to be effective providing sufficient business training, then, it is necessary to identify these students, help them understand the discrepancies and address a remedy. For example, MBA professors must understand the English writing skills that entering students possess in order to adjust the curriculum and perhaps include an obligatory writing course in the first semester. In addition, as the requirements of the business job market and students' knowledge and skills are continually changing, continuous evaluation of students' perception and performance is required in order to evaluate the extent to which MBA education is adequately preparing students to their post-graduation job and today's global economy.

#### Limitations of the Study

This study had some limitations that need to be mentioned. I acknowledge concerns regarding the fact that I am too an international student and that the way I interpret the finding of this research is influenced by my own transnational experience. Nevertheless, I believe that every researcher uses his previous experiences as criteria through which s/he makes sense of the data. Sharing the same culture, language and experience with the respondents and being able to deeply understand participant comments have increased the validity of interpretations presented here.

The conclusions of this study are based on the interpretation of a relatively small number of participants' experiences, and although the analysis was corroborated by four coders: the researcher, a fellow graduate student, a business professor, and the chair of

the dissertation committee, the findings of this study do not allow an immediate generalization to a larger population.

Yet, beyond the small sample size and the lack of random sampling, the unique characteristics of the study group constitute the main limitation in this study. Being accepted to one of the top ten business programs in the U.S, this group of students has unique characteristics that the entire population of international MBA students might not have. Being recruited from one institution the extent to which these findings are applicable across MBA programs is limited. These are gifted learners and analytical thinkers, at least according to the GMAT; They have very high abilities in basic mathematics, English grammar, reading comprehension, understanding of written arguments, and basic writing skills (a score of 700 and up).

From a socio-cultural point of view, the study group comes from a different cultural context and need to adjust to a new academic setting. As Israelis, these people are very practical and their main motivation to go to business school is getting a job. From a disciplinary point of view, since these are business, their tendency to be set high goals and work hard toward them may distinct them as well from international students who pursue graduate degrees in other fields. These limitations have to do with the extent to which the findings of this research can be generalized beyond the cases studied.

In essence, the present research study confirms that the literacy experiences of Israeli study abroad MBA students are closely linked to the students' previous literacy experiences, study abroad motivations and attitudes toward academic experience as a literacy event and the way they cope with the challenges it poses. At the same time, the attitudes toward the literacy is shaped by the cultural perceptions the respondents bring

with them, the way they interpret the target culture and their willingness to adapt their previously acquired skills to a new context.

### Generalizability and Transferability

Before discussing the extent to which this conclusion can be generalized to comparable groups or situations, I would like to explore the concepts of generalizability and transferability. The idea of generalizability is a commonly discussed concept in quantitative research. In this context, generalizability is associated with creating images of statistical generalization from samples to larger populations which means that if the characteristics of the study group match with the characteristics of the population from which the study group was drawn, then the findings of the research can be generalized to the whole population. But that is not the goal that we are pursuing in qualitative research. Further, it is often claimed that the concept of generalizability is irrelevant to qualitative research, because the sampling is rarely randomized and participants are invited to take part in the study based on their ability to provide rich descriptive and particular information regarding the phenomenon under investigation.

Generalizability in qualitative research has a different meaning. It essentially means that the categories extracted from the data in one study may apply to the experiences of other individuals who are in similar situations (Popay et al., 1998). The issue of generalizability should be addressed in the context of qualitative research for two main reasons: (1) to claim for the usefulness of a particular research study, and (2) to increase the credibility of the findings of qualitative data analysis.

In the context of qualitative research, when trying to answer the question how far the findings of this particular study can be extrapolated, the concept of transferability is

more relevant than the concept of generalizability because it refers to the other situations and contexts and not the entire population from which the sample was drawn (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In this particular study, as a researcher in the discipline of applied linguistics, I do have to consider the theoretical import of the findings and the extent to which they refer to some setting or population wider than that of the research itself. This involves thinking through what kind of relationship the study findings have to other populations and settings, and unpacking exactly what inferences can be drawn from the data analysis.

The results of this particular study have relevancy to two settings or populations: (1) International MBA students, and (2) Israeli study abroad students in different academic fields. Looking at the characteristics of the study group and these two possible comparable groups we see many similarities but also some notable differences.

Because the cultural adaptation experience of Israeli MBA students in an American university is somewhat similar to that of other international students, findings from this study can be exported to other groups. All International students struggle in foreign cultural environments. Frustration due to gaps between what they thought and what they faced are documented robustly in the literature. Hence the conclusion that intercultural sensitivity is a much needed skill for all students in international business is applicable to other populations engaged in foreign study programs. In particular to MBA students, to get the most from the business training experience, students need to move beyond culture shock and adapt to the new setting (Sizoo and Serrie, 2004).

Studies that employed a similar research design as in the current research project shows that MBA students in transnational context share a lot of challenges

(Thorstensson, 2001; Sizee & Serrie, 2004; Simpson & Tan, 2009; Bennington, L., & Xu, L., 2001). Although the population in these studies included Asian MBA students in various English speaking context (Australia, New Zealand, U.K and the U.S), the discourse that informs that the study abroad experiences of these 6 students is similar in nature to the one of the study group. Like the Israeli study abroad MBA students, Asian students were concerned with the heavy work load, frustration which resulted from working in mixed groups, culture shock, language barriers, and learning the rules of interaction with Americans.

It is important to note that most studies on study abroad have been performed on a selected population of college students. Asian students are the biggest group of international students in the U.S (60%). This is the most accessible group for research and the dominant discourse about international students in general, including international MBA students, are strongly influenced by the experiences of this group of students.

Although the population sampled does not include only MBA students, an important work to mention here to put the comparison into perspective is Lee's study (2010) which investigated using a quantitative line of analysis the relationship between study abroad experiences and the student's country of origin. The results of this study confirm that despite the shared characteristics, students from predominantly non-white regions, namely, Asian students, had more negative experiences during the study abroad period and a greater difficulty in social adjustment compared with students from predominantly white regions.

Negative experiences in international MBA context were usually associated with oral literacy practices that were found to be a source of stress for both the study group and other MBA populations studied, especially Asians. However, while Asian students typically respond to this challenge by asking for more support, the participants in the current study chose to criticize the way local students speak, what obviously arises from their inability to match these skills.

We mustn't forget the timing this research project was carried at which also increases the applicability of the theory deriving from the present study to seemingly different populations. In a period of economic slowdown and high-rates of unemployment and overqualified professional's market, it is likely that employment would be the main concern for the entire population of international MBA students. Being worried and stressed about loans they need to pay off, similarly to the study group, many other international MBA students will expect more support with job seeking. Simpson and Tan (2009) who report on the experiences of 160 Chinese students in New Zealand in a range of programs found concerns regarding a need in support and assistance in the job market as well.

Looking at studies that focus on the functioning of Israeli study abroad students in other disciplines, it seems that to a certain extent some of the results of the current study may be applicable to the wider population of Israelis in transnational education setting. In Tubin and Lapidot (2008), the researchers sampled 27 scholars with diverse academic background who won Fulbright grants for their doctoral and postdoctoral studies. In accordance with the study group in the present study the shifting American and Israeli

identities of the scholars were constantly negotiated into a combined individuality of global and local values.

Still, we have to keep in mind that Asians and Israeli students vary in a range of characteristics. For instance, as far as motivations concern, this study found that the study group was purely instrumental in the decision to pursue an MBA. They see studying abroad as a springboard to being international business professionals, and the end here is clearly the financial compensation MBA is translated to as a ticket to the high-status job market. Conversely, in a study that examined the experiences of Chinese MBA students in Australia (Bennington, L., & Xu, L., 2001), it was documented that the three most common motivations for the study abroad experiences were: to improve English, to gain an MBA and to learn about Australian culture. Chinese students in Australia mostly valued the knowledge they gained while the study group described the whole experience as a failure if they were not offered a job.

In regard to the respondents' self assessment of their English abilities, it is fair to say that the findings from this study cannot be transferred to other International MBA students. Because Israeli International business students' second language proficiency is sufficient to the programs' needs, this characteristic of the study is also different from other nationality-based MBA groups that were studied. Enhancing English proficiency was a central motivation to studying MBA abroad and for that reason the language barrier and difficulties related to it are widely documented in studies that were also conducted using Asian participants. In these studies it has been found that these students need more support with the second language skills (Soontiens, 2004), and put great emphasis on their English competency (Bayliss & Raymond, 2004).



When examining the literacy during the MBA, several characteristics surfaced with respect to the study group's transnational academic experiences. While the respondents' approach to literacy shows significant preference in their investment in career-related literacy as opposed to academic-based literacy, international MBA students from other nationalities do focus on the academic experience. Again, because the approaches to learning for the study group and other MBA populations, mainly Asians, are different, the learning experience is different as well.

I believe that because the way the study group experienced the study abroad was dependent upon the Israeli culture that informed their discourse, some findings from this research project are to a large extent not transferable to other situations or groups. What can be transferable is the conclusion that the distance between the target culture and the culture of origin determines the way the student experiences international education. For example, the fact that language use is seen by the respondents as a ritual in the sense that it is not only structural and non-creative, but it is also fake, staged, and pre-designed to the smallest detail is a function of the difference between the informal Israeli culture and the more pragmatic American culture.

As seen above, there are differences between the social and psychological characteristics of the study group and the Asian groups who major in business administration. Clearly, these differences derive from the gaps between the western and eastern cultures. While Israelis attach great importance to individualism, self-expression, being critical, skeptical of authority, Asian cultures train the young generations to minimize self expression and avoid criticism. This may explain Thorstensson's (2001) findings regarding the literacy experiences of 6 MBA Asian students in a Minnesota

institution. In this study the author explains that because of the hierarchical culture they come from, these students find it hard to approach professors or participate in class.

It seems that the characteristics of the study group in this particular research are more similar to European students as far as literacy habits concern. In a study that compares the literacy practices of British, French and Spanish international students (Taillefer, 2005), it was suggested that while the British read the most, understanding that reading is the central activity they should be focused on, Spanish students read the least instead relied on note taking during lectures. The reading habits of the French reflected a combination of the first two. Although the present study didn't specifically examined the literacy habits of Israeli MBA study abroad students, the participants' responses do allow a comparison to the French and Spanish speaking students in Taillefer's (2005) research. In many of the interviews, the respondents suggested that they tend to read the bare minimum, and in a superficial manner, relying mostly on lectures for information, and this shared characteristic of literacy habits which has a lot to do with the way international students view the academic experience of their study abroad may allow transferability to a certain extent.

In essence, this study reports on the perceptions of just one group of students from one North American institution and therefore I don't claim that the experiences of these students may be similar to other MBA students or other Israeli students in study abroad context. Nevertheless I do believe that some conclusions may help us understand the experiences of international MBA students in similar situations. Although I cannot assume that the perceptions of Israeli MBA students are representative of the entire populations of International students from Israel, because the theory developed based on

data from this particular group is mainly based on a cultural explanation, I believe some of the conclusions of this study can be imported to situations of Israeli students abroad in other disciplines.

After specifically rescreening studies of populations comparable to the current study group and the similar and dissimilar characteristics of the study group and parallel samples, it seems that the responses of the study group in many cases can be viewed as universal. I strongly suggest that the perceptions are far more symptomatic of international students in general than the specific MBA student. For example, as with the students in this study, Hills and Thom (2005) found that the unfamiliarity of non- western MBA students in the U.K with the academic methods and cultural context in the academic institution and the cultural setting effected their achievements.

In summation, students from different cultures still show similar needs but in different levels of intensity, and the extent to which conclusions from this study can be transferred to the examination of another populations is based on the degree to which these needs affect the various group of international students and the role of culture in the equation. Assisting students with ways to adjust more quickly and easily to the target culture seems to be a significant factor in how international students will experience an international MBA program. However, while for Asian groups the issue of adjustment is closely tied to foreign language competency, for the study group, the cross-cultural adaptation was more crucial to performance.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

This study does suggest other areas of further analysis. First, this study was cross-sectional in nature study and not longitudinal. In other words, this was a snapshot of the

beliefs held by Israeli MBA students in a particular context. A follow up study, comprised of a comparable sample, could add the factor of time to the research design to explore the development of students' perceptions regarding literacy and cultural experiences in an international educational context.

Although these findings add to the growing literature on study abroad, there is obviously a need for future research of the literacy experience in the application stage of the study abroad student in various fields of study across cultures. In the case of career-oriented international programs such as business administration, further research is needed to look at the literacy experiences of International university graduates in the process of searching employment opportunities.

I would be curious to know whether or not the participants in this study and MBA study abroad Israeli students in comparable and non-comparable MBA programs share the same literacy and cultural experiences, i.e. to what extent they are facing similar struggles and challenges and if they use the same strategies to cope with them. The fact that this research was conducted in a highly competitive research-oriented university with a fair percentage of study abroad students may or may not have influenced the results of this study. Further investigation will determine the role of the rating of the institution.

As noted in the literature review chapter, there are few studies that sampled the population of Israeli study abroad student. Therefore, another worthwhile investigation would be examine students of similar background but from other professional programs, preferably the most common ones for this population, for instance, undergraduate art majors, social science PhD students or post doctoral students in life sciences.

It is my personal view that it would be fascinating to further explore the literacy and cultural experiences of Israeli MBA alumni in an attempt to learn to what extent the MBA prepared them to cope with the literacy practices and the cultural interactions they are faced with on the job.

It would be interesting to further investigate the international experience of MBA study abroad students of various cultural backgrounds in an attempt to see similarities and differences between the Israeli study abroad student population and individuals in transnational education from other countries/cultures.

Last but not least, I would like to sum up this section by saying that the body of research that evaluates literacy experiences in study abroad context is in need of more work. While the many studies are focused on the linguistic, social and cultural effects of study abroad, this study provides us with insights into the perspective of a specific group of study abroad students. It teaches us what it means to be an Israeli student in a top B-school in the U.S. While the canonical literature downplaying international students, and although the findings were more modest than the model I wanted to present, this study does a good job portraying international students as ambitious, resourceful and resilient. In contrast to the dominant narrative that views international students as incapacitated, this study challenges this preoccupation by placing more focus on previous literacy experiences for business students in contrast to adherers to the popular view.

This investigation has a practical value in that the findings offer valuable addition to the factors that shape the experience of transnational business students. Essentially, the outcome of this study is a theoretical model that describes the determinants that are associated with the second language academic literacy of international students in a

professional program. A follow up study with a quantitative line of analysis should identity the power of the relationship between the independent variables described and second language academic literacy.

At the very least, this addition will hopefully be taken into consideration by institution and educators in an attempt to maximize the academic and experiences of study abroad and improve the quality of the cultural experience. This study also provides policymakers with a profound insight into the economic challenge international business students are facing and the direct implication on these on the educational experience.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview questions**

1. Tell me your study abroad story? How did you end up here?
2. Tell me about your memories of learning to write papers in Hebrew? How do you think these experiences affected your writing in English in your current program?
3. Tell me about your memories of learning to write papers in English in Israel?  
How do you think these experiences affected your writing in English in your current program?
4. What is the first week in the program like? What do you most remember about it?
5. What types of reading were you required to complete in the courses you've taken so far? Were these types of writing familiar/new to you? How did you learn the conventions of each type of writing?
6. What types of papers were you required to complete in the courses you've taken so far? Were these types of writing familiar/new to you? How did you learn the conventions of each type of writing?
7. What was reading the first case like? What were your difficulties? How did you overcome them?
8. What was writing your first group case analysis like? What were your difficulties?  
How did you overcome them?
9. What was writing your first individual case analysis like? What were your difficulties? How did you overcome them?
10. When working with a group on a case analysis project, what is your role?

11. What are the differences between writing business papers in Hebrew and writing them in English?
12. Tell me about the process of writing the paper you chose to share with me today?  
How did you start? What stages did you go through? Were you satisfied with the final product? What did your professor think about it?
13. How have you changed as a reader and a writer? Do you still feel the same way about writing as you did in your first semester here?

## **Appendix B**

### **MBA courses**

Below are the descriptions of the core courses of the MBA program:

#### **Principles of Financial Accounting**

This course introduces the basic concepts and methods used in corporate financial statements for the information of investors and other interested external parties. Readings, problems and cases are used. Major topics included are: The Basic Accrual Model, Analysis of Transactions, Balance Sheet, Income Statement and Cash Flow Statement Construction and Analysis. The course also emphasizes analysis of cases and actual financial reports and concerns the applications of the basic concepts and methods of financial accounting to issues such as long-term assets, inventory, sales, receivables, debt securities, corporate ownership, international operations, and analysis of financial statements.

#### **Applied Microeconomics**

This course provides students with the foundations of microeconomic analysis. The primary objective is to develop the abilities of students to apply fundamental microeconomic concepts to a wide range of managerial decisions, as well as public policy issues. Foundation topics include: costs and supply behavior of the firm; consumer behavior and market demand; market forces, price formation and resource allocation; international trade and trade restrictions; and, market power and price-setting behavior. Students will also be introduced to more advanced aspects of microeconomic analysis. Advanced topics include; decision-making with risk and imperfect information; and, complex pricing strategies.

#### **Corporate Strategy**

This course focuses on the job, perspective, and skills of the general manager in diagnosing what is critical in complex business situations and finding realistic solutions to strategic and organizational problems. The course provides a total business perspective, and thus serves as a foundation on which to build expertise in various functional areas.

#### **Applied Business Statistics**

This course covers probability, sampling distributions, confidence intervals, hypothesis testing, correlation, and simple and multiple regression analysis. Business applications are used to illustrate these concepts. The course requires familiarity with the statistical analysis package of MS Excel.

#### **Management Accounting**

This course introduces the basic concepts of managerial accounting for internal decision-making. Major topics included are product costing, emphasizing costing approaches used

in today's business environments, relevant costs for decision analysis, variance analysis, divisional performance evaluation, and transfer pricing.

### Operations Management

All value in society is generated by transforming one set of things into other, different things. Without such transformations, there would be no wealth creation and no rationale for business. Operations management is the design and management of those transformation processes. In this course, we will provide a framework for systematically examining and understanding operation management issues. We will also expose you to a few of the most important tools and practices that are useful in managing manufacturing and service production systems.

### The World Economy

The march of globalization continues, and international markets are pivotal to the operations of virtually all corporations. As companies intensify their international presence, the need to understand the economic and political challenges associated with the global environment increases. Such challenges are the focus of this course. We will explore the theories and concepts that are crucial to understanding the global location and structure of industries, the politics of trade and investment, and the impact of globalization on firm strategy. Various learning methods are used in the course, including in-class lectures, discussion of current events in the world economy, and case analysis.

### Financial Management

The course is primarily devoted to the principles of financial valuation. We will first discuss the concept of present value in extensive detail, and then apply the principles of valuation to value (a) real projects (or what is commonly referred to as capital budgeting) and (b) financial securities (stocks and bonds) under certainty. Since financial decision-making virtually always involves risk & uncertainty, we will then introduce the concept of risk, and the relation between risk & return. We will integrate our knowledge of cash flows with our understanding of risk to modify capital budgeting techniques in the presence of risk & uncertainty. The course concludes with an introductory treatment of the effects of financing on capital budgeting decisions. Although the concepts of competitive capital markets and market efficiency will not be covered in a separate session, they will be woven in the fabric of the course.

### Marketing Management

This course is concerned with understanding 1) an entity's own goals and abilities and 2) its potential and existing customers and competitors as bases for setting objectives and making decisions about products, services, pricing, promotion, and distribution. The ability to analyze current situations and objectives, recognize impediments, and generate solutions is the foundation for creating, achieving, and maintaining competitive advantage. This is a management-oriented course designed to give students an integrative framework for analyzing marketing programs and making marketing decisions. Leveraging the Business School's action-based learning approach, student teams take an active part in course development by creating cases based on their own areas of interest.

The course consists of a mixture of lectures, student case presentations, in-class exercises, and a case-based final examination.

#### Human Behavior and Organization

This is a course in the diagnosis & management of human behavior in organizations. One of the most important keys to your success as a manager is the ability to generate energy & commitment among people within an organization and to channel that energy and commitment toward critical organizational goals. Doing this requires a thorough understanding of the root causes of human attitudes & behavior and how they are influenced by your actions as a manager and by the surrounding organizational context. Thus, the course seeks an understanding of human behavior in hopes that such an understanding will enhance management practice. It is designed to include both individual level and organizational level concepts to enable students to develop an understanding of both psychological and contextual factors that affect behavior in the workplace.

#### Multidisciplinary Action Projects (MAP)

MAP is a field study program in which teams of students apply structured problem solving techniques to analyze multidisciplinary business problems or opportunities and make recommendations for improvements. It is a unique feature of the Ross MBA program -- the action learning experience it provides is central to the School's curriculum. Students learn how businesses apply and integrate multiple functions and gain an appreciation of the value of teamwork through an intense hands-on project at a sponsoring company.



## Appendix C

### Communication Exam

Here is the practice exam offered in the program website:

#### **The Jones Electric Case**

##### Background

You are the manager of a medium-sized electric contracting and supply company based in Lyons, France. Your company was originally a subsidiary of a larger American company based in Dallas, Texas, and you moved three years ago from Dallas to Lyons to manage this subsidiary. Just a year ago, a German electric contracting and supply company acquired the American company and all its subsidiaries. The German company made few changes in the company structure, leaving the American headquarters in Dallas and keeping all the employees at headquarters and at the subsidiaries on board. For you personally, there have been no changes of note because the hierarchy has not changed. You still report directly to Al Miller, the Vice President of Operations for America and Europe, who is physically located at the headquarters in Dallas. The subsidiary you manage in Lyons consists of approximately 75 office employees and over 500 field service personnel.

Six months after you took charge of the Lyons operation, you became aware of a problem in the number of complaints made by people in the office regarding back pain and arm and hand problems. As time went by, more employees needed medical treatment for these problems. In your first year alone, three people were treated for back problems and another eight for carpal tunnel syndrome, including two surgeries. In addition to the problems actually needing treatment, employees were beginning to complain loudly about the uncomfortable work environment.

You got permission from Al Miller to bring in a consultant for advice on the situation. She recommended a change in office furniture and computer equipment. Chairs should be ergonomically designed, and computers should include arm rests and monitor shields (to reduce eye glare). After pricing these potential changes, you found that the improvements would not be inexpensive: chairs would cost roughly \$500 each, some desks would have to be replaced, and the computer additions would add \$50-\$100 for each computer. The overall cost would be approximately \$60,000. You believed that the improvements were worth the cost, and therefore, you requested that Al Miller approve the expenditure so you could proceed with the improvements.

Unfortunately, Al Miller did not agree with the consultant's assessment. He stated that there was no conclusive data that employees' health problems could be attributed to the office furniture or computers. Furthermore, he said that cost of the upgrades recommended by the consultant was outside the scope of the current budget. Apparently, he had hoped that the solution proposed by the consultant would be less expensive. You decided it would be unwise at this time to approach Al's superior, the president of the company, so you set your information aside.

During your second year in Lyons, the number of employees with back, arm, and wrist problems increased. Three employees had to have carpal tunnel surgery, and another had back surgery. More people were complaining about the “poor working conditions,” and many were managing the problem by taking an extra vacation day once a month, thereby reducing the day-to-day productivity of the office. You heard from the director of benefits at headquarters that the insurance carrier was threatening to raise its premiums. That prompted you to revisit the issue with Al Miller, prior to the start of next fiscal year’s budgeting process.

In preparation for sending your request to Al Miller again, you spoke to several office suppliers to update the price on the furniture and equipment you would need. This process gave you an unpleasant surprise, because the overall cost of the improvements would now be around \$95,000. Nevertheless, you believe that the improvements are critical to your office. You’ve spoken with Al on the phone, and he has asked you to send him another memo via email on the subject. He has made it clear that he does not want to have to refer to a bunch of attachments or look up your memo from over a year ago; he wants all of the data clearly presented in the memo you send him, so he can review it quickly and easily.

#### Instructions

Write a persuasive email memo to Al Miller asking for money to pay for the office improvements you believe are necessary. Construct your argument carefully using the data provided in the case, inferences you can draw from the data, and any other knowledge you have about these kinds of issues in organizations to support your points. You may create additional data or use data from credible sources on the Internet, if the following conditions are met: (1) The data does not contradict the facts of the case; and (2) The data would be accessible to you if you were the character in this case.

**Task:** You must demonstrate your ability to write a persuasive recommendation supported by reasoning and evidence. Whether or not you would actually handle a similar situation in this way is not relevant; this is an opportunity for you to demonstrate your managerial writing ability.

**Audience:** Your primary reader is Al Miller, the Vice President of Operations for America and Europe of Jones Electric. He has turned down your request before. He is physically located in Texas, while you are in France. While you have spoken to him on the phone about this issue, he wants a clearly written persuasive recommendation, with all relevant data, delivered to him via email.

**Length:** You should write as long a document as the message needs to be effective—but no longer. Even though many people believe that memos should always be short, your focus should be on making an effective argument rather than on length. In this instance, we are looking for a complete argument, so do not cut your message short because you are concerned about length.

Evaluation: We are looking for a strong persuasive recommendation. A strong persuasive recommendation will include at least three relevant, compelling supporting points followed by both general and specific data to support those points. We will evaluate your memo in four areas:

1. Audience/task focus: How well you address the problem and reader objections. Tone and recognition of your relationship to your reader(s).
2. Organizational structure: Communication of context, overall coherence, and clear opening and closing paragraphs.
3. Content development: Development of 3 or more strong reasons/claims that support your position. General and specific data to support reasons/claims. Data relevant to reasons/claims being made.
4. Language control: Management of grammar, spelling, syntax, punctuation, and vocabulary.

## Appendix D

### **Recommendations: MBA – Myth vs. Reality**

**Myth 1: you go to MBA to find a job; therefore Recruiting is more important than the courses.**

Reality: Students who invest more in learning will do better in job interviews and are also likely to get good grades. Yes, grades may not be the more informative signal about students' ability; but a student with a low grade has likely spent less time studying and did poorly on class assignments and exams; and is less likely to find a job than a student that studies hard. The perception that one can find his dream job without working hard is false.

**Myth 2: Nobody fails MBA.**

Reality: First, students do flunk in the core courses. Second, it's probably worse to get a 'pass' grade when many others get 'excellent' than to fail and retake the course. Contrary to the widespread belief, flunking, to a large extent, is irrelevant and is the wrong focus; Business school education is more about distinguishing yourself as a super smart future business leader among a group of very smart people.

**Myth 3: Don't make an effort producing excellent course assignments. It is a waste of time.**

Reality: This is a mistake. Contrary to the widespread perception, professors do pay attention to the quality of the written English when grading assignments. They can easily tell the difference between an original work and a cut and paste job. Again, the name of the game is standing out, remember?

**Myth 4: Reading the assigned materials before class is a waste of time. The professor will talk about it in class anyway.**

Reality: Reading before class is essential, especially cases. Because a case requires complex thinking, it is recommended to read in groups. Highlighting important sentences is useless as the reader doesn't just search for the information, but simultaneously asks himself what it means and what's left out of the text, and fill the gaps accordingly.

**Myth 5: "Managerial Writing" is not an important course, therefore it should be saved for the fourth semester.**

Reality: Although Israeli MBA students usually have high estimation of their language abilities when they enter the program, taking a writing course in the first semester is still recommended. You will apply the knowledge from the course in the courses and in your future job where writing skills are considered essential.

**Myth 6: Israelis are not trained in public speaking, so they do poorly in cold calling.**

Reality: Cold calling is part of the preparation MBA students need for their real professional lives. This is a required skill in the business world. Because this is a much

neglected skills in Israeli schools, Israelis need to work harder and design their contribution to class discussions in advance.

**Myth 7: Israel is the 51<sup>st</sup> State of the U.S**

Reality: You may realize this by now but the American and the Israeli culture don't have much in common. These are two very different cultures with different rules of personal and professional interaction. Jewish Americans are American and not Israeli.

**Myth 8: Israelis are out of the box thinkers, and Americans have a lot to learn from them.**

Reality: Many Israelis think that they'll manage and that people from other culture will adjust to the Israeli way of doing things. It is very presumptuous of Israeli students to think that people of the host culture will adjust to their cultural norms. A change of attitude is essential to achieve both academic and professional goals.

**Myth 9: Networking is an artificial and ridiculous process of getting a job.**

Reality: It's neither artificial nor ridiculous. It's different. Don't forget that you have moved to a country with a different culture and, if you want to succeed, you need to learn the local rules, instead of trying to criticize them or forcing the Israeli approach on the system. You are not in Israel. You can't call someone who served with you in the army and get him to call a potential employer.

**Myth 10: Job search tasks are technical and phony.**

Reality: Employment seeking in MBA context is neither a ceremonial procedure nor a formal routine. When a recruiter makes 40 interviews a day, they will find students that respond better even though all students had memorized their responses. In order to succeed you have to be noticeable, and to be noticeable means hard work that will make you stand out from other applicants in your CV, cover letter and interview.

## **Appendix E**

### **Suggested Syllabus**

#### **Reading and Writing for Academic and Professional Business Purposes**

##### **Course Description**

This is an intensive writing course which is designed to help you acquire the skills of reading and writing critically in the academic and professional business world. You will learn how to read to analyze and produce a variety of texts. You will also develop your language and communication skills as you pay attention to purpose, audience, tone, and the elements and conventions of business writing. The course is designed to teach specific valuable skills, such as reading critically and analyzing cases, using secondary sources responsibly, evaluating the writing of others and communicating your ideas clearly, thoughtfully and persuasively.

##### **Course Aims**

- To prepare the student for participation in the academic and professional business world.
- To develop the student's awareness of audience and purpose in writing.
- To develop awareness of text structure through critical analysis of different types of texts.
- To provide the students with opportunities and strategies to improve his/her writing abilities.

##### **Class Format**

Because I believe that knowledge is not only transmitted to learners from teachers or books, but can be created collectively by students, this is going to be a workshop class. During classes we will be brainstorming, planning, outlining, writing, revising, getting feedback and having class discussions. Often, you will be placed in groups to generate ideas, to give feedback, and to work on your papers. My role is to encourage this learning and reflection process as well as provide you with helpful feedback.

##### **Conferences**

Individual conferences between you and me are for the benefit of your own writing development. They are scheduled to address any questions and difficulties you and I may have about your work. From my experience, students who take the time to meet with me learn to write more effectively and get better in writing.

##### **Academic Integrity**

Borrowing other people's words or ideas as without giving credit, using the same paper or work more than once without authorization of the faculty member to whom the work is

being submitted, or fabrication of research data are types of violation of the academic integrity code.

The result of these and other forms of academic dishonesty is receiving an F on the assignment, an F for the course, and referral to the University Judicial Review. Please don't risk it!

### **Key concepts**

1. Introduction to Academic Business Writing: the concept of audience
2. Analyzing the characteristics of the academic business genres
3. Being a critical consumer of Business information
4. What is a case and how do you read it anyway?
5. How to write an excellent case analysis
6. Writing longer papers – the structure of persuasive writing
7. Writing from sources: summarizing and paraphrasing vs. copying and pasting.
8. How to use sources responsibly/Documentation
9. Connecting with your reader, talking about voice
10. How to create a power point presentation
11. Professional business writing: self introduction and informative business emails

### **Course Requirements and Procedures**

1. Reading/ Writing Journal
2. Magazines article reading response
3. Case analysis
4. Firm Research project
5. Power point presentation
6. Business emails

For every written assignment the students will complete three drafts. The first draft will be shared with peers and be revised according to the feedback received. The second draft will be shared with the instructor and based on the feedback, the final version will be developed and submitted for grading

### **Description of Assignments**

To accommodate the diversity of aspired business career interest and backgrounds of the students who take this course, this project will allow each student to choose a topic work on his own material throughout the course. For example, if your dream job is to work for a specific company, then this should be the focus of your work in this class. In other words all the reading and writing assignments you will complete in this class will be related to this company. For example, when we work on magazine articles or cases you will be asked to bring published materials the selected firm. When writing a self introduction memo, a business email or a presentation, you will do with that firm as your target audience in mind. Therefore, it is important that each student select a topic, or area of investigation, very early in the semester.

**1) Reading/Writing Journal (10%):** During this course you will keep a Reading/Writing notebook where you will reflect on the reading and writing

assignments you'll be engaged with this semester. In addition, you will write about the ways the course has shaped your ideas about the experience of composing knowledge through reading and writing. Each journal should be about 1-2 double-spaced pages.

**2) Magazine article reading response (10%):** A basic goal of this course is to train you in being a critical consumer of business information, for this assignment you are asked to search for a magazine article related to your topic/chosen company and draft a 250-350 word paper in response to the information presented. This is not a summary of the article or a series of notes about it. Rather, you should pick up on one theme from the article and develop it.

**3) Case Analysis (20%):** The objective of this assignment is to write a short critical analysis about a case. Here you can focus on a variety of different aspects, including strategic management, finances, marketing, administration etc', by interpreting and reflecting on the information. Your analysis should be focused on an overall claim or point about the case using personal experience, evidence from the case, and evidence from other business contexts you've encountered with to support your claim. The length of the paper is 3-4 pages.

**4) Firm Research Project – 40%:**

Literature Portfolio (10%): This assignment will require you to search the literature on the chosen topic and select articles on your topic. For each article, the student will summarize and paraphrase the information he'd use in the Firm Research Project. The literature portfolio will be graded for the quality of the chosen materials and the ability of the students to critically read them.

Firm Analysis (20%): The aim of this project is to provide the student with the experience of synthesizing materials. Your job in this paper will be to share your opinion about how a specific company handles its challenges. You will need to use the sources you gathered for your literature portfolio to come up with a thesis that reflects your understanding of the struggles this firm is addressing at this moment. The length of the paper is 8-10 pages.

**5) Presentation - (10%):**

Students will present their Firm research projects to the class. The presentation will be evaluated on the basis of effective communication to an audience. You are required to make use of visual aids such as PowerPoint, short videos, music etc.

**6) 2 Business Emails – 10%:** this assignment requires that you compose two business emails and communicate with your firm of interest. In the first email you are required to introduce yourself and in the second email you should address one of the challenges this company is facing and offer your thoughtful analysis of the situation, suggesting strategies and solutions.